



ARROYO CENTER

THE ARTS
CHILD POLICY
CIVIL JUSTICE
EDUCATION
ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT
HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
NATIONAL SECURITY
POPULATION AND AGING
PUBLIC SAFETY
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
SUBSTANCE ABUSE
TERRORISM AND
HOMELAND SECURITY
TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE
WORKFORCE AND WORKPLACE

This PDF document was made available from www.rand.org as a public service of the RAND Corporation.

[Jump down to document](#) ▼

The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world.

Support RAND

[Purchase this document](#)

[Browse Books & Publications](#)

[Make a charitable contribution](#)

For More Information

Visit RAND at www.rand.org

Explore [RAND Arroyo Center](#)

View [document details](#)

Limited Electronic Distribution Rights

This document and trademark(s) contained herein are protected by law as indicated in a notice appearing later in this work. This electronic representation of RAND intellectual property is provided for non-commercial use only. Permission is required from RAND to reproduce, or reuse in another form, any of our research documents.

This product is part of the RAND Corporation monograph series. RAND monographs present major research findings that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors. All RAND monographs undergo rigorous peer review to ensure high standards for research quality and objectivity.

Something Old, Something New

Army Leader Development in a Dynamic Environment

Henry A. Leonard, J. Michael Polich, Jeffrey D. Peterson,
Ronald E. Sortor, S. Craig Moore

Prepared for the United States Army
Approved for public release; distribution unlimited



ARROYO CENTER

The research described in this report was sponsored by the United States Army under Contract No. DASW01-01-C-0003.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Something old, something new : Army leader development in a dynamic environment / Henry A. Leonard . . . [et al.].

p. cm.

“MG-281.”

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-8330-3887-7 (pbk.)

1. United States. Army—Officers—Training of. 2. Command of troops.
3. Leadership—United States. I. Leonard, Henry A.

UB413.S65 2006

355.5'50973—dc22

2005034812

The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors.

RAND® is a registered trademark.

© Copyright 2006 RAND Corporation

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from RAND.

Published 2006 by the RAND Corporation

1776 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90407-2138

1200 South Hayes Street, Arlington, VA 22202-5050

201 North Craig Street, Suite 202, Pittsburgh, PA 15213-1516

RAND URL: <http://www.rand.org/>

To order RAND documents or to obtain additional information, contact

Distribution Services: Telephone: (310) 451-7002;

Fax: (310) 451-6915; Email: order@rand.org

Summary

Background

Over the past two decades many aspects of military operations have changed profoundly, with the potential for equally profound effects on the things that Army leaders must know and do. The tangible threat of the Soviet Union has been replaced by amorphous, changing, and ill-defined threats and challenges. Simultaneously, the focus has shifted toward stability operations, support operations, and military operations other than war. As a result, considerations that once were peripheral now often take center stage. These changes have created a dynamic situation—volatile, unpredictable, and novel in many respects—making the conduct of military operations more complex and varied than in the past.

The Department of Defense and the Army have taken many steps to adapt to these changes, but so far that adaptation has centered largely on the more tangible elements and mechanics of war: weapons, logistics, doctrine, unit organization, and basing. Less attention was paid at first to how the contemporary environment affects soldiers and especially *leaders*. Since it seems likely that the new environment may call for officers to have different skills, greater knowledge in certain areas, or a different intellectual orientation toward command and decision making, we undertook an examination of how recent changes in the operational environment might have affected leadership requirements. We then assessed the degree to which the Army may need to make corresponding changes in how officers are educated, developed, and prepared for the fluidity of the contemporary environment.¹

Something Old: Foundations of Military Leadership

Many of the general attributes that the Army seeks in officers reflect timeless values that will remain at the core of leadership. These enduring attributes include character

¹ Parallel concerns may apply to noncommissioned officers and other leaders. However, we limited our scope to commissioned officers.

and values as well as many basic military technical and operational skills (the “something old” in our title). The Army’s long-standing formulation of leadership’s core (Department of the Army, 1999) is built around three critical aspects:

- What the leader must *Be* (the persona, primarily character);
- What he or she must *Know* (from very general to very specific areas of knowledge and skill, over a range of disciplines); and
- What he or she must *Do* (the kinds of actions leaders must take to make their organizations accomplish their tasks and function effectively).

