

COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF COLLEGE

L200 Essay – Crucible Experience

MAJ Michele Callahan

8 February 2010

My decision to start a family while on active duty caused me to re-examine my priorities, paradigms and leadership style. The resulting self examination influenced me to develop a balanced lifestyle. In turn, I became more integrative and flexible in my leadership style and aware of my hidden thinking traps. Being aware of personal shortfalls, thinking traps and their affect on my leadership style will help me better adapt my style to the needs of my organization.

Deciding to start a family while on active duty caused me to re-evaluate my priorities and paradigms. Prior to starting a family I made decisions based first on professional requirements, degree of personal benefit and then degree of family benefit. I believed that as long as I was succeeding professionally, everything else would work itself out. The professional was all that mattered. Becoming pregnant made me aware that someone else was completely reliant on me and my decisions directly impacted them. I had to put my child's well being and needs ahead of my personal and professional needs. My child's needs now competed with my professional requirements, personal and family needs. I could no longer spend countless hours working after 1700 and on the weekends completing the endless professional "to do" list. I could no longer work out when I pleased, prepare meals only if I felt hungry or go to sleep if tired. My family required more from me than an occasional lunch and a date every Friday night. I began to realize that the health of my child and family required more personal action from me. My child's welfare was dependent on the health of my family; my family was dependent on my career; my career success was dependent on my ability to balance all areas of my life. Career was no longer everything. My child's welfare became more important. My priorities changed to my child, my family and then my career. I also realized I needed a better balance between priorities. I couldn't focus solely on the professional without damaging my family or my child. Starting a family made me realize that professional success wasn't everything and that I needed a more balanced lifestyle. It caused me to re-evaluate my priorities, challenge my paradigms and develop a more balanced lifestyle.

Examining my priorities also influenced my leadership style. Before having a child, my decision making style was methodically decisive. I took my time and needed to have large amounts of data before making a decision. I now realized that my decisions had to be made quicker if I were to maintain a balanced lifestyle. Additionally, my unit was transitioning from a non-modular Division structure focused on training National Guard units to an interim modular Division structure preparing for deployment. Decisions needed to be made on internal organizational structure, office configurations, personnel allocations, training and work load distribution. I had to conduct the mission analysis and develop solutions while simultaneously providing subordinate brigades support. High personnel turnover rates, a pending deployment and the challenges of maintaining a balanced lifestyle further complicated the decision making process. It soon became apparent I needed help in gathering and analyzing the data. I realized that my decision making procedures needed to be more integrative and flexible. The constant organizational changes required flexibility in courses of action. Sticking to only one course of action was impractical as the conditions changed from month to month; available manpower and experience levels varied as personnel were rotated and new personnel were incorporated. I also realized that I would be unable to achieve the knowledge and expertise required to make the best decision on my own at the organizational level. It was impossible to manage the Division's frequency spectrum, design the WIN-T network, develop and resource training while maintaining daily operations and leading the staff section through the modularity process all by myself. I needed the perspective, technical expertise and knowledge from others with more experience than I to develop viable, flexible and concurrent courses of action. This was especially important as an organizational level leader if I were going to maintain a balanced lifestyle. I needed the help from other members in gathering information, analyzing data and developing courses of action. Examining my priorities and paradigms made me realize that my leadership style needed to change. As an organizational leader, I could no longer be directive but had to become more integrative and flexible.

My self examination also made me more aware of my hidden traps. As I modified my decision making processes and underwent organizational change, I realized I gave too much weight to initial information. Gathering information from multiple sources helped me build a better knowledge base. Getting different perspectives helped me see the problem in a different context. The WIN-T PM gave me initial fielding information and selected lessons learned; my staff gave me additional information and different lessons learned. It was not enough to only get fielding information from the WIN-T PM; I needed technical, training and experiential information from outside sources to develop the best recommended course of action for the Division. Through this process, it became apparent that I had not been collecting all the information necessary and defining all possible alternatives. As I gathered more information, I began to notice a negative reaction pattern to opposing views. What was the cause of the reaction? Being presented with alternative perspectives on the same technical information forced me to investigate which one was correct for our circumstances. I became aware of a tendency to only seek information that supported my initial impressions. In turn, it forced me to ask myself honestly if I had looked at the problem from all possible angles. Changing my decision making processes and leadership style made me more aware of my tendency to give too much weight to initial information and bias toward conformational evidence.

Challenging my beliefs and making personal changes will help me become a better organizational level leader. Through self examination I was able to recognize that my well being was dependent on the well being of others and my existing leadership style did not reflect those values. Communications is an ever changing technical field. It is important for all individuals and the community to constantly learn. By continuing to be more integrative and flexible, I can foster a learning environment. As individuals benefit, so will the organization as a whole benefit from the increased knowledge. Understanding my bias toward conformational evidence will help me recognize similar thinking traps. At the organizational level, I will need to be aware of

the potential thinking traps. I will have to work to overcome my tendency to put too much emphasis on initial information and seek conformational data. It will be important to gather differing views and devise methods to counter inherent biases when evaluating information and making decisions. Challenging my beliefs, being conscious of my shortfalls and making personal changes will help me become a better organizational level leader.

The simple decision to start a family caused me to become introspective. Upon examining my priorities, I realized that I had been harboring personal and professional biases. The professional was all that mattered. I realized I couldn't focus solely on the professional without damaging my family or my child, and I needed a better balance between priorities. Once I was able to recognize that my well being was dependent on the well being of others, it made me realize my existing leadership style did not reflect those values. My decision making style could not remain methodically decisive. I needed the perspective, technical expertise and knowledge from those around me in order to become more integrative and flexible. It made me aware of my tendency to give too much weight to initial information and bias toward conformational evidence. Understanding my bias toward conformational evidence will help me recognize similar thinking traps and develop as a leader. By continuing to be more integrative and flexible, I can foster a learning environment. Combined with continued self awareness, I will be able to continue to develop as a leader and become a better organization level leader.