The Cost of Compliance

A Call for Context in Military Behavioral Compliance Training

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Abstract

The military continues to experience adverse effects on morale and readiness created by sexual assault, suicide, and other behavioral misconduct. Despite mandatory behavioral compliance training programs, continued violations of ethical behavior standards prove challenging to overcome. This article offers a hypothesis suggesting that aligning behavioral compliance training with unit readiness activities may more effectively achieve ethical behavior outcomes. It also calls for further research to establish a model instructional designers can offer to compliance program unit representatives that helps correlate job-specific tasks with ethical behavior outcomes.

The military continues to experience adverse effects on morale, trust, and unit cohesion caused by behavioral issues such as suicide (Harmon et al., 2015; Lopez, 2019) and sexual assault (Holland et al., 2014; Protect Our Defenders, 2020; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2013). The military experiences comparatively similar rates of suicide (Lopez, 2019) and sexual assault (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2013) to peer civilian populations, but the unique nature of military culture and elevated expectations for behavioral conduct of military service members place additional scrutiny on these and other behaviors. This increased scrutiny requires proactive interventions to address these behavioral issues. Congressional oversight has resulted in the creating of multiple programs (Defense Suicide Prevention Office, n.d.; U.S. Department of Defense [DOD], 2020) by the DOD to study the causes of and develop mechanisms to prevent or limit the incidence of unethical behaviors in the military.

Notwithstanding myriad training programs employed to remedy behavioral misconduct in the military, rates of sexual assault (Protect Our Defenders, 2020) and suicide (Lopez, 2019) remain consistent, with more recent periods seeing an increase (Baldor & Burns, 2020). Behavioral issues like sexual assault, suicide, hazing, and substance abuse are multifaceted (Harmon et al., 2017). These issues have

many contributing factors that extend beyond the influence of the instructional design community. Instruction is, however, one of the primary strategies employed by DOD programs (Defense Suicide Prevention Office, n.d.; Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, n.d.). Addressing the psychological, cultural, environmental, and operational factors contributing to behavioral issues in the military is the responsibility of other professional fields. The instructional design community can use its interdisciplinary approach to develop instructional strategies that translate recommendations from these adjacent professional fields into achievable learning outcomes for service members. The continued addition of mandatory training requirements (Burke, 2017; U.S. Air Force, 2020; U.S. Army, 2018; U.S. Marine Corps [USMC], 2018b; U.S. Navy, 2020) with no appreciable decline in the incidence of sexual assault (Protect Our Defenders, 2020) and suicide (Baldor & Burns, 2020) should alarm those directing, developing, and delivering the training.

While the experience of each service and each service member is unique, this article acknowledges the broad similarities of compliance programs across the service branches. In the interest of brevity, declarative statements about "the military" will be supported by examples from the USMC. Additionally, given the extensive availability of data and scholarship, sexual assault and suicide will serve as representatives of the broader category of behavioral compliance training, including equal opportunity, hazing, substance abuse prevention, and others.

Additional research is needed to analyze the effectiveness of current instructional approaches used in military behavioral compliance training. I recommend a new integrative approach to conducting compliance training in the military. This recommendation solicits further research to establish a model instructional designers can offer to compliance program representatives to help them correlate job-specific tasks to ethical behavior outcomes.

Behavioral Compliance

Military law has governed behavioral ethics for as long as organized militaries have existed (Lanni, 2008). The Uniform Code of Military Justice (1950) regulates every issue from espionage and fraternization with the enemy to theft, hazing, rape, and murder. Across martial cultures, behavioral ethics and soldierly virtue are deeply en-

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trenched (Rowell, 2013), with each service branch having its own defined set of core values, including the Marine Corps' famed "Honor, Courage, Commitment" (USMC, n.d.). Recalling the military origins of John Flanagan's Critical Incident Technique (1954), today's military compliance professionals may introspectively observe extant training programs like leadership development and look externally to business and industry for examples of effective and ineffective execution of behavioral compliance training programs to guide military compliance training.

Organizational ethics and behavioral compliance in the corporate landscape is a comparatively new concept. Until the latter half of the twentieth century, many corporate strategies embodied the win-at-all-cost approach of the robber-barons (Waugh, 2019). As part of the Sentencing Reform Act of 1984, increased scrutiny over corporate ethics established seven recommended pillars for an effective organizational compliance program, including "proactive training and communication" (Waugh, 2019, The Organization on Trial section).

