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# **TRUST-BUILDING FACTORS IN COMBAT AND COMBAT SUPPORT SUB-UNITS**

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## Abstract

This thesis investigates the concept of trust between sub-unit commanders and their subordinate platoon commanders in the context of combat and combat support units of the British Army. Using the repertory grid method 30 former sub-unit commanders (selected as a representative sample of the current population of sub-unit commanders) were interviewed. During this primary research 147 trust constructs were elicited from the interviewees. These were reduced into 16 core factors which were categorised into two core themes (*competence/ability* and *benevolence/intent*) and two independent factors (*a trustworthy reputation* and *briefs, approaches and challenges their OC*). These core themes and factors, representing company commanders' most important trust factors, are discussed with a view to understanding how they relate to wider research on trust and how junior platoon commanders can justifiably maximise the trust their company commanders place in them.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

“Perhaps there is no single variable which so thoroughly influences interpersonal and group behaviour as does trust. On this point ancient and modern observers typically agree. Trust acts as a salient factor in determining the character of a huge range of relationships. Trust is critical in personal growth and development as well as task performance.”<sup>1</sup>

Trust is a key enabler of military success. The British Army includes trust as one of its five principles of mission command.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, it is a key element of the Australian and US armies’ command philosophies.<sup>3,4</sup> British Army doctrine describes it as “Arguably the single most important factor to effective interoperability”<sup>5</sup> and “a pre-requisite of command at all levels... improve[ing] speed of decision making, and, therefore, tempo”.<sup>6</sup> Canadian research argues that high-trust military teams have less internal monitoring, reduced control requirements, increased cooperation, and display better group performances and mental processing.<sup>7</sup> As a result Canadian Doctrine describes it as “an important human dimension of military effectiveness”.<sup>8</sup> Outside of the military there is equally strong evidence that trust enables success. In business trust is a prerequisite for cooperation. It provides a viable alternative to a signed contract, offering certainty of outcome without a contract’s transaction costs.<sup>9</sup> High-trust business relationships are considered to have a higher ‘speed’ and greater efficiency – concepts that relate closely to operational tempo and effectiveness in the military.<sup>10</sup> However, there has not been a great deal of research into what drives trust in the military context. Although the importance of trust in military teams is undisputed, military doctrine simply “allude[s] to it as a fundamental ingredient or lubricant, an unavoidable dimension of social interaction, only to move on to less intractable matters”.<sup>11</sup> This study aims to remedy this.

In understanding trust one must strike a balance. A shallow, broad understanding provides a widely applicable theory but lacks contextual meaning. A narrow, deep understanding provides a highly context-specific theory but offers little applicability beyond its narrow focus. This thesis will

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<sup>1</sup> R Golembiewski and M McConkie, “The centrality of interpersonal trust in group processes” in *Theories of group processes*, ed C Cooper (Wiley, London, 1975), 131.

<sup>2</sup> United Kingdom, British Army. *Warfighting Tactics Part 1: The Fundamentals*. Army Field Manual AC 72071. (Warminster: Land Warfare Centre, 2018), 2-6.

<sup>3</sup> Australia, Australian Army. *Land Warfare Doctrine 1 – The Fundamentals of Land Power*. (Duntroon: Land Warfare Centre, 2017), 34-35.

<sup>4</sup> United States, US Army. *Leader Development*. Field Manual 6-22. (Washington: HQ Department of the Army), 1-5.

<sup>5</sup> United Kingdom, British Army. *Planning and Execution Handbook*. AC 72099. (Warminster: Land Warfare Centre, 2018), 1-11.

<sup>6</sup> United Kingdom, British Army. *Land Operations*, Army Doctrine Publication AC71940. Warminster: Land Warfare Development Centre, 2018), 6-6.

<sup>7</sup> Barbara Adams, et al. *Trust in Teams Literature Review*. DCIEM No. CR-2001-042. (Department of National Defence, 2001), 79.

<sup>8</sup> Canada, Department of National Defence. *Leadership in the Canadian Armed Forces: Conceptual Foundations* (Ottawa: DND, 2005), 74.

<sup>9</sup> Kieron O’Hara. *Trust from Socrates to Spin*. (Duxford: Icon, 2004), 66-67.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Covey and Rebecca Merrill. *The Speed of Trust*. (London: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 13-17.

<sup>11</sup> Diego Gambetta, “Can we Trust” in *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*, ed D Gambetta (Oxford: OUP, 1988), 213

deliberately keep its focus narrow. In doing so it attempts to fill a specific gap in the study of trust. It will not examine *if* or *why* trust is essential to military success. Nor will it attempt to identify or critically examine mechanisms by which trust can be built. It asks the research question ‘What are the most important factors that lead company commanders to trust their subordinate platoon commanders in combat and combat support units?’<sup>12</sup>

The specific context of combat and combat support units has been chosen for two reasons. First, they make up the greatest proportion of the British Army’s deployable field forces. Second, they share a common structure where one company commander leads three or more platoon commanders. In contrast, some combat service support units (such as those involved intelligence and education) have more distinct structures where the command relationship and role is significantly different to the norm. The context merits study for three major reasons. A sub-unit team of around 150 soldiers is the smallest combat-focussed organisation where experienced leaders (Majors of over 11 years’ experience) lead inexperienced subordinates (Lieutenants of less than one year’s experience). In this context the imbalance in ability between leader and subordinate makes trust all the more important. It is also the lowest level at which a leader commands subordinates that have no reputation or track record of achievement (having just completed basic training). With no track record to rely upon, trust-making decisions are purely made on displayed attributes and behaviours. Finally, it is a context in which new and inexperienced subordinates lack an intuitive understanding of why their leaders trust them. This thesis should aid these junior officers, helping them understand what their immediate commanders’ value in junior leaders.

## Defining Trust

Before studying a concept it is normal to begin by defining it. Trust, however, is a contested concept.<sup>13</sup> A 2007 content analysis found over 70 definitions.<sup>14</sup> For example, the Oxford English Dictionary defines trust as the “firm belief in the reliability, truth or ability of someone”.<sup>15</sup> Sociologist Adam Seligman defines it solely in terms of an expecting a person to act in keeping with their role in society.<sup>16</sup> Political philosopher Russell Hardin defines trust as the expectation of X that Y will act in keeping with X’s interests.<sup>17</sup> However, the meaning of trust is highly personal and driven by its context.<sup>18</sup> From a constructivist perspective, it is a personally constructed concept.<sup>19</sup> In fact, the

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<sup>12</sup> For the sake of brevity the term ‘company commander’ and ‘platoon commander’ will be used to indicate equivalent commanders in all branches of combat and combat support arms, such as batteries, squadrons and troops.

<sup>13</sup> Neville Stanton, *Trust in Military Teams* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Fergus Lyon et al, “Researching trust: the ongoing challenge of matching objectives and methods,” in *Handbook of Research Methods on Trust*, ed F Lyon (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2015), 3.

<sup>15</sup> OED. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/trust> (accessed 12 Mar 19).

<sup>16</sup> Adam Seligman, *The Problem of Trust* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 13-43.

<sup>17</sup> Russell Hardin, “Do we want trust in government?” in *Democracy and Trust*, ed Mark Warren (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 24-6.

<sup>18</sup> Roy Lewicki and Chad Brinsfield, “Trust research: measuring trust beliefs and behaviours,” in *Handbook of Research Methods on Trust*, ed F Lyon (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2015), 58.

<sup>19</sup> Melanie Ashleigh and Edgar Meyer “Deepening the understanding of trust: combining repertory grid and narrative to explore the uniqueness of trust” in *Handbook of Research Methods on Trust*, ed Fergus Lyon (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011). 179 and 182.

research question is simultaneously asking how company commanders construct the concept of trust. It is asking 'In the context of your relationship with your platoon commanders, what *is* trust?' Therefore, while all these definitions are valid they do not suit this study. The contexts they examine are either too wide to be wholly applicable or too different in their narrow focus. For this reason, this thesis will use a mixed methodology, including grounded theory, in order to answer the research question.

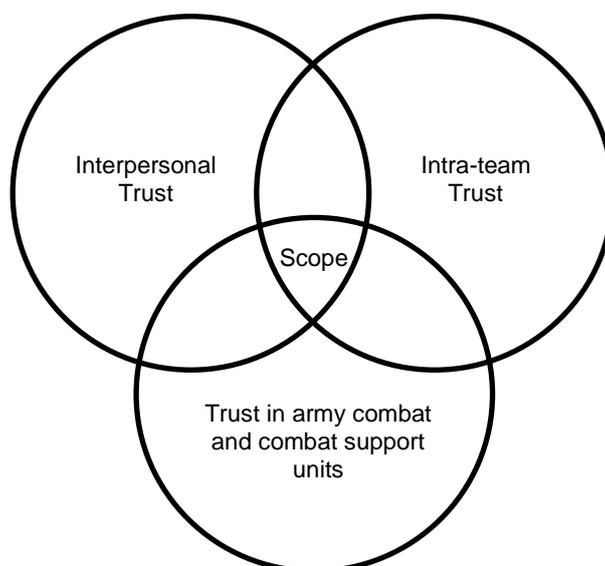
Chapter 2 begins the study by examining the current understanding of interpersonal trust. It will identify factors that may be considered important by company commanders. Chapter 3 then explain the methodology used in the study. This will include the selection of interviewees, a brief explanation of Personal Construct Theory and a description of the repertory grid interview method. Having thus explained the data's sources, Chapter 4 examines and analyses the data gathered from 30 interviews with former company commanders, analysing their personal constructs to identify those trust factors considered most important by the interviewees. These are grouped into two Core Themes and two independent factors which form what is known as a Common Trust Indicators Framework (CTIF). This CTIF accurately describes the most important trust factors that lead company commanders to trust their platoon commanders. The chapter ends with an examination of why company commanders trust and what they look for in a platoon commander. It argues that when it comes to trusting their platoon commanders, company commanders highly value those who demonstrate specific competences and abilities, those who prove they have the right intentions and, to a lesser extent, those with a trustworthy reputation and with whom they have full and open communication. Chapter 5 discusses the significance and implications of the themes and factors exposed by the study. Chapter 6 then concludes the study, summarising the findings and discussing whether the study has met its aims.

## Chapter 2

### Research into Trust

Organisational researchers Fuller and Gelfand stress that in studying trust it is important to understand the context in which it occurs; trust exists “*in a referent and at a level*”.<sup>20</sup> That is to say, the measure of trust in a relationship can only be understood when it is clear *who* the trustee is and the *level* at which the relationship occurs. The five levels of trust are interpersonal (between individuals), intra-team (where teams are less than 150 people), inter-team, intra-organisational (where teams are grouped into organisations) and inter-organisational.<sup>21</sup> This study’s research question asks about the factors that lead company commanders to trust their platoon commanders. Thus it examines interpersonal trust, a one-way trust relationship between two individuals.

However, Lewicki and Brinsfield take Fuller and Gelfand’s contention one stage further: trust dynamics only make sense not only *in a referent and at a level* but also “*within a specific context*”.<sup>22</sup> Therefore this thesis must also examine research within the context of an established team framework, the company. Indeed, a significant link between the interpersonal and intra-team levels of trust has been established by Ashleigh and Stanton’s research, which found nine factors common to both inter-personal and intra-team trust.<sup>23</sup> For this reason literature on intra-team trust is also relevant to this study. Finally, the thesis must also consider research that looks at the specific context of combat and combat support sub-units in the army. The scope of this study is therefore the intersection of the interpersonal, intra-team and combat/combat support unit contexts. It is illustrated in Figure 2-1 and Chapter 2 examines these three contexts in turn.



