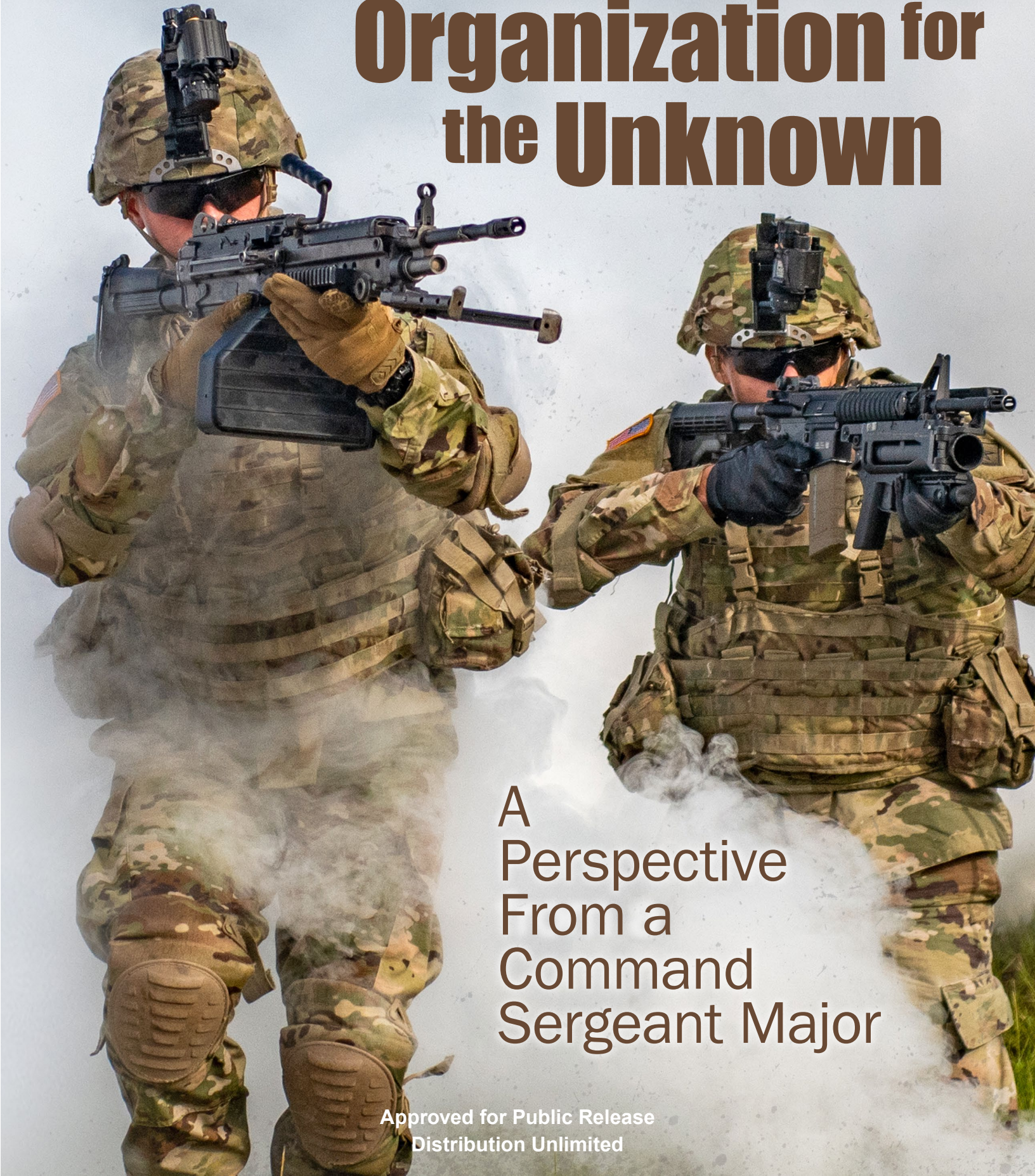


Preparing Your Organization for the Unknown



A
Perspective
From a
Command
Sergeant Major

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Foreword

“To be prepared against surprise is to be trained. To be prepared for surprise is to be educated.”

