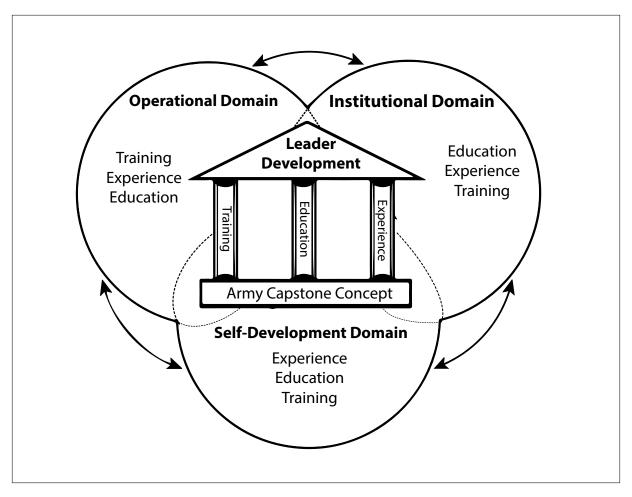
## Improving Leader Development in the Operational Domain

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MAGINE HAVING TO CHOOSE a surgeon out of three available to perform a much-needed procedure. The first surgeon just completed medical school but has not performed a surgical procedure since graduation. The second has performed many procedures illegally but has never completed medical school. The third has completed medical school and performed several procedures over ten years ago but has not practiced medicine since. If you are thinking what I am thinking, the search is not over; a qualified surgeon has attended medical school, performed surgical procedures, and continued to improve his or her craft.

This analogy illustrates the significance of each of the Army's three learning domains to effective leader development (see figure). To become effective leaders, individuals need developmental activities in the institutional domain, the operational domain, and the self-development domain.





The Army leader development model

The Army leader development model shows experience, education, and training in each learning domain, with overlap between the domains. Leader development activities in the institutional domain tend to occur in schools and courses. Activities in the operational domain tend to occur in duty assignments. Activities in the self-development domain tend to consist of activities selected and performed by individuals. Few would disagree that Army leaders need to build a solid foundation of leadership training, typically in the institutional domain; they need to apply that training, typically in the operational domain; and they need to continue maintaining and improving on it, typically in the self-development domain. Army leader development activities in the institutional and selfdevelopment domains are, for the most part, effective. The Army as an institution generally ensures

soldiers participate in institutional leader development activities. Individual soldiers commonly exercise initiative to ensure their participation in self-development activities. However, the Army has shortfalls in leader development activities in the operational domain. Effective leader development in the operational domain depends on unit leaders taking the time to provide individualized counseling, coaching, and mentoring to their subordinates.

## The Institutional Domain

Leader development in the institutional domain, through programs such as professional military education and the Civilian Education System, gives individuals a foundation of leadership capabilities. These courses are designed to provide knowledge and skills deemed necessary for success at a particular professional level. As the Army Leader

Development Strategy 2013 states, "Every program of instruction in our officer and NCO development programs has been updated to account for the lessons of the past 12 years while also looking forward to the requirements of tomorrow." This is why it is ideal for leaders to complete these courses at the beginning of each career level. The courses also ensure leaders in each cohort build a similar foundation that helps them perform in various positions across a particular field. Additionally, attending courses gives leaders an opportunity to take a step

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back from operational requirements and dedicate time solely to the process of learning, reflecting on their past performance in the operational field, and making changes they need for future success.

The Army does not have any serious problems of leader development within the institutional domain. Since there are forcing mechanisms or standards in practical exercises and tests that one must pass in order to graduate, when leaders complete any course, there is little doubt they will learn the minimum requirements. It is true, however, that not all students leave a certain course with the same knowledge. For example, in the Command and General Staff College, majors can participate in extracurricular activities such as completing the masters program or participating in various academic competitions. Many participate and gain additional knowledge, but many do not. Even those who only learn the bare minimum will leave the course with a significant amount of knowledge when they graduate.

