



A Green Beret assigned to 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) instructs during an advanced skills company culminating exercise on Fort Bragg, NC, Aug. 28, 2017. The class is intended to ensure mechanics are proficient at recovering vehicles when in austere conditions. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Peter Seidler)

# Leading Change in a High OPTEMPO Environment

*By Capt. Stephanie R. Worth and Master Sgt. Emmanuel A. Emekaekwue*

Bravo Maintenance Company, Group Support Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group

**A** rmy Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, since retired, said in the foreword to *Army Doctrine Publication* (ADP) 6-22: *Army Leadership*: “Decentralized operations require leaders at all levels that understand their environment, learn quickly, make sound decisions, and lead change” (Department of the Army, 2012b). Empowered subordinates are fundamental to the success of any organization. And never has this been more prevalent, or important, than in the Army’s non-commissioned officer (NCO) corps—the backbone of today’s United States Army (Bouilly, 2018). Such was the culture in Bravo Maintenance Company, Group Support Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group (SFG)(Airborne), in 2017 when the company won the Secretary of Defense

Field-Level Maintenance Award (Small Category), the Chief of Staff of the Army–Army Award for Maintenance Excellence—Small Modified Table of Organization and Equipment (MTOE), the inaugural U.S. Army Ordnance Crucible Combat Repair Team of the Year, the United States Army Special Operation Command (USASOC) Combined Logistics Excellence Award (Small MTOE), and the 1st Special Forces Command Army Award for Maintenance Excellence (Small MTOE) while supporting combat operations in the Middle East and training missions in Africa.

## **A Framework for Leading Change**

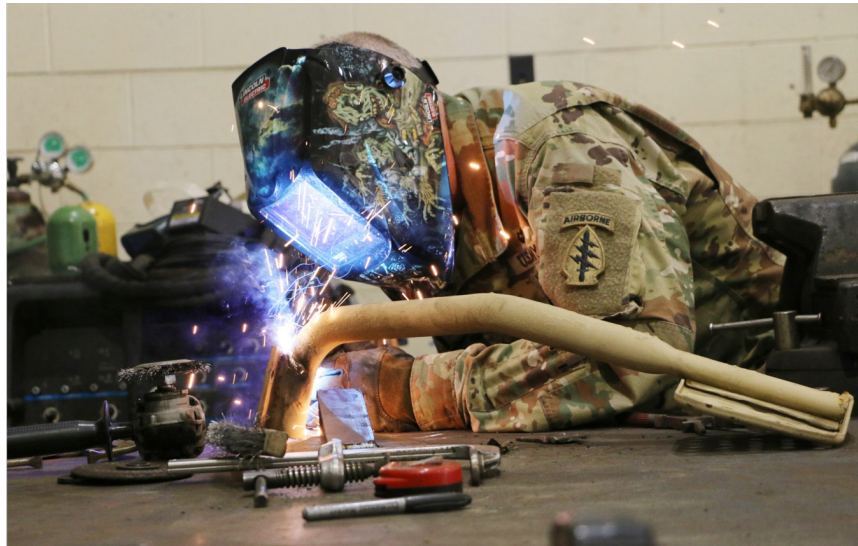
As we reflect back a year ago since we relinquished

command as company commander and first sergeant, we believe it is important and instructive to capture our thought process and the model we followed to cultivate and protect empowered leaders in our organization. At the heart of our success lies our deliberate implementation of John P. Kotter's eight-step process for leading change (Kotter, 1996). Kotter's quintessential framework for change management offers a roadmap for leading organizational transformation, regardless of size. Leaders of Army organizations can gain from his perspective, just as Bravo Company did.

