PART TWO

Naval Leadership in the Ancien Régime

CHAPTER TWO

Leadership Networks and the Effectiveness of the British Royal Navy in the Mid-Eighteenth Century

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It is difficult to conceive of the history of naval warfare being researched, discussed or taught without the idea of leadership emerging at some point in the process. Surviving on the sea, let alone fighting in ships, demands consistent collaborative action among those who undertake it. For a ship to move and fight, it requires individuals to apply their efforts in precise conjunction with their colleagues, and for this to happen the effort has to be coordinated and directed by someone recognised in that role. The importance of the leadership role or roles in this confined and hazardous environment has been enshrined in the rules conferring legal status and responsibilities since the Middle Ages.[32] These laws recognised the limits of authority, the need to consult others and the consequences of negligence or incompetence as well as defining the power of the master. They were distinct from the rules concerning the command of soldiers on the ships. However, in the 200 years between the 1490s and 1700, as the ship at war transformed from what was essentially a transport for soldiers into a formidable gun platform to be fought with in its own right, the separate leadership roles of the 'master' (commanding the seamen and navigation) and

the 'captain' (commanding the soldiers and the fighting function) had to merge and, in the process, became a matter of serious concern. Although the primacy of the combat role and thus the captain has been recognised since the Middle Ages, ensuring land officers had adequate navigational and ship-handling skills was beset by operational, social and cultural obstacles which were never entirely resolved in Europe during the eighteenth century.[33]

The evolution of this professional competence of naval officers is a complex story and this paper only concerns itself with one aspect of this – the leadership exercised by flag officers in the Royal Navy before 1789. Much of our understanding of naval leadership has been shaped by the popular and professional naval histories that were published between 1890 and 1914. In these years, naval history was written with an explicit didactic purpose of educating the public, servicemen and statesmen about the importance of naval power and the means to exercise it. It was particularly the history of the naval wars against France, from 1793 to 1815, that formed the core of this history. These wars brought about the oceanic *Pax Britannica* of the next 70 years. During the nineteenth century navies changed dramatically, but the ideal of leadership that was abstracted from the campaigns of the French wars remained the model. The ideal naval officer for navies everywhere was Horatio Nelson (1758–1805). Nelson was a remarkable, outstanding leader and commander. His dedication to duty, his bravery and success in battle left little to be desired or explained. 'The Nelson Touch' was a semi-mystical sensitivity to what it was possible to achieve with one's own squadron against the enemy that succeeding generations of officers were expected to emulate. Nelson encapsulated leadership of the heroic kind that became the frame of reference for naval officers and the measure against which historians would judge them.

The consequence of this is that in most naval histories, the question of leadership is unproblematic. The benchmark is clear and the officers under examination are at some point on a continuum between good and bad that could be determined by their operational performance compared to Nelson or the way in which their command reflected the Nelsonic attributes. In more recent naval histories the nature and context of that leadership is more nuanced. Historians are more sensitive to the demands of leading naval forces in the complex, changing, multi-dimensional battle spaces of the period post-1939. While this sensitivity to near-contemporary environmental complexity is considered important, the same cannot be said of the naval history that precedes the wars of 1793–1815. There is the temptation to infer that before the demands of industrialised warfare, there was a golden age of naval leadership in which everything was clearly defined. Nelson and his contemporaries eventually produced a dominance at sea that was unprecedented, but they did not live in a world of certainty in which command and leadership were uncomplicated. However, their tremendous success, and particularly the clarity with which Nelsonic attributes were subsequently distilled and presented

by historians as causal factors of that naval dominance, has deflected from serious consideration of how leadership worked in the period before the French Revolution.

There are a number of questions concerning leadership that have not yet been fully absorbed into the realm of historical analysis. Scholars in other disciplines have been trying to understand leadership for decades. Leadership has been seen as a set of tasks or functions that are carried out more or less effectively. It has also been seen as a set of personal attributes which leaders possess in different proportions and quantities. It is not possible to construct experiments in which the absence or presence of a leader (with known attributes and functional capability) is the only variable, and attempts to establish historically the precise contribution of either the leadership functions or qualities to the outcome of any specific operational activity have proved impossible. Similarly, attempts to identify a successful outcome and then infer the leader's contribution to this success are plagued by distortions of reporting, lack of information and a multiplicity of other variables. For example, it is commonly understood that it is the followers who achieve the result for the leader, but they are not passive automata responding to the leader's will. What the followers inject into any operation is unpredictable and often neglected. The immediate operational context will influence the leader and the willingness of the followers to be led, but this is often relegated to a factor that is assumed to be under the control of the leader. This post-facto attribution of leadership qualities to the victorious commander makes the quality of leadership dependent upon the outcome rather than vice versa.

