



Military Leadership and Technology

In which ways do military leaders perceive technology as support or limitation in their leadership?

Philip Lindh

Department of Security, Strategy and Leadership

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Abstract:

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how technology, in broad meaning, is perceived as supporting or limiting in conducting military leadership. Implementation and advancement of new technology has affected the whole military organization in everything from firepower to IT-systems. The environment which the military operates in is lethal, complex and have a high degree of variety and puts an extra burden on military leaders who must have the recourses to be able to execute different missions in conditions which can rapidly change. Military leaders from the Swedish Armed Forces were interviewed regarding perceived supporting and limiting factors in military leadership caused by technology. Technology in itself was not perceived to limit or support leadership, but rather the consequence of its implementation. The perceived supporting factors were; calmness due to the feeling of more control and easiness to communicate with subordinates. The perceived limiting factors were risk of micro-management due to increased overview of subordinates, feeling of not being adequate, administrative technological systems and access to more “irrelevant” information. A contemporary military leader needs to both trust their subordinates and not micromanage but also use their critical thinking to understand what is relevant and what is not.

Keywords: leadership, perception, technology, military leadership, Swedish Armed Forces

Foreword:

I would like to thank Lieutenant Colonel Torbjörn Engelkes for his valuable inputs and advice. I would also like to thank the Swedish Defence University and the teachers from the Department of Security, Strategy and Leadership for a challenging high-class education. Without the knowledge gathered from the education – this thesis would not be possible.

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Purpose:

The purpose with this thesis is to investigate how technology, in broad meaning, are perceived as supporting or limiting in conducting military leadership. The rapid development in technology that happens and has happened makes this a contemporary and important topic. This thesis focuses on the human dimension and how the individual leader perceives technology as a support or limit in the process of influencing other people to achieve a goal. The knowledge which is gained from this thesis may be used to further understand how technology limits and supports military leadership.

Research question:

In which ways do military leaders perceive technology as support or limitation in their leadership?

Introduction:

This thesis examines current research on technology and innovation and its implementation in the Swedish Armed Forces and how well technology is perceived as limiting or supporting when conducting military leadership. The amount of information and technology available for a military leader in today's complex world requires these leaders to have the ability to think critically. Depending on how well a technology is accepted and how well a leader's critical thinking is developed can affect decisions, which is highlighted in the cases of *Stanislav Petrov* and *USS Vincennes* in the theory section. The thesis is based on interviews with 6 different military officers in the Swedish Armed Forces and their perception on how technology has affected their leadership but also what implications this has had for the organization. Technology is broadly defined in the thesis and refers to both technological systems and other technical equipment. The thesis further investigates what officers would like to see in the future development of technology from a leadership perspective and how the emergence of social media has affected their leadership. The thesis also gives suggestions on future research.

Theory and Background

Leadership:

Leadership can be defined in several different ways. Northouse defines leadership as “Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.” (Northouse, 2018 p. 43). Some ways in which leadership has been studied are through leader characteristics, needs of followers and their characteristics, an exchange between a follower and leader or leadership based in adapting to the situation (Laurence, 2011 p. 489). Great Man Theory of Leader, Trait Theory of leadership, Behavior or Skills leadership, Power or Influence theory of leadership, Contingency Theory of leadership and Integrative leadership are some of the different leadership theories (Shafique & Beh, 2017 p. 135). The Great Man Theory focuses on the personality of the leader. Trait theory researchers have tried to find specific attributes which existed in effective leaders. Another theory is the so-called theory of situational leadership. The situational leadership model is based on four different situations where the leader should lead differently. The first one is telling the employees on what to do, the second is telling and preparing the followers to accept. The third one is participating, where the leader makes decision based on discussing the task. The fourth one is delegating where the leader delegates the power to the followers to make own decisions which will lead toward the common objective (Shafique & Beh, 2017 p. 138).

Another approach to leadership is the so-called *transformational leadership*.

Transformational leadership a part of the so called “New leadership paradigm” and is currently one of the most researched approaches since the early 1980s (Northouse, 2018 p. 263). This current approach to leadership is therefore more thoroughly described.

Transformational leadership, with its charismatic and visionary leadership, can be used to describe both influence on a one-to-one level but can also encompass things such as influence on a whole organization (Northouse, 2018 p. 263). Transformational leadership is built upon four different behaviors: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration (Kelloway & Gilbert, 2017, pp. 202-204). *Idealized influence* describes how leaders function as role-models for their followers and consequently followers can and want to identify with these leaders. The leaders provide a vision for their followers, but also a sense of a mission. *Inspirational motivation* is about leaders who communicate a vision and sets high expectations and motivates followers to become a part of a shared vision (Northouse, 2018 pp. 271-272). *Intellectual stimulation* describes a leader

that tries to stimulate their followers to be creative and innovative - supporting followers to try new approaches. *Individualized consideration* concerns a behavior where a leader establishes and provides a supportive climate for the individual follower and listens to the individual follower's needs (Northouse, 2018 pp. 272-273).

Leadership in a military context:

Leadership in the military and leadership in a civilian context are different. One of the differences is in followers' motivational base but also in the contextual settings. In a combat unit, unlike most civilian business, there is a possibility of death and mental or physical injury (Popper, 1994 pp. 19-20). The leader works as a "projection screen" where the followers will project their anxiety on (Popper, 1994 p. 20). Another difference is the ambiguity, complexity and volatility faced by military leaders. Military leaders, due to for example counterinsurgency and irregular warfare, require a focus on both the technology and the human aspects (Laurence, 2011 p. 490). The environment which the military operates in is lethal, complex and have a high degree of variety. Military leaders must have the recourses to be able to execute different missions in conditions which can rapidly change (Morath et al, 2011 pp. 455-456).