**Figure 2-1. Study scope**

<sup>20</sup> C Fulmer and M Gelfand, ‘At what level (and in whom) we trust: trust across multiple organisational levels’, *Journal of Management*, No 38 (2012): 1214.

<sup>21</sup> Stanton, *Trust in Military Teams*, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Lewicki and Brinsfield, “Trust research: measuring trust beliefs and behaviours, 58. Emphasis added.

<sup>23</sup> Neville Stanton and Melanie Ashleigh, “Trust, key elements in human supervisory control domains,” *Cognition, Work and Technology*, No 3 (1990), 92-95

## The Interpersonal Context

One of the most influential early studies of interpersonal trust is Zucker's 1986 work that articulates its findings as a list of 'indicators of trustworthiness'.<sup>24</sup> As a result of this seminal work the most common method of investigating trust is to measure the 'perceived trustworthiness' of the trustee and articulate the research findings as a list of 'indicators of trustworthiness'. This convention is followed in this study, with Chapter 4 articulating the findings as a list of platoon commander trustworthiness indicators based on the perceptions of company commanders.

Mayer et al incorporate and build on Zucker's work by providing another deeper proposal: that trust is "a function of the trustee's perceived *ability*, *benevolence*, and *integrity* and of the trustor's propensity to trust".<sup>25</sup> Mayer's definition of trust as *ability*, *benevolence* and *integrity* (commonly referred to as the ABI dimensions) is one of the most influential definitions of trust.<sup>26</sup> Mayer defines *benevolence* as "the extent to which a party is believed to want to do good for the trusting party".<sup>27</sup> *Integrity* is defined as describes it as "the perception that another person adheres to a set of principles that a trustor finds acceptable".<sup>28</sup> In trust research this is the commonly accepted definition but it differs from the common military understanding of integrity as "being truthful and honest".<sup>29</sup> To prevent confusion, this study will only use the term in the trust research sense. Finally, Mayer defines *ability* as the "skills, competencies, and characteristics that enable a party to have influence within some specific domain".<sup>30</sup> Mayer's three ABI dimensions appear repeatedly across other trust researchers' works.

Some research considers trust as an equation, arranging the indicators or factors as a mathematical equation. While this format seems to offer clarity, it actually sidesteps the issue of measuring relative weighting and the importance of different factors.<sup>31</sup> Maister offers an equation where trust is defined as:<sup>32</sup>

$$\text{Trust} = \frac{\text{Credibility} \times \text{Reliability} \times \text{Intimacy}}{\text{Self-Orientation}}$$

Maister defines *credibility* as demonstrable expertise (both rationally, such as having qualifications, and emotionally, such as looking and acting the part), *reliability* as being dependable and consistent and *intimacy* as the ability to be honest about emotions. The negative trait, *self-orientation*, relates to a selfish-selfless dyadic where selfish behaviour (in favour of the trustee

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<sup>24</sup> L Zucker. "Production of trust: institutional sources of economic structure, 1840-1920," in *Research in Organisational Behaviour*, edited by B. Staw, (Greenwich: JAI Press, 1986): 60.

<sup>25</sup> Roger Mayer et al, "An integrative model of organisational trust," *Academy of Management Review* 20, no 3 (1995): 720

<sup>26</sup> Lyon et al, "Researching trust", 5.

<sup>27</sup> Mayer et al, "An integrative model of organisational trust", 718.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibdi.*, 719.

<sup>29</sup> United Kingdom, British Army. *Army Leadership Doctrine*. AC72029. (Camberley: Centre for Army Leadership, 2016), 21.

<sup>30</sup> Mayer et al, "An integrative model of organisational trust", 717.

<sup>31</sup> Lewicki and Brinsfield, "Trust research", 46.

<sup>32</sup> David Maister, Charles Green and Robert Galford. *The Trusted Advisor*. (London: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 69-70.

rather than the trustor) reduces trust.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Covey and Merrill arrange their factors in an equation-like manner, calculating trust using four core factors:<sup>34</sup>

$$\text{Trust} = \text{Integrity} \quad \text{Intent} \quad \underbrace{\text{Capability} \quad \text{Results}}_{\text{Competence}}$$

Covey and Merrill define *integrity* as being made of three parts: congruency, being true to your values; humility, being more interested in what is right rather than being right; and courage, the courage to do the right thing.<sup>35</sup> *Intent* is defined as a combination of a motive and an agenda that supports the trustor – similar to Mayer’s *benevolence*.<sup>36</sup> *Capability* refers to the knowledge and skills required and, in agreement with Maister, the behaviours and styles that convey those skills.<sup>37</sup> Finally, *results* are defined as a proven track record of focussing on successful results.<sup>38</sup> Covey and Merrill agree with Maister in that *self-orientation* and *intent/integrity* relate to the trustee’s desire to work for the trustor’s good and that *credibility* and *capability* relate to the trustee’s perceived ability to achieve tasks. While they both agree in the importance of proven results, Maister adds a factor that Covey and Merrill do not mention: the consistency of those results.

Misztal’s 2013 study builds on sociological theories, considering trust as a mechanism that reduces uncertainty in three areas, using three social mechanisms.<sup>39</sup> O’Hara summarises Misztal’s theory into a “synthesis of sociological theories of trust” shown at Figure 2-2 (overleaf).<sup>40</sup> The three effects of trust in Figure 2-2 are highly valued in the military. Predictability in chaotic circumstances, cohesion in teams and the ability to work together to a common goal are qualities referenced in the Army’s Leadership Doctrine.<sup>41</sup> Misztal’s nine factors might, therefore, relate well to trust in this study. However, O’Hara critiques Misztal’s work, pointing out that in contexts where there is little prior knowledge “attribution of trust cannot be an inference from any [previous] behaviour”. In these circumstances, such as when dealing with new platoon commanders, a trustee’s ability to fulfil *routine expectations* becomes more significant than *reputation* and *memory past actions*.<sup>42</sup> Fukuyama supports this view, contending that trust “is the expectation that arises within a community ...based on commonly shared norms”.<sup>43</sup> Fukuyama therefore states that *shared norms* and *expectations* are a significant factor in trust inside teams.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 71-83.

<sup>34</sup> Stephen Covey and Rebecca Merrill. *The Speed of Trust*. (London: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 54-55.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 59-66.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 73-90.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 91-108.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 115-118.

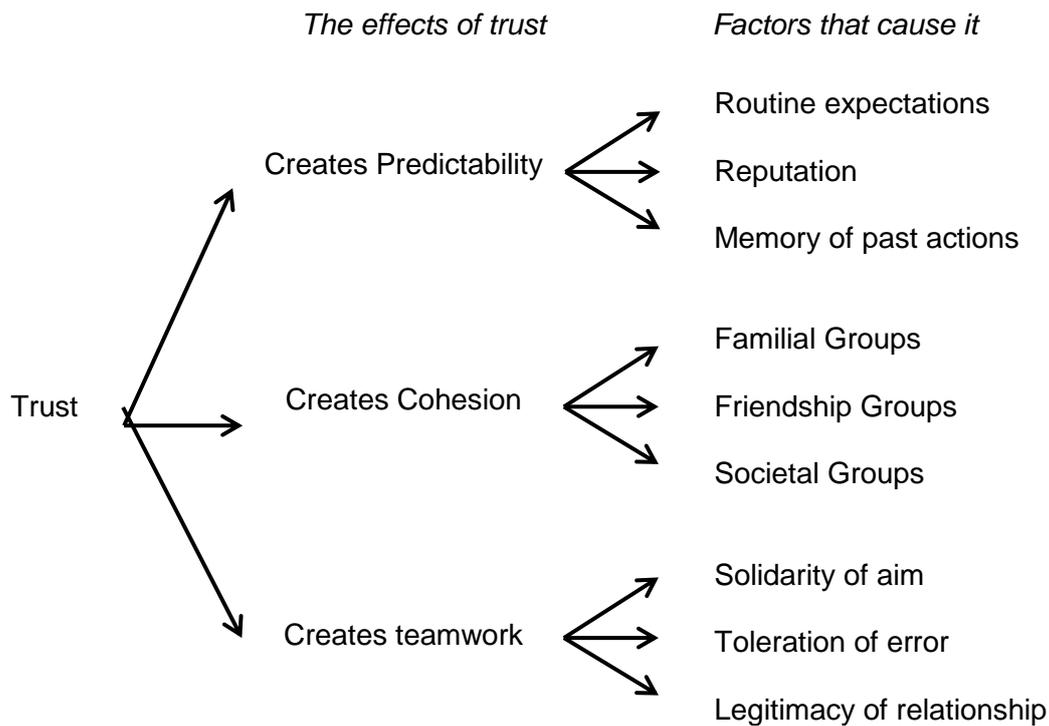
<sup>39</sup> Barbara Misztal, *Trust in Modern Societies: the Search for the Bases of Social Order* (Oxford: Wiley, 2013), 95-101.

<sup>40</sup> O’Hara, *Trust from Socrates to Spin*, 70.

<sup>41</sup> For example trust, cohesion, teamwork, social identity and reliability are mentioned as parts of ‘Building Teams’. United Kingdom, *Army Leadership Doctrine*, 49-50.

<sup>42</sup> O’Hara, *Trust from Socrates to Spin*, 267.

<sup>43</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: the Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 26.



**Figure 2-2 A synthesis of sociological theories of trust**

While all these studies are relevant, neither Misztal, O’Hara nor Fukuyama examine a context identical to this study, one where new entrants to a community (platoon commanders) lack *proven results*. What does this lack of *proven results* mean for how company commanders trust? It could mean that *proven results* are less important in this study than in other studies. On the other hand the paucity of *proven results* may mean a platoon commander’s results carry unusual importance. The extent to which *proven results* are a significant factor for company commanders is one of the notable findings of this study and will be examined in Chapter 4.

### **The Intra-team and Business Context**

Examinations of intra-team trust divide trust into several different types. Lewicki and Bunker define intra-team trust as working across three types.<sup>44</sup> *Calculus Trust* exists when trustees believe the cost/benefit analysis supports trusting. It is most important when there is little prior knowledge or shared identity, such as the company commander – platoon commander context that this study examines. *Knowledge Trust* is based on the trustee’s predictability, and is developed over time, becoming increasingly important as a track record of behaviour is built up. Shapiro contends that this type of trust is facilitated by regular communication to maintain currency.<sup>45</sup> *Identification Trust* is based on a mutual understanding of each party’s intent and motivation, enabling effective action independent of regular communication. Lewicki and Bunker’s trust types, and the factors that

<sup>44</sup> R Lewicki and B Bunker, “Trust in relationships: A model of trust development and decline” In *Conflict, Cooperation and Justice* ed Bunker and Rubin (San Francisco : Jossey-Bass, 1995) and R Lewicki and B Bunker, *Trust in Organizations: Frontiers of theory and research*, (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications 1996), 114-40.

<sup>45</sup> Debra Shapiro, Blair Sheppard and Lisa Cheraskin, “Business on a Handshake,” *Negotiation Journal* 8, no. 4 (1992): 375.

underpin them, are summarised in Table 2-1. All three types of trust are relevant to the context of this study. Importantly, there is some commonality between *Knowledge Trust* and Misztal's *predictability* effect, and between *Identification Trust* and Misztal's *cohesion* and *teamwork* effects.