Upon assumption of our roles as the company's senior leaders, we were faced with an unprecedented challenge, especially since our backgrounds were in support of conventional maneuver forces. Our company's mission did not follow the doctrinal framework of providing area support maintenance to the Group's separate companies. Instead, because of the vastness of Africa and the high operational tempo of the Group we needed to provide mechanics to individually augment operational detachments while performing our doctrinal mission. The forward support companies of the Group were simply above their capacity to support such a complex and fast-paced deployment schedule. Bravo Company was not initially equipped to perform these missions simultaneously, with an MTOE and Mission Essential Task List designed around support to Special Operations Forces during large-scale combat operations.

Faced with this challenge, and absent a doctrinal framework for leading change, it was only fitting for us to adopt Kotter's tried-and-true framework, popular in the private sector and academia, including senior service colleges (Army War College, Naval War College, etc.). Given the prescriptive nature of the eight-step process, we first applied the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis to diagnose the climate of the company and pinpoint areas that needed to change before proceeding with Kotter's change initiative. The initial command climate survey, initiated within 30 days of assuming command, was sufficient for the SWOT analysis and provided a baseline to measure success against. Our goal for the change initiative was to become a learning organization, capable of decentralized maintenance actions in support of Green Berets of the 3rd SFG anywhere in the world.

The command climate survey findings revealed that many of our junior Soldiers were nervous about making



Chief Warrant Officer Mike Cox, the Bravo Company Allied Trades Warrant Officer, conducts metal repair at Fort Bragg, NC, June, 2017. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Joshua Worth)

decentralized decisions and lacked the technical acumen to diagnose mechanical faults on unconventional equipment – two skills necessary for optimal individual support to Operation Detachment-Alphas (ODAs).

## Create a Sense of Urgency and Build a Guiding Coalition

Sharing this result with the organization helped create a sense of urgency and bolstered the readiness for change (steps one and two in Kotter's Change Model). We communicated directly and often with the Soldiers, explaining that we wanted to empower and protect them and allow them to make decisions for themselves, trusting their judgement.

Noncommissioned officers, junior officers, and warrant officers of the company were instrumental in building the guiding coalition to protect this initiative. They solicited buy-ins from junior Soldiers and championed the proposal to change the unit mascot to "The Pride," based on the hunting unit of the African lion, requiring each member to play their individual role and pull their weight in support of each other. Working together with the guiding coalition, we ensured the culture was also aligned with the "family" values of the organization.

## Develop, Strategize and Communicate the Vision

After much collaboration, Bravo Company decided upon a vision statement: *To provide innovative, world-class maintenance support to the 3rd SFG while fostering a climate that strongly supports Soldier and Family readiness.*

Following the development of our vision for improvement, we spent considerable time and effort communicating it—in training meetings, safety briefs, counseling sessions, performance evaluations, leader professional de-

velopment, etc. (step three and four of the Change Model).

The strategy for achieving our vision was the creation of the Critical Skills Enabler (CSE) training pipeline: A six-month institutionalized approach to training that seeks to equip Soldiers with conventional and specialized training required to maintain many of the unconventional equipment we support in garrison and overseas in support of special operations forces. As depicted in *Figure A*, the cornerstone of the pipeline is cross-training selected 91-series Soldiers. These Soldiers are quickly inducted into the pipeline upon completion of in-processing and the Enabler Integration Program (EIP) – a three-week program that familiarizes newly assigned Soldiers with the customs of the 3rd SFG.

Next, Soldiers follow a programmed five-point training plan that includes capability familiarization, technical training, individual training, certification, and finally, utilization. Utilization is especially important for the forward support companies because these Soldiers were in high demand to augment the forward support companies for deployments and permanent reassignments due to the previously mentioned mission requirements. This added training removed obstacles of doubt and strength-

ened the Soldier's confidence in their abilities (step five of the Change Model).

CSE graduates deploy as individuals – attached to ODA teams – as the only logistician, responsible for all logistic requirements, including power generation, welding, fabrication, component repair, additive and subtractive manufacturing, recovery, construction, parts acquisition, and many other tasks and responsibilities. Though a seemingly overwhelming scope of work, these Soldiers were equal to the task. Their enthusiasm to support the ODA teams was only matched by our enthusiasm to resource training and ensure a healthy deployment-to-dwell-time ratio for them.