Difference between being a leader and being a manager/management

There is discussion concerning the difference between being a leader and being a manager. According to Liphadzi et al, the difference can be seen as; "leadership definitions include social influence and the leader's role is setting a purpose or vision of change, whereas management associates with fulfilling organizational goals and processes" (Liphadzi et al., 2017 p. 479). Managers and management handles tasks such as controlling, budgeting, and structuring whereas leadership is about influence. These two can though overlap and an organization needs both managers and leaders to be successful in achieving the set organizational goals (Liphadzi et al., 2017 p. 480).

Information technology and other technology:

There are plenty of different technologies that the military uses, everything from logistics to information systems. Information systems can be defined as systems which are designed to efficiently store large amounts of data and automatically arrange them into specific format and outcomes to enhance operational management achievement (Kuo & Lee, 2011 p. 113). During the Cold War information technology have become more advanced. (Lindsay, 2021)

According to Lindsay, the relationship between information technology and military power is incredibly complicated (Lindsay, 2021) As an example, leadership is central for the U.S. military. The personal management and leadership development processes of the U.S. military have not, in the last 30 years, changed in the same pace as the development of the technological environments (Dobbs et al., 2017 p. 2).

Technology and innovation in the military and its implications:

Implementation of technology has affected the whole military organization. Technological advancement has been done in both firepower but also IT-systems (Barley, 2020 p. 165). This has led to the military being more mobile. There are several examples on when the world has been on the brink of destruction because of malfunctioning technology. One example is the Soviet Lieutenant Colonel Stanislav Petrov. In 1983, the technology warned for a nuclear attack from NATO forces. He decided that this was a false alarm and did not launch counter-rockets. (Demont-Biaggi & Jager, 2017 p. 169). Demont-Biaggi & Jager argues that this is an example that shows and implies that there is a great importance for human leaders that both can and will, assess information which is computer gathered. It is also important that military leaders can decide against the conclusions of information and communication technology (Demont-Biaggi & Jager, 2017 p. 170). In multinational military operations information technology can create problems if the systems are not connected well to each other (Barley, 2020 p. 167).

Data and technology created for using the data to predict outcomes and help in the decision-making processes, have made advancement. Lack of data can lead to misleading and inaccurate decisions (Dobbs et al., 2017. p. 3). On the other hand, the increase of information available and the analysis of this data might prove to be hard since too much information may lead to an information overload (Barley, 2020 p. 169). Morath et al also argues that the amount of information can lead to information overload (Morath et al, 2011 p. 458). Demont-Biaggi & Jager argues that it is important for leaders to take control in the extent it is possible, because the information and automatic data processing might limit the options available to the leaders and therefore reduce leaders' control over decision-making and make their leadership not much more than a "dry leaf" (Demont-Biaggi & Jager, 2017 p. 174). Demont-Biaggi & Jager says that the information which a military leader must act on usually comes from one technology, one source. To "take control" is important but also in those

cases where it is possible, to ask another source, for example a human advisor, this should be done (Demont-Biaggi & Jager, 2017 p. 182). As example, in 1988, USS *Vincennes* shot down a civilian aircraft, killing almost 300 people. The radar worked fine but the operators misinterpreted the information as the civilian aircraft to be an Iranian F-14 fighter jet which was about to attack (Lindsay, 2020). As shown, decision making and processing of information is becoming more complex at all different ranks, even at lower ranks (Fallesen et al, 2011 p. 470).

The acceptance of new innovations and technology:

The use and acceptance of technology can be analyzed through three different models. One of the widely used models for the adoption of information technology systems is the *technology acceptance model* (TAM) which was introduced in 1989. (Kuo & Lee, 2011 p. 115). TAM builds on the notion that there are two things which determine if a person will accept a new technology and a person's behavior intention to use a new technology. The first thing is if the person perceives the technology as being useful – will this increase my job performance? The second thing which determines if a person will accept the technology is the perceived ease of using the technology. The less hard it is perceived to use a technology the easier the technology will be accepted by the person (Kuo & Lee, 2011 p. 115). The second model is the *Innovation diffusion theory* (IDT) which is based on that there are three main characteristics which are significant when it comes to the adoption of a specific innovation. These are relative advantage, compatibility, and complexity. Relative advantage is about if the new technology or innovation brings a greater benefit than that of “traditional methods”. Compatibility is about if the new technology is perceived as compatible with past experiences, values and what is needed by the adopters. Complexity is about how hard it is to apply and understand the innovation (Kuo & Lee, 2011 p. 115). The third model is called the *task-technology fit-model* (TTF). The focal point of this model is on how well the new technology solves or fits the tasks. If a technology does not offer any advantage, it will not be used (Kuo & Lee, 2011 p. 116). Implementing new technology or the resistance against implementation have been major factors in the battlefield (Barley, 2020 p. 165). Lindsay argues that it is not only the quality of the new technology that matters in war, but also how the people that are using it, use it (Lindsay, 2021).

Social Media and Military Leadership

The emergence of social media has led to several things in a military organization. The possibility to be able to reach out to family via social media has been shown to increase psychological relief for soldiers but can also lead to increased feelings of separation from family (Alvinus et al, 2017, p. 209). Another current topic which has been discussed, but not properly researched, is the fear of making decisions due to the increased transparency that social media brings. The potential fear of making decision can also endure over time since pictures and documentation can be stored and then used later, which can make soldiers or commanders accountable for behaviors and actions in the past (Alvinus et al, 2017, p. 210).

