

## Introduction

The focus of this project is leadership in uncertainty. Uncertainty in this context, is derived from the unpredictability of the environment, as well as a leader's unfamiliarity with the problem set. This ultimately creates a challenge for a leader when a decisive moment is required.

## Problem

Junior officers in the Marine Corps are immediately thrust into leadership positions in which they have minimal experience to draw upon when confronted with uncertainty and often times chaotic situations.

## Purpose

The goal of this capstone is to provide junior officers in the Marine Corps a flexible set of strategies that have been employed by successful individuals and can be referenced to reduce the effects of uncertainty to manageable levels.

## Methods

- Literature Review
- Qualitative Interviews
  - 7 interviews conducted.
  - Average of 21 years of military or corporate leadership experience.
  - 60% of interviewees possessed combat experience.
  - 15 interview questions with a deliberate focus on how uncertainty affected their decision making processes.



## Literature Cited

- Dixon, D. P., Weeks, M., Boland, R., & Perelli, S. (2016). Making Sense When It Matters Most: An Exploratory Study of Leadership In Extremis. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 24(3), 294–317. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051816679356>
- Snowden, D. J., & Boone, M. E. (2015, December 7). *A Leader's Framework for Decision Making*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2007/11/a-leaders-framework-for-decision-making>
- Power, N., & Alison, L. (2019). Decision Inertia in Critical Incidents. *European Psychologist*, 24(3), 209–218. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1016-9040/a000320>
- Johnson, Judith L., and William R. Hill. "Personality Traits and Military Leadership." *Individual Differences Research* 7.1 (2009): 1-13. Print

# LEADERSHIP IN UNCERTAINTY

## Strategies for Combatting Chaos

Gabriel C. Granado, Master of Arts Candidate  
Human Dimensions of Organizations, The University of Texas at Austin

## 7 Strategies & Subthemes

with supporting quotes from interviews

### Develop an Organizational Culture

**Sense of Duty**  
"The Marine had made it known through the chain of command, that if he got hit [killed] 'I don't want a [burial] service in Marjah, I want one in Dwyer after the unit has been pulled out.' He didn't want to be a distraction...he wasn't even 21"

**Discipline**  
"We all did the small things right, upheld standards....previous unit had gone native."

### Build Relationships

**Emotional Intelligence**  
"[Initial meeting for FEMA team] I broke the reservation and broke the chaos with humor in a vulnerable space."

**Knowing Your Team**  
"I'm good at recognizing who is not of value, and then finding folks who will elevate the organization."

### Making Sense (of information)

**Pattern Analysis**  
"[During company downsizing] I had to frame what I was looking at, is this a company thing, the economy, or a combination of the two?"

**Reciprocal Feedback**  
"JC [subordinate leader] was good at making things simple for me. He would say 'we're good Sir,' and I knew I could focus elsewhere."

### Generate Tempo

**Delegation**  
"That's at your level to decide and not me. It creates tempo, and creates decision making authority at the lowest levels."

**Anti-Decision Inertia**  
"I always leaned towards intensity over duration. Instead of sending 1 [artillery] round a minute, give me all the rounds in 30 seconds. Make a decision and go with it!"

### Develop a Subconscious Reflex

**Training**  
"[Taking contact on patrol] the squad leaders had taken over and pushed their squads to gain the advantage of the high ground [mountainous terrain]...I didn't have to say anything...it was beautiful to watch"

### Image Projection

**Calming Influence**  
"The nuances of body language, and nuances of tone of voice, those nuances that people pick up on are paramount."

**Steward Leadership**  
"[FEMA response to flooding] they didn't need me to be authoritative, they didn't need me to be heroic, they needed me to be a steward leader at that very moment."

### Notable (leadership) Traits

**Conscientiousness**  
"Until all the weapons are back in the armory in [Camp] Lejeune...then we're done."

**Extroversion**  
"The human comm's [communication] are just as important, person to person, vehicle to vehicle. Leadership through presence is most important"

## Strategy Summary

The below summarizes my analysis of the key points from the strategies that emerged from both literature review and qualitative interviews. These strategies were found to be most prominent during my research.

Develop an Organizational Culture & Build Relationships

- Preemptive measures a leader should take to prepare an organization or team for unpredictable challenges.
- A sense of accountability for one another should be cultivated.
- By knowing your team and understanding the environment, leaders will understand what type of leader they need to be at that moment.



Making Sense, Generating Tempo, & Developing a Subconscious Reflex

- Understand the environment and information being received through patterns. Information sharing must be reciprocal amongst the team.
- Decisive action and decentralization prevent the environment from outpacing your decision-making cycle as a leader.
- Training mitigates a cognitive stalemate and opens a leaders available capacity for further decision making.



Image Projection, & Notable Leadership Traits

- Perception of a leader by the led and their observable responses are critical to success. "It's not about you."
- "Never let your emotions outrun your intellect."
- Tangible leadership traits inspire action from your team.