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Continued Emphasis on Leadership: One Solution for Future Soldier Effectiveness

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CONTINUED EMPHASIS ON LEADERSHIP: ONE SOLUTION FOR FUTURE SOLDIER EFFECTIVENESS

Introduction

The U.S. Army is undertaking fundamental changes to prepare to meet the missions of the 21st century. Through initiatives focusing on 25 or more years into the future, the Army is working hard to capture and integrate to fully advantage emerging technologies, organizational structures, and operating procedures. However, Army leadership recognizes first and foremost the importance of its people--soldiers--to force effectiveness. In this regard, the Army is seeking to insure readiness of soldiers for future operations and future job performance.

When the focus is on future jobs and future missions, application of the "scientific" methodologies traditionally used for personnel and training decisions is complicated. Central to these methodologies is description of the performances involved in or needed for job or mission effectiveness. Such description cannot of course be made with certainty when focusing on the future. That is, when planning for the future, the focus is on performances that are not now fully in existence and available for description through survey of job incumbents, observation of work samples, or other traditional approaches. These uncertainties about the nature of future jobs risk the effectiveness of the Army systems that build and maintain the personnel force for future performance.

An ongoing project by the U.S. Army Research Institute (ARI) has taken on the challenge of systematically projecting the knowledge, skills, and attributes (KSAs) that will enable non-commissioned officers (NCOs) to perform effectively in the 21st Century. This paper builds upon early findings from this project reported by Ford, Campbell, Campbell, Knapp, and Walker (2000). Examination of the projections made in this effort indicates a direction that the Army might take to insure the readiness of 21st century NCOs for future jobs and missions. More specifically, the KSAs for which there was most agreement appear to overlap with or be reflected in the leadership competencies that the Army has used for leader development. This finding suggests that a focus on leadership capabilities will serve the Army in its selection and development of future soldiers for performance at all non-commissioned levels.

Requirements for Performance of Future NCO Jobs

The purpose of ARI's project was to provide a foundation for promotion decisions that insure NCOs have the capabilities needed for successful performance during the first quarter of the 21st century. The research sought to provide this foundation by projecting the KSAs that will likely be most important for performance of future jobs. To make the projections, ARI and its contractor, the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO), used the Army's vision of the future, Army documents, and questionnaires and interviews to construct a comprehensive picture of current jobs, factors producing changes in jobs, and the likely nature of future jobs. Questionnaires

and interviews engaged the forecasts of individuals with expertise and experience in a number of different domains. These domains included force development, the Army's initiatives on future force structures, and education and other specialties in human behavior and its development. Expertise from multiple domains allowed use of "convergence" to increase certainty about projections for the future. That is, greater confidence was given to the changes that were expressed in the forecasts of individuals with expertise in different domains. Using these procedures, job descriptions were developed for NCO at each of three levels: junior (E-5), mid-level (E-6 and E-7), and senior (E-8 and E-9). The job descriptions were analyzed to make decisions about types of KSAs that would enable future NCOs to perform effectively.

Judgment convergence was again used to prioritize the importance of the attributes for future performance. The identified KSAs were presented to two panels. These two panels ranked the KSAs in terms of their criticality for job performance and promotion at each of the three NCO levels. The panels met separately and independently carried out their tasks. One panel consisted of nine Army personnel, mostly senior NCOs and all having expertise in Army subjects pertinent to the Army of the future. The other expert panel was comprised of 10 behavioral scientists, mostly Industrial/Organizational psychologists, with knowledge of the Army and experience in selection processes.

These panels separately created a hierarchy of the KSAs that would predict job success. This was accomplished by having each panelist choose the 10 KSAs they judged to be the most critical for future NCO performance and promotion at three levels of NCO. These choices were tallied, and the 10 KSAs with the most votes across panelists were considered to form the first tier for that panel. From the KSAs not in the first tier, the panelists again selected the 10 most important KSAs. These choices were tallied, and the 10 KSAs with most votes were placed in the second tier for the panel. The remaining KSAs were placed in the third tier.

This report examines the KSAs for which the two panels' hierarchies of importance converged or agreed¹. The panels' nominations were considered to have converged on the importance of a KSA if, within a NCO level, the KSA had been placed in the first tier of one of the panel's hierarchy and either in the first or second tier of the other panel's hierarchy. Of the 37 KSAs sorted by both panels, 14 met this criterion for one or more of the three levels. Table 1 displays the 14 KSAs and contains an entry for each of the NCO levels for which there was convergence on the KSA.

