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FUTURE WAR PAPER

PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY: THE ANTIDOTE TO TOXIC LEADERSHIP
"USING SCIENCE TO PERFECT THE ART OF LEADERSHIP SELECTION"

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF OPERATIONAL STUDIES

MAJOR MISTY J. POSEY

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Mentor: Dr. Wray Johnson
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THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF EITHER THE SCHOOL OF ADVANCED WARFIGHTING OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT
“I’ve watched through his eyes, I’ve listened through his ears, and I tell you he’s the one.”¹ In Orson Scott Card’s science-fiction novel, *Ender’s Game*, the military connected a monitor directly to the protagonist’s (Ender Wiggin’s) brain, which allowed recruiters to know his thoughts and feel his feelings for a period of three years. In so doing, the military was able to scrutinize Ender’s personality to determine how compatible he was for a leadership position in the armed forces. Due to the precision of the instrument, the military was certain Ender was ideally suited for service and he was recruited. Conversely, the monitor also determined who was incompatible for service. For example, Ender’s older brother, Peter, was deemed too “toxic.” Ender, however, was indeed ‘the one’—during his final assessment at Battle School, he saved earth from destruction by alien “buggers.” In the US military, personality variables that affect leader performance are just as important as they were in *Ender’s Game*. Unlike *Ender’s Game*, however, the US military lacks a personality “brain monitor.” As such, toxic leaders manage to find their way into the ranks. Toxic leaders are highly detrimental to the long-term health of their unit and are difficult to remove once admitted into the military. In this context, understanding the variety of factors that contribute to toxic leadership is critical to officer selection.² The US military, however, largely ignores personality when screening applicants. Fortunately, recent breakthroughs in personality psychology have enabled the identification of personality attributes that predict leader-role effectiveness. Specifically, the US military should conduct entry-level officer-candidate personality testing to screen for neuroticism and antagonism, psychological hardiness, power response, and emotional intelligence. A personality test designed specifically to identify suitable applicants for service would not be as precise as a brain monitor, but it is a step in the right direction. “What the bad man cannot be is a good sailor, or soldier, or airman. Let’s find out in advance.”³
Toxic leadership, like leadership in general, is more easily described than defined. Essentially, it is the abuse the "leader-follower" relationship, resulting in the cumulative deterioration of an organization's morale and overall effectiveness. The three key elements of toxic-leader syndrome are as follows: a personality or interpersonal technique that negatively affects command climate; an apparent lack of concern for the well-being of subordinates; and a conviction by subordinates that the leader is motivated primarily by self-interest. Additionally, toxic leaders commonly exhibit the following behaviors: avoiding, denigrating, and intimidating subordinates; behaving aggressively toward others; and being overly critical of work that is done well. Not to be confused with incompetent leaders, toxic leaders are usually technically proficient even though they have a destructive leadership style. They respond enthusiastically to tasks from higher and are deferential to peers and especially superiors. In short, they accomplish the mission. Despite the achievement of short-term objectives, toxic leaders represent a daily challenge that can result in excessive organizational stress, misplaced values, poor ethics, and a negative command climate. Moreover, their impact lasts far beyond their tenure. To sum up, "toxic leaders are anathema to the health of units."

When cast in the light of poor command climate, one easily understands the menace of toxic leadership. The effects of a negative atmosphere are lack of productivity and motivation; immoral and unethical behavior; and increased levels of hazing, suicide, absenteeism, domestic violence, sexual harassment, and alcohol and drug consumption. According to the 2011 Profession of Arms campaign senior leader survey, in which more than 22,630 soldiers from the rank of E-5 through O-6 and Army civilians were interviewed, toxic leadership is also affecting retention. Among those surveyed, 'poor leadership' was the number one reason active-duty enlisted soldiers cited as their reason for "hanging up" their uniform, and the third-most popular
reason for active-duty officers leaving the Army. Significantly, 'poor leadership' was cited more so than the hardship and strain caused by repeated deployments to combat zones. Poor leadership affects retention because service members hold the institution responsible when they see bad leaders get promoted. "Their faith and confidence in the Army goes down when toxic leaders go up," according to retired Army Colonel George E. Reed. "The soldier looks at the promotion list, slaps his head and says, 'They can't do that to my Army.' "

