Chapter 2
Identity Growth in the Professions

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ABSTRACT

Identity theory and research offer important insights for helping to guide the development of professionals across the lifespan of service vital to the public's wellbeing. A developmental framework is introduced as a guide for professional identity growth along dimensions of cognitive and moral reasoning. The framework includes literacies, spanning the dimensions, associated with social intelligence, leadership, competencies, and mindsets. Insights from research are offered for supporting the use of the framework with developmental instruction of professionals to promote higher levels of identity growth and maturation associated with improved judgment and behavior. Instructional practices are also described for helping professionals transition effectively to higher growth levels for use by coaches, mentors, and instructors. The profession of arms is highlighted for illustrating and applying the developmental framework in the context of a profession.

INTRODUCTION

Duty – Honor – Country. Those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, what you will be. They are your rallying points: to build courage when courage seems to fail; to regain faith when there seems to be little cause for faith; to create hope when hope becomes forlorn. General Douglas MacArthur

General Douglas MacArthur in his farewell speech to West Point Cadets in May of 1962, said "Yours is the Profession of Arms, the will to win, the sure knowledge that in war there is no substitute for victory, that if you lose, the Nation will be destroyed, that the very obsession of your public service must be Duty, Honor, Country."

From the perspective of the US military, as expressed by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, The Profession of Arms presents a calling requiring unique expertise to fulfill a collective responsibility to the American people, "provide for the common defense and secure the blessings of liberty. The Profession of Arms is distinguished from other professions in society because expertise rests in the justified application of lethal military force and the willingness of those who serve to die for country. The Profession of Arms is defined by values, ethics, standards, code of conduct, skills, and attributes. As volunteers, our sworn duty is to the Constitution. Our status as a profession is granted by those whom we are accountable to, our civilian authority, and the American people" (JCS, 2016).

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, white paper, *America's Military - A Profession of Arms* succinctly summarizes how all who enter the military join the profession: "All service men and women belong to the profession from the junior enlisted to our most senior leaders. We are all accountable for meeting ethical and performance standards in our actions and similarly, accountable for our failure to take action, when appropriate. The distinction between ranks lies in our level of responsibility and degree of accountability. We share the common attributes of character, courage, competence, and commitment. We qualify as professionals through intensive training, education, and practical experience. As professionals, we are defined by our strength of character, life-long commitment to core values, and maintaining our professional abilities through continuous improvement, individually and institutionally" (JCS, 2016, p. 4).

Another distinguishing feature of a professional is not only the internal nature of the individual but also the nature of their service. As stated above, a professional is defined by qualities addressing strength of character, life-long commitment to core values, and willingness to maintain and improve abilities (Hackett, 1962). What also distinguishes a practitioner in a profession is the practice of the professional in services vital to the public's well-being. Within a practice, professionals have a high degree of autonomy in deciding how to carry out their services, as authorized by legal rights, and are expected to conduct their behavior by a code of ethics. Thus, a professional is expected to not only engage in life-long development of their cognitive complexity associated with skillful abilities but also to developmentally grow and mature in moral reasoning dimensions impacting their judgment and behavior vital to the public's well-being. Recognition, understanding, and acceptance of the interdependence of these developmental dimensions is at the heart of a professional's identity and personal dedication to a course greater than oneself. The journey of developmental growth does not take place for a professional in social isolation but is highly dependent on social structures and networks involving peers, mentors, and coaches across the lifespan of service (Burke & Stets, 2009; Stryker, 1980).

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