



Sociology of Leadership: The Value of Cross-Cultural Competence in the Armed Forces

One aspect of the sociology of leadership is that leaders must develop cross-cultural competence to build a vibrant culture and enhance the diversity posture in their organization. If there was any organization that embodies the essential aspects of the sociology of leadership, we need to look no further than the United States Armed Forces. Not only does the armed forces serve as the biggest learning organization for leaders, but it also sets the tone for those followers who might excel in

leadership positions in the future. The environment of the military is one of rapid change capable of adapting to defeat an enemy at any place or at any time. One thing that was clear during my 20 years in the army is that we were not only a team, but leaders also created a culture in which soldiers were valued as part of that team. They also supported soldiers to develop to their full potential. Behind every good leader, there must be good followers. The U.S. Army also has competent, self-assured, and motivated followers who serve as the key to their leader's success. Sociology is the study of social behavior and human groups. Sociologists tend to focus on people relationships and how a person can influence others through those relationships. If we were to flip the script to leadership, one would find something similar in that a military leader is tasked to influence people behavior so that they may directly accomplish the goals of the organization. However, for the military leader, there is a bit more to this overall influence.

Leadership adds a new twist to this picture, and it's about leaders having more control of their environment. All leaders will need to build a culture within their organization that will position one to accomplish this control more easily. Culture is nothing more than socially transmitted customs, knowledge, material objects, and behavior that people learn over the course of their interactions with others and these can be passed on over a period. Although language is considered the most important aspect of culture, other things characterize people from one another which a leader must know and learn from time to time as a means to manipulate that culture. For example, we could say that society as a whole is a human group and it comprises people who share a common culture and heritage. Individuals who are members of that community will learn this culture and transmit it from one generation to the next. There may even be some unique parts of this culture that serve as a means of expression that set them apart from other groups. For example, like the sister services, the U.S. Army is organized around a mixture of various cultures. However, when asking any member of the team, you will find that they would all answer as we are all one, "Army of One." Some might even say we are all Army green. Just like any other organization in our society, our armed forces are tasked to learn and build cross-cultural competence in its leadership. However, they go further in that they teach this skill throughout the ranks. Simply put, anyone who has developed a cross-culture competence will end up being ahead of the game.

A cross-cultural competence enables one to lead and manage an organization effectively. The United States of America is a multicultural society, and those who serve in our armed forces reflect this position. We have an obligation to develop an understanding of others in this multicultural world of ours, and this helps us to enhance diversity. The capacity to communicate in a culturally appropriate manner goes a long way to improving the leadership posture of any organization. This tells a story that the leader not only embraces diversity but sets the stage to communicate with all for whom he or she serves that the organization is culturally sensitive to the needs of its members. The armed forces have always served as a leader in this important area. Ross (2012) found that it all started with President Harry S. Truman when on June 26, 1948, he signed an executive order stamping out segregation in the armed forces. However, it was President Dwight David Eisenhower who successfully integrated the U.S. military. The United States Armed Forces have set the standard not only for leadership in our society but diversity as well. The entire armed forces are in the business of making and developing leaders. However, there is something more unique about members of the military forces in that they are culturally competent. Most companies in the United States recognize the value of a person who has served in the military because they go a long way toward building a vibrant and productive culture in any organization. They make us proud!

Reference

Ross, L. F. (2012). *Leadership: So what makes you think you can lead*. Philadelphia: Xlibris Publishers.

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