Transformational Leadership: A Soldier's Need for Creativity in the Maine Army National Guard

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Transformational leadership:
A Soldier's Need for Creativity in the Maine Army National Guard

by
Johnathon A. McGahey

A QUANTITATIVE STUDY

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate Program at the
University of Southern Maine
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Master's in Leadership Studies

Under the Supervision of Dr. Sharon Timberlake.
University of Southern Maine
May 10, 2019
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Abstract

Leadership creativity can inspire organizations to innovate and to compete in the global marketplace. There are many forms of leadership that can produce such passion, but transformational leadership is well suited for today’s corporations. Transformational leadership creates a vision and cohesion that drives organizational culture. This quantitative study of the Army National Guard examines leadership creativity within its corporate culture. The Army National Guard is not known for its leadership creativity and there are few studies examining this phenomenon. This study collects quantitative data from active duty personnel to gain direct insight into leadership creativity and its effects on innovation. The Army National Guard needs to develop, grow, and innovate to compete on the world stage. Transformational leadership fosters an autonomous environment that inspires followers to create solutions and methods through personal motivation. This quantitative study offers compelling evidence for the transformational leadership style and its effects on creative development within the Army National Guard.

Keywords: creativity, leadership, innovation, organizations
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Chapter I: Introduction

“Companies in the 21st century are faced with two incommensurable challenges. On the one hand, they need to be constantly innovative and ready for change. On the other hand, they are expected to create an enduring and recognizable identity that attracts attention” (Jensen & Beckmann, 2009, p. 468). Organizations must be able to live up to these two creative challenges, or face irrelevance and/or extinction. This study examines these creative challenges within the context of the Maine Army National Guard. Modern soldiers have a need for creative work environments and creative vision from their leaders. Transformational leadership is well positioned to meet this challenge and provide our military with the tools to continue leading on the international stage.

Creative leadership has many key factors within its scope. For instance, one key factor studied by Rosso (2014) is the idea of time constraints. Rosso correlates time constraints with creativity by outlining the increase in creative thought when individuals are confronted with task deadlines. Rosso’s time constraints study does not consider other key factors effecting creativity and this offered a limiting view of organizational creativity.

“Call it the resilience gap; the world is becoming turbulent faster than organizations are becoming resilient and the evidence is all around us; big companies are falling more frequently than they did some decades back (Hamel & Valikangas, 2003)” (Marwa & Milner, 2013, p. 835).

Kamel, Martins, Passanha, and Andrada (2017) discuss how creative work environments contribute to employee happiness but lack leader involvement, transformational leader concepts, and the effect on creating dynamic environments. In
general, there is limited research on the need or effect of transformational leadership on organizational creativity. This study contributes to this academic need for the effects of transformational leadership with regard to followers and subordinates.

**Statement of Problem**

It is vital to an organization’s growth to nurture professional, emotionally intelligent, and creative leaders. Creativity through transformational leadership caters to followers needs and desires. Followers have individuality and needs for new ideas and interesting work environments. Understanding the needs of followers is crucial in developing a modern organizational structure. These needs are psychological in nature and are difficult to harvest at the organizational level.

It is essential to understand that “creativity is at the individual level, while innovation is at the organizational level.” (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009, p. 461) In other words, one first must understand what creativity is and the benefits any organization has by adopting creativity through leadership. An organization might realize the need for creativity through leadership.

Organizations must have the correct leaders in place to advance a creative agenda. Transformational leadership is uniquely positioned as a leadership style that inspires and fuses an emotional mission within an organization’s followers. This vision will help propel any organization in the 21st century to be creative which will produce innovation.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to survey military service members to gain an understanding of the importance of creativity in their workplace. The result of this survey helps leaders design protocols that incorporates creativity and leadership styles that enhance innovation.
With revolutionary organizations such as Apple, Google, Tesla, Amazon, and Netflix, it is an innovate or die world that organizations compete within. For organizations to be innovative, they must hire the appropriate people in positions of leadership. Furthermore, they need to allow those leaders the necessary autonomy to operate in their own fashion.

Despite breakthroughs in thinking and knowledge, the area of innovative leadership is ever-changing. These breakthroughs require constant adaptation as theoretical foundations regarding creativity, innovation, and leadership have expanded. In contrast, the practical organizational workplace, including the branches of the military, have not been researched or studied as thoroughly.

Transformational leadership, by definition, fosters inspiration and vision which is needed for creative followership. An understanding of creativity can help organizations grow leadership, adaptation, and innovation. A creative mindset is the cornerstone of transformational leadership and this quantitative survey adds vital data to the literature on creative organizations and innovation within the Maine Army National Guard.