With these debates surrounding the study of leaders and leadership, and the centrality of the subject to naval history, it is surprising how little attention naval historians have paid to the question of leadership at all levels.[34] This paper aims to lay out a few thoughts for bringing a closer study of leadership into the study of command in the eighteenth century. Informing this discussion is another set of debates underutilised in the realm of naval history, that of network analysis and decision theory. Since the 1960s, historians of technology and international relations have been working on influencing networks in decision-making. From developing nuclear weaponry to managing international crises, analysing the different role of influencers has informed historical judgements.[35] These works hold additional interest for historians of naval leadership. As Spinadi's study of the development of the Polaris missile suggests, Admiral Arleigh Burke's ability to convince the networks of decision-makers about his definition of success for the project was as important to the eventual development of the family of Fleet Ballistic Missiles as the engineering achievement itself. While network analysis is established in the study of post-1945 naval history, it is not commonly applied to earlier history. There seems to be no reason why this should be so, and the following is an attempt to shed some light on the historical context facing British admirals in the eighteenth century.

Gross Quantity and Quality of Naval Force

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                    Professional Leadership
                            Network

                    Leaders ←——→ Followers

                          Context
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Political/Social Network — Leaders — Followers — Context

Administrative Network — Leaders — Followers — Context

Maritime, Financial and Fiscal Resources

Fig.1: A simple network of influence on naval power.

A very simple network of influence on naval power is set out below.[36] A network consists of a connected group of people. They exist within a context that unites or distinguishes them from others, and many networks may overlay one another in the social environment under investigation. We are interested in the exercise of naval power and for our purposes it is possible to identify at least three significant networks that are critical to its generation in Britain during the eighteenth century. It is assumed that naval power rests on the ability to convert maritime, financial and fiscal resources into naval assets. These resources may exist in a society, but their conversion to naval assets is a social and political process that requires at least these three primary networks to be working effectively – the political/social network, the professional naval network and the administrative network. Individuals overlap by being in all three of these networks, but it is the concerted action of the networks as a whole that enables the effective channelling of resources into naval power. Just from this very crude framework, one can imagine the possible channels and potential blockages. The political/social network that linked Court, Parliament and the wider political community was the context in which the political battle for the financial and fiscal resources was fought and generally won. The administrative network provided the direction and structures within which ships, stores and manpower were brought together. They also had to link to the political/social network of contractors for all kinds of stores, manpower and even the building of the ships themselves for much of the period. The professional naval network had to take these weapons and employ them to effect in battle or on campaign. Together they generate the quantity and quality of fighting ships
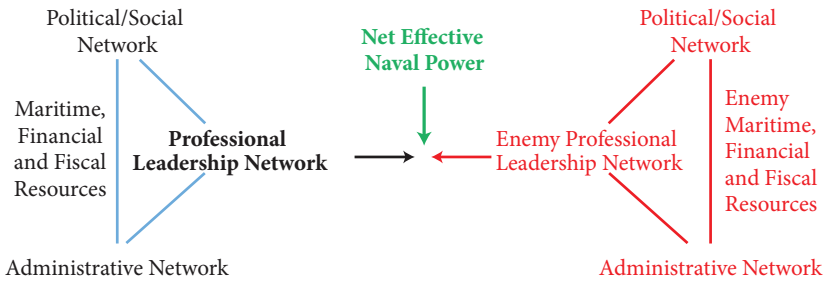
Political/Social
Network

Net Effective
Naval Power

Political/Social
Network

Maritime,
Financial
and Fiscal
Resources

**Professional
Leadership Network**

Enemy Professional
Leadership Network

Enemy
Maritime,
Financial
and Fiscal
Resources

Administrative Network

Administrative Network

Fig. 2: Net effective naval power.

that are available at any given time and place (the gross quantity and quality
of naval force).

However, this is, at best, only half of the situation. Similar networks were at
work generating the enemy's naval forces and its gross naval force. Relative, or
net, seapower can be said to emerge from the opposition of these naval powers.
Warfare is a dynamic environment in which the networks are in a state of flux,
stimulated by and stimulating the progress of a campaign. Seen in this way, it
becomes clearer how complex the issue of leadership and followership can be.
Leaders and followers interact constantly at different levels within their own
networks and they influence other networks. Their effectiveness alters relatively
and absolutely as a result of these interactions.