It should be noted that Table 1 only shows the 14 KSAs for which there was convergence, as just defined, of the two panels' rankings. Appendix A contains definitions of the KSAs. This paper's concentration on those 14 does not suggest that the other 23 KSAs lack importance. Rather, agreement across domains of expertise

¹ Each panel actually created two hierarchies, one for the near-term future (through 2010) and one for a more distant future (from 2010 to 2025). This paper is based on the first sets of hierarchies as only the near-future hierarchies differentiated NCO by level.

yields somewhat greater certainty about the importance of a KSA because the KSA had met the judgment standards of the two professional domains represented by the panels of military leaders and researchers.

As Table 1 shows, half of the 14 KSAs reached convergence at more than one NCO level, with five KSAs convergent at all three NCO levels. These five KSAs, located at the top of Table 1, might be viewed as important to the effectiveness at all NCO levels. The other half of the KSAs were convergent at only one NCO level. Inspection of the seven KSAs suggests a qualitative shift in projected requirements across the levels of NCO. The shift is such that the KSAs unique to junior-level NCOs describe characteristics of individuals (high level of effort, initiative, need to achieve). In contrast, the KSAs at the more senior levels tend to describe attributes linked to performance in the context of groups or organizations (e.g., *training others*, *successful communication* of thoughts to others).

Table 1.

Fourteen Agreed Upon KSAs

Knowledge, Skill, Attribute (KSA)	Jr	Mid	Snr
General Cognitive Aptitude	X	X	X
Characteristic Level of Integrity and Discipline	X	X	X
Judgment and Decision Making Skill	X	X	X
Oral Communication Skill	X	X	X
Motivating and Leading Others	X	X	X
Conscientiousness/ Dependability	X	X	
MOS/ Occupation-Specific Knowledge and Skill	X	X	
Characteristic Level of Effort and Initiative	X		
Need to Achieve and General Energy Level	X		
Directing, Monitoring, and Supervising Work		X	
Training Others		X	
Concern for Soldier Quality of Life			X
Knowledge of System Inter-Relations			X
Writing Skill			X

Note: This table draws from Ford, et al. (2000) and lists the 14 KSAs by the criteria discussed within the body of the report.

Future Performance Requirements & Leadership

In reviewing the 14 KSAs, a certain theme appeared to emerge. In particular, there seemed to be a considerable amount of overlap between the attributes described by the KSAs and the attributes that Army doctrine defines as important for leadership performance and effectiveness.

The 1990 version of FM 22-100, Military Leadership (Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1990) was used to verify this observation. This document summarizes and defines military leadership in terms of nine competencies that broadly encompass the array of duties and situations faced by Army leaders. The 1990 version offered these competencies as a framework for leadership development. Appendix B lists and describes the competencies. The current version of the FM 22-100 (Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1999) does not explicitly list the nine competencies. It also does not provide an alternative list. Further inspection indicated that the leadership constructs in the new FM 22-100 are consistent with the nine-competency framework used to describe Army leadership. Additionally, these nine leadership competencies have been utilized in past research (e.g., Twohig & Tremble, 1991; Tremble, 1992) to improve understanding of the factors influencing leadership behavior and its effectiveness (e.g., Kane & Tremble, 1994).

The 14 KSAs were examined against the competencies to determine their overlap. To do this, the two investigators came to consensus on the core meaning of each of the nine competencies. Each researcher then used this core meaning to compare each KSA with each of the competencies. The goal of the comparison was to identify which, if any, of competencies included a KSA in its definition (Aguinis & Kraiger, 1997). In making this determination, each researcher sought to adhere stringently to core meanings and not to read beyond the presented definitions. Thus, the comparison yielded a crosswalk of the competencies and KSAs that indicated which KSAs were incorporated in each competency. After the two researchers had independently made their linkages, they met to reach consensus. Table 2 shows the agreed-upon linkages.

Table 2 suggests several conclusions about the 14 NCO KSAs and Army leadership. Most broadly, the observation about overlap was verified. Except for one KSA, each KSA was judged to be included in the definition of one or more competency. This suggests that a KSA can be important to more than one area of competence. However, the groupings of KSAs linked to the competencies tended to differ by competency, with any grouping of KSAs highlighting the fuller meaning of the competency. As an example, the KSA of *training others* was linked to three competencies: *teaching and counseling*, *soldier team development*, and *technical and tactical proficiency*. By implication, *training others* is important to all three competences. *Training others* combined with the KSAs of *concern for quality of life* and *motivating and leading others*, respectively, for the competencies of *teaching and counseling* and *soldier team development*. These combinations placed training skills in the context of concern for the person, in the case of *teaching and counseling*, and in the context of the

group for *soldier team development*. The KSA of *general cognitive aptitude* is open to a similar analysis. *General cognitive aptitude* was linked to five of the competencies, and this linkage suggests the importance of conceptual skills to competencies (like *planning, communication, decision making, technical/tactical proficiency*) necessary for adaptation of learned principles to diverse and changing situations.

