

Upward Communication in Military Organizations: A Review of Literature

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Effective communication is principal to the success of any organization, but within the structure of the U.S. military it is paramount. While other organizations' ineffective communication merely causes layoffs, revenue loss, or other relatively small consequences, failure to communicate effectively in the military can have grave consequences. A communicative blunder in the armed forces can cost people their health and even their lives. With that, it is important to understand how the organizations of the United States military communicate.

The military has various avenues of communication in its rigid hierarchical structure. Firstly, there is downward communication, where leaders convey information to lower-ranking subordinates (Lunenbug, 2010). Secondly, there is lateral communication, where those of the same rank communicate amongst each other (Ioana, 2017). Thirdly, there is upward communication. Upward communication is communication flowing up-rank, it is the transmission of information from a lower-ranking subordinate to a higher-ranked leader (Lewis, 1992). In this paper, upward communication will be analyzed in the context of the U.S. military. However, upward communication is in any organization with some semblance of hierarchy. In any context, upward communication is defined as the messages flowing from a subordinate to a superior, and is a key element in effective communication (Baird, 1977). Returning to a military context, good upward communication has a positive effect. It ensures mission readiness, the generation and maintenance of morale, and the achievement of objectives established by the organization (D. Tourish, 2005). However, strong upward communication is not guaranteed. In fact, in the military, it is often mitigated.

Understanding upward communication in this context is raises questions about the military's structure. The difficulty seen managing proper use of upward communication channels

indicates management reform may be needed. Or, more realistically, better practices in upward communication might be needed. If upward communication is effective, there is chance for positive consequence. Depending on who reads this review, a chance at positive reform or initiative within the armed forces can alter upward communication to its benefit.

This literature review delves into the multifaced dimensions of upward communication within military hierarchies. Through the synthesis of existing research, this review attempts to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex communicative circumstances within military organizations.

This review has six sections. First, upward communication is defined and related to power distance, trust and organizational culture. Second, the military is described through its unique characteristics. Third, theoretical components relevant to the literature are delineated through their relationship with upward military communication. Fourth, challenges facing upward communication are addressed along with strategies to effectively enact organizational communication. Finally, the ethical handling upward communication is discussed.

### **Upward Communication**

Effective organizational communication is essential for the facilitation of information, decision-making, and achieving organizational goals (Baker, 1999). Among the many forms and vectors of communication, upward communication plays a pivotal role in ensuring that feedback, concerns, and innovative ideas are conveyed from the lower levels of hierarchy to upper management (D. Tourish, 2005). Without the information gained from lower levels, upper-level decisions would not have the necessary details for informed decisions. To understand how

upward communication functions, its features, power distance, the role of trust and organizational culture's influence are examined.

### *Defining Upward Communication*

Again, upward communication refers to the flow of information, feedback and ideas from the subordinate to the superior (Baird, 1977). Contrary to downward communication, which includes directives and instructions from upper-level management to lower-level members of the hierarchy (Lunenburg, 2010), upward communication is essential to fostering employee engagement. Lower-level members can identify organizational issues superiors may be blind or ignorant to. Feedback with this information allows the organization to learn from itself and construct a better environment (Collins, 2016).

In the past, upward communication has been characterized through its challenges. This includes fear of reprisal, hierarchical barriers and the filtering of information (Oberg & Walgenbach, 2009). Subordinates may not provide feedback or distortion because they believe that if they do, managers will retaliate. Hierarchical barriers may complicate the transfer of information or prevent it altogether (Fulk & Mani, 1986). As communication flows upward through the hierarchy and power distance increases, the information may become filtered into distortion as well (Athanasziades, 2017). Implementing open, supportive communication encourages upward feedback and participation. If lower-level members communicate and relay the correct message, upward communication will be enhanced.

*Power Distance and Upward Communication*

Power distance, the extent to which organizational members accept hierarchical authority and inequalities of power distribution, holds a strong influence in the dynamics of upward communication (Khatri, 2009). Cultures or organizations with higher power distance usually have strict hierarchies and formal communication channels, and members are hindered in expressing opinion and challenging authority (Bruins & Wilke, 1993). On the other hand, lower power distance cultures tend to have participatory decision-making and open dialogue, which is more conducive to upward communication. Reducing power distance and promoting a sense of psychological safety is important for the enhancement of upward communication in organizations.