Critical thinking and autonomous learning for military leaders:

Today's military operations have become more complex and one of these reasons is advancement of technology (Mensch & Rahschulte, 2008 pp. 264-265). Due to this complexity, critical thinking is a key asset for military leaders. Today's military leaders will face situations which are not like those which were encountered during their training. Critical thinking and reasoning in the form of believing and deciding beyond analogical experience, and hence hopefully moving towards a superior course of action, is important (Mensch & Rahschulte, 2008 p. 265).

Military leaders who act in these complex situations are required to have a set of diverse skills, including an ability to think critically and creatively. To be able to use these skills appropriately in the right situations this further requires knowledge which have been or need to build up by formal, non-formal or informal learning (Alexa, 2021 p. 88). Formal learning takes place in an education system with a goal-oriented approach. A curriculum with the specific knowledge outcome is stated. Non-formal learning is not a goal-oriented process but instead takes place in institutionalized format with a legal framework – such as an organization. Informal learning on the other hand is something which is developed throughout one's life and takes places in for example at one's workplace, in one's family or during meeting with peers (Alexa, 2021 p. 88). This life-long learning is by Mensch & Rahschulte defined as autonomous learning, self-directed learning. This self-directed learning is when an individual takes the initiative on their own, diagnosing their learning needs, and on their own implementing and choosing learning strategies. This can be both with and without the help of others. The important is the self-initiative (Mensch & Rahschulte, 2008 p. 266). The initiative in itself does not imply the ability to reach some kind of learning goal.

Maintaining motivation when facing obstacles, competing goals and frustration is important for learning and critical thinking (Mensch & Rahschulte, 2008 p. 268).

Method

Science philosophy

This study takes a romanticist approach when it comes to the information gathered in the interviews. A romanticist perspective highlights the human encounter in an interview. The interviewees are encouraged to share their authentic experiences and feelings, creating a more realistic picture of the interviewees experiences than what could have been uncovered using a neopositivist approach (Qu & Dumay, 2011, pp. 241-242). This approach also allows for the acceptance that not all the interviewees that participated in the study might have understood the wording of the questions in the same way, but rather the interview gives access to the perspective of the individual interviewee (Qu & Dumay, 2011, p. 245). Since the purpose of the study is to investigate technology's perceived support or limitation in conducting military leadership the individual interviewee's perspective is not only important, but the mere essence of this thesis.

Epistemologically this means that the interviewee is seen as a passive vehicle of information. In contrast to a neopositivist approach, this study does not necessarily regard the information gathered in the interviews as universal or as the genuine experience or perception of other officers in the Swedish Armed Forces but might work as an indicator.

Qualitative method - interviews

This is a qualitative study based on interviews. Qualitative studies and the data generated are by some quantitative researchers seen as something which is "unreliable, impressionistic, and not objective". These researchers do not value the data generated by a qualitative interview more than that of a casual conversation (Qu & Dumay, 2011, p. 239). This thesis wants to investigate how the interviewees perceives technology as supporting or limiting in conducting military leadership. A qualitative method with interviews can be a useful way to learn about the world of others (Qu & Dumay, 2011, p. 239). Interviews can also provide a deeper understanding people's feeling, emotions, and perceptions, and is by Langemar described as the "natural way" in which to understand and gather knowledge of the world of others (Langemar, 2008 pp. 68-69). This thesis investigates the perception among the interviewees. A qualitative method with interviews was therefore chosen.

Participants

There was a total of 6 participants in the study. Everyone who participated has over 20 years of experience in the Swedish Armed Forces. There was one captain, one Major, three Lieutenant Colonels and one Regimental Sergeant Major. All the participants were males. This was not intentional, but probably rather a consequence of the distribution among the number of male and female officers in the Swedish Armed Forces. The sample selection of interviewees was made both strategically but also through an availability sampling. The participants had to fill the criteria of being “military leaders”. The fulfilment of this criteria was based on the formal roles of the interviewees and not whether they were leaders or managers as defined in the theory section. This definition of the criteria of being a military leader, was due to two reasons. The first reason is that most of the literature on military leadership do not make a difference between the formal role of being an officer and being a military leader. An officer is in the literature the same as a military leader – and this thesis uses the same definition, with the reservation that this necessarily is not true all the time. The second reason for why being a military officer is enough to fulfil the requirement of being a military leader in this thesis, is that measuring who is doing more of “controlling, budgeting, and structuring” and who is doing more of “influencing” can be complicated to measure and define and is outside of the scope of this thesis. Being an officer, either commissioned or non-commissioned, was therefore in this study the requirement that had to be fulfilled. All the interviewees fulfilled this requirement.

Interviewees which then were available to the author, through contacts but also through being course directors/lecturers in other courses at the Department of Security, Strategy and Leadership at the Swedish Defence University, and would be likely to be able to participate in this study were contacted. A total of 7 potential participants were contacted. 6 of these replied and participated in the study.

Data gathering

The data gathering was done by a total of 6 interviews. These interviews lasted between 25-33 minutes. 4 of the interviews were done over telephone without moving picture. 2 interviews were done through the digital communication platform *Zoom*. The interviews were based on a semi-structured format and the interviews were conducted in Swedish. The semi-structured interviews followed the same format, and the interviewees were asked the same

questions. The questions had the format of a subjective open-ended question and were targeted towards the perception of the individual interviewee. An example of a question is:

“Upplever du, generellt, att det blivit svårare eller lättare idag att vara en bra ledare på grund av teknologi? Varför?”

Which translates to:

“Do you, generally, perceive it to be harder or easier today to be a good leader because of technology? Why?”

The questions were based on the research question but were also influenced by the theory-section and cotemporary research. Since the interviewer is also Swedish-speaking there was no need for a translator – something which would have an effect since it would then not be direct communication. The interviews were recorded and then listened through afterwards. Notes were also taken during the interviews.

