U.S. Air Force Military Training Instructor and Instructor Trainer Competencies

Training the Instructors of the Next Generation of Airmen

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Abstract

All U.S. Air Force enlistees, regardless of background or career field assignment, begin their careers in Basic Military Training (BMT), an intense 8.5 week acculturation into the Air Force. During this period each group of forty to sixty new enlistees is led by a military training instructor (MTI) (termed "drill sergeant" or "recruit division commander" by other services) who oversees their activities sixteen hours per day in events covering topics such as Air Force core values, military drill, dorm set-up, weapons, and physical training. Although MTIs are experienced NCOs accomplished in a technical career field specialty, they typically enter BMT without experience as teachers or instructors. As such, the development of the new enlistees they supervise is dependent on how MTIs themselves have been trained in beginning their MTI assignment. The current study provides a job analysis of the competencies identified as important for MTI trainers. Because MTI trainers are competitively selected from among a pool of experienced MTIs to train future MTIs, we also present results comparing those competencies identified as important in the role of MTI trainer (training other NCOs to become MTIs) to those of MTIs (directly instructing new enlistees).

The United States Air Force charges just over five hundred military training instructors (MTIs) with the monumental task of training approximately thirty-eight thousand enlisted trainees annually, transforming civilians into productive military members at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. These trainees come from diverse backgrounds and arrive at Basic Military Training (BMT) with differing types of motivation and levels of understanding of what they have volunteered for. The job of the MTI is to effectively engage, motivate, and train these recruits in 8.5 short weeks for their follow-on technical school training. The MTIs are noncommissioned officers (NCOs) from a variety of occupational specialties across the Air Force (e.g., aircraft maintainers, security forces, personnel administrators, etc.) and require nomination by their commander for the job of MTI. These individuals compete in a rigorous selection process for service members who will be expected to work in a highly fluid and challenging environment.[1] This necessitates a high degree of classroom instruction and on-the-job training with an experienced MTI trainer.

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The current study examines the job roles and requirements of MTI trainers—prior MTI service members now tasked with preparing and training other NCOs to effectively lead and direct newly enlisted BMT trainees. First described is the integral role MTI trainers play in preparing newly assigned MTIs as competent instructors for incoming Air Force trainees and the current processes used for training and developing MTIs and selecting MTI trainers. Next, we present the results of two independent surveys in which experienced MTIs and MTI trainers rated the relative importance of a common set of behavioral competencies for MTIs and MTI trainers. Finally, we present results from focus groups tasked with further developing a unique competency model for MTI trainers with the goal of better distinguishing how to best draw from the pool of experienced MTIs to select MTI trainers. Similarities and differences between the behavioral competencies required for successful MTI versus MTI trainer performance are summarized, and implications for MTI trainer selection are discussed.

Role of MTI Trainers in Developing MTIs and Establishing BMT Culture

Upon selection into the MTI program, the Air Force brings accomplished NCOs to BMT for 7.5 weeks of formal classroom instruction at the Military Training Instructor School (MTIS) followed by twelve weeks of on-the-job training assigned under an MTI trainer. MTIS instructors ensure soon-to-be MTIs have a basic understanding of BMT policies and procedures. Following completion of classroom instruction, MTI trainers pick up where the MTIS instructor left off, providing a shadowing, on-the-job training experience that allows the student to learn training concepts alongside an experienced former MTI. In addition to learning required MTI technical skills, MTI students also take classes on topics including leadership, stress and learning, and risks associated with highly power-imbalanced positions. MTI students also receive in-depth course instruction on stress management, sleep hygiene, and mindfulness to maintain resilience throughout their tour as an MTI.

MTI trainers in the 737th Training Group establish the standard of training for all MTIs in the Air Force. As such, it is critical MTI trainers are capable of and motivated to inculcate the proper training style and philosophy into their students. Because there is a high probability that the training methods an MTI utilizes will closely reflect those of his or her trainer, it is critical that the 737th Training Group selects MTI trainers who possess (or are capable of developing) the competencies required to produce and develop the next generation of MTIs. While MTI trainers are sourced from a candidate pool of experienced MTIs, differences exist in the competencies necessary for successful performance in these two job roles.