*Trust and Upward Communication*

Trust, the basis for organizational communication, is a fundamental component of effective upward communication processes (Reina & Reina, 2006). When subordinates trust their input will be valued by leaders of an organization, they are more likely to share feedback and express concerns and potential improvements (Mellinger, 1956). Conversely, if a subordinate lacks trust in a leader, they are reluctant to openly communicate. This reservation can withhold pertinent information to a decision-making process, leading to the distortion of information and potentially diminished organizational performance (Fulk & Mani, 1986). Cultivating trust through the means of transparent communication, consistent leadership and interpersonal relationships can enhance both upward communication and an organization's resilience, the ability to adapt to crises and disruptions as an organization (Ruiz-Martin et al., 2018).

*Organizational Culture and Upward Communication*

Organizational culture, defined by Edgar Schein (1983) as “the pattern of basic assumptions which a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which have worked well enough to be considered valid , and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (p.1), is pivotal in any dimension of an organization. It molds communicative norms, values and practices. Communication patterns obey culture, especially if that pattern moves upward (D. Tourish & Robson, 2003). Those cultures prioritizing innovation, collaboration and empowered lower-level members are increasingly likely to have open communication climates where upward feedback doesn’t just happen, it’s encouraged. In contrast, cultures that are rigid, fear failure or resist change might suppress upward communication. This can consequently stifle organizational learning and adaptability. If communication objectives, transparent cultural values and organizational culture are aligned, then upward communication will be optimized.

Upward communication is indispensable in a successful organization. It is critical in organizational communicative processes, subordinate engagement, the exchange of information, and an organization’s internal learning process. The optimization of influence of power distance, trust and organizational culture can enhance communication climate and, in turn, organizational performance. By addressing the issues that obstructing good upward information channels, organizations can use upward communication to innovate, attain resilience, and become strategically agile as an organization.

## **The Military**

The U.S. military has a rich and largely successful history filled with tradition. Its firmly structured hierarchy shapes its communication patterns and channels, leadership behaviors, organizational culture and norms. The dynamics of upward communication in the context of the military can lend insight into strengthening operational success, further leadership development, and improve organizational resilience. In this section, the military's rigid hierarchy, leadership variation, organizational culture and norms, and environmental factors will be explored.

### *The Rigid Structure of the Military*

The U.S. military's central structural characteristic is its hierarchical structure. This structure is defined by rank, authority and chain of command (J. Soeters et al., 2010). Higher ranks lead to more respect and increased power distance. This means more authority to those of higher rank, and a chain of command that was prevalent before its official establishment in 1948 (J. L. Soeters et al., 2007). This framework, while conveying role clarity, maintaining operational efficiency and enforcing discipline, generates challenges for upward communication.

Upward communication in the military, like any organization, can take many forms. It can be a report, a conversation, a digital message, or anything else that is a message from a subordinate to a superior. Most organizations push for inclusiveness in their operational framework, but the military doesn't have that luxury. Military tradition engrains its benefits and enforces its costs, and in this instance that cost is the challenges for upward communication built-in to the hierarchical structure. In this structure, subordinates might hesitate to communicate feedback or ideas to higher-ranking officers due to perceived repercussions (Halbe, 2011). If the gap is somehow bridged between ranks, the hierarchy is flattened in a sense, and

communication channels are opened, then the military might have a fighting chance to overcome communicative barriers.

### *Leadership Style Variation*

When visualizing typical leadership in the military, it's typical to envision an authoritative leader who barks orders at the maggots beneath them. This is not the reality of U.S. military leadership. In truth, leadership styles vary widely throughout the ranks. This variance is influenced by individual personality, experience and organizational culture (Ozlen & Zukic, 2013). Granted, some leaders do adopt authoritative leadership styles and behaviors, emphasizing strict adherence to standards and procedures. However, there are also transformational leaders in the ranks, prioritizing collaboration, empowerment and the success of both the individual and the organization (Gonzales, 2016). It is more difficult to adopt other styles due to the importance of authority of the military, but instances of transactional leadership, situational leadership and even servant leadership behavior has been seen in today's branches of the armed forces (Earnhardt, 2008). Effectiveness of leadership styles in facilitating upward communication varies on context, objective requirements and norms within military units (Stănciulescu & Beldiman, 2019). Nevertheless, proper leadership training, mentorship and role modeling is important in any style of leadership. An environment conducive to upward feedback can be created through strong leadership attuned to these three elements.

