

THE NAVY PROFESSION

In recent years, the Department of Defense and each of the military services has endeavored to better articulate and spread a common vocabulary for understanding the foundation of the military as a profession. The Army's notable 2004 study, *The Future of the Army Profession*, played a significant role in reinvigorating the discussion of the military ethic and grounding that dialogue in the sociological language of "profession"; which is richer in concept than everyday usage of the term. The appointment of RADM Margaret Klein in 2014 to serve as the Secretary of Defense's Senior Advisor for Military Professionalism provided a forum for all of the services to engage in dialogue and compare best practices on how to communicate and firmly establish the foundational concepts of *military profession*, *professionalism* and *professional military ethics* throughout DoD. In continuing this effort, this primer on the Navy profession is provided to further our drive toward renewing and strengthening the Navy Team's dedication to our Navy profession.

Profession defined

In general, the word "professional" is applied loosely to anything a person does for pay, and contrasts with the term "amateur." This is what we mean when we differentiate professional athletes from "non-professional" amateurs. However, in social science, "profession" has a more precise and restrictive meaning that distinguishes "true" professions from other kinds of gainful employment. Specifically, professions are relatively high-status forms of work that attend to the vital functions of the societies they serve. In the early modern period of Western culture, there were only three true professions – clergy, medicine, and law. The central functions of these professions – salvation, health, and justice – were absolutely vital to society and, importantly, were functions that society could not provide for itself. Like these classic professions, the Navy – and, indeed, the military writ large – provides a vital service to the American people: national defense.

Navy Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority: For 240 years, the U.S. Navy has been a cornerstone of American security and prosperity. In an increasingly globalized world, America's success is even more reliant on the U.S. Navy. Our Navy protects America from attack and preserves America's strategic influence in key regions of the world.

Features of a Profession

Professions have features in common that distinguish them from other occupations. The Navy possesses each of these features; namely, *professional knowledge*, *professional ethic*, and *professional autonomy*.

Professional knowledge. Professions have a unique body of knowledge that requires a considerable amount of study and preparation. This knowledge is “abstract” – that is, it is broad and not reducible to easily conveyed skills acquired relatively quickly through simple training. Professionals – *as members of their profession* – are required and expected to engage in continuous intellectual development, and keep current in the body of expert knowledge of their professions. To that end, professional knowledge continuously adapts as a profession learns better ways to meet the needs of the society it serves. The profession, in turn, devotes considerable resources to continuing education and development of its members. Professionals are given wide latitude to exercise their judgment with discretion to apply the knowledge they possess. In other words, in the absence of routine solutions to address a particular professional challenge, it is expected and reasonable that different members of a profession might approach a given problem in a range of ways. For members of the Navy profession, years of training and education yield specific expertise that should be applied with discretion and professional judgment.

Navy Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority: We learn and adapt, always getting better, striving to the limits of performance. We foster a questioning attitude and look at new ideas with an open mind. Our most junior teammate may have the best idea; we must be open to capturing that idea.

Professional ethic. Professions have their own internal ethic, and are expected to police the conduct of their fellow professionals. This professional ethic is defined by the profession’s espoused and enacted core values. Members of a profession are driven and motivated by shared professional values, with an expected sense of duty and pride in their profession and professional activity. As members of a profession grow and mature, *professional identity* emerges and becomes an important component of their personal sense of self – increasingly making their work no longer just about what they do, but also who they are. In the Navy, professional identity reflects our core values of Honor, Courage, and Commitment, and our core attributes of Integrity, Accountability, Initiative and Toughness. A strong professional identity, reinforced by

daily action consistent with these values and attributes, enhances the trust and confidence between commanders and subordinates necessary for decentralized operations.

Navy Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority: Our behaviors as individuals and as an organization align with our values as a profession. We actively strengthen each other's resolve to act consistently with our values. As individuals, as teams, and as a Navy, our conduct must always be upright and honorable both in public and when nobody's looking.