Job Analyses of MTIs and Relevance for Identifying Effective MTI Trainers

Although there exist several rigorous job analyses of military instructor duty, to our knowledge no job analysis exists regarding the competencies or characteristics that make NCOs effective in training and mentoring other NCOs to become instructors.[2] Some may expect that to train other NCOs to be effective MTIs, one would only need to be an effective MTI. However, there are several examples where competent, successful employees are ineffective at training others on the same job.[3] While technical knowledge and skills are important components of trainer excellence, without possession of additional skills, there is no guarantee that technical experts will successfully transfer their expertise to others.[4] Job analyses of civilian training professionals and research on characteristics of exemplary trainers in business and industry make clear this responsibility entails an additional skill set apart from being a subject-matter expert (SME) alone.[5] Competencies identified as critical to success in training others include showing interest in individual trainees, interacting with others to build confidence and trust, engaging others to maximize their strengths, and having knowledge of effective training strategies.[6]

While both MTIs and MTI trainers instruct and train others, the audience and context differ considerably. That is, the MTI and MTI trainer roles differ on a number of important required competencies, some which may result in effective MTI performance but less effective performance as an MTI trainer. First, MTIs lead a flight (a basic U.S. Air Force unit) of forty to sixty trainees and work with trainees in a group setting, while MTI trainers typically work one-on-one with their students. As such, MTI trainers are often required to tailor training approaches to complement each of their students' individual learning styles and motivations, while MTIs are more likely to utilize training techniques that maximize effectiveness across an entire flight. Second, MTIs instruct new enlistees—likely experiencing the military for the first time—who are typically young, impressionable, and potentially vulnerable. These individuals lack or have only a basic understanding of military culture, which requires MTIs to focus instruction on fundamental knowledge and basic expectations. In contrast, MTI trainers work with experienced peer NCOs already well accomplished in their own military technical specialties who, in some cases, even outrank their MTI trainers. As a result, communicating a certain level of humility and being able to verbalize one's own limitations to a peer are vital for the MTI trainer in a way that it is not when working with subordinates with far less prior experience. Finally, while MTIs are responsible for training others to internalize basic military knowledge and expectations, MTI trainers are responsible for training others *how to teach*, requiring an additional layer of knowledge and skills than might be expected of an MTI.

Current MTI Trainer Selection Process

The existing MTI trainer selection process consists of senior leaders from MTI training squadrons nominating current MTIs they believe would be capable trainers. MTI trainer candidates meet a board of four to five panel members, typically consisting of senior enlisted leaders from the group and the trainer squadron, the training director, and a psychologist from the Military Training Consult Service. While existing selection processes have produced competent trainers (i.e., few issues with trainers struggling with their duties), developing a robust selection process built upon the foundation of a formal job analysis might better serve the organization in further identifying more capable MTI trainers.

Comparison of Common Behavioral Competencies between MTIs and MTI Trainers

Because MTI trainers are sourced from a pool of experienced MTIs, an initial step in identifying MTI trainer competencies is determining the adequacy of existing MTI competency models as applied to MTI trainers.[7] Although prior job analysis has identified important general attributes (e.g., honesty, dependability, adaptability, etc.) expected of MTIs, in developing specific screening criteria for MTIs, we sought to identify more observable behavioral competencies corresponding to the broader attributes identified previously as important for safe and effective MTI performance.[8] Having these more observable behavioral competencies also allows for documentation of differences in the required competencies for the MTI trainer and MTI roles.

Overview. The current study compares the relative importance of forty-two behavioral competencies identified as potentially applicable to both MTI and MTI trainers. We first describe the process used to identify behavioral competencies of potential importance for MTIs based on previous job analysis. We then describe two independent surveys in which independent MTI and MTI trainer groups rated the importance of those behavioral competencies for MTIs (Survey 1) or MTI trainers (Survey 2). Finally, we compare the results of the two surveys and describe the results of iterative focus-group sessions to further refine and distinguish the unique competencies required for MTI trainers.