<b>Calculus Trust</b>	<b>Knowledge Trust</b>	<b>Identification Trust</b>
Extent to which distrustworthy action by the trustee carries a future penalty	Trustor knowledge of the trustee	Collective identity
Ability to monitor potential untrustworthy behaviour by the trustee	Predictability of the trustee	Collocation or shared team membership
Ability for the trustee to withdraw from the relationship if they act untrustworthily	Repeated interactions increase the value of knowledge and predictability	Common goals and objectives
		Common values

**Table 2-1. Summary of Lewicki and Bunker's types of trust and trust factors**

Cousins and Stanwix's research, based on interviews in the automotive industry, suggests 17 root causes of trust, although not all are relevant to this study's context.<sup>46</sup> Once the factors specific to business operations have been removed (for example, those related to profit, payments, price and market testing) there are seven factors relevant to this study. They are listed in Table 2-2. Again, there are similarities between these factors and those of other authors, although some of the language used by Cousins and Stanwix is imprecise and may not easily map over to the context of this study. This is relevant because Lewicki and Brinsfield advise that trust always occurs "*within* a specific context": in this case, a specifically military context.

<b>Root Cause Factor</b>	<b>Expansion</b>
Full and open communication	Communication in which good news as well as bad is shared
Long term commitment	Does the trustee intend to commit to the team's success in the long term
Honesty and openness	Both 'telling the truth' and 'not lying by omission'
Words are backed up with action	Do they do what they promise
Receptive to new ideas	Are they open minded and take on advice and ideas
Attitude and loyalty	Are they loyal to their team and do they have a positive attitude towards the team
Confidence in personal ability	Is the trustor confident of the trustee's ability

**Table 2-2. Relevant root cause factors of trust**

<sup>46</sup> Paul Cousins and Euan Stanwix, "It's only a matter of confidence! A comparison of relationship management between Japanese- and UK non-Japanese-owned vehicle manufacturers," *International Journal of Operations & Production Management* 21, No. 9 (2001) 1160-1164.

## The Military Sub-Unit Context

Specific research into tactical team trust is relatively rare and tends to focus more on narrative descriptions of trustworthiness indicators and trust factors. Ashleigh and Stanton’s primary research into trust in the human supervisory control domain (which, it is contended, has similarities to military command and control) is the notable exception.<sup>47</sup> This research identified nine common ‘trust constructs’.<sup>48</sup> The shortcoming in Ashleigh and Stanton’s research is that it does not reveal the general meaning interviewees ascribe to each of the constructs, reducing the value of the research. Nevertheless, these constructs, ranked in importance and with a brief expansion where available, are shown in Table 2-3.

Construct	Expansion
Honesty	Open, honest, truthful, principled
Understanding	Knowledge, experience and familiarity
Respect	<i>Not defined</i>
Quality of Interaction	The way in which people interact. Personable, informal, approachable.
Reliability	<i>Not defined</i>
Communication	<i>Not defined</i>
Ability	<i>Not defined</i>
Performance	<i>Not defined</i>
Expectancy	<i>Not defined</i>

**Table 2-3. Ranked trust constructs in human supervisory control domains**

Summarising work on trust in military contexts, Stanton further adds *agreeableness*, *openness*, *permanent teams* and *adopting others’ norms* as factors that increase trust within teams.<sup>49</sup> Taken together this wide list of trust factors matches some previous theories from outside of the military context. However, the lack of detailed analysis of the constructs’ meaning limits its value.

Works that use a narrative examination of military teams include Kile’s analysis of Canadian Army operations in Afghanistan, in which he highlights *vulnerability* and *predictability* as significant factors.<sup>50</sup> Kile suggests that when a person deliberately places themselves in a situation of vulnerability others will naturally trust them more. Whilst definitions of trust often mention vulnerability as being a prerequisite of trust (e.g. Mayer et al)<sup>51</sup> and that circumstances of mutual vulnerability enhance trust (e.g. Lorenz)<sup>52</sup>, no other studies suggest that deliberately putting an individual in a position of vulnerability will increase trust in them. Beardsley’s narrative of Canadian operations identifies *competence*, *character* (which he considers made of *integrity*, *duty*, *loyalty*,

<sup>47</sup> Neville Stanton et al, *Modelling Command and Control: Event Analysis of Systemic Teamwork* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2008),

<sup>48</sup> Stanton and Ashleigh, “Trust, key elements in human supervisory control domains”, 92-95

<sup>49</sup> Stanton, *Trust in Military Teams*, 8-9.

<sup>50</sup> Jim Kile, “Trust in the sandstorms of Afghanistan: operation Athena Rotation 3”, in *Leveraging Trust: a Force Multiplier for Today*, ed Mantle, and Stouffer (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2008), 1-16.

<sup>51</sup> Mayer et al, “An integrative model of organisational trust”, 12

<sup>52</sup> Edward Lorenz, “Neither Friends nor Strangers: Informal Networks of Subcontracting”, in *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*, ed D. Gambetta (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 196 and 201.

and *moral courage*) and *intellect* as key trust factors.<sup>53</sup> He defines *duty* as putting the mission above self (similar to *intent* or the opposite of *self-orientation*). His definition of *moral courage*, “supporting what is morally ethic and right”, is similar to Covey and Merrill’s *integrity*.<sup>54</sup> As well as relating to Covey and Merrill’s work, these factors have commonality with Maister, Mayer and Stanton’s works. However, Beardsley’s is the only theory that includes *intellect* as a factor. Beardsley states that “followers need to be able to respect their leaders as being creative, abstract and even systems thinkers”<sup>55</sup> in order to have confidence in “this critical ability of the leader”.<sup>56</sup>

Finally, Adams et al have carried out the most comprehensive military review of trust literature. Their review reinforces the applicability of Mayer’s three factors (*ability*, *benevolence* and *integrity*) in the military context.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, they confirm the applicability of Lewicki and Bunker’s *Calculus Trust - Knowledge Trust - Identification Trust* model and bring together other theories of *open communication*, *similarity of role* (which is related to social identity) and *shared goals*.<sup>58</sup> Adams et al admit that “the development of person-based trust is a complex process” and highlight the lack of empirical, evidence-based research that confirms the relevance of specific factors.<sup>59</sup>

## Summary

The scope of this study spans inter-personal trust, intra-team trust and trust in combat and combat support sub-units. This literature review therefore considers research within these three areas. It finds significant overlap in interpersonal and intra-team trust theories, which has been further corroborated by research into military trust, both empirically through narrative examination and theoretically through literature review. These three areas of study have highlighted several common factors that are summarised in Table 2-4.

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<sup>53</sup> Brent Beardsley, “Building trust in a team during multinational combat or near-combat operations”, in *Leveraging Trust: a Force Multiplier for Today*, ed Mantle, and Stouffer (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2008), 44-52.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>57</sup> Adams, et al. *Trust in Teams Literature Review*, 28-30.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-24.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<b>Trust Factor or Indicator</b>	<b>Expansion</b>	<b>Author</b>
Competence/ability (including intellect)/confidence in personal ability	Do they have the skills, knowledge and attributes to carry out their role?	Mayer, Covey and Merrill, Beardsley, Cousins and Stanwix, Ashleigh and Stanton, Beardsley
Benevolence/self-orientation /intent/solidarity of aim/common goals/duty	Do they have the interest of the trustor at heart or share their goals?	Mayer, Maister, Covey and Merrill, Misztal, Lewicki and Bunker, Beardsley.
Integrity/works backed by action	Do they carry through on their promises and words?	Mayer, Covey and Merrill, Cousins and Stanwix, Beardsley
Results/track record/reliability/memory of past actions/knowledge/performance	Have they a reliable and demonstrable record of delivering on promises or tasks?	Covey and Merrill, Maister, Misztal, Lewicki and Bunker, Ashleigh and Stanton
Credibility/capability	Do they demonstrable evidence of ability (such as qualifications)	Maister, Covey and Merrill,
Follows role/group norms/common values/expectancy	Do they act in line with roles, group norms and values?	Misztal, Lewicki and Bunker, Ashleigh and Stanton
Reputation	Can others provide evidence that they will act predictably?	Misztal, Kile
Group membership/collective identity	Are they part of our shared group identity?	Misztal, Lewicki and Bunker
Long term interactions/quality interactions	Has repeated interaction built up a picture of their actions?	Lewicki and Bunker, Ashleigh and Stanton
Full and open communication	Has our communication been open?	Cousins and Stanwix, Ashleigh and Stanton
Honesty and openness/honesty	Do they 'tell the truth' and 'not lie by omission'?	Cousins and Stanwix, Ashleigh and Stanton
Loyalty	Are they loyal to their team?	Cousins and Stanwix, Beardsley

**Table 2-4. Common trust factors and indicators in inter-personal, intra-team and military contexts**

Table 2-4 provides a valuable insight into the common trust indicators and factors that company commanders may value in their platoon commanders. However, research on trust rightly focusses on the importance of the context in which trust happens. It is therefore unsurprising that not every factor discussed in Chapter 2 is considered important by company commanders. The difference between the factors in Table 2-4 and those considered important by company commanders is discussed in Chapter 4. However, first the methodology of the study must be explained. In order to identify which specific factors are important to company commanders the research must be properly designed; it must identify trust factors *and* measure their relative importance. Chapter 3 explains how the research's philosophy and design does this.

## Chapter 3

### Studying Company Commanders' Concepts of Trust

Although the results of this research stand alone, there is benefit in explaining the method by which they were gathered and analysed. The research philosophy, process and strategy used are popular in trust research; explaining them demonstrates how the research question was approached. Several methods are available to trust researchers; understanding the strengths and weakness of the method chosen helps understand the weaknesses of the research. Equally, the interview method and analysis tools chosen are not commonly used outside of psychological research. A brief understanding of their use helps understand how the results were reached. Chapter 3 covers each of these elements in turn.

#### Philosophy, Process and Strategy

One of the most difficult challenges in researching trust is that the method of analysis must align with the measurement of trust, and the measurement of trust must align with its corresponding theory.<sup>60</sup> As a result of the many different definitions and measures of trust there are therefore a variety of different methods available to trust researchers. Therefore, in order to provide the most accurate results possible, the method used in this study has been chosen to match the research question being asked.<sup>61</sup> The research question asks “what are the most important factors that lead sub-unit commanders to trust their platoon commanders, in combat and combat support arm units?” As Mayer et al explain, trust is based on human perceptions and social context.<sup>62</sup> For that reason this study approaches the research question from a positivist philosophy, seeking to “describe, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning ... of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world”.<sup>63</sup>

The aim of this research is to build a framework that describes the most important trust factors and indicators. The process chosen takes observed data from interviews, codes and analyses patterns in the data and builds a tentative theory that can be compared to existing literature. It is an inductive process through which the researcher “observes certain phenomena and on this basis arrives at a conclusion”.<sup>64</sup> The study also follows a grounded theory strategy in three stages.<sup>65</sup> First, the research was carried out before an in depth literature review in order to reduce observer bias. Second, the researcher attempted to saturate themselves with interviews, a technique that allowed them to sufficiently “define the relative importance and relevance” of the factors

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<sup>60</sup> Lyon et al, “Researching trust”, 1.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>62</sup> Mayer et al, “An integrative model of organisational trust”, 720.