Professional autonomy. Professions are granted by their societies a high degree of autonomy to conduct their work according to their own expertise and ethic. The profession itself decides who is admitted, by what criteria, and who should be removed – in other words, professions have the responsibility for admitting, promoting, and policing its members. This autonomy, however, is provisional. It depends on the degree to which the society perceives the profession to be faithful to its espoused values and competent in its expertise. Said differently, it is the *trust* society places in the profession. When serious failures of competence and/or ethics become apparent, the society can and does reduce or even take away professional autonomy through government regulation, external inspection and review, or other mechanisms (for example, Congressional response to sexual assault in the military). The Navy has been granted a high degree of professional autonomy to manage our own system of admission, assignment and promotions, and discipline of our members, with the expectation of upholding the trust of the American people to achieve our missions and adhere to our professional ethic.

Navy Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority: We are a mission-focused force. We achieve and maintain high standards. Our actions support our strategy. We clearly define the problem we're trying to solve and the proposed outcomes. In execution, we honestly assess our progress and adjust as required – we are our own toughest critic. Our leaders take ownership and act to the limit of their authorities.

Profession and Bureaucracy

Of course this description of a profession is an “ideal type.” In reality, professions exist within, and interact with, another form of organization of work: bureaucracies. Physicians, for example, deal constantly with the demands of insurance companies, group practice requirement, and government regulation. Intrinsically bureaucracies are neither bad nor good. In fact, bureaucracies are very good at organizing and distilling large problems and ensuring uniform compliance with standards. Bureaucracies seek *efficiency* in resource utilization (e.g., people,

monies, etc.), centrally manage training requirements, and operate from the standpoint of close supervision. Professions, by contrast, focus on *effectiveness* in meeting the needs of the client (e.g., mission accomplishment), application of professional knowledge by individual members with discretion, and trust and confidence as the most effective means to lead others. Importantly, the profession v. bureaucracy dichotomy is not a simple matter of “good” vs. “bad.” Both have value. However, for professions to succeed in their service to society, *professional knowledge*, *professional ethic*, and *professional autonomy* must not be subsumed by bureaucracy. The implication for the Navy profession – and the military profession writ large – is that **bureaucracies don't win wars, professions do**. Operating through the lens of the Navy profession is a warfighting imperative.

Navy Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority: U.S. naval forces and operations – from the sea floor to space, from deep water to the littorals, and in the information domain – will deter aggression and enable peaceful resolution of crises on terms acceptable to the United States and our allies and partners. If deterrence fails, the Navy will conduct decisive combat operations to defeat any enemy.

Without question, there is inevitable tension between the profession and bureaucracy. This requires professionals to be alert to those tensions as well as careful to preserve and reinforce core professional values and functions; even while coping with inevitable – and at times necessary – bureaucratic processes. Because of the dual nature of naval service as both a profession and a bureaucracy, it is critical for the Navy to recognize these tensions and know when to assert the profession against bureaucratic tendencies. The attached comparison chart is instructive.

Professional Obligation

Our Navy profession must never be static. We must always seek new and better ways of thinking, acting, and leading to ensure our Navy is optimally prepared to meet the demands of the complex global security environment. This is what we exist to do. Therefore, there is an operational imperative – a warfighting imperative – that we view our Navy as a profession, and ourselves as members of a true naval profession.

Navy Profession and Bureaucracy Comparison

Derived from Snider, The Future of the Army Profession

Comparison	Profession	Bureaucracy
Knowledge	Expert, requires life-long learning and education to enhance experience	Skills based, learned on the job and/or through training
Application	Knowledge applied through discretion and judgment of individual professional; commitment based	Work accomplished by following SOPs, administrative rules and procedures; compliance based
Measure	Mission effectiveness	Efficiency of resource expenditure
Culture	Values and ethos based; granted autonomy with high degree of authority, responsibility and accountability, founded on trust; self-policing	Procedural compliance based; closely supervised with limited discretionary authority, highly structured, task-driven environment, founded on low-trust
Investments	Priority investment in leader development; human capital/talent management; investment strategy	Priority investment in hardware, routines; driven by cost
Growth	Develop critical thinking skills to spur innovation, flexibility, adaptability; broadened perspectives	Develop tactical and technical competence to perform tasks
Motivation	Selfless service, sense of duty, work is a calling; future focused	Ambition to get ahead, competition; problem solving