Since 1984, and with numerous examples of corporate misconduct (Investopedia, 2013), behavioral compliance has become an essential part of corporate risk management, often taking a mechanistic (Jackman, 2015) or "check the box" (Waugh, 2019, Compliance at a Crossroads section) approach. The corporate environment, like the military, struggles to limit or eliminate instances of behavioral misconduct despite the increasing number of firms adopting or expanding ethics and compliance training programs (Schembera & Scherer, 2017). Calls for new approaches to compliance training suggest that overcoming this stagnation of outcome is found in developing new, integrative approaches toward compliance training (Jackman, 2015; Waugh, 2019). Hauser (2019) advances a multidimensional conceptual framework that fosters practical compliance training through an alignment of various training strategies in a consecutive fashion.

Hauser (2019) argues practical compliance training raises awareness of organizational expectations for ethical compliance and informs managers and employees of an organization's expected adherence with said policies, thereby eliciting appropriate behavior within the organization. In its application, effective implementation of compliance programs and compliance training facilitates integrating ethical concepts into various workplace scenarios and contexts (Bell et al., 2017). This strategy of practical application is consistent with fundamental theories of instruction and learning.

Comparison of Instructional/Learning Theory in Military Compliance Training

The very formation of instructional design principles traces its roots to military training (Gagne, 1962; USMC, 2017a, see ADDIE). The ADDIE process (analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation) is the product of a partnership

between the military and academia to create an approach for instructional systems development (Molenda, 2015). The military community employs systematic approaches to learning that incorporate the most prominent and widely accepted principles of learning and instructional design (USMC, 2017a). Although more than 40 years have passed since Mager (1975) introduced his criterion-referenced instruction principles, elements of that foundational approach continue to shape modern individual and unit training requirements. Yet, it is largely excluded from compliance training. Adopting the constructivist approach of contextual learning (Baker et al., 2009; Berns & Erickson, 2001; Kalchik & Oertle, 2010), individual commanders are delegated responsibility for their unit's mission readiness training. This approach is practical because commanders can contextualize the performance goals within the work environment that shapes learner performance. Still, while compliance training location, time, and venue are up to the commander (USMC, 2018a), compliance training content is centrally developed and prescribed at the service level (DOD, 2020). Finally, military training exemplifies the benefits of practice through cyclical readiness training. Yet, service members do not benefit from the same consistency of opportunity to regularly rehearse essential skills of behavioral ethics like bystander intervention or ethical dilemmas. This section discusses the application and misalignment of instructional and learning fundamentals to military compliance training.

Instructional Objectives

Mager's (1975) foundational research suggests that instruction should be objective-based and correlated to job performance. In Mager's view, proof of learning occurs when the learner demonstrates behavior changes (Lassonde, 2010). Consistent with this concept, each service branch employs a broadly similar approach to job-specific training programs for each occupational specialization within a unit. In the Marine Corps' approach, these individual skills aggregate to perform required unit skills known as mission essential tasks (MET; USMC, 2017a). In this model, training development and conduct are directly aligned to achieve unit-specific readiness outcomes that comprise the unit's mission-essential task list (METL). As expected, a unit's METL receives the preponderance of its operational training effort and regular evaluation by higher echelons of command. The cyclical approach and repetitive nature of MET training are consistent with learning theories suggesting essential skills or concepts that are most difficult to learn should receive repeated opportunities for learning (Khalil & Elkhider, 2016; Wurth & Wurth, 2018).

Unit METLs do not list behavioral compliance skills as METs. Instead, they are treated as ancillary professionalism skills required by service members to exist inside the military effectively. Perhaps this would explain the disassociation of behavioral

compliance training from other unit readiness activities; however, individual physical fitness (USMC, 2018a), leadership development (USMC, 2017b), and organizational ethos (USMC, 2016) all receive regular training, practice, and evaluation despite not being listed on a unit's METL. Examples in business and industry suggest that rather than disassociating behavioral compliance initiatives from an organization's operational objectives, they should be woven into organizational structure and operations (Hauser, 2019).