Certainly there are more good military leaders than bad. Never-the-less, research suggests that toxic leaders are more common than one might think. Retired Lt. Gen. Walter Ulmer, former III Corps commander, agrees that more needs to be done to address toxic leadership. He estimates roughly 8 to 12 percent of Army officers at the rank of colonel and higher "are so toxic that they need to be removed from command." Additionally, according to the 2011 Profession of Arms campaign senior leader survey, 83 percent of respondents said they observed a toxic leader in the last year and roughly one in five sees his or her superior as toxic and unethical. Some might interpret the results positively, however, pointing out that most military officers are performing exceptionally well. Colonel Thomas Guthrie, director for the Center for Army Leadership, takes a different view, "Leadership is a combat multiplier, so...we should put out the best product all the time. We can't settle for second-best. Even if just a portion of our leaders aren't performing, we need to take a look at it."

Aware of the problem, the military is working on several programs to combat toxic leadership, such as developing coping mechanisms for followers, and identifying, rehabilitating, and mentoring toxic leaders. Furthermore, where the leader is so toxic that rehabilitation is unlikely to work, the military is working to expel toxic leaders from its ranks. For example, in 2011, the Army relieved four brigade commanders, two of which were relieved for issues related
to toxic leadership instead of poor performance or misconduct. The efforts, however, are insufficient. The 2011 Profession of Arms campaign senior leader survey revealed that "...more than two-thirds of the time, toxic leadership was never directly questioned or reported, and 50 percent of toxic leaders are expected to achieve a higher level of leadership responsibility and are still emulated by 18 percent of their subordinates." Thus, it is not surprising that only 27 percent of respondents believe the Army is effective in identifying toxic leaders, and just 17 percent thought the Army is effective in rehabilitating or removing such leaders.

The primary reason the military’s effort to remove toxic leaders from service is insufficient is because military culture can be blamed in part for the tolerance and elevation of these individuals. For example, the military values loyalty and stoicism, which mitigates the likelihood of service members “airing dirty laundry” or appearing to be “whiners.” Military culture also esteems technical competence and mission accomplishment, which leads some senior leaders to tolerate toxic leaders that are otherwise proficient. Known as “competent jerks,” these toxic leaders enjoy a degree of protection and become insulated. In other situations, senior leaders might not be aware of the toxicity of their junior leaders. Taken together, these practices make identification and removal of toxic leaders exceedingly difficult once they are admitted to the military. Thus, the solution is to commission fewer toxic leaders in the first place. As was done in Ender’s Game, the US military needs exclude the “Peters” from service.

In an organization as large and diverse as the military, excluding toxic leaders from selection to military service is a daunting task. By default, it can be said that the military already attempts, albeit poorly, to exclude toxic leaders from selection to service. Few are excluded because given the current selection criteria and test instruments, it is difficult to predict if a candidate will develop into a toxic leader. The implication, then, is that overall the military is
selecting the right leaders, but there are bound to be mistakes. More to the point, perhaps the military should just accept that some leaders will be toxic because better tools are not available. Additionally, “perhaps the effect of toxic leadership is insignificant and a large-scale institutional response in not appropriate.”13 Instead of asking whether or not toxic leadership is a large enough problem to warrant an institutional response, a better question to ask is whether or not anything can be done to mitigate toxic leadership? Specifically, if one examines the techniques that are currently used—and not used—to screen military candidates for suitability, it is easy to see there is room for improvement. For example, officer selection officers (OSOs) focus on biographical data when screening candidates. They use an acronym called ICOMBATV to assist with the process, which stands for: implants, contacts, operations, medications, broken bones, asthma, tattoos, and vision. From the list, one can see that there is a medical focus to the screening. Candidates are also interviewed and asked questions such as whether or not they use drugs, have any gang affiliations, or have been arrested. Yet biographical data alone is not likely to identify potentially toxic leaders. All applicants are also tested for cognitive skills, for the military has long accepted intelligence as a predictor of leadership performance. There is a minimum intelligence requirement for various specialties and officer candidates, in particular, must obtain a higher intelligence score relative to recruits.

