

# DECISIVE POINT

The USAWC Press Podcast Companion Series

## Podcast Transcript

Jeff McManus

### “Operating Successfully Within the Bureaucracy Domain of Warfare: Part Two”

In this episode, Dr. Jeff McManus discusses his article, “Operating Successfully Within the Bureaucracy Domain of Warfare: Part Two.” He addresses seven key fundamentals for navigating bureaucracy, emphasizing the importance of principles, perspective, and prediction in policy making. McManus highlights effective persuasion strategies, the role of privacy in building trust, and how programming and budgeting influence policy formulation, as well as the significance of objectivity and social media’s impact on credibility, providing valuable insights for professionals navigating complex bureaucratic environments.

Read part one of the series here: <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol54/iss2/11/>

Listen to the podcast about part one of this series here: <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/SSI-Media/Recent-Publications/Article/3900805/operating-successfully-within-the-bureaucracy-domain-of-warfare-part-one/>

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#### Episode Transcript

##### Stephanie Crider (Host)

You’re listening to [Decisive Point](#). The views and opinions expressed in this podcast are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Department of the Army, the US Army War College, or any other agency of the US government.

Joining me today is Dr. Jeff McManus, author of “[Operating Successfully Within the Bureaucracy Domain of Warfare: Part Two](#),” which you can find in the [Autumn 2024 issue of Parameters](#). McManus is an assistant professor of strategic studies in the Department of Distance Education at the US Army War College.

Welcome back to Decisive Point, Jeff.

##### Jeff McManus

Thanks, Stephanie. Great to be here.

##### Host

Part one of your article addressed externally imposed fundamentals of policy—politics, personalities, and pressure. Let’s talk about the seven internally imposed fundamentals for successfully operating in bureaucracy. What do we need to know about principles in this context?

##### McManus

So, principles is the most important fundamental in my assessment of these internally controlled, or imposed, items. These are the red lines that entail the legality, professional ethics, and morality concepts. These are the personal and professional lines that you just must never cross.

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You hear a lot of talk about the illegal, unethical, immoral. Things that are illegal are forbidden by law. These are things determined by our society through our constitutional process with Congress and with the president.

Things [that] are unethical, are not in accordance with standards or rules of conduct. These are determined by our profession. And, as military officers swear an oath of allegiance, so do career civilians, to the Constitution. And then finally, is the acts that are immoral, contrary to the rules right of virtuous conduct. These are things that are determined individually.

You need to think about these ahead of time, know where these lines are, operate within them, but then always remember that something that is unwise or risky or ill considered or imprudent are not the same as red lines. Decisions get made that you may think [are] high risk or unwise, but that's not the same as something that is illegal. And, you need to be able to support the one, but not cross the red lines and support something that crosses those three factors.

### Host

What role does perspective play?

### McManus

This is the value that a policy professional brings is perspective. Context is key. And so, based on your expertise and your experience, knowing the local or bilateral or regional or global or even geostrategic issues and ramifications of potential options, this perspective, it's a core element of what you bring. It's the value that you add to their considerations. Being able to both understand and appreciate other stakeholders' interests and equities helps you help your senior decisionmaker, make the right choices, the best choices, for policy.

### Host

Prediction is next on the list. What do we need to know?

### McManus

Defining objectives and end states is always key, but this is something that's always easier said than done. In the process of policy making, usually seniors try to jump right to a solution before they fully understand what it is they're trying to solve. Having this ability to take a step back, think about what is the end state you're trying to achieve, predicting what the future might hold and how different stakeholders will react is very important. And that prediction is not only our own actions and responses, but it also includes our partners or allies, how they might respond or react to an option. And, always remember that the enemy gets a vote. So, adversaries themselves have inputs to the way our policies are implemented, and being able to think through, working closely with the Intelligence Community to factor those considerations in, is really part and parcel of that prediction fundamental.

### Host

Tell me about persuasion and bureaucracy.

### McManus

If you can't persuade, you will not be effective. Your persuasion, in my experience, is enhanced if you focus on pros and cons rather than right or wrong or good or bad. This is a right option or this is a good option versus that's a bad option, tends to bring with it more of a personal perspective and keeps you away from the unbiased sort of risk calculus we really want our seniors to be thinking about. Persuasion is always enhanced through consensus building, trying to find the win-win solution versus a win-lose or trying to make somebody lose at the table. If you can come up with solutions or options by which there are degrees of winning, that's better than putting somebody or an organization into a corner where they're going to lose.

