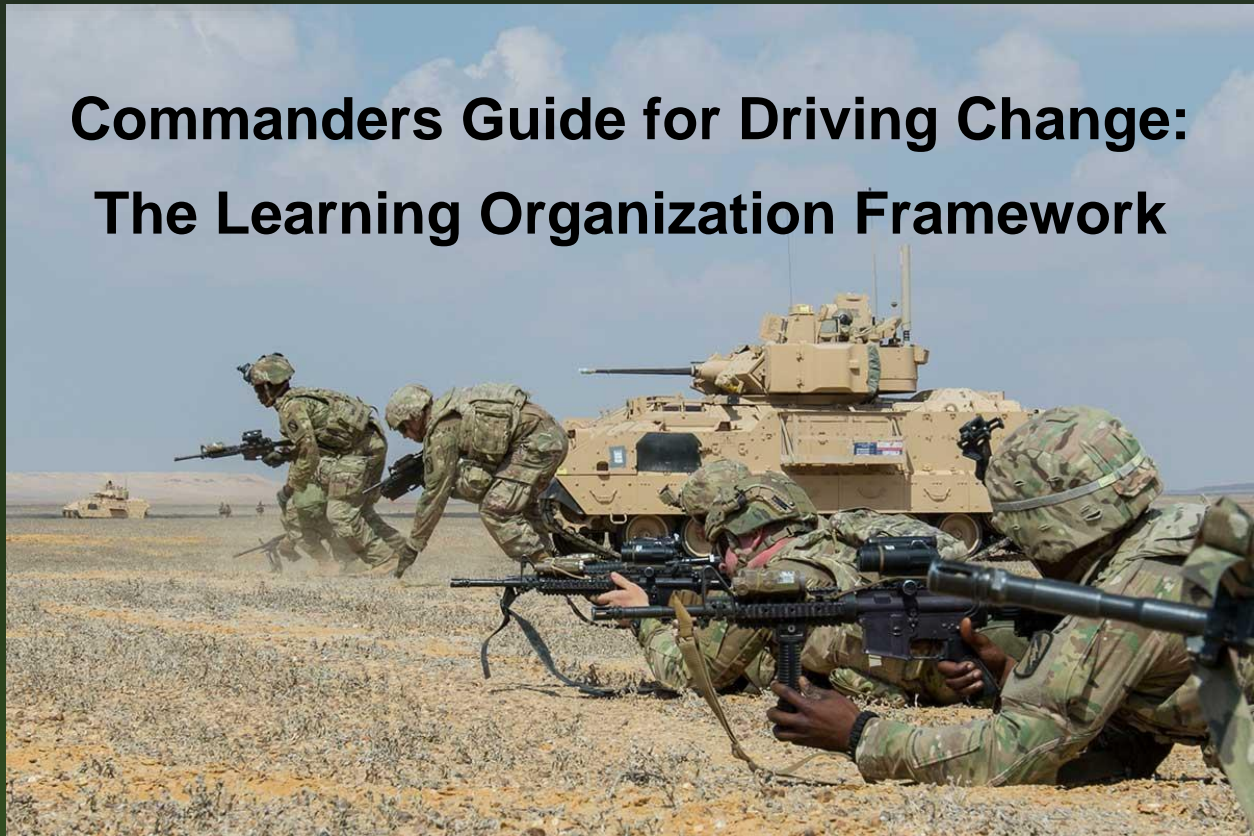


NEWS FROM THE FRONT



24 Jan 19

Commanders Guide for Driving Change: The Learning Organization Framework



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. James L. Larimer

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“Sharing lessons and best practices distinguishes a great learning organization. Sharing happens both internally to facilitate change at the local unit level and externally to other personnel and units to drive change across the entire Army”

-Former company commander

Introduction

Is your unit consistently focused one or two echelons below, with fast approaching training events, missions, and 50 meter targets, without much consideration for sharing observations and lessons upon completion of events? If so, you are not alone- this is a common pitfall of our busy profession; however, it is a resolvable issue given a relevant Learning Organization Framework. Highly developed learning organizations place emphasis on long-term problem solving, consistently modifying behavior, and sharing observations and lessons across the Army enterprise. To address the challenges of becoming a learning organization, leaders apply foresight, insight, and the education and training space required to create the conditions for learning. To effectively learn and ultimately solve problems, a process for developing, observing, capturing, sharing, and modifying lessons can be integrated into training and mission plans.

Leaders implement variations of learning processes to improve proficiency, but rarely seem to execute a holistic process to achieve desired change across formations. Brigade leaders may review combat training center (CTC) rotational force trends and take home package (THP) to identify their training needs prior to a CTC rotation. Company or battalion leadership could update standard operating procedures (SOPs) on a collective task based on their after action report (different from an after action review). A Squad possibly reviews past training exercise after action reviews (AARs) where individuals and teams identify lessons and best practices, to change or reinforce how they perform during upcoming iterations. While all of these leader actions provide examples of a learning organization attribute at the local level, more work is required to make units and the entire Army highly functioning learning organizations.

