



Theirs *Is* to **REASON WHY**

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Deciding when and how to close with an enemy may be the least important decision leaders make on an asymmetric battlefield.

The challenge the Army faces today is not one of over-thinking situations, rather it is the failure to think clearly in situations that require sound judgment at junior levels, and leadership's hesitation to believe that juniors can or will think clearly. Soldiers and junior leaders who are trained or conditioned to look at the situation—to assess, exercise judgment, and make a decision—are more decisive, deliberate, and correct in their actions. This is particularly important in the complex environment of full-spectrum operations. The most important capability needed for the future Army of 2030 and beyond are thinking Soldiers and junior leaders who seek the “why” of a situation, task, or directive. They are interested in this primarily to understand and make better use of the purpose behind it. But the future is now.

In light of this, thinking young men and women who have been taught the purpose behind military operations understand that anarchy leads to failure. An organization of thinking individuals, working in unity of purpose with a strong understanding of intent or why, is more readily able to adapt to the unexpected realities of today's missions. The Army acknowledges the need for change and has begun a revolution in the way it develops—trains, educates, accesses, promotes, and selects—leaders and Soldiers specifically for adaptability. As a result, the Army has adopted an approach to training and education called Outcome Based Training & Education (OBT&E) with a new teaching method under its umbrella called the Adaptive Leaders Methodology (ALM).¹

No More Assembly-Line Training

In the past, the competency theory of learning dominated course curricula, and signs of it continue today in leader development. This theory is a product of the old, industrial-age outlook that once, by necessity, governed the way our military approached preparing for war. Order and control are central to instruction programs based on this theory.² During the time when we relied on a citizen army consisting of draftees, this assembly-line mentality made sense, but the disadvantage was that it emphasized output more than individual quality of the product. Today, some leader-centric programs within the institutional Army still reflect this approach.

Leader development for the full range of 21st-century military operations must be based on quality, not quantity, at every grade level. The rule should be, Soldiers deserve and require trained leaders. Schools must constantly put students in difficult, unexpected situations and then require them to decide and act under time pres-

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General George S. Patton Jr. once noted: “War is an art and as such is not susceptible to explanation by fixed formula.” Outcome-based training teaches the art in a manner that encourages retention while fostering independent and creative means of obtaining the end goal. Here, Soldiers at Fort Benning, Georgia’s War Training Center tackle a field problem during an exercise last October.



Outcome Based Training & Education is labor intensive, requiring trainers and leaders alike to literally go back to school to learn how to teach and lead in the new environment. Here, Asymmetric Warfare Group Command Sergeant Major Ray Devens addresses an OBT&E workshop in March 2009.

sure. Schooling must take students out of their comfort zones. Stress—mental and moral as well as physical—must be constant. War games, tactical decision games, map exercises, and free-play field exercises must constitute the bulk of the curriculum. Drill and ceremonies and adherence to “task, condition, and standards” (task proficiency) in the name of process are not important, although there are a number of requirements where it is still relevant.

The Army has begun to embrace outcome-based training as a doctrine, which evolved out of the efforts of Colo-

nel Casey Haskins and his 198th Infantry Brigade at Fort Benning, Georgia, from 2006 to 2008 in the approach they took in developing new infantry Soldiers. Colonel Haskins is currently implementing the newly adopted training regime in the U.S. Military Academy’s Department of Military Instruction. (See sidebar.) Several other courses at Forts Knox, Benning, Huachuca, Jackson, Leonard Wood, and Sill are also putting the techniques to practice as attested by instructors in recently published Army journal articles.³

Learning and Context

Put simply, outcome-based training looks for results and is best described as developmental training. It puts a burden of professionalism on the shoulders of the student while the instructor determines how they get results. This is much like mission orders or tactics where the “how” is left to those executing the mission with little or no oversight from higher authority.

Dr. Robert Bjork, dean of the UCLA School of Psychology, told attendees at a U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command–hosted workshop in August 2006 that the way we thought we learned is wrong. He emphasized that when instruction occurs under constant and predictable

Payoff is Worth the Effort

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Implementing an outcomes-based training and education (OBT&E) program is not for those who would be popular. It requires hard work and the willingness to break established patterns. However, even before it is fully implemented rapid improvements in creativity, energy, and enthusiasm result, and when properly executed, it clearly produces better training outcomes.

I have used the techniques at three schools, each with very different types of students: the Captains’ Career Course at

Fort Benning, Georgia, which trains newly promoted captains mainly in planning and coordinating tactical operations; the 198th Infantry Brigade, also at Fort Benning (the unit that trains all the Army’s newly enlisted infantrymen); and now with cadets at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. These were not solo efforts. Each has required the hard labor and persistence of many talented subordinates and the assistance of like-minded experts willing to help educate leaders.