### *Organizational Culture*

The organizational culture of the U.S. military is deeply rooted in its tradition. This tradition is ingrained in duty, honor, service and discipline. These values are the core of the military's



organizational culture, and in turn its norms, decision-making, and upward feedback (Breslin, 2000). For organizations to attain effectiveness in upward communication, a culture of trust, accountability and transparency must be established (Collins, 2016). However, there are cultural barriers preventing many military organizations from attaining this. Hierarchy, conformity and aversion of risk impede the flow of information and hinder constructive dialogue between lower-ranked subordinates and higher-ranked leaders (Lewis, 1992). Promoting a culture that is adaptable, innovative and continuously learning can enhance upward communication in the military.

### *Norms*

The military, as mentioned before, is shaped by its tradition and structure. Organizational norms may vary from branch to branch (Army versus Navy, Air Force compared to Marine Corps, etc.), there are still principles that carry over no matter the branch of the U.S. military.

All branches respect the chain of command and adhere to disciplinary and uniformity standards set out by their respective branch. Each organization's primary goal is mission success, and each member is held accountable for their decisions. Each branch upholds values of integrity, honesty and ethical behavior, and members are expected to exhibit personal and professional integrity. The *Espirit de Corps* lives in all branches, the military breeds camaraderie, loyalty and pride in service. As circumstances, threats and challenges change, military organizations must be flexible and resilient. The U.S. military places value on rigorous training and professional development (J. L. Soeters et al., 2007). Diversity is embraced and the military ethos focuses on service before self. All these norms collectively create the culture of the military and shapes member behavior and decision-making.

### *Environmental Factors*

While all branches hold the norms above, they are still different branches with different circumstances. These circumstances present drastically different settings for upward communication to take place. For example, a soldier in the infantry is going to communicate to his NCO differently than a submarine Commander reporting to the Commander of the Pacific Fleet. A navigator in a B-52 communicates differently to an aircraft commander compared to a gunner in a tank unit to a tank commander. There are limitless examples, and limitless variations in upward communication. However, in each instance, it is important for the atmosphere to be conducive to upward communication for the considerations of an informed decision. If a gunner is withholding information that is pertinent to the unit's survival or success, then the tank commander might make a poor decision that otherwise would not have been made if that information was communicated.

### **Theoretical Factors**

Upward communication is clearly a complex phenomenon. Its structure contradicts the cultivation of functional upward communication with its high-power distance, focus on standards and structure, traditions, and norms. These influences shape the information exchange between subordinates and superiors. There are three theoretical components in this exchange: social exchange theory, safety and trust. These theoretical facets of upward communication in this context are essential in understanding this communicative process.

*Social Exchange Theory*

Social exchange theory lends a theoretical perspective to analyze the communicative relationship between the subordinate and the leader in the military. The theory emphasizes the role reciprocity has in interactions between individuals and the exchange of resources in relationships. To boil it down, social exchange theory means that an individual weighs the costs and benefits to communicating a message to another party (Emerson, 1976). For example, a private might choose not to communicate a message to a sergeant because they perceive it as too costly. In a broader sense, subordinates choose to engage in upward communication based on mutual benefit. This could be recognition, career advancement or support (Plexico, 2011). Leaders rely on upward communication to gauge morale, gather information and make informed decisions (Boyles & Wicker, 1977). For lower-ranking members to conduct social exchange analysis without apprehension, they must feel comfortable in communicating with a superior within reason (Hafidz Bin Maksom & Winter, 2009). Illegitimate social costs like fear of reprisal must be limited for optimal social exchange to occur. On the other hand, weighing any one motive for upward communication can be harmful. The distortion of upward communication often transpires due to the desire for career advancement or recognition, but that topic will be addressed in the challenges section (Boyles & Wicker, 1977).

*Safety*

Physical and psychological safety is a fundamental prerequisite for upward communication in the U.S. military. Personnel must feel a certain degree of security in voicing concerns, dissenting opinions and providing feedback without fear of retaliation or consequences (Edmondson, 1999). Creating a culture of safety characterized by psychological safety and supportive leadership

enhances upward communication quality and promotes organizational learning in military units (Zohar & Luria, 2005). Additionally, ensuring physical safety through clear communication protocol, risk mitigation strategies, and conflict resolution mechanisms fosters a conducive environment for open dialogue and constructive feedback.