<sup>63</sup> John Van Mannen, *Qualitative Methodology* (London: Sage, 1983), 9.

<sup>64</sup> Uma Sekaran *Research Methods for Business: A Skill Building Approach* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 28.

<sup>65</sup> Jill Collis and Roger Hussey *Business Research. A Practical Guide For Undergraduate & Post Graduate Students* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 84.

discovered.<sup>66</sup> Finally, the factors were ordered and categorised so as to be applicable across all British Army combat and combat support sub-units.

## Subject Selection

30 interview subjects were selected to provide a representative sample of the current and recent company command population. Subjects had completed company command in the last five years. This provided a balance between having time to reflect on their experience, against having time to forget specific individuals and events. Interviewees were asked to consider their experiences solely during their company command, a period normally of two years. The total population of officers who had completed company command over the last five years was assessed to be 570.<sup>67</sup> Accepting a 15% margin of error and a 90% confidence level a minimum sample size of 29 was required.<sup>68</sup> In order to further reduce error margins, interviewees were also selected according to the current gender and branch breakdown of regular British Army combat and combat support units, as shown in Table 2-1.<sup>69</sup>

Branch	Male		Female	
	Population	Sample	Population	Sample
Infantry	51%	50%		
Royal Armoured Corps	16%	13%		
Royal Artillery	16%	17%	2%	3%
Royal Engineers	10%	10%	2%	3%
Army Air Corps	2%	3%	1%	0%
Total (ignoring rounding errors)	95%	93%	5%	7%

**Table 2-1. Breakdown of interview sample compared to breakdown of population.**

The selection process was designed to provide a cross-sectional data set that was representative of current company commanders.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Author's analysis based on two year posting lengths, four sub-units per regular unit and fifty three units across the combat and combat support arms. Data for numbers of units taken from: United Kingdom, British Army, *Transforming the British Army: An Update*. (London: Ministry of Defence, 2013). Archived at [https://web.archive.org/web/20140610215557/http://www.army.mod.uk/documents/general/Army2020\\_Report.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20140610215557/http://www.army.mod.uk/documents/general/Army2020_Report.pdf) (accessed March 14 2019)

<sup>68</sup> Sample calculations carried out using Raosoft Sample Size Calculator. <http://www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html> (accessed March 14 2019).

<sup>69</sup> Data from: United Kingdom. Defence Statistics. *UK Armed Forces Biannual Diversity Statistics*. (London: Ministry of Defence, 2018), [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/712124/Biannual\\_Diversity\\_Statistics\\_Apr18.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/712124/Biannual_Diversity_Statistics_Apr18.pdf) (accessed March 14 2019). Infantry and RAC are 67% of subunit commanders and are 100% Male. The remaining 23% of subunit commanders are RA, RE and AAC and are 89% male and 11% female. Figures for total female sample percentage does not match the total of the individual branch percentages due to rounding.

## Choice of Method

Several methods are available to trust researchers, including structured interviews, questionnaires, Critical Incident Technique, repertory grid semi-structured interviews.<sup>70</sup> The repertory grid semi-structured interview method was selected as it offered several advantages.

- It provides measurable and dimensional data. The method solicits trust criteria (known as *constructs*) and the relative extent to which each construct is important to the interviewee (its *dimension*).<sup>71</sup>
- It provides comparable data. Each construct can be compared with other constructs from other interviewees in order to create categories of trust factors.<sup>72</sup>
- It articulates tacit understanding. The method helps “make the interviewee’s tacit knowledge ... explicit”.<sup>73</sup> It also helps them articulate the knowledge in their own words, which is important for understanding abstract concepts like trust.<sup>74</sup>
- It reduces observer bias. The technique is designed to reduce observer bias.<sup>75</sup> Importantly, it “allows the researcher to challenge their own views”.<sup>76</sup>
- Simplicity. Perhaps the greatest advantage is the relative simplicity of the method by comparison to the quality of the data it gathers. As Easterby-Smith et al state, “The fact that perceptions of nebulous relationships can be written down rigorously by someone who is not a trained psychologist is itself significant”.<sup>77</sup>

Equally, the method has some disadvantages.

- Although it has been claimed that “observer bias is reduced almost to zero” this claim is disputed.<sup>78</sup> Researchers must still be careful to avoid biasing the data. It was for this reason that the interviews were carried out before the literature review.
- Complexity to the interviewee. The method can appear complicated to the interviewee.<sup>79</sup> However, this study found the method was quickly understood by interviewees.

On balance, the method was chosen because the advantages were significant and outweighed the disadvantages, which could be mitigated against. Although the repertory grid method was developed in 1955 it is not often used outside of the psychological field and, as a result, is not well known. As a result it merits explanation in more detail.

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<sup>70</sup> Options selected: Lyon et al, “Researching trust”, 1-24.

<sup>71</sup> David Jonassen, et al, *Task Analysis Methods for Instructional Design*, (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999), 225.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Devi Jankowicz, *The Easy Guide to Repertory Grids* (Chichester: Wiley, 2013), 136.

<sup>74</sup> Catherine Cassel and Gillian Symon. *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014), 69.

<sup>75</sup> Melanie Ashleigh and Edgar Meyer “Deepening the understanding of trust: combining repertory grid and narrative to explore the uniqueness of trust” in *Handbook of Research Methods on Trust*, ed Fergus Lyon (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing , 2011). 182.

<sup>76</sup> Cassel and Symon. *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods*, 70.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>78</sup> Lars Björklund , “The Repertory Grid Technique: Making Tacit Knowledge Explicit: Assessing Creative Work and Problem Solving Skills” in *Researching Technology Education: Methods and Techniques*, ed Howard Middleton, (Sense Publishers: n.p., 2008), 46-69.

<sup>79</sup> Cassel and Symon. *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods*, 70.

## The Repertory Grid Method

The repertory grid method stems from Personal Construct Theory (PCT), the theory that humans understand the world by constructing their own personal meaning of concepts. These meanings, known as 'constructs', underpin an individual's understanding of psychological concepts.<sup>80</sup>

Importantly, each construct is understood not as a single absolute but instead as a spectrum with two separate ends.<sup>81</sup> For example, a company commander would not consider "They understood their obligation to support the company's intent" as an absolute indicator of trust. Rather, they would understand it as a dichotomy between "They understood their obligation to support the company's intent" and "If they didn't understand the intent, instead of seeking clarification, would pursue their own objectives".<sup>82</sup>

The repertory grid elicits each end of this dichotomous spectrum, "accessing an individual's personal constructs" which are "often unarticulated or implicit".<sup>83</sup> The method consisted of asking interviewees to select a group of up to five platoon commanders who worked for them. These platoon commanders were then compared in groups of three, identifying a factor in which "two of the platoon commanders were similar, and opposite to another, in the context of why [the interviewee] trusted them".<sup>84</sup> These opposite descriptions became the starting point of a construct. The interviewer then used the technique of 'laddering down' to elicit the deeper tacit meaning of the construct, in the interviewee's words. Once the construct was considered irreducible by the interviewee the interviewer wrote the construct into a repertory grid (see Figure 3-1) and confirmed that the meaning of the recorded words was correct. The interviewee then rated each platoon commander against the construct on a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 and 5 representing either end of the construct. This process was then repeated until the interviewee could come up with no more constructs. At this point the interviewee scored each platoon commander against a final summary construct of "overall, I trust this subordinate" versus "overall, I distrust this subordinate". This process elicited 3-10 reasons why interviewees trusted their platoon commanders (the constructs), along with how each platoon commander scored against those reasons, and a score for how each platoon commander was trusted on the whole. An example of a completed repertory grid from the study is shown in Figure 3-1.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 61-62.

<sup>81</sup> George Kelly, "A Brief Introduction to Personal Construct Theory" in *Perspectives in Personal Construct Theory*, ed D Bannister. (London: Academic Press, 1970), 2.

<sup>82</sup> Interview 2, December 2018.

<sup>83</sup> Cassel and Symon. *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods*, 62.

<sup>84</sup> This was the common question used in each interview to repeatedly elicit the constructs.

		<i>This end is 1</i>				<i>This end is 5</i>				Similarity to summary construct Weighting
		PI Comd 1	PI Comd 2	PI Comd 3	PI Comd 4	Description				
<b>Construct 4.1</b>	Motivated by professional reputation foremost (although career-aware)	3	3	4	2	Motivated by ego and personal recognition, not professional reputation. Competitive to the point of being adversarial.				38%
		Score								M
<b>Construct 4.2</b>	Able to plan complex tasks reasonably well without oversight or direction. Good administration.	2	2	2	3	Poor capacity to plan in advance. Lack of attention to detail lead to poor organisation.				50%
		Score								H
<b>Construct 4.3</b>	No serious prior incidents of poor personal/social judgement	1	5	1	1	Prior serious/social personal lack of judgement, demonstrated in a single incident.				13%
		Score								L
<b>Construct 4.4</b>	Were familiar with soldiers but kept their distance to the extent required to not undermine authority	1	4	1	4	Over familiar with their soldiers to the extent that it undermined their authority when making decisions.				13%
		Score								L
<b>Construct 4.5</b>	When detached from SU. Received compliments from new SU about ability to build effective relationship.	2	1	4	1	When detached, I received concerns from their new SU: Problems forming effective relationships with many personalities				63%
		Score								H
<b>Construct 4.6</b>	Immature, brash and short-sighted about the consequences of their actions.	4	3	2	2	Mature, disciplined and level headed. Understood the consequences of their actions				25%
		Score								M
<b>Construct 4.7</b>	Understood what to do in their organisation, but not due to a deep understanding of why: learnt by drills or rote.	3	5	3	3	Deeply understood 'why' their organisations did things - tactics, doctrine, technical knowledge, etc				13%
		Score								L
<b>Summary Construct</b>	<b>Overall, I trust this subordinate</b>	1	1	3	2	<b>Overall, I distrust this subordinate</b>				
Score										

Figure 3-1. Example Repertory Grid from Interview 4

## Data Difference Analysis

The data from each grid was analysed using *Difference Analysis*, which measures the correlation between each construct and the overall trust-distrust construct. This analysis provided a percentage similarity score (seen on the right of Figure 3-1). This is the recognised convention for analysing repertory grid data and allows constructs to be compared against each other in terms of importance to the interviewee.<sup>85</sup>

An additional level of analysis was then applied to identify importance of the construct to the interviewee.<sup>86</sup> This is required to ensure comparisons can be made *between* interviewees. For example, in Figure 3-1 one can see that in interview 4 the constructs with the highest correlation to trust was Construct 4.5, at 63%. However, during interview 5 (not shown here) the interviewee identified Construct 5.1 as their most important, with a correlation of 90%. Whilst each construct scored different percentage correlations, both Construct 4.5 and 5.1 represent the single most important trust factors for each of the two interviewees. Thus, in order to compare the relative importance of constructs *between* interviewees the grid must distinguish the difference between high, medium and low importance factors. This outcome of this can be seen in Figure 3-1 on the right hand side under the 'weighting' column, shown as H (high), M (medium) and L (low) importance.

## Data Categorisation Analysis

30 interviews, each of between 1 and 1½ hours in length, provided a total of 147 constructs. These were then collected into common categories. Once the constructs had been categorised the data was used to identify the most important categories. Importance was calculated by number of constructs with weighting added according to the high, medium or low relative importance of the constructs.

