

DEVELOPING THE BASES OF POWERS AS A LEADER—A COMPARISON OF TWO GREAT MILITARY LEADERS

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ABSTRACT

Military leaders are the cornerstone of a country's armed forces. Directing soldiers under their command, they must possess the ability to understand what power they have and the appropriate situations where they can exercise their power. According to the author, to be effective, firstly, leaders need to possess strong domain expertise and critical analysis ability, which are the basics for sound decision-making and key sources of power to exercise influence. Secondly, leaders need to expand their social network constantly as it will provide commanders with better situational awareness. In addition, having a strong network of connections provides commanders with substantial authority to exercise influence over others. Thirdly, leaders need to understand the context and be prepared to exercise their influence in the most effective manner. They need to exercise the relevant powers as demanded by the situation. Lastly, leaders must recognise that there is power in unity. Hence, they should strive towards the development of their subordinates to strengthen the collective power of their team.

Keywords: Understand, Appropriate, Effective, Expertise, Social Network, Potential

INTRODUCTION

Field Marshal Sir Thomas Blamey and Air Vice Marshal (AVM) William Dowling Bostock were key Australian military leaders who served in the same era. Both served in World War I (WWI)—first in Gallipoli and then at the Western Front.¹ During WWII, both leaders were in a similar leadership situation when they took up the high command of the Australian military forces as part of the South West Pacific Allied (SWPA) Forces commanded by General Douglas MacArthur. Specifically, Blamey was the Allied Land Force (ALF) Commander and Bostock was the Air Officer Commander (AOC), Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Command.² Both Blamey and Bostock were in difficult high command positions that required them to safeguard Australia's national interest while simultaneously ensuring operational success for the Allied Forces. The challenging positions of these two commanders highlighted that the ability to influence not only subordinates but also peers and superior was critical for them to be effective leaders.

This essay will argue that for commanders to be effective leaders, they must be able to understand the powers they possess before exercising them to achieve their objectives. In support of this argument, this essay will be organised into three key parts. Firstly, the Five Powers of Leadership model developed by John French and Bertram Raven will be introduced.³ This model provides a useful

framework to highlight the different powers that a leader needs. Secondly, this framework will be used to analyse the two leaders to derive key leadership lessons. Key lessons drawn will show that effective leadership requires expert power to influence with credibility, referent power to influence with social identity and formal powers to influence with authority. More importantly, leaders need to understand the different powers that they possess and exercise them judiciously to achieve the best results. Lastly, the author's reflections on the application of these lessons will be discussed. The author thinks that effective leaders need to: (1) constantly expand their knowledge and build their social network; (2) exercise self-awareness to use their power effectively; and (3) continually build their command team to strengthen the collective power of their teams.

THE FIVE BASES OF POWERS FOR COMMANDERS

The Five Bases of Power developed by John French and Bertram Raven serves as a useful framework to consider the concept of power for leaders to exercise influence. These five bases of power are commonly grouped into two key parts—formal powers and personal powers. Notably, formal powers comprise legitimate power, reward power and coercive power while personal powers comprise expert and referent powers. (See Table 1)

Formal Powers			Personal Powers	
Legitimate Power	Reward Power	Coercive Power	Expert Power	Referent Power

Table 1: Five Bases of Power.⁴

Military leaders should possess all the five bases of powers. Formal powers are usually accorded to commanders while leaders need to develop their own personal powers. Reward power stems from the commanders' authority to incentivise people under their charge while coercive power comes from the authority to punish them. However, exercising formal powers does not necessarily lead to willing compliance. When influencing peers and superiors, formal powers are also usually not effective. Then Major General Ng Chee Khern, former Chief of the Republic of Singapore Air Force, highlighted that leaders have responsibilities 'sideways', 'upwards' and 'downwards'.⁵ Therefore, effective commanders need to be able to influence their subordinates, peers and superiors. To do so, leaders must also possess strong personal powers.

More importantly, formal powers are also usually not effective when exercising influence over peers or superiors.

The first form of personal power is expert power. Raven described expert power as 'the results from the target's faith that the agent has some superior insight or knowledge about what behaviour is best under the circumstances'.⁶ In the military context, the key sources of expert power for commanders would be the wealth of knowledge and experience accumulated throughout their service as well as their critical thinking abilities. Relevant experience will allow them to gain respect from their men and critical thinking skills allow them to provide value to peers and superiors.

