

Elements of Purpose-driven Leader Development

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Abstract

Military leaders need to be carefully prepared to be ready for a wide spectrum of missions. Most military leaders develop through education and operational assignments. In the past self-development has been portrayed as a “gap-filler” between these two. However, it seems there are advantages to having leaders take an increased role in their own development. Through surveys, experimental results, and literature reviews, the status of current leader development is examined. Self-reports about the contribution of development types and characteristics that relate to adaptable performance are described. Potential ways to enhance leader development from a purpose-driven perspective are identified. Leaders having a purposeful plan for development may achieve greater versatility in knowledge and ability to handle situations successfully.

Introduction

In a review of 35 years of goal-setting research, Locke and Latham (2002) conclude that conscious motivation affects performance and job satisfaction. Purpose-driven activity begins with the desire to pursue a goal. At a given point in time a leader may have existing developmental goals or can take account of the situation and set them. U.S. Army doctrine encourages this to be a joint endeavor with the leader's rater. Purpose-driven development aligns closely to the notion of self-responsible learning or development (Heimstra, 1994).

U.S. Army leaders generally recognize the importance and value of self-development (ATLDP officer, NCO & WO reports, 2001; 2002). Results from a sample of 470 U.S. Army Captains showed that they spent an average of about 4 hours a week at self-development while attending a resident military course (Boyce, 2002). While the Captains possessed traditional skills for self-development and were motivated to self-develop in specific areas, surprisingly their activities did not employ the skills and were not in the desired areas. While self-development is important, U.S. Army officers believe that work-based development provides the

greatest contribution to development followed by self-development experiences and other development means. In practical terms most U.S. Army leaders find lack of time as the greatest obstacle to self-development and lack of personal support (from mentors and superiors) second. While leaders perceive self-development as important, the practice of self-development leaves room for improvement.

What does purpose-driven development mean for how U.S. Army leaders develop through operational assignments and self-development? Operational assignments are generally designed to provide opportunities for increasing levels of leadership responsibility. Self-development is often described as filling the gaps between what is missing from institutional education and operational work experience (FM 7-0, Headquarters DA, 2002).

Development Processes

Development in operational assignments and through self-development has some common activities. A process model of leader development suggests that all leaders should:

1. Recognize developmental needs or opportunities.
2. Understand why change is required or provides an opportunity.
3. Determine how to fulfill a need or pursue an opportunity.
4. Engage in learning or practice to effect change.
5. Monitor, adjust, and change to fulfill needs or take advantage of opportunities.

These steps correspond to self-regulation models for performance and for change (Bandura, 1991; Carver & Scheier, 1981; 1998; Murphy, 2002). Researchers (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998) argue that ideally self-regulation is an automatic process that consumes few conscious attention resources. Thoughts about self are a small proportion of all thoughts (from 5 to 8 percent) (Baumeister et al., 1998; Csikszentmihalyi & Figurski, 1982). Key activities are believed to include defining preferred states from standards and goals, using internal feedback to compare current states against the standards, and energizing response systems for change.

Process steps 1 and 2 indicate the need for change based on comparison between what leaders perceive an ideal leader is compared to how they perceive themselves (Markus & Nurius,

1986). An assessment of the difference between the ideal and perceived self by the leader will result in determining his or her ability to reduce the discrepancy (Bandura, 1986; 1991). When people don't think that they can reduce a self-discrepancy, they may escape from self-awareness and search for distractions (Baumeister, 1991; Carver & Scheier, 1981). On the other hand it seems that people tend to meet a goal best by aligning developmental needs or opportunities to activities that hold intrinsic interest in the domain, with suitable degrees of novelty, challenge, or aesthetic value (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Motivation

Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET) (Deci & Ryan, 1985) emphasizes the importance and conditions that reinforce intrinsic motivation. Deci and Ryan argue that people have a psychological or cognitive need to feel competent (also Massimi & Delle Fave, 2000). Further they found that feelings of competence will not sustain intrinsic motivation unless people also have a sense of autonomy or self-determined behavior. Adult learning theory suggests the same is true for adults (Knowles, 1990). Tangible rewards can diminish self-determination and intrinsic motivation, as well as threats, deadlines, directives, and imposed goals (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999). Intrinsic motivation is important for development because it provides self-initiating and self-sustaining drive for continual development that is espoused in U.S. Army doctrine (e.g., Headquarters, DA, 2001).