Now, due to the demands of recent conflicts, some courses have been curtailed. Sgt. Maj. of the Army Raymond F. Chandler III stated in reference to courses that were reduced to accommodate the deployment cycle, "We know we've cut a lot of

things that we are seeing we need to add back in."<sup>3</sup> This correction, however, is an easy fix. Unlike issues in the operational domain, the issues in the institutional domain are relatively simple to change. Yet, while activities in the institutional domain are highly valuable and effective, this domain is not enough by itself.

## The Operational Domain

It is imperative for leader development to occur in the operational domain, where leaders are assigned to perform operational duties. Leaders cannot cease their development at school graduations and then continue again at the next school, years later. Learning in the institutional domain needs to be perfected and built upon in the operational domain. The responsibility to make leader development activities continue in the operational domain falls on unit-level leaders. Unit leaders must develop their subordinates. As the Army Leader Development Strategy 2013 states, "If today's leaders do not adequately develop their subordinates through personal example, counseling, and mentorship, then today's leaders have not succeeded in accomplishing tomorrow's mission."4 Within the operational domain, development focuses more closely on the soldier's specific duty position, unlike the institutional domain, in which development focuses more on a general foundation that applies across multiple positions within a career field.

The serious shortfall of leader development within the operational domain has implications for future generations of soldiers. Like the curtailing of courses due to operational requirements, leader development was minimized, if not lost, in much of the operational domain. I am not saying that leader development was not happening in the operational domain, nor am I saying no leaders were developing their subordinates. However, while leader development was occurring to some extent, it was not occurring up to par and as much as needed. As the 2012 Center for Army Leadership Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL) stated, "Army leader effectiveness in the competency Develops Others continues to be the lowest rated, and the most in need of attention."5 As exceptional as leaders have been during the past 12 or 13 years of conflict, unit leaders simply have not had enough time to conduct leader development properly in the operational

domain because of mission requirements. However, unlike the institutional domain, correcting this is not an easy fix. Because leader development in the operational domain has been minimized, there are majors, chief warrant officers, sergeants first class, and below who joined the ranks after 9/11 and have not been developed properly. They in turn, may not understand the need to develop their subordinates, or they may not know how. Likewise, those who served before 9/11 with knowledge of how to develop others are starting to leave the ranks and retire.

Army leaders need to take prompt action to ensure leader development occurs within their organizations and to ensure their subordinate leaders are developing others, especially in the operational domain. As the Army Leader Development Strategy 2013 states, "Senior leaders must hold subordinate leaders accountable for leader development and reward those who take this to heart." Moreover, leader development is not complicated. ADRP 6-22, *Army Leadership*, states, "Leaders have three principal ways of developing others. They can provide knowledge and feedback through counseling, coaching, and mentoring." In other words, leaders pass their knowledge

to others—to individuals—so that individual soldiers and Army civilians become even better leaders.

It is true that some leader development in the operational domain occurs through activities such as real-world missions and training exercises, but unless individual leaders provide individualized counseling, coaching, and mentoring, leader development is not what it could and should be. One can only learn so much without receiving personal and specific feedback. For example, I originally wrote this article to the best of my ability, until I could no longer improve it. When others, more experienced and capable than I, took the time to review my work and provide feedback, I was able to improve it. A similar process occurs with leaders. They can perform a mission repeatedly, but unless a counselor, coach, or mentor observes and provides feedback, the amount of improvement will be minimal. The main resource the higher leader needs to develop subordinates is time—the time it takes to talk to an individual and share knowledge. The process can be beneficial to both parties.