Initial identification of behavioral competencies for MTIs. Potential relevant behavioral competencies for MTIs were identified to correspond to critical domains identified in an earlier job analysis of attributes relevant to safe and effective MTI performance: conscientiousness/work dedication, integrity, judgment/self-control, intelligence/decision-making, leadership, adaptability, interpersonal abilities, and communication.[9] These proposed behavioral competencies were themselves drawn

from a larger set of behavioral competencies identified as important within the Air Force across many career fields.[10]

Survey 1: MTI importance ratings. A total of 434 current and former MTIs assigned to the 737th Training Group as MTI supervisors or MTIS instructors were requested to complete an online survey to identify competencies critical to MTIs. The email survey link directed MTIs to complete one of two randomly assigned survey versions. To minimize survey time completion and increase SME participation, MTI competency item content was divided between the two versions, such that half of MTIs (randomly assigned) were asked to rate the first half of the competency list, and the other half were asked to rate the second half of the competency list. On the survey, MTIs rated the importance of each performance competency on a 4-point scale: 0 = Not Important for MTIs, 1 = Low Importance for MTIs, 2 = Medium Importance for MTIs, 3 = High Importance for MTIs. Of those invited to participate, 124 MTIs completed the survey and an additional thirty-one completed a portion of the survey (overall response rate: 35.25%). With slight differences in the response rate, half of the items were rated by fifty-four to fifty-five MTIs while the other half of items were rated by sixty-eight to sixty-nine MTIs. By rank, survey participants included fifty-nine staff sergeants (40.14%), sixty-four technical sergeants (43.54%), seventeen master sergeants (11.56%), and five senior master sergeants (3.40%). Females represented approximately 11% of respondents.

Survey 2: MTI trainer importance ratings and focus group input. In order to better capture the full range of competencies potentially relevant for MTI trainers, an independent sample of SMEs rated the importance of a common list of forty-two behavioral competencies identified in Survey 1 and twenty-two additional behavioral competencies identified through reviews of O*NET worker characteristics for "11-3131.00 - Training and Development Managers," U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) multipurpose competencies, and previous Air Force surveys.[11]

Ratings of behavioral competencies needed for MTI trainers were made by a total of nineteen participants in a series of three focus group sessions in May 2016 (five to seven per focus group session). The nineteen MTI trainer SMEs included fourteen incumbents and five supervisors. The three separate focus groups included (a) current MTI trainers, (b) former MTI trainers (including those currently serving within the 737th Training Group in roles such as MTI/standardization and evaluation, Airmen's Week facilitators, military drill and ceremonies NCO, MTIS instructor, and protocol NCO), and (c) instructor supervisors and the MTI training superintendent. Participants were asked to rate their familiarity with the MTI trainer job (1 = Not Knowledgeable to 5 = Extremely Knowledgeable). Overall participant knowledge of the MTI trainer position was high ($M = 4.50$, $SD = .837$). By rank, survey participants included one staff sergeant (5.26%), eleven technical sergeants (57.89%), six master sergeants (31.58%), and one senior master sergeant (5.26%). Females represented approximately 47.37% of

Table 1. Effect Size Comparisons for Behaviors Rated in both Military Training Instructor (MTI) Trainer and MTI Job Analyses

Domain	Behavioral competency	MTI-T mean (N = 19)	MTI-T SD	MTI mean (N = 54-69)	MTI SD	Cohen's *d* value
Adaptability	Modifies leadership or interpersonal style to match audience and setting	2.947	.223	2.73	.59	.421
	Remains focused, decisive, and on-task during stressful situations	3.000	.000	2.87	.51	.289
	Effectively manages multiple tasks and priorities to complete work objectives	2.947	.223	2.87	.38	.221
	Adapts to new and changing missions, tasks, and situations	2.842	.365	2.80	.59	.084
Communication	Understands the appropriate time and place to communicate message	2.789	.408	2.62	.73	.258
	Appropriately expresses thoughts and opinions	2.737	.440	2.59	.67	.227
	Listens attentively and clarifies information when necessary	2.789	.408	2.71	.49	.176
	Speaks clearly and persuasively to individuals or small groups	2.684	.567	2.72	.68	-.058

(Table by Laura Barron)

Table 1. Effect Size Comparisons for Behaviors Rated in both Military Training Instructor (MTI) Trainer and MTI Job Analyses (continued)

Domain	Behavioral competency	MTI-T mean (N = 19)	MTI-T SD	MTI mean (N = 54-69)	MTI SD	Cohen's d value
Conscientiousness/ work dedication	Maintains physical standards and professional military appearance	3.000	.000	2.87	.42	.353
	Enforces Air Force instructions, policies, and procedures	3.000	.000	2.87	.45	.330
	Prioritizes work so that critical tasks and projects are completed in a timely manner	2.842	.365	2.84	.54	.012
	Follows through on tasks and projects to ensure responsibilities are met	2.789	.521	2.81	.55	-.047

(Table by Laura Barron)

participants (nine of nineteen). All participants had a minimum of eighteen months of experience as an MTI; fifteen of nineteen participants (78.95%) had served as an MTI for thirty months of more. Overall 63.16% of the sample (twelve of nineteen) had at least twelve months of experience as an MTI trainer, and an additional 10.53% of the sample (two of nineteen) had six to eleven months of experience as an MTI trainer.

