



# Executive Summary

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## COMMAND DECISION: ETHICAL LEADERSHIP IN THE INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

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This monograph considers how a classical challenge that commanders face in war—namely, making critical decisions on the basis of limited and often unreliable information—has been exacerbated in the era of big data. Data overload complicates the intelligence community's efforts to identify and exclude disinformation, misinformation, and deception, and thus hampers its ability to deliver reliable intelligence to inform decision-makers in a timely manner. The military commander remains responsible for making a final decision, yet the great wealth of data now available through the intelligence cycle amplifies the risk of decision paralysis. With this in mind, technological solutions tend to be considered the most appropriate response for managing data overload and disinformation. While these remain relevant, they alone may be insufficient to equip the military commander with the necessary insight to guide decisions through the uncertainty of the big data environment. Rather, the military commander must cultivate a range of new behaviors in order to avoid decision paralysis and fulfill the distinct leadership roles a commander must play at the various stages of the intelligence process.

For this purpose, this monograph combines U.S. psychologist Daniel Goleman's theory of leadership styles; author John Knights' notion of "transpersonal leadership," on how to identify appropriate behaviors that reflect values which are essential to ethical leadership and ultimately cause positive change in an organization; and retired U.S. Army General Stanley McChrystal's observations from his leadership of the operations and intelligence (O&I) briefing of a task force in Iraq. Significantly, all of these models take inspiration from timeless classical virtues that prove essential for command—for example, Thomas Aquinas's views on justice, temperance, prudence, and fortitude.

IBM data scientists have summarized the new big data challenges in four categories—namely, the volume, variety, veracity, and velocity of how infor-

mation is produced, consumed, and spread, limiting our ability to check its reliability. As a result, different leadership approaches, emotional intelligence (EI) competencies, and critical values will be required at different stages in the intelligence cycle. Three phases are included in such a cycle, each of which entails a specific big data challenge. This monograph proposes solutions to each of these challenges on the basis of the three leadership models mentioned earlier.

The first challenge refers to data overload in volume and variety, primarily affecting the planning and directing phase of the intelligence cycle. Here the military commander is advised to assume the role of a coach, empowering subordinates by training them to act with the command's perspective. McChrystal's "thinking out loud" approach during daily O&I briefings provides an example. The commander would share his or her thought process with the entire command. In so doing, the latter may access the commander's way of thinking and suggest alternative ways of approaching a situation. The EI competencies required at this stage are developing others, empathy, and self-awareness. While it has proven to be quite time-consuming, ultimately, the coaching approach consolidates an atmosphere of honesty and trustworthiness, thus reinforcing the respect and responsiveness subordinates develop toward their leaders.

The second challenge concerns the risk of disinformation in the assessment. At this stage, the military commander should stimulate a team mentality as the team assesses and questions intelligence analysis. Under these circumstances, by asking questions, the commander can leverage the expertise in the room and create a democratic environment in which subordinates are given the opportunity to challenge analyses and identify possible disinformation. Among key EI competencies, the democratic leadership style requires transparency to facilitate open discussion and build trust. Here, the commander must demonstrate

fairness in building team collaboration in order to avoid turf wars, which would only compartmentalize information and increase the possibility of disinformation. Hence, the commander must display self-confidence and inspirational leadership by showing that all issues raised during the assessment phase are meant to improve team efforts and not discredit the intelligence function as a whole. At the same time, the commander must show humility by admitting that team efforts can more successfully navigate the disinformation environment. Ultimately, he must encourage team members to promote change and act for the greater good.

The third challenge relates to the unprecedented public scrutiny of command decision, resulting from the nonstop flow of real-time information from the battlefield to citizens through mass media. Nevertheless, especially in the presence of the uncertainty of the big data environment, commanders cannot delegate ultimate authority and must demonstrate visionary leadership. The latter requires the same EI competencies as democratic leadership – namely, inspirational leadership, self-confidence, change catalysis, and transparency. These underpin McChrystal’s description of the heroic leader, one who is self-confident in one’s capacity to lead despite the complexities of the modern era. Such capacity entails having the moral courage and willpower to take ownership of one’s decisions in the

face of uncertainty as well as confidence that the work devoted toward cultivating and empowering the team will provide the best service to the country.

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