The most important categories were those with the greatest number of high and medium importance constructs. These categories represented the most important factors that company commanders considered when deciding whether to trust platoon commanders. Of all the categories, 16 stood out as being the most important. Chapter 4 shows these 16 factors graphically and examines what they mean in detail.

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<sup>85</sup> The full details in: Jankowicz, *The Easy Guide to Repertory Grids*, 95-118.

<sup>86</sup> The full details in: Jankowicz, *The Easy Guide to Repertory Grids*, 146-169.

## Chapter 4

### Why Company Commanders Trust

Chapter 4 analyses and discusses the results of the study. The 16 most significant factors discovered are grouped together into two Core Themes and two independent factors. This chapter analyses both themes and both independent factors, concentrating on the most important factors and explaining some of the richer meaning behind them. It highlights similarities to the literature and emphasises their relevance. Finally, it summarises the findings of the research in order to answer the question “Why do company commanders trust their platoon commanders?”

Each factor has been described using two numerical scores. These are based on the frequency that each factor was mentioned and the importance interviewees placed on it (combined to give an order from 1-16) and the percentage of interviewees that mentioned each factor (100%-0%). However, this chapter carries a warning. The repertory grid method is underpinned by Personal Construct Theory and as such is not suited to too deep a statistical analysis. Over-quantification of data can undermine the analysis.<sup>87</sup> Therefore the scores should be considered relative rather than absolute. That is to say, these numbers do not suggest that a factor that is mentioned 10% of the time is half as important as one mentioned 20% of the time, nor that that the top factor is sixteen times as important as the last factor. The differences in score provide information about their relative order of importance and must not be subjected to deeper numerical analysis. Nevertheless, the factors uncovered by this research are based on empirical evidence from a statistically significant sample of the subject population. As such they can be considered representative of the factors that lead combat and combat support sub-unit commanders across the British Army to trust their platoon commanders.

#### Common Trust Indicators – The Core Themes and Factors

The 30 interviews elicited 147 personal constructs of trust. These 147 constructs were grouped to identify common factors. Of these, 16 were considered to be the most significant. Below the 16<sup>th</sup> factor both the importance and frequency of the factors dropped off significantly. 14 of the 16 factors neatly fit into two Core Themes. In order of importance, the first of these themes is *competence/ability*, expanded as the question “Do they have the competence – the right skills, knowledge and attributes – for the job?” The second Core Theme is *benevolence/intent* expanded as the question “Do they have the right intentions – are they acting for the best of the organisation or are they self-orientated?” The two remaining factors stand independent of any theme. The first independent factor is *briefs, approaches and challenges their OC*. Its related question is “Do we have full and open communication?” The other is *a trustworthy reputation*, expanded as the

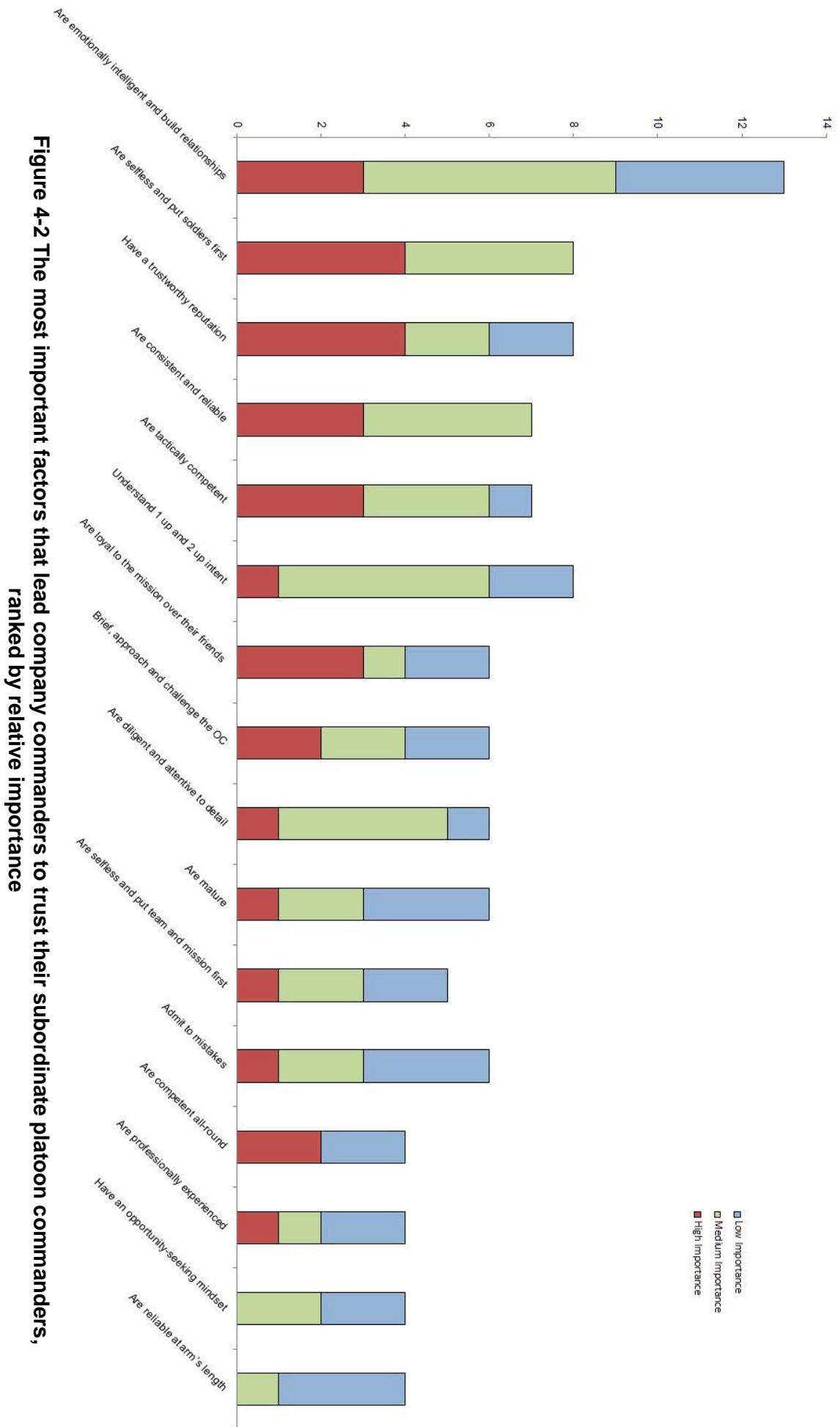
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<sup>87</sup> Cassel and Symon. *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods*, 63.



<b>Importance</b>	<b>Common Trust Factors “I trust them because they ...”</b>	<b>Percentage of interviewees mentioning the factor</b>
1	Are emotionally intelligent and build relationships	37%
2	Are selfless and put soldiers first	27%
3	Have a trustworthy reputation	23%
4	Are consistent and reliable	23%
5	Are tactically competent	23%
6	Understand 1 up and 2 up intent	27%
7	Are loyal to the mission over their friends	17%
8	Brief, approach and challenge the OC	20%
9	Are diligent and attentive to detail	20%
10	Are mature	20%
11	Are selfless and put team and mission first	13%
12	Admit to mistakes	20%
13	Are competent all-round	13%
14	Are professionally experienced	13%
15	Have an opportunity-seeking mindset	13%
16	Are reliable at arm’s length	13%

**Table 4-1. The most important factors that lead company commanders to trust their subordinate platoon commanders, ranked by relative importance**



**Figure 4-2 The most important factors that lead company commanders to trust their subordinate platoon commanders, ranked by relative importance**

## Core Theme 1: Competence/Ability

The first and most significant Core Theme relates to the most commonly mentioned trust factor in almost every study into trust: the competence and/or ability of the trustee. 83% of those interviewed mentioned at least one of the factors that relates to *competence/ability*. The language used in trust literature closely matches that used by the interviewees: “Do they have the competence – the right skills, knowledge and attributes – for the job?” The significance of this Core Theme is not that *competence/ability* is important. Rather, the significance is that it explains how company commanders construe the concept of *competence/ability*. *Competence/ability* is represented by eight factors, displayed in Table 4-2. Each of these is a facet of the concept of *competence/ability*.

Importance	Core Theme 1: Trust Factors “I trust them because they ...”	Percentage of interviewees mentioning the factor
1	Are emotionally intelligent and build relationships	37%
4	Are consistent and reliable	23%
5	Are tactically competent	23%
9	Are diligent and attentive to detail	20%
10	Are mature	20%
13	Are competent all-round	13%
14	Are professionally experienced	13%
15	Have an opportunity-seeking mind set	13%

**Table 4-2. Core Theme 1: Competence/Ability**

### Factor 1: They Are Emotionally Intelligent and Build Relationships

This factor was mentioned by 37% of interviewees, with 33% of interviewees considering it of medium or high importance in trusting their platoon commanders. The factor describes the ability to build effective workable relationship with peers, superiors and subordinates. Several interviewees specifically described it as emotional intelligence. Interviewees described trusting platoon commanders who “knew what was going on in the platoon. They had built relationships across the platoon so they had their finger on the pulse” and “could get things done through their personal relationships with others. They created social bonds that made things work”.<sup>88</sup> The importance of the ability to build relationships was in the leverage it created, allowing tasks to be achieved through others.

Its place as the top factor is significant. Company commanders clearly value those who can build teams and work with and through others – not just those who can do jobs well themselves. The building of effective relationships, and its reliance on emotion intelligence, is specifically highlighted

<sup>88</sup> Both from interview 11, December 2018

in Army Leadership Doctrine.<sup>89</sup> However, there are three issues with the concept of emotional intelligence. First, it has no agreed definition. Second, it has no agreed measurement. Finally, with less than 1,000 peer-reviewed publications on emotional intelligence, the subject is still young and not fully understood.<sup>90</sup> Therefore, irrespective of what company commanders mean by emotional intelligence it is perhaps more relevant to focus instead platoon commanders' ability to build effective relationships.

It is also important to note that emotional intelligence and relationship building appears only once in trust literature, in a small study into university undergraduates that found links between emotional intelligence, trust and creativity.<sup>91</sup> However, the study suggests that emotional intelligence builds trust between trustee and trustor because they understand each other's intents better, not because the trustor considers emotional intelligence to be a trait that makes the trustee more competent. Further research is required to understand the exact reasons why and how company commanders trust platoon commanders with high emotional intelligence.

#### **Factor 4: They Are Consistent and Reliable**

Consistency and reliability are highly trusted traits. 23% of interviewees mentioned it, all considering it of medium or high importance. The factor is related to two elements. The first is whether or not platoon commanders had the skills or abilities required. Quality of output was important. One interviewee explained that "they were reliable. If they had a task delegated, it would happen on time, and at the expected quality or above, every time. Even complex tasks".<sup>92</sup> The second element was whether or not the platoon commander could consistently and predictably deliver those outputs, or if they needed additional oversight from the company commander. Unreliability was explained by one interviewee as "Generally, he needed more direction, checking and realignment because his plans wouldn't always work" as opposed to "every time, I could give them a task (with effects, times and boundaries) and I knew they would deliver something that would work effectively".<sup>93</sup>

This factor is also related to another theme of trust literature: *track record/reliability*. As Covey and Merrill predict, company commanders value platoon commanders who can consistently demonstrate their competence. Trust is built through both competence *and* the repeated demonstration of it. Freedom is a key component of mission command and company commanders can offer more freedom and less oversight to consistent platoon commanders.<sup>94</sup> Platoon

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<sup>89</sup> United Kingdom, *Army Leadership Doctrine*, 27 and 41.