The idea of the single controlling will bringing about victory or causing defeat
becomes less compelling when viewed from this perspective. Only very rarely
would an individual be so dominant across all the contributing networks as to
become the sole author of the result. However, to conclude that the leader is
irrelevant is equally unconvincing when one looks at these networks in opera-
tion. Below is a simple leadership network within which Nelson operated dur-
ing his years of greatest triumph, 1798–1805.

In this illustration the squadron commander, Nelson, sits at the centre of a
series of networks, all of which he influenced and had influence on him. In
1805 he was strongly connected and supported by his professional community,
represented here by Lord St Vincent. Similarly, he was well connected to the
civil administration of the navy, represented by Lord Barham, the First Lord of
the Admiralty. Nelson was also connected (and supported by his professional
standing) with his captains and the crews of his ships in his squadron. By 1805
Nelson was also strongly connected to the social and political networks (repre-
sented here by the Prime Minister William Pitt). However, these networks were
not static: they varied and the strength of the ties between them varied continu-
ously as a result of changes within them (new leaders, new priorities, new tasks
etc.) and as a result of other networks of factors that influenced the connections.
For example, the connections that bound Nelson to his professional community
and the civil administration were strongly influenced by traditions of command,
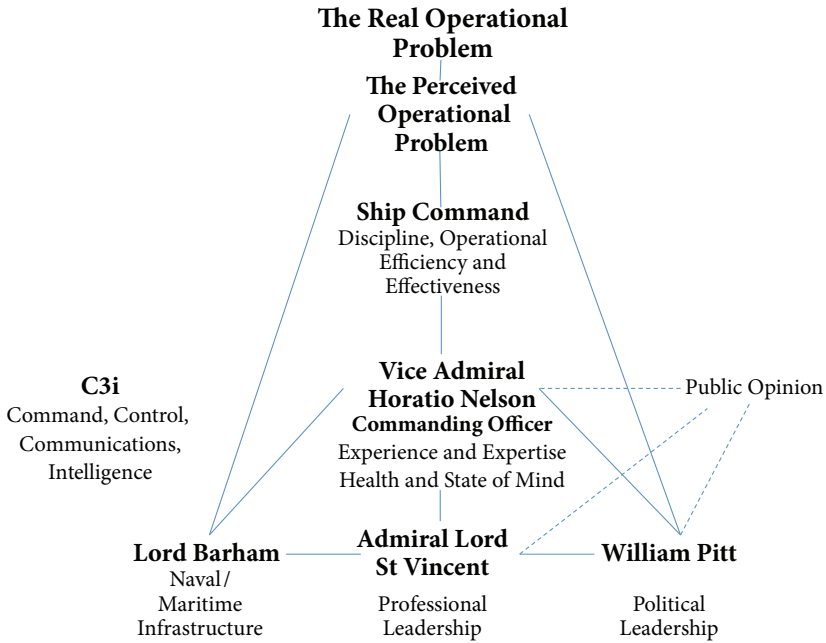
**The Real Operational
Problem**

**The Perceived
Operational
Problem**

Ship Command
Discipline, Operational
Efficiency and
Effectiveness

C3i
Command, Control,
Communications,
Intelligence

**Vice Admiral
Horatio Nelson**
Commanding Officer
Experience and Expertise
Health and State of Mind

Public Opinion

Lord Barham
Naval/
Maritime
Infrastructure

**Admiral Lord
St Vincent**
Professional
Leadership

William Pitt
Political
Leadership

Fig. 3: Leadership network: squadron 1805.

control, communication and intelligence. These were relatively stable during
1804–5. However, in 1798–9, Nelson's behaviour in the Mediterranean, possibly
as a result of the wound he received at the Battle of the Nile, caused changes in
the supporting networks that fed back into the political and social network as
well. Over his lifetime, Nelson's relations with this network were more volatile,
but Nelson himself did a great deal to influence opinion positively. The actors
within these networks not only formed opinions of people, but also of the oper-
ational problems and how they could be resolved (the perceived operational
problem). Sometimes perceptions might be shared, but on other occasions they
could vary widely. Furthermore, depending on the quality of intelligence and
communications, the real operational problem might have been entirely differ-
ent, presenting serious disconnection between the leadership expectations of
the actors in various networks and the leadership actions of the commander.
Nelson played a crucial role in shaping these perceptions. He was closest to
the immediate operational problem and the way he articulated it to others fed
back into their perceptions of his operational problems. Part of Nelson's public
appeal was his aggression and certainty, which played into shaping how other
actors expected a commander in Nelson's position to behave.