Competency importance (i.e., the level of importance that one would place on the attribute for performing MTI trainer responsibilities) was rated on the following scale: 1 = Not Important, 2 = Slightly Important, 3 = Important, 4 = Very Important, or 5 = Extremely Important. A "Do Not Know" option was also available for participants uncertain about the importance of a specific behavior. Interrater reliability (IRR) of behavioral competency importance ratings was first assessed within group, with focus group one (ICC = .825), two (ICC = .725), and three (ICC = .712) demonstrating adequate levels of within-group agreement. Additionally, pooled IRR between focus groups was also high (ICC = .895), indicating groups could be combined into a single pool of nineteen

Table 1. Effect Size Comparisons for Behaviors Rated in both Military Training Instructor (MTI) Trainer and MTI Job Analyses (continued)

Domain	Behavioral competency	MTI-T mean (N = 19)	MTI-T SD	MTI mean (N = 54-69)	MTI SD	Cohen's *d* value
Integrity	Does not take advantage of rank or position for personal benefit	2.941	.235	2.77	.62	.305
	Does not hide or distort negative information to avoid consequences or inconvenience	2.833	.373	2.65	.70	.282
	Assumes responsibility for actions of team	2.842	.365	2.70	.66	.231
	Does not allow biases or personal relationships to interfere with professional actions	2.895	.307	2.80	.59	.178
	Supports Air Force mission and goals, regardless of personal feelings	2.842	.365	2.81	.43	.080
	Displays commitment to the Air Force core values	2.842	.365	2.91	.37	-.191
	Accepts responsibility for own actions, regardless of potential consequences	2.842	.365	2.94	.29	-.319

(Table by Laura Barron)

raters. Final IRR values across all nineteen raters indicated subject-matter experts had high levels agreement (ICC = .884), and that importance ratings could be averaged into a single mean score for each behavioral competency.

Comparison of MTI and MTI trainer competencies. The common forty-two behavioral competencies rated on importance for MTI trainers (Survey 2) and, separately, on importance for MTIs (Survey 1), were compared to one another to determine relative importance for MTI trainers as opposed to MTIs. MTI trainer

Table 1. Effect Size Comparisons for Behaviors Rated in both Military Training Instructor (MTI) Trainer and MTI Job Analyses (continued)

Domain	Behavioral competency	MTI-T mean (N = 19)	MTI-T SD	MTI mean (N = 54-69)	MTI SD	Cohen's *d* value
Intelligence/ decision-making	Considers multiple sides of an issue and input from appropriate individuals when making decisions	2.842	.365	2.62	.60	.395
	Identifies and understands constraints and mitigates potential problems	2.842	.365	2.69	.60	.273
	Identifies and assesses risk and takes appropriate action to ensure safety and mission accomplishment	2.842	.365	2.71	.63	.232
	Makes sound decisions based upon facts and available information	2.842	.365	2.70	.74	.208

(Table by Laura Barron)

ratings from Survey 2 were converted from a 1-5 scale (1 = Not Important to 5 = Extremely Important) to the 0-3 (0 = Not Important to 3 = High Importance) ratings scale used during the MTI job analysis. MTI trainer ratings of "5" and "4" (Extremely Important or Very Important) were rescaled as "3" (High Importance), while ratings of "3" (Important), "2" (Slightly Important), and "1" (Not Important) were rescaled as "2" (Medium Importance), "1" (Low Importance), and "0" (Not Important), respectively. Cohen's *d* values were computed to determine the magnitude of differences in rater behavioral importance scores between the two occupations, with effect size values of .2, .5, and .8 corresponding to small, medium, and large mean differences, respectively.[12]

Results

In total, importance ratings for twenty-seven out of forty-two behaviors (64.3%) had Cohen's *d* values of .20 or greater, indicating higher importance ratings for

