



Logisticians and leaders walk down a railroad ramp used for loading cargo ships at the port of Batumi, Georgia, on April 26, 2016, during the Southern Sustainment Terrain Walk organized by the 21st Theater Sustainment Command. The tour showcased sustainment resources in Turkey, Georgia, Romania, Slovenia, and Italy. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Jacob McDonald)



Building Tomorrow's Leaders by Design

■ By Col. Todd A. Heussner

FEATURES

To prepare for complex and ambiguous environments, the Army must create ideal leaders, put the right people in the right places, change the curriculum paradigm, and transform the instructional environment.

It has been said many times that war is chaos and that a plan never survives the first shot. Yet we continue to train Soldiers and leaders that there is only one correct answer to a question on a test. We use test scores to certify that we are prepared to engage with and destroy our enemies. However, time and again, it is a single individual facing an uncertain situation or ambiguous environment who makes a decision that turns the tide of battle.

When we train to the specific, we are not training the skills required for success on the battlefield or at the strategic level. We must train for ambiguity by designing programs of instruction that prepare leaders for the uncertainty that we will face on the battlefields of the future.

In February 2011, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates told United States Military Academy cadets, “When it comes to predicting the nature and location of our next military engagements, since Vietnam, our record has been perfect. We have never gotten it right.” If we do not know who we will fight, or even where we will fight, how can we be sure we are training the skills required to be successful on the battlefield of the future?

To guarantee our Army’s success in future conflicts, we must find a way to replicate in a training environment the uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity of an actual area of operations. We must build on our strengths while identifying and addressing areas where we can improve our institutional and operational training.

A Solution

Given the uncertainty of the future and the reality that the world is becoming more unpredictable and dangerous, how do we prepare our leaders? We must evaluate past successes, reduce them to the most basic components, and then master the skills that enhance our chances of success.

The Logistics Leader Development Strategy describes some of the abilities the Army is looking for in leaders, such as being able to plan and

adaptively execute effective support, comfortably make decisions with imperfect information, and develop Soldiers to be adaptive.

When we start out on a mission, it is always helpful to begin with the end state in mind. Therefore we must define the traits, characteristics, and abilities we want in our leaders in greater detail.

What We Want

The term “entrepreneurial leader” succinctly describes the ideal leader. An entrepreneur is someone who exercises initiative while undertaking risk in order to produce a profit. While the Army does not produce a profit in the business sense, it measures value in trust, respect, reputation, and competence.

We Army logisticians must consider profit as providing effective and efficient support to our teammates in a way that would cause them to choose us as their supporters if they were given a choice. We must develop entrepreneurial leaders who can solve ambiguous problems through initiative and risk-taking.

We must tailor our military education system to be one that creates problem-solving skills rather than one that teaches Soldiers to pick the right answers on a multiple-choice test. We must teach and enable leaders to solve ill-defined problems that have more than one right answer or, at the very least, to choose the least detrimental outcome.

To achieve these things, the Army should follow these four steps:

- ☐ Design a strategy for creating the ideal leader by looking at past commonalities.
- ☐ Put the right people in the right places.
- ☐ Change the curriculum paradigm.
- ☐ Transform the instructional environment.

Strategy for the Ideal Leader

Ultimately, our training environment should produce leaders who can achieve operational success and secure

victory in future conflicts. I have read many times that the Army has been perfectly wrong in predicting the future when it comes to the next war. With this in mind, we are forced to identify the common denominators needed for success regardless of the time, place, or adversary.

When we study successful battles and campaigns, we discover that there are common themes displayed by all great leaders. These traits should be our guide as we lay out our strategy.

The Logistics Leader Development Strategy, the Army Leader Development Strategy, and the School of Advanced Military Studies website all describe the attributes we are looking for in ideal leaders. Common traits include adaptive, creative, agile, and innovative. These people are critical thinkers and complex problem solvers who are comfortable with ambiguity.

I would add to the list people who take risks, have the courage to challenge the status quo, are confident in their abilities, and are willing to accept input and modify their thinking. Once the ideal, or standard, is defined and established, we can develop a strategy in our institutional training that seeks to create and replicate this type of leader.

Right People in the Right Places

Once we build consensus, we must assign the right people to positions that will enable them to model the standard. Senior Army leaders must identify subordinates who display these characteristics and assign them to key positions.

In doing so, they will nourish and solidify an emboldened culture within our Army—one that builds capability and fosters success. Junior leaders, in turn, will adapt and model their behavior to follow in the footsteps of their mentors.

There is always a danger that we might not pick the right leaders as we start down the path. However, that is the nature of transformational leadership. It is resilient, but it takes time to implement. Consistency will de-

termine success or failure as we move forward.

