

## Power, Values, Rules and Leader Decision Making: A Discourse Perspective

**Authors :** Cathryn Robinson, Bernard McKenna, David Rooney

**Abstract :** This paper argues that the application of values-based leadership increasingly challenges leaders in rules-based organisations, particularly in bureaucratic organisations such as the military, public service, police, and emergency services. Leaders are grappling to reconcile how to enact values-based leadership and decision-making when they are bound by rules, policies, and procedures. This interpretive study used a multi-faceted vignette (critical incident) as the basis of an interview with air force officers at three levels: executive, senior, and junior. In this way, practice is forced to intersect with discourse. The findings revealed a shared set of discourse themes (legal; rules; safety and risk; operational practice/theatre discourses), but also clear dialectical tensions. These tensions were evident in executive officers and senior leaders emphasizing rules and information themes, whereas junior officers emphasized decision making, collateral, and situation. These findings reveal discourse and practice incommensurability that could have grave implications in the conduct of war.

**Keywords :** critical incident, discourse analysis, rules-based, values-based

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