Research Question

From the perspective of a follower, is there a need for creativity in the United States Military?

This question leads to the following:

Can transformational leadership be successful in providing this followership need for creativity?
Chapter II: Literature Review

The research study investigated multidisciplinary issues such as creativity, innovation, and transformational leadership. As a result, the literature review broke down and covered creativity at the individual’s level. It is vital for leaders in organizations to foster environments that allow their employees to be creative. Creativity sparks new ideas and solutions in organizations of all forms. Leaders rely on these ideas in establishing and maintaining truly innovative organizations.

This literature review began with an analysis of creativity within organizations, continues with how innovation derives from creativity, and offered support for transformation leadership as an important leadership style to foster creativity. Most of the reviewed literature, although scholarly and peer reviewed, did not address the lack of creative leadership in the Maine Army National Guard, such as Rosso (2014) and (George & Zhou, 2007). The following literature review provided adequate research on creativity, transformational leadership, and innovation. However, this review does not apply these topics directly to the main research question, *from the perspective of a follower, is there a need for creativity in the United States Military?*

**Creativity**

There has been a great deal of research conducted on the different types, methods, and practices regarding creativity, such as Rosso (2014), and Hughes, Ginnett, and Curphy (2012). In order for ideas and solutions to be considered creative in an organizational setting, they must be considered new ideas that are also valuable to the organization (George & Zhou, 2007). The traditional view of creativity is understood to be something that some people are born with and others are not. According to this particular view, creativity is primarily determined by a group of rare cognitive
characteristics (Weisberg, 2010). Although it is true that some people are inherently born
with cognitive characteristics that make them naturally creative, it is a rare occurrence.

So how is creativity nurtured? The current research on organizational creativity
for this literature review has been found to be fragmented and narrow. Some scholars
have argued that constraints can foster creativity.

Rosso (2014) argued that there are three types of constraints that foster creativity.
Rosso described time constraints, resources constraints, and constraints such as
standardized processes and routines. Rosso’s study was focused on a narrow and unique
group of research and development teams whose primary purpose was to generate
creative solutions for their respective organizations. Russo’s findings differ from this
quantitative study. This paper researches military organizations which typically are
structured and have limited creative work opportunities. The military is focused more on
function and not form.

**Innovation**

The fundamental source of creativity is an individual, who in turn is the catalyst
for innovation in an organization (Shalley & Gilson, 2004). Although the concept of
innovation is not revolutionary, it is constantly adapting. Furthermore, as we move more
into a society where the internet has become such an important platform, we should
include new technologies, processes, business models, and entire organizational
reinvention (Vlok, 2012).

**Mission Command**

“The Army defines mission command as the exercise of authority and direction
by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative with the
commander’s intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders” (Harvard, 2013, p. 135).
In other words, the Army is creating an overarching mission for its leaders to follow. However, to create a more innovative, adaptive, and creative organization, the military is allowing their leaders the autonomy to determine how to best complete the mission. By creating a mission and opening the solution up to individual interpretation, the military is working towards creating a more innovative and creative organization.

**Transformational Leadership**

Out of all the available leadership theories, transformational leadership is considered the theory that fosters and enhances creativity and innovation with greater success than other leadership theories (Sosik, Avolio, & Kahai, 1997). The term transformational leadership is best conceptualized as a multi-dimensional (creativity, innovation) concept (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 2012). Some characteristics that transformational leaders possess are “good vision, rhetorical, and impression management skills and use them to develop strong emotional bonds with followers” (Hughes et al., 2012, p. 590).

Transformational leaders “actively encourage followers to take innovative and creative approaches rather than conventional and traditional ones” (Jung, 2001, p. 186). Another benefit with this leadership style is that the leaders have a tendency to “use intellectual stimulation, promote consideration of different viewpoints, and inspire collective action to promote group creativity” (Sosik, Kahai, & Avolio, 1998, p. 112). With an “idealize influence, [transformational] leader[s] inspires the inherent thoughts of followers by acting as a role model to gain respect, admiration and loyalty, which generates a sense of collectivity among the followers” (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2014, p. 31).

These definitions and descriptions of transformational leadership offer insight for this military study. Transformational leaders support a work environment and encourage
the processes that promote a creative and innovative workplace. Research conducted on transformational leaders has been studied on a contextual understanding. These are firms that develop, innovate, and focus less on structural processes. This distinction is being made because military organizations typically have greater structure and coherence to work process rigidity.