The other personal power—referent power, stems from the followers' desire to be identified with and emulate the leader.⁷ Arguably, referent power can be attributed to the social networks of commanders, which in turn affect their abilities to exercise influence. Typically, people find a strong desire to want to associate themselves with people who have strong referent power and connections in their social networks. These five bases of power for leadership would be used to analyse Field Marshal Blamey and AVM Bostock in the pinnacle of their military appointments during WWII to draw out valuable leadership lessons. The

analysis of both leaders would demonstrate the importance of expert and referent power as well as their complementing effects on formal powers for effective leadership.

IMPORTANCE OF EXPERT - INFLUENCE WITH CREDIBILITY

Expert power allows a person to not only influence subordinates but also peers and superior. Relevant experience is one key contributor of expert power for commanders. For example, at the lower levels of leadership, junior commanders at the platoon (or equivalent levels) can relate to how their sergeant majors usually possessed some form of expert power over them. This is largely due to the relatively longer years of service and experiences that the sergeant majors have in comparison to these junior commanders. However, as these junior commanders grow in experience and critical thinking abilities, the leverage of the sergeant majors' expert power over them diminishes with time. Hence, the more relevant experience a leader has compared to his followers, the greater influence he has over them. However, it is also important for leaders to note that these sergeant majors still possess valuable experience and insights which could not be replaced. Hence, it is imperative that commanders build their teams with a good mix of subject matter experts.

At the highest level in the military, the government will usually choose leaders for high command appointments based on the level of relevant experience. Notably, Blamey's and Bostock's relevant experiences contributed significantly when they took up senior leadership appointments. The Australian government requested their advice, as they have gained rich and valuable military experiences throughout their careers. For example, Blamey served as the Chief of Staff in the 1st Australian Division in WWI and was awarded 'the Distinguished Service Order award for developing the successful attack plan for the Battle of Pozieres'.⁸ Similarly, Bostock participated in 'flying operations over the Western Front' and 'was awarded the Belgian Croix de Guerre'.⁹ The service of both Blamey and Bostock during the WWI not only gave them first-hand combat experience but also provided them with a wealth of knowledge about planning and execution of military operations with other Allied nations.



A BMT Sergeant interacting with recruits at the Basic Military Training Centre.¹⁰

Besides having a wealth of experience, good leaders also need to have the necessary critical thinking skills to translate these experiences into insights and apply them appropriately when the situation arises. Similarly, Blamey's and Bostock's opinions were highly regarded for their strong critical thinking abilities. For example, Blamey demonstrated his intellect and understanding of military knowledge even before WWI when he became the first Australian Officer to pass the entrance examinations to attend Staff College in Quetta, India.¹¹ In another instance, he predicted a Japanese invasion into Malaya and Singapore during pre-war radio talks after analysing the developing strategic environment.¹² Acknowledging Blamey's critical thinking abilities, Gavin Long, a military historian, commented that Blamey was able to comprehend 'the largest military and politico-military problems with singular clarity'.¹³

Similarly, Bostock possess strong critical thinking abilities. Historian Alan Stephens claimed that Bostock 'was regarded as one of the RAAF's best thinkers' during the WWII era.¹⁴ As Air Officer Commanding, RAAF command, he was responsible for the planning of many successful air operations. One example would be the successful planning

and execution of the series of Oboe air operations that involved a significantly large number of Allied Squadrons. The success of the operations won him many accolades from senior commanders in acknowledgement of his superior planning capabilities. For instance, General MacArthur described Bostock as 'one of the world's most successful airmen' while General Kenney 'stated that Bostock was the best qualified officer in RAAF to handle operations'.¹⁵

Both examples of Blamey and Bostock demonstrated that relevant experience and strong critical thinking abilities are significant sources of expert power for commanders. Their strong expert power earned them recognition by their peers and superiors. Their examples highlighted the importance for commanders to seek and accumulate relevant operational experiences as they progressed through their careers. More importantly, recognising that experience could be opportunity based—those who aspire to be effective leaders should constantly upgrade themselves in terms of knowledge and hone their critical thinking skills. This would significantly improve their ability to make sound decisions and exercise expert power to influence followers.