The Army’s doctrine, in common with other treatments of leadership, particularly emphasizes character as essential to success in leadership. That doctrine lists seven values that form the essence of military character, the foundation of what the leader must Be: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, personal courage. The other aspects of what the leader must Be fall into three categories: mental, physical, and emotional. The mental category includes will, self-discipline, initiative, judgment, self-confidence, intelligence, and cultural awareness. The physical dimension includes physical fitness, general good health, and military and professional bearing. The most important emotional attributes are identified as self-control, balance, and stability. No doubt the value of these attributes will endure. Nevertheless, even at this level of generality, some attributes may need to be developed in different ways or to a different degree. For example, cultural awareness is taking on greater importance throughout the Army, and particularly at lower levels in the chain of command. Likewise intellectual acuity, while always a desirable trait, is being applied in different decision-making processes to deal with new challenges. Thus, it is now more important to develop officers with well-grounded intellectual and critical thinking abilities, practiced intensively across a range of situations.

The other two elements of the Army’s leadership construct cover what the leader must Know and Do. The Know and Do arenas are closely interlinked, in part because much of the learning that contributes to knowing what to do comes from doing, i.e., from experience. Under these rubrics the doctrine identifies four general categories of skills needed for successful leadership (interpersonal, conceptual, technical, and tactical skills) and three types of actions that officers must take (influencing, operating, and improving the units and systems under their command). Recent official updates (e.g., U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 2001) also call out new requirements, often implying some change in the way leaders need to reason toward sound decisions. For example, it is now said that officers need “self-awareness” (roughly, understanding one’s own capabilities and limitations relative to the situation) and “adaptability” (an ability to learn new things necessary in changing circumstances and change accordingly).

In this monograph we focus on more detailed abilities that fall into those general categories. In most treatments the technical and tactical dimensions of knowledge tend to be the most prominent, but we argue that those two dimensions are not sufficient by themselves. For example, to gain situational understanding—a comprehensive picture of the battle space—conceptual and interpersonal skills are as important as tactical and technical skills. Thus, while the same general attributes may be required, there are apt to be many important differences in the specifics of what officers need to Know and Do.

Something New: Adapting to the Contemporary Operating Environment

To identify the “something new,” we examined challenges posed by the new operational environment and analyzed the skills and background that might better enable leaders to meet those challenges. Our analysis pointed to three key areas of skills, knowledge, and ability:

Specific operational skills. Analysis of recent and ongoing operations suggested several skill areas that now require more emphasis because they have become more important, more complex, or required at lower echelons of leadership. These skills include

- Facility in joint and combined arms operations
- Dealing with civilian populations
- Force protection
- Operations in urban or restricted terrain
- Understanding the enemy situation
- Using technology for situational awareness
- Integrating coalition forces
- Interacting with media.

Intellectual and cognitive abilities. The contemporary environment places a heightened premium on making decisions quickly, in unfamiliar situations amid greater ambiguity and uncertainty than leaders faced in the not-so-distant past. In such circumstances, leaders have to short-cut the time-consuming decision-making processes taught in school; instead they rely on less formal “recognition” decision making, based on models from their experience.

Breadth of knowledge and perspective. While intellectual abilities are essential, they are not sufficient for effective decision making. Leaders also need a broad base of experience and background knowledge to inform their decisions, particularly in fluid

and unfamiliar environments. This base includes both a tactical or operational component (exposure to a wide array of operational environments) and a broader intellectual component (knowledge and appreciation of nonmilitary and non-U.S. environments and institutions). Since officers' careers are already chock-full of demands on their time, attaining this breadth will be a challenge.

Experience: The Foundation for Leader Development

Our analysis indicates that future leaders will need more preparation and experience. How much more operational experience can leaders attain, given the time they have in a career and the many other things that officers must do? To address that question, we modeled sequences of officers' assignments and other activities during the course of their early career. We focused our modeling efforts primarily on operational experience *in units*—always the military's preferred venue for developing leaders and sharpening operational skills—but we also included time for periods of education in Army schools that parallel current professional education sequences.

