

Peer Perspectives

Why We Follow: The Power and Perils of Belonging

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Langley Sharp MBE

In 2013 I had the privilege of commanding a joint British/Afghan counterinsurgency task force. Our mission was to disrupt Taliban safe havens and, in so doing, supporting the protection of both Afghan civilians and coalition forces in Central Helmand. On 22nd August one of my

junior commanders, Lance Corporal (LCpl) Josh Leakey, undertook an act of bravery that was to cement his name in British military history. A few hours into a routine search operation with our Afghan partners and United States Marine Corps (USMC) allies, an element of the 300-strong force found themselves surrounded by Taliban fighters. Pinned down by extremely accurate enemy fire and with communications failing, a USMC officer was shot and wounded.

Reading the situation and knowing that their comrades were in grave danger, Leakey and his sniper team decided to seize the initiative. Having crossed open ground under fire and with the casualty secured, Leakey proceeded to fight back. Twice more he exposed himself to mortal danger, running up and down a steep hillside to get the silenced machine guns into action. Carrying a mounted gun on his back,

with an all-up weight of over 100lbs, he faced an intensity of fire that saw bullets ricocheting off the frame of the weapon.

Demonstrating extraordinary acts of bravery, Leakey consciously took the decision to risk his life on five separate occasions throughout the firefight. His decisiveness turned the tide of the battle, saving countless lives in the process. For his actions that day Leakey was awarded the Victoria Cross, the UK's highest award for valor. He is one of only 10 living recipients of this honor.

At face value, this remarkable story is one of undoubted bravery, the highest living example of commitment to what the military terms 'unlimited liability.'¹ It is a tale of loyalty, selflessness, courage, and leadership. Yet beyond this surface analysis lies an example of much more. It is simultaneously an act of exemplary *followership*.

As defined in the British Army's recently published Doctrine Note, followership is, "the act of an individual or individuals willingly accepting the influence of others to achieve a shared outcome."² Key to this conceptual understanding is that followership, "requires the consent of those being led, whether consciously or unconsciously."³ Followership, therefore, is a choice.

On 22nd August 2013, as the battle enraged nearby, Leakey had a choice to make; stay safe in the lee of the fire and continue to provide overwatch as directed, or step into the breach and risk his life to save others. It is argued that his decision to step forward that day was born of a career as both a very effective junior commander and leader, but also an exemplary follower. The compounded interest of influence that he had accrued throughout his military career (and indeed prior) had shaped the character, values, identity, and mindset that compelled him into action when it mattered most.

Having served in the British Army for 23 years, including a further 8 operational tours and almost a decade with special forces, I have reflected at length on what drives individuals and teams to high performance. Stripped to its essentials, the answer so often lies in the intricate social dynamics between leaders and followers in pursuit of a shared objective, for success is a collective endeavor. But if followership is a choice, one that requires the “willing acceptance” of a leader’s influence, what compels one to follow?

Undoubtedly the answer is multifaceted and contextually dependent, though perceptions of trust, authority, power and purpose are, from experience, highly influential. Whilst such factors were almost certainly at play in Leakey’s VC-winning actions, his stated rationale was more revealing. “I did it for my mates and I did it for the Regiment,” he said. In this simple yet telling statement, his deep sense of obligation and loyalty to his teammates is evident. But perhaps more insightfully, he added, “I did not feel I had a choice. That was what was expected of me as a paratrooper.”

This heartfelt justification for arguably the most selfless of acts, reveals much about Leakey’s decision-making that day, for it speaks to one of the most basic of human instincts; the need to belong. Not only did he follow the demands of the mission, the values of the organization and the cultural expectations of the team, but at his core, Leakey was driven by his self-identity, indivisible in this instance from the shared identity of the tribe to which he belonged.

To Belong

This apparent juxtaposition between self and others was perhaps best articulated by the father of sociobiology, Edward O. Wilson. In his Pulitzer Prize-

winning book *On Human Nature*, Wilson argued that selflessness is at once also self-serving. In so doing he distinguished between ‘hard-core’ altruism, whereby the “impulse can be irrational and unilaterally directed at others,” and ‘soft-core,’ in which “good behavior is calculating, often in a wholly conscious way, and [...] orchestrated by the excruciatingly intricate sanctions and demands of society.”⁴