IMPORTANCE OF REFERENT POWER - INFLUENCE WITH SOCIAL IDENTITY

However, expert power alone does not result in effective leadership. In addition to expert power, leaders need referent power to achieve the desired level of influence on their followers. Without the necessary referent power to build a strong social network, a leader's ability to influence with his expert power could be substantially limited, particularly among peers and superiors. Leaders should note that this level of influence varies, depending on the collective power of a leader's social network.



Sir Thomas Blamey with General Douglas MacArthur in New Guinea.¹⁶

Looking at Blamey, his level of influence varied over time and across different situations. Arguably, his referent power allowed him to build a personal network of influence in the government, which contributed to his selection for high command appointments. Despite some personal flaws that tainted his career when he was Chief Commissioner of the Victoria Police, the social network, which he built over time, led him to be considered and eventually appointed as Commander 6th Division Australian Imperial Force early in WWII.¹⁷ However, Blamey did not always enjoy the same level of influence with the government. For example, despite Blamey's strong expert power, his views on the need to maintain the integrity of deployed Australian forces in Egypt were not heeded. Menzies, the Australian Prime Minister then, did not consult Blamey when he agreed with the British to divide the deployment of Australian troops for the battle in Greece.¹⁸ Blamey's strong views on the need 'to prevent the piecemeal use of Australian forces' were based on his WWI experiences and critical thinking ability. He made a sound judgement on the need to maintain 'the national identity of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF).'¹⁹ However, due to his lack of referent power to influence his superiors at that time, he was unable to influence the government's decision.

In addition to expert power, leaders need referent power to achieve the desired level of influence on their followers.

Blamey's level of referent power changed when the Labour Party came into power as Australia's government. His close associate Sir Federick Sheddell became more influential in the government when he 'established himself as principal adviser to the new Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, John Curtin.'²⁰ Shortly after, Blamey was appointed as the Commander in Chief of the Australian Military Force. Indirectly, Blamey's referent power grew with the circumstances and he was even able to develop an extraordinary comradeship with Curtin.²¹ In one example, Blamey was able to secure the necessary manpower for the war effort while balancing the economic needs back in Australia.²² With the increased influence, he was able to exercise both his expert power and referent power at the same time to secure the required manpower for the military. Blamey was able to tap on his referent power to gain support and understand the government's concerns about balancing the manpower needs for the war efforts and the economy. He then exercised his expert power—accumulated from his experience and knowledge gained when he was Chairman of the Commonwealth Government's Manpower Committee and Controller General of Recruiting—to develop a reasonable solution. With an astute use of his referent and expert powers, Blamey was able to secure the 'resources he needed and [ensured] that their use met with Government approval.'²³

Blamey has shown that even with strong referent power, it does not necessarily mean that a leader can effectively influence and achieve agreement from all the stakeholders all the time. More critically, a leader needs to exercise judgement and apply his referent power to achieve the desired level of influence when it matters. At the same time, his example also highlighted how referent power can have a significant impact on securing the necessary resources for commanders to carry out their mission successfully.

In addition to securing the necessary resources for operations, Blamey's strong link with the government also allowed him to remain aligned to the larger strategic interest for Australia. This was evident again with his persistence in ensuring the integrity of the Australian forces in the South West Pacific Campaign. 'He was aware that fragmentation of the Australian forces ... would effectively decrease the perception of Australia's contribution to the

war ...'.²⁴ Thus, by ensuring Australia's continued involvement in the South Western Pacific campaign, Blamey secured Australia's strategic position at the end of the war. David Horner described Blamey as 'the link between the Government and battlefield'.²⁵ Arguably, referent power at the senior command level contributes to the achievement of unity of effort at all levels. A senior commander's correct understanding of the political intent will allow him to lead those under his command towards a common goal to serve the national interest.

