

Mentorship Growing Company Grade Officers

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IN 1985, CHIEF OF STAFF of the Army (CSA) General John A. Wickham, Jr., designated “leadership” as that year’s Army theme and addressed a framework designed to produce more effective Army leaders. The benchmark for the framework revolved around senior leaders challenging all leaders within the Army to be mentors to their subordinates. Mentoring immediately became an Army paradigm.

Wickham quickly generated tremendous support for the concept of mentoring, and “[m]entoring emerged as a primary concept in all leadership courses throughout the Army’s professional education system.”¹ The term “mentoring” began to appear in official Army publications, and most officers included “mentoring of subordinates as a major objective on their Officer Evaluation Support Form.”²

Problem Statement

According to Wickham, “the problem was that the Army had not formulated an official definition of mentoring nor had it established any guidelines for instituting a mentoring program.”³ This lack of a widely accepted, clear definition of mentoring and the absence of an approved mentoring program created a void in Army policy, much ambiguity, and was the beginning of many different interpretations of mentoring and diverse ideas about how to implement a mentoring program. Consequently, mentoring came to mean different things to different people, causing considerable misunderstanding.

During this CSA initiative, U.S. Army publications provided minimal coverage of mentoring. Field Manual (FM) 22-103, *Leadership and Command at Senior Levels*, did not specifically mention mentoring; however, “it did discuss coaching, teaching, and role modeling in the leader development process.”⁴

Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-80, *Executive Leadership*, provided the best description of mentoring, defining mentoring as a “process used to develop the thinking skills and frames of reference for sequential and progressive leader develop-

ment.”⁵ Mentoring is different from coaching in that “coaching focuses on here-and-now performance and is the responsibility of immediate superiors. Superiors are the mentors and they are concerned with assessing potential and developing the capabilities and frames of reference that will be required in the future.”⁶ The pamphlet pointed out that mentoring could not be imposed as a requirement. Consequently, “executive leaders are responsible only for establishing and reinforcing a mentoring structure through the organization by setting the example.”⁷

Field Manual 22-100, *Army Leadership*, addresses mentorship to a degree and provides guidance on the skills and competencies an effective leader needs. However, the manual falls short in addressing mentoring to prepare leaders for future service. Herein lies the problem: the Army lacks policy for a formal mentoring program for company grade officers or that provides senior leaders the framework in which to grow them for future service.

Literature Review

As 21st-century senior leaders face challenges complicated by rapid technological, economic, and social changes, the requirement to find and develop future senior leaders of wisdom, vision, intelligence, and devotion to the Army and the Nation has never been greater. Once the Army identifies potential leaders, an important developmental task is for senior leaders to mentor them and adequately prepare them to meet future challenges.

Mentoring is a unique, often-misunderstood process. From a historical perspective, “the term ‘mentor’ is derived from both the Greek language and mythology. Mentor was the friend and counselor of Ulysses, who during his 10-year Odyssey raised Ulysses’ son.”⁹ However, mentorship is a dynamic, time-consuming relationship in which the person mentored matures professionally and personally under the mentor’s tutelage so he can “innovate, think, and adapt to the demands of a fast-paced, highly stressful, rapidly changing environment.”¹⁰ For an Army mentoring policy to be effective, the Army must first understand what mentorship is.

In *Mentoring at Work: Developmental Relationships in Organizational Life*, Kathy E. Kram describes four common characteristics found in mentorships:¹¹

1. Individuals (mentees) are allowed to “address concerns about self, career, and family by providing opportunities to gain knowledge, skills, and competence (from their mentors) and to address personal and professional dilemmas (with their mentors).”

2. Both participants benefit since the relationships “respond to current needs and concerns of the two people involved.”

3. The relationships “occur in an organizational context that greatly influences when and how they unfold.”

4. These relationships “are not readily available to most people in organizations.”¹²

During the mid-1980 Armywide leadership initiative, Lieutenant General Charles W. Bagnal coauthored an article called “Leaders as Mentors,” in which “[t]he authors supported the common characteristics of mentorship by defining the mentor’s functions as helping the mentee do the following:

- Clarify career goals and develop a long-term strategy for career planning and advancement.
- Develop short-term individual development plans.
- Develop technical as well as leadership and management skills through instruction and knowledge sharing.
- Develop the frame of reference, values, and skills required at higher organizational levels.
- Deal with job-related or personal problems through counseling.
- Receive the assignments and experience required for advancement through visibility and, as necessary, intervention.”¹³

Major General Kenneth A. Jolemore offered another approach to identifying the characteristics of mentorship in his July 1986 *Military Review* article, “The Mentor: More than a Teacher, More than a Coach,” in which he listed 10 mentor functions:

1. Teaching—skills for job performance and future growth.
2. Guiding—unwritten rules, interface with important people, organizational and social behavior.
3. Advising—experience of a mentor 8 to 15 years older; wisdom.
4. Sponsoring—opportunities for mentee’s growth.
5. Role modeling behavior—common values worthy of emulation.

6. Validating—goal setting.
7. Counseling—emotional support.
8. Motivating—encouragement to move on and accomplish goals.
9. Protecting—providing an environment allowing risk taking; buffer.
10. Communicating—candid, frank interchange of ideas.¹⁴

Kram put the functions of the characteristics best suited for senior leaders into a mentorship model consisting of two subgroups: career and psychosocial (figure 1). Career functions are “those aspects of the relationship that enhance career development, while the psychosocial functions enhance the sense of competence, identity, and effectiveness in a professional role. If the mentor is two or more levels above his mentee in the organization, his experience, rank, and influence within the organization make the career functions possible. If the mentor is 8 to 15 years older than the mentee, a peer-like relationship is avoided. . . ; with mutual trust and increasing intimacy, the psychosocial functions become more possible.”¹⁵ One could certainly add Jolemore’s mentoring characteristics to those of Kram’s, but her list fits his model admirably.

Kram further illustrates that mentorship can be divided into four phases: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition (figure 2). Kram said, “The initiation phase averages six months to a year with the identification of the mentee as one whose potential is worthy of developing. Contact between the two reinforces the idea that the mentor relationship is possible whereby it then becomes important to both participants.”¹⁶

The cultivation phase generally lasts from 2 to 5 years. “During this phase, the range of career . . . and psychosocial functions that characterize a mentor relationship peaks. Generally, career functions emerge first as the mentor provides challenging work, coaching, exposure and visibility, protection, and/or sponsorship. As the interpersonal bond strengthens with time, psychosocial functions emerge. Sometimes they include

primarily role modeling and acceptance—confirmation. In instances of greater intimacy, they include counseling and friendship as well. While career functions depend on the mentor’s organizational rank, tenure, and experience, psychosocial functions depend on the degree of trust, mutuality, and intimacy that characterize

<i>Career Functions</i>	<i>Psychosocial Functions</i>
Sponsorship	Role modeling
Exposure and visibility	Acceptance and confirmation
Coaching	Counseling
Protection	Friendship

Figure 1. Mentoring functions.

the relationship.”¹⁷ The relationship during this phase will change as the mentee grows in competence and self-worth. This phase ends when changes in individual needs or organizational requirements occur.

The separation phase in Kram’s research generally lasts from 6 months to 2 years “after a significant change in the structural role relationship or in the emotional experience of the relationship.”¹⁸ In the Army, this phase, which normally begins with the permanent change of station of one of the participants, is an adjustment period because “career and psychosocial functions can no longer continue in their previous form; the loss of some functions, and the modification of others, ultimately leads to a redefinition of the relationship.”¹⁹

Kram says, “The redefinition phase covers an indefinite period after the separation phase. The relationship either ends or develops significantly different characteristics evolving into a more peer-like friendship. While some functions stop or decrease, sponsorship from a distance, occasional counseling and coaching, and friendship normally continue.”²⁰ During this phase, the mentee might be promoted to the same or higher rank in the organization as the mentor. Kram’s mentorship model is well suited for use by Army senior leaders. The model, which defines the phases of mentorship and the functions that can occur within those phases, is dynamic enough to accommodate differences in personalities, positions, circumstances, and other variables.

According to Kram, a classic mentorship relationship between two individuals would provide the full range of the functions and phases described here. However, many such relationships might contain only a portion of the full range of functions and possibilities. The key point is that each mentorship relationship will be different because of the varying personalities, backgrounds, capabilities, and talents of the individuals involved.