From a theoretical viewpoint, there are many reasons to believe that intelligence is related to leadership. Moreover, on the basis of a comprehensive review, Schmidt and Hunter (1998) reported that intelligence is one of the best predictors of general job performance, with an overall validity of .51.14 A leader can be toxic, however, and also be intelligent. Thus, intelligence is not a trait that is likely to exclude toxic leaders from the ranks. Personality, on the

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1The Cohen scale rates a correlation of 0.50-1.00 as “large/strong.”
other hand, is an attribute that may be useful. There is a substantial research base establishing a link between personality traits and leadership emergence and performance. Conceptually, personality traits are generalized consistencies in styles of thinking, feeling, and acting, and thus can be expected to affect many aspects of behavior, including leadership. For many years, however, experts maintained that temperament and personality were unrelated to leadership. Instead, psychologists largely focused on intelligence and other mental abilities in seeking to understand the qualities associated with effective leadership—to the neglect of factors such as personality. Fortunately, due to modern developments in psychology, personality has reemerged as a legitimate topic in the study of leadership. Progress in conceptualizing and differentiating the effects of various personality qualities from background causes has led to the ability to more accurately measure normal personality. This progress has generated renewed interest in applying personality to leadership research and theorizing.¹⁵

In light of the advancement of personality psychology, the US military should incorporate a personality assessment into the officer candidate selection process to screen for potentially toxic leaders. Even with the progress in personality psychology, though, the task of purpose designing a personality test to identify potentially toxic leaders is complicated. Leadership is a dynamic and complex process—what are the personality criteria one should use to exclude—or include—candidates? The highly popular “trait” theory of leadership asserts that effective leaders can be described in terms of various sets of attributes and also postulates that people are either “born or not born with the qualities that predispose them to success in leadership roles.”¹⁶ Research indicates that although possession of the right traits alone does not necessarily make a person a great leader, it does increase the probability of effective leadership performance (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1995).¹⁷ The US military accepts this theory, for the “trait”
model is foundational to leadership training and education. Never-the-less, the question remains— which personality traits should the military use for selection?

The five-factor model (FFM) of normal personality may provide a starting point. Also known as the "Big Five" personality traits, the FFM is a comprehensive, empirical, data-driven research finding in which five broad dimensions of personality were discovered and defined by several independent sets of researchers. The five factors are openness to experience (inventive/curious vs. consistent/cautious), conscientiousness (efficient/organized vs. easy-going/careless), extraversion (outgoing/energetic vs. solitary/reserved), agreeableness (friendly/compassionate vs. cold/unkind), and neuroticism (sensitive/nervous vs. secure/confident). The first factor, openness to experience, includes the constituent traits of creativity, intellectual curiosity, and preference for novelty and variety. It also consists of an appreciation for unusual ideas, variety of experience, adventure, art, and emotion. The second factor, conscientiousness, consists of the tendency to be self-disciplined, act dutifully, and aim for achievement. It also consists of organized, dependable, and planned rather than spontaneous behavior. The third factor, extraversion, consists of high-energy, positive emotions, assertiveness, sociability, and the tendency to seek stimulation in the company of others. The fourth factor, agreeableness, consists of the tendency to be compassionate and cooperative rather than antagonistic and suspicious towards others. The fifth factor, neuroticism, consists of the tendency to experience unpleasant emotions easily, such as anger, anxiety, depression, or vulnerability. Neuroticism also refers to the degree of emotional stability and impulse control one possesses, and is sometimes referred by its low pole—"emotional stability." Growing consensus on the validity of the FFM among many contemporary personality psychologists has allowed scientists to more clearly estimate the strength of the personality-
leadership relationship. Significantly, several independent studies have linked the FFM to leadership emergence and performance. For example, Judge et al. (2002) meta-analyzed 222 correlations from 73 samples providing personality data according to the Big Five personality traits and found that measures of "high" conscientiousness, "high" openness to experience, and "low" neuroticism correlated moderately with leadership emergence. Additionally, in a recent study examining personality factors in West Point cadets, the Big Five personality dimensions of conscientiousness and agreeableness emerged as significant predictors of leader effectiveness over a 3 to 4 year time span. In a similar study with Australian Army officers, leader achievement was predicted by "high" conscientiousness and "high" openness to experience.