Getting started required the strong support and encouragement of commanding generals who saw the need for a better way and were willing to take the risk of trying something different. I have seen only two patterns: support and encouragement from a commanding general but reluctance and foot dragging from his staff, or opposition from a general reinforced by vigorous staff efforts to suppress OBT&E. (This case kills it, of course.) I have not yet seen a staff working to provide active

conditions, learning appears to become contextualized. It works well in that context, but not when tested in others. Conversely, varying conditions of practice, even just the place of study, for example, can enhance recall on a later test. Massing information, such as cramming for exams, supports short-term performance while spacing with distributed presentations, multiple study attempts, and training trials supports long-term retention.⁴

Bjork's work, as it relates to evolving the current task- and process-centric approach to Army education, can thus be summed:

- Conditions of instruction that make performance improve rapidly often fail to support long-term retention and transfer, whereas

- Conditions of instruction that appear to create difficulties for the learner, slowing the rate of apparent learning, often optimize long-term retention and transfer.

The Adaptive Leaders Methodology holds to the idea that every moment and event offers an opportunity to develop adaptability. Every action taken by a student in the classroom or in field training is important to the process of inculcating a preference for new solutions. If students err while acting in good faith, they suffer nothing more than corrective coaching. Constructive critiques of solutions are the norm, but more important are the results of actions and the reasons for those actions. The role of coaching and 360-degree assessment is to develop students so their future actions will make a posi-



Colonel Casey Haskins is one of the Army's preeminent authorities on outcome-based training having used the techniques at three different schools over the past four years. Here, the colonel outlines an exercise for two Afghan generals during training this past summer at the U.S. Military Academy.

support and assist the change, although there are always a few brave individuals who offer furtive help.

This experience makes sense when one considers how disruptive OBT&E is despite its fundamental basis as a simple idea: results matter more than processes. Measure outcomes, not inputs or processes.

The impetus for this stemmed from several observations. First, the level of individual skills in units was often too low to allow them to easily change the way they did things, even in combat. Soldiers often knew only one course of action, and generally had little understanding of *why* they did it that way. Second, our training seemed

to increase rigidity rather than the desired adaptability. A pronounced predilection for "the approved solution" blinded people to opportunities and made it difficult for them to see the existence of other possibilities.

Third, because our training considered each task in isolation, it not only worked against the way people learn, but caused us to miss that advances in one area (marksmanship, say) often came at the expense of other areas (confidence, problem solving, initiative, accountability).

Finally, it became apparent that tests provided a better measure of how well we executed a training plan rather than how well those plans worked. This was not a

conscious deception, merely a collective failure to consider the bigger picture. The more efficient we became, the more rigid the controls and we were less adaptive. We assumed it all worked. The institution seized on much information that confirmed the assumption, and filtered out or distorted contrary information. It is doing so still.

Enter OBT&E. Putting this into practice requires four broad changes. Leaders must first define precisely what they are trying to accomplish (outcomes) and what will be seen when it is done right (observable measures of effectiveness). This is difficult, requiring much hard thought and group buy-in, and is also uncomfortable



Teaching the teachers, the author (center) is shown at the Army Signal School at Fort Gordon, Georgia, during one of his workshops on Adaptive Leaders Methodology. This is the teaching method that underlies outcome-based training.

tive contribution to their unit's success, no matter what the mission. This is based on the premise that one learns more from a well-meaning mistake reviewed critically and constructively than from applying an established and memorized process.

Adaptive methodology teachers are concerned with why the students do what they do—an action-learning approach. The course emphasis is on ensuring that students gain and maintain a willingness to act. During numerous

after-action reviews and mentoring sessions—occurring concurrently and after multiple scenarios with different conditions—the teacher will analyze why students acted as they did and the effect their actions had on the overall operation.

Time and Justification

The adaptive curriculum and leader evaluation system use two criteria to judge students' decisions and ultimately

in an institution that centralizes planning. These outcomes and their associated measures of effectiveness become the basis for all training and assessment.

Second, the commander must set conditions. This includes finding and changing rules that prevent deviation and neutralizing outside vetoes (range-control procedures, ammo distribution processes, quality-control inspectors, etc.). It also means changing systems. The Army's current task-based training system has co-evolved with numerous scheduling and support systems, all of which prevent meaningful change. The commander

must first break these systems, but then develop and implement new ones that perform the beneficial functions of the originals without doing the harm. This is slogging, unglamorous work, which if omitted, will virtually guarantee that OBT&E will not outlast the commander who implemented it.

Third, it requires developing leaders. OBT&E replaces scripts and set-piece instruction with trainers who know the material, are empowered to experiment, and held accountable for their results. They have to be able to perform the skills and explain why things are done that way.