The absence of one or more of the functions above does not disqualify the relationship from being classified as a mentorship, however. An example illustrative of this and well known throughout military history is the mentor relationship between General of the Armies John J. Pershing, who mentored General George C. Marshall, who in turn, mentored General of the Army and later President Dwight D. Eisenhower.”²¹ All three men served as Army chief of staff. In his article, “Defining Mentorship,” Major James O. Patterson says

that if one accepts the premise that the true goal of a mentor is not to further his mentee’s career, “but to help make the Army better by allowing mentees to develop to their full potential, then both mentorships, although very different, were successful.”²² Both mentorships were successful because the mentor helped the mentee develop to his full potential, and the mentee subsequently served with distinction in a position of great responsibility.

The mentorship of Marshall by Pershing comes closest to Kram’s model. The full range of mentorship functions occurred throughout distinct mentorship phases. The Marshall-Eisenhower relationship was not a classic one. The cultivation and separation phases were merged into one because of wartime requirements; however, the relationship ran the gamut of the mentoring functions—some stronger than others. Since these historical examples support Kram’s mentorship model, one could argue that if it worked for Marshall, Pershing, and Eisenhower, then the model can be written into Army policy and used as a standard for senior leaders to use to develop subordinates. Opponents of this model say otherwise, however.

Patterson once defined mentorship as a “service performed in an atmosphere of mutual trust, professional respect, and comradeship in which selected senior soldiers share experiences, knowledge, and challenges with selected junior soldiers, with the goal of improving the Army through increased individual maturity, higher and deeper levels of knowledge, and the full achievement of potential.”²³ He says, “The chain of command depends on leadership, so leaders designate official time for their leadership activities. Leadership has a legal base in the *Uniform Code of Military Justice*, the oath of commission, and the [U.S.] Constitution. The ‘authority’ for mentorship, however, is personal consent.”²⁴

Patterson contends that not everyone can become a mentor or a mentee. If mentorship were structured into a formalized program, it would fail. Mentorship is simply too idiosyncratic in its approach and far too select in its applicability to be institutionalized. He holds that “the essence of mentorship is to improve the force in the long term.”²⁵

Mentoring receives minimal exposure in structured classroom instruction in the Army’s formal military educational system. During leadership instruction at the U.S. Military Academy, the Command and General Staff College, and the Army War College, the concept of mentoring is mentioned

Phase	Time Span
Initiation	6 months to 2 years
Cultivation	2 to 5 years
Separation	6 months to 2 years
Redefinition	Indefinite

Figure 2. Mentorship phases.



only along with subjects like coaching, teaching, and counseling. Instructors make no attempt to explore the concept in depth. The only documented curriculum on mentorship I found was at the Infantry School. During the mid-1980s, the leadership curriculum at the Infantry Officer Advanced Course defined a mentor as “a trusted counselor and a guide, teacher, a coach, and more. He [has] the commitment of a guardian and the duty of a tutor. He has a personal stake in the positive development of his subordinates and is considered an expert in his field.”²⁶

The U.S. Navy takes a similar position. In 1999, 691 active and retired admirals were asked for recommendations for improving the mentoring process in the Navy. They responded emphatically that they did not want a formalized system. Although they endorsed the value and importance of mentoring, they believed such relationships must develop spontaneously and that senior officers must choose carefully those they wish to mentor.

In the article, “Does Mentoring Foster Success,” Brad Johnson and others say, “True mentorship cannot be ordered, forced, or taught. It is a natural result of harmonious rapport inherent in the people themselves and the relationship they develop. It is a natural process that needs no planned process. If you are good, you will be recognized, and if you are fortunate, your superiors will have the opportunity to assist in your career development. Mentoring is a natural process; don’t mess with it.”²⁷

In 1993, the U.S. Air Force (USAF) took another approach to mentoring. At Headquarters, Fifth Allied Tactical Air Force, a NATO headquarters in

Vincenza, Italy, approximately 20 U.S. military officers from various career disciplines—fighter pilots, navigators, airlifters, air defenders, and so forth—formed the “Douhet Society,” named after Italian General Giulio Douhet, author of *The Command of the Air*.²⁸