**Researcher Perspective**

The researcher is a member of the Maine Army National Guard and a student in the master's program at the University of Southern Maine. The researcher may have biases that include such characteristics as male, Irish, Caucasian, middle class, academically biased, politically Independent, skeptical of news and social media content. All efforts will be made to remain objective and any biases should not influence the data collection, the survey, or the analysis.
Chapter III: Research Methods

Quantitative Research Design

The methodology of choice was quantitative based on the research question, *from the perspective of a follower, is there a need for creativity in the United States Military?* The quantitative method was selected because qualitative data collection would not be appropriate for this type of study, since these research questions are personal in nature and require psychological consideration. A quantitative method provided a quality poll of answers that are significant to the study. A spreadsheet was created, frequencies of responses were tabulated, and charts were designed from the collected data. Every effort to obtain truthful and uncoerced answers were critical for study reliability.

Sample

The sample for this study was mined from the Maine National Guard, specifically the 152 Support Maintenance Company located in Augusta, Maine. The survey sample consisted of \( n = 44 \) military service members. Survey data included answers to questions that may offer insights into the need for creativity within the military workplace. This survey was recorded in person and then transferred to Microsoft Word, Excel, and organized by mode (frequency).

Data Collection

The site of the survey was the Maine National Guard, specifically the 152 Support Maintenance Company located in Augusta, Maine. The researcher briefed the respondents with the following disclosure:

*Hello, my name is Johnathon McGahey. I am here today regarding a research project that I am conducting based on creativity, innovation, and leadership in the United States military. As part of the research project, I am trying to survey 40-50 people regarding their views and opinions regarding how creativity to them is perceived. I have*
spoken with your commander, and he has provided me the opportunity to ask some of you standing here today to take this survey. The survey will be conducted in the next room and everything is all set up and ready for those that choose to participate in the survey. Before you designate yourself on whether or not you will participate, I will leave this room so as to keep the information I receive completely anonymous. Before I leave, I want to outline a few important items that I want to make you all aware of. The most important be that this is entirely voluntary. You do not have to take this survey today. Any information you provide in the survey will be entirely anonymous.

Data Analysis and Verification

Survey data was grouped by mode (frequency), and charts were produced that visually display respondents need for creativity in the workplace.

Ethical Considerations

Care was taken to follow the Institutional Review Board’s (IRB) Belmont Report. Respect for persons, benevolence, and justice was observed during the collection of data with human subjects. IRB approval has been applied for and granted, and this approval was made available to Dr. Sharon Timberlake of the Leadership Program. Please see Figure 3 for the secured IRB certificate, Figure 2 for the survey questions, and Figure 4 for the IRB approval.

Care was taken not to jump to conclusions from the evidence collected, but there is no guarantee of objective findings. Researcher or experimental bias did not skew the discussion or concluding statements. This researcher bias did not present a limitation to realistic data and objectivity.
Research Goal

The essential research goal of this study was to determine possible patterns in environments that generate creative thoughts. Unlike previous research, the goal here was to establish patterns in a field that is not inherently creative. The information from the study provided patterns for environments that cause people to be creative. Once this information was determined, a review of what leaders need to do to foster and promote the creative environment was compiled.

Summary

The objective of the data collection was to uncover if military personnel desire creativity in the workplace. This objective was to answer the research question, from the perspective of a follower, is there a need for creativity in the United States Military?
Chapter IV: Findings and Results

Demographics, Population, and Sample Data

In order to gather participants, a meeting was held during the soldiers first formation during a drill on Sunday May 5, 2019. The following was the recruitment information read to the soldiers in Figure 1 below.

Hello, my name is Johnathon McGahey. I am here today regarding a research project that I am conducting based on creativity, innovation, and leadership in the United States military. As part of the research project, I am trying to survey 40-50 people regarding their views and opinions regarding how creativity to them is perceived. I have spoken with your commander, and he has provided me the opportunity to ask some of you standing here today to take this survey. The survey will be conducted in the next room and everything is all set up and ready for those that choose to participate in the survey. Before you designate yourself on whether or not you will participate, I will leave this room so as to keep the information I receive completely anonymous. Before I leave, I want to outline a few important items that I want to make you all aware of. The most important be that this is entirely voluntary. You do not have to take this survey today. Any information you provide in the survey will be entirely anonymous.

Figure 1. Recruitment Materials

This anonymous survey was conducted on May 5, 2019. A sample of responses from forty-four participants were collected on May 5, 2019. These participant responses were copied and pasted into an Excel spreadsheet file. The participants were at least 18 years of age and were members of the Maine Army National Guard. The ethnicity, country of origin, occupation, race, socio-economic status, educational background, or any other identifying information was not gathered. The sampled answers to the survey
questions and opinions were gathered. Dr. Sharon Timberlake kindly authorized the gathering of generic demographics such as gender, age, years of service, and satisfaction of military service.