This very simple network is enough to illustrate how important networks
are in perceptions of leadership. If Nelson is replaced by Sir Robert Calder, the
dynamics of the networks immediately change. Calder met the Franco-Spanish

Combined Squadron in foggy weather about 100 miles west of Cape Finisterre on 22 July 1805. Calder met them with an inferior force, captured two of their ships and forced the Combined Fleet away from Brest, to Vigo and then to Ferrol, where the fateful decision to head south to Cádiz was made. Yet the political expectations were for a decisive victory and, judging from Calder's subsequent reprimand at a court martial, the professional service expectations were the same. Calder's action was a major factor in finally thwarting Napoleon's invasion plans, but by not clinging to the Combined Fleet after the first day of action, he did not precisely answer expectations in London and his career never recovered.[37] Calder's leadership was found wanting within the critical networks, despite the tactical and strategic success he achieved.

Calder's experience illustrates how judgements about leadership are heavily influenced by the networks that exist at any given point. In earlier years, with different actors in key positions, the response to Calder's action would probably have been different. It also highlights how leadership has to be judged within the context of its own networks and times. This being so, how then are we to assess the leadership of British admirals before 1789?

First, it is clear that we cannot treat the leadership of these admirals as an undifferentiated whole. Over the eighteenth century, the networks that supported them, and through which contemporary definitions of successful leadership emerged, were constantly changing. Perceptions of problems changed over time as the actors in the networks changed, or changed their relationships with other actors. Of the three networks we have discussed, the political, with the influence of public opinion, was probably the most volatile. The social concept of leadership changed more slowly, but over the century there was a distinct shift. In the second half of the century, the general Enlightenment shift of focus from Mankind's relationship with Providence to the study of Man as the main mover of events was important. By the last quarter of the century, there was a rising public interest in biography and autobiography, and particularly an interest in the heroic. Nelson and his contemporaries were serving in an environment that was looking for heroes/heroic leaders and, because of the revolutionary threat, believed it needed them.

Thus, if the social, cultural and political context of Nelson's predecessors was rather different, we must suppose that contemporary definitions of success and good leadership might also have been different and we need to establish what these were. Admirals were not trying to meet the standards imposed by later generations of historians, or even consciously struggling to create what was later to be a Nelsonic ideal, but to meet the expectations of their own contemporaries. While victory is an obvious and relatively stable concept, what constitutes victory is more ambiguous. Despite a generalised feeling that the Royal Navy should be able to achieve whatever was desired, expectations of operations as diverse as the expeditions to the Baltic (1715–9 and 1726), the Mediterranean and the Atlantic coast of Spain (1718–9), the West Indies (1726) and Lisbon (1736) were not universal

among the decision-makers and other actors at the time. The disjunction between expectations, or between expectations and reality, was a core element in the political disputes of the century, which appear most obviously during the major wars. The rest of this paper seeks to illustrate just one of these points – the dynamic nature of the leadership networks – by reference to a short period in the eighteenth century, 1740–6.

The early 1740s was a period of intense public expectation and crushing disappointment. In 1739 Britain had entered a war with Spain confidently expecting that the Royal Navy would rapidly force Spain to a humiliating peace.[38] This would be done by severing the trans-oceanic trade link to Spain's American empire, along which the vital supplies of silver flowed from Mexico and Peru into the treasuries of the Spanish crown. Furthermore, the Royal Navy would devastate Spanish trade in Europe and the Americas and even land an expeditionary force to take and hold some part of the Spanish empire to be held as a perpetual threat to Spanish trade in the future. Seven years later Spanish trade had been severely mauled, but this had not forced Spain to come to terms. Britain was at war with France and Spain by this time. The navy had failed to deliver conquests in the Caribbean. It had failed to win a decisive victory over the Franco-Spanish fleets. It had failed to maintain control of the Channel, as a French squadron penetrated as far as Dungeness in support of an invasion force in Flanders, before being forced to retreat in the face of winter storms. To contemporaries and to later generations the cause of this failure was clear and simple – bad leadership within the civil administration, the political leadership and within the naval officers corps. The First Lord of the Admiralty between 1741 and 1744, the Earl of Winchelsea, has borne much of the blame, but the naval officers and the administrators within the Admiralty have not escaped censure.