### Generate Short-term Wins

Short term wins are necessary for sustaining change momentum (step six of the Change Model), so when the chief of ordnance announced the inaugural Ordnance Crucible Combat Repair Team of the Year, designed to “assess Soldiers’ teamwork and critical thinking skills as they apply technical solutions to real world problems” (“Ordnance Soldiers,” n.d., para. 1), we knew we had to enter a team. The Soldiers and leaders who volunteered did not disappoint,

## Critical Skills Enabler Concept

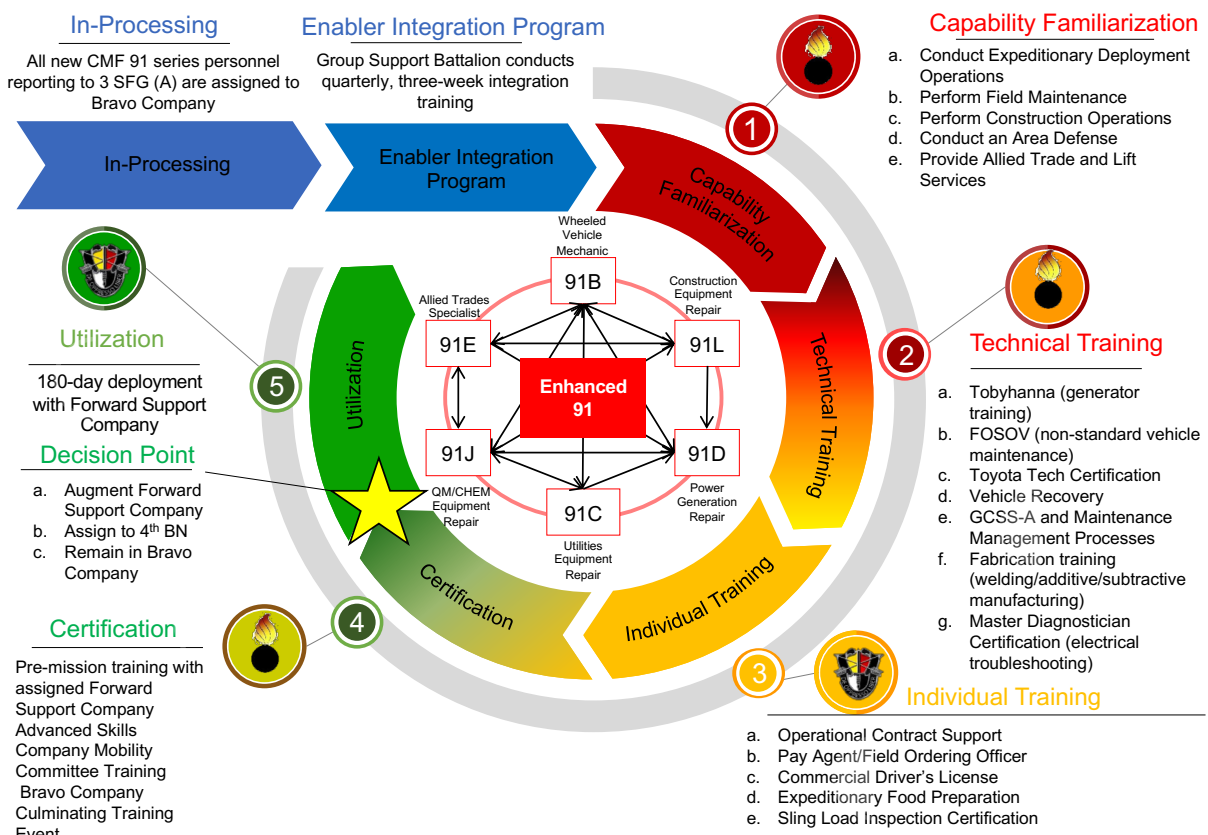


Figure A. Critical skills enabler training model. (Graphic by Capt. Stephanie R. Worth and Master Sgt. Emmanuel A. Emekaekwue, Bravo Maintenance Company, Group Support Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group)

decisively winning the competition in every category. This short-term win was just the boost the company needed to show we were headed in the right direction.

