

Developing Lieutenants in a Transforming Army

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ACCORDING TO U.S. Army doctrine, “leadership is key, and the actions of leaders often make the difference between success and failure, particularly in small units.”¹ Leadership is a deciding factor on the battlefield and takes many forms. No one leadership style, action, or trait is universally effective for all situations.

What, then, should be the focus of Army leader development? Which traits should the Army develop? Which actions should the Army emulate? Which examples should the Army study as models of leadership behavior, and which should the Army ignore as historical anomalies? The dynamic nature of the environment in which officers will lead is also an important consideration in making any future determination.

To maximize the benefit of its technological edge in materiel in any future conflict, the Army must adapt its leader development system to changes in social, political, or military domains. As societies change, new types of missions emerge and new organizations form. The Army must anticipate leadership requirements and develop the attributes its future leaders will need rather than relying on old leadership theories.

One glaring weakness in the Army’s current leader development system is its development of lieutenants. The Army’s leader development program emphasizes three pillars of development: institutional training, operational assignments, and self-development.² Because most new lieutenants have little operational experience, their leadership development rests primarily in the institutional domain.

Because of their limited experience, lieutenants are likely to be unsure of what aspects of leadership they need to focus on for self-development. Young leaders begin to understand where to focus self-development activities only after experiencing situations that call for leadership skills and receiving feedback on their performance.³ Lieutenants rely primarily on the Army’s institutions for their initial

development. Unfortunately, the institutional training portion of the Army’s leader development system has failed to adapt to the changing nature of conflict and does not adequately prepare lieutenants to lead soldiers in today’s environment.

Changes in the conflict environment have created doubts about the relevance of the existing leader development paradigm as it prepares leaders for today’s environment.⁴ Junior leaders must now lead soldiers in increasingly complex and ambiguous circumstances where seemingly simple tactical decisions can have dramatic strategic implications.⁵ Potential unintended second- and third-order effects of tactical decisions are not always immediately evident, especially to inexperienced new lieutenants. Newly commissioned officers might not be adequately prepared to handle such situations unless the Army teaches them how to deal with ambiguity and complexity.⁶

In addition to dealing with a changing environment, the Army faces societal value changes, such as diminished service ethic and organizational commitment, which create additional challenges for direct-level leaders.⁷ Just as advances in technology lead to changes in equipment, organization, and doctrine, changes in social and political conditions require changes in the way leaders influence subordinates.

Because lieutenants are direct-level leaders who motivate new soldiers during any operation, societal changes will more likely present more leadership challenges for lieutenants than for higher-ranking or strategic-level leaders. Changes at strategic and tactical levels of the conflict environment present additional challenges for lieutenants.

The New World Order

Since 1989, the United States has shifted its strategic focus from opposing a single peer adversary to countering an almost unlimited number of potential threats across the complete spectrum of conflict.⁸ President George H.W. Bush used the phrase

Second Lieutenant Conor Winslow, a platoon leader in the 10th Mountain Division, asks village elders to lock up all dogs and move women to an area where they won't come into contact with American soldiers during a weapons search, Shiakhan, Afghanistan, August 2003.



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“new world order” to describe the changing strategic landscape. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations, the strategic environment has become much more complex and ambiguous. Lieutenants must now be prepared to lead in conventional major theater wars and stability operations and support operations. This poses a particular leadership problem for the lieutenant who must inspire subordinates to accomplish any mission. Such strategic issues create myriad additional tactical leadership problems.⁹

Because of changing global politics, societal idiosyncracies, and organizational transformation, several aspects of the tactical environment have changed. Operations U.S. forces are likely to be engaged in have shifted from conventional warfare to stability operations and support operations, the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), and contingency or expeditionary operations. Troops are more dispersed across the battlefield and interspersed with noncombatants, who range from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), to members of the news media, to displaced civilians. U.S. societal changes have altered the force's makeup so it is more diverse, and soldiers have different value systems from those of past generations. Each of these variables significantly affects leadership and should also significantly affect the leader development system.

