



Command Sgt. Maj. David Davenport Sr., the Training and Doctrine Command's command sergeant major, discusses changes to Soldier training over lunch with leaders from the 1st Battalion, 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute), on Sept. 29, 2016, at Camp Ashland, Nebraska. (Photo by Spc. Lisa Crawford)

Where the NCO Professional Development System Began

The modern concept of training the Army's NCOs has been in place for nearly half a century. New additions to the program bring greater flexibility in training leaders.

■ By Command Sgt. Maj. David S. Davenport Sr.

There seems to be a misconception throughout the force that the concept of the Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development System (NCOPDS) is new. Actually, it began in 1971 as the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES).

In the early 1970s, the first commander of the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) and his deputy chief of staff for training set out to transform the Army Training Program, a World War I-era program that had become distorted during the Vietnam

War. Part of that transformation included initiatives to establish a sequential and progressive education program for noncommissioned officers.

These efforts included various studies, which eventually led to the select-train-promote methodology. This should sound familiar; NCOPDS evolved from this methodology as well.

However, the NCOPDS method includes an emphasis on education. That method is known as STEP, which stands for select, train, educate, promote.

NCOES

NCOES featured four vertically integrated levels of training: primary, basic, advanced, and senior. The intent was to develop NCOs' skills and establish training standards that would help to define their roles and responsibilities.

These levels of training provided the NCO Corps with rigorous and relevant training for both resident and nonresident courses. The institutions that supported the training provided resources and guidance to help shape lifelong learning in support of mission execution, profes-

sional growth, and personal goals.

Various revisions to NCOES throughout its history established its functionality. The Army has improved the system continually based on its contemporary operational environment.

Why Change?

When the operational force made it clear that the select-train-promote model was not meeting the educational intent, it was clear that it was time for a change. NCOs often attended an NCOES course well after they had already served in an assignment in which the course's instruction and skills were needed.

The force also complained that the courses needed better instruction on leader development, counseling, training management, communication skills, and tasks common to all military occupational specialties. Training rigor and standards also needed to be raised in order to provide experiential learning. These changes needed to happen to support the best education system possible, so NCOPDS was designed.

Fostering Holistic Change

NCOPDS was established to operationalize the concepts and lines of effort outlined in the NCO 2020 Strategy. The system is designed to develop NCO competencies for the 21st century and to support greater flexibility with regard to when, where, and how Soldiers learn. In order to accomplish these goals, the Army must strategically shape new policy, leverage innovation, and focus on closing performance gaps using an organized framework that establishes achievable milestones.

NCOPDS represents a transparent and grounded approach to managing future changes in how the Army trains and develops Soldiers. As an approach, it is intended to support imperatives related to the Army profession, mission command doctrine, human performance optimization, and combat readiness of the force. The approach to this

system will ensure the NCO Corps is prepared to fight and win our nation's wars and will enhance the overall readiness of the Army.

The NCO 2020 Strategy was developed as a means to create this production system that provides NCOs with access to developmental and broadening experiences. The desired end state of the NCO 2020 Strategy includes the following outcomes:

- Providing the Army with a more adaptable, resilient NCO Corps.
- Improving professionalism, training, and education expertise.
- Providing challenging, relevant, and rigorous leader development training, education, and experiences.
- Articulating learning responsibilities and requirements across the three learning domains (institutional, operational, and self-developmental) and integrating them into a synchronized, effective, and efficient development system.
- Improving professional development models and learning curricula so that Soldiers and leaders can assess progress, track learning events, create goals, and certify professionals to identify and develop NCOs to serve at operational and strategic levels.
- Ensuring that the Army, commanders, and NCOs are satisfied with development programs and performance policy.
- Ensuring that doctrine and programs fully support a lifelong learning environment and the needs of both active and reserve Soldiers.

Central to the NCO 2020 Strategy is that NCOs at all levels understand their responsibility to continually mentor and develop Soldiers. Army senior leaders set conditions for development by teaching, training, and providing the experiences NCOs need to grow as leaders. Additionally, leaders help individuals realize that a commitment to career-long learning

is essential to their development and to the readiness of the force.

Sustaining NCO Development

The goal of NCOES has always been to prepare NCOs to lead and train Soldiers and to assist their leaders in executing unit missions. Now that NCOPDS has been established, we also want the NCO Corps prepared to fight and win our nation's wars and to enhance the overall readiness of the Army while remaining consistent with the NCO Corps' vision.

The TRADOC commanding general, Gen. David G. Perkins, and I are striving to find innovative ways to better prepare the NCO Corps for the challenges of an uncertain future. To accomplish this, TRADOC must fundamentally change NCOES into a system that links training, education, and experiences that span the operational, institutional, and self-developmental learning domains.

By implementing NCOPDS, TRADOC is creating professional, adaptive, trained, and ready NCOs who will be supported by a holistic development system that provides appropriately designed learning experiences at the points of need. We are developing the next generation of competent and committed NCOs of character and trusted Army professionals who are adaptive, capable of thriving in chaos and ambiguity, and prepared to win in a complex world.

NCOs are as critical as ever in supporting our Army's ability to overcome ever changing operations across multiple domains. We must leverage our experiences to prepare our Soldiers and develop the future NCO Corps to meet those challenges and remain ready as the world's premier combat force.

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