The results of these studies demonstrate that leadership performance is influenced by one's personality. Although the traits associated with effective leadership are hardly surprising (conscientiousness, openness to experience, and agreeableness), the verifiable existence of a personality-leadership correlation is profound. More to the point, perhaps there are also verifiable traits associated with toxic leadership. Based on the characterization of toxic leaders as antagonistic and easily angered, it is plausible that these behaviors would manifest as "high" neuroticism and "low" agreeableness (antagonism) on the FFM scale. More research is needed to determine if the testing of toxic leaders would indeed yield the aforementioned results, but it is certainly reasonable to believe that identifiable, constituent traits exist that could be used to predict the propensity for a leader to be toxic.

Since neuroticism and antagonism are clearly undesirable personality traits for leaders, one might assume that the military already endeavors to disqualify officer candidates who possess these qualities. This is not necessarily the case, however. As previously mentioned, the military does not administer a personality test for officer candidates—the only standardized test that is
administered to all applicants is one designed to evaluate their intelligence and cognitive aptitude. Further, OSOs do not screen for negative personality traits such as neuroticism and antagonism during the interview process. In short, even if the OSO gets the impression that the applicant is neurotic and antagonistic, the officer candidate is not likely to be excluded from the next step in the process—Officer Candidate School (OCS). The OSO assumes it is the job of the staff at OCS to screen and dismiss undesirable candidates from the course. Yet, the same issue exists at OCS as exists during entry-level screening. Unless the OCS staff is specifically testing and screening for neuroticism and antagonism as disqualifiers, the behavior is likely to go unnoticed. The curriculum is not “designed” to test for these traits. Moreover, even if neuroticism and antagonism are detected in a candidate, the evaluators are not likely to disqualify him or her if the candidate possesses other qualities esteemed by the military, such as high intelligence, extreme physical prowess, and aggressiveness. Thus, to guard against toxic leaders making it through OCS and into service, the military should incorporate the FFM personality test into the officer screening process.

Some might argue against incorporating the FFM into the officer screening process due to a general lack of confidence in this form of testing. For example, potential flaws in the psychometric properties of the instruments could render the tests invalid. Additionally, motivational distortion, the desire of applicants to present themselves in the most favorable light, could render the tests unreliable. To some extent, this may have been the case in the past. Modern-day test profiles, however, are a more reliable indicator of a person’s personality. For example, the FFM includes self-report and questionnaire data, peer ratings, objective measures from experimental settings, and a motivational distortion scale. Moreover, some military leaders have already realized the utility of the FFM, for the U.S. Army War College has included
measures of the Big Five personality factors into its leader development assessment programs, which involve detailed feedback sessions for students. Going a step further, the South African military is using personality measures in selection and development applications. The US military should do the same by including the FFM in the selection process.