### *Trust*

Trust is center to effective communication processes in the U.S. military. Trust influences the willingness of lower-ranked members to engage in upward communication with higher-ranked members (Bergh, 2017). Trust encompasses beliefs about the integrity, competence, and reliability of leaders found in the normative values of the military. It also connects with the organization's commitment to supporting all members (Adams & Webb, 2002). Military leaders must foster trust through transparent communication, consistent behavior, and genuine concern for the well-being of their subordinates. Incorporating trust-building initiatives, like leadership training, mentorship programs, and participative decision-making, are essential for enhancing upward communication effectiveness and fostering accountability and resilience (Fors Brandebo, 2015).

### **Challenges in Upward Communication**

Effective upward communication is essential for ensuring mission readiness, creating a culture of organizational learning, and sustaining leadership effectiveness within the U.S. military.

However, multiple challenges hamper the free flow of information, feedback, and ideas from subordinates to superiors. This section explores the complex interplay of the military's

hierarchical barriers, the distortion of information, and military values and norms that contribute to these challenges.

### *The Hierarchy Barrier*

Significant barriers to upward communication sprout at the seams of the U.S. military's hierarchy. Subordinates can perceive rank-based authority as intimidating or discouraging, and are thus unwilling to express dissenting opinions, concerns, or critical feedback to higher-ranking officers (Chapman, 1965). This hierarchical barrier can create communication silos, where information is filtered or distorted as it moves up the chain of command. This polluted filtration leads to misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and ineffective decision-making processes (Athassiadis, 2017). If informative processes don't welcome the perspective of lower ranks, whether actively done or passively, the entire picture in decision-making is occluded.

### *Information Distortion*

Information distortion is all too common within the U.S. military, challenging fruitful upward communication. Driven by favorability bias and non-communication, distortion can transpire in a manner of ways. Subordinates may present information in a favorable light or withhold negative feedback to avoid harmful repercussions or damage to their careers (Kuhmley Jr., 1983). Alternatively, falsified reporting up the chain of command occurs to advance a lower-ranking member's career. For example, in Vietnam, there are many reports of officers reporting to their superiors that they destroyed an NVA target when, in reality, they flubbed the mission. This was done so the officer in question and their unit appeared more favorably to command, and the officer took one step closer to promotion (Lewis, 1992).

This phenomenon, upward distortion, causes a false sense of security among leaders and sometimes their subordinates. Accuracy and reliability of information conveyed upwards is compromised and affects decisions made by those above them. Additionally, non-communication, where subordinates opt to remain silent instead of risking confrontation or backlash, exacerbate the problem of incomplete or misleading information reaching higher levels of command (Strauss, 2011). In either type of information distortion, higher parties lack information needed to make an educated decision.

#### *Military Values and Norms as a Hinderance*

Military values and norms, while produce for disciplined, loyal, and cohesive, soldiers, leaders and platoons, can also challenge upward communication. An emphasis on chain of command, obedience, and conformity can deter subordinates from necessary challenging of authority or questioning decisions made by superiors (J. L. Soeters et al., 2007). In any context, this manner of thinking railroads a group towards groupthink, where cohesion and harmony within a group leads to irrational and dysfunctional decision-making (Janis, 1971). Moreover, the pervasive culture of commander's intent, where leaders are expected to intuitively understand the needs and priorities of their units, discourages subordinates from proactively seeking clarification or providing input (Ozlen & Zukic, 2013). When commander's intent is blindly accepted, subordinates surrender necessary autonomy. This cultural dynamic reinforces the status quo and may stifle innovative thinking, creativity, and critical thinking within military organizations (Morrison & Milliken, 2024). While subordinates should be cooperative and serve their role and purpose, they should not forfeit their cognitive process. They are capable of creative solutions to problems, and limiting their own perspective damages the unit rather than disrupts it.

### **Strategies for Effective Communication**

Effective upward communication is essential for operational readiness, innovation, and promoting leadership development. While it is difficult to design upward communication strategies that are practical for a hierarchy in the armed forces, it is not impossible. There are various techniques to enhance upward communication that are feasible for the U.S. military. These are open-door policies, suggestion boxes, promoting appropriate individualistic expression, and implementing anonymous reporting. However, power distance may impact the effectiveness of these strategies.