Table 1. Effect Size Comparisons for Behaviors Rated in both Military Training Instructor (MTI) Trainer and MTI Job Analyses (continued)

Domain	Behavioral competency	MTI-T mean (N = 19)	MTI-T SD	MTI mean (N = 54-69)	MTI SD	Cohen's *d* value
Interpersonal	Works effectively and appropriately with people of the opposite sex, and from different cultural and religious backgrounds	2.947	.223	2.84	.41	.285
	Works effectively and appropriately with people of the opposite sex, and from different cultural and religious backgrounds	2.947	.223	2.84	.41	.285
	Acts courteously and respectfully to others at all times	2.737	.547	2.63	.78	.147
	Identifies and diffuses tensions among team members, as needed	2.632	.581	2.65	.54	-.028
	Takes a personal interest in the welfare of each team member	2.632	.741	2.70	.55	-.107

(Table by Laura Barron)

MTI trainers than for MTIs (see table 1, pages 64–70). The five behavioral competencies showing the greatest difference in terms of higher importance for MTI trainers relative to MTIs were:

- *Modifies leadership or interpersonal style to match audience and setting* (*d* = .421)
- *Holds others to expectations and standards to help them meet goals* (*d* = .401)
- *Leads others in a fair and consistent manner* (*d* = .388)
- *Remains patient with subordinates when they make a mistake* (*d* = .437)
- *Considers multiple sides of an issue and input from appropriate individuals when making decisions* (*d* = .395)

Table 1. Effect Size Comparisons for Behaviors Rated in both Military Training Instructor (MTI) Trainer and MTI Job Analyses (continued)

Domain	Behavioral competency	MTI-T mean (N = 19)	MTI-T SD	MTI mean (N = 54-69)	MTI SD	Cohen's *d* value
Leadership	Holds others to expectations and standards to help them meet goals	2.947	.223	2.78	.45	.401
	Leads others in a fair and consistent manner	3.000	.000	2.87	.38	.388
	Provides subordinates or others with timely, honest, and constructive feedback	2.833	.373	2.62	.68	.348
	Leads by example (i.e., talks the talk and walks the walk)	3.000	.000	2.90	.35	.328
	Provides training to subordinates or others when they need it	2.947	.223	2.84	.41	.285
	Reprimands fairly, consistently, and to the appropriate amount	2.895	.307	2.78	.48	.256
	Motivates and empowers others to complete tasks and assignments	2.895	.447	2.80	.44	.221

(Table by Laura Barron)

Generally, the additional importance of these competencies for those who train other NCOs to become instructors as compared to those who instruct new recruits (basic military trainees) directly may be explained in terms of

a.   a focus on individualized attention and tailored instructional methods that is possible to a greater extent when working with MTIs one-on-one than when

Table 1. Effect Size Comparisons for Behaviors Rated in both Military Training Instructor (MTI) Trainer and MTI Job Analyses (continued)

Domain	Behavioral competency	MTI-T mean (N = 19)	MTI-T SD	MTI mean (N = 54-69)	MTI SD	Cohen's *d* value
Self control/ judgment	Remains patient with subordinates when they make a mistake	2.895	.307	2.63	.68	.437
	Refrains from negative or degrading comments about members of the opposite sex, other cultural or ethnic groups, or different personal backgrounds	2.947	.223	2.83	.54	.238
	Manages setbacks with maturity	2.947	.223	2.87	.42	.203
	Displays control under pressure	2.947	.223	2.87	.42	.203
	Acts as a role model to others regarding good judgment, alcohol use, and the Wingman concept	2.833	.373	2.72	.63	.194
	Avoids inappropriate personal relationships (e.g., flirting, fraternization)	2.947	.223	2.94	.29	.019
	Does not engage in maltreatment or maltraining of others	2.842	.488	2.89	.50	-.094

(Table by Laura Barron)

working with flights of over forty trainees ("Modifies leadership or interpersonal style to match audience …");

b. taking more of a helping role in working with more advanced learners who are more likely to be self-motivated and bring their own goals for learning ("Holds others to expectations … to help them meet goals"), rather than having to focus more efforts on drilling the goals of training into new recruits;

c. approaching training of instructors with greater open-mindedness and recognition of multiple ways that different instructors can respond to a given situation to effectively teach students ("Considers multiple sides of an issue …"), as opposed to the need for generally projecting a more definitive, directive approach for drilling in new recruits black-and-white Air Force standards for training tasks that are more concrete (e.g., how to march in formation, how to accomplish a push-up, etc.); and

d. exercising more patience ("Remains patient with subordinates when they make a mistake") and according more respect and showing even greater attention to fair treatment ("Leads others in a fair and consistent manner"), consistent with the fact that MTI students, unlike new recruits who undergo BMT for the purpose of being indoctrinated or "blued" in Air Force ways, have already demonstrated themselves as high-performing members (having achieved the rank of E-6 or higher) over the course of their Air Force careers.