In addition to the FFM, an especially promising personality dimension for predicting military leader performance is described as "psychological hardiness." Conceptually rooted in existential psychology, hardiness involves a high sense of commitment to life and work, a strong belief in one's ability to control events and influence outcomes, and greater openness to changes and challenges in life (Kobasa, 1979; Maddi and Kobasa, 1984; Maddi, 1999). Persons high in hardiness are more resilient when exposed to a range of environmental stressors and tend to remain healthy and perform well despite high stress levels. Not surprisingly, many studies have now documented positive health and performance effects for hardiness in the military. For example, a longitudinal study of West Point cadets identified hardiness as a significant predictor of leader performance, as measured by military development grades. "Examined alongside several other personality and cognitive abilities measures, [psychological] hardiness was found to be the strongest predictor of leader performance." Additionally, psychological hardiness was used to predict success in US Army Special Forces candidates. US Army Special Forces represent a "high-reliability" occupation, where stress levels are often intense and failure can be catastrophic. For this reason, the candidates were the subject of a 2008 study, in which they were assessed for psychological hardiness using the short form of the Dispositional Resilience Scale, and these scores were applied to predict successful completion of the Army Special Forces candidate school. The study found that psychological hardiness contributed significantly to

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2 The underlying mechanisms whereby hardiness confers resiliency, though still poorly understood, most likely involve the interpretation or meaning individuals impute to events around them.
successful completion of the rigorous course.\textsuperscript{26} These results provide further evidence that people who are high in hardiness—a characteristic sense of commitment, control, and challenge—are more effective in high-stress positions in a military organization.

Considering both theory and empirical findings linking hardiness with successful performance under stressful conditions, one can infer that psychological hardiness would also predict success in military command, especially during combat. Significantly, since toxic leaders are often described as ineffective at handling stress, it follows that a leader low in psychological hardiness may have a propensity to become toxic, especially if selected to command. Moreover, since prolonged combat is especially stressful and characterized by moral corrosiveness, commanders that lack a personal stress-resiliency resource in a combat environment are especially vulnerable to becoming toxic.\textsuperscript{27} A decade of war has illustrated this point clearly. Thus, the military should pay careful attention to psychological factors associated with resiliency under stress when selecting leaders for command. Accordingly, to make the military more effective overall and to guard against toxic leaders ‘moving up’ the ranks, all officer candidates should be screened for psychological hardiness using the Dispositional Resilience Scale upon entry to service. They should also be periodically tested throughout their careers, in particular before field-grade promotion and command selection boards. An important question for future research is to what degree can hardiness be trained or developed in military leaders? There is preliminary evidence that hardiness levels be increased through specialized training, but more work is needed.\textsuperscript{28}

In addition to personality traits, which have a biological component, situational factors such as the “experience” of power can also influence leadership effectiveness. Specifically, the psychological effect of power often constitutes the proximate and driving force on the behavior
of potential leaders. Essentially, empirical social psychologists have argued that possessing power—the asymmetric control over valued resources—has potentially metamorphic consequences. Basically, since the powerful rely less on the resources of others, they are independent and free of constraint. Free from constraint, the physiological effects of power emerge and are observed in behavior. Some effects are positive and contribute to positive leadership emergence, while other manifestations of leadership are associated with malfeasance and are the antithesis of good leadership. For example, one study (Greenfeld et al. 2008) found that power increases objectification, or the tendency to view others as a tool for one’s own purpose, especially if one already has that predisposition. Power also influences some people to be poor perspective takers by reducing social attentiveness, placing a blind spot on considering the unique vantage point of others. For example, research has demonstrated that high-power participants were less accurate than low-power participants at judging other’s facial expressions of emotion. The high-power participants also inaccurately predicted that others would see the world as they saw it. Thus, possessing power seems to impair one’s ability to see things from other points of view. Accordingly, an effective leader is one who is able to harness the positive effects of power while mitigating the negative effects.