Army doctrine (ADRP 6-22) discusses fostering a learning environment and challenges leaders to embody characteristics and use leadership styles that foster innovation, risk-taking, and allowing for mistakes to improve units. This focus is on concept, rather than identifying behavior which can be modified to facilitate desired change. Leaders need to know what specific actions they can take to create a learning organization, which ultimately modifies behavior and processes to the desired change.

Incorporating existing learning methods into a Learning Organization Framework (LOF) of develop, observe, capture, share, and modify, provides a holistic approach to becoming a Learning Organization. To best achieve this requires knowledge of existing learning tools and training processes. The 8 Step Training Model process is often used for company level events and includes leader training, AARs, and retraining. Objective T, the Army training process to assess organizational readiness, is supported by Training and Evaluation Outlines (T&EOs), which directly influence leader insights at AARs, identification of areas requiring change, and resulting ability to modify behavior. As Combat Training Centers (CTCs), exercises, and home station training continue to improve and further challenge rotational units, it would probably be beneficial to establish baseline understanding (a known point to shift from) and knowledge prior to any chaotic event. By implementing a learning organization framework into an organization, units can better learn, observe, inform and drive Army change. Various learning tools and the best practice Learning Organization Framework provide a recommended way for your unit to become an effective learning organization.

Learning Tools: Before Action Report, After Action Review, and After Action Report

Before Action Report. The before after action report utilizes existing reports to inform upcoming events. Instead of being conducted after completing an operation, a before action report is given to a unit months prior to their CTC exercise or mission. The report consists of after action reports, articles, information papers, and any other relevant products from units who have conducted a similar mission or a mission in the same environment. The before action report will arm leaders and subordinates with knowledge they need to properly plan, prepare, and accomplish their mission. Anyone in a unit can add to or compile a before action report. Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) can help units get started in compiling the information, and in many cases will send one to the unit prior to the execution of a named operation or CTC rotation. These before action reports make for great discussions during unit leader professional development (LPD) sessions. Using these reports for LPDs allows leaders to identify their current strengths, which can be maximized, generate new ideas, and also identify weaknesses or problems that need command and staff assistance to solve before mission execution. More often than not, multiple staff sections or functions might be required to solve an issue or prepare the unit for success in a particular task; LPDs are premier forums for cross talk amongst key leaders and staff in a learning environment.

After Action Review. Units conduct an after action review (AAR) after each major event. This is an internal discussion on what was supposed to happen, what actually happened, how to sustain strengths, and how to improve weaknesses. The objective of the AAR is to improve individual and collective task performance by providing immediate feedback to the participants. To accomplish this, units conduct AARs as soon as possible after the event. With many units experiencing higher operational tempos, leader involvement and accountability are necessary to ensure AARs are conducted and result in an after action report. For after action reviews, leaders may consider utilizing the two levels down rule, where a division covers down on battalions, brigade with companies, and so on. As echelon increases, leaders must often designate more time for the AAR, to account for geographical separation of their subordinate units. As the organization becomes larger, it becomes increasingly difficult to gather necessary leaders together to participate in the AAR and raises the importance of sharing the outputs of the AARs, so all personnel understand their role and responsibilities for change.

Leaders consider the importance of the mission command philosophy and building trust within their organizations when creating a learning environment. In order to learn from the missteps and lessons of others, it must be encouraged to identify mistakes or operational shortfalls. A challenge is the real or perceived Army culture of risk aversion, which hinders innovative action. Further, the lack of tolerance for mistakes sets the conditions to bypass creative approaches to problem solving, leading to an inability to identify and then fix issues associated with necessary risk. Operational and institutional mistakes that are honest, legal, moral, and ethical, must be viewed through an entirely separate and educational lens to inform necessary change in operational or institutional behavior. Trusting others with delicate unit observations and lessons is paramount to changing behavior across formations, and that trust must exist both ways. Most likely, our unit has a similar problem set and challenge as those around us. Reach out and ask the tough questions, which can result in solutions to our most difficult challenges.

After Action Report. Leaders can use internal knowledge management tools (SharePoint, shared drives) to make AARs readily available across their unit. This provides subordinates easy access after home station training and CTCs, so they can use them to plan, prepare, and execute future missions. It is important for units to provide enough context to the observations in order to be of value. Vague bullets and limited information do not provide enough specificity and clarity to assist others, whereas identifying

root causes and adding recommendations to improve performance will be of great value to external leaders and ultimately mission success.