Battlefield Dispersion

Since the advent of the rifled musket, technological advances have caused the battlefield to become increasingly dispersed and fragmented. As weapons more lethal and communications equipment became more reliable, commanders altered battlefield tactics to make soldiers more survivable. One tactical change was to disperse troops on the battlefield. Since the late 19th century, the distance between soldiers in combat and other operations has been continually increasing, creating new challenges for leading soldiers in battle.¹⁰

Dispersion makes it more difficult to engage in direct leadership to convince soldiers of their safety and the importance of mission accomplishment.¹¹ Citing a study by Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz in his book *Combat Motivation*, Anthony Kellest states, “Cohesion within the primary group was enhanced by spatial proximity, by the capacity for intimate communication, by the provision of personal protectiveness from junior officers.”¹² In short, platoon leaders provide a sense of security for soldiers. Producing that feeling of protection when units are spread across larger and larger spaces is increasingly difficult.

Dispersion adds to the leadership dilemma. Junior leaders are often faced with making political-military decisions previously reserved for more senior

officers.¹³ In a discussion of U.S. involvement in peace operations, David R. Segal and Dana P. Eyre state, "The very nature of these operations precludes effective centralization of decisionmaking."¹⁴ Whether negotiating, mediating disputes, or interpreting rules of engagement, young leaders face difficult decisions that require a broad understanding of the mission's context. Dispersion inhibits a lieutenant's ability to seek guidance from senior officers in how to deal with these issues and to effectively monitor and control subordinate actions across a wide area of operations.

The difficulty becomes even more problematic when combined with other aspects of the changing tactical environment. With the influx of members of the news media and other civilians on the battlefield, it is more likely that decisions at every level will have immediate consequences for the entire operation. Noncombatants' presence increases the likelihood that military actions are no longer confined to a military audience. Information quickly passes to civilian channels today. Seeing the broader picture and making decisions accordingly requires a mature lieutenant with an ability for systems thinking.

Systems thinking, according to Peter M. Senge, is "a discipline for seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things."¹⁵ Because of the potentially strategic effect of tactical actions, lieutenants must think through second- and third-order implications of their tactical decisions before executing them. They must see the interrelationships between parts of the entire system and convey that understanding to subordinates to empower them to make decisions that do not create strategic consequences contrary to mission success.

The Changing Society

In addition to the problems associated with dispersion of the battlefield, young leaders face the challenge of motivating and inspiring a new generation of soldiers. Changes in societal values have caused the U.S. military to create special enticements for people to join it and offer unprecedented incentives for those who are already serving to remain on active duty. These include monetary inducements, promises of increased stabilization, a reduced operational tempo (OPTEMPO), and improvements in pay and benefits. These changes and incentives are necessary to recruit and retain the Army's all-volunteer force because society today and "Generation X" have different values than past generations.¹⁶

Many youths do not see the need to serve their country when they can make more money working

in civilian jobs.¹⁷ Generation X'ers reportedly do not possess the inclination toward selfless service to the Nation.¹⁸ A report on military culture from the Center for Strategic and International Studies states, "The family structure in the United States has been weakened, and we have produced a generation of bright young people who all too often lack role models or moral anchors. In addition, a booming economy, the lack of a major military adversary, and decreasing numbers of community leaders with military experience have made military service an increasingly remote issue for many Americans."¹⁹

The implications are many. Soldiers who enter the military do so with fundamentally different motives. The leader must inculcate appropriate values in these soldiers and inspire them to accomplish missions they cannot easily link to a vital national interest. The leader must articulate the purpose of an operation and clearly link it to a higher cause that will motivate subordinates and inspire them to great achievement.

An additional challenge for new lieutenants is the increased number of civilians and noncombatants on the battlefield. Noncombatants might be from the host nation or from any one of a number of NGOs or private voluntary organizations (PVOs) on the battlefield, especially during humanitarian support operations. The news media has increasingly stepped up its efforts when U.S. forces deploy. This phenomenon is not restricted to humanitarian operations. The media is just as likely to be present on the conventional battlefield of the future as it is during a peace operation. Leaders will have to know how to interact with and influence these individuals so they do not interfere with the success of tactical missions.