Achieving effective transformation and consistency depends on correctly identifying leaders who embody the ideal and institutionalizing the process to establish a path to success. The pitfall is that, as a general rule, we pick those who are like us. If we are to be successful in transforming our training and our culture, we must pick leaders whose personalities may be different but, as a whole, complement one another's strengths.

Again, common traits are creativity and the ability to challenge the status quo and take risks. These leaders must also be confident in their abilities, be open enough to accept input from others, and possess the maturity and flexibility to change their minds when presented with divergent points of view.

Furthermore, they must be "microdevelopers" while resisting the temptation to be micromanagers. This consideration moves to the forefront as we transform into the leaner and more agile formations of Force 2025.

Once we have the correct leaders in place within our operational units, we must select leaders for our training institutions. These individuals must not only lead but also possess the ability to teach others how to do the same. They must be comfortable teaching in an environment with little structure and be able to impress upon their students that ambiguity can be assumed, every problem has multiple solutions, and each course of action has associated risks.

Finally, we must select instructors who are committed to excellence and who exercise initiative in an attempt to continually challenge their students and improve their institutions. This requires instructors and administrators who are comfortable with outcomes-based action learning. This is a radical departure from our institutional training model and from the way we conduct home-station training.

We must reinvent our institutional training model along with the way we train in our units. Our new model

must be one that recognizes and promotes entrepreneurial leaders.

The Curriculum Paradigm

Retired Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, framed the present challenge best in his June 2016 interview with *Foreign Affairs* magazine. He stated, "It's the most dangerous period in my lifetime. In my 41 years of military experience, we often had the opportunity to focus on one security threat or another ... now we've got lots of things cropping up at the same time. We have multiple challenges competing for finite resources—and grotesque uncertainty with regard to the military budget."

Our current training model seeks to produce an end state characterized by predictability and certainty. Using this model, we are setting expectations that cannot be met in combat and forcing our leaders to quickly adjust to realities on the battlefield that they were not trained to face.

While our training has provided us with a foundation of technical competence, we have relied on our ability to identify leaders who have the traits needed for success in combat rather than developing them by design in our institutional and organizational training. If we introduce students and leaders to ambiguity, complexity, and uncertainty earlier and reinforce it in our operational units, we will make great strides in developing the leaders we need to carry us into the future.

After we define the characteristics and skills we want in our leaders, we must develop a curriculum that produces results that guarantee success on the battlefield.

My education, training, and experience has shown me that leaders always excel when they take initiative, develop creative solutions to unanticipated problems, take calculated risks, are aggressive and innovative, and have a genuine interest in people.

My professional education did not develop these characteristics and abilities. We learned doctrine and then were given multiple-choice tests to see



Second Lt. Dustin Peterson helps 2nd Lt. Dennis Price prepare for a briefing during the final exercise of the Ordnance Basic Officer Leader Course at the Army Logistics University on Dec. 13, 2016, at Fort Lee, Virginia. (Photo by Julianne Cochran)

if we could pick the one right answer.

It is absolutely important that we develop a solid professional understanding of doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel and facilities as a fundamental foundation, but we must then force our leaders to use that knowledge to solve ambiguous and ill-defined problems in a creative way.

There are no easy answers on a messy battlefield, and we must prepare our leaders to face uncertainty by intentionally placing them in uncomfortable situations before they arrive on the battlefield. Moving away from a multiple-choice test to ill-defined problems with messy solutions requires a shift in our curriculum and, more importantly, a shift in who we select to teach our future leaders.

The end of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan provides us with the opportunity to refocus our efforts and place some emphasis on rebuilding the Training and Doctrine Command by sending our most capable leaders to teach, coach, and mentor the future of our Army.

If we are to cement our future as the best trained, most capable army on the face of the earth, we can afford nothing less. Once we select our best leaders, we have to secure their futures by providing them the very best follow-on assignments and opportunities.

Nearly everything we do in our training and in our organizations is designed to reduce or eliminate chaos and ambiguity. We develop training with checklists, known answers, and desired outcomes because it is easy to evaluate. We take a bubble sheet, jam it through a reader, and out comes a grade. If only it were that easy on the battlefield.

Our experience in training for deployment has also taught us to follow an established path as we execute required predeployment training. This has negatively affected our ability to continue to develop creative solutions to emerging problems.

Our training must be tailored to replicate the conditions our leaders will face on the battlefield. We must trade schedules and predictability for

chaos and ambiguity.