In contrast, one behavioral item ("Accepts responsibility for own actions, regardless of potential consequences") was identified as being more important for MTIs than for MTI trainers, $d = -.32$. This is consistent with the fact that the impact of MTI trainers' actions is more indirect than that of MTIs, such that MTI trainer actions do not affect BMT trainees directly, but have second-order effects in terms of how their actions affect MTIs who then in turn affect BMT trainees.

All behavioral competencies rated as highly important for MTIs were similarly rated as highly important for MTI trainers (average importance rating greater than or equal to 4.50). Two additional behavioral competencies not included in the MTI survey that were identified as highly important for MTI trainers ($M \geq 4.50$) were "Works independently and accomplishes tasks without constant supervision" and "Takes personal responsibility for completing work tasks." Although these behavioral competencies are also likely important for MTIs, MTIs are monitored and supervised more closely than MTI trainers, necessitating a higher level of self-sufficiency and initiative for MTI trainers. Although consensus was that most of the additional OPM, O*NET, and other competencies were important for MTI trainers, competencies related to creative or divergent thinking (e.g., "Develops creative ways to solve a problem") were generally not rated as important ($M \leq 3.0$), nor were competencies associated with (formal) oral presentations or writing ($M \leq 3.4$). Table 2 (on pages 72–77) displays the average importance ratings for MTI trainers for the full list of rated behavioral competencies (incorporating OPM, O*NET, and other competency additions).

Additional Focus Group Insights

The use of an iterative focus-group process allowed for additional insights on MTI trainer competencies and discussion of how the competencies required for

Table 2. Mean Ratings of Work-Related Competencies for Military Training Instructor (MTI) Trainers

Domain	Source	Rater mean	Rater SD	Behavioral competency
Self-control/ judgment	MTI	4.842	.501	Avoids inappropriate personal relationships or flirting.
Self-control/ judgment	MTI	4.842	.501	Avoids negative or degrading comments about the opposite sex or other cultural groups.
Interpersonal	MTI	4.789	.535	Works effectively and appropriately with people from different cultural or religious backgrounds.
Interpersonal	MTI	4.737	.562	Works effectively and appropriately with people of the opposite sex.
Self-control/ judgment	MTI	4.737	.806	Avoids maltreatment or maltraining of others.
Leadership	MTI	4.684	.478	Leads by example (i.e., talks the talk and walks the walk).
Leadership	MTI	4.684	.478	Leads others in a fair and consistent manner.
Adaptability	MTI	4.684	.478	Remains focused, decisive, and on-task during stressful situations.
Conscientiousness/ work dedication	MTI	4.684	.478	Enforces AF instructions, policies, and procedures.
Integrity	MTI	4.647	.606	Avoids taking advantage of rank or position for personal benefit.
Leadership	MTI	4.632	.597	Provides training to subordinates or others when they need it.
Self-control/ judgment	MTI	4.632	.684	Remains patient with subordinates when they make a mistake.

(Table by Laura Barron)

Table 2. Mean Ratings of Work-Related Competencies for Military Training Instructor (MTI) Trainers (continued)

Domain	Source	Rater mean	Rater SD	Behavioral competency
Leadership	MTI	4.579	.769	Motivates and empowers others to complete tasks and assignments.
Adaptability	MTI	4.579	.607	Manages multiple tasks and priorities to complete work objectives.
Self-control/judgment	MTI	4.579	.607	Displays control under pressure.
Self-control/judgment	MTI	4.579	.607	Manages setbacks with maturity.
Conscientiousness/work dedication	MTI	4.526	.513	Maintains physical standards and professional military appearance.
Integrity	MTI	4.526	.772	Accepts responsibility for own actions and for actions of team.
Initiative	O*NET	4.500	.618	Works independently and accomplish tasks without constant supervision.
Initiative	O*NET	4.500	.707	Takes personal responsibility for completing work tasks.
Leadership	MTI	4.474	.612	Holds others to expectations and standards to help them meet goals.
Analysis/decision-making	MTI	4.474	.772	Assesses risk and takes action to ensure safety and mission accomplishment.
Integrity	MTI	4.474	.697	Avoids allowing biases or personal relationships to interfere with professional actions.
Leadership	MTI	4.421	.692	Reprimands fairly, consistently, and in the appropriate amount.