Table 2.

Crosswalk for Identified KSAs and FM 22-100 Competencies

Critical KSA Identified	FM 22-100 Competency								
	Communication	Supervision	Teaching and Counseling	Soldier Team Development	Technical and Tactical Proficiency	Decision Making	Planning	Use of Available Systems	Professional Ethics
Conscientiousness / Dependability									X
Characteristics of Integrity and Discipline									X
Characteristic Level of Effort and Initiative						X			X
Judgment and Decision Making Skill						X	X		X
MOS/Occupation Specific Knowledge & Skill					X			X	
General Cognitive Aptitude	X				X	X	X	X	
Knowledge of System Inter-Relations					X		X		
Concern for Soldier Quality of Life		X	X						
Training Others			X	X	X				
Motivating and Leading Others		X		X					X
Directing, Monitoring, and Supervising Work	X	X					X		
Writing Skill	X								
Oral Communication Skill	X								
Need to Achieve and General Energy Level									

There were at least two notable exceptions to the patterns just described. The NCO KSA of *need to achieve and general energy level* was not found in the definition of any competency. Inspection of the need-to-achieve KSA suggested that it describes attributes of the leader as an individual or person and not attributes more descriptive of a leadership task, job, or function within an organizational context. As mentioned earlier, the competencies tend to capture broadly such duties or functions, as opposed to individual attributes per se. As such, the need-to-achieve KSA may point out an important quality of future leaders (e.g., enjoyment of assuming and enacting the performance requirements of leadership positions), but it does not appear to speak directly to the capabilities represented by the nine leadership competencies. A second variance involved the competency of *use of available systems*. The NCO KSAs of this competency were a subset of the KSAs linked to *technical and tactical proficiency*, perhaps accentuating the technical aspect of this competency and the future enactment of tactical performance through the use of equipment and (digital) systems.

Implications For Future Leadership

Communication

The findings suggest that the competency of *communication* will be an important aspect of leadership at the three NCO levels. A recurring theme within the KSAs linked to *communication* is that leaders at all ranks will need to insure that their communication is clearly understood by their subordinates. Additionally, communication quality is stressed by the *oral communication skill* (e.g., clear, logical, and well-organized) and by the *writing skill* for senior NCO (e.g., good sentence structure).

Supervision

In the KSAs linked to *supervision*, there is a sense that NCO supervision will use more than goal setting and an exchange of rewards and corrective actions to promote subordinate performances and task accomplishments congruent with the established mission. Rather, *supervision* will require a more active leadership role from the NCO. It will involve a willingness to try new things, acting as a role model, and leading by example. This more active style will also include instilling a sense of motivation, discipline, and commitment in soldiers. Finally, the KSAs suggest that in exercising supervision, an effective NCO will display a broader concern for a soldier's well being and, especially at the most senior NCO level, consider off-duty priorities and interests, as well as duty related matters.

Teaching and counseling

The two KSAs linked to this competency reached convergence at the two more senior levels of NCO. The linked KSAs also seem to single out two domains within the competency's broad content area. One KSA singles out training soldiers for their work and technical matters. The other KSA adds consideration of the soldier's personal, as well as professional, well being. Both of the linked KSAs appear to support an inference

that as they progress in level of responsibility, NCOs will need the capacities or skills for a broad perspective and for determining the approaches for developing and caring for soldiers.

Soldier team development

In contrast to *teaching and counseling*, *soldier team development* was linked to competencies classified as important at the two more junior NCO levels. Combination of the two linked KSAs suggests soldier development through the world of work. Like the KSAs for *teaching and counseling*, the KSAs for *soldier team development* seem to stress the importance of the capabilities of 21st century NCOs to provide developmental experiences. Based on the KSA of *motivating and leading others*, the capabilities for *soldier team development* will need to support the type of active style of leadership described earlier under *supervision*. This style associates soldier performance with their loyalty and commitment to the organization.

Technical and tactical proficiency

The KSAs linked to *technical and tactical proficiency* are emphasized across all levels of 21st century NCO, supporting an inference that all NCOs will need to be motivated and able to learn emerging technologies and then apply the acquired knowledge and skill in the battlefield. Based on the convergence of the linked KSAs by 21st century NCOs level, the scope of *technical and tactical proficiency* will broaden across NCO levels. This broadened scope include the teaching role so that the skill currency and mastery of 21st century NCOs are used to train subordinates. The broadened scope also includes perspective on the relationship of one's own unit with the larger strategic picture.