Army leaders can combine a variety of approaches to facilitate developing others, but all depend on



U.S. Army Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, the chief of staff of the Army, speaks during the Army War College class of 2013 graduation ceremony at Carlisle Barracks in Carlisle, Pa., 8 June 2013. (U.S. Army, Staff Sgt. Teddy Wade)

individual leaders taking the time to develop their individual subordinates. The Center for Army Leadership (CAL), the Army's lead for leadership doctrine and leadership development, provides tools to support leader development activities. For example, the CAL website, in the Virtual Improvement Center, offers a lesson on developing leaders through challenging job assignments. Unit leaders can task subordinate leaders to teach a class, give a presentation, or perform a task, but this type of development activity must be joined with counseling, coaching, and mentoring. As the Commander's Handbook for Unit Leader Development, produced by CAL, states, "Your ability to provide feedback to your subordinate leaders will significantly contribute to their development. It will enhance and accelerate learning from the day-to-day work experience—the most valued and effective environment for leader development."8 Simply placing a subordinate in a position of increased responsibility or assigning a task without ensuring feedback will be marginally effective. Only when the ranking leader provides individualized feedback can subordinates achieve their full leadership potential.

## The Self-Development Domain

The self-development domain, including activities such as attending college courses or obtaining a professional license, is distinct in that it puts the primary responsibility on the individual being developed. ADRP 6-22 states, "To prepare for increasingly more demanding operational environments, Army leaders must invest more time on self-study and self-development than before." This is not to say leaders do not have some responsibility to assist their subordinates in self-study. In the operational domain, a leader can assess leadership shortcomings of subordinates

and then can counsel and support them to conduct self-studies.

Self-development activities have never been more robust than in this age of technology. Individuals can complete college courses during a permanent change of station and even while deployed. Whereas many had to withdraw from college classes when deployed in support of Operation Desert Storm, completing college courses while deployed now has become common.

Among the numerous online tools available is the Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback Program, which leaders throughout the Department of Defense can use to assess their strengths and weaknesses. Through this program, leaders can take advantage of numerous leader development resources, including coaching to help build an individual development plan.

In conclusion, the Army needs to focus attention on improving leader development in the operational domain. The institutional domain functions well, with few issues. Soldiers and civilians routinely take advantage of the plentiful opportunities in the self-development domain. However, because of operational requirements over the past 12 or 13 years, individuals have not received sufficient leader development in the operational domain. Operational experience has provided some leader development, but unit leaders have not had enough time to invest in properly developing others. Higher-level leaders must not only develop their subordinates through counseling, coaching, and mentoring, but also ensure subordinate leaders do the same. This means providing unit leaders sufficient time, tools, education, and training for conducting leader development properly so they can prepare the next generation of Army leaders. MR

**NOTES** 

<sup>1.</sup> Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 7-0, *Training Units and Developing Leaders* (Washington, DC, Government Printing Office [GPO], 2012), 1-2, found at <a href="http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/DR\_pubs/dr\_a/pdf/adrp7">http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/DR\_pubs/dr\_a/pdf/adrp7</a> 0.pdf>.

<sup>2.</sup> Army Leader Development Strategy 2013, 8, found at <a href="http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/CAL/repository/ALDS5June%202013Record.pdf">http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/CAL/repository/ALDS5June%202013Record.pdf</a>.

<sup>3.</sup> Lance Bacon, "Sergeant Major: 12 Changes to Expect in '12," *Army Times* (29 January 2012), found at <a href="http://www.armytimes.com/article/20120129/NEWS/201290313/Sergeant-Major-12-changes-expect-12">https://www.armytimes.com/article/20120129/NEWS/201290313/Sergeant-Major-12-changes-expect-12</a>.

<sup>4.</sup> Army Leader Development Strategy 2013, 9.

<sup>5. 2012</sup> CAL Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL): Main Findings, Technical Report 2013-1 (April 2013): 9, found at <a href="http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/CAL/CALSurvey/ResourceData.asp">http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/CALSurvey/ResourceData.asp</a>>.

<sup>6.</sup> Army Leader Development Strategy 2013, 9.

<sup>7.</sup> ADRP 6-22, Army Leadership (Washington, DC, GPO, 2012), paragraph 7-59, found at <a href="http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/cgsc/events/ADP622/">http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/cgsc/events/ADP622/</a>.

<sup>8.</sup> Combined Arms Center, Center for Army Leadership, Commander's Handbook for Unit Leader Development, 16, found at <a href="http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/CAL/resource-library.asp">http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/CAL/resource-library.asp</a>.

<sup>9.</sup> ADRP 6-22, para. 7-32.