#### *Open-Door Policies*

Open-door policies encourage subordinates to approach leaders with concerns, feedback, or suggestions. While the schedule of lower-ranking members of the military is tight, setting aside time for essentially office hours can be beneficial. This strategy breathes accessibility and a culture of transparency and trust within military units, which can only be beneficial. Authority is not lost, as professionalism and formality are maintained with this strategy. However, power distance dynamics may deter subordinates from utilizing open-door policies, particularly in hierarchical organizations where deference to authority is ingrained (Karambelas et al., 2011). Thus, more apprehensive subordinates will likely avoid utilizing this avenue of upward communication (Vakola & Bouradas, 2005). Leaders must actively engage with subordinates, demonstrate approachability, and create a supportive environment to mitigate power distance barriers and encourage the use of open-door policies.

*Suggestion Boxes*

Suggestion boxes provide a formal mechanism for soliciting input from subordinates and gathering feedback anonymously. This strategy allows individuals to express concerns or innovative ideas without fear of reprisal or judgment (Kraut & Freeman, 1992). However, power distance may influence the effectiveness of suggestion boxes, as subordinates may be hesitant to challenge authority or offer dissenting opinions openly (Bruins & Wilke, 1993). Another obvious detrimental aspect of this method is that subordinates may abuse the anonymity of the suggestion box for their own amusement. To make this strategy practical, leaders must communicate the value of feedback, assure anonymity, and demonstrate responsiveness to suggestions to overcome power distance barriers and encourage productive participation in suggestion box programs.

*Promoting Individualistic Expression*

In this strategy, the subordinate is encouraged to voice their perspectives, experiences, and expertise within the organizational context through more creative and indirect means. This strategy recognizes the value of diverse viewpoints and encourages creativity (Hall, 2012). Sometimes, individualistic expression is as simple as improving cohesion. It is based on permission as cultivation, creating a stronger culture so subordinates are comfortable not just with the chain of command, but themselves (Yellin, 2008). Examples of this method are typically historic and simple, painting and naming an airplane or tank, writing on a helmet, or even listening to music when flying as a unit cultivate individual comfort and collective cohesion. Ideally, this comfort is subliminally recognized as the leader permitting them to this in a strict hierarchy, and they are in turn more approachable (Yellin, 2008).



However, the positive exhortative properties are limited by power distance. Closer power distance physically allows for more fluidity in expression and stronger recognition from subordinates. Higher power distances are more formal in this respect, as the benefits are more explicit (Yuan & Zhou, 2015). This takes the form of permission for the allowance of this expression, and some of these forms have gone largely extinct in the last 30 years, resulting in larger power distance gaps and collectively limiting upward communication capability.

#### *Anonymous Reporting Systems*

Anonymous reporting systems let individuals report misconduct, safety concerns, or ethical violations confidentially. This strategy promotes accountability and integrity within military organizations through a mechanism for whistleblowing and addressing systemic issues (Housel, 1976). Reputation and hierarchy can inhibit this form though, as officers who are notified of these issues may keep things quiet to look better as leaders, demonstrating a concern for their career and distorting information (Housel, 1977). Additionally, power distance dynamics may influence the utilization of anonymous reporting systems, as subordinates may fear retaliation or mistrust the confidentiality of the process. Leaders, like with the suggestion box, must emphasize the importance of accountability, ensure confidentiality, and address root causes of misconduct to overcome power distance barriers and foster ethical conduct and transparency.

#### *Acknowledging Power Distance Discrepancies*

While these upward communication strategies promise enhancing organizational effectiveness in the U.S. military through optimized upward communication, it is essential to acknowledge potential power distance discrepancies that impact their implementation and effectiveness. Power

distance dynamics may vary across military units, branches, and ranks (i.e. a tank gunner versus the fighter pilot), influencing the willingness of subordinates to engage in upward communication. Leaders must be cognizant of disparities and adopt communication strategies specific for their situation. In this, they can address power distance barriers and actively promote a culture of openness, trust, and inclusivity to facilitate effective upward communication within their respective military organization.

### **Ethics**

Ethical considerations in upward communication in the U.S. military is critical. The balance between transparency, accountability, security, and confidentiality is the focal point of these considerations. The ethical dimensions of upward communication strategies in the military context highlight the challenges and considerations associated with promoting openness while safeguarding sensitive information (N. Tourish, 2007).