Wilson suggested that this balanced, albeit often unconscious, calculation between self-serving and true altruism enables humans to be, “capable of indefinitely greater harmony and social homeostasis.”⁵ Our motivations are therefore driven both by our own needs and those of the social groups with which we identify. Moreover, as Robert Dunbar, Professor of Evolutionary Psychology at Oxford University argues, the closer the social affiliation (family, team, tribe or regiment), the greater the alignment. Beyond the optimum group size of 150 (otherwise known as the ‘Dunbar Number’), “we are a great deal more circumspect in our willingness to act altruistically.”⁶

► READ MORE FROM ROBIN DUNBAR ON STARLING INSIGHTS

As a species, our very survival has predicated on our ability to align such motivational needs. As herd animals, we seek safety, love and meaning in others.⁷ The stronger the bonds we create, the more assured our perceived safety, the greater our affection for and from others, and the higher our sense of self-esteem and respect. As such we have an in-built desire to belong. Our sense of self is inextricably linked to our sense of what it means to belong to a particular social group (or, in reality, the myriad of social groups with which we affiliate, and which define our complex identities). Belonging is both innately individual and intrinsically collective.

“Our ancestors deeply understood our primal need to belong, before psychology or neuroscience gathered the proof. It was visceral to them, part of every day and every decision.”⁸

OWEN EASTWOOD

Belonging is a fundamental tenet of being human. As David Samson argues in his book *Our Tribal Future*, we have, since Palaeolithic times, sought to answer one of the most important questions of any species’ survival: in whom should we trust? Beyond kin and kith, declares Samson, the answer lies in the tribe: “the evolution of nested groups, each with their own particular symbols — and enshrined shared myths and values — that bound participants together in trusting relationships.”⁹

We seek belonging in these trusted relationships in order to survive and, whilst they are human manifestations, such social connections are born of our in-built biological drivers. When appropriately stimulated, the release of an optimized group of hormones balances a sense of empathy, connection, well-being, trust and social-bonding.¹⁰ In short, we are hard-wired to belong. ▶ **PAGE 393**

It is not surprising therefore, that the collective psychology fostered within close-knit groups can prove a powerful force, both for good and ill. Channelled appropriately it can engender strong loyalty, high moral purpose, and superior performance. Misguided, however, and it can sow dissent, distrust, and division.

The Power of Belonging

On 6 June 2019 I found myself nervously waiting to exit out of yet another perfectly serviceable aircraft at 800 feet. This parachute descent, however, was unique and one that will live long in my memory. I was joining my fellow Commanding Officers

of the Parachute Regiment as we conducted a commemorative jump over the village of Ranville, Northern France. The aircraft we sat in was an original WWII Dakota which, 75 years to the day, had flown over the English Channel to drop paratroopers behind enemy lines, just hours ahead of the D-Day beach landings to their north.

Awaiting my turn to ‘stand up and fit chute,’ I scanned around me. Perfectly preserved on the walls of the light alloy aircraft were hastily scrawled messages that our brave forefathers inscribed moments before take-off. Opposite me, one such message read:

Jock Hutton
Operation Overload
Ranville
5/6 June 1944
Nightdrop

Moments later I was out the door and under silk canopy. Having hit the ground and been met by a chorus of cheering crowds (rather than the vengeful German Army of yesteryear), we moved off to await the follow-on troops. More than a dozen Dakotas flew overhead. The door of the first aircraft opened and The Parachute Regiment Freefall team led the way. Having descended under trails of coloured smoke and an oversized Regimental flag, they hit the deck. Jumping tandem was a very special guest, an elderly gentleman dressed in the team’s trademark red jumpsuit. As the pair came to rest, he gingerly got to his feet, donned his Parachute Regiment beret and walked smartly off the ‘drop zone,’ to be met by the then Prince of Wales, now King Charles III. The gentleman’s name was Jock Hutton, aged 95.

For my fellow paratroopers and I, the moment was visceral. We were living our history, sharing an experience that closed a generational divide, uniting us in what it meant to belong to our tribe. We believed we were part of something special,

something that had, and continues to offer, value to our society. For that brief moment, our entity felt meaningful, larger than ourselves. We were part of a legacy, whose story was still in the writing. It was an experience that was both symbolic and real, defining what it meant to be a paratrooper. In that moment, we had a heightened sense that we belonged.