Use of available systems

Based on the KSAs linked to it, the competency of *use of available systems* appears to be a sub-set of the competency of *technical and tactical proficiency*. However, here the concentration is on technical know-how, and the linked KSAs tend to suggest that NCOs will need the desire and ability to keep up with advancing technology.

Decision making

The KSAs for the competency of *decision making* emphasize the leader's role in the decision making process and the qualities needed by 21st century NCOs to make sound, high-quality decisions. The qualities tend to combine attributes that involve applying learned principles and practical experience, learning new things, and willingly taking on difficult challenges.

Planning

Related to the competency of *decision making* is *planning*. The NCO KSAs linked to *planning* include but go beyond the action-orientation of decision-making KSAs. The KSA of *supervision* seems to highlight that *planning* is a basis for work structuring and for subordinates' understanding of their work. Convergent at the most senior level of NCO, the KSA of *knowledge of system inter-relations* points to the importance of considering the larger picture. These KSAs seem to emphasize that while *decision making* will be characteristics of all NCO levels, decisions made by higher NCO levels will take on the broader concerns of groups or the organization. Thus, the future planner will need to see the larger strategic picture, know their own role, and structure the work and understanding of subordinates for overall performance within the larger picture.

Professional ethics

The 21st century NCOs KSAs captured by *professional ethics* suggest the importance of this competency at all levels of NCO. Perhaps especially noteworthy is the linkage of the KSA of *motivating and leading others*. As already discussed, the KSA of *motivating and leading others* seems to suggest that future leadership will involve a broad and active range of leadership behaviors that include leading by example and building the motivation (loyalty and commitment) of followers. One possible inference from this linkage is that the *professional ethics* of the individuals serving as NCOs will be critical to their ability to perform the type of leadership style needed for future group and organizational effectiveness. In fact, recent research supports that a leader's own level of motivation can be contagious (Savell, Teague, & Tremble, 1995) and that an active, transformational style of leadership promotes the organizational commitment of subordinates (Kane & Tremble, 2000). Thus, the personnel selection and development processes might help insure 21st century NCO effectiveness by appropriate attention to the individual attributes that enable ethical decision-making and action congruent with such decisions.

Summary

This paper compared the Army's leadership doctrine with the KSAs most agreed-upon by subject matter experts as predictive of 21st century NCO performance. The comparison generally confirmed the observation that there is overlap between the attributes projected as needed for the future and attributes that the Army defines as important for leadership performance and effectiveness. The comparison also allowed inferences about aspects of leadership that might be especially important for leadership in the future. These inferences place emphasis on future leaders who:

- 1) Have *broad perspectives*, going beyond the particular organization of assignment and taking into account the personal as well as the professional well being of soldiers.

- 2) Can *communicate well* and in ways that develop in their subordinates understandings that reflect the broad perspective of the leader.

3) Have an *active style of leadership*, played out by leading by example, by serving as a role model, and by engaging the motivation, discipline, and commitment of unit members with a shared and broad perspective.

4) Are *active learners*, keeping up-to-date with changes in technology and able to apply new technologies.

5) As they learn themselves, are *also active trainers, teachers, and developers* of the skills of their subordinate.

6) Make *ethically sound decisions* and live those decisions in their organizational behavior.

It is of course self-evident that the future is, by definition, characterized by some amount of uncertainty. The findings here suggest that one way for the Army to prepare for the future to continue in its tradition of developing the leadership skills of soldiers over the course of their careers. The trends identified here are areas for consideration in leadership development programs oriented towards the future.