That the results were bad is unquestionable. However, the role of leadership in the failure has received little real analysis. For contemporaries and historians, the centrality of leadership failure was demonstrated by a change of fortunes that began in 1747 and reached a glorious climax in 1762. By this latter date the Royal Navy had effectively destroyed the French and Spanish navies, stifled their trade and conquered vast parts of their overseas empires. The reason was the new leadership that Admiral George Anson brought to the service after his return from his remarkable circumnavigation in 1744. He entered the Admiralty in 1746 and retained a sea-going command. Guided and inspired by his professionalism the navy regained its edge. Two battles (First and Second Finisterre) were fought and won in May and October 1747. By the time the peace was finally signed, the Royal Navy had regained the initiative. During the peace and for most of the subsequent war with France, Anson remained at the Admiralty, reforming and leading. By this time he was serving with the great William Pitt, whose strategic grasp of naval power was unparalleled as he led Britain to the spectacular victories of 1759–62. Little more needed to be said – heroic leadership had made the critical difference.
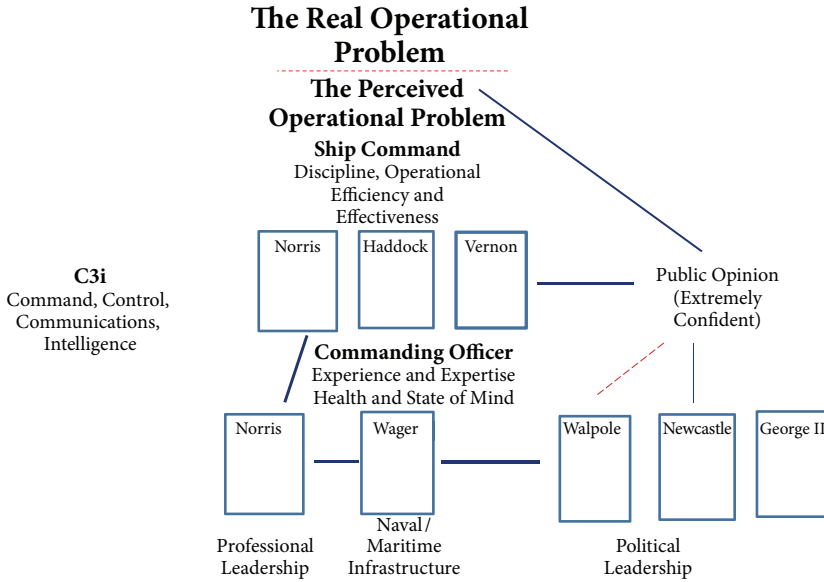
The Real Operational Problem

The Perceived Operational Problem

Ship Command
Discipline, Operational Efficiency and Effectiveness

| Norris | Haddock | Vernon |

C3i
Command, Control, Communications, Intelligence

Public Opinion (Extremely Confident)

Commanding Officer
Experience and Expertise
Health and State of Mind

| Norris | Wager | | Walpole | Newcastle | George II |

Professional Leadership

Naval / Maritime Infrastructure

Political Leadership

Fig. 4: Leadership network: 1741.

Whereas the role of Pitt, Anson and others is certainly important, this expla-nation ignores why their leadership worked better than their predecessors'. Seen as a changing social network, the reasons for the collapse of effective lead-ership in the early 1740s and its reconstruction in the second half of the decade become clearer.

Above is a simple leadership network as it looked in the spring of 1741. The three squadron commanders were Sir John Norris (Channel), Nicholas Haddock (Mediterranean) and Edward Vernon (West Indies). The adminis-tration was headed by Sir Charles Wager. The professional head of the navy, the Admiral of the Fleet, was Sir John Norris. While there was some profes-sional jealousy between Norris and Wager, they had worked well together since 1739. As a whole, the professional and administrative systems of the navy were working efficiently. The connections of this naval leadership with the political and social leadership of the nation were equally strong. The ministry of Sir Robert Walpole was on good terms with King George II and although political jealousies existed between Walpole and the Secretary of State for the Southern Department, the Duke of Newcastle, these had been largely submerged after the outbreak of war. Newcastle and the King were strongly in line with public opinion in their support for the war, although Walpole had far more reserva-tions and his enthusiasm for the war was a weakness that could be exploited politically by his opponents. In 1739 the expectations about the war at sea,

and the perceived operational problems, were similar among these three networks – the war would be fought at sea, and it would be short and victorious.