Thematic analysis and data analysis

There are different qualitative methods, but one of the most fundamental ones is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method to find and form relevant themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). In order to form and find relevant themes the recordings of the interviews were listened to several times and were then also transcribed. Transcribing the material was made to get an overview of the recorded material. The transcribed material was then read individually. Repeating and relevant words and sentences were picked out from the individual transcribed material and became the basis for codes. After the transcribed material had been read individually, the codes from these were compared and contrasted against the other interviews. After comparing the individual codes some major themes emerged. When uncovering and finding these themes, an emphasis was put on leadership and the research question. To make sure that the interviewees meant the same thing, the individual interviews, with the potential themes in mind, were read through again to understand the context. The identified themes are presented below in the “Results” part.

Reliability

Studies show that non-verbal communication is important for communication. Some argue, even if it has been questioned, that communication is 7% verbal, 38% vocal and 55% facial (Lapakko, 1997 p. 63). None of the interviews were done in person which means that some important parts of the communication might have been lost. 2 of the interviews were done through the digital communication platform Zoom which allowed for moving camera during the interview. This might have had the effect that this risk was mitigated a bit.

The answers were translated from Swedish to English in the “Results” part of the thesis. The translation was done by the author. When translating, important information could potentially be lost, lowering the reliability of the study. To lower this risk as much as possible, the Swedish answers were read through and translated several times. A native-level bilingual Swedish/English speaker was also asked to help translate back these results to Swedish to verify the reliability.

Validity

All the participants in the study come from the Swedish Army or the Swedish Navy. This means that military leaders from the Swedish Air Force and the Home Guard were not represented. The study aims to investigate how technology, in broad meaning, is perceived as supporting or limiting in conducting military leadership. By only having Swedish interviewees and only two service branches represented, the validity of this study, when it comes to investigating how technology has affected military leadership, is low. To strengthen this validity, the research question and its research aim could have been different, targeting military leadership in the army service branch of the Swedish Armed Forces.

Ethical considerations

The interviewees were approached and asked if they wanted to participate in an interview through a written email. The initial email also contained information about the study and its purpose. All the interviewees which participated responded and accepted the request to participate through a written email.

Three of the interviewees are affiliated to the Department of Security, Strategy and Leadership at the Swedish Defence University, the same department at which this thesis is written at. This could potentially mean that these interviewees feel obligated to participate.

Another potential interviewee, also connected to the department, never replied to the request of participate. This implies that the interviewees not necessarily felt obligated to participate because they were affiliated to the department, but rather participated because they wanted to.

Every interviewee was asked if they would allow the interview to be recorded before the recording started. The recorded material has been handled according to the ethical guidelines at the Swedish Defence University. The recordings have only temporarily been stored at the recording device and have thereafter been transferred to an USB. The recordings on the USB will be removed and the USB formatted after this thesis has received a passing grade.

Another ethical consideration, which according to Bryman, is an ethical principle in Swedish research is whether the research intrudes on the participants private life (Bryman, 2011, p.170). The thesis targets the perception of the participants in their roles as military leaders and no questions is asked about their private life.

Results

After the thematic analysis had been conducted in the way which was described in the “Method” section some major themes were revealed. These themes are sorted based on whether they were perceived as something which supported the military leadership or something which was seen as limiting the military leadership. The subsections are then further structured based on organizational factors which have an impact on the individual leadership, and then individual factors. Another theme which does not fall under this sorting is how social media have affected the military leadership and what the military leaders would want to see in the future when it comes to the development of technology and technological tools.

The results of the interviewees perceptions of limiting and supporting factors in their military leadership, connected to technology, are summarized below:

Supporting:	Limiting:
Calmness due to the feeling of more control	Risk of micro-management due to increased overview of subordinates
Easier to communicate with subordinates	Feeling of not being adequate

-	Administrative technological systems
-	Access to more “irrelevant” information

Perceived limitations in conducting military leadership due to technology

Micro-management due to increased overview of subordinates

One thing which is perceived as being more prone to happen today, due to the technological advancement, is micro-management. The risk of micro-management was something which by some of the interviewees was seen as limiting in their military leadership. One of the interviewees described that when he started his career in the Swedish Armed Forces, there was not an option to always reach each other. The technological advancement in command-and-control systems is perceived as the reason by the interviewee.

“Back in the days, you were sometimes to give an order which would maybe last for days – today I can feel that we might have become less good at this, since we can always reach each other”

This interpretation seemed to depend on what branch in the Armed Forces the interviewee came from. One interviewee described that they have never had orders which lasted for several days due to the nature of the branch. The technological advancement has led to the option to be able to go into details in things which are supposed to be solved by subordinates. One of the interviewees gave an example. He had been given an order by a superior and one hour later the same superior had asked him how it is going, when the interviewee did not even had had the time to start. From a perspective of Mission-type tactics – *uppdragstaktik* in Swedish – the leadership philosophy of the Swedish Armed forces; it was seen that some aspects of technology made it better and some worse. The technology was in this case perceived as a limitation, but the access to for example digital pictures and video have also made the possibility to be more precise in giving orders possible. Having the opportunity to give more precise orders was seen as something which supported the leadership. One of the interviewees said that every *manager* needs to pull oneself together and ask:

“What kind of manager am I now? Who knows best? Is it really me which sits and watches what happens on a computer screen where people are located, or should I trust that the

person that I see on the computer screen - which actually has an overview of the terrain, understands the situation better than me?”.

Feeling of not being adequate

Another theme which was perceived as being limiting in conducting military leadership was the feeling of not being adequate due to technology. One of the interviewees described that; allied nations, on a joint-mission in Afghanistan, had much better technology, both in terms of effectiveness and task-fit. The better technology used by the allied nations gave rise to a feeling of being an inadequate leader. Since this military leader – first had – experienced what technologies the Swedish Armed Forces could have but lack he felt that he could have been a better leader for his subordinates if he had these tools.