<sup>90</sup> Moshe Zeidner, Gerald Matthews, and Richard Roberts. *What We Know about Emotional Intelligence: How It Affects Learning, Work, Relationships, and Our Mental Health* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), xiii-xiv.

<sup>91</sup> Gloria Barczak, Felicia Lassk and Jay Mulki, "Antecedents of Team Creativity: An Examination of Team Emotional Intelligence, Team Trust and Collaborative Culture". *Creativity and Innovation Management* 19 no. 4, (2010): 332-345.

<sup>92</sup> Interview 20, January 2019.

<sup>93</sup> Both from interview 21, January 2019.

<sup>94</sup> United Kingdom, *Land Operations*, 3-6 and 6-1.

commanders must understand that that if they desire more freedom of action they need more trust, and that this is enabled by consistent demonstration of professional competence.

### **Factor 5: They Are Tactically Competent and Factor 13: They Are Competent All Round**

Tactical competence was mentioned by 23% of interviewees. 20% considered it to be of high or medium importance. It related specifically to tactical skills, knowledge and ability in the field. It also included knowledge of doctrine. Company commanders considered it be the fundamental skill set required by combat leaders. For example: “they were professionally effective and capable in the field, which is their main role and purpose”<sup>95</sup> or “the standard of their military skills and fieldcraft were so poor that I didn't trust them to keep the soldiers safe. As a result I was concerned about the effectiveness of the platoon”.<sup>96</sup>

Separate to tactical competence, only 13% of interviewees mentioned all-round competence. 7% considered it of high or medium importance. All-round competence was categorised as a separate factor because interviewees who mentioned it were specific in highlighting they were not simply interested in tactical ability. All-round competence was described as in-field and in-barracks professional skills and ability. Interviewees talked of a platoon commander’s “professional competence across the board”<sup>97</sup> and that they trusted those who were “competent and confident across the full requirements of a platoon commander”.<sup>98</sup> Interviewees were clear that all-round competence was more than tactical or field competence, although they did include this within the concept.

The importance of professional competence is no surprise. It is mentioned by almost every study into trust and Army Leadership Doctrine puts professional competence at the heart of the Army Leadership Framework, as the key element of “what leaders know”.<sup>99</sup> What is significant is that company commanders clearly hold tactical ability as being more important than all-round ability. Looked at another way, since tactical competence is also a part of all-round competence, it could be said that 37% of interviewees valued tactical competence, compared to only 13% who valued all-round competence. Tactical ability is a highly significant factor in whether company commanders trust their platoon commanders, and should be the focus of platoon commanders who wish to be trusted.

### **Factor 9: They Are Diligent and Attentive To Detail**

Diligence and attention to detail was mentioned by 20% of interviewees. 17% considered it of medium or high importance. It related to carrying out tasks diligently and paying attention to detail

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<sup>95</sup> Interview 24, January 2019.

<sup>96</sup> Interview 27, January 2019.

<sup>97</sup> Interview 16, January 2019.

<sup>98</sup> Interview 22, January 2019.

<sup>99</sup> United Kingdom, *Army Leadership Doctrine*, 16.

in planning and execution. Interviewees frequently used both 'diligent' and 'attention to detail' in the same construct. Examples included "he displayed a lack of attention to detail leading to poor organisation",<sup>100</sup> "they gave tasks the right level of rigour or attention"<sup>101</sup> and "in certain circumstances he stopped giving a damn. He was less diligent, so I always had to be on his back".<sup>102</sup>

It is debatable whether diligence and attention to detail are truly skills. It could be better said that they are attributes, related to conscientiousness. This factor highlights the value company commanders place on conscientious platoon commanders who do not cut corners and look in sufficient detail at the task and problems they receive. This is an element of character and reinforces the idea (enshrined in US and British Army leadership doctrine) that good leadership is about character as well as ability.<sup>103</sup> The implications of this for junior platoon commanders will be discussed in Chapter 5.

### **Factor 10: They Are Mature**

Maturity was mentioned by 20% of interviewees although only 10% rated it of high or medium importance. The concept of maturity was not related to age but rather to the platoon commander's self-discipline or ability to act with a long term view. For example they "were more mature and self-controlled"<sup>104</sup> or "were mature, self-disciplined and level headed. They understood the consequences of their actions".<sup>105</sup> This factor is about self-discipline and the ability to take a long-term view.

Given the risks involved on combat operations it is not surprising that company commanders value those who can think of the long term consequences of their actions. Equally, given that junior leaders have an ethical responsibility when they use lethal force it is not surprising that self-discipline is highly valued. This may explain why maturity is a trusted trait. There is a second possible explanation for why maturity is valued. The Army considers self-discipline as one of its core values; this should lead to it being valued by company commanders.<sup>106</sup> Misztal and Lewicki and Bunker both suggest people trust others who share *group norms/common values*.

### **Factor 14: They Are Professionally Experienced**

Interviewees valued platoon commanders who had already served time in another unit or company. Whilst company commanders had no direct experience of the platoon commander's ability in the other unit, the fact that the platoon commander had experience suggested that they

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<sup>100</sup> Interview 4, December 2018.

<sup>101</sup> Interview 11, December 2018.

<sup>102</sup> Interview 19, January 2019.

<sup>103</sup> United Kingdom, *Army Leadership Doctrine*, 9 and United States, *Leader Development*, 9.

<sup>104</sup> Interview 2, December 2018.

<sup>105</sup> Interview 4, December 2018.

<sup>106</sup> United Kingdom, British Army. *The Values and Standards of the British Army*. AC 64649 (London: Ministry of Defence), 13.

had the skills required for the job. Statistically, professional experience appears to be one of the least significant factors, being mentioned by only 13% of interviewees with only 7% believing it to be of medium or high importance. However, every company commander who had a more experienced platoon commander in their company mentioned this factor during their interview. That is to say, where there was a more experienced platoon commander present, 100% of company commanders considered them more trustworthy.

Interviewees increased their trust because they expected experienced platoon commanders to have an experience base to draw upon when making decisions: "I knew they could react well to situations, based on a solid experience base" as opposed to "they had a lack of experience, so ... they wouldn't always know how to do things right."<sup>107</sup> While this factor is notable, it offers little helpful information for the practitioner. It is unsurprising that company commanders value experience and there is little an inexperienced platoon commander can do other than seize every opportunity to gain greater experience.

### **Factor 15: They Have an Opportunity-seeking Mind Set**

Opportunity-seeking was mentioned by 13% of interviewees while only 7% considered it to be of medium or high importance. It included ideas such as effective followership, enthusiasm and seeking to gain maximum benefit from situations. Interviewees described traits such as "positivity and enthusiasm in solving problems and dealing with issues"<sup>108</sup> and valued platoon commanders who "wanted to taste the adventure... were enthusiastic and committed to tasks"<sup>109</sup> or "took opportunities and leant into problems".<sup>110</sup> These traits were considered important characteristics of professionally competent junior leaders. This is in line with the Army's organisational view, that "land operations require commanders at all levels to identify and seize opportunities".<sup>111</sup> The value of having an opportunity-seeking mind set is in the effect on platoon output: enthusiastic opportunity seekers were seen as delivering better outcomes, higher morale and more effective teams.

### **In Summary: What Is 'Competence and Ability'?**

This study's research question asks "What are the most important factors that lead company commanders to trust their subordinate platoon commanders?" The first Core Theme partially answers the question. Company commanders ask "Do they have the competence – the right skills, knowledge and attributes – for the job?" The skills, knowledge and attributes they seek are: emotional intelligence; consistency of output; tactical and all-round competence; diligence and attention to detail; maturity; professional experience; and an opportunity seeking mind-set. When

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<sup>107</sup> Interview 16, January 2019.

<sup>108</sup> Interview 7, December 2018.

<sup>109</sup> Interview 15, January 2019.

<sup>110</sup> Interview 25, January 2019.

<sup>111</sup> United Kingdom, *Land Operations*, 9A-1.

platoon commanders displayed these traits and behaviours they were trusted significantly more than those who did not.

The high importance that company commanders place on competence and ability is supported by the majority of trust research. Some of the factors that sit beneath the theme also appear in research findings: consistency; reliability; tactical (or technical) competence; and professional experience. Some have clear relationships with other trust antecedents such as group norms and common value systems. Perhaps the most significant finding is the high importance that company commanders place upon emotional intelligence and relationship building, which is not well represented in trust research.

## Core Theme 2: Benevolence/Intent

The second most significant core theme relates to another commonly mentioned trust factor: whether the trustee has the best interests of the trustor at heart. 73% of those interviewed mentioned at least one of the factors that relate to *benevolence/intent*. As with Core Theme 1, the importance of *benevolence/intent* is not a surprise. What is most important is that the findings unravel how company commanders construe the concept of *benevolence/intent*.

*Benevolence/intent* is made up of six factors, displayed in Table 4-3.

Importance	Core Theme 2: Trust Factors “I trust them because they ...”	Percentage of interviewees mentioning the factor
2	Are selfless and put soldiers first	27%
6	Understand 1 up and 2 up intent	27%
7	Are loyal to the mission over their friends	17%
11	Are selfless and puts the team and mission first	13%
12	Can admit to mistakes	20%
16	Are reliable at arm’s length	13%

**Table 4-3. Core Theme 2: Benevolence/Intent**

**Factor 2: They Are Selfless and Put Soldiers First; Factor 7: They Are Loyal to the Mission Over Their Friends; and Factor 11: They Are Selfless and Put the Team and Mission First**

Three factors described a common concept, that of selflessness and putting the team and mission first. Putting soldiers first was mentioned by 27% of interviewees, with all 27% considering it of medium or high importance. Interviewees believed that when platoon commanders put their soldiers before themselves the soldiers would return the commitment under tough circumstances, building a stronger team. For example “they loved and cared for their soldiers and were selflessly committed to them, which told me soldiers would support the platoon commander in tough

circumstances”<sup>112</sup> and “their compassion built a team most would envy. When something went wrong, their whole team helped them unpick it”.<sup>113</sup> This view is supported by Army Leadership Doctrine, which suggests that selfless commitment “earns respect and encourages others to behave similarly. It underpins teamwork, engenders loyalty and as such is an essential leadership trait”.<sup>114</sup>

Loyalty to mission over friends was mentioned by 17% of interviewees and 13% considered it of high or medium importance. Interviewees trusted those who could balance the needs of the mission or job against their relationships with peers, NCOs and soldiers. Interviewees expressed concern that some platoon commanders might become friends with members of their team and might shirk from “passing on bad news that would affect [their] friendship with [their] soldiers”.<sup>115</sup> This in turn would mean both the platoon commander and the platoon would be less effective. One interviewee explained that some platoon commanders “had an overly 'matey' relationship with their NCOs that led to them being overly influenced by them and unable to do the right, difficult, thing when the job required it” whereas others had “a productive relationship with their NCOs that brought out the best from both parties. They displayed moral courage in their dealings with their soldiers”.<sup>116</sup>

Duty, and putting the team before themselves, was mentioned by 13% of interviewees, with 10% considering it of high or medium importance. It related to platoon commanders correctly prioritising their tasks and understanding that their enjoyment and their desire to do a task was less important than whether they completed the task effectively. For some interviewees it was about platoon commanders prioritising enjoyable secondary duties over their primary command responsibility. For others it was about prioritising tasks that would benefit the platoon commander over tasks that would benefit the team. It links closely with the two previous factors that describe selflessness and prioritisation.