Bostock on the other hand had difficulties gaining referent power throughout the entire WWII. Similarly, the lack of referent power affected the acceptance of his expert opinions. A significant example would be his failure to influence his peers and superiors to accept his assessment on the need to review the command arrangement of the RAAF command for more effective operations. Due to strong opposition from the Minister for Air, Arthur Drakeford, Bostock was passed over for promotion to the RAAF Chief of Air Staff (CAS). His junior, Air Vice Marshall Jones was chosen instead. This resulted in a split within the RAAF organisation structure. Bostock was given operational command but administrative and logistical control resides with the CAS. In a letter to General Kenney, Bostock highlighted the flaws of the arrangements and hinted at the need for rectification:

*"Though I am the operational Commander of the RAAF, I am denied, completely, any authority in regard to organisation, works, supply, maintenance, or other administrative functions of the force I am required to command. I contend that such an organisation is fundamentally unsound and can lead only to confusion and failure."*²⁶

Throughout WWII, Bostock made numerous similar attempts to influence changes to the command arrangement but was in vain. Bostock's failure to influence a beneficial change was due to his lack of referent power. This was evident through his inability to resolve his disagreement with the CAS and the Minister for Air up till the end of the war.²⁷

Bostock's lack of referent power also significantly affected his ability to secure the resources required to carry out military operations. Bostock failed to influence the command arrangement. As a result, resources were not made available for the RAAF command to carry out the missions effectively. Not only did this ineffective arrangement affect the RAAF command but it also had a direct impact on the larger Allied Air Force at that time.

Norman Ashworth observed that '[t]he divided control of the RAAF certainly reduced [General Kenney's] ability to employ the RAAF forces assigned to him to best effect'.²⁸

In addition to Bostock's inability to secure resources for effective operations, he also lacked the referent power to resolve his differences with the CAS. This in turn affected the alignment of interest at the strategic level that resulted in long-term detrimental effects on Australia's national interest. Without co-ordinated efforts by the senior leadership, the leaders could not focus on securing the perception of Australia's war contributions. Hence, this provided the United States (US) with an opportunity to exclude Australia from the operations in Japan. Alan Stephens clearly illustrated this point when he commented that "[i]f the Americans were ever predisposed to exclude their allies from the prestige of participating in the final attacks against the Japanese homeland, then the RAAF's higher command problems made the decision easy for them."²⁹

The examples of Blamey and Bostock highlighted that the referent power of a commander plays a critical role in effective leadership. Importantly, without referent power, a commander's expert power could not be fully utilised. Not only does the ability to influence with referent power have a direct impact on resource allocation, it also affects the alignment of operational efforts to the larger strategic intent. Personnel in the working levels will suffer when the commanders' lack the ability to exercise the necessary influence over other agencies. It is difficult for different agencies to work together when the commanders could not converge to a common objective. Hence, it is important to note that the referent power attributed by the commanders' social network could improve the cohesiveness and collaboration with other agencies at all levels.

IMPORTANCE OF FORMAL POWERS - INFLUENCE WITH AUTHORITY

However, a commander might not be able to exercise influence based solely on his personal powers. Considering the time criticality and nature of military operations, commanders would still need to exercise influence over his subordinates. The operational environment demands that commanders possess formal powers to complement their personal powers. Bostock's example showed that both formal and personal powers are closely related and an absence of either one can lead to significant failure as a commander.

With an obvious lack of referent power, Bostock was extremely concerned over the official authority given to him. As AOC, RAAF Command, Bostock did not possess any

formal powers since the administrative control of the RAAF Command remained with the CAS. This seriously undermined Bostock's ability to function effectively as a commander, which manifested during the Morotai Mutiny incident. During the incident, a group of eight senior RAAF officers threatened to resign their commissions due to disagreement with how the RAAF forces were deployed.³⁰ Bostock assessed that the morale of the personnel in the First Tactical Air Force, which was under his command, was 'extremely low'. His assessment hinted at the urgency of the situation and the need to address it expediently. However, even though he saw the need to replace the Air Officer Commanding of the First Tactical Air Force, he did not have the power to do so. After putting forth his recommendation, he needed AVM Jones to carry out the necessary actions. Even though Bostock's recommendations were eventually carried out, it was not until after AVM Jones interviewed all the officers and caused a major disagreement with General Kenney.³¹



*Captain Clive Carwell, speaking in Morotai, Indonesia to a group of Spitfire pilots.*³²