As the society took shape, many officers displayed great interest by writing papers, establishing reading lists, and holding discussions based on their personal experiences. In the foreword to USAF Pamphlet 36-13, *Officer Professional Development Guide*, former USAF Chief of Staff General Larry Welch says professional development is a “daily business.”²⁹ USAF Manual 1-1, *Basic Aerospace Doctrine of the United States Air Force*, gives officers the “vector” to develop themselves and their subordinates professionally.³⁰ The Douhet Society is a tool that commanders, units, or groups of interested officers can use to achieve that end. In the absence of a written policy, it provides mutually directed guidance that can enhance an organization’s combat effectiveness organization while professionally developing its members.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) introduced the TEAM Principle—a model to train, empower, acknowledge, and mentor its junior leaders. This simple, but effective principle teaches young marines to become technically and tactically proficient through tough, realistic training on how to be successful on the battlefield. Giving them the responsibility and authority to carry out assigned missions fosters trust and respect that enhances and furthers mission accomplishment. The Society rewards Marines with ribbons at the

end of each exercise and provides on-the-spot feedback so participants know what they need to improve on. The Society uses a mentoring aspect to open lines of communication between leaders to share knowledge with subordinates.

Some USMC officers believe mentoring is an art that cannot be formalized; others believe mentoring is a science that should be formalized. The TEAM principle recommends that mentoring never become formalized because mentoring is simply expressing a personal or professional experience that might enhance another person's job performance.

Mentoring is not just top down or bottom up; it is also side to side and should not be formalized but open and continuous. Many years ago, General John Lejeune wrote, "The young American responds quickly and readily to the exhibition of qualities of leadership on the part of his officers."³¹ In a recent article, Captain Chris S. Richie says, "All leaders, regardless of their charisma or natural abilities to lead, can enhance their effectiveness through scientific application of the TEAM principle. I adhered to the TEAM principle during a challenging leadership event in my career and found that the Marines became more committed to the exercise and to one another than to themselves. The TEAM principle works. Military leaders who use it will grow as leaders. They will also have the satisfaction of knowing that they contributed to the retention of fine young Americans we are privileged and entrusted to lead."³²

Problem Analysis

In 1985, Wickham directed a study to determine whether or not to institute an Armywide formal or informal mentoring program. Bagnal tasked the study group to look at the entire Army and make recommendations for an officer professional development program to year 2025. The study was the first to address mentoring as a tool for improving the leadership and professional development of officers.

The group examined all aspects of the officer professional development system examined in what became known as the Professional Development Officer Study. The study, which included a review of officer professional development through education, training, and socialization within the Army, collected data from over 14,000 officers and included more than half of the serving general officers. As a result of the findings, the "professional development framework was designed which depicted professional development occurring throughout an officer's career in both peace and war."³³

Mentoring is one of the many issues the study addressed. The study group defined mentor as "a leader involved in developing through education, so-

cializing, and training [and] being for that individual a role model, teacher, coach, adviser, and guide."³⁴ Of those surveyed, 88 percent agreed that the officer should first be a role model and then a mentor and that commanders should be evaluated on the extent to which they develop the officers serving under them. General officers felt the professional development of subordinates was just as much a leader's responsibility as accomplishing an organizational mission. However, 59 percent of the participants said they had not had a mentor.

The study also found that mentorship was the desired style of leadership in the Army. A mentorship style of leadership "is characterized by open communication with subordinates, role modeling of appropriate values, effective use of counseling for subordinate development, and sharing of the leader's frame of reference with subordinate leaders."³⁵

An in-depth survey of Army and civilian literature on mentoring, with a careful analysis of studies on mentoring in the military, supports the generally accepted view that the primary purpose of mentoring is to develop future leaders. For the most part, the Army agrees with the theories, ideas, and opinions of civilian academia.

In spite of the findings from across the services, most of the research can be assembled into a fairly cohesive application of mentorship. The application also fits nicely into Kram's characteristics and functions model. Each description of an agreed-on mentorship program can be broken down into career and psychosocial functions. Although Kram's mentorship phases vary from mentor to mentee, she concludes that leaders often disagree over which functions are most important. However, the study found that current Armywide mentorship functions include role modeling, teaching, advising, sponsoring, counseling, guiding, motivating, and protecting.

Because leaders' ideas vary about what exactly mentorship is, a mentorship program is not clearly conceptualized; this leads to confusion about what mentorship does and how the process works. Mentoring appears to mean one thing to some, another thing to others. Teaching, sponsoring, counseling, role modeling, coaching, and protecting are not mentoring as traditionally defined. Rather, they represent only some of the many functions the mentor performs. The current functions are simply characteristics required of any good leader.