Transparency and accountability are fundamental ethical principles underpinning effective upward communication. Transparency entails the disclosure of information, decisions, and processes to relevant stakeholders. Here, trust should be fostered, and legitimacy should be sought within military organizations (Fors Brandebo, 2015). Accountability holds individuals and organizations responsible for their actions, ensuring compliance with ethical standards and legal obligations. Ethical upward communication practices prioritize transparency and accountability by providing clear channels for conveying information, soliciting feedback, and addressing concerns in a timely and transparent manner.

Two other worthy ethical considerations in upward communication are security and confidentiality. The disclosure of sensitive information could jeopardize national security,

operational effectiveness, and personnel safety. Ethical upward communication strategies must strike a balance between transparency and the protection of classified or sensitive information. Military organizations employ stringent security protocols, encryption technologies, and clearance procedures to safeguard confidential communications, all the while ensuring the sharing of essential information with authorized personnel on a need-to-know basis.

Balancing transparency, accountability, security, and confidentiality has several challenges. Determining appropriate classification level and clearance requirements for information shared through upward communication channels, ensuring compliance with classification guidelines and safeguarding sensitive data from unauthorized disclosure is important in the subordinate-supervisor relationship. Leaders must assess potential risks and consequences of disclosing information. This includes the impact on operational security, mission success, and national security interests, and implementing risk mitigation measures accordingly.

Another ethical consideration arises with whistleblowers. Whistleblowers need to be protected as opposed to cast out in the military. Individuals reporting misconduct, fraud, or ethical violations through upward communication channels should be protected from retaliation and afforded due process rights, thereby promoting a culture of accountability and ethical conduct (Miceli et al., 2008). Ethical leadership can be fostered through a culture of integrity, trust, and accountability. Leaders lead by example, uphold ethical standards, and ensure upward communication channels are accessible, transparent, and free from undue influence or censorship.

All in all, upward communication in the U.S. military demands a careful ethical balancing act between transparency, accountability, security, and confidentiality. Ethical upward

communication practices prioritize information disclosure, adherence to legal and regulatory requirements, and the protection of sensitive data from unauthorized members. By addressing the challenges and considerations associated with upward communication in military contexts, leaders can ensure a culture of integrity, trust, and ethical conduct, ultimately enhancing organizational effectiveness and mission readiness.

## **Conclusion**

Research on upward communication in the military has made significant strides in understanding its dynamics, challenges, and implications. However, several gaps in the literature suggest opportunities for future research. These gaps include cross-cultural perspectives, technological integration, organizational change, leadership development, ethical considerations and impact on outcomes.

Most existing research on upward communication in the military focuses on Western contexts, mostly the U.S. military. New studies could look at upward communication in militaries across other cultures to identify culture-specific factors influencing upward communication in militaries and rigid hierarchies. Next, with advancements in communication technologies such as digital platforms, social media and virtual collaboration tools, there should be examination on the impact of technology on upward communication in the military. Research could potentially explore technological innovations shaping communication channels, new information sharing practices, and how recent technology affects leadership behaviors within military organizations. Military organizations undergo frequent structural and operational change in response to threats, geopolitical events, and technological advancements. Future research could examine how organizational changes impact upward communication processes and

effectiveness. Leadership plays a crucial role in effective upward communication in military units and there is research on the results of good and bad leadership. However, there is little research on the cultivation of that leadership. While there is evidence to suggest effective upward communication contributes to organizational performance and mission readiness, more research is needed to see the actual longstanding impact of upward communication on outcomes.

To conclude, upward communication in the military originates in the interactions between subordinates and their superior. Social exchange theory, trust and safety affect members' motivation to communicate with higher-ranking members. The military's rigid hierarchical structure and innate power distance causes some members to avoid communicating upwardly, while leadership style variety and militaristic norms and values can alter the likelihood of this communication. Other obstacles like favorable information distortion can lead to distortion through communicating as opposed to abstaining. Utilizing strategies like open-door policies, suggestion boxes, appropriate expressional methods and anonymous reporting can offer feasible upward communication avenues in a rigid hierarchy like the U.S. military. Any method to close perceived power distance while maintaining authority should be pursued. Additionally, in any interaction with a subordinate, transparency, accountability and security should be considered.

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