“It led to frustration which probably affected my leadership – you do not feel adequate when you know how much better you could have been”.

Adapting and learning the new systems was also something which was perceived as a thing which can create a feeling of feeling inadequate or affect the leadership. One reason which was mentioned was the increased workload, which getting to know a new system leads to. Connected to the perceived feeling of not being adequate, the topic of not being able to use and apply the tactics that you as a leader would want, emerged. One of the interviewees described a situation when he had been a battalion commander and the telecommunication system “Telesystem 9000” just had been implemented. The system had limitations on how it could be grouped in terrain.

Organizational technological limitations which are perceived as limiting when conducting military leadership

Administrative technological systems

One theme which was mentioned by every interviewee except one, as limiting in conducting leadership, was administrative systems such as the time reporting system. This theme can be said to be on a meso-level rather than on a micro-level. Systems such as the time reporting system have had the perceived consequence of creating less time face-to-face with the soldiers. The behaviors of officers and military leaders in the Swedish Armed Forces connected to the administration were also mentioned. It was described as that, administrative technology was used more, both intentionally and unintentionally, than what would be

needed. This limited time with subordinate soldiers. Time with subordinate soldiers was something which was seen as important by the interviewees in their leadership.

“Some people make the administration harder than what it actually is”.

Another interviewed further described:

“It is very easy, even for ambitious persons, to sometimes hide behind the administration with the purpose to get away easier”.

One suggested potential factor of the increased amount of time spent on administrative tasks, was by one of the interviewees described as

“The Swedish Armed Forces might have not put enough time and effort in recruiting the “right type” of officer towards the work-related tasks which an officer in 2021 needs. Being a leader today requires an administrative ability – no matter where in society one might work in”.

Access to more “irrelevant” information

Some of the interviewees experienced that the access to more information could lead to more questioning among the subordinates, or that the increased access to information has led to that the focus is steered away from what their focus should be. The easier access to the information, which technology has made possible, has led to this consequence. An example of this was when a more junior officer was going to plan a shooting exercise, a “Susa”. The junior officer was thinking about the budget for the ammunition which was going to be used. The interviewee described the thoughts of this junior officer as

“It is better that we take four practice grenades rather than one sharp-charged grenade, because then we can afford [...]”

The interviewee described that on the level of the junior officer, one should not worry about the budget, the junior officer should focus on the shooting. This has the organizational implication that too much information could mean that military leaders complicate their function.

Perceived supporting factors in conducting military leadership due to technology

Calmness due to the feeling of more control:

The increased information available has perceived downsides but there are also perceived upsides. Technology was perceived by some of the interviewees as something which would make them calmer in their role as a leader. This was due to the feeling of more control. Knowing for example where the subordinates are positioned and what is going on without asking for reports from the subordinates all the time was something which was seen as something supporting for leadership.

One of the interviewees described a situation where the use of technology could have supported the leadership. The interviewee explained that he had visited an army regiment in Sweden where they still used technology which is about to get switched to newer technology. This old technology consisted of mainly telecom and had the support of traditional maps. The interviewee described that an officer who led the exercise communicated using the same systems as well. After a couple of hours of battle, the commanding officer became mad because he felt that they had lost the control – they did not know where the soldiers were, or what they were doing. The lack of control was something which was perceived as something which could be mitigated by technology and technological tools such as positioning systems.

Another interviewee described that in his personal leadership, he perceived the implementation of more modern GPS-systems to be important. He described that it led to a feeling of more control and feeling safer and more confident in oneself because of the opportunity to be able to verify one's position easier.

“[...] in an area with 9 million mines, the ones in the back of the wagon count upon the ones in the front, which leads, to know where we are going”

He further explained that he thinks that the consequence of feeling more confident and safer and its implication on leadership is that one saves “*cognitive capital*” which can be used on other things.

Easier to communicate with subordinates

The interviewees also explained how for example the increased range in radio- and telecommunications systems were perceived as supporting in their leadership. One of the interviewees described that this had led to the opportunity to communicate with each other even if commercial products would be non-functioning. Another interviewee described how he perceived technology in the form of radios:

“Just having such a things as a radio and being able to communicate with people have had the consequence that I can be much quicker in delivering decisions – every situation do not require me to stand face to face and give an order, in some cases it’s enough with things such as “Halt, Forward, Right, Left” and in those cases the technology have made it considerably easier – or is sometimes even crucial to succeed”.

Another interviewee explained how communication trough informal channels such as social media could help to anchor the organization and its operations among the personnel. He explained that he had used *Facebook* as a complement, to highlight what the battalion was doing and by that, try to create a feeling that they did both a lot, but also a lot of good things.

“[...] It was a shortcut to reach all the personnel at the battalion – a lot of people have Facebook, and many of these were following us “

Other themes connected to military leadership:

Information overload and when to make decision based on the information

All the interviewees agreed on that information is more accessible today than it was before. Some of the interviewees describe how the information has always been too much for the human to handle – but the information historically took longer time to “create” and obtain. Another one of the interviewees explained that even if the information is more accessible today, a dilemma with information has always existed in the military. The interviewee described that he thinks that even when an army had mounted cavalry as reconnaissance units, the commander had to decide on when there was enough information and then decide.

“You have to draw a line, and decide that now we have enough information, and then make a decision”.