Leaders operate under two main constraints: lack of resources and a rule that they may not make progress toward one outcome at the expense of another. In the previous example, progress in shooting cannot come at the expense of confidence or understanding. If so, the leader must find another method. Perhaps surprisingly, the most difficult part of developing leaders is convincing them that they have the power to try new approaches. Most are reluctant at first, some even deeply suspicious. OBT&E's embrace of leaders doing different things in different ways also causes staff angst as it makes

their strength of character: the timeliness of their decisions and their justification for actions taken. The first criterion will impress on students the need to act in a timely manner, while the second requires them to reflect on their actions and gain insights into their own thought processes. Because students must justify decisions in their own minds before implementing them, imprudent decisions and reckless actions will be less likely. During the course, student decisions in terms of a “school solution” are relatively unimportant. The emphasis is on the effect of the students’ actions, not on the method they may have chosen. This encourages creative solutions.

The adaptive methodology’s evaluation system is based on the philosophy that feedback should be given to encourage a willingness to act and then reflect on actions in a manner that maximizes learning. Unconstructive critiques destroy the student leader’s willingness to act and can lead to withholding of adverse information or false reporting.

The course, beginning at the entry level, will avoid formulaic solutions and provide room for innovative answers. This achieves transformation over a generation of leaders, teaching new dogs new tricks. As Command Sergeant Major Zoltan James, commandant of the Non-Commissioned Officer Academy at Fort Benning observed, “We have a better trained and developed NCO corps that become critical thinkers and can adapt to a changing operating environment to support senior leaders’ mission requirements.”

Evolution Must Continue

Critically important to the institutionalization of adaptability, which will assist with recruiting and retaining good Soldiers, is superior (innovative) military education and training. Not only will the Army need to produce leaders who possess adaptability, but the institutions responsible for developing leaders must become adaptive as well, evolving as the future operating environment evolves.

Cultivation of adaptability requires a vast effort, from the top down as well as bottom up, and is so central to the

future of the service that it applies to squad leaders as well as to the joint-force commander.⁵ Moving the Army toward a learning organization structure will bring the collective creativity of the Army to bear in solving problems at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of war, as well as in problems that involve recruiting and training.

Sergeant Major James concludes, “ALM has enhanced my entire NCO Academy instructors’ ability to plan and execute training at my non-commissioned officer education system courses that encapsulates the students ability to think for himself, giving him another tool to training his Soldiers when they return to their units.”

The culture will become one that rewards leaders and Soldiers who act, and penalizes those who do not. Today’s culture needs to evolve so that the greater burden rests on all superior officers, who have to nurture—teach, trust, support, and correct—the student who now enters the force with the ability to adapt. ❄

1. Discussions with retired Command Sergeant Major William “Morgan” Darwin.
2. Donald E. Vandergriff, “Review of Army Training,” unpublished paper, (Arlington, VA: Army TRADOC, September 2006), p. 4-5.
3. MAJ Chad Foster, “No Approved Solutions in Asymmetric Warfare: Nurturing Leaders in an Outcomes Based Training Environment,” *Assembly Magazine*, (West Point, NY: U.S. Military Academy, August 2009), p. 14. MAJ Robert Perry and LTC (Ret.) Kevin McEnery, “Army Reconnaissance Course: Defining the Aim Point for Reconnaissance Leader Training,” *Armor Magazine* (Fort Knox, KY: U.S. Army Armor Association, August 2009). Also, Fort Sill has published several papers and provided input to the Association of the United States Army’s Institute of Land Warfare paper.
4. Dr. Robert Bjork, “How We Learn Versus How We Think We Learn: Implications for the Organization of Army Training,” unpublished briefing presented at Science of Learning Workshop (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA, 1 August 2006), p. 2.
5. LTG Walter Ulmer, “Creating and Assessing Productive Organizational Climates,” Army War College Course Handout (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2002), p. 1.

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the old centralized scheduling systems impossible to use.

Fourth and last, OBT&E requires a new method of assessment. Leaders at all levels have to measure progress against *all* outcomes. The basic technique involves randomly selecting individuals and giving them problems—different from any they have previously encountered—which they must use their newly developed skills to solve. These ongoing assessments provide insight not just to the level of skills, but into character and problem-solving traits. They provide feedback on needed program changes and are also the means

by which leaders are held accountable for their results. Soldiers, like all people, train to the test. Therefore, designing the right test is crucial as it will drive the entire training program. Building tests that leaders cannot game means they have to train their Soldiers to think as well as to apply their skills.

OBT&E works. In fact, the results can be spectacular. Soldiers not only learn skills better but also become much more comfortable making decisions, exercising initiative, and accepting responsibility for their actions. Leaders almost always end up working harder but report much more job

satisfaction because they have a good deal of control over their destinies. It can appear to be a magical transformation within a unit if one is not aware of all the work that went into it. However, OBT&E will disrupt many supporting processes and is almost guaranteed to create resistance from outside the unit. Overcoming that requires the commanding general’s support and a great deal of persistence. But the payoff is worth it: leaders and Soldiers who are much better prepared for combat.

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