The survey questions were focused and aimed towards gaining an understanding of creativity. During the survey, participants had answer choices of agree, neutral, and disagree. Other questions explored risk tolerance, problem solving, and time management. Finally, the participants were asked about their impulsive feelings, creative natures, and variety seeking activities, as reflected in Figure 2 below.

| 1 | I like much variety in my life. |
| 2 | I study each problem until I have fully understood it. |
| 3 | I typically try to find creative solutions to problems. |
| 4 | I prefer well-prepared meetings with strict time management. |
| 5 | I need clear timelines to accomplish my task. |
| 6 | I want to have a full understanding every problem. |
| 7 | I like to take the time to analyze problems. |
| 8 | I like to extend the boundaries. |
| 9 | I try to avoid routine. |
| 10 | I always want to know clearly what needs to be done. |
| 11 | I prefer well-prepared meetings with a clear agenda. |
| 12 | I enjoy taking physical risks or chances. |
| 13 | I would like to have as many exciting experiences in my life as possible. |
| 14 | I prefer detailed plans of action. |
| 15 | I often act impulsively. |
| 16 | I like to complete tasks as fast as possible. |
| 17 | I enjoy finding different ways to solve a problem. |
| 18 | I enjoy taking mental chances or risks. |
| 19 | I need a clear goal/objective when given a task. |
| 20 | I think I am a creative person. |

Figure 2. Survey Questions

The following figure is the required International Review Board Certification, as reflected in Figure 3 below.
Course Completion for Johnathon McGahey

Congratulations on your recent course completion!

Name: Johnathon McGahey (ID: 8036626)
Institution: University of Maine System (ID: 1111)
Course: Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher
Stage: 1 - Basic Course
Completion Date: 07 Apr 2019
Expiration Date: 06 Apr 2023
Completion Record ID: 31228541

**Figure 3. IRB Certificate from CITI Program**

The following figure is the required International Review Board Approval, as reflected in Figure 4 below.

**Figure 4. IRB Approval**
Survey Question Findings

Question 1

The result of question one was surprising. No soldiers disagreed with increased variety in their military service. These findings show that variety is important to a soldier in the Maine Army National Guard, as reflected in Figure 5 below.

![Bar chart showing responses to Question 1](image)

**Figure 5.** Question 1

Note: All data limitations are explained in the limitations section.

Question 3

Question three appealed to the participants problem solving sensibilities in search for creative solutions to problems, as reflected in Figure 6 below.
3. I typically try to find creative solutions to problems.

**Figure 6. Question 3**

Note: All data limitations are explained in the limitations section.

**Question 4**

Question four asked participants about meetings and the idea of structure. This was in contrast to creativity, as reflected in Figure 7 below.
Figure 7. Question 4

Note: All data limitations are explained in the limitations section.

Question 7

In question seven, soldiers expressed the need to take extra time in analyzing tasks before engaging in action, as reflected in Figure 8 below.

Figure 8. Question 7

Note: All data limitations are explained in the limitations section.
Question 10

Question ten asked participants about structure and clarity, as reflected in Figure 9 below.

![Bar chart showing responses to Question 10](image)

*Figure 9. Question 10*

Question 13

Question thirteen showed that soldiers want to try new and exciting experiences, as reflected in Figure 10 below.
Figure 10. Question 13

Note: All data limitations are explained in the limitations section.

Question 14

Question fourteen showed that soldiers prefer clear guidelines and clarity before initiating a task, as reflected in Figure 11 below.
Figure 11. Question 14

Note: All data limitations are explained in the limitations section.

Question 17

In question seventeen, soldiers showed that they want to exhibit resourcefulness in solving problems, as reflected in Figure 12 below.

Figure 12. Question 17

Note: All data limitations are explained in the limitations section.

Question 19

In question nineteen soldiers showed that they need clear guidelines and instruction with regard to tasks, as reflected in Figure 13 below.
Question twenty found that soldiers feel that they are creative people with creative ideas, as reflected in Figure 14 below.

Figure 13. Question 19

Figure 14. Question 20
Note: All data limitations are explained in the limitations section.

**Limitations**

One weakness inherent in this method of obtaining data was that the sample size for the study was rather small ($n = 44$), due to the availability and willingness of the targeted participants. The small sample size would not be conclusive for any concrete findings. This is why the actual number of responses was given in cases where percentages were not appropriate. A larger sample size would be recommended for further research on this subject. Quantitative findings must be taken at face value and do have weight since they are a participant's personal answer on the topic, but one or two opinions are too few to make substantial conclusions. However, the data could be used to refine the instrument, as such providing groundwork for broader studies in the future.