However, between 1739 and 1744, the war did not progress according to those expectations. Operations in the West Indies failed to achieve the decisive results predicted. From the summer of 1740, France was acting in conjunction with Spain and by the early part of 1741, France and Spain were acting together against Austria. British naval power was being stretched to cover far more than had been anticipated in 1739. By the end of February 1744, Britain was formally at war with France as well as Spain, and the Brest squadron had penetrated up the Channel to support an invasion force assembling in the Low Countries. Although the war did not cause Walpole's fall from power in February 1742, his well-known lack of enthusiasm for it became part of the rhetoric that accompanied his resignation and the reconstruction of the new ministry. By this time, Sir Charles Wager had resigned from the Admiralty, his own confidence in the war having been shattered. Walpole left office despite the wishes of the King, who was not reconciled to his new ministry, headed by the Duke of Newcastle. The new First Lord of the Admiralty, the Earl of Winchelsea, gained neither the support of the professional part of the service, nor the surviving part of Walpole's old ministry. Sir John Norris resigned from active service. Vernon was recalled from the Caribbean after the failure of a major expedition to that region. Haddock in the Mediterranean suffered a nervous breakdown and was eventually replaced by Thomas Mathews in a process that in itself caused some rancour within the squadron. The new ministry was itself soon riven by political differences, in which the conduct of war became a central feature by 1743. The King and his new Secretary of State for the Northern Department, the Earl of Carteret, had become more convinced that the war could be won in Europe than by overseas expeditions.

Thus, by the early part of 1744, there was plenty of evidence of failure, but precisely what role leadership failure played in this is very difficult to establish. For the most part, it has been enough to condemn the politicians and the political part of the administration as being uniquely incompetent. The senior professional leadership of the Royal Navy is seen in a similar manner – doing their best, but hampered by inept politicians, they lacked the nerve or weight to force a more effective strategy upon the decision-makers. Seen from the perspectives of leadership networks, the comprehensive nature of the problem becomes readily apparent.

There are now almost no solid lines, indicating confidence and communication, between the networks. The professional leadership of the navy, represented by Vernon and Norris, is detached from the administrative leadership at the Admiralty. They have their views on the perceived operational problem, which are not shared by Winchelsea and the Admiralty Board. This Board has not retained the confidence of either Mathews or Lestock in the Mediterranean, who, were, themselves, not working well together. The political leadership was
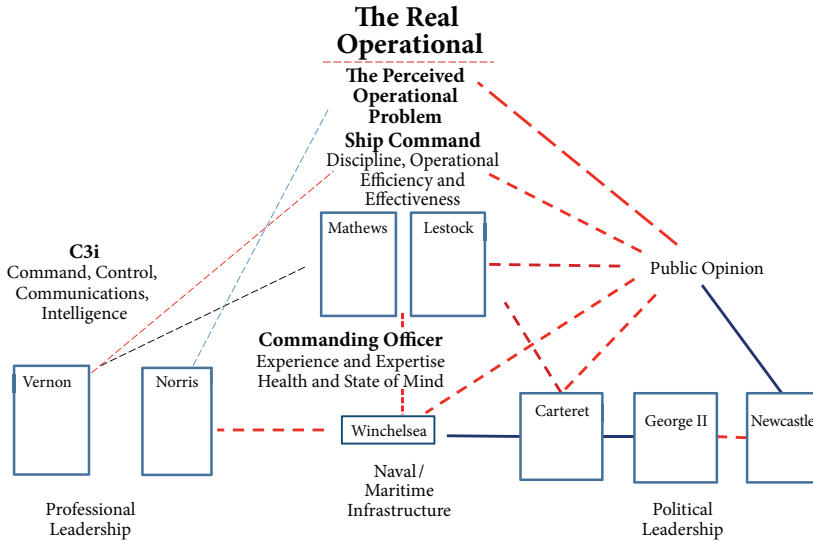
The Real Operational

The Perceived Operational Problem

Ship Command
Discipline, Operational Efficiency and Effectiveness

| Mathews | Lestock |

Public Opinion

C3i
Command, Control, Communications, Intelligence

Commanding Officer
Experience and Expertise Health and State of Mind

| Vernon | Norris |

| Carteret | George II | Newcastle |

Winchelsea

Professional Leadership

Naval / Maritime Infrastructure

Political Leadership

Fig. 5: Fractured leadership network: 1744.

divided. The King had confidence in Carteret, who had some confidence in Winchelsea, but Newcastle had confidence in neither and the King distrusted Newcastle and his colleagues. Public opinion was increasingly suspicious of the ministry, the Royal Navy and its administration. Newcastle remained acutely aware of this, but this did not mean that he either had the confidence of the public at large or that he could influence their views on the perceived operational problem. In sum, the leadership networks were fragmented within themselves and from each other.