As identified above, a sense of belonging meets both individual and collective needs. It both fosters and enables. At an individual level, belonging fosters the basic need to feel safe. In its purest sense it offers safety from danger, giving us the confidence that we are not alone and as such, we have a more assured chance of survival. More broadly it provides the safety to be oneself, confident in our own abilities, familiar in our surroundings, knowing we will not be judged; 'to dance like no one is watching.'¹¹ As world-renowned performance coach Owen Eastwood articulates, "When our need to belong in a team is met, [...] we can be ourselves. We feel that we are respected and that we matter. We feel included. We can be a good teammate here. Our identity and that of the team happily coexist."¹²

Belonging also fosters meaningfulness. In the unfathomable complexity of our existence, it gives us perspective and control, an appreciation of 'our place.' It also offers "a fundamental sense of life being worth living."¹³ In a world that is arguably more (technologically) connected than ever before, whilst perhaps never more (socially) disconnected, the quest for meaningfulness is acute. In increasingly individualist (largely Western) societies, with post-Covid working patterns exacerbating our sense of isolation and dislocation, we strive to generate our understanding of place, purpose and belonging.¹⁴ "In existential terms, human beings derive meaning from the idea of being part of something larger than the self."¹⁵

The force-multiplying effect of having a purpose beyond self was understood intuitively by Phil Jackson, keen practitioner of Zen, student of the Lakota Sioux and, reputedly, one of the greatest sports coaches of all time. With a record 11 NBA championship titles to his name,¹⁶ Jackson understood that success at the highest level required a collective mindset. Through outstanding leadership he crafted a team, moulding some of the greatest players ever to grace the court — some with egos to match — into a tribe. A tribe which, as Jackson so eloquently put it, "surrendered the 'me' for the 'we'."¹⁷

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"But working with the Bulls I've learned that the most effective way to forge a winning team is to call on the players' need to connect with something larger than themselves...
It requires the individuals involved to surrender their self-interest for the greater good so that the whole adds up to more than the sum of its parts."¹⁸

PHIL JACKSON AND HUGH DELEHANTY
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In so doing, Jackson fostered belonging, and with it a group consciousness that generated shared commitment to the mission, loyalty to one another, mutual trust and respect, and accountability. He also fostered love — a concept less talked about in the context of high performance teamship, but all-powerful when harnessed.

As Jackson advocates, "Love is the force that ignites the spirit and binds teams together."¹⁹ Such a force would be familiar in militaries the world over, with the intensity of bonds created through shared purpose, experiences and belonging fostering familial love. Hence the well-versed concept of 'band of brothers,' made famous by the WWII exploits of Easy Company, 2nd Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment.²⁰

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“Belonging is a wildly undervalued condition required for human performance.”²¹

OWEN EASTWOOD
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Once fostered, belonging enables. All-too-often overlooked, it is a key enabler of effective and sustained team performance. Assured psychological safety allows people to take risk, push boundaries, try, make mistakes and, as Professor Amy Edmondson advocates, to intelligently fail.²² It allows for “radical candor,”²³ with teammates confident they can speak their mind, safe in the knowledge that their views will be understood in the context of the task in hand, rather than taken as a personal affront. It encourages a climate of what Dr Timothy Clarke, author of *The Four Stages of Psychological Safety* terms, “high intellectual friction and low social friction.”²⁴ In turn, it unleashes the diversity of thought and experience, a “group intelligence,”²⁵ that resides in any social collective, protecting against the dangers of narrow-minded thinking that homophily can nurture. In turn, this drives much heralded innovation and creativity, enabling personal growth and joint learning.

The collective psychology and mutual trust forged by belonging also enables cultures of ‘freedom and responsibility.’

Freedom is granted to allow devolved decision-making and empowered action where it is needed most, whether that be on the field of play, the forward edge of the battle or in a customer-facing role. In the military, this philosophy is immediately recognizable as Mission Command. It supports one of our basic intrinsic motivations; autonomy.²⁶ Put simply, people perform at their best when they feel respected, are encouraged to contribute, and see themselves as active participants in the team. If people feel valued, they will add value.

But with such freedoms, as the great Viktor Frankl so wisely counselled, comes great responsibility.²⁷ When people feel they belong, when they believe they are part of something larger than themselves, they take responsibility, both for their own actions and for the collective outputs of the group.

Furthermore, belonging builds resilience and enhances well-being, both individual and collective. A deep sense of connection — whether to family, friendship group or work colleagues — offers the security and support necessary to face everyday challenges and hardships. It is not surprising, therefore, that those professions which by their very definition face some of the toughest challenges — specialist police units, firefighters and trauma medics to name but a few — often thrive on the strongest sense of identity and belonging.