The Pershing-Marshall and Marshall-Eisenhower mentor-mentee relationships demonstrate that a special professional relationship exists that exhibits most of the characteristics of the traditional model of mentoring. Both relationships were idiosyncratic: they were not products of a formalized mentoring program. Both relationships were strictly voluntary:



each was initiated because of a mutual need and desire and developed according to individual leadership styles. The success of the relationship resulted from the mentor's exceptional ability, self-confidence, commitment, dedication, and experience and the mentees' uniquely great potential. It follows then that the traditional model of mentorship is available and applicable to only a select few.

In March 1989, Lieutenant Colonel Steven Wilson, referencing the Marshall example, wrote a paper on the application of mentorship at the Army War College, addressing five steps that must occur for a mentorship to take place where a traditional model is not present.³⁶

1. "[T]he mentor must invest a great deal of time and energy into his mentee's development. The voluminous correspondence between Marshall and Eisenhower during World War II speaks highly of their commitment to success and the importance they attached to the relationship.

2. [T]he mentor cannot expect the mentee to become his clone. One of the prominent features of the Marshall relationships was that neither [were] characterized by the mentor actively trying to shape his mentee into a mirror image of himself.

3. [B]oth parties must benefit from the experience. Pershing and Marshall derived great satisfaction not just from the fact that their mentees succeeded but that they succeeded while reinforcing the values of their mentors.

4. [S]uccessful mentorship can occur at any level in the Army. Colonels can effectively mentor cap-

tains to the limit of their experience; brigade commanders can mentor captains in how to become successful company commanders.

5. [T]he goal of any mentorship should be to allow the mentee to develop to his or her full potential, thereby making the Army better, rather than just furthering the mentee's career."³⁷

Possible Solutions

There are three possible courses of action (COAs) to implement a viable mentorship program in the Army, each having its pros and cons.

COA 1. Develop and implement a mentorship policy from the top down that uses researched metrics for every commander to use as a benchmark for mentoring.

Pros. The program can—

- Fill the current void that exists in Army policy by defining mentorship and by providing guidance on how to be an effective mentor.

- Be subject to revision based on feedback from the field.

- Be used as a teaching tool in the service schools instead of the minimal coverage that mentorship presently receives.

- Give junior leaders guidance on how to be effective mentors as their experience begins to build.

- Instill trust and confidence that senior leaders recognize the need for a formal program and are willing to address it.

Cons. A formal mentorship program might result in ambiguity because the definition and practice of

mentorship vary from leader to leader, and—

- Resentment can cause the program to be “just another check-the-block” program.

- Officers will only get out of the program what they put into it.

- Measuring the program’s effectiveness might be difficult because it is subjective.

COA 2. Require commanders to institute a bottom-up mentorship program that follows mentorship’s basic tenets set by a new Army policy and, subsequently, require them to report milestones.

Pros: This approach—

- Gives commanders and junior leaders the flexibility to develop tailor-made programs.

- Decentralizes the program with reoccurring oversight to monitor progress.

- Can instill trust and confidence in company grade leaders that senior leaders recognize the need for a formal program and are willing to address it.

- Fosters professional growth because the program is driven from the bottom up.

Cons: In this approach—

- Measuring performance of each program would be subjective, not quantifiable.

- There would be no Department of the Army standard to use as a benchmark.

- Every unit would have a different definition of how to conduct mentoring, which could cause confusion when the officer departs for the next duty station.

COA 3. Leave FM 22-100 as it is and do nothing.

Pros: Leaving things as they are—

- Would allow commanders to define and implement mentorship programs as they see fit and when they see fit.

- Does not force commanders to pursue mentor relationships.

Cons: If things are left as they are—

- Company grade officers would not benefit by learning from senior leaders in structured mentorship programs.

- Company grade leaders would lose faith and trust in senior leaders because mentorship would be provided to only a select few.

- The officer corps would shrink because of a lack of faith and trust.

- Mentorship would be found by way of luck and timing of assignments.