Although it is well understood that in a social context power can lead to dangerous and destructive behavior, the question remains why do some leaders use power for good and others for ill? Research suggests the answer is that power does not make the person, but reveals the person. For example, one study (Chen et al. 2001) found that the possession of power led those with a communal orientation to demonstrate greater generosity, but drove those with an exchange orientation to engage in more self-serving behaviors. “With power, the aggressive become more fierce, the generous more magnanimous, and the flirtatious even more amorous.”
This difference, however, was not uncovered when individuals lacked power. Thus, although it might seem that individuals are “transformed” by the experience of power, it is actually their underlying tendencies that are being exaggerated instead of new tendencies being created. Perhaps this experience of power partly explains the emergence of toxic leadership. The underlying personality traits that predispose leaders to be toxic may be triggered and exaggerated by the bestowal of power, which in turn contributes to their emergence as toxic leaders. Compellingly, toxic leaders have been described as being “drunk with power,” and tend to view their subordinates as “disposable instruments,” which are behaviors characteristic of individuals who mishandle the experience of power. Significantly, “because the experience of power leads to behavior that is consistent with existing dispositions and idiosyncratic tendencies, people should know the predispositions of those they would endow with power in the hopes that they will emerge as quality leaders.”32 This is especially important in the military, since military leaders are granted increasing power and influence by virtue of their rank. Since the underlying traits that are associated with abuse of power can be triggered by the experience of power, perhaps leadership training for officer candidates should be structured to include scenarios that trigger a strong power-response. This would enable evaluators to identify and exclude from service individuals who are incapable of mitigating power’s negative effects. Another option is to identify and test for the underlying traits that trigger a negative power response.

In addition to testing for a negative power-response, potential military candidates should be screened for emotional intelligence (EQ). Since power tends to reduce social attentiveness and inhibit the consideration of other points of view, leaders already low in EQ are especially susceptible to emerging as toxic leaders as they move up in rank. Specifically, EQ is a multidimensional construct defined as, “The ability to monitor one’s own and other’s feelings, to
discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and action.”

Specifically, EQ is a set of interrelated skills that allows people to process emotionally relevant information efficiently and accurately. EQ brings together the fields of emotions and intelligence by viewing emotions as useful sources of information that help one to make sense of and navigate the social environment. Since leadership is a social phenomenon—one that requires the presence of others—the importance of EQ to leadership is unmistakable. "The role of a leader is a multifaceted one, for one must be able to persuade others, make decisions, resolve conflicts, and effectively regulate oneself. Effective leadership demands both the motivation and capacity for effective self-regulation..." Moreover, positive emotions can temporarily broaden a person’s repertoire of thoughts, leading to creative problem solving—another essential component to successful leadership. Thus, good interpersonal skills and social competency are prototypical of leader effectiveness.

As early as 1973, researchers examined the role of broad interpersonal skills, such as empathy, social skills, and tact, in predicting leadership emergence and effectiveness. People had noticed there were other factors besides intelligence that predicted success in leadership roles and sought to explain the phenomenon, for in some instances, highly intelligent individuals were not at all successful. Once researchers isolated these factors, the challenge was to reliably and accurately measure them. Although many models have been proposed, the soundest approach to testing EQ is the abilities model suggested by Salovey, Mayer, and colleagues, which breaks down EQ into four proposed abilities that are distinct yet related. They are perceiving, using, understanding, and managing emotions. Perceiving emotions involves the ability to recognize emotions in oneself and others, as well as the ability to express emotions. This is the most basic aspect of emotional intelligence as it makes all other processing of
emotional information possible. Using emotions facilitates thinking, which involves using emotions to improve thinking processes and problem solving. Understanding emotions includes the complexities and subtleties of emotions as well as their interrelationships. Managing emotions involves skills in regulating and controlling felt emotions in a positive fashion. This four-factor structure of emotional intelligence is typically measured with the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT), a performance-based assessment tool. Emotional skills are related to the ability to accurately express, read, and understand emotions, all of which are components of emotional intelligence. Significantly, although findings remain preliminary, EQ has been shown to predict success in the work environment, in particular for those in leadership roles. For example, a sample of employees from a Fortune 500 insurance company completed the MSCEIT. They worked in small teams, each headed by a supervisor. All employees were asked to rate each other on the qualities they displayed at work, such as handling stress and conflict well and displaying leadership potential. Supervisors were also asked to rate their employees. Compellingly, colleagues rated employees with high scores on the MSCEIT as easier to deal with and instrumental in creating a positive work environment. Further, supervisors rated the high-scoring employees as interpersonally sensitive, more tolerant of stress, more sociable, and having greater potential for leadership. Additionally, high scores on the MSCEIT were related to more promotions and higher salary.