From personal experience, the power of belonging is most acute amongst our special forces communities, both in the UK and US. Widely regarded as exemplars of sustained high performance, the Mission Command culture is intuitive. Whilst operating in the same chains of command as their wider military peers, hierarchies are flattened and power distributed, granting ownership as far forward as possible. Reinforced by alignment of intent, clear lines of communication, and a ‘relentless pursuit of excellence,’ individuals step up and take responsibility. All is underpinned by a steadfast belief in why they exist and the greater good they are enabling. This mindset, matched by an intense pride in their tribe and trust in one another, enables tenacity and endurance in the face of the most complex of challenges. The result is a force-multiplying effect, far in excess of the sum of its parts.

The Perils of Belonging

Yet, as respected statesman Edmund Burke once remarked, “The greater the power, the more dangerous the abuse.”²⁸ Intentionally or otherwise, the psychological potency of belonging can be nurtured to achieve great good or manipulated to realize unspeakable evil, as evidenced throughout our checkered human history. ►PAGE 401

“In Sovu, Rwanda, on May 6, 1994, the symbol was a bit of cloth. That day, Tutsi refugees sought escape from bands of Hutus in Sovu’s convent. The mother superior, Sister Gertrude, called in the Hutu militia. Hundreds of the Tutsi were shot, hacked or burned to death. But Sister Gertrude did not turn over the convent’s Tutsi nuns. Their veils protected them. Seeing this, a nineteen-year-old woman named Aline, the niece of a nun, begged for a veil. Sister Gertrude refused.

Seven years later, she was convicted in Belgium of war crimes. Among the witnesses was the murdered niece’s mother. “My daughter was killed because of a little piece of cloth,” she said. [...] A symbolic strip of cloth — its presence saving you from a pack of rampaging killers, its absence marking you as the kind to kill — is something only Homo sapiens create.”²⁹

This horrifying snippet from our recent past, brought to life in David Berreby’s compelling book, *Us and Them*, illustrates the dark side of what it means to belong. We create the meaning of our social identities and stipulate what it means to be a member in our tribe. The symbols, language, traditions, rites, and rituals, and the meaning they offer us, are created by us, for us, as a means of making sense of our world. Yet the lived realities of such creations are real indeed. Our shared identities can be forged to achieve collective greatness — uniting global communities to fight climate change — or manipulated to unleash the very worst of

humanity. The 1994 Rwandan genocide, one of many that sickens human history, demonstrated this yet again. ►PAGE 409

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“From massive, breathtaking barbarity to countless pinpricks of microaggression, Us versus Them has produced oceans of pain.”³⁰

ROBERT SAPOLSKY
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Our conceptual understanding of ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ was theorized in 1979 in the seminal work of social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner. Their posited “social identity theory”³¹ argued that our own concept of self is inextricably shaped by the shared identities of the social groups with which we affiliate. As such, we see ourselves through the lens of the groups to which we feel we belong and, in so doing, we seek to protect what it means to be part of the ‘in-group.’ Unavoidably, reinforcing concepts of ‘Us’ creates an understanding of what it means not to be ‘Us’ — or one of ‘Them’ in the ‘out-group.’

From gender identities and political affiliations, to sporting passions and regimental loyalties, we are bound up in rich and unique identities through which we understand our reality. As military psychologist Sarah Chapman Trim stated, “Now common sense in hindsight, this simple re-conceptualisation of human behaviour was a paradigm shift that advanced our understanding [of both] the ‘bright side’ of human interaction in groups (trust, cooperation, loyalty and leadership) [and] the ‘dark side’ of social identity (prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping and their outcomes, ranging from workplace bullying and harassment to violence, human atrocities, and genocide).”³²

The perils of belonging, therefore, exist in how we both conform to ‘Us,’ as well as defend against ‘Them.’

‘Us’

Our conceptualization of self is reinforced through the notion of homophily. Defined as, “the tendency for people to seek out or be attracted to those who are similar to themselves,”³³ it is an instinctively human characteristic and a key contributor drawing us to belong.

We crave to affiliate with people like us, those we can relate to, and with whom we share similar views, values and perspectives. There is a familiarity and predictability of one another that underpins interpersonal trust and in turn strengthens social bonds. Having been drawn together through perceived likeness, we reinforce what it means to be ‘Us’ through created narratives, in turn evolving our social identities. Rituals, codes and distinct practices all seek to define group membership.

Military organizations exploit this to great effect. From uniforms, berets and badges, to ceremonies, traditions, and manicured histories, we define what it means to be a ‘British Paratrooper,’ ‘United States Marine,’ or ‘French Legionnaire.’ In so doing we create bonds of association that people will literally put their lives on the line for.