In addition to the potential effect on tactical operations, the presence of the news media is a primary reason for the increasing link between tactics and strategy. As news media present near-real time information to the public, small unit actions are observed or read about by a large audience worldwide and have the potential to cause strategic consequences. Lieutenant Commander John F. Kirby, a former public affairs officer for the U.S. Second Fleet, wrote, "News reporting is often just as significant in determining success as military action."²⁰ Interacting in a positive way with media personnel and understanding the potential media consequences of decisions can help tremendously in maintaining positive public opinion about any operation.

The presence of other noncombatants also creates challenges for tactical leaders such as the

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A lieutenant from the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment interrogates a man detained near Falluja, Iraq, after a rocket was fired on soldiers removing contraband from a weapons cache, 27 August 2003.

lieutenant. American forces rely increasingly on contractors for logistics and maintenance support during operations. Contractors are part of the U.S. contingent but are not in the military chain of command and do not answer directly to the lieutenant. NGOs and PVOs also have significant influence during operations. Humanitarian relief agencies sometimes have a different agenda or mode of operation than military forces and are not constrained by the rules of engagement as U.S. soldiers are. Officers at every level must understand and respect others' positions and work with them to get the maximum benefit from their organizations.²¹

Because of the presence of so many nonmilitary personnel on the battlefield, lieutenants must deal effectively with personnel who are not in their chain of command but who wield significant influence because of their position, skills, or knowledge. The Army must teach lieutenants how to influence these people even though they do not have any real authority over them. Influencing people outside of the military organization requires seeing others' perspectives, tolerating ambiguity, having a variety of leadership techniques, and being persuasive.

Leadership Requirements

Leadership challenges for junior officers will arise from leading a diverse group of subordinates, with

diverse value systems dispersed on a battlefield that includes combatants and noncombatants. Young leaders' decisions have tactical and strategic implications. For the Army to be successful, its leader development system must instill the knowledge, skills, and behaviors (KSBs) that will help young leaders succeed under these conditions.

The new battlefield environment requires a leader who is more than just tactically and technically proficient in branch-specific skills. The Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) Future Lieutenant Study concludes that "a rich and varied sociopolitical knowledge base is often more important than a proficiency with the employment of weapons systems."²² Simply understanding the mission and intent of the next higher commander is no longer sufficient. Special emphasis must be paid to U.S. national interests and how the operation supports them. Commanders must expand the intent of the operation to include the rationale for that intent. Lieutenants must understand the big picture. A clear expression of the commander's intent provides the added benefit of helping expand lieutenants' professional development and their perceptions of situations by forcing them to think in broader terms; that is, develop a systems approach to thinking.

U.S. society's changing nature significantly affects leadership and requires a new lieutenant to have

specific KSBs. Many soldiers entering the service today do so because they want to make money for college or to acquire a set of skills for a future career, not because they have a strong desire to serve the Nation. This presents a problem for lieutenants who engage in an autocratic leadership style based on the old Army system of enforced discipline and obedience. For subordinates to change their values, they need to perceive that a leader believes in those values and sincerely cares about their welfare.²³

This does not imply that discipline and obedience have lost their place in the military. The military must continue to instill values in its soldiers. The nature of today's force, however, requires that leaders treat soldiers with more respect and impart discipline, in the authoritarian sense, out of necessity rather than routine. Discipline should not be the default answer to get soldiers to obey orders. The Army must teach lieutenants a variety of leadership techniques to inspire soldiers and to create the desire to obey; in short, the Army must educate them in the art of leadership.

Each soldier and noncombatant is unique. The lieutenant must be able to differentiate between individuals and choose an appropriate leadership style or action depending on the circumstances. The Army must teach lieutenants a variety of leader behaviors so they can choose the appropriate one when the situation arises. Emotional intelligence enhances the ability to discern relevant situational cues to choose the correct leadership strategy.²⁴ Developing this critical skill, combined with education in leadership theories and understanding human behavior, will significantly enhance young officers' performance in any potential situation.

