



Great Leaders Know What's Inside the Box

■ By Capt. Howard "Jimmy" Barrow



Capt. Michael Mason, a small-group leader, instructs Logistics Captains Career Course students at the Army Logistics University at Fort Lee, Virginia. Institutional training like this provides the intellectual framework, including a knowledge of doctrine, needed to support purposeful innovation. (Photo by Julianne Cochran)

FEATURES

Doctrine provides the framework needed to create outside-the-box ideas by providing the knowledge that supports purposeful innovation.

Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6–22, Army Leadership, defines leadership as “the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization.” Many young Army leaders infer from this definition that leadership requires creativity.

My experience teaching the Logistics Captains Career Course at the Army Logistics University (ALU) at Fort Lee, Virginia, has shown me that junior officers yearn to exercise creativity but often feel stifled. They learn throughout their professional military education that the Army wants critical and creative thinkers, but their experiences do not support that narrative.

Many junior leaders see a dichotomy between reality and the perception of creativity within the Army. Junior leaders desire the opportunity to be creative but feel penalized for exercising innovation. I argue that the Army does want creativity and that great leaders embrace it.

The LRM and Creativity

The leadership requirements model (LRM) in Army Doctrine Publication 6–22, Army Leadership, supports the idea that the Army does encourage creativity. The LRM combines two distinct categories: what a leader is (attributes) and what a leader does (competencies). The leader attributes are character, presence, and intellect. Leader competencies are “leads, develops, and achieves.” Both attributes and competencies require creativity.

The intellect attribute includes mental agility, sound judgment, innovation, interpersonal tact, and expertise. It is during innovation that creativity arises. Creativity, according to ADRP 6–22, is required to produce “original and worthwhile ideas,” “prevent complacency,” and “adapt to new environments.”

Most importantly, ADRP 6–22 states, “To be innovators, leaders rely on intuition, experience, knowledge, and input from subordinates.” Thus, experience influences innovation. Without

experience, innovation can occur by accident, but purposeful innovation demands experience.

Teaching doctrine to new leaders provides the knowledge that supports purposeful innovation. As I am prone to telling my students, you cannot think outside the box until you know what’s in the box.

Why Be Creative?

In their November–December 2009 *Military Review* article, “Developing Creative and Critical Thinkers,” retired Army colonels Charles D. Allen and Stephen J. Gerras state that creative thinking “is a critical element of strategic thought and is necessary for successful leadership of our military.” This statement categorically demands that leaders think creatively.

Great leaders possess the ability to think not only critically but also creatively in order to find success. Allen and Gerras state, “Our enemies will be creative, so we must be, too. Creativity and innovation must inform senior leaders in critically deciding what to do and how to do it.”

To achieve commitment. According to ADRP 6–22, commitment is the willingness to support a cause or organization and, when effectively utilized, encourages “initiative, personal involvement, and creativity.”

Leaders are required to influence others. Effectively committing to achieve influence encourages creativity and supports the mission command philosophy.

ADRP 6–0, Mission Command, states that the mission command philosophy exists to “empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations.” Thus, leaders need to support creativity within their formations in order to create agile and adaptive leaders and earn their commitment. Great leaders welcome and enable creativity because they understand the need for commitment.

To develop adaptive leaders. ADRP 6–22 states that leaders must prepare subordinates for positions of greater responsibility in order to develop multi-skilled leaders. Additionally, the mission command philosophy “empowers

agile and adaptive leaders.” Developing adaptive leaders demands “not only warfighting skills, but also creativity and a degree of diplomacy.”

In order to support creativity in an organization, junior leaders need to be developed, and to support junior leaders, creativity needs to be developed.

Is There Support for Creativity?

The notion that creativity is required for success is repeated throughout doctrine, yet officers bemoan that the Army fails to recognize creativity.

In his 2011 *The Atlantic* article, “Why Our Best Officers Are Leaving,” Tim Kane recounts a true story of creativity being recognized in the Army. In World War II, innovative Soldiers developed a hedge-cutting mechanism that attached to tanks to allow troops to traverse the thick hedgerows in northern France.

Kane writes, “It’s a point of pride among officers that the American way of war emphasizes independent judgment in the fog and friction of battle, rather than obedience and rules.”

This example offers anecdotal evidence of the value of creativity but proves insufficient when paired with Kane’s assertion that “during World War II, German generals often complained that U.S. forces were unpredictable: they didn’t follow their own doctrine.”

It appears that our young leaders yearn for a time when creativity seemed to reap rewards. This belief is detrimental to the development of our leaders because it is misguided, inaccurate, and incomplete.

Kane supports the notion that junior leaders do not trust the Army to reward their creativity when he writes that “the Pentagon doesn’t always reward its innovators. Usually, rebels in uniform suffer at the expense of their ideas.”

Kane strengthens his stance that the Army does not prepare its leaders to be creative by quoting Lt. Col. Paul Yingling’s 2007 *Armed Forces Journal* essay, “A failure in generalship.” Yingling writes, “It is unrea-

sonable to expect that an officer who spends 25 years conforming to institutional expectations will emerge as an innovator in his late forties.”

Having taught at ALU for nearly two years, I can attest that my students agree with the notions of Kane and Yingling and have grown disenchanted. Fortunately, a solution exists.

Doctrine and Creativity

Junior leaders need creativity to accomplish missions; great leaders enable that creativity. According to ADRP 6-0, the effective use of mission command “must be comprehensive, without being rigid, because military operations as a whole defy orderly, efficient, and precise control.”

The Army acknowledges that a dress-right-dress approach fails because of the complexity of modern military operations. The Army needs leaders capable of thinking and developing novel ideas to combat challenges in a world where both the enemies and civilians have their own objectives.

The Army touts three concepts to overcome the problems felt by junior leaders: the exercise of mission command, the mission command philosophy, and the mission command warfighting function. The application of creativity focuses on the mission command philosophy.

The Army fosters creativity through effective use of the art of command, the science of control, and balance between the two. As the art of command is “the creative and skillful exercise of authority through timely decision-making and leadership,” it is the road map to being a great leader.

ADRP 6-0 says that great leaders provide thorough and complete intent, which allows subordinates “to adapt to rapidly changing situations and exploit fleeting opportunities.” Additionally, it specifies that junior leaders can, “when given sufficient latitude, accomplish assigned tasks in a manner that fits the situation.”

Great leaders recognize the difference between sufficient and insufficient latitude through the art

of command. The mechanism that enables great leaders to provide the sufficient latitude is the science of control. The latitude afforded to leaders represents the realm in which junior leaders exercise their creativity.

The key is that great leaders provide sufficient latitude, not *carte blanche* to accomplish missions. After all, thinking outside the box still has parameters. While that may be a sticking point for some, most students who come through ALU are not asking for free rein. They want the opportunity to take ownership of their roles and responsibilities. The oversimplification is that junior leaders want their superiors to identify left and right limits and then allow them to act within that range.

Great leaders welcome and enable creativity. They demonstrate creativity to accomplish their missions. They possess the ability to think critically and creatively in order to find success. Great leaders find the latitude that each situation demands and foster an atmosphere conducive to original thought. That atmosphere must be based on the creation of purposeful innovation, which means that great leaders must provide their subordinates with experience.

As providers of professional military education, the instructors at ALU give junior leaders the backbone of experience through doctrine and historical examples. I like to think that, to borrow my own expression, we give them the box.

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