



Senior noncommissioned officers of 101st Airborne Division Artillery Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), drag a simulated casualty on a Skedco approximately 400 meters during a combat-related physical fitness training event, March 2, 2018, at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. The event was conducted to reinforce the importance of planning and executing rigorous physical training so Soldiers are fit to fight. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Todd Pouliot, 40th Public Affairs Detachment)

The 21st Century NCO

By Dr. Evelyn Hollis

United States Army Sergeants Major Academy

Senior noncommissioned officers (NCO) fulfill dual roles in a unit, both as leaders and as mentors in the organization. They must find ways to motivate subordinates through leadership, Army values, competence, and judgement while designing, arranging, influencing and executing a myriad of activities that move the organization towards the completion of its mission. Targeting the developmental needs of senior NCOs is necessary for their overall growth as holistic leaders, and allows them to groom their subordinates to one day take their place as they pass on the sword.

Up until the 21st century, most developmental training was based on operational experience and there was not a concrete doctrinal training plan in place to encourage the pursuit of a higher education. In order to bring attention to this gap in development, a case

study was conducted exploring the variables within the operational and organizational environment (Hollis, 2017). This research provided a basis to understand the development process and activities that support current NCO skill progression and feedback. To fix the neglected areas, a shift in paradigms was imperative to structuring an effective developmental process wherein senior NCOs relied on learning and growth from experiences through all sources—not just hands-on or on-the-job training. This not only created a change in basic assumptions about development, but also took into account diversity, technology, knowledge management, and generational differences. The case study provided an understanding of the developmental background, activities, and practices used to train NCOs and allowed for a pathway forward to develop a more complete leader.

Development Background

The increased operational tempo that NCOs have experienced the last two decades created a need for leaders to not just be operationally sound, but also have an education in order to execute quick decisions based on a deep knowledge base. According to Vane (2011), leaders need to be adaptable, culturally proficient, flexible, and agile—ready to face the demands of the environment. The United States Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) formed an officer, NCO, and warrant officer Army Training Leader Development Panel (ATLDP) to gauge the condition of development as leaders at all levels continued to see an increase in challenges and complexity in today's evolving battlefields (Department of the Army, 2000). Panel findings produced several implications for leader development, mainly that training and leadership development programs need to be relevant to the contemporary operating environment and that current programs were not effective for today's Army (Department of the Army, 2000). Additionally, the panel suggested a need to emphasize the skills of flexibility, adaptability, and agility for current and future leaders (Department of the Army, 2002).

TRADOC implemented procedures and models to develop leaders ready to engage the demands of the Army throughout the complete span of military operations. These measures curtail a leader's sole reliance on operational experiences as a main strategy for development, and instead emphasize learning and growth from a combination of operational, educational, and self-development experiences (U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 2015).

Development Initiatives

Within the operational field, both broadening and operational assignments contribute to an individual's talents, skills, behaviors, and potential (Department of the Army, 2000). During a senior NCO's career, the bulk of time, roughly 60 to 75 percent, is spent in operational assignments and deployments requiring real world problem solving in real time scenarios (Department of the Army, 2015). While operational assignments are crucial to the success of the Army on the world stage, broadening assignments, especially those with a writing component, are also necessary for preparing senior NCOs to expand their creative thinking and decision-making skills (Griffing, 2019). Maximizing talent assignments will continue to play a vital supplemental role in developing senior NCOs to be flexible, adaptive, agile, and capable of success in future operational environments.

Select, Train, Educate, and Promote (STEP) rep-



Command Sgt. Maj. Craig Owens, command sergeant major of the 200th Military Police Command, gives a presentation to brigade command sergeants major from across the command during the leadership and readiness symposium in Grand Prairie, Texas, Nov. 15, 2018. As the senior enlisted advisor to the commanding general of the 200th MP Command, Owens serves as the subject matter expert on all matters pertaining to enlisted Soldiers. (U.S. Army Reserve photo by Sgt. Elizabeth Taylor)

resents a progressive process for NCO development (Select-Train-Educate-Promote, 2015). To complete the STEP process, an appropriate level of formal education is required, such as the basic, advanced, and senior leader courses. The knowledge and skills acquired from a formal education support the four Army Learning Areas (ALAs) and 14 General Learning Outcomes (GLOs), providing senior NCOs with multiple strengths in areas of readiness, operations, training management, program management, communications, and leadership.

The Army Learning Concept for Training and Education sets the conditions to educate senior NCOs with the knowledge and skills needed to improve and thrive under conditions of ambiguity and chaos, which can only be achieved with both a formal education, as well as operational experience (Department of the Army, 2017b).