In this new environment, leadership requirements entail three underlying principles. First, lieutenants and officers in general must maintain a systems perspective and understand how the military fits into the sociopolitical landscape. Lieutenants must comprehend the military's role in political affairs and explain how the intent of an action relates to national interests. Rather than simply understanding an operation's basic mission and intent, lieutenants must understand how the mission fits into the tactical scenario and how tactical decisions affect larger operational and strategic schemes. This breadth of understanding is often reserved for the education of officers at more senior levels. Developing the ability of systems thinking requires a long period of education and experience. It is not something that can be taught just before deployment. The Army must

include it as a part of a lieutenant's precommissioning education.

Second, The Army must educate lieutenants and officers in the sciences of human behavior and in the art and science of leadership. Leadership theorist Bernard M. Bass recommends that the Army use what he calls transformational leadership.²⁵ His empirical data support the notion that transformational leadership is not just beneficial for the Army but is *necessary* if Army leaders are to be successful. Transformational leadership is "based on long-term development rather than a quick dose of training. On the other hand, transactional leaders tended to take on particular leadership roles according to the situation they faced—the kind of leadership then taught in short-term training programs."²⁶ The implication is that if the Army desires transformational leaders, it must develop the KSBs for transformational leadership at an early point in the leaders' development and take a long-term approach to training. Short-term training on leadership theories, or simple tactics, techniques, and principles for particular scenarios, does not produce the necessary skills for lieutenants and other officers to influence soldiers' values and actions.

According to Bass, transformational leadership also helps leaders instill greater commitment in the military and the current mission.²⁷ This might be especially important when it is difficult for soldiers to see relevance in what they are doing. In such cases, the lieutenant must be able to explain the mission's purpose and appeal to soldiers' motivations and values to encourage them to work harder at tasks they perceive as unimportant. Transformational leadership involves interaction and results in commitment. Although transactional leadership often results in behavior change (such as compliance), it is less likely to produce attitudinal change. The attitudinal change that results in a long-term commitment should be the goal for most leadership situations, however.

The Army must increase lieutenants' ability to decide what leader actions to take. With complex operations and diverse forces on the battlefield, leaders will find it difficult to tailor leadership skills to suit subordinates' needs. Often, especially in stressful conditions, inexperienced leaders will revert to the default autocratic leadership style that worked in the past. Since lieutenants have a limited number of experiences from which to draw, the added stress of a tactical situation can result in a poor decision.²⁸ Leadership scholars Robert Cooper and Ayman Sawaf note, "Whenever stress rises, the human brain



Sergeant Ronald Best and 2d Lieutenant Paolo Sica of the 28th Infantry Division find their position on the Balkan Digitization Initiative, a tactical mapping system, and determine which direction they will travel to conduct surveillance watches for smugglers, 26 August 2003.

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switches to autopilot and has an inherent tendency to do more of the same, only harder.²⁹ Unfortunately, the resulting decisions are often inappropriate for the situation or person in question.

In a research report on leadership, Robert Hooijberg, R. Craig Bullis, and James G. Hunt describe a new theory of leadership that incorporates leader flexibility.³⁰ They argue that effective leadership requires leaders to exhibit “behavioral complexity”—a variety of roles and behaviors to use depending on the situation. The leader’s ability to discern the important aspects of the situation and to choose the appropriate leader response from his “behavioral repertoire” is critical.

Emotional intelligence, popularized by Daniel Goleman in his book *Emotional Intelligence* has received recent attention as one predictor of effective leadership.³¹ Emotional intelligence refers to leaders’ abilities to “maintain control of their emotions and to read and respond appropriately to the emotions of other people.”³² Emotional intelligence helps leaders accurately assess relevant variables in a given context, including their own emotions, and adjust their actions to better respond to that situation. When combined with training on how to motivate subordinates, emotional intelligence allows leaders to adjust their actions to best fit the situation.

Changing strategic environments necessitate

change. The focus is no longer on the Soviet Union as the one major, conventional threat. The Army might find itself mired in regional conflicts with distant connections to the public’s perception of national interests. This requires leaders who can inspire subordinates toward mission accomplishment when intrinsic motivation is lacking.