Company commanders believed that those who put their people and their mission first delivered the best outcomes for the company. As one interviewee explained, the least trusted platoon commanders “sought out personal benefit. As a result they didn't put team first. That kind of behaviour always delivers the worst outcomes for the company”.<sup>117</sup> If all three factors were grouped together under a single heading of ‘selflessness’ the factor would have been mentioned by 47% of interviewees.

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<sup>112</sup> Interview 26, January 2019.

<sup>113</sup> Interview 30, January 2019.

<sup>114</sup> United Kingdom, *Army Leadership Doctrine*, 24.

<sup>115</sup> Interview 13, January 2019.

<sup>116</sup> Both from Interview 13, January 2019.

<sup>117</sup> Interview 16, January 2019.

The majority of trust research suggests trust is built when a trustee has the best interests of a trustor at heart.<sup>118</sup> However, this study suggests there is a subtle but significant difference in the military context. It does reinforce Maister's view that *self-orientation* is a negative trust identifier. However, it finds that the opposite of *self-orientation* is not 'trustor-orientation'. Instead it suggests that in this context the opposite of *self-orientation* is 'mission-orientation and team-orientation'. Company commanders do not trust platoon commanders who do what is best for the company commander but trust those who will do what is best for the mission and the team.

This could suggest that company commanders subordinate their own needs to the needs of the mission and the team. Alternatively (and more cynically), it could be that company commanders know that the performance of their company will have a strong effect on their career and therefore the needs of the mission, the team and themselves are closely aligned. Further research is required to determine the extent to which either of these is correct. Irrespective, all three factors reinforce the need for junior leaders to selflessly put the needs of their mission and their soldiers above themselves and their friendships if they are to be trusted. Selflessness is emphasised in junior officer training. This study strongly supports the importance of doing so.

#### **Factor 6: They Understand 1 Up and 2 Up Intent**

Understanding intent was mentioned by 27% of interviewees. 20% considered it of high and medium importance. It related to platoon commanders acting "in line with the bigger picture"<sup>119</sup> and "understanding their contribution to it".<sup>120</sup> Negative indicators included not understanding the intent through lack of ability or interest and also twisting the company or battalion commander's intent to suit the platoon commander's own ends. For example "If they didn't understand the intent, instead of seeking clarification, they would pursue their own personal objectives".<sup>121</sup>

This definition of *intent* closely matches those used by Misztal and Covey and Merrill in their research.<sup>122</sup> It is of great importance to company commanders because understanding the higher commander's intent is part of mutual understanding, itself one of the five guiding principles of mission command.<sup>123</sup> Therefore it is no surprise that company commanders value platoon commanders who can understand higher intent. As with selflessness, understanding higher intent is strongly emphasised in junior officer training and this study supports doing so.

#### **Factor 12: They Can Admit To Mistakes**

Admitting to mistakes was mentioned by 20% of interviewees, with 10% regarding it a factor of high or medium importance. Interviewees were clear that making mistakes was a normal part of a

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<sup>118</sup> Maister, Green and Galford. *The Trusted Advisor*, 69-70.

<sup>119</sup> Interview 1, December 2018.

<sup>120</sup> Interview 11, December 2018.

<sup>121</sup> Interview 2, December 2018.

<sup>122</sup> Misztal, *Trust in Modern Societies*, 95-101 and Covey and Merrill. *The Speed of Trust*, 73-90.

<sup>123</sup> United Kingdom, *Warfighting Tactics Part 1: The Fundamentals*, 2-6.

platoon commander's development but that they trusted platoon commanders who "admit mistakes up front".<sup>124</sup> It both demonstrated honesty (a sign of integrity) and created an opportunity for the team to recover from the mistake instead of it developing into a more serious issue. For example "I knew they would come to me if they made a mistake. In this respect I felt errors were visible to me and I could deal with them".<sup>125</sup>

Where platoon commanders hid their mistakes the company commander believed they were limiting the damage to themselves, instead of limiting any damage to the company or the mission. This clearly links to selflessness, to Factors 2, 7 and 11 and therefore the literature on *intent*. It is also worth noting that 'learning from mistakes' was mentioned as a separate factor, but was mentioned so rarely and with so little importance that it did not make the list of significant factors. This suggests that admitting to mistakes is more important than learning from them when it comes to trusting platoon commanders. This is highly relevant. There is a great deal of contemporary literature on the value of learning from mistakes.<sup>126</sup> There is much less on the importance of admitting to those mistakes if one wishes to be trusted.

#### **Factor 16: They Are Reliable When at Arm's Length**

Reliability when at arm's length is the least important factor in the study. Nevertheless it highlights an important aspect of trust. Interviewees believed that acting reliably was particularly important when platoon commanders were operating apart from their company commander. This could be when they were operating under another unit, or when they were based in another geographic location. Interviewees did not trust platoon commanders who abused the freedom they had when they were away from observation, particularly when they damaged the reputation of the company or unit. In some cases this was related to drinking or acting inappropriately: "I couldn't trust them to act appropriately when they drank". In other cases it was about professional behaviour when representing their unit: "They were picked up for behaviour issues on an external course. It reflected badly on [the unit] and they didn't understand the importance of this."

While the issue of reliability has already been discussed, interviewees were clear that unreliable behaviour that damaged the company's reputation is particularly detrimental. This is because it shows that individuals do not sufficiently care about the damage they do to the team. Described another way, acting poorly when unsupervised but under external scrutiny demonstrates selfishness and a lack of self-discipline. These traits have already been identified in the selflessness factors, Factors 2, 7 and 11.

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<sup>124</sup> Interview 27, January 2019.

<sup>125</sup> Interview 22, January 2019.

<sup>126</sup> For example: Dan Maurer, "On Failure." The Modern War Institute at West Point. <https://mwi.usma.edu/on-failure/> (accessed May 19, 2019) and Timothy Trimailo, "Epic Fail: Why Leaders Must Fail to Ultimately Succeed." *The Military Review* Nov-Dec (2017): 94-99.

## **In Summary: What is ‘Benevolence and Intent’?**

The second core theme provides another partial answer the question “What are the most important factors that lead company commanders to trust their subordinate platoon commanders?” Company commanders ask “Do they have the right intentions – are they acting for the best of the organisation or are they self-orientated?” The actions they look for are: selflessness, putting soldiers and the mission before themselves and the mission before friendships; understanding and acting in line with their commanders’ intents; admitting to mistakes; and safeguarding the team’s reputation when working at arm’s length. Platoon commanders who act in this way are judged to be working with the good of the company in mind. As such, they are more highly trusted than those who work with their own or others’ interests at heart.

Every factor in this theme is supported by existing trust research. Benevolence to the trustor, having the right intentions and a lack of self-orientation are mentioned in almost every study into trust. However the key difference that this study has discovered is that company commanders do not trust those who have the best intentions of the company commander at heart. Instead they trust those who have the best intentions of the mission and the team at heart. This is a subtle but significant difference to the literature and merits further study.

## **Independent Factor: They Have a Trustworthy Reputation**

Reputation was a factor that stood apart from any theme. It was mentioned by 23% of interviewees with 20% according it high or medium importance. Trust studies consider *reputation* (as delivered by third parties) as being separate to *track record/reliability* (coming from first-hand experience). The interviews supported this. Company commanders distinguished between third party and first-hand knowledge of platoon commanders. They valued third party information because it provided an additional, independent, assessment of the platoon commander. Reputation information came from external courses (“they had been externally validated and scored well on their key technical competency”)<sup>127</sup> and from other individuals in the unit or company (“I was warned by the CO that they needed to be watched, due to a lack of leadership and professional skill”).<sup>128</sup>

Reputation, defined as third-party knowledge of the trustworthiness and ability of the trustee, appears only rarely in trust literature. Most studies have found that third-party knowledge is insignificant by comparison to first-hand experience of results, reliability and ability. For this reason it might be expected that a platoon commander’s reputation would not be important to company commanders. Yet 23% of interviewees mentioned it, demonstrating the opposite. Why could this be? It is possible that the scarcity of first-hand experience (a result of the platoon commander being new into their jobs) elevates the importance of reputation. Alternatively, since such

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<sup>127</sup> Interview 6, December 2018

<sup>128</sup> Interview 3, December 2018

importance is placed on selflessness and subordination of the platoon commander to the team, it could be that company commanders place significant value on the input of the team members. It will require further research to understand why third-party reputation is of such importance in this context. Nevertheless, platoon commanders must be aware that their performance on external course and in other organisations will be scrutinised by their company commanders and have a strong bearing on whether or not they are trusted. Equally, how well they are trusted by the rest of their company – particularly their soldiers and Senior NCOs – will be taken into account.

## **Independent Factor: They Brief, Approach and Challenge Their OC**

The other factor that stood independent from a theme was whether platoon commanders could brief, approach and appropriately challenge their OC. This factor was mentioned by 20% of interviewees and 13% considered it of high or medium importance. Company commanders value platoon commanders who can approach the company commander to offer unsolicited information – either to back-brief them on tasks, ask for direction or appropriately challenge shortcomings in the company commanders' plans or ideas.

For most interviewees the value lay in improving the quality of the platoon commander's outputs: "They always came back and asked for clarification or read-back when given a task. They also asked for my advice. It meant the product they delivered would be in a better state".<sup>129</sup> It also showed platoon commanders understood what was being asked of them: "They were willing to reasonably challenge me. So I knew they understood my intent and it showed they have thought about adding value to the plan".<sup>130</sup> In this respect it related to Factor 6: that they understand 1 up and 2 up intent. Back briefing and challenging conversations help reinforce understanding of intent. For one interviewee there was an additional benefit. "They had the courage of their convictions and were willing to challenge me over some of my potentially hare-brained ideas".<sup>131</sup>

This factor relates to several trust factors found in other research, such as *quality interactions*, *full and open communication* and *honesty and openness*. However, there are no previous studies that specifically mention it. There are three possible reasons why this factor is prominent in this study. First, the sample population interviewed are all students or staff at the UK's Joint Service Command and Staff College, where the value of communication and challenge are reinforced. This might lead to them recognising and retrospectively valuing a trait that may not have been so important at the time. Second, this may be an example of prestige bias. Prestige bias occurs when interviewees provide answer that they know will raise their prestige in the eyes of the interviewer: in this case, highlighting the importance they place in being challenged in order to demonstrate to the researcher how well they accept 'reasonable challenge'. Finally, the sample size includes an

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<sup>129</sup> Interview 29, January 2019.

<sup>130</sup> Interview 22, January 2019.

<sup>131</sup> Interview 12, January 2019.

unusually high number of company commanders who were later selected for promotion. Good communication, back-briefing, clarification and challenge are all recognised as improving the performance of teams.<sup>132</sup> It may be that company commanders who value this attribute in platoon commanders are more successful, are thus more likely to promote, and so the sample population contained a greater number of them than in the general population. Further research will be required to better understand why company commanders value being approached, back briefed and appropriately challenged. Irrespective of why the factor appears, it provides a valuable and perhaps unexpected lesson for platoon commanders: company commanders value junior leaders who are willing to approach them, back brief them and challenge their ideas.