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Appendix A

Fourteen Agreed Upon KSAs For 21st Century NCOs²

1. General Cognitive Aptitude: Has the overall capacity to understand and interpret information that is being presented, the ability to identify and solve problems, and the capability to learn new things quickly and efficiently.
2. Characteristic Level of Integrity and Discipline: Maintains high ethical standards. Does not succumb to peer pressure to commit prohibited, harmful, or questionable acts. Demonstrates trustworthiness and exercises effective self-control. Takes responsibility for decisions.
3. Judgment and Decision-Making Skill: Reacts to new situations by applying learned principles and experiences appropriately and effectively. Makes timely decisions even with incomplete information.
4. Oral Communication Skill: Speaks in a clear, organized, and logical manner.
5. Motivating and Leading Others: Recognizes, encourages, and rewards effective performance of subordinates. Corrects unacceptable conduct. Acts as a role model. Leads by example. Fosters loyalty and commitment.
6. Conscientiousness/Dependability: Has the tendency to be trustworthy, reliable, planful, and accountable. Respects the chain of command and the value of discipline. Does not shy away from responsibility.
7. MOS/Occupation- Specific Knowledge and Skill: Possesses the necessary technical knowledge and skill to perform MOS/occupation-specific technical tasks. Stays informed of the latest developments in field.
8. Characteristic Level of Effort and Initiative: Demonstrates high effort in completing work. Takes independent action when necessary. Seeks out and willingly accepts responsibility and challenging assignments. Persists in carrying out difficult assignments and responsibilities.
9. Need to Achieve and General Energy Level: Has confidence in own abilities, seeks and enjoys positions of leadership and influence, is typically enthusiastic and energetic, sets high standards, and strives for accomplishment and recognition.
10. Directing, Monitoring, and Supervising Work: Assigns tasks to subordinates. Sets goals, targets and criteria for work and assignments. Ensures that assignments are clearly understood.

² Definitions are taken directly as listed in Ford, et al. (2000, p. 33-34)

11. Training Others: Evaluates and identifies individual or unit training needs. Institutes formal or informal programs to address training needs. Develops others by providing appropriate work experiences. Guides and assists subordinates on technical matters.
12. Concern for Soldier Quality of Life: Is aware of subordinates' and peers' needs, constraints, and values. Is sensitive to others' priorities and interests, including on and off duty.
13. Knowledge of System Inter-Relations: Is capable of analyzing how goals and operations of own unit are inter-related with other units and systems. Can see the larger strategic picture and interpret how one's own unit relates to it.
14. Writing Skill: Communicates thoughts, ideas, and information successfully to others through writing. Uses proper sentence structure including grammar, spelling, and capitalization, and punctuation.

Appendix B

Leadership Competencies of the 1990 FM 22-100³

1. Communications: The exchange of information and ideas from one person to another. Leaders communicate to direct, influence, coordinate, encourage, supervise, train, teach, coach, and counsel. Leaders should understand a problem and translate it into a message that is clear, concise, and appropriate for their audience.
2. Supervision: Leaders control, direct, evaluate, coordinate, and plan the efforts of their subordinates to ensure the task is accomplished. Leaders ensure efficient use of time and resources and shows concern for their subordinates.
3. Teaching and Counseling: This refers to improving performance by overcoming problems, increasing knowledge, or gaining new perspectives and skills. Leaders teach their soldiers to succeed and survive in combat and direct their professional and personal growth. Leaders show concern for the entire scope of a soldier's well being and counsel to assist subordinates in developing problem-solving skills.
4. Soldier Team Development: Leaders create strong bonds between themselves and their subordinates so that their units function as a team. Leaders take care of their soldiers and conserve and build their spirit, endurance, skill, and confidence to face the inevitable hardships and sacrifices of combat. Soldier team development is significant in training and orienting new tasks and units.
5. Technical and Tactical Proficiency: Leaders must be able to train their soldiers, maintain and employ their equipment, and provide combat power to help win battles. Leaders have to know that they can depend on their soldiers, and employ their weapons systems. Tactical competence requires that leaders know warfighting doctrine so they know the overall mission intent and help win battles by understanding the enemy, terrain, troops, and time available.
6. Decision-Making: Refers to the skills you need to make choices and solve problems. A leader's goal is to make high-quality decisions their soldiers accept and execute quickly. It is important that these decisions be made at the lowest organizational level where information is available. Leaders include subordinates in the decision-making process if time is available.

³ The descriptions of the competencies are summaries of the general ideas listed in Military Leadership (Headquarters, Department of Army, 1990, p. 66-68).

7. Planning: Intended to support a course of action so that an organization can meet an objective. It involves forecasting, setting goals and objectives, developing strategies, establishing priorities, delegating, sequencing and timing, organizing, budgeting, and standardizing procedures. Include your subordinate leaders in the planning process so they can develop leadership abilities as well.
8. Use of Available Systems: Leaders must be familiar with techniques, methods, and tools that will give them and their soldiers the edge. Leaders should learn and know how to use computers, analytical techniques, and other modern technological means available to manage information and help their soldiers perform their mission better.
9. Professional Ethics: Military ethics include loyalty to the nation, the Army, and your unit; duty; selfless service; and integrity. This competency relates to the responsibility to behave in a manner consistent with the professional Army ethic and to set the example for subordinates.