Learning Organization Framework: Develop, Observe, Capture, Share, Modify

The Prerequisite. While the Army transitions to large scale ground combat operations (LSGCO) and concepts like multi-domain operations, leaders are figuring out how they can create adaptive leaders to combat new and emerging peer threats. It is important to understand the role risk-taking, innovation, and accepting mistakes plays in developing adaptive leaders and a learning organization. In learning organizations, commanders are willing to underwrite the honest mistakes that a subordinate makes in training or combat, assuming the mistake is within the commander's intent, and the risk is necessary to accomplish the mission. In learning organizations, doing a task just because 'this is the way we've always done it' is consistently challenged; leaders do not routinely fall into this trap as trust is built through empowering leaders to take necessary risk, innovate, and make honest mistakes. Mission command allows maximization of learning results within the Learning Organization Framework of develop, observe, capture, share, and modify.

Develop. Foresight is the precursor to long-term problem solving, able to anticipate requirements, and therefore build in necessary event space at an acceptable cost. Foresight goes hand in hand with developing Soldiers and leaders, training the trainers, and informing how we think about training or events from a foundation, baseline, or starting point. We must develop our leaders with the requisite knowledge to understand "how the Army fights." Educating and training the formation prior to an event, on "what right looks like," provides units a common reference point for execution, which all can commit to or adjust from as needed during operations, to continue operating within the commander's intent while achieving the desired end state. LPDs, OPDs, NCOPDs, terrain walks, and staff rides are a few examples of pre-execution venues to establish baseline knowledge for execution of an event. Previous lessons should shape these events, along with doctrine, leader input, and training or event objectives. While it may appear cumbersome in an already busy training glide path, it serves as a key component to level the knowledge bubbles across formations and leadership. Additionally, leader experience is a subjective variable that can only add to the depth of these valuable leader training venues.

Observe. Leaders must understand observations as a mechanism to drive necessary change in the Army. While assessments and evaluations are required for readiness, they are not required to drive Army change. The Army Lessons Learned Program (Army level program run by CALL) specifically addresses Army level warfighter capability gaps, which senior leaders identify for further collection and analysis to validate those gaps through the doctrine, organization, training, material, leadership, personnel, facilities, and policy (DOTMLPF-P) process. CALL leads teams focused on collecting and analyzing observations against these topics. Outcomes from CALL are as simple as stand-alone observations to be available for use by the Army, or more complex observations requiring further validation, which may result in production of Army doctrine gap-filling products such as a Newsletters, Bulletins, and Handbooks for the warfighter.

Leaders can and must be both observers for their unit and the greater Army, and also assessor or evaluator of readiness of their organization. Additionally, every warfighter is also an observer. This understanding is two-fold for events. First, it allows leaders to observe through an Army lens with the big picture in mind, looking for root cause of actions. This equally lends credence to identifying observations which reflect the use of best practices, so the focus is not solely on issues. Secondly, while observing, leaders

are able to simultaneously assess and evaluate the events to determine readiness proficiencies and meet training or mission objectives.

Capture. Resourcing an event for learning, is the most beneficial way to ensure capturing the observations. Leadership directs staff to resource parts or the entirety of an event based on time available and desired learning outcomes. The more resources provided two levels down to assist in a seamless flow between rotating mission or training audiences, the better the AARs. As an example, a battalion level staff can resource a squad LFX with the ammo point, medical coverage, meals, command post, AAR tent, and standardized AAR formatting. Further, these resources along with a command climate that values openness and has a high level of trust, facilitates high Soldier and leader attendance, awareness, motivation, and involvement in the AAR process. Leaders consider asking ‘why’ to help discover root causes and ensure proposed changes will solve the issue before implementation of change. An example is asking why a piece of equipment did not work during the training event. Repeatedly asking ‘why’ things occurred will help leaders and Soldiers identify root causes and work to see the interrelationships that exist when conducting operations. Upon completion of well-resourced AARs, battalions can quickly consolidate, analyze, and further distribute observations inside and outside the unit. Leader emphasis is critical for resourcing the training and then leading and attending after action reviews with time built in for capturing details, root causes to issues, appropriate solutions, writing up reports, and dissemination. By utilizing the two levels down framework, leaders can provide thoughts and guidance to subordinates prior to training, observe during training, participate in the AAR, and ensure observations are distributed after the event.

For specialized company events, such as the signal and military intelligence companies (MICO) within a BCT, brigade and division leadership participation is beneficial. The 82nd Airborne Division’s *Military Intelligence Training Strategy (MITS) Information Paper* supports the idea of division assistance in the facilitation and involvement with the brigade combat team/MICO intelligence training. This information paper can be found at CALL’s website (available to authorized users only, CAC login required): <https://call2.army.mil/toc.aspx?document=17742>

Share. Sharing lessons and best practices distinguishes a great learning organization. Sharing happens both internally to facilitate change at the local unit level and externally to other personnel and units to drive change across the entire Army.

