

BATTLE ON THE HOME FRONT:
A CONTINGENCY APPROACH TO ANALYZING HOW AN ARMY UNIT
COMMUNICATES WITH FAMILIES DURING A DEPLOYMENT

Franzine Biebl Schneider

Dr. Glen T. Cameron, Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

A case study with an Army aviation unit was conducted to determine what factors in Cameron's contingency theory contribute to how Army rear-detachment commanders and family readiness group leaders communicate with families in their unit during a deployment, as well as how the families perceive and respond to the communication they receive. In addition, the case study, which included a two-month communication audit, in-depth interviews and a survey, evaluated the stances and strategies of unit leadership as they moved along the continuum from advocacy to accommodation.

Results support the application of the contingency theory of accommodation to military unit leadership during times of deployment. Although unit leadership tended to advocate more than accommodate, the information communicated affected if and when unit leadership moved along the continuum toward accommodation. Two factors were found to trigger a shift in communication stances and strategies by unit leadership: the intended recipient of the communication and the source of the message. Although the presence of strong predisposing variables made Army units more likely to advocate, situational variables allowed the possibility for dynamic communication. The public was satisfied with the communication they received, and the findings suggested that FRG members responded favorably to the communication they received and felt positively toward unit leadership.