Dispersed troops necessitate transformational approaches to leadership. A leader’s concern for subordinates as individuals is likely to give them greater confidence. Soldiers will better withstand the forces that diminish cohesion in times of danger if they believe that their leader truly cares for them and will not abandon them or unnecessarily place them in harm’s way.

As dispersion causes lieutenants and other leaders to increasingly make quick decisions with potentially strategic outcomes, it becomes evident that developing a systems thinking approach in lieutenants is a necessity. Leaders must grasp the larger context, anticipate the long-term, strategic consequences of tactical decisions, think beyond immediate tactical situations, and anticipate the long-term consequences of every action.

Leaders must also discern subtle cues from the environment when making decisions. As more civilians enter the battlefield and peace operations become more frequent, leaders must be able to

influence people who are not under their direct control. They must be able to defuse potentially dangerous situations and resolve conflicts in a timely, efficient manner. Emotional intelligence aids in this effort by making leaders more aware of themselves and those around them.

Leader Development System

Institutional training and education provides the foundation for Army leader development followed by continued development through operational assignments and self-study. The institutional foundation is divided into pre- and postcommissioning education. Three primary commissioning sources exist in the precommissioning realm: the ROTC, the U.S. Military Academy (USMA), and the Officer Candidate School (OCS), each of which attempts to give cadets leadership experience by allowing them to lead their peers while in school. While this experience is beneficial, it is insufficient. Leading peers with similar values and beliefs is much different from leading a diverse group of soldiers in a unit. It takes a different type of leader to influence someone's values. Because of the relative homogeneity of the value systems of officer candidates, these leadership situations cannot provide the future officer with a complete developmental experience.

Only a select few leaders in ROTC, USMA, or OCS actually maximize the benefit from their positions. Class leaders (battalion commanders) are the only cadets routinely exposed to the thinking of senior officers so that they can benefit from mentorship. Other future officers do not get this developmental experience.

Precommission training provides little decision-making or inspirational leadership experience, and the curriculum outcomes for precommissioning are not sufficient to prepare lieutenants for an initial assignment with troops. Of the 87 precommissioning tasks that leader development doctrine outlines, only 5 are directly related to leadership or the development of systems thinking.³³

After commissioning, lieutenants are sent to their branch-specific Officer's Basic Course (OBC). At OBC, officers learn the requisite skills to perform designated missions for their specific branch. The basic courses focus on the platoon leader's necessary technical and tactical skills for the branch's primary go-to-war mission. The focus of instruction at the Infantry Officer's Basic Course for example, is on tasks necessary to leading an infantry platoon for specific missions. However, leadership instruction is limited to just 13 hours.³⁴ While the tactical and technical proficiencies taught during OBC are important,

the time spent on developing this knowledge takes time from the important developmental tasks of broadening perspectives, thinking in terms of systems, and learning leadership theories and techniques.

After basic leader development in precommissioning education and at the branch-specific OBCs, the Army relies on experience gained during operational assignments and self-development to complete a lieutenant's development. The operational assignments have shortcomings in terms of developing lieutenants as leaders. According to Army doctrine, operational assignments provide "the experience needed for more complex and higher-level assignments."³⁵ While this prepares officers for *future* assignments, it does nothing to prepare them for conducting operations in their initial units. Therefore, other than OCS graduates and a small percentage of officer candidates in ROTC and the USMA who served previously as enlisted soldiers, most newly commissioned lieutenants have only limited operational experience when they arrive at their initial assignments.

The final pillar of the Army's leader development system is self-development. On commissioning, each officer is expected to begin a program of self-improvement to supplement his institutional training and operational assignment experiences. Self-development includes reading professional books and articles, seeking developmental assignments, and self-evaluation. Department of the Army (DA) Pamphlet 350-58, *Leader Development for America's Army*, states, "The concept of self development places responsibility squarely on the leader to do his share to attain and sustain competency."³⁶ The problem with this concept is that it assumes that leaders know what it is they need to improve. This might be true for some leaders with experience, but it is not true for most newly commissioned lieutenants.