## **In Summary: Why Company Commanders Trust**

Chapter 4 has examined the results of the study and discussed their meaning, with reference to existing research on trust. It has concluded that company commanders ask themselves four questions when considering how they trust their platoon commanders. First, they ask if the platoon commander has the competence – the right skills, knowledge and attributes – for the job. They will trust platoon commanders if they are emotionally intelligent, consistent, competent (tactically and all-round), mature, diligent, show attention to detail and have an opportunity seeking mind-set. If they are professionally experienced this also helps. Second, they ask whether they have the right intentions and if they are acting for the best of the organisation. Company commanders trust platoon commanders who selflessly put soldiers and the mission before themselves and the mission before their friendships. They trust those who understand and act in line with their commanders' intents, who admit mistakes and who safeguard the team's reputation when working at arm's length. Third, and to a lesser extent, company commanders ask whether they have full and open communications. They trust platoon commanders who brief them, approach them and are willing to appropriately challenge them. Finally, they ask the opinion of others. Company commanders will trust a platoon commander more highly if others within the unit trust them.

It is also important to note the multiplicative effect of these themes and factors. Competence and intent work in combination. If a platoon commander is competent then a company commander will want to be sure that the competence will be used for the right ends. If not, this will damage their trust. On the other hand, if a platoon commander has the right intent but is not competent, they still cannot be fully trusted. Individually the themes are important. Together, they work in combination to build a powerful bond of trust. This powerful trust can be further multiplied if a platoon commander has open and full communication because it provides further evidence of good intent. Finally, asking others about the platoon commander provides independent verification: whether the company commander's judgement verified by a third party.

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<sup>132</sup> For example, in: United Kingdom, Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre. *Understanding and Decision-Making*, Joint Doctrine Publication 04 (Shrivenham: DCDC, 2016), 43.

Many of the factors described by company commanders are also mentioned in trust literature and Chapter 4 has highlighted these. It has also highlighted those areas where the study deviates from other research: in the meaning of selflessness; the importance of reputation; and the importance of relationship building skills and emotional intelligence. The implications of Chapter 4's findings, both to the study of trust and to platoon and company commanders, is discussed in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 5

### What This Means: The Implications for Trust

Using the data from 30 interviews, providing 147 separate constructs, it has been unequivocally demonstrated that company commanders place greater trust in platoon commanders who exhibit two significant behaviours or traits. These are competence and ability, and selflessness in respect to their mission and their people. It can also be said with reasonable confidence that two other factors are important in building trust. Around 20% of company commanders value platoon commanders who brief, approach and appropriately challenge them; around the same percentage value platoon commanders who have a reputation for trustworthiness. However it is the underlying factors within the themes that provide the most value, explaining how company commanders construe competence and selflessness. They provide important implications for research into trust and some compelling implications for platoon commanders and company commanders themselves.

#### Implications for Trust Research

This thesis has several implications for the study of trust. First, this research supports some findings of existing studies into trust. Benevolence, intent and self-orientation are factors that appear in the works of Maister, Covey and Merrill, Misztal, Lewicki and Bunker and Beardsley. They are central to the seminal work of Mayer et al. Capability, credibility and ability are critical trust factors the works of Mayer, Covey and Merrill, Cousins and Stanwix, and Ashleigh and Stanton. To a lesser extent, the two independent factors support the works of Cousins and Stanwix, Misztal, and Kile. Yet equally, many of the factors found in existing research are not supported, or appear as coincidental factors. At no point did interviewees mention qualifications or accreditation (such as having passed courses or exams). Conforming to group norms was not specifically mentioned. While interviewees mentioned loyalty (which might support elements of Cousins and Stanwix's work), they actually valued loyalty because it demonstrated benevolent intent to the group. While interviewees valued demonstrable track records and reliability, they did not talk about whether platoon commanders followed through on their promises (which would support the works of Mayer, Covey and Merrill and Cousins and Stanwix). All this confirms the view that the context of the situation is critical in determining what factors cause trust. Underlying themes from across the literature occur; not all are equally valued.

This leads to the second implication: that some trust factors are underpinned by greater tacit meaning. As mentioned, this study supports several authors' works. Yet it also demonstrates that ideas such as 'competence' and 'intent' are underpinned by deep networks of meaning that are specific to the context. This study shows that company commanders would agree that competence is important. However, they would disagree on exactly what they mean by 'competence' or which

facets are of most importance. Most would agree that having the right intentions is important, yet some characterised it as 'selflessness' whilst others understood it as 'understanding and acting within higher intent'. The implication is that general models of trust are reasonably applicable, but as the context narrows these models can be drilled into to produce more meaningful contextual models.

It is also of note that *a trustworthy reputation* appears as a factor. The author initially assumed that the lack of experience amongst the platoon commander cohort would mean that reputation was not a factor. Platoon commanders have so little time to build a reputation. In fact the opposite appears true. This study implies that when there is little information on a group of trustees, the trustor places a great deal of importance on reputation. This suggestion does not appear in other literature on trust, perhaps because very few studies investigate situations where the trustees have such a paucity of reputation.

Finally, this study endorses the repertory grid method in eliciting tactic trust factors. The method is complex and time consuming for the researcher. Even so, it provides comparable and measurable data that can identify the meanings, importance and themes behind the concept of trust. It is already commonly used in trust research. This study supports its use.

### **Implications for Platoon Commanders**

Each theme and independent factor has implications for platoon commanders. The implication of Core Theme 1: *competence/ability* highlights areas which a platoon commander should focus on if they wish to be trusted. Improving emotional intelligence is one of these, as are tactical competence and consistency/reliability. Company commanders trust those who can work with and through others and can build relationships. This skill or trait is not specifically mentioned in appraisal reporting and might leave platoon commanders to underestimate its importance. Platoon commanders should note that the act of building relationships and empathising with others, both within the company and across the unit, is valued irrespective of any concrete output. Company commanders do not need to see an operational output of the relationship building. They just need to know one could be enabled in the future. One particular aspect of tactical competence should also be highlighted. Most company commanders were clear that tactical competence included knowledge as well as skill. Understanding doctrine and the technical aspects of the platoon commander's trade is part of tactical competence. Platoon commanders need to do more than 'cut it in the field' if they want to be trusted. They must cut it in the classroom too.

In Core Theme 2: *benevolence/intent* the concept of selflessness appeared repeatedly. The three factors that relate to selflessness all talk about platoon commanders understanding their place in the hierarchy of mission, team and self. Platoon commanders must understand just how critically this issue is considered by their company commanders. They will lose trust rapidly if they put

themselves, their friendships and their own enjoyment over the mission and the team. Another area worth focussing on is admitting to mistakes, especially when platoon commanders are working away from their commander. Chapter 4 noted the volume of publications on learning from mistakes. Platoon commanders must understand that it is not only learning from them that has value. Admitting to them does, too.

The two independent factors have two implications for platoon commanders. First, a trustworthy reputation must be cultivated and guarded. Interviewees who mentioned the importance of a trustworthy reputation were commenting on the impact of a poor reputation as much as the advantage of a good reputation. Further research into why soldiers and non-Commissioned Officers trust their platoon commander would be of value. Second, platoon commanders should be reassured that company commanders trust those who are confident enough to approach them and challenge them. Platoon commanders may find these conversations difficult. They should understand that having them builds trust. However, these two independent factors are the less important than the core themes. Most importantly, platoon commanders should understand that if they focus on being professionally competent and doing what is best for their team and the mission, they are highly likely to be trusted. This message in itself should be a reassuring one.

### **Implications for Company Commanders**

This research has two implications for company commanders. First, they should role model the trustworthy behaviours they value, developing those behaviours in their subordinates. Second, they can engineer situations in which their subordinates can demonstrate the behaviours and traits.

As some of the most senior officers in their unit, company commanders can rely on their authority to get results and can be spared the requirement for selflessness. By publically role-modelling selfless behaviour, by admitting mistakes and acting reliably when away from their unit, company commanders demonstrate the importance of those characteristics. They must equally be competent in their role, attentive to detail, take an opportunity-seeking mind set and demonstrate emotional intelligence and relationship building. Company commanders must also engineer situations in which their subordinates can show off the skills and traits they trust. By being open in their communication and inviting appropriate challenge a company commander will encourage platoon commanders to brief, approach and challenge them. By offering the opportunity to admit to mistakes platoon commanders will do so more often. These behaviours all have advantages in and of themselves.<sup>133</sup> In addition they invite platoon commanders to demonstrate trusting behaviours and thus help to build a more effective company team.

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<sup>133</sup> For example: United Kingdom, Ministry of Defence. *The Good Operation* (London: Ministry of Defence, 2017), 7. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/674545/TheGoodOperation\\_WEB.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/674545/TheGoodOperation_WEB.pdf)

## Chapter 6

### In Conclusion

This study had two aims. It aimed to fill a specific gap in the study of trust: understanding trust in the context of British Army sub-units. Specifically, it sought to understand the factors (both situations and behaviours) that lead sub-unit commanders to trust their subordinate platoon commanders in combat and combat support sub-units. It asked 'in your relationship with your platoon commanders, what do you understand by the word trust?' The study has succeeded in answering this question and filling the gap. It provides both the key themes behind trust and the underpinning meaning of those themes.

It studied a context in which new and inexperienced subordinates lack an intuitive understanding of why their leaders trust them. As a result it aimed to inform those junior leaders in order to help them build a trusting relationship with their commanders. It also achieves this aim. Should they read it, junior leaders will find in this thesis a clear explanation of the behaviours they need to display in order to be trusted, as well as the reasons why they matter. It provides them the opportunity to look inside the mind of their commander and understand what is valued.

The study's contribution to the wider understanding of trust was explained in Chapter 4. As well as filling an otherwise unresearched gap it has supported many areas of existing research. The importance of *competence/ability* and *benevolence/intent* supports existing research, as does the importance of *full and open communications*. However the study has highlighted several areas where the findings deviate from the norm, such as how the concept of selflessness is understood and the importance of relationship building and appropriate challenge. Some would argue that its contribution is narrow and only relevant to a specific context. Because some of the findings have not been replicated elsewhere they might argue that this study has limited utility. However true this argument is, it misses the point of research into trust. Narrow, context-specific trust research may be less widely applicable than broad unspecific research but it is more deeply and accurately applicable. It could also be said that this research has not provided an answer to *why* certain factors lead to greater trust and as a result it has left questions unanswered. Again, this challenge would be accepted as correct. The limitations of the method mean further study is required to answer these questions and the researcher has been careful to ensure the research method has not been pushed beyond its analytical limits. As with most research, this study leaves some interesting and tantalising questions about trust unanswered.

In summary, this study has achieved its research aims and answered the question "what are the most important factors that lead sub-unit commanders to trust their platoon commanders in combat and combat support arm units?" This research shows that company commanders ask themselves four questions when considering how they trust their platoon commanders. They ask "Does the

platoon commander have the competence – the right skills, knowledge and attributes – for the job?”, “Do they have the right intentions and are they acting for the best of the organisation?”, “Do we have full and open communications?” and finally “Do others in the company believe they are trustworthy?” These conclusions have implications for trust research and for the commanders themselves.

In answering the research question and in identifying the implications this study has filled a narrow gap in the canon of trust research. In addition, the researcher hopes it provides platoon and company commanders with valuable insights into how trusting relationships can be fostered. It is those commanders who will be the true judges of the value of this study.

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