Development Implications

The research and case studies provide clarity to the holistic approach established in doctrine indicating the intentional focus placed on implementing developmental strategies to create a well-rounded leader (Department of the Army, 2000; Hollis, 2017). An interpretation of the NCO ATLDP findings show the need for a more deliberate focus on mentorship, noting that leaders lack a common understanding of what mentorship is as well as its processes and outcomes (Department of the Army, 2002).

A senior NCO's relationships created through interactions with mentors and coaches, and through formal and informal feedback, are conducive to fast tracking the development of leadership skills. Alyssa Rapp stated



Command Sgt. Maj. Jacinto Garza, the 8th Theater Sustainment Command's senior enlisted leader, stresses the importance of building relationships during the Joint Senior Enlisted Logistics Forum (JSELF) January 31, 2018 at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam. The JSELF brought senior enlisted logistics leaders from all services together to enhance relationships in order to better organize joint capabilities. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Michael Behlin)

in her 2018 *Forbes* article, "A remarkable 75 percent of executives say mentoring has been critical to their career development" (para.1). This shows that both in the military, and in the private sector, the knowledge and experiences shared through mentorship are necessary to develop effective leaders.

Practices for Development

The intentional emphasis on capability, as outlined in the *Army Learning Concept 2020-2040*, provides the framework to transform and sustain the learning environment essential for senior NCOs (Department of the Army, 2017a). There is a need for practical strategies to integrate individual skill development with organizational skill development. Possible programs could include a series of face-to-face and online meetings to facilitate building a network from which the leader can hone their presence and intellect (Department of the Army, 2017a). This practice can be a time-conscious and cost-effective way to balance development while also promoting collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.

Conclusion

The study and implementation of leader development programs and initiatives, and their success or faults, are beneficial to improving Army leadership as a whole. This will not only increase the Army's chance of winning future conflicts on future and unpredictable battlefields, it will also increase retention across the board as quality leadership will motivate Soldiers to remain in the Army and begin their own path towards becoming a senior NCO. ■

References

- Griffing, A. (2019, February 4). Stewardship of the profession through writing. *NCO Journal*. Retrieved from <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/Archives/2019/February/Stewardship-Through-Writing/>
- Headquarters, Department of the Army. (2000). *The Army training and leader development panel officer study report to the Army*. Washington, DC: Government Accounting Office. Retrieved from http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/army/atld-panel/off_report.pdf
- Headquarters, Department of the Army. (2002). *The Army training and leader development panel NCO study report to the Army*. Retrieved from <http://www.dtic.mil/docs/citations/ADA401192>
- Headquarters, Department of the Army. (2015). *DA Pam 600-25: U.S. Army noncommissioned officer professional development guide*. Retrieved from <http://data.cape.army.mil/web/character-development-project/repository/dapam600-25-2017.pdf>
- Headquarters, Department of the Army. (2017a). *The U. S. Army learning concept for training and education 2020-2040*. Retrieved from <http://www.tradoc.army.mil/tpubs/pamndx.htm>
- Headquarters, Department of the Army. (2017b). *AR 350-1: Army training and leader development*. Retrieved from https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/ARN6701_AR350-1_Web_FINAL.pdf
- Hollis, E. (2017). *Flexible, adaptive, and agile leaders: A qualitative case study of experiences in leading and development* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global. (UMI No. 10615689)
- Rapp, A. (2018, October 2). Be one, get one: The importance of mentorship. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/yec/2018/10/02/be-one-get-one-the-importance-of-mentorship/>
- Select-Train-Educate-Promote. (2015, August 24). *Army*. Retrieved from https://www.army.mil/standto/archive_2015-08-24
- United States Army Training and Doctrine Command. (2015, December 4). *NCO 2020 strategy: NCOs operating in a complex world*. Retrieved from <https://www.tradoc.army.mil/Portals/14/Documents/NCO2020.pdf>
- Vane, M. A. (2011). New norms for the 21st century soldier. *Military Review*, 91(4), 16. Retrieved from <http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/MilitaryReview/>

Dr. Evelyn Hollis is an assistant professor at the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy in the Department of Command Leadership. She holds a doctor of management with a specialization in organizational leadership from the University of Phoenix. Dr. Hollis' last assignments were as the command sergeant major for 1st Battalion, 56th Air Defense Artillery and 1st Battalion, 1st Air Defense Artillery.



<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/>

<https://www.facebook.com/NCOJournal>

<https://twitter.com/NCOJournal>

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the NCO Journal, the U.S. Army, or the Department of Defense.