He thus recognizes that there might be colleagues that face a problem when making decisions. The interviewee puts emphasis that it is important for a military leader to decide on for example a time when to give an order or decide upon an “amount” of information which is needed, then make the ultimate decision. He explained that if the decision would later be proven wrong then at least you would have made a decision. The interviewee explained that this process might be harder for officers and military leaders who are not as secure in their role. One more interviewee mentioned that how secure one is in their role as military leaders will affect. Another of the interviewees says:

“In 8 hours, you will have more information, and the problem, both now but also then, is to establish that - now I do not need more information, or I will not become wiser with more information and now I just need to make my decision”.

The interviewee further adds that:

“[...] I think it builds more upon a safety in oneself and the certainty from maybe have experienced a similar situation before”.

The amount of information in the form of for example emails is something which is perceived by some of the interviewees as limiting in their leadership. One of the interviewees who perceived the amount of information in the form of example emails limiting in his leadership said that it creates a feeling of being inadequate. This was something which he did not experience 15 years ago.

Social media’s transparency and military leadership

A theme which was identified was social media’s effect on military leadership. Most of the interviewees had had experience of social media being used or had seen social media being used throughout the organization. None of the interviewees had personally experienced that the increased transparency, which the emergence of social media has led to, has affected their decision-making. The interviewees acknowledged that a wrongdoing or a not thought trough expression could lead to consequences that did not exist before social media. Two examples of this are:

“Back in the days you could say practically whatever – it did not get out anywhere. Today, an incautious commentary can create a Twitter storm”.

And

“When I was a commander on an international mission, we were very clear and precise about what information that our soldiers could share on social media and what kind of information that were not allowed to be shared since some information could also end up in the hands of non-friendly persons”.

Most of the interviewees were positive to the increased transparency due to social media. In the decision-making process and what orders that have been given, and how it has been affected by social media, the interviewees described that there has not been any change. The interviewees described that increased transparency might instead work as an “extra-check” or that one would “think an order through on more time” before issuing the order. None of the interviewees thought that it had personally affected them, but two of the interviewees described that they have seen or experienced that it might have influenced colleagues. These interviewees emphasized that it depends on what kind of person you are and how safe you are in the role as a military leader and officer. Most of the interviewees emphasized that even before the emergence of social media it was important for a military leader to be able to stand by their decision. If a military leader would make another decision or make their followers act in another way due to the increased transparency it would be the “wrong” decision or order in the first place.

“There are old ethical guidelines regarding decisions and one of the most important ones are whatever one can see oneself in the mirror and stand for the decision afterwards”.

Future development of technology from a military leadership perspective

When asked what the interviewees would like to see in the future from a leadership perspective, when developing new technology, themes emerged. The interviewees emphasized the need to create technology and technological solutions which are better suited for the wanted outcome rather than just developing and creating a tool. This were perceived as something which would support the future military leadership

The technology needs to be needs-driven rather than technology-driven. The perception among some of the interviewees was that they were given “things” which they had not asked for and were then expected to use them. Some technological tools are perceived as not being developed with the available resources of a military leader in mind. One of the interviewees described this lack of adaption as:

“Some of the systems presuppose an office, office chairs and also a certain computer knowledge and are not always developed for what The Swedish Armed Forces specifically wants”.

And

“The technical systems need to be better at packaging the information to the individual and what the specific position requires”.

The interviewees would also want to have an explanation on why the new technology, or the technological tool, have been developed. An interviewee expressed that he sometimes felt that the Swedish Armed Forces sometimes “tried to fix thing which are not broken” by introducing new systems which are more complicated than the old system.

“The lead-word should be usability and simplicity – it should work in darkness when it’s raining, and one is afraid”

Discussion

The aim of this study has been to research in which ways military leaders perceive technology as support or limitation in their leadership. The results give answers to these questions but also further provide important implications on for example future development of technology from a leadership perspective. Some of the results are in line with the current research on the area and will be discussed with consideration to both the results but also with regard to the theory-section.

Social media and military leadership: Supporting the leadership

Current research problematizes about that military leader might not make certain decision due to the increased transparency and consequently also affecting the leadership of military

leaders (Alvinius et al, 2017, p. 210). The increased transparency is something which does not seem to bother and is not perceived as having a limiting effect on the military leadership, by the military leaders who participated in the study. It was instead, by most interviewees, seen as something good to have the increased transparency, because this might work as an “extra-check” before issuing an order to subordinates. The social media were also instead perceived as something which can help reach out more effectively to personnel. This would imply that the technology of social media has actually been supporting in military leadership rather than working as something which would make military leaders to make certain decisions. The limit of this conclusion is though, that this study has researched and investigated the perception that of military leaders, rather than their actual actions that has or will be taken. This means that they might perceive that they would lead or act in a certain way, but the actual way would be different.

Another aspect of the results is the communication with followers, through the help of technology such as social media. An important aspect of being a leader is the ability to inspire one’s follower. From a transformational leadership approach, which today is one of the most researched approaches, two important behaviors of a leader are idealized influence and inspirational motivation (Kelloway & Gilbert, 2017, pp. 202-204). By using social media to communicate with personnel as one of the interviewees described, to show what the organization was doing and show “*all the good things*” can be an example of when the military leader, intentionally or unintentionally, did things which are coherent with idealized influence and inspirational motivation. By creating a sense of team-spirit and emphasis on a shared vision, a leader, according to the transformational leadership approach, can create a better organizational outcome than mere *transactional leadership*. The technology of social media can thus be seen as something which supports the leadership and according to the study conducted, does not lead to that certain decisions are not made because of the increased transparency.

Making a decision based on the information and critical thinking for military leaders

The interviewees agreed that the information today, due to the technological advancement, might be more accessible than it was before. Some of the interviewees thus argued that there always has been a dilemma in the military to make a decision based on available information since there can always be new information coming in. Morath et al argued that the amount of information which is available today can lead to information overload (Morath et al, 2011 p.

