

A Case for Changing the Professional Military Education Paradigm

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Because our junior leaders – commissioned and noncommissioned officers – operate more independently and with greater responsibility today than ever before, it is time to change our professional military education paradigm to match the expectations we place on these leaders. “That’s above your pay grade” is a thing of the past. “Early to need” is what they require now.

The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Martin Dempsey published his white paper, “America’s Military – A Profession of Arms” in February 2012. In this paper, he issues a singular challenge to us, the volunteer force: “Renewing our commitment to the profession of arms is essential to ensure we maintain the best-led and best-trained force in the world – leadership is the foundation of our profession,” Dempsey said.

The chairman’s statement demands examination and an honest look at our force. It demands that we ask ourselves how are we grooming leaders, and are we doing it either correctly or the best way we can? Each service has its own leadership development model that accounts for both tangible and intangible dynamics,

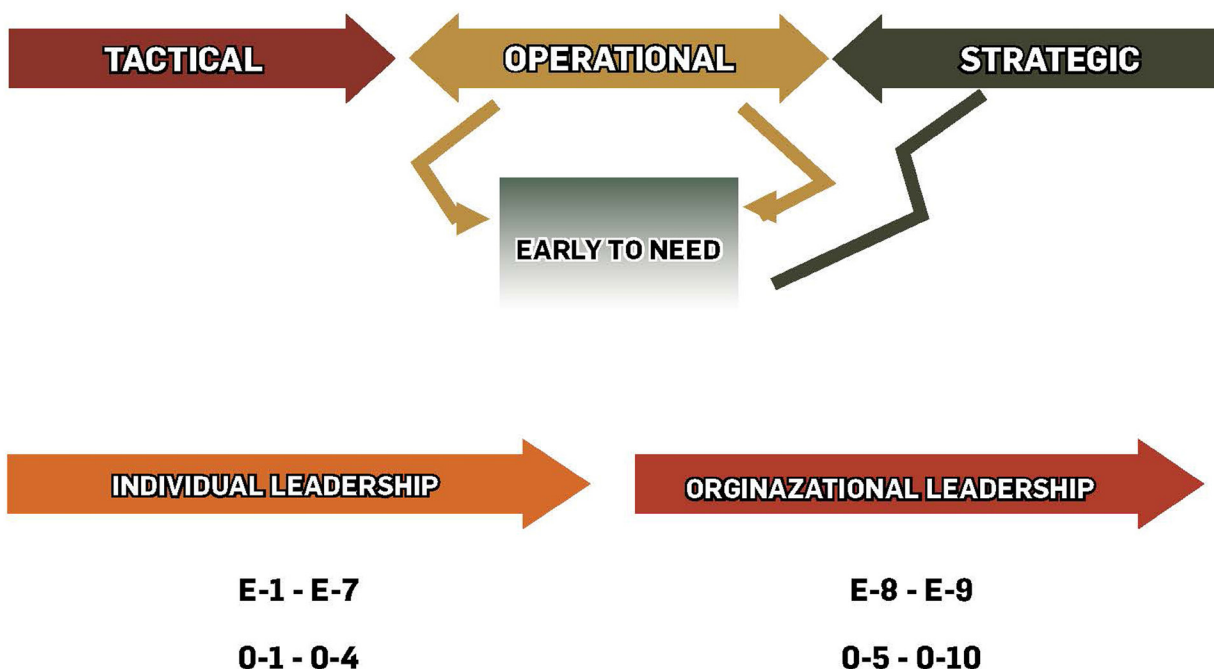
The current paradigm for PME is based upon the belief that a military career is a progression from tactical to operational to strategic leadership as Soldiers attain each level of war or control. This is convenient and allows nice and neat stovepiping by rank and position. However, this convenience also creates barriers. Has anyone ever been told that an answer to a question is “above their pay grade” or “that’s in the operational or strategic realm, and you need to focus on the tactical?” We all have. But, has anyone ever asked why those are the default answers?

Let’s examine the “why” under the current paradigm. If you look at the following diagram (admittedly simplified for discussion), it is clear that these solid barriers exist because, institutionally, we have created a modality that supports both the attitude and the belief. We intentionally stovepipe ranks into each level of war or control. The default answers in the previous paragraph came about because of this delineation. As a second-order effect, these barriers also prevent an honest examination of the levels of war or control to determine what should be “early to need” regardless of rank or position.

TACTICAL	OPERATIONAL	STRATEGIC
E-1 -- E-6	E-7 -- E-8	E-9
O-1 -- O-4 (-)	O-4 -- O-5	O-6 -- O-10

and each is influenced heavily by their roles, missions and culture, especially in the intangible dynamic arena. However, if we look at our military as a whole, the one common tangible dynamic is our professional military education. Though each service has a different PME emphasis for its officers and NCOs, they all have PME and, I submit, share the same PME paradigm.