(Table by Laura Barron)

Table 2. Mean Ratings of Work-Related Competencies for Military Training Instructor (MTI) Trainers (continued)

Domain	Source	Rater mean	Rater SD	Behavioral competency
Integrity	MTI	4.421	.769	Displays commitment to the Air Force core values, and supports Air Force mission and goals, regardless of personal feelings.
Self-control/ judgment	MTI	4.389	.778	Acts as a role model regarding good judgment, alcohol use, and the Wingman concept.
Teaching others	MTI	4.389	.778	Provides constructive feedback.
Adaptability	MTI	4.368	.761	Adapts to new and changing tasks and situations.
Adaptability	MTI	4.368	.597	Modifies leadership or interpersonal style to match audience and setting.
Conscientiousness/ work dedication	MTI	4.368	.761	Prioritizes work so that critical tasks are completed in a timely manner.
Integrity	MTI	4.333	.767	Avoids hiding or distorting negative information.
Teaching others	OPM	4.333	.840	Helps others learn through formal or informal methods.
Teaching others	OPM	4.333	1.138	Acts as a mentor.
Teaching others	OPM	4.278	.895	Coaches others on how to perform tasks.
Interpersonal	MTI	4.263	.933	Acts courteously and respectfully to others.
Conscientiousness/ work dedication	AF	4.263	.933	Manages own time and the time of others to accomplish work goals.

(Table by Laura Barron)

Table 2. Mean Ratings of Work-Related Competencies for Military Training Instructor (MTI) Trainers (continued)

Domain	Source	Rater mean	Rater SD	Behavioral competency
Communication	MTI	4.211	.787	Understands the appropriate time and place to communicate message.
Analysis/ decision-making	MTI	4.211	.713	Considers multiple sides of an issue and input from appropriate individuals.
Conscientiousness/ work dedication	MTI	4.211	.855	Follows through on tasks to ensure responsibilities are met.
Teaching others	OPM	4.111	.832	Identifies training needs.
Analysis/ decision-making	MTI	4.105	.658	Identifies constraints and mitigates potential problems.
Conscientiousness/ work dedication	AF	4.056	.873	Pays close attention to the details of own work, to ensure work is accurate and complete; carefully reviews and scrutinizes own work.
Communication	MTI	4.053	.705	Listens attentively and clarifies information when necessary.
Analysis/ decision-making	MTI	4.053	.621	Makes sound decisions based upon facts and available information.
Communication	OPM	4.000	.471	Expresses information (for example, ideas or facts) to individuals or groups effectively, taking into account the audience and nature of the information (for example, technical, sensitive, controversial).
Interpersonal	MTI	3.947	1.026	Takes a personal interest in the welfare of each team member.
Analysis/ decision-making	O*NET	3.947	.848	Analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of specific actions or decisions.

(Table by Laura Barron)

Table 2. Mean Ratings of Work-Related Competencies for Military Training Instructor (MTI) Trainers (continued)

Domain	Source	Rater mean	Rater SD	Behavioral competency
Analysis/ decision-making	O*NET	3.947	.705	Combines separate pieces of information to form general rules or conclusions; recognizes patterns or trends and anticipates outcomes.
Communication	MTI	3.895	.809	Speaks clearly and persuasively to individuals or groups.
Analysis/ decision-making	O*NET	3.895	.937	Applies general rules to specific problems to produce answers that make sense.
Interpersonal	MTI	3.842	.834	Identifies and diffuses tension among team members, as needed.
Communication	MTI	3.789	.535	Appropriately expresses thoughts and opinions.
Conscientiousness/ work dedication	O*NET	3.737	1.046	Shows willingness to work long hours when appropriate.
Learning ability	OPM	3.722	.752	Acquires new skills, and understands new concepts, ideas, or facts quickly and easily.
Conscientiousness/ work dedication	AF	3.684	.946	Carefully plans out the sequence of actions needed to meet short- and long-term goals.
Communication	O*NET	3.579	.838	Reads and understands written English words and sentences.
Initiative	O*NET	3.529	1.068	Initiates difficult tasks without excessive procrastination.
Communication	OPM	3.368	.684	Makes clear and convincing oral presentations.