The military, by convention, has a hierarchical or a top down organization structure where soldiers may find themselves in dual positions as followers and leaders. A survey of followers includes leaders with these ranks. Due to the unique position of the military, leaders can also be followers as each individual has a peer above and below them. This survey focused on followers, but these followers are also leaders. Due to the dual position of each individual, follower data collection was considered as leader data collection as well.
Chapter V: Discussion

Creativity lives where the inner child dwells and tapping into that space sheds the adult and our child-like impulses are re-born. This is where innovation lives as a norm, our adult existence is blind to these memories where everything is amazing, fresh, and new. Transforming moments reach down deep into our inner child and refresh our minds to see without eyes. Transformative leadership touches our souls and inspires us to be as children again. Innovation is the effect of these moments and this is where the creative organization may flourish.

The United States Armed forces seems like an unconventional arena for creative and transformational aspirations, but these soldiers are human, and grown up children at heart. War and conflict might offer a burdening mind, but transformational leadership can help balance and free the minds of our most sacred resource, our soldiers.

The intention of this research paper was to ask engaging questions regarding the need for creativity in the workplace. The demographic chosen was the soldiers of the Maine Army National Guard 152 Support Maintenance Company. This research study helped to build an understanding of military service members in general on the concept of creativity. This quantitative study sought to determine if there was a need for creativity in the workplace. If there was a need, how can leaders at all levels cater to these needs and adapt to become transformational leaders?

This paper and the survey uncovered a truly unique view of creativity. The results of the survey reveal that soldiers require a certain degree of structure, clear guidelines, and timelines. Despite this need for structure, soldiers also require new and exciting experiences. The majority of those that were surveyed consider themselves to be creative
leaders. These findings underscore the need for transformational leadership in the armed forces.

This research shows that soldiers do require structure, guidelines, and a clear purpose. To create a comforting environment for soldiers, leaders will need to offer stable work conditions. In contrast, soldiers also desire creativity and empowerment to be creative. This research study reveals the frameworks that soldiers need in order to complete tasks and missions. The survey answers profoundly emphasize the creative freedom and ability that soldiers need to come up with their own processes and conclusions. Fostering a creative environment does not guarantee results or accomplishment but will satisfy a psychology need within our military service members. There will certainly be growing pains with new creative processes, but necessary growing pains to establish greater creativity and innovation.
Chapter VI: Conclusion

A master’s degree in leadership studies is a fascinating and comprehensive study of the history and development of leadership. However, one area that is lacking is the concept of transformational leadership in understanding follower’s needs. In many of our work environments, including the United States Military, work processes have established work flow and optimization that perpetuate reactive followers.

To compete on the global stage, we must have proactive followers that creatively problem solve and task delegate. Followers need internal vision and inspiration to effectively delegate and problem solve. Transformational leadership is the best catalyst to inspire this vision. This survey provides a universal understanding of what soldiers need for a creative work culture.

There was a main research questions considered for this study was, from the perspective of a follower, is there a need for creativity in the United States Military?

This question also leads to; can transformational leadership be successful in providing this followership need for creativity?

The answers given by the soldiers of the Maine Army National Guard in this survey, provided insight into their requirements for a more creative working environment. This research provides current and future leaders the ability to develop creative environments for soldiers. These work environment changes are important because there are countries like Russia, Japan, China, North Korea, Iran and Saudi Arabia that are in competition with the United States of America.

Foreign leaders are working every day to increase their military prowess to become the next world super power. These leaders’ study what the United States military
is doing. These other countries take advantage of intellectual property rights, sanctions, and trade imbalances to build and innovate for their own interests.

Military service members at all levels need to be empowered to accomplish their missions in their own unique ways, including an embodiment of creativity and transformational leadership. This study is revolutionary in providing timely data that will contribute to the academic and scholarly research of the United States Military. These findings contribute to the United States Military and the Armed Force’s reputation as an exemplary model for the world to emulate.
We hereby recommend that the thesis of Johnathon McGahey entitled Transformational leadership: A Soldier’s Need for Creativity in the Maine Army National Guard be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master’s in Leadership Studies.

Thesis Advisor (Dr. Sharon Timberlake, Ph.D.)
Second Reader (Dr. Dan Jenkins, Ph.D.)

Accepted

Chair (Dr. Dan Jenkins, Ph. D.)
Chair Leadership Studies Program
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