Since high EQ has been shown to predict leadership effectiveness, perhaps low EQ can predict toxic leadership. In particular, toxic leaders are characterized as ineffective at managing their emotions and as having poor inter-personal skills—each indications of a person low in EQ. Since EQ can be measured, the US military should incorporate the MSCEIT into the screening process for officer candidates, with preference given to applicants with high EQ. Additionally,
candidates for command should also be tested. Additionally, there is preliminary evidence that EQ levels be increased through specialized training, but more work is needed to determine to what extent a person’s EQ can be improved. If future research validates preliminary evidence, EQ training should be included in leadership development programs. This would not replace the need to add the MSCEIT to the selection process, however, since there is likely an “upper limit” to a person’s EQ potential.

Toxic leadership is a very real problem in the military. Although most leaders are not toxic, those that are have a disproportionally large and destructive impact. Toxic leaders work to promote themselves at the expense of their subordinates, threatening the morale and effectiveness of fighting men and women in uniform. They are detrimental to the long-term health of their unit and the military profession. Due to the nature of modern conflict, more than ever before, command climate will become an increasingly significant prerequisite for unit effectiveness and combat readiness. “The problem is when leadership fails and command climate breaks down, tragic things can happen.” The military in particular should be on the lookout for the phenomenon of toxic leadership since culture and organizational policies inadvertently combine to perpetuate it. The military should value long-term organizational growth and organizational effectiveness more so than short-term mission accomplishment and individual performance. Further, the US military should be mindful that once toxic leaders make it into the service, they are exceedingly difficult to remove—it is not an accident that most current strategies for dealing with toxic leaders involve rehabilitation or learning how to cope with them. Instead of learning how to “cope” with toxic leaders, the military should do what the military did in *Ender’s Game*—it should strive to exclude toxic leaders from selection to the
armed forces in the first place. Thus, the key to ensure success is to invest in good leadership—
selecting the “right” people for the job.

Paradoxically, even though leadership is often viewed as the “panacea” for success, the
task of picking the right person is not often given the attention it deserves. The reason is the military neglects certain criteria that would help to predict leadership performance, which are neuroticism and antagonism, psychological hardiness, power response, and emotional intelligence. The military is neglecting these criteria largely because it does not have the right tools to be more discriminate. Fortunately, developments in personality psychology have yielded instruments the military can use to identify “high risk” candidates for toxic leadership emergence—the FFM, Dispositional Resilience Scale, power-response triggers, and MSCEIT. Personality psychology could also be used to predict the motivations and predispositions under which applicants are applying and the likelihood they can be further developed in their individual character to the profession’s high standards. From a developmental perspective, knowing that there are limitations in terms of “who can become a leader” and “who is likely to be an effective leader” has important implications for the allocation of resources for leadership development. Thus, although leadership may be developed and improved, the behavioral-genetic component may determine the “upper-limit” of a person’s leadership potential. As such, every effort must be made to estimate aptitude before granting authority to a leader. The military not only wants to allocate developmental resources wisely, it wants to pick the right leaders since not doing so can have tragic results. The surest method is to put an untested leader in command, but the price of failure is tallied in blood and the learning curve is steep.44

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Tan, “Army Wants to Rid Top Ranks of Toxic Leaders.”
41 Tan, “Army Wants to Rid Top Ranks of Toxic Leaders.”
42 Snider, “The Moral Corrosion within Our Military Professions.”
43 Reed, “Toxic Leadership,” 70.
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