Support for purpose-driven leader development can contribute to all leader development domains, but especially self-development and operational assignments. Leaders have the greatest autonomy over developmental activities in the self-development domain, and so it is important to encourage and support it from an organizational standpoint. If work-based learning has the greatest contribution to change, as officers perceive, then it is a target for change that needs to be enhanced to the greatest extent possible.

After appraisal of the capability to reduce any discrepancies, the motivated, self-regulated leader will engage in attempts to reduce the discrepancy. Various aspects of discrepancy reduction focus on is proposed to be purpose-driven development. Purpose-driven development involves allocation of cognitive resources to change; setting of goals; development of learning

and developmental plans; identification and use of learning resources; engagement of others to provide assessments, feedback and improvement suggestions; self-reflection; correction and improvement; and transferring self-learning to new roles (Cortina et al., 2004; Goldstein & Ford, 2002).

Purpose-driven development is enhanced when competence, autonomy and relatedness are supported by the organization (Ryan & Deci, 2000). By the culture that organizations allow and promote, employees can be alternatively supported or alienated (Ryan & Deci). Self-determination theory provides a framework for understanding these alternatives. Intrinsic motivation can be reinforced by the social contexts in which individuals operate when the contexts promote active and integrated learning.

Purpose-based qualities.

Ideal conditions for purpose-driven development are believed to include certain personal qualities. Individuals with a “positive personality” will tend to be self-organizers, self-directed, and adaptive (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Also characteristics such as hardiness and resilience (Maddi, 2002), goal orientation (Dweck, 1986), and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1991) are considered to be important. Ackerman (1996) has offered a theory called PPIK (process, personality, interests, and knowledge) that provides an idea for translating adult intelligence into an integration of process, personality, and interests. Over repeated task trials, intelligence seems to become relatively less important than personality variables and degree of “intellectual engagement” (Ackerman, 1994).

For conscious developmental choices, individuals often gravitate toward a niche area or domain according to their traits, competencies, and talents (Lubinski & Benbow, 2000; Hodges & Clifton, in press). Development of expertise seems to be the result of the intensity and occurrence of behaviors moderated by individual interest.

“To the extent that students are placed in correspondent learning and work environments, they are more likely to experience a greater density of reinforcing events and,

simultaneously, are less likely to experience punishing events, including boredom. These environments encourage maximal positive development.” (Lubinski & Benbow, p. 144)

Development of new skills takes concentrated effort. Being willing to expend the effort and to have patience to try new approaches and to persist through failures are important for increasing one’s conceptual and leadership skills. While learning and while thinking, it is important to have an active fair-mindedness that is not based on being correct from the start but being correct in the end. Open-mindedness is a similar characteristic that creates greater willingness to accept more information or contrary arguments. Being able to retract and come away from one’s conclusion is an important characteristic of a critical learner. It is best if one can separate their ego and their self-esteem from what they are doing, so they are not tied up in proving to themselves or to others that they are right. Positive attitudes toward thinking are believed to contribute more to ultimate performance rather than having been right from the start.

Research has shown that beliefs about learning and knowledge have a significant relationship to tactical problem solving (Fallesen, 2000). Ninety-two Army officers were given a questionnaire on epistemic beliefs (Schommer, Calvert, Gariglietti, & Bajaj, 1997) that distinguished among naïve and sophisticated ideas about learning. Four scores of naïve belief are generated: ability to learn is innate, knowledge is discrete and unambiguous, learning is quick or not at all, and knowledge is certain. The sample of officers worked two tactical decision making problems and identified the problem solving strategies that they used. The naïve belief that ‘learning is innate’ was a contributor to the negative set of discriminators for adaptability demonstrated in the solution. Problem solving strategies that were more thoughtful also were associated with sophisticated learning beliefs (e.g., *considered the relevancy of information, suspended judgment about alternatives until all information was examined, and re-examined acceptable options*). Epistemic beliefs have also been found to relate to performance on ill-defined problems (Schraw, Dunkle & Bendixen, 1995) and moral reasoning (Bendix, Schraw & Dunkle, 1998).