The traditional account from this point is that a new leader in the heroic mould, George Anson, emerged and put right what was wrong. Anson had not been tarnished by the events of 1740–4. In June 1744 he returned from a circumnavigation, loaded with the wealth of a captured Spanish galleon. The public response after so much disappointment was jubilant. He was promoted to flag rank almost immediately, but he just as quickly resigned when an appointment he had made while on his voyage was not confirmed by the Admiralty. Anson joined the Admiralty Board in December 1744 when a new board was formed under the Duke of Bedford and finally took his flag in April 1745.

Anson was active at the Admiralty and at sea. His contribution to stimulating reform was second to none at the time. His cruises in the Western Approaches in 1745 and 1746 were not as successful as was hoped, but in May 1747 he intercepted two outward-bound French convoys with their small covering escort north-west of Cape Finisterre. By 7 pm he had captured six French warships and four East Indiamen. Later in the year, other French convoys fell victim

to British cruising squadrons and on 14 October, another French escort force suffered heavily when six of their number were captured after a vigorous chase action conducted by a force under Edward Hawke. Largely as a result of these actions during 1747 the Royal Navy ended the war with far greater public and political confidence that it had enjoyed since 1740.

Although Anson deserves all the credit he is given for his actions at sea, within his profession and at the Admiralty, the explanation for how and why one man was able to achieve all this has been rather neglected. By placing Anson into the changing leadership networks of his time, it is possible to see how his talents were appreciated and supported.

The diagram below illustrates the leadership network as it existed early in 1747. Anson is clearly visible in very significant roles, but other changes have also taken place. First and foremost, the political fragmentation that had followed Walpole's fall in 1742 had been resolved during 1746. The struggle for dominance between Newcastle and Carteret had concluded in the former's favour. Since December 1744 the head of the Admiralty had been the Duke of Bedford, the leader of one of the 'New Allies' whose parliamentary influence was critical in the eventual defeat of Carteret. Bedford had come to the Admiralty convinced that Britain could win a war against the united Bourbon monarchies of France and Spain by the judicious application of seapower. Newcastle held this view, although strongly modified by his concern for Britain's Dutch allies. By 1747 the King was becoming convinced of this, and more at ease with Newcastle as his leading minister. There was, therefore, a shared perception of the operational problem. Public opinion was less homogenous and more distrustful, but generally sympathetic to the claims for maritime war. One of the most influential figures outside of the formal leadership systems was Edward Vernon, who had been dismissed in April 1746 after a series of clashes with the Admiralty. However, his opposition did not extend to the concept of the maritime war, of which he had been one of the most vocal exponents since the early 1730s.

Anson was therefore operating in a context in which leadership was far less contested and the networks were mutually reinforcing. Anson was, in practice, the professional head of the navy by this point. His potential competitors for this role had fallen away as they had been swept up in the crises of 1740–6. Most were in retirement or engaged in distant operations in the West Indies or the Mediterranean. Those officers that surrounded Anson were largely his protégés or junior to him. Only Vernon could have contested his leadership, but Vernon was broken by his quarrels with the Admiralty by this time. Anson's professional leadership was reinforced by his sea commands, which bore fruit in 1747. In turn this reinforced his standing in the eyes of the public. Anson was also linked to the political network. As a staunch Staffordshire Whig family in a predominantly Tory county, the Ansons were an important bridge between the parties at a time when Tory support was needed by the Broad
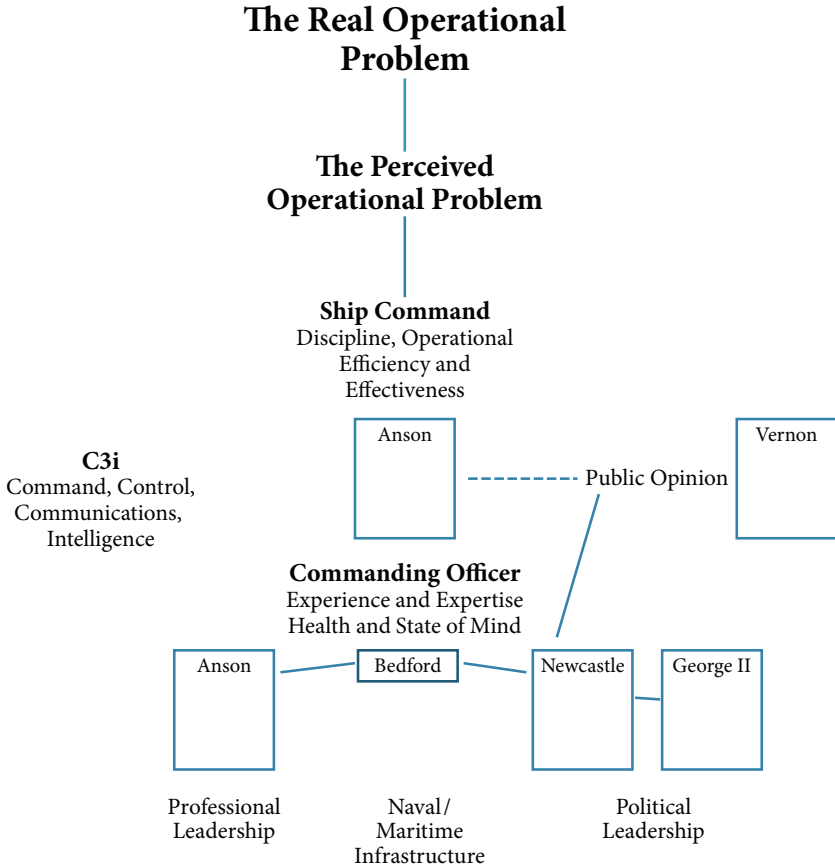
The Real Operational Problem

