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# Leadership Versus Information Technology Management—Where Do We Go From Here?

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and  
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As our Army, by necessity, becomes more technologically savvy and dependent, we must keep an eye on the fact that ultimately the Army is a people profession (as opposed to a business or a bureaucracy) that requires authentic ethical leaders to lead our soldiers. We introduce this cautionary dialogue because our Army is “building the airplane while we are flying it”—engaged in persistent conflict in which ethical leadership is paramount for success while introducing and using more sophisticated technology.

State-of-the-art technology is an enormous force multiplier and will be one of many keys to our success as we fight these complex wars. As we look to the future of our Army, however, we need to be careful not to lose focus on growing and developing strong moral/ethical leaders who know how to develop leadership in their units. This is centered on a fundamental un-

derstanding of human development.

Just as when America launched its industrial prowess and intellectual capability during World War II, we are now investing in research and testing, and using some of the most sophisticated (and often classified) technologies in history. These capabilities include intelligence gathering, communications, and lethal and nonlethal weaponry. Because our adversaries are certainly racing against us to gain an advantage in these areas or to counter our capabilities, we need to continue to press forward to maximize our potential. We need to caution ourselves, however, against growing, developing and rewarding leaders who are only comfortable in front of plasma screens, managing volumes of data.

Technological superiority often gives warfighters (and policymakers) a false or inflated sense of superiority. Technology alone does not guarantee success. There are numerous examples of this, such as operations in Somalia (1993) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in 2003. According to a Novem-

ber 2004 article in *Technology Review*, in Iraq “some units outran the range of high-bandwidth communications relays. Downloads took hours. Software locked up. ... [Some ground units] found the enemy by running into them, much as forces have done since the beginning of warfare.”

Another example, from a conversation that occurred during OIF 1:

“If GCCS [Global Command and Control System] goes down, I’m screwed.”

“Why didn’t they give you a radio?”

“Because they gave me GCCS.”

This conversation illustrates a leadership failure, not a technological failure.

What about map reading? Do soldiers and leaders need to be able to read maps? Field Manual 6-22 *Army Leadership* states that we have a “decreased emphasis on manual land navigation skills in training, thus rendering forces more vulnerable if the technology fails or is wrongly programmed.” Again, failing to ensure that our soldiers are proper-

ly trained is a failure of leadership, not technology.

Arguably, our Army is growing leaders and already has some who are too focused on numbers, metrics and electrons—that is what competent staffs are for. Staffs need to gather and collate intelligence and data, summarize it, and present it to commanders and leaders who will then synthesize it and make command decisions. Commanders need to be out with soldiers—leading, advising, gaining situational awareness, setting the example and commanding. The “boots on the ground” nature of our current conflicts requires that senior leaders be constantly out with our young soldiers and leaders. We need to be careful not to foster a generation gap between soldiers and leaders who have *fought* the dirty fight with others who have *managed* the dirty fight. This may be an uncomfortable topic for some to discuss, but that is OK—let the discussion begin.

In recent interviews, former brigade commanders (who commanded in Iraq or Afghanistan) cautioned against senior leaders getting stuck and comfortable in their forward operating bases (FOBs) and tactical operations centers (TOCs), managing the fight and/or preparing for the next briefing or battle update briefing. Some of their comments:

■ “We are developing a big cultural

gap between those who have *fought* and those who have *managed*. ... The warfighters versus the war managers.”

■ “Battlefield circulation is key (vice sitting in the TOC/FOB).”

■ “Young soldiers and officers are not seeing and connecting with senior leaders.”

These observations by senior leaders, some of whom are now general officers, highlight the need for our Army to stay focused on the human dimension of leadership and warfare.

Another topic that surfaces in this technology discussion is “leadership by e-mail.” If leading and leadership are human endeavors, should leaders lead via e-mail? Notwithstanding the obvious necessity to use e-mail over long distances, it can become a crutch, “the easy way out.” For example, is it appropriate to reprimand a subordinate via e-mail? Should a leader praise a subordinate via e-mail or in public? The number of stories circulating in our Army from young leaders who talk negatively about their leaders and commanders leading via e-mail is not good—it should be of concern to the leadership of our Army.

Finally, we need to be cognizant of how skilled managers of technology can and will affect our personnel system, specifically in terms of promotions and assignments. For example, we are now promoting officers (some

even below the zone) to field-grade rank who have never commanded at the company level. This would have been unheard of 15 years ago and points to the state of flux our Army has been in since Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom began. We are not saying anything is wrong with this, but as an Army, we need to acknowledge it is happening and analyze it from a personnel and officer professional-development standpoint.

Leadership, at its core, remains a human-to-human endeavor, and the Army remains a people-centered profession. Leadership involves personal connections with seniors, subordinates and peers, and it is central to building trust, confidence, loyalty, a sense of duty and winning teams.

We cannot lose sight of this. □

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