## Empower Soldiers for Decentralized Action

While empowering Soldiers for decentralized action, we integrated the principles of the Army's Mission Command as our guiding framework. *ADP 6-0, Mission Command*, defines mission command as "the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander's intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations" (Department of the Army, 2012a, p. 1-1). Soldiers were encouraged to exercise disciplined initiative, tempered with prudent risk. Everyday tasks became an opportunity for leaders in the organization to foster resourcefulness and responsible decision-making within the commander's intent. These were also deliberately overstated in all aspects of the CSE pipeline.

## Consolidate Successes to Produce more Change

Building on many short-term wins, we went about consolidating successes to effect more change, thus ensuring lasting institutional impact (step seven of the Change Model). For example, two of our NCOs, Staff Sgt. James Coffey and Staff Sgt. Daniel Ewing, pioneered the Expeditionary Enabler Package (EEP), a compact toolbox with commercial-off-the-shelf special tools. The EEP was a product of feedback from downrange – to satisfy the need for a special tools kit to work on commercial vehicles in austere environments. They presented the product to the USASOC G4 team for funding and resourcing across the command so as to standardize what had long been a disparate procurement process.

The feedback received on CSE graduates was overwhelmingly positive. Some earned strong individual

recognition and were often requested by name. For example, Spc. Brian Lopez, the first power generation specialist to deploy with an ODA team from 3rd SFG in over 10 years, was frequently requested. Accounts of his performance while deployed with the ODAs were beyond expectations for a junior enlisted Soldier. An ODA team member told us of a time Lopez dutifully studied the Arabic schematic of a broken generator. He was initially encouraged to abandon it as a lost cause, but he persisted, and though he had never seen or worked on it

before, repaired it within a few hours.

Like many others in the company, Staff Sgt. Nathaniel Green's reputation preceded him. While deployed with an ODA team to a remote outpost in Africa as a wheeled vehicle mechanic, he became the logistic lead in that country, responsible for the coordination of all logistics in and out of the

country in support of ODA teams and partner forces. During his deployment, Green identified shortcomings in the custom civilian vehicles the team utilized. He offered recommendations for mechanical improvements which the manufacturer adopted.

## Anchor New Approaches in the Culture

Our change initiative also had the ancillary benefit of reinforcing a culture of diversity, equality, and diplomacy (the final step in Kotter's Change Model), as exemplified by Sgt. Natalie McGinness. McGinness, a wheeled vehicle mechanic, was the first female mechanic to deploy with an ODA team in 3rd SFG. Her performance, however, bears a commendable distinction. While deployed with an ODA team to a remote site in Africa, the U.S. Ambassador to the country requested that she speak to a gathering of local women about women empowerment on International Women's Day.

## Conclusion

These Soldiers, and many others – junior officers, warrant officers, noncommissioned officers – believed



Sgt. Natalie McGinness (second to left) participates on a panel for International Women's Day during her deployment as the first female mechanic deployed with 3rd Special Forces Group to Africa. (U.S. Army photo courtesy of Bravo Maintenance Company, Group Support Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group)

in the vision. Their hard work ensured its manifestation, consequently validating the utility of Kotter's eight-step process for leading change. They were agile, resilient, and capable of decentralized maintenance actions because we empowered, trained and rallied them under a vision for a better organization.

Their extraordinary achievements in garrison as well as the far corners of the world, made 2017 a banner year for Bravo Maintenance Company. Standing on the stage in Salt Lake City, Utah, to receive the Secretary of Defense Award for Maintenance Excellence was the company's affirmation that their hard work produced lasting institutional change and resounding results. ■

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