In selecting people for promotion and for command positions, the military system accords heavy weight to previous operational experience, and especially to previous successful *command experience* in operational environments. Our analysis adopted that orientation and sought to determine how much leadership and operational experience leaders could be provided along their career paths. The analysis also considered experiences in non-unit organizational assignments that would enhance an officer's understanding of operations and tactics—such as a position as observer-controller at a Combat Training Center (CTC).

With these ideas in mind, we designed a model to explore the ways in which officer career paths can impart opportunities for operational experience, while still satisfying other demands (e.g., time attending professional schools or performing institutional functions). In essence, the object of the model was to assess how well the system can provide the experiential dimensions needed to produce (1) cohorts of officers who are well prepared to assume leadership positions within the grades of O-2 through O-4; and (2) a cohort of officers promoted to O-5 who are well prepared for battalion command.

We employed the model to identify feasible sets of career paths that would produce future leaders who had noticeably higher amounts of experience in operational units than in the past. For example, the model represented selection processes that would favor officers with repeated operational assignments, particularly in new or transforming units. In one case, we even stipulated that leaders would need to be considerably more senior to take on command positions—e.g., requiring that company commanders in new units always be O-4s rather than O-3s.

Overall, the results of the analysis are encouraging: the model yielded feasible solutions for every set of officer requirements we specified. The Army has latitude, therefore, to provide its leaders more time in field units and more exposure to operational challenges, if it needs to do so. Within the constraints of the current position structure, it is possible to ensure that many officers get repeated operational assignments. We also found that the Army could build significant repetitive experience in *new* (or transforming) units, even to the point of developing a cadre of officers who get multiple leadership assignments in such units.

However, creating this degree of depth in operational experience comes at the expense of breadth. While the paths we modeled would produce a group of officers with high operational expertise, those same officers would lack much exposure to the Army's TDA institutions. Moreover, another group of officers would move along different paths, which would provide them little exposure to operational assignments beyond early years of service. Similar findings also apply to the distinction regarding service in transforming units: while the system can produce some officers with solid depth in new or transforming units, such a policy would simultaneously create another group of officers with little or no experience in such units.

Because of these drawbacks, we conclude that some other actions would probably be necessary if the Army needed to pursue sharply higher levels of operational experience for many officers, especially in new or transforming units. While it is too soon to know whether or how much of this may be necessary, we suggest that the most promising course is to supplement the development of operational expertise in non-unit settings.

Supplementing Experience: Combining Venues for Leader Development

Evidently, not all required development can be accomplished through unit experience. Other venues will be needed, and for some skills those other venues may be more appropriate. We concluded that this applies particularly to two of the primary types of skills and knowledge that we identified.

Intellectual and cognitive skills for decision making. Recent years have seen renewed recognition within the Army that the modern environment calls not just for specific skills, but also for better-developed intellectual abilities. Leaders need to know how to think about novel situations and demands and how to devise a course of action fitted to those demands. They also need to know how to learn, and to become confident that they can acquire new skills and knowledge quickly when they confront new challenges. These skills and attributes underlie the key ability in operational command: the ability to make a good enough decision soon enough to count.

This set of skills and attributes includes the main attributes that support recognitional decision making:

- Pattern recognition
- Ability to gain situational understanding
- Facility with mental simulation
- Critical thinking
- Adaptability

All of the above skills are inherently *cognitive* processes (modes of thinking). Thus, they are amenable to development in an academic, institutional setting: their development calls for reflection on past experience, ferreting out the essential elements of a new problem, entertaining alternatives, and thinking through the consequences of actions that have not yet been taken. Institutional education has long-proven worth in teaching these kinds of skills, and thus it can play a key role in developing and refining the meta-competencies for operational command: the ability to develop comprehensive situational understanding and the ability to use it to produce effective solutions and decisions. Combining this intellectual grounding with the application of such skills in operational environments, using simulations or practical exercises, will help to hone both the general and the specific skills. While some of this may be accomplished in fast-paced operational environments, units' practical constraints and time limits mean that the predominant role in developing intellectual skills must be played by academic institutions. We argue that there is a role in this process both for the Army's institutional schools and for graduate civilian education.

Breadth of knowledge and perspective. Breadth is becoming more important for leaders, for two main reasons. First, as important as the above cognitive skills are, their successful application rests on a base of wide experience and knowledge. Familiarity with a wider range of possible operational situations will give an officer a wider array of knowledge on which to draw when evaluating possible courses of action. The broader the base, the greater the likelihood a leader will find a similar situation on which to base such evaluations.