(Table by Laura Barron)

Table 2. Mean Ratings of Work-Related Competencies for Military Training Instructor (MTI) Trainers (continued)

Domain	Source	Rater mean	Rater SD	Behavioral competency
Communication	OPM	3.316	.820	Writes clearly and uses language appropriate for the audience; writes English words or sentences so others will understand; spells correctly.
Creative thinking	OPM	3.111	.758	Designs new methods where established methods and procedures are not suitable or are unavailable.
Conscientiousness/ work dedication	AF	3.053	1.268	Keeps own work space neat, tidy, and organized.
Creative thinking	O*NET	3.000	.877	Comes up with unusual or clever ideas about a topic.
Creative thinking	O*NET	2.938	.680	Develops creative ways to solve a problem.
Creative thinking	OPM	2.833	.786	Uses imagination to develop new insights into situations and applies new solutions to problems.

(Table by Laura Barron)

successful performance as an MTI trainer differed from those important for MTIs. Qualitative input from two initial focus groups on behavioral competencies important for MTI trainers that were not captured on the initial lists were recorded and summarized. The additional behavioral competencies identified in the initial MTI trainer focus groups were then reviewed and validated in a second round of focus groups in which seventeen participants were asked if there were any competencies identified in the earlier focus group that should be removed (i.e., were not relevant to MTI trainer performance) or added. Eight vetted behavioral competencies were ultimately identified to include competencies focused on the domains of "communication," "initiative," "self-control/judgment," and multiple competency behaviors focused on the domains "teaching others" and "adaptability":

◆ **Adaptability**: *Demonstrates resilience in response to adversity*
◆ **Adaptability**: *Displays awareness of one's own limitations or weaknesses*
◆ **Communication**: *Communicates clear, measurable performance standards for meeting training objectives*

- **Initiative**: *Demonstrates an active commitment to self-improvement*
- **Self-Control/Judgment**: *Projects a sense of humility*
- **Teaching Others**: *Gives trainees the opportunity and latitude to succeed through their own trial and error where appropriate*
- **Teaching Others:** *Adapts training styles and methods to the needs and style of the student*
- **Teaching Others:** *Manages trainees' unrealistic expectations when needed*

Discussion

Overall, results validated that most competencies important for MTI performance are also important for MTI trainer performance. However, results also suggest certain competencies may be particularly important for MTI trainers relative to MTIs. These findings highlight that tailoring or modifying one's leadership or interpersonal style may be more impactful for MTI trainers given that they train their MTI students one-on-one rather than training a flight of forty to sixty trainees simultaneously. Additionally, a more open-minded, tolerant point of view (considering multiple sides of an issue, remaining patient with subordinates when they make a mistake) may be particularly critical as an MTI trainer given that they work with experienced student NCOs who have already proven themselves within the military rather than with new, inexperienced trainees who must be indoctrinated on basic military culture. Recognition of these differences creates an opportunity for the organization to modify its trainer selection process to find these capabilities among the pool of MTI trainer candidates. Additionally, these findings can enhance training efforts to reinforce or develop the competencies identified as most critical for MTI trainer performance.

Discussion in the focus group sessions also highlighted the importance of humility, awareness of one's own limitations, and active commitment to self-improvement as important to a greater extent for MTI trainers than for MTIs. While these competencies may be important to MTIs to some extent, working with students closer in experience level may make recognition of one's own weaknesses particularly important. While noting personal weaknesses with inexperienced trainees as an MTI may undermine necessary credibility in some instances, one-on-one mentoring of other NCOs to become MTIs may necessitate recognition of one's own shortcomings, and encourage admission when one does not have "all the answers."

While the present study focused on MTI and MTI trainers in the context of Air Force BMT, one would expect findings to provide good generalizability to initial military training across the other services. As such, those who make good drill sergeants or drill instructors in sister services may similarly require a distinct set of behavioral competencies as opposed to those who effectively teach the next generation of NCOs to become effective drill sergeants or drill instructors. ❧

Notes

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