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And finally, about persuasion, always, always remain professional. When you lose your cool or something becomes a personal antagonism, that comes through, and those will add additional walls or friction to your ability to persuade. And so, always, always keep your cool.

### Host

Privacy. Why does this matter?

### McManus

I would say that privacy is key based on three factors. First is the trust. Say what you mean, mean what you say, and do what you say you're going to do so seniors recognize that they're getting the bottom line from you. Second is discretion. If you want to be in the room where decisions are being discussed and made, then you need to protect the equity of your leader, your office, your organization [by] knowing what their mission and values and standards are. And third, is confidentiality. You want to always preserve decision space and option space for your boss to make their own calculations, their own decisions. And, if they're afraid that thinking out loud or playing out options with you, and your advice is going to leave the room before they've made their decision, again, you won't be in the room. Then your effectiveness will suffer from that.

### Host

How does programming impact policy professionals?

### McManus

Programming is the money or budget piece. Saying so doesn't automatically make it so. When you propose an option, you need to think through how the option would be implemented. Many policy professionals will come in and will put out options that really are not feasible from a resourcing point of view. Knowing the programming, planning, budgeting, and execution system, the PPBE process, how money flows in the department, if you know that, you'll have an inside track in terms of proposing options that not only make strategic sense but have viability from a resourcing point of view, [such as] resourcing with people, funds, you know, colors of money, program elements.

The more conversant you are in the budgeting process, the better of a policy adviser you will be.

### Host

The last item is permanence. Tell me about it.

### McManus

If you've ever operated within the Pentagon, there is a big difference in decision making—if it's just an e-mail that your boss sends out or if your boss signs a memo or if your boss signs off on a new DoD directive. The longer you want a policy to last, the more staffing it requires.

And again, understanding what is the objective of your boss [is important]. Is it something that they want to leave a long legacy and change the way the department does their business? Then it needs to be a DoD directive or a DoD manual or instruction. That changes doctrine over time. If it's just a quick decision to move one unit to another unit, that might be able to be accomplished through an e-mail, maybe through a memo. Understanding what is the purpose of the policy and then picking the product that has the longer legs serves you better. Too often, people will default to the easy solution and then wonder why, for example, a policy doesn't stick over the long term. That is why. You can't short circuit the coordination process if you want something to really pay dividends down the road.

### Host

Do you have any concluding thoughts you'd like to share with us?

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### McManus

Two things. First, it relates to your maintaining your objectivity. It's both real and perceived. The danger really comes into the use, in my view, of social media. If you really want to be taken seriously as a policy professional and be viewed objectively, then you need to be very, very careful about the use of tools like Facebook or X or Instagram or WhatsApp or whatever is out there. You cannot be objective from eight to five, say, in the Pentagon, and then, after hours, you're liking, disliking, or commenting negatively on decisions that your boss is making or on them personally. Nothing will undermine your credibility faster than doing something like that.

And so, my advice when I have mentored policy professionals is if you're thinking about using social media, just don't because it can really come back to bite you. A second, and I iterated this when we met previously, the purpose of these fundamentals is really for helping enable policy professionals, whether they're military officers or career civilians, to operate successfully in this bureaucracy that is part and parcel of our system. My view is if you take these things on board, if you operate within these parameters, it will enhance your ability to have trust and access with your seniors. It'll enable you to provide solid, objective advice that will be listened to, will be considered. And, it will give you the ability to speak truth to power in a manner that's most likely to be well-received to the overall benefit of national security in our country.

Thanks for this opportunity.

### Host

Thank you so much for being here. I hope I get it right, you mentioned one time when we talked before, if you're a true professional, your boss will never know your political persuasion.

### McManus

That is correct. That should be your measure of effectiveness in terms of when you come in in the morning and when you leave at the end of the day is that co-workers, and especially your seniors above you, should not know your personal persuasions. You can speak very aggressively and very strongly regarding positions that you take, but they need to be done in an objective way so that there's no underlying confusion or views or biases against your advice.

It's very hard to do, but if you want to be in that room when those decisions are being considered and made, then yeah, your objectivity is a critical aspect, and protecting it is so important.

### Host

Thank you so much. This was a pleasure. Listeners, you can read the article at [press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters](https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters). Look for volume 54, issue 3.

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