In contrast, Blamey's strong referent power allowed him to secure strong formal powers. Blamey's close relations with John Curtin contributed to the government's decision to 'abolish the Military Board and placed sweeping powers in Blamey's hands.'³³ Ironically, this was the same powers that Bostock wanted but could not attain when he proposed to abolish the Air Board.³⁴ With Curtin's blessings, Blamey was able to exercise formal powers and thus able to function more effectively as a commander. This was evident when he decisively replaced Lieutenant-General Rowell with Lieutenant-General Herring as the Commander New Guinea Force after much disagreement with Rowell. While his actions received much criticism, his decisive actions were necessary, considering the need for senior commanders to work well together for effective execution

of military operations.³⁵ In addition, Herring had good relations with Blamey and was someone Blamey trusted.³⁶ By replacing a senior member of his command team with a close associate, Blamey was also directly increasing his referent power. This incident demonstrated that with effective use of formal powers, a leader could also strengthen his personal powers. However, it also showed that strong personal powers might not be effective all the time. Despite his strengths, Blamey was not able to influence Rowell to see things from his perspective. Hence, a leader must be able to read the context of the situation and exercise the right form of power.

Both Blamey's and Bostock's examples demonstrated that the level of personal powers may not be sufficient to exercise influence all the time. Commanders also need to possess the necessary formal powers to exercise influence, especially in time critical situations and when there is a need to execute unpopular decisions. Their examples reinforced the requirement for commanders to have a mix of all five powers and the ability to exercise a combination of these powers to achieve the best outcome.

REFLECTIONS: APPLICATIONS OF LESSONS

The analysis of both leaders demonstrated three key lessons. Firstly, there is a need for a leader to build up his personal powers constantly. In building his referent power, there is a need for a leader to constantly build and expand his social network. When the time calls for it, he can then draw on the power of this network of influence. A commander's network is important because he is the key link beyond his command. It is the commander's responsibility to be able to exercise influence over his peers and superiors. For example, at the battalion commander level, it is important for the Commanding Officer (CO) to establish a strong network with the higher headquarter (HQ) staff and the other units' CO. This network will contribute to the battalion's ability to establish a clear understanding of the superior commanders' intent. Importantly, it is difficult for the subordinates to function effectively when various levels of their superiors could not influence each other towards a common goal, which often manifest through contradicting instructions. Hence, leaders need to be cognisant of this potential impact on our subordinates.

Secondly, leaders need to be aware of the powers they possess. The analysis of Blamey and Bostock showed that while it is ideal for a commander to have all the powers at the desired levels, the commander usually have a mix of powers at various degrees. Effective commanders must therefore be able to assess the amount of powers he has

relative to the influence he is trying to achieve. With this awareness, besides the ability to employ a mix of powers to achieve his objectives, leaders could also develop mitigating measures. For example, when a leader recognises his lack of experience in certain areas, he could incorporate personnel with that experience and knowledge in his command team to strengthen his expert power.

By harnessing the collective bases of power of the entire command team, the leader can exercise greater influence over others.

Lastly, leaders need to constantly build and develop their own command teams. In addition to the responsibility of commanders to develop future effective leaders, developing the subordinates' bases of powers will also enhance a leader's own bases of power. By harnessing the collective bases of power of the entire command team, the leader can exercise greater influence over others. For example, creating opportunities and tapping on the subordinates' abilities to build networks with other agencies indirectly contribute to the collective referent power of the team. As such, even when there is difficulty in

resolving differences at the highest command level, the effects could still be mitigated through communications and development of understanding at the lower levels.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the five bases of power serve as a useful framework to analyse leadership effectiveness. Using the framework to analyse Blamey and Bostock, four key lessons were drawn. Firstly, leaders need to possess strong domain expertise and critical analysis ability, which are the basics for sound decision-making and key sources of power to exercise influence. Secondly, leaders need to expand their social network constantly. A strong social network that spans vertically and horizontally will provide commanders with better situational awareness. More importantly, having a strong network of connections provides commanders with substantial power to exercise influence over others. Thirdly, leaders should be prepared to exercise their powers appropriately in different contexts. Possessing the relevant powers does not equate to effective leadership. Leaders need to recognise that different situations require different forms of power. Lastly, leaders must recognise that there is power in unity. Hence, leaders should strive towards the development of their subordinates to strengthen the collective power of their team.

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