—James Carse, author, *Finite and Infinite Games: A Vision of Life as Play and Possibility*

In the year leading up to Operation Allies Refuge, my organization built a climate based on trust and communication. We developed confident and competent leaders through leader professional development (LPD) and the traditional training glide path where we mastered individual tasks, then moved on to collective task training.

Each of the above-mentioned priorities represent a philosophical change to the conventional wisdom of unit training management. The purpose of this article is to inform the force on how an organization can prepare, fight, and win in an unknown mission. It is not to change doctrinal processes, but to give a perspective from a senior noncommissioned officer (NCO) on key components that may help an organization be successful. Providing these components can give junior leaders a starting point to begin their preparation for future missions they may encounter. Operation Allies Refuge provided a clear example of the efficiency of these tenets.

Upon notification of a no-notice deployment to Kuwait and potentially Afghanistan, our organization rapidly prepared and executed deployment operations. Once on ground in Kuwait, we were unsure of the specifics of our mission, roles, and responsibilities. Our brigade commander ordered us to move a portion of our battalion to Qatar to support the refugee evacuation from Afghanistan.

As an infantry organization, we did not train for the mission in which we found ourselves. However, because of the command climate, our leader development program and the training we conducted, especially the training at Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), prepared us to execute this mission and save thousands of lives in a short period of time. As a senior leader, successfully accomplishing this historic mission with no prior specific training gave me a great sense of pride.

As a leader, it is important to prepare your organization for an unpredictable future. Every leader prepares their organization differently, depending on the circumstances. Variables include the type of organization, collective proficiency level, and their personal experience. Most units prepare by following a gated glide path based on the guidance found in the Integrated Weapons Training Strategy (IWTS); Field Manual (FM) 7-0, *Training*, 14 June 2021; and the unit's mission-essential task list (METL). These tools are great for preparing for the "known." Preparing for the unknown proves more difficult.

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SECTION 1

Command Climate

“Good judgement comes from experience, and a lot of that comes from bad judgement.”

—Will Rogers, former American actor

A unit’s command climate can significantly contribute to its success in any environment. Specifically, when commanders instill desired values in their Soldiers through the command climate, they will demonstrate those values. The most important ways a leader can affect the climate of a unit is by instilling the importance of three attributes of Army leader intellect: sound judgement, mental agility, and innovation.

When applied correctly, these three attributes underwrite the chain of command’s decisions through enabling communication flow and instilling discipline, leadership, and trust in their subordinate leaders. Accepting and learning from failure is critical to enabling an effective climate. Discerning the root cause of an outcome and learning from it is a second important facet of creating a climate. This learning can occur in every subsequent event. Every interaction an organizational leader has is important in shaping the message for subordinates. See figure 1.



Figure 1. CSM Clark speaks to leaders and Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment (2-4 IN) before a four-day weekend. (Photo by SPC Kevin West, unit public affairs representative)

From weekly safety briefs to platoon certifications, leaders can reinforce their message and command climate. When preparing for unknown missions or tasks, possessing a positive climate is beneficial because it allows organizations to work as a team to accomplish them. This established atmosphere provides the members with a comfort, confidence, and genuine feeling of assurance to make decisions and apply their judgement, shaped by the training and values instilled by their leaders. Assurance makes solving problems easier. Conversely, when the command identifies that the climate of the organization is shifting unfavorably, it must engage immediately to correct the deficiency. Failing to act inevitably leads to a painful future for the organization and its new leaders. To summarize, a positive command climate and instilling a culture of learning and self-improvement sets the tone for an organization’s ability to succeed during any mission. In addition, a dedicated leader development program can reinforce these attributes and instill the values needed.