458). As the results implicate, some of the interviewees thought that the problem with information overload has always existed, this is something which is not completely coherent with the theory. The results show that the interviewees put emphasis on that a military leader should be able to decide when to make a decision. As the results describe, two of the interviewees also thought that the ability to make decisions was somehow dependent on how secure a military leader is in their role. This can be connected to critical thinking, which was mentioned in the theory part. Critical thinking is a key asset for today's military leaders, who acts and make decision in situations which are characterized by complexity (Mensch & Rahschulte, 2008 p. 265). Critical thinking is defined as reasoning in the form of believing and deciding beyond analogical experience. One reason why military operations today have become more complex is technology advancement (Mensch & Rahschulte, 2008 pp. 264-265). Studies shows that critical thinking can be or needs to be built up by formal, non-formal or informal learning (Alexa, 2021 p. 88).

The military leaders who participated and were interviewed might have a bigger capability of critical thinking due to; formal, non-formal or informal learning. All the participants have over 20 years of experience which might mean that these military leaders might have had the opportunity to improve their critical thinking and ability to make decision even though the information is more easily accessible today than it was before. More junior officers and military leaders who have just started in their role might not have had these opportunities to develop their capabilities of critical thinking. As mentioned, two of the interviewees also explained that they had the perception that military leaders, who might not be so secure in their role, as maybe more junior officers. might not be as good at knowing when to make a decision – when there is “enough” information to give an order. Fallenen et al argues that decision making and processing of information is becoming more complex at all different ranks, even at lower ranks (Fallesen et al, 2011 p. 470).

This thesis shows that the perception among the participants, who are more senior military leaders, is that making decisions as a leader not necessarily have become harder. The limitation is though that they have a lot of experience and probably have great critical thinking capabilities but at lower ranks this might not be the case. This might be illustrated as; when one of the interviewees described how a junior officer, who planned a shooting exercise, and the junior officer was thinking about the budget for the ammunition and if they were supposed to use four practice grenades rather than one sharp-charged grenade and had a

hard time deciding. He had a hard time deciding because technology had made the budget and other information more accessible than it was before. A more critical thinking approach to this might be that he would instead not use this information, as the interviewee, which was his superior implicated, but should have just made the decision and not worry about the information about the budget.

Accepting new technology – if the technology better fits the task, it will be perceived as being supporting in one’s military leadership

Maintaining motivation when facing obstacles, competing goals and frustration is important aspect when it comes to critical thinking (Mensch & Rahschulte, 2008 p. 268). Some of the interviews described how the implementation of new technology sometimes has been hindering when they have conducted military leadership. One of the most prominent examples which was revealed was the implementation of the time reporting system. Another example which was given by an interviewee was the Telesystem 9000. Other technological tools have also been implemented which, based on the interviews, also have been seen as just “another tool” and have not really been seen as being useful. As mentioned in the theory, one of the widely used models for the adoption of information technology systems is the *technology acceptance model* (TAM) (Kuo & Lee, 2011 p. 115). TAM mentions that there are two things which determine if a person will have a behavioral intention to use a new technology and if a person will accept a new technology.

The first one is concerning if one thinks that the technology is useful and will increase one’s performance. The second thing which determines if a person will accept the technology is the perceived ease of using the technology. The less hard it is perceived to use a technology the more easily the technology will be accepted by the person (Kuo & Lee, 2011 p. 115). What is interesting with this is thus that most of the interviewees, when asked what their opinion was on technology which was implemented around 10 years ago, they did maybe not longer view these as just “tools” but instead rather something helpful. This implicates that some technology and technological tools, which are in the beginning seen as something rather unnecessary or useless might later be perceived as something useful.

As described in the theory section, the resistance against implementation have been a major factor in the battlefield (Barley, 2020 p. 165). With this said, almost all the interviewees called upon technology which would be better suited for solving the problems and situation at

hand, or at least work better than the old technology used. Implementing new technology or the resistance against implementation has been a major factor in the battlefield, and hence also affecting the leadership (Barley, 2020 p. 165). It is further not only the quality of the new technology that matters in war, but also how the people that are using it, use it (Lindsay, 2021). According to the *task-technology fit-model* (TTF), the acceptance of new technology is explained by how well the new technology solves or fits the tasks. If a technology does not offer any advantage, it will not be used (Kuo & Lee, 2011 p. 116). When the military leaders explained in what they would like to see in future from a military leadership perspective they emphasized that they would like to see technology which is better suited for the task at hand – “not just another tool”. This is in line with the current research and the TTF-model’s explanation, if it better suits the task the technology is more likely to be accepted. The conclusion which we can draw from this theory and our results is that if military leaders get technology which is better suited for the task, the technology will easier get accepted by the leaders and will hence not be perceived as something which is limiting their leadership.

Micro-management

Niklas Nilsson, at the Department of Military Studies at the Swedish Defence University, argues that modern technology, such as disruption technology and missile technology, from a potential adversary have increased the importance for countries such as Sweden to develop units that can fight independently. These unit will have to be able to fight with limited direction from higher commands and will therefore rely more on mission command (*uppdragstaktik*) (Nilsson, 2020 p. 436). As the results show, the risk for micromanagement, which technology have enabled, was something which the interviewees thought of as a limitation in their leadership. Nilsson further argues that when applying mission command, a commander needs to accept that there might be uncertainty. Many commanders are deeply uncomfortable with uncertainty like this and strive to instead exercise a high degree of control, micromanagement (Nilsson, 2020 p. 443). To be able to practice mission-oriented leadership effectively and not produce units who sit and await direct orders, military leaders need to use their critical thinking and take a step back, and not use the option to micromanage, which has developed with technology. As described by one of the interviewees in the results part, every military leader needs to ask themselves “*What kind of manager am I now? Who knows best? Is it really me which sits and watches what happens on a computer screen where people are located, or should I trust that the person that I see on the computer screen?*”.