Solution and Implementation

I recommend that a formalized Army mentorship policy combine COAs 1 and 2. I advocate centralized planning of a mentorship model from the Department of the Army with decentralized execution at battalion and brigade levels tailored

to each unit’s mission and training goals. Field manuals and publications are a guide for commanders to use in the decisionmaking process. A mentorship program tailored in this regard should be no different. The resources that create this mentorship model can be acquired through study and research.

The key to the mentorship program’s success is command emphasis and accurate and timely feedback through the chain of command to ensure its continued success, beginning with the CSA and ending with the second lieutenant in charge of a platoon. The Army is a hierarchal organization. For a mentorship program to succeed, it must be developed from the top down.

A mentorship program must be broad enough to grant commanders the freedom to develop junior leaders as they see fit from the bottom up yet be direct enough that adequate boundaries and definitions are provided to achieve stated goals. The basic tenets of the traditional mentorship model—role modeling, coaching, teaching, advising, sponsoring, counseling, guiding, motivating, and protecting—should be included in Army doctrine for leader development. However, fostering those tenets should be up to battalion and brigade commanders in the field. Their challenge will be to develop a results-oriented approach to mentoring that can be measured over time. This program can mirror the characteristics of any self-directed team found in any high-performance organization.

I believe the combination of centralized planning and decentralized execution will provide the necessary framework to set boundaries from which field commanders can have the flexibility to establish mentorship programs as they see fit. In turn, the framework will provide senior Army leaders a foundation on which to build and implement a program beneficial across the force.

Eric and Bud Van Slyke are managing directors of HR Alliance, a human resources consulting firm in Greensboro, North Carolina. They suggest a 7-step, results-oriented, business approach to mentoring I feel would be effective in implementing such a program. The Army could tailor these steps to meet its needs. The steps are as follows:

1. “Identify potential at all levels. Earmark professionally trained college graduates who are perceived to have management potential. Develop a greater variety of employees. Nurture that potential to ensure that all employees meet organizational objectives and individual goals so to become an integrated part of the culture.”

2. “Develop the right skills. Traditional mentoring taught employees how to ‘play the game.’ New mentoring must be linked to performance-based

competencies. They must learn how to interpret and use the information that flows through the workplace. They must develop their people skills when dealing with a diverse group of organizational stakeholders.”

3. “Protect your people investment. Mentorship can retain the workforce so attrition is reduced and job satisfaction increased.”

4. “Develop individual employability. Mentoring should focus on developing and broadening individual skill sets that create maximum flexibility and personal responsibility for meeting the demands of the workplace.”

5. “Foster communication. Mentoring needs to integrate the individual employee into the core organization, not just in his department but companywide from suppliers to customers to senior executives. A more informed employee is a more effective and productive one.”

6. “Break down boundaries affecting high performance. Encourage mentoring relationships across diversity lines and functional areas to reinforce the team concept. Mentoring must go beyond just improving morale and attitudes. Use it to reduce stovepipe thinking and individual focus.”

7. “Reinforce organizational mission, vision, and values. Ultimately, mentoring should improve productivity by reinforcing job objectives, organizational goals, and modes of interaction.”³⁸

These steps, when used with Kram’s model, could serve as the framework for the Army staff to use to write a mentorship policy that provides

guidance and direction for senior Army leaders while providing commanders the flexibility to tailor their unit’s individual mentorship program within that framework. An Army mentorship policy would provide the standard from which all commanders could derive their unit’s specific mentorship programs.

Justification

The results of a 2001 report on captain attrition indicate company grade officer attrition in the Army could be attributed to lack of communication between junior officers and their immediate supervisors.³⁹ Drawing on a variety of sources and other research, Colonel Albert Johnson concluded, “Recent initiatives for reducing attrition would fail unless midlevel managers—majors and lieutenant colonels—do a better job of communicating with lieutenants and captains.”⁴⁰

Johnson also says, “The lack of communication with junior officers results in those officers trying to figure out a direction for their careers without guidance, leadership, or mentoring. Combine that with a robust economy, and officers who believe they are not going to be challenged and led will feel they may as well go elsewhere and earn more money.”⁴¹

To do nothing and leave mentorship up to luck and timing of assignments would be a disservice to the Army’s company grade leaders and would not allow us to earmark and retain quality personnel. Traditional mentoring means are inadequate and will not suffice to develop a self-aware, adaptive force. **MR**

NOTES

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