The function of homophily, for connection and relationship-building, is self-evident. But, left unchecked, it reveals a dark side. As Camilleri, Rockey and Dunbar argue in their insightful book, *The Social Brain*, homophily, “can also present challenges for organisations: groupthink, complacency, in-groups versus out-groups, narrow-mindedness and poor decision-making can all easily result from it.”³⁴ The impact to performance can be extensive, influencing siloed working, unchallenged directives, organizational rigidity, and resistance to change in light of shifting market forces.

Furthermore, driven by a desire to belong, we adapt our behavior to align with what is deemed acceptable by the group. What follows is either compliance (changing behavior to conform to others) or acceptance (changing behavior and internalizing and adopting shared beliefs).³⁵

Where group norms are not kept in check by strong leadership, responsible followership and agreed moral codes, we see what Diane Vaughan has termed a “normalization of deviance.” Developed in her organizational analysis of NASA following the 1996 Space Shuttle *Challenger* disaster,³⁶ the “normalization of deviance” refers to ‘a phenomenon in which individuals and teams deviate from what is known to be an acceptable performance standard until the adopted way of practice becomes the new norm.’³⁷

Regrettably our society appears plagued with such dysfunctional organizational cultures in which behavioral transgressions are deep-rooted. From elite sport and global banks, to health trusts and military Services, not a week goes by without another headline unveiling entrenched misogyny, reckless decision-making, harassment and discrimination, or abuse of authority. From individual misery to institutional collapse, high prices are paid as a consequence of morally distorted cultures exploiting the urge to belong.

‘Them’

One of the greatest perils of belonging to the preferential ‘Us,’ however, is the often unconscious bias we exercise against ‘Them.’

As Stanford Professor, Robert Sapolsky explains, “Our brains form Us/Them dichotomies with stunning speed.” Within just a fifty-millisecond exposure to a face, we instinctively categorize those of a different race, gender or social-status.³⁸ We are genetically wired, at great speed, to classify

ourselves and others into a vast array of what Berreby refers to as ‘human-kinds’;³⁹ Republicans, United fans, Chinese men, firefighters or Gen Zs. We simplify complexity through such human-defined categories, to each of which we add meaning, assumptions, and bias. As the science tells us, to our own we demonstrate in-group bias, favoritism, and prosociality, while ‘others’ typically invoke our distrust, anger and, at its worst, vilification.⁴⁰

At the professional level, I have experienced the perils of these dichotomies throughout my career. In an institution whose operational effectiveness is underpinned by the loyalty, pride and confidence inspired by our regimental (tribal) system, too often this is unmatched by the humility necessary to optimize performance. Such institutional arrogance, of which my own regiment has been guilty of in the past, has at best led to parochial and insular mindsets preventing evolution, collaboration, and integration, and at worst yielded toxic protectionism or sown dissent and distrust.

Such dangers appear to be worsening. Our daily interpretation of the world around us is increasingly fuelled by bite-size news briefings and 140-character social media posts,⁴¹ simplify complexity in language fraught with subjective meaning. We read about our politics through the prism of Republican v Democrat, discuss the impact of Brexit from a standpoint of Leave or Remain, or analyse our economic policies by reference to the wealthy elite, welfare claimants, or illegal immigrants. Our conceptualization and rationalization of our own realities are fraught with bias, misunderstanding and misrepresentation and, as the vitriolic rhetoric fills our phones and news channels, we seem to be further entrenching into our own tribes. This polarization of Us and Them is arguable one of the greatest dangers we face today. ►PAGE 421

However, as Berreby reminds, the ability to control the perils of belonging remains in our hands, or rather, our heads. “Your human-kind code makes nothing happen, for good or ill, unless you choose to act,” he writes. “Ethnic tensions, religious strife, political conflict, clan rivalries, and the like have never harmed anyone and never will. People do the harm. In other words, the Us-Them code does not own you; you own it.”⁴²

Leadership and Followership: A Collective Responsibility

And own it we must, for the dangers of leaving ‘belonging’ to chance are too fearful, and the rewards are demonstrably force-multiplying. But how are the somewhat ethereal concepts of values, beliefs, and ideals turned into a lived reality? How are they embedded across a team —or the team of teams as exists in most organizations⁴³ — to foster the positive identity and sense of belonging that supports a united purpose?