The Marine Corps' Leadership Development Program tasks unit commanders to "deliberately integrate … Marine Leader Development into operations, training and unit activities" (USMC, 2017b, p. 4). An examination of the Marine Corps' governing order on sexual assault prevention and response (SAPR) (USMC, 2019) and its current guidance on SAPR training (USMC, 2018b) provide explicit direction for the frequency of delivery of centrally developed SAPR training packages but offers no similar verbiage charging commanders to incorporate SAPR training into a unit's operations. The theme repeats upon reviewing the Marine Corps' suicide prevention program (USMC, 2012).

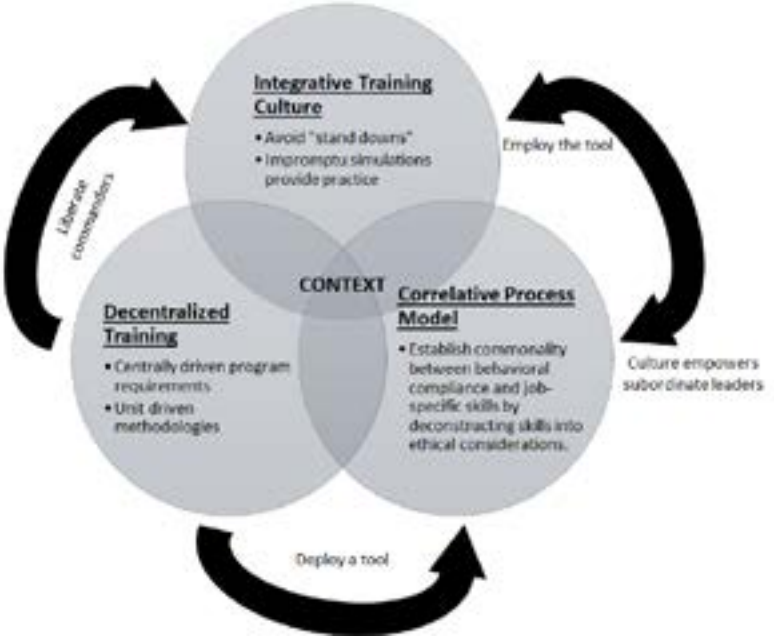
Decentralization

In learning and applying knowledge, context matters (Bell et al., 2017). Context enables learners to transfer what they learned through instruction and generalize its applicability to their given situation (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Holton & Baldwin, 2003). In applying training to accomplish METs, occupational specialization communities periodically develop and offer community leaders their recommendations for individual and unit training requirements. This bottom-up approach to design ensures training remains relevant to each respective occupational specialization community. Individual units even contextualize universal training initiatives such as physical fitness (USMC, 2018a) and leadership development (USMC, 2017b) to the unit's mission and personnel.

In a departure from traditional approaches to military training, the development of behavioral compliance training is centralized, and its delivery format is specifically prescribed (DOD, 2020; USMC, 2012, 2018b, 2019). Unit commanders are responsible for maintaining unit-level programs and ensuring the mandatory training is delivered within the required time frame. Still, little flexibility exists to tailor this training to the context of an individual unit. This results in concentrated sessions of mandatory training that segregate the topics from a unit's primary mission readiness activities. This division may engender degraded perceptions of the legitimacy or efficacy of the training in the minds of service members (Saum-Manning et al., 2019).

The small fraction of an organization's time dedicated to compliance training and practice presents the most significant deterring effect preventing compliance learn-

Figure 1
Proposed Approach to Military Compliance Training



ing (Gentile, 2013). Competition for time to complete an ever-expanding list of compliance training requirements creates learner fatigue and limits a unit leader's ability to manage training effectively (Burke, 2016). The Army recognized this dilemma by removing some of its annual mandatory training requirements and increased flexibility afforded to commanders in how, when, and where they deliver that training (Myers, 2018).