If we are going to teach leaders to be comfortable in chaos and ambiguity, we should pick instructors who have demonstrated an ability to succeed in that type of environment so they can train our future leaders to succeed. Fortunately, we have a large pool of candidates who have been trained in combat and have demonstrated an ability to succeed in just such an environment.

The Instructional Environment

Once we have decided what we want to produce and have picked the right people to develop our product, we have to create a training environment that will produce leaders who will lead us into the future. That environment must encourage creativity and innovation.

We have to recognize and reward those who are comfortable and capable of operating in an ill-defined and ambiguous environment. We must work to place students in situations where they are required to apply foundational knowledge to ambiguous and

ill-defined problems and arrive at creative solutions.

Our current training model does a great job of providing foundational knowledge. Now we must take it to the next level by forcing students to use the information to synthesize solutions to unanticipated problems when the outcome is not known or predetermined.

Producing leaders at the institutional level will have limited impact if we do not follow it up by reinforcing the training at the unit level once leaders arrive in operational Army units. Again, in units, we work to reduce chaos, ambiguity, and uncertainty. We are working against ourselves in a vain attempt to improve performance.

We must work to teach the skills required to succeed in combat by encouraging leaders and Soldiers to thrive in chaos, uncertainty, and ambiguity. Our leaders in the field must be comfortable with risk and underwrite mistakes.

Combat is a series of events that are uncontrolled, unmanaged, and unpredictable. We must create these same opportunities in garrison and in our training. This flies in the face of all that we have been taught throughout our military careers.

We must teach all of our Soldiers to take initiative, exercise judgment, and take calculated risks while they are under stress. We train with predictability and certainty and then wonder why we have issues with resilience. If we want Soldiers who are strong, confident, and comfortable on the battlefield, we have to train them for the rigors of combat before they arrive on the battlefield.

The 43rd Sustainment Brigade

The 43rd Sustainment Brigade deployed in February 2013 as the headquarters of the U.S. Central Command Materiel Recovery Element (CMRE). The execution of the CMRE mission was proof that training at home station as you operate in war is the best preparation a leader can provide for a unit.

This nonstandard mission was the

epitome of uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. The problems were complex, were unanticipated, and required creativity to solve; there was never one right answer.

This was the perfect opportunity to validate whether the unit's training prepared it to operate effectively in a challenging environment, void of any doctrine, tactics, techniques, procedures, and established operational guidelines. The unit's Soldiers, non-commissioned officers, and officers executed the mission flawlessly, and they made it look easy.

While at Fort Carson, Colorado, the 43rd Sustainment Brigade established a sustainment operations center that received, processed, resourced, and supervised the execution of all sustainment missions at Fort Carson and in support of a disaster relief operation when the Waldo Canyon fire consumed parts of Colorado Springs.

While the unit worked to reduce no-notice missions, it always responded when units called for support. The Soldiers learned agility, flexibility, and adaptability. They executed daily battle update briefings and weekly support operations synchronization meetings, and they managed sustainment across Fort Carson on a daily basis.

Because of this preparation, the brigade's Soldiers easily and effortlessly transitioned into the CMRE mission and were never stressed as they executed their mission in support of retrograde operations. They trained on a daily basis for just such a mission while at Fort Carson.

At Fort Carson, the brigade established "big idea groups" in which Soldiers, noncommissioned officers, and officers tackled big Army problems like budget, recruiting, training, and property accountability. These are complex problems that have no right answer, and in some cases Soldiers were forced to pick the best of the bad options. Again, this prepared them to attack complex and ambiguous problems with confidence since they had done it routinely at home.

The brigade turned daily sustainment missions at home station into

deliberate combat patrols. Rather than just delivering fuel from the motor pool to a supported unit's motor pool as an administrative move, the brigade developed concepts of operations, resourced, rehearsed, and executed deliberate multiechelon, combined arms operations that included maneuver, aviation, engineers, and military police.

Once again, when called upon to execute similar operations in Afghanistan, the Soldiers executed without missing a beat.

As logisticians, we have the opportunity to perform our wartime missions daily in a garrison environment. Setting up systems and processes at home station that replicate combat operations makes the transition to combat uneventful for our Soldiers. We simply change the location to another theater and execute established procedures in a new environment.

This current period of transition is an exciting opportunity to transform our training, education, and experience. We must ensure that we identify the skills we want in our leaders and develop training that encourages, nurtures, and rewards with opportunities those who display desired skills.

If we are to be successful in our transformation, we absolutely must select leaders who embody the traits and characteristics we desire in our subordinates. Once we have the right training to produce necessary skills, the right leaders to grow those skills, and the right organizational construct to reinforce them, we will deliberately produce the leaders of the future who will continue to lead us to victory.

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