An organizational culture prioritizing caution and stability — encapsulated in the mindset, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" — often reinforces senior NCOs' reluctance to adopt and adapt to new technologies and methodologies. While this approach provides stability, it can limit the Army's ability to adapt to new operational realities and technological advances. (Original U.S. Army photo by Spc. Devin Davis, graphic by *NCO Journal*)

Navigating Resistance to Transformation

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Introduction

As technological innovation accelerates, the Army must adapt to new technologies and methodologies. Despite the benefits, NCO resistance poses challenges. This opposition threatens the Army's operational readiness and ability to maintain a strategic edge on the modern battlefield, where agility and adaptability are paramount (O'Hanlon, 2018).

Resistance to New Policies and Procedures

Resistance to adopting Army policies often stems from some senior NCOs' preference for well-established methods over newer, potentially unproven approaches. A deep-seated reliance on traditional military frameworks drives this viewpoint. These NCOs may see new strategies and technologies as unnecessary risks that could disrupt established operational harmony.

An organizational culture prioritizing caution and stability — encapsulated in the mindset, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" — often reinforces such reluctance. While this approach provides stability, it can limit the Army's ability to adapt to new operational realities

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and technological advances. The situation could place the organization at a strategic disadvantage (Chinn & Dowdy, 2014).

Technological Resistance

The cyber warfare and artificial intelligence fields are evolving rapidly, transforming the nature of modern combat. These technologies demand new kinds of operational knowledge and adaptability, often beyond the traditional skill sets of many senior NCOs (O'Hanlon, 2022).

The daunting pace of technological advancements may be the reason why they're reluctant to engage with these crucial tools. Senior NCOs may hesitate to update their technological competencies because they lack institutional incentives.

Without strong command directives or clear career benefits linked to technological proficiency, there is little motivation for these leaders to step outside their comfort zones. Consequently, their units may need help to keep pace with essential technological advancements, hindering their operational effectiveness and strategic responsiveness (O'Hanlon, 2022).

A proven example of incentivizing technological adaptation is the Army's Cyber Operations Specialist (17C) career field, which integrates structured training, certification opportunities, and clear promotion pathways to encourage skill development. By offering competitive reenlistment bonuses, special incentive pay, specialized training at the Army Cyber School, and a direct pipeline to high-demand assignments, the Army successfully motivates Soldiers to invest in technical expertise.

Similar incentive-based models, such as ArmyIgnitED — which funds professional certifications in cybersecurity and IT — demonstrate how structured incentives can drive engagement with emerging technologies. Applying these principles more broadly could help senior NCOs overcome their reluctance, ensuring they lead from the front in adopting and integrating new capabilities.

The Undervaluation of Experiential Learning

Experiential learning, an active educational approach where individuals learn by doing, is critical for mastering and applying new technologies in operational settings. However, some NCOs underestimate this type

The daunting pace of technological advancements may be the reason why senior NCOs are reluctant to engage with tools that demand new kinds of operational knowledge and adaptability. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Christopher Saunders)

of learning due to traditional views on military training, which often emphasize discipline and rote learning over innovative, hands-on experience.

Such skepticism can lead to insufficient support for training programs focused on new technologies, limiting Soldiers' opportunities to experiment with and adapt to these tools in controlled environments. The lack of adequate support for such programs can leave Soldiers ill-prepared for the technological demands of contemporary warfare (Chinn & Dowdy, 2014).

Adapting to the Demographics of Modern Soldiers

Soldiers today often join the Army with robust digital skills and a comfort with technology that previous generations lacked. Senior NCOs must recognize and harness these capabilities to enhance the Army's technological fluency and adaptability (O'Hanlon, 2018).

Promoting a culture that values innovation and continuous learning is essential to bridging the gap between traditional military practices and modern operations' needs. This cultural shift is vital for leveraging the full potential of younger Soldiers, who are crucial for the Army's ability to innovate and remain competitive in an increasingly digital battlefield (O'Hanlon, 2018).

Higher Leadership's Role in Technological Integration

Senior Army leadership plays a crucial role in preparing NCOs to integrate and use new technologies within their units. This responsibility encompasses strategic planning, policymaking, fostering a culture of innovation, and providing mentorship and support (O'Hanlon, 2018).

Leaders at the highest levels must prioritize including technology in strategic planning and policymaking, embedding technological advancement into the Army's core objectives to establish a clear directive emphasizing the importance of technology in mission success.

To cultivate an organizational culture that values and encourages innovation, leadership should promote a mindset that views technological challenges as opportunities for growth (Chinn & Dowdy, 2014). They inspire active participation in the Army's technological transformation by championing innovative thinking and problem-solving among NCOs and recognizing successful technological integration.

Additionally, senior leaders should be mentors and role models when using new technologies. Actively engaging with technology themselves, they set a powerful example for NCOs, helping demystify new technologies and overcome apprehensions

Experiential learning, an active educational approach where individuals learn by doing, is critical for mastering and applying new technologies in operational settings. However, some NCOs may have traditional views on military training, which often emphasize discipline and rote learning over innovative, hands-on experience. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Sar Paw)

(Chinn & Dowdy, 2014).

The multifaceted role of higher leadership in technological integration is indispensable. By setting strategic priorities, fostering an innovative culture, and offering mentorship, senior leaders can guide NCOs through the challenges of adapting to technological advancements, enhancing the Army's operational capabilities, and securing its position as a technologically advanced force ready to face the challenges of modern warfare (Chinn & Dowdy, 2014).

Conclusion

Some NCOs are reluctant to embrace new technologies and methodologies, impeding the Army's ability to adapt and innovate in response to evolving global threats. This resistance limits the Army's current operational capabilities and threatens its future readiness.

Without strong command directives or career benefits tied to technological proficiency, leaders have little reason to step outside their comfort zones. To drive meaningful change, the Army must implement a comprehensive approach that includes clear incentives, robust training programs, strong leadership engagement, and a culture that values continuous learning and innovation.

The Army can accelerate technological adaptation by integrating promotion pathways, specialized training opportunities, recognition programs, and hands-on technological experiences. Prioritizing these efforts enhances long-term operational effectiveness, reinforces strategic superiority, and ensures the force remains agile and prepared for the complexities of 21st-century warfare. ■

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