Practice

Repetition and practice are essential strategies for effective learning (Williams, 2020). Of deliberate practice, Ericsson et al. (1993) argue expert performance is not the product of blind repetition, but rather by intentional efforts to improve performance through the targeted application of skill improvement. Gladwell (2008) furnishes numerous examples of individuals and organizations that achieve elevated performance levels through effective practice. One cannot overstate the importance of practice. That is why the military employs cycles of training that progressively build capability in a unit as it works toward an operational readiness goal. However,

service members are not afforded the same frequent opportunities to rehearse skills that may help them save an at-risk service member's life or intervene in an ethically problematic situation that could lead to sexual assault. Outside of a short period of compliance training, the first opportunity for most service members to apply the skills they learn is during a crisis event. These events represent some of the most socially nuanced and ethically complex scenarios an individual can experience. Asking a service member to effectively intervene in a potential suicide, sexual assault, hazing incident, or managerial malpractice is akin to giving an administrative clerk an exposure-level class on infantry tactics then tasking him or her to lead a nighttime combined-arms assault on a well-defended position.

A New Approach to Military Behavioral Compliance Training

The issues of behavioral ethics are complex and multifaceted. Training translates readiness directives to service members. Still, training is only one component of a multipronged approach from numerous professional communities to raise awareness and improve behavioral outcomes. Mental health experts work to help service members overcome the unique stressors created by life in the military. Instructional designers should continually evaluate what, if anything, they can contribute to the improvement of behavioral compliance training in the military. This section offers three recommendations to improve DOD behavioral compliance training by amplifying instruction delivery and learner retention through the benefits of context.

Figure 1 illustrates the interdependent nature of the three recommendations. As the discussion shows, increased context results from the convergence of decentralized training approaches, an integrative training culture, and a new model to correlate behavioral compliance outcomes to unrelated job skills.

Decentralized Training

The development of training for all behavioral compliance programs should be guided by centralized policy but decentralized to unit commanders for contextualization within the mission and unique characteristics of each unit. In their review of five different suicide prevention programs, Harmon et al. (2015) found lower suicide rates in units with contextualized prevention programs.

In the Marine Corps' fundamental doctrine of maneuver warfare (USMC, 1997), decisions are delegated to the lowest possible level, recognizing that those closest to the point of friction are often the best informed to make timely calculations on the most effective means to alleviate that friction. Governing service policy should require incorporating essential points into the development of commanders' training pro-

grams. Still, the mandated delivery of prepackaged and scripted instruction ignores the special trust and confidence placed in commanders. It also denies established research suggesting behavioral compliance training is most effective when contextualized within an organization (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Bell et al., 2017; Harmon et al., 2015). Decentralized training affords commanders the flexibility to contextualize behavioral compliance training within the mission, environment, and social fabric of their unit.

Integrative Training Culture

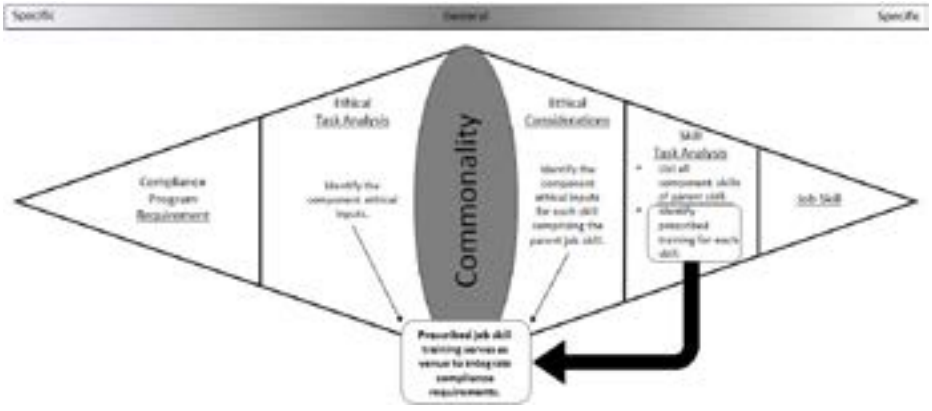
Consistent with examples from business and industry, commanders should take an integrative approach to behavioral compliance training that applies established learning theory (Ericsson et al., 1993; Williams, 2020) for repetition and job skill association. Taking an integrative approach to behavioral compliance training contextualizes training within the realities of a given unit. This integrative training culture is already embedded into the innumerable units that include the Leadership Development Program in everyday, regular operations.

The standard approach to conduct compliance training compartmentalizes the instruction within "stand-downs" segregated from operational training (Leipold, 2012). An integrative approach incorporates the essential points of the given behavioral compliance program throughout the training calendar as a matter of unit culture. A typical example of integrating leadership development into normal operations is to allow a junior enlisted member to lead a formation or conduct an impromptu period of instruction on a general topic. This strategy requires little or no planning and occurs organically in units with effective leadership development cultures.