Second, familiarity with external institutions and cultures (e.g., other services, Joint commands, and government agencies) aids not only in planning and conducting operations, but also in gaining support from or influencing the actions of these external players. The same need for breadth applies to familiarity with foreign institutions, both military and civilian. Recent operational experiences at all echelons of the U.S. military—in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq—have brought this point home. This kind of breadth is achievable only through contact with external institutions, and its importance argues for greater exposure of officers to graduate education and broadening assignments outside the Army.

Recommendations

We begin our recommendations by re-emphasizing the “something old”: the Army should continue to acquire and develop leaders with the character traits and values that have always been the underpinning of effective leadership. Leaders who are not so grounded will fail, regardless of technical or operational skills, because their subordinates will not follow them.

Beyond that essential base of leadership, our findings imply that considerably more needs to be done to develop leaders who are well prepared to meet the challenges of the contemporary environment and to continually learn and adapt to new circumstances. To accomplish that preparation, we suggest the following avenues of approach:

- Develop more **education modules** specifically designed to develop competence and confidence in less formal, more rapid decision-making skills. These should pose both military and nonmilitary challenges.
- Develop more **practical exercise** tools that proffer a wider array of challenges, consistent with the contemporary operating environment, for use both in education modules (as above) and in field environments. The Army is already working to include more diverse challenges in its training modules at the Combat Training Centers.
- Capitalize on **distributed learning** capabilities to support predeployment (or, for that matter, postdeployment) familiarization as well as self-study programs. These tools can quickly take users through a variety of situations and thus can supplement other efforts to enhance breadth.
- Give officers **dedicated learning time**, in both academic and unit settings, to develop and broaden their skills.
- Provide greater opportunities for officers, especially those in the operations career field, to receive **advanced civil schooling**.² Graduate education inculcates depth in the key intellectual skills we have cited, and will also broaden perspectives in ways that other experiences cannot.
- Broaden **professional military education**. Focus more on other institutions and cultures and how to cooperate with them. Increase opportunities to study in the schools of other services and nations, possibly as a supplement to the Army’s professional academic curricula. Broaden exposure by including more foreign students, civilians, and officers from other services in Army schools.

² We stress that this should be in addition to, not at the expense of, opportunities for officers in technical or other specialties that depend heavily on such education.

- Set aside some **dedicated positions** specifically for the purpose of broadening officers who would not normally be designated for such positions. Officers could be “seconded” to these positions; while their primary purpose would be to learn, they could also make a direct contribution. An example would be a combat arms officer “seconded” to a position in strategic planning; a strategic planner could also be “seconded” as a deputy operations officer in a Joint command.
- **Lengthen careers.** Most of the alternatives above become more feasible if officers have more time to spend in each assignment and at each level. The current array of key developmental “gates” is so extensive as to be almost exclusively prescriptive. Adding additional developmental requirements (like “seconding” or more schooling) without adding more time would further complicate this situation.
- Access and develop a **larger inventory of officers.** This could go hand in hand with longer careers. Like longer careers, this would require major changes and resource investments, and thus would require a long-term planning horizon. However, it seems likely that many of the initiatives suggested above could be taken only with a larger base of officers to work with. We argue that while the current grade pyramid may have been suitable when it was designed, it may not allow enough officers to meet all the requirements of the modern environment. At a minimum, the overall specifications for inventory and structure should be reviewed to assess whether they can meet modern requirements for breadth and depth.

The challenges we have laid out are significant, but not insurmountable. The Army excels at developing the detailed listings of tasks and subtasks that would comprise the skills we have enumerated, along with a collection of supporting exercise and simulation vignettes. Some steps in this direction have already been taken. But implementing the ideas contained here—or others that grow out of them—will take time and money. It will be harder still to bring about the changes needed to better develop intellectual skills and broaden perspectives. This points up a need for more investments in schooling, more time for development during a career, and perhaps more officers in the force. Nevertheless, we argue that investments along these lines will be needed if the Army is to meet its responsibilities as a profession, which include the development of new officers and the maintenance of the body of expertise essential for military functions in the future.