SECTION 2

Leader Development

Senior leaders in any organization must constantly maintain a leader development program. See figure 2. An optimal leader development program provides knowledge and skills to subordinates, which is the best way of distilling lessons from the operational domain, in turn reinforcing the institutional and self-development domains.¹ Optimal programs provide subordinates with topics focused on organizational and individual success and establishing fundamentals are an important pathway for achieving that success. Organizations I was a part of employed a “big five” that focused on fundamentals of marksmanship, small-unit drill, communication, combat casualty care, and physical fitness; however, you must give thought to the topics at echelon. An organization’s “big five” should focus on the audience and the organization’s needs. For senior-ranking populations, discussions of tactics, techniques, and procedures and being a good steward of the profession can contribute to organizational objectives.



Figure 2. NCOs from 2-4 IN conduct a two-day, off-site leader professional development and training event to build cohesive teams and make them more lethal on the battlefield. (Photo by CSM Clark)

To less-experienced populations such as aspiring team leaders, teaching doctrine and ensuring practiced proficiency in these fundamentals proves more important.

When operating at a high operational tempo, some organizations cancel leader development events to accommodate competing requirements without weighing potential negative impacts it could have on the leaders. There have been many times where last-minute requirements given to an organization conflicted with a leader professional development (LPD) and training event already scheduled, resourced, and certified. Do not allow leader development sessions to be the first item taken off the training calendar. This takes away tools junior leaders could and would take forward with them in their careers. Develop a program that provides the best opportunities for the organization to be well-rounded and successful.

SECTION 3

Training

“Some succeed because they are destined to; most succeed because they are determined to.”

—Henry Van Dyke Jr.,
American author, former U.S. ambassador

“The Army trains to fight and win—it is what we do in order to preserve the peace and to decisively defeat our enemies. Organizations must train on their mission essential tasks during their training glide path. We do this through challenging, relevant, and realistic training performed to the highest standards.”² This builds competence in leaders and confidence in their subordinates that their leaders know their jobs, which produces a competitive spirit and esprit de corps. Soldiers who are confident in their leaders and proud of their organization will support their leaders and follow them into the unknown. Being able to successfully train your organization enables the successful execution of missions and tasks, and even allows for units to execute missions not on their mission-essential task list (METL) (unknown missions). An infantry organization, for example, must start at individual training (Expert Infantryman Badge and individual weapons qualification) and go all the way through collective training (normally a combat training center [CTC] rotation). This established glide path provides any infantry leader the required information for the next step to meet outlined gates.³ The components that take more effort are the planning and resourcing of each event, including leader success at executing the event. Too often, leaders execute planned ranges without considering additional resources besides ammunition. This includes items such as a full water buffalo, medical coverage, and possibly even a warming tent. This can impact the desired training outcome. Multiple repetitions built into the plan result in leader proficiency and organizational efficiency. This is what allows organizations to become great at their craft and successful in their mission. Do not allow poor administrative management to derail training.

SECTION 4

Conclusion

Preparing an organization for specific missions or tasks is not easy. Trying to prepare an organization for the unknown is difficult, but focusing on the climate, leader development, and training of an organization can make executing the unknown easier when the time comes. Senior leaders must be open-minded and willing to provide their organizations the necessary tools to be successful in any situation they may find themselves. If not, their organizations will face challenges. In today's world of compressed decision cycles, there is limited time to spend on addressing challenges while still achieving mission success. Senior leaders must do everything possible to ensure their organizations are prepared for what the future may bring. Focusing on the fundamentals as an organization can make an organization successful in any mission.

ENDNOTES

1. Field Manual (FM) 6-22, *Developing Leaders*, 1 November 2022, https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN36735-FM_6-22-000-WEB-1.pdf, page 1-1.
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GLOSSARY

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ADP	Army doctrine publication
CTC	combat training center
FM	field manual
IWTS	Integrated Weapons Training Strategy
JMRC	Joint Multinational Readiness Center
JRTC	Joint Readiness Training Center
LPD	leader professional development
METL	mission-essential task list
NCO	noncommissioned officer
OC/T	observer coach/trainer
TC	training circular



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