For the British Army, with a history dating back to 1660, the answers are deep-rooted. It is an institution which has nurtured the power of belonging — and, regrettably, the perils perhaps more than it would care to admit — for over three and a half centuries. From regimental tattoos, berets, and cap badges, to parades, pageantry, and customs, a rich tapestry of tangible and intangible markers has evolved, defining its social identity. The policies codified, standards reinforced, past glories regaled, and colloquial language refined, collectively seek to ascribe, consciously and unconsciously, what it means to belong.

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“I see values as shorthand for our Us story.”⁴⁴

OWEN EASTWOOD
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Yet, as I have sought to argue, the meaning attributed to any of these mechanisms can be skewed, deliberately or otherwise, for both good and ill. What defines the chosen path is our moral code, our shared principles of right and wrong. For the British Army, such foundations are grounded in its Values (courage, discipline, respect for others, integrity, loyalty and selfless commitment) and Standards (lawful, acceptable behaviour and total professionalism.)⁴⁵

Whilst only inscribed for the first time just over two decades ago, these Values and Standards would be just as familiar to Wellington's soldiers, two centuries ago, as they are to the young men and women deployed on British Army operations today. Embedded in reward systems, disciplinary procedures, training and histories, our Values and Standards provide the moral anchor points that shape individual and collective senses of self, shape the character of our soldiers and, in turn, influence their behaviors.

Yet, as is all too often the case in many organizations today, values remain nothing more than words on a page unless they are lived. It is people who turn concepts into reality. It is the habitual, everyday decisions and actions of both leaders *and* followers that give meaning to principles, defining what it means to be 'Us.' Regardless of role, we all have a part to play.

Leaders are duty bound to ensure that the shared identity of the team is fit for purpose but also evolving in line with societal expectations. Strong moral leadership is fundamental: setting the example to others, modelling expected standards, and leading with integrity — not just as regards one's own behavior but also with the moral courage to hold others to account where expectations have not been met.

Leaders set the cultural climate within their immediate sphere of influence: clear direction, alignment of responsibilities, effective

communication, support, and challenge are all staples of the role. To guard against an Us-Them dichotomy, leaders must work conscientiously to drive what a former commander of mine, Brigadier Charlie Stickland,⁴⁶ termed "infectious inclusivity." Pride in team performance must be matched with the humility to learn from and collaborate with others.

Concurrently and symbiotically, those in follower roles have an equal responsibility to define what it means to belong. Followers too must demonstrate moral courage and a strength of character, ensuring that behaviors are in line with what is known to be right, rather than reflecting blind subservience to the norms of the social group even where transgressions of Values and Standards are evident. Followers must be loyal, professional, and accountable and, above all, they must be driven by the needs of the team over self.

Shaping, nurturing and evolving the power of belonging, is a collective responsibility: a reciprocal partnership between effective leaders and courageous followers, operating at every level of the organization, jointly doing the right thing in pursuit of the shared mission.

On 22 August 2013, LCpl Leakey VC did just that. His actions were the epitome of courageous followership. He exemplified the Army's Values and Standards; courage, discipline, loyalty, selfless commitment and total professionalism. He lived the philosophy of Mission Command, understanding the commander's intent and, with agency to act, doing everything in his power to deliver. He took responsibility, for his teammates and the task in hand.

Paradoxically, Leakey showed leadership in his followership. Not only did he inspire others into action that day, but in so doing he set the standard for future generations, modelling what it means to belong to his tribe. Despite his trademark humility, declaring, "I

didn't feel I had a choice," consciously or otherwise, he did. His rationale? "That was what was expected of me as a paratrooper."

Leakey surrendered the "me" for the "we," putting his life on the line because he belonged.

Langley Sharp MBE is the former head of the Centre for Army Leadership, responsible for championing leadership excellence across the British Army. Having himself graduated from Sandhurst two decades ago, his career in the Parachute Regiment, which included operational command at every rank, saw him deployed to Northern Ireland, Macedonia, Afghanistan and Iraq. Among his many varied roles, he led a counter-insurgency Task

Force operation, commanded a Parachute Regiment Battalion and delivered the Ministry of Defence's training programme for the London 2012 Olympics venue security, for which he was awarded an MBE. He is the author of the British Army's official account of leadership, [The Habit of Excellence](#), distilling over three centuries of the Army's experience in the art, science and practice of leadership.

The breadth of Langley's life experiences has fostered in him a steadfast belief in the potential of people. As an executive coach and leadership consultant, working with executives and senior leadership teams across the private and public sectors, his passion is to help unleash this potential. Langley is the Founder and Director of the consultancy firm [Frontier Leadership](#).

ENDNOTES

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