Calmness due to feeling of more control

As mentioned in the discussion with micro-management, a contemporary military leader will have to avoid getting too involved in detail – especially if mission-command/mission-type tactic is used as a leadership philosophy. The calmness due to feeling of more control can though be very important, especially in complex, stressful and uncertain situations a military leader of today can face. In times of uncertainty and stressful situations, people tend to seek strong leaders (Larsson et al., 2007 p. 14). In order to gain trust in a critical and uncertain situation it is important that the leader emits competence (Enander & Börjesson, 2017, s. 126). By feeling and being calmer due to the feeling of more control, a military leader might therefore be able to build more trust among its subordinates in a complex and critical situation – something which would support that technology can support the military leadership.

Conclusions

There are several conclusions which can be drawn from this thesis. The first one is that there are both indirect and direct factors which military leaders perceived as either limiting or supporting in their leadership. Technological advancement in itself does not seem to be limiting or supporting leadership but rather the consequence of its implementation, such as spending more time with administrative tasks or being able to communicate easier. The technology which was perceived as limiting in conducting military leadership was technology which was perceived as not really solving the task or being a better alternative than the old method or technology which it was replacing. The conclusion would suggest that military leaders should be more involved in the process of developing technological tools, so they are more adapted to the task. Based on the results, the conclusion can also be drawn that technology, from a military leadership perspective, seems to be double-edged. An example of this is how access to more information, due to technology, has led to the perceived supporting effect on leadership, of feeling more calmness due to more control. The opportunity of having more control have though, what is perceived as limiting, increased the risk of micro-management.

In summary, based on the whole thesis, is that: Technological advancement in itself does not seem to be limiting or supporting leadership but rather the consequence of its

implementation. Technology in the military should be better adapted to the need of the military leaders, this will make them accept the technology easier which will then also affect their perception of how well they can conduct leadership. Critical thinking for military leaders is important when assessing when to make a decision, both now when information is easier available due to technology, but have also been important before. Technology has made information more available, both in terms of access to organizational information but also information regarding one's subordinates. A contemporary military leader, therefore, in greater extent, needs to both trust their subordinates and not micromanage but also use their critical thinking to understand what is relevant and what is not.

Suggestions on future research

This thesis will give three suggestions on future research. The first suggestion is to further investigate whether micromanagement in a military situation is more prone to happen due to easier access to information and communication caused by technology. Will a military leader micromanage just because he or she can, and why, or why not? The second suggestion for future research is how the implementation of new technology actually affects the leadership – not just the perception from the leaders on technology's effect, but also the practical outcome. The third suggestion is to further investigate how social media affects leadership decisions. Based on this study, social media was perceived as not having an effect, can the opposite be true, and why?

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Bakgrundsfrågor:

Vad har du för grad och inom vilken försvarsgren är du verksam inom?

Hur många år har du varit aktiv inom det militära?

Uppfattning:

Anser du att det är en skillnad idag – i hur arbetet utförs, när det kommer till användning av tekniska hjälpmedel än när du började? Kan du ge exempel?

Kan du ge ett exempel på när du upplevde att teknologi eller något tekniskt hjälpmedel begränsade eller försvårade ditt ledarskap?

Kan du ge ett exempel på när du upplevde att teknologi eller något tekniskt hjälpmedel underlättade ditt ledarskap?

Upplever du, generellt, att det blivit svårare eller lättare idag att vara en bra ledare på grund av teknologi? Varför?

Frågor baserade på teori:

Forskare, såsom Aida Alvinus på FHS har forskat på sociala medier och dess påverkan på ledarskap och menar att ökad transparens kan påverka beslut då konsekvenserna av besluten som fattas är mer publika – känner du ingen dig i detta?

Annan forskning visar att informationsöverflöd är en faktor som kan påverka det militära ledarskapet – upplever du att det ligger någon sanning i det?

Vad hade du velat att man skulle ha i åtanke i fortsättningen när man tar fram ny tekniska hjälpmedel med fokus på ledarskapet?

Appendix 2: Interviewee email

Hej x,

Mitt namn är Philip Lindh. Jag håller just nu på att skriva min kandidatuppsats här på FHS i ledarskap under påfrestande förhållanden. Jag skriver om hur teknologi (i bred bemärkelse) upplevs ha påverkat ledarskapet hos militära ledare. Jag letar därför just nu personer som kan tänka sig ställa upp på en intervju på ca 30 minuter där jag kommer ställa frågor om just detta, jag fick ditt namn av x som nämnde att du eventuellt hade kunnat vara intresserad av att ställa upp.

Min studie undersöker som sagt teknologi i bred bemärkelse, det vill säga vad som helst inom området som du och de andra tycker stödjer eller begränsar ert utövande av ledarskap. Det kan vara ledningssystem, kommunikationsutrustning (radio, internet, stridsledningssystem etc.) Jag vill veta vad i det tekniska som är begränsande, resp. stödjande inte vilka system eller specifika produkter som upplevs som begränsande. Så som exempelvis, via radio så kanske man inte får med den icke-verbala kommunikationen.

Intervjun kommer vara väldigt öppen, ett exempel på en fråga är exempelvis:

Kan du beskriva hur teknologi (eller tekniska hjälpmedel) begränsar ditt ledarskap som militär chef, och varför?

Vore väldigt tacksam om du hade velat och haft möjlighet att ställa upp. Jag är såklart flexibel att helt och hållet anpassa mig till när du kan – Zoom eller vanligt telefonsamtal fungerar alldeles utmärkt.

Allt gott,
Philip Lindh