Commanders demonstrate insight and foresight by sharing with the operational and institutional Army, but also ensure internal dissemination at echelon (e.g. companies, battalions, brigades). Lateral sharing with peers and adjacent units along their sphere of influence, is also vastly important. For example, brigade leadership ensures their brigade AARs are shared with adjacent brigades, and their subordinate battalions are passing lessons and after action reports to each other. Battalion commanders do the same with their companies. Specialty units, such as the MICO, present unique relationship and dissemination challenges. The MICO provides direct support to the brigade during CTC rotations and operations, but is task organized under the Brigade Engineer Battalion (BEB). MICO task organization along with its various highly technical MOSs, requires both brigade and division support during training and AARs. This ensures specialty units’ lessons and best practices are properly captured and shared laterally with other brigade specialty units and the larger community.

To facilitate external sharing across the Army, CALL publishes CTC trends reports every year, dozens of publications, and observations to support the warfighter. We find that most units are grappling with similar issues over the course of the last three years. Some units have overcome these recurring issues and have disseminated their successful solutions to the Army through use of CALL publications or other

professional military journals. How can units benefit from these lessons learned or best practices? The first step is knowing the resources exist and then tapping into them as early as possible. The earlier units read CTC trends, the more time they have to apply those lessons and best practices to their development programs, home station training, or training glide-path, well before they arrive to a CTC. Also, units at the brigade and higher levels are required, per AR 11-33 (Army Lessons Learned Program), to have a lessons manager who ensures their unit AARs are shared through the Joint Lessons Learned Information System (JLLIS) and CALL, so their internal AARs are accessible to units across the Army.

The CALL website (available to authorized users only, CAC login required) at <https://call2.army.mil> provides Soldiers the ability to order publications and send requests for information on any topic or ask a question.

CALL also teaches the Army Lessons Learned Course, and units can send Soldiers to the class through ATRRS at <https://www.atrrs.army.mil> (available to authorized users only, CAC required), school 150, course 00-F5/000-F4 (MC). This course trains members who are or will be responsible for their organization's lessons learned program. Upon completion, attendees will have the knowledge to help enhance their unit's AAR execution and sharing process through JLLIS and CALL.

A lessons manager is required at brigade and higher level units. Subordinate units can coordinate with their respective lessons manager to assist in the process and ensure the distribution of their AARs to the rest of the Army through JLLIS. AR 11-33, Army Lessons Learned Program, provides information on how to organize, build, and submit AARs and can be found at https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/ARN2887_AR11-33_Web_FINAL.pdf

Modify. Behavior and processes can be modified after observations and associated problems and their appropriate solutions are captured and shared to all relevant personnel who have roles and responsibilities for change to occur. Resolving issues requires changes in behavior by all parties involved. Army units are organized in a hierarchy and staffs separated by function, which makes organizations reliant on subordinates and various staff sections to coordinate and work together during operations and training exercises. Solutions could likely require behavior modification by more than one person, unit, or staff section.

Instead of various units making the same mistakes at CTCs, ideally a unit uses outside AARs and documents from before action reports to modify the behavior in their unit prior to their home station or CTC training. A unit could simply apply a lesson or best practice that is being utilized by another unit to resolve a problem or create a solution for their organization. Regardless of whether the lesson was captured internally or gained through an external unit, a lesson learned occurs when behavioral change solves a problem or increases performance.

Operational Army observations are captured during mission or training events in multiple ways. Regardless of the capture mechanism, the goal is for the institutional Army to become aware of the observations in order to validate capability gaps, and provide resolution to those gaps. Unit AARs are the most effective way for CALL analysts to become aware of unit observations and then contribute to the gap resolution and drive change through the DOTMLPF-P process.

Summary

Leaders apply insight, foresight, education, and training opportunities to create the conditions for a learning environment, leading to a learning organization that effects Army change. Relevant observations are shared across the institutional Army for validation and eventual capability gap

resolution, while the operational Army can make immediate and desired changes to behavior. The Learning Organization Framework best practice and learning tools provide leaders a method to drive behavioral change within their unit and inform capability gap resolution and Army change outside their footprint. Awareness of the existing tools, best practices, and processes to improve the Army and create Learning Organizations can allow units to maximize the value of their observations. Sharing these lessons across the Army enterprise is key to facilitating desired change throughout the Army to stay ahead of our adversaries.

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Additional acknowledgements

Thank you to the following personnel who provided feedback to the CALL announcement asking for responses to the question, "Is your unit a learning organization? If so, what does your organization do that makes it that way?"

MAJ Degerlund, Kurt J., Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, NJ.

Mr. Dunford, Russell L., Huntsville, AL.

Mr. Kitchens, Michael E., Fort Leavenworth, KS.