Core Goals.

One way of integrating leader development includes aligning instruction, development of leadership in operational assignments, and assessment of personal performance with a common set of core competencies. While the competencies are core, they are also general and high level to support flexible assumption of various positions.

Another contributor to purposeful leader development occurs when the processes of leadership are purposely reinforced and shaped. Recent study of future Army leadership requirements produced eight core leadership competencies for the U.S. Army (Horey et al., in preparation). The competencies are identified in Figure 1. This set of competencies is focused on the functions that leaders perform to influence others through purpose, direction and motivation in order to accomplish missions and improve the organization (Headquarters, DA, 1999). They compare favorably to the nine competencies developed by the IAMPS 2003 working group for peace support operations. Specifically content overlaps six IAMPS competencies: interpersonal skills, managing interactions, personnel management, personal coping skills, resource management, and motivation management. The proposed competencies acknowledge that knowledge and specialized skills are required, such as threat assessment, tactical decision making, applicable laws all identified in the IAMPS 2003 version, but the focus is centrally placed on leadership that crosses positions, time and missions. The core leadership competencies allow synchronization of key leader development activities across the force and across time for an individual.

Self-reflection.

Learning can occur in all settings. It takes awareness of what one knows, what one knew, and whether all that is satisfactory for one's future. Learning can be a continuing process and often is for some, but many people do not shape their experiences into full learning events. One step to help make thinking more capable is to make learning an explicit process in one's daily routine. One thing that promotes this is conscious reflection.

Reflective learning is the active assessment of knowledge, progress, limitations and learning tendencies. Reflective learning is similar to double loop learning, a term coined by Argyris (1976) whereby the learner questions what is framing the learning and whether actual

goals and strategies are consistent with those intended. Flake (1993) had college students keep a journal of their thoughts about learning and had them write a paper on their reflections. The students reported positive benefits of reflecting and identified styles and patterns of their learning that they were not aware of before. This study shows that through a simple class assignment, students learned how to better understand their learning. Some see the natural occurrence of reflection as something people do everyday as they discover new things and reflect on new information. Reflective learning integrates and reinforces the knowledge and skills that are learned during work experience.

Many have not learned how to make learning a conscious activity. Learning how to learn can be an assist to the long-term development of adaptive leaders. A constructivist approach is useful model for learning to learn. Von Glaserfeld (1995, p. 14) pointed out “From the constructivist perspective, learning is not a stimulus-response phenomenon. It requires self-regulation and the building of conceptual structures through reflection and abstraction.” Constructivism suggests that emphasis in learning should occur on process not product; that how one arrives at an answer is more important than the retrieval of a particular answer. Processes should include how to construct meaningful representations of current situations, desired goals, and the means to get there. Meaningful representations are key to subject matter expertise and thinking processes are key in achieving adaptability. The errors experienced during learning give an opening to see how learners organize their world. With this feedback loop, learners - themselves - have access to information to increase their ways of thinking and their knowledge in a domain. Meaningful feedback on the mental models that one constructs should encourage in-depth learning and eventually more versatility in performance.

Cognitive Flexibility.