For example, according to the current paradigm, an E-6 or O-3 does not have a requirement (nor, according to some attitudes, a need) to understand Title 22 or Title 18 authorities. Yet the future force in its Phase 0 (Shape) and Phase 1 (Deter) Building Partnership Capacity roles should understand these authorities at the appropriate level. What good is capacity if it can’t be



fully employed to counter a nation state's threats and adversaries? What good is capacity if those who are training that capacity do not understand the context in which it will or should be employed? Many resources are available under Title 22 and Title 18 authorities that do not exist in Title 10.

Under the current paradigm, do we truly support mission command and its intent? Mission command consists of three key attributes – understanding, intent and trust. If we overlay our PME paradigm to these three attributes, does it support the proper leader development for Joint Force 2020? These and the previous questions will best be answered after proposing a new paradigm.

I submit that a military career is truly about a progression from individual leadership to organizational leadership along a continuum of the levels of war and control. In the simplest of terms, the diagram below, shows how, the continuum is ever-present and influencing, though leadership is the constant focus. Notice the gap between individual leadership and organizational leadership. This is intentional from a PME perspective, allowing the services to appropriately fill positions based upon roles, missions and culture. This is the gap that should be filled with elements from the operational and strategic levels to meet “early to need” requirements.

Why is the idea of “early to need” important to this paradigm? It will be the “early to need” curricula that will bridge (or leap) the gap from individual to organizational leadership. “Early to need” curricula will reinforce mission command key attributes to a greater extent. So what is the “early to need” concept?

I define “early to need” as an examination across the operational and strategic levels of war and control. This examination is not just operationally as applied in joint, full-spectrum conflict, but also in Title 10 force generation, training, management and budgeting aspects, and then appropriately applied based upon career progression pertinent to duties and responsibilities.

For example, Section 1206 of the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2006 provides the secretary of defense with the authority to train and equip foreign military forces for two specified purposes – counterterrorism and stability operations – and foreign maritime security forces for counterterrorism operations. Funds, however, may only be obligated with approval by the secretary of defense and there is a \$350 million cap per year. This approval process requires a concept of operation staffed through the Joint Staff.

This is definitely something our E-6 and E-7 and O-1 to O-4 populations should know about. They are the ones who are on the ground and who will be working with partner nation forces. They are the ones who can, as a part of their after-action reports, identify and propose 1206 candidates to the geographic combatant commanders. How many of the above population are aware of this authority? Where in the current PME paradigm would they get access to such knowledge?

Also, why do we wait so late in a career to truly expose our service members to joint capabilities? As we move into shape and deter operations through building PN capabilities, service members should know what a Seabee or a Red Horse (Navy and Air Force combat construction units) can do for them. If I

have to train an element within reach of a Marine expeditionary unit or amphibious ready group and its assets, how can I leverage that to enhance host-nation interoperability if I do not know what they bring? This is not about educating joint war-fighting at early career levels, this is educating joint capabilities. This will enhance joint war fighting as a second-order effect in the long term, but it will enhance joint training immediately.

In terms of Title 10 man, train and equip responsibilities, why do we not educate our service members on something as simple as “the colors of money?” Especially in these fiscally tumultuous times, a basic understanding beginning at the E-6 and O-1 level and the appropriate progress would lend tremendous understanding to the decisions that are being made at the Department of Defense and service levels. Why do we not teach the basics of the Program Objective Memorandum process and its cycle so that troops understand that through their respective service hasn’t finished a current POM, it is half-way through the next? They do not need to know how to do the process, but they do need to know of the process.

The above are only a few examples, but I believe that one can see the validity for examining the benefits of a new paradigm. This shift is not just theory. At U.S. Special Operations Command, I am implementing this for my NCO Corps through a program called

the Continuing Education Program. CEP consists of four levels, starting with E-6 and culminating with a Summit Course geared toward grooming nominative-level E-9s. No course is redundant to each service’s NCO Education System and each course focuses on “early to need”.

Currently CEP-3, which is geared toward promotable E-8s, has been running for three years. In July, we completed the pilot course for CEP-4, or Summit Course, and Class 2 began in August. The CEP-1 pilot commenced in September with the CEP-2 pilot scheduled to begin in March. All of this is intended to help make better organizational leaders who are effective from day one instead of having to play catch-up on their knowledge deficits.

As the saying goes, knowledge is power. We need to ask ourselves why are we not truly empowering our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen with the right knowledge at the right times in their careers? We no longer have the luxury to stay service-centric in our thinking. We must know our joint capabilities and how to leverage and capitalize on them. We must know our inter-agency partners’ authorities and how to use them to enhance our whole-of-government approach to partnering. The sad part is that under the PME paradigm, we wait too late into a career to educate ourselves and gain that knowledge. ■

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