The Perceived Operational Problem

Ship Command
Discipline, Operational Efficiency and Effectiveness

C3i
Command, Control, Communications, Intelligence

Anson

Vernon

Public Opinion

Commanding Officer
Experience and Expertise Health and State of Mind

Anson — Bedford — Newcastle — George II

Professional Leadership

Naval/ Maritime Infrastructure

Political Leadership

Fig. 6: Emerging leadership network: early 1747.

Bottom Administration. In sum, the resistance to Anson's leadership within the profession, the administration and the political networks was, by the standards of his immediate predecessors, remarkably small. The consistency with which all these networks perceived the operational problem of the Royal Navy was strong. The internal unity of the networks was strong and there was diminished inter-network friction.

The leadership context within which Anson reached the top of his profession was far more benign for him than it had been for many years for his predecessors. The frictions that might have destroyed his attempts to reform or command were greatly reduced. This does not diminish Anson. His skill as a navigator, a squadron commander, an administrator and a politician all played a part in the way he was able to work within those networks to achieve his objectives. At every level he experienced some set-backs as well as successes. He was

also fortunate that he was leading at a time when the strength of the Franco-Spanish naval force was beginning to wane, worn down by the attrition of years of war conducted against it by Anson's predecessors. At the same time, British naval resources in home waters had been gradually growing, giving Anson a far greater margin of superiority than the Royal Navy had experienced since 1740.

All of these contextual factors could be described simply as 'luck', but to do so does not do justice to any of the leaders. The context is the arena within which leadership is carried out. Naval leaders and followers and those whom they fight are all parts of dynamic networks of individuals that are interacting. British admirals were part of these networks with the capacity to influence and be influenced by them. Anson brought great skills, capabilities and contacts to a situation that was, independently of him, becoming more amenable to his objectives. Anson continued to use all those advantages very effectively and is now rightly regarded as one of the most important leaders that the Royal Navy ever had. Other officers, notably Edward Vernon, also had outstanding talents as well as failings, at a time that was marginally before Anson's, but starkly different in the way the leadership networks were configured and working. Vernon, Norris and most of their contemporaries could not influence the context in the way that was to open itself up to Anson.

For most people, the facts of naval success or failure are clear in the historical record. Nelson, Anson and Edward Hawke stand out as benchmarks against which other eighteenth-century British admirals are judged. This paper has tried to argue that such judgements about eighteenth-century naval leadership are deficient. They are based on the idea that the demands of naval leadership and the definitions of success were generally unchanging during the century. This is simply untrue – they were changing all the time. This does not reduce the leader to being a passive recipient of luck, but it does change his tasks, his options, his prospects, and his resources. Each brought talents to the perceived and actual operational problems. Some leaders were able to meet the challenges spectacularly well, others were not, but they were not necessarily all facing the same challenges, nor can success or failure be attributed unconditionally to the individual leader. Far more work needs to be carried out on these officers, particularly those of the first half of the century, before we understand how they saw their tasks, how they related to the networks within which they operated, how the external contexts impinged on their options, how dynamic that context was and how they perceived leadership at flag rank. Only then will we be able to engage with the broader questions of whether there is a discernible trajectory of leadership approaches and behaviours.