Cognitive flexibility is a construct that deals with knowledge that is accessible through many paths. “A learner who has developed ‘cognitive flexibility’ will be able to utilize conceptual knowledge in an adaptive fashion, selecting and assembling disparate elements of knowledge to fit the needs of a particular understanding or problem solving situation (rather than relying on retrieving from memory knowledge that is monolithically prepackaged for use).” (Spiro et al., 1992, p 7). Multiple paths to one’s knowledge can be encouraged by organizing the

learning with interconnections that criss-cross the knowledge domain. Presentations that go in breadth and start at different levels of abstraction help create these networks of connections. Cognitive flexibility theory proposes that flexibility of thinking can be promoted by (1) using multiple perspectives and knowledge representations, (2) following active learning practices, (3) developing broad interconnections or links among knowledge, (4) marshalling of knowledge to the needs of a specific situation rather than reliance on simple recall, (5) maintaining complexity in knowledge and not falling into a trap of oversimplification, and (6) learning from experience or case study.

Summary

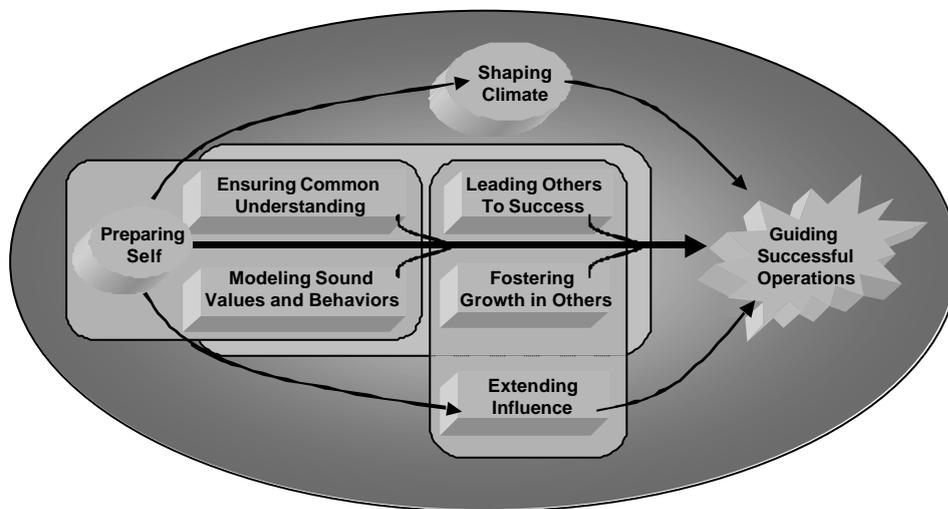
Work-based experience is perceived be the greatest single contributor to leader development, although self-development receives high ratings on its extent of contribution to professional development. Purpose-driven development involves an individual who is motivated to improve and takes responsibility for his or her own development. Enhancement of self occurs when the process is cohesive, comprehensive and integrated across multiple tasks, jobs, assignments, and years. Several elements of purpose-driven leader development were proposed (see Table 1) and rationale for them presented. Developing leaders will be pushed forward when developmental activities are novel, challenging, or have some other satisfying value. Such conditions lead to intrinsic motivation, where the learner is looking to construct sophisticated knowledge structures. Development activities that are intrinsically motivating, have the full potential to satisfy needs of competency, autonomy, and relatedness.

Table 1. Purpose-driven Elements of Leader Development

Self-regulation
Goal-setting. Goal-setting identifies desired states.
Self-appraisal. Self-appraisal produces needs and opportunities.
Change. Involvement in developmental activities leads to change.
Intrinsic motivation
Autonomy. The individual needs to take responsibility for learning.
Competence. Desire for competence will initiate and sustain development.
Social support. Context can support active, self-determined development.
Qualities
Positive personality. Positivism relates to self-direction and adaptation.
Self-efficacy. One's belief in his or her capability to successfully accomplish something.
Beliefs about learning. Certain beliefs about learning and knowing relate to development and performance.
Others. Resilience, persistence, fair-minded, open-minded, check premature commitment to ideas.
Learning approach
Competencies. Organizational competencies provide core goals and purposeful direction for aspiring leaders.
Self-reflection. Awareness through reflection and acceptance of self are necessary steps to adopt changes.
Cognitive flexibility. New information covered to encourage accessibility via multiple retrieval paths.

Figure 1. Proposed Future U.S. Army Leader Requirements.

Proposed Competency Framework Representation



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