According to the Center for Creative Leadership, leader development depends on assessment, challenge, and support.³⁷ For lieutenants to be able to understand the leader dimensions on which they need to improve, they must compare their current leadership abilities with the leadership KSBs needed for success. This requires that they have enough experience to identify shortcomings in their own self-development. Lieutenants, however, have limited experience with the type of complex environments in which they are likely to find themselves and cannot accurately assess their leadership weaknesses.

The Army's leader development system fails to provide the lieutenant with sufficient information or experience to succeed in his first assignment. Al-



First Lieutenant Eric Klage (*left*), Second Lieutenant Kurt Koptish, a medical platoon leader (*right*), and an interpreter coordinate the next day's 1st Armored Division Medical Civil Assistance Program mission with the mayor of Jabugani, Kosovo, January 2001.

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though the system is logical and progressive, its design has a fundamental flaw that places lieutenants at a great disadvantage. Professor Donald H. Horner, Jr., notes that “the Army’s system is predicated on the belief that leaders should have the opportunity to grow over the course of a career to handle the increased levels of responsibility accompanying promotion.”³⁸

To be successful, the Army’s leader development system must assume that lieutenants will not deploy until they have had sufficient time in their first unit to identify shortcomings and address them. Given the pace and nature of recent operations and the current personnel policy, this assumption is likely to prove false.

In the current system, the Army presumes lieutenants need only a basic level of KSBs and that senior leaders require a different set of skills and attributes. This might be true to some degree, but the distinction is blurring. The tactical environment’s changing nature requires lieutenants to have skills and attributes previously thought unnecessary until later in their careers. The problem is that the current leader development system cannot ensure officers develop these attributes early enough in their careers for them to be of any benefit.

Stanley A. McChrystal, John D. Gardner, and Timothy P. McHale identified shortcomings in officer education in a 1997 study and recommended a change in instruction at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College to include classes on systems thinking.³⁹ They identified this as a need for field grade officers and concluded that the Army’s leader development system did not adequately prepare officers to think in these terms. Given today’s conflict environment, one can argue that the Army should teach and develop this ability even earlier in the institutional system so lieutenants can learn how to cope with the future battlefield’s complexity.

Recommendations

The Army should reduce the amount of time spent on tactical proficiency during precommissioning and OBC. While technical and tactical proficiency is desired for a new lieutenant, the nature of current operations and the social demographics of the force require more. Focusing on tactical and technical competence reduces the amount of time during precommissioning and OBC that can be spent on other topics, such as understanding human behavior, motivating and influencing others, and developing emotional intelligence and systems thinking.

Leadership theory and human behavior should be required courses for all cadets regardless of the commissioning source. This education should be reinforced during OBCs with examples and vignettes from the specific branch. Officers should role-play leadership scenarios in a variety of contexts and critique each other's actions. This would afford officers opportunities to reflect on their personal leadership philosophies and see how alternative leader actions can be effective.

While leadership training would reduce the amount of time available for developing tactical proficiency, once they arrive at their units, lieutenants and other officers should spend time interacting with noncommissioned officers (NCOs) to learn weapons systems and tactics in greater detail. Not only would this provide lieutenants with the knowledge necessary to lead soldiers effectively, it would require them to interact with soldiers once they arrive at their units.

A second recommendation is to put lieutenants into a staff position as soon as they enter a unit

rather than asking them to lead soldiers they are unprepared to lead. Since operational assignments are such a critical part of leader development, a lieutenant should be able to benefit from being in a unit before assuming the responsibility of leadership. Lieutenants should be given a staff role to perform while they become tactically and technically proficient. During this time they can observe leaders at all levels and compare the actions they see with the leader actions they studied during institutional training. They should also have a more senior officer as a mentor to provide them the opportunity to mature and to broaden their perspectives.

Finally, the Army must inculcate the belief that lieutenants are part of a profession. The Army must remember that lieutenants are from the same generation as the soldiers they must lead. To influence subordinates' values, leaders must set the example through personal sacrifice.⁴⁰ If lieutenants are expected to instill a selfless-service ethic in their subordinates, the Army must first imbue them with it. **MR**

NOTES

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