An integrative approach to compliance training empowers young officers and noncommissioned officers to continually integrate and contextualize behavioral compliance exercises into their daily battle rhythm. This integration occurs as quickly and organically as a young, enlisted member who is tasked to lead a formation to develop his or her leadership presence. Such an approach is, admittedly, a sea change from current techniques that segment compliance training from other readiness activities.

The Navy's new guidelines to incorporate andragogical techniques, like scenario-based and group training (U.S. Navy, 2020), will likely enhance the effectiveness of behavioral compliance training. Still, compartmentalizing these methods into yearly packages of training creates implicit qualitative classifications between operational activities and training (essential) and behavioral compliance training ("check the box") (Saum-Manning et al., 2019; Waugh, 2019). Instead, techniques such as role-playing exercises, vignettes, and impromptu simulations of hazing, suicidal ideation, or a sexual assault report should be interspersed throughout the training calendar. This ensures members receive opportunities to apply the compliance training concepts before they are required to do so in a real scenario.

Figure 2
Example Correlative Process Model



A New Framework for Learning Transfer

As this article continually affirms, context matters, and enhancing context requires associating the desired learning outcomes to the learner's environment (Berns & Erickson, 2001). Decentralizing training liberates commanders to contextualize behavioral compliance concepts and fostering an integrative training culture provides the mechanism to conduct the training. Still, another tool is required to help compliance program unit representatives correlate behavioral compliance outcomes to the job skill training activities within a given unit. The development and adoption of a model is essential to enable the success of the first two recommendations.

Figure 2 represents a nascent conceptual approach to correlating behavioral outcomes to other job skill training activities. It begins on either end with greater levels of specificity. The correlative process model generalizes toward the center as it works to establish commonality between the behavioral compliance requirement and a specific job skill. In its current state, it is not intended for application. Instead, it exists to depict what is meant by a correlative process model. This article calls for the investment of additional scholarship to develop, test, and refine a functional correlative process model that helps compliance program unit representatives contextualize program requirements inside the mission training activities of their unit.

Following the approach of Figure 2, the left side explicitly lists behavioral compliance program requirements. As a form of task analysis, the model considers the specific program requirement's ethical inputs. SAPR training, for example, requires service members to be apprised of bystander intervention techniques (USMC, 2018b). The ethical task analysis lists considerations needed to intervene effectively. Examples of those considerations are courage, selflessness, and judgment.

The right side of the diagram lists a specific job skill. For this example, the required skill is to conduct maintenance on a radio. Conducting a task analysis creates a list of component skills necessary to complete maintenance on a radio. Skills such as using an ohmmeter, testing batteries, and performing inspections of the radio's associated items are needed to maintain that radio. Each of those component skills are thematically correlated to ethical considerations like teamwork and commitment. The dark arrow places the extant training required to develop proficiency in the job skill at the point of commonality between behavioral program requirement and job skill. This training is how the program representative fuses ethical considerations from the compliance requirement with those of the job skill.

Conclusion

This article provides background and context for current approaches to conducting behavioral compliance training in the military. Comparative examples from business and industry demonstrate the effectiveness of integrating behavioral compliance throughout the structure and operations of an organization to achieve desired behavioral outcomes. This concept is not new in the military. Other ancillary training efforts are already incorporating into the regular battle rhythm of units.

A new method along three lines of effort creates an integrative approach to behavioral compliance training. Through this approach, a unit contextualizes the behavioral compliance program concepts and requirements into its mission, environment, and people. Decentralizing training methodologies to commanders affords them the flexibility to tailor program requirement training within their command. Once training is decentralized to commanders, they should foster an integrative training culture where subordinate leaders are empowered to incorporate behavioral compliance concepts as opportunities arise. Similar approaches already incorporate leadership development and physical training into other operational activities. Finally, instructional designers should pursue research that develops a correlative process model for compliance program unit representatives. This model would help program representatives contextualize behavioral compliance outcomes to job-specific training. By creating such a model, instructional designers will proactively engage the issues of behavioral misconduct that continue to degrade trust, morale, and mission effectiveness within the ranks of military service members.

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