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Report

Creativity for the Leaders of Future

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Abstract- Military operations, particularly those involving combat, have always been tough. But, it is obvious that future operational environment will challenge us even more with increasingly complex and ambiguous circumstances. As in the past, creativity will be the key element for military victory in wartime and a successful transformation in peacetime. The need for leaders who understand the strategic environment, be able to think creatively, and visualize solutions will be critical in the future.

Keywords- Creativity, military creativity, leadership, future security environment.

1. Introduction

The term creativity is usually associated with scientific, artistic or business fields. It is rather interesting that being creative is often not a characteristic attributed to military leaders. However, military history is replete with highly creative leaders. As the warfare is itself largely an art, creativity is an indispensable aspect of warfare. While accepting that the technological creativity and following innovations are very important for the military, the focus should be on those aspects of creativity most directly related to leaders and leadership (Vego, 2013). Because the military creativity is linked with activity, so it is inseparable from leadership, which is the art of influencing men in action (Nazareth, 1987).

2. Leadership and Creativity

Why does leadership matter for the army? Firstly, leadership is critical for operational success. Because, despite the technological advancements, war is still an intense human endeavor. And, it is leadership that inspires the soldiers by providing the purpose, direction and motivation that is required to win in battle. Furthermore, the military depends on itself to develop its leaders. Different from other organizations, the military does not assign leaders from outside, but trains and educates both enlisted soldiers and officers to lead. So, leadership development is one of the most important issues in the military. And the last point, leaders at all levels deal with existing problems and try to anticipate threats and opportunities that may emerge for the unit. But it is very rare that those problems are identical; many important issues facing leaders require novel approaches, in other words, creative approaches.

The simplest meaning of creativity is the ability to bring something new into existence. But human beings cannot make something out of nothing, so our creations consist of a restructuring of existing ideas, forces and materials into new forms (Nazareth, 1987). From an academic perspective, creativity is defined as the production of ideas, products, or procedures that are (a) novel and (b) potentially useful or practical (Amabile, 1996).

The creativity is a complex psychological construct influenced by personal, contextual and environmental factors. And, creativity is an outcome of work on certain types of problems. All problems, of course, do not require creative thinking (Michael, Kimberly, & Issac, 2012). The literature indicates that the kind of problems that call for creative thinking should have

three key characteristics, novelty, complexity, and ill-definition (Mumford and Gustafson, 2007). It should be noted that considerable empirical evidence suggests that individual creativity makes a significant contribution to organizational effectiveness and survival (Amabile, 1996; Madjar & Oldham, 2006), which I believe is also valid for military organizations

3. Military Creativity

The military is a unique profession. Military service is usually regarded as more than just a simple job choice, maybe a way of life. The military is a unique profession in that its personnel are expected to sacrifice their lives for the country when necessary. Civilian organizations, unlike military ones, do not expect or demand a similar devotion to duty or dedicated obligation from their employees (Bowen, 1989). Maybe because of these unique features, the military has a strong sense of group identity, and its highly specialized functions have created a distinct culture. Maybe, the most significant aspect of this culture is its centralized and hierarchical command structure (Vego, 2013).

However, I am of the opinion that it is rather hard to say that this culture always favors creativity. Why? Because; in this hierarchical command structure, the military personnel are expected to obey procedures, follow various checklists and matrices to execute the tasks. So, in contrast to their civilian counterparts, military leaders must work within a rather narrow framework and are bound by numerous rules and regulations (Vego, 2013). They are expected to abide by the concepts, doctrines, standard operating procedures and numerous regulations. Because, it is widely accepted all these have been written with the light of accumulation of thousands of years of experience. They all, understandably, aim to ensure a high degree of conformity.

While accepting the benefits and military necessity of all these unique organizational dynamics, it should be acknowledged that they have the potential to prevent creativity. Furthermore, there is also the risk for military leaders drifting to a kind of mediocrity. But mediocrity in both combat and peacetime could be costly. Under a mediocre leadership, creativity and the following innovations do not find the opportunity to flourish. It should be underlined again that it is quite understandable that the military needs the stability of

conformity so it can successfully function in peace and in wartime (Vego, 2013). But at the same time it also has a vital need for creativity; otherwise, failure is inevitable in warfare and mediocrity is inevitable in peacetime. I think one of the most critical tests for any military leader is to appropriately reconcile these contradictory requirements.

Indeed, military history is replete with stories of these successful leaders and armies. For example, in the Trojan War, Greeks' use of a huge wooden horse to gain access into Troy; and in the conquest of Istanbul in 1453 by Ottoman Empire, Sultan Mehmed II's order of transporting the ships over land on wooden rails are two very well-known and remarkable creativity examples from military history. As the examples indicate, the creativity of military leaders actually means their ability to find novel and workable solutions to problems and dilemmas (Vego, 2013), thus, out-of-the-box or out-of-the-doctrine ideas and decisions should not be regarded as unacceptable in advance but should be deemed as important and valuable.

As one of the principles of war, surprise requires striking the enemy at a time, at a place, or a manner for which he is unprepared. It would not be an exaggeration to state that only creative acts could achieve such a surprise effect. Because; if the commanders decide and act in a conventional and traditional manner, the chance of success lowers significantly as the enemy will probably guess the act.

Saying that creativity is required in war times should not mean that it is not important in peace times. Although it is not that critical as wartime creativity, the problems encountered in peacetime activities like administrative tasks, training and education, and maintenance mostly require creative approaches.

Furthermore, the armies are experiencing similar processes and dynamics as civilian organizations. For example, because of the negative impact of economic crisis on defense budgets, the armies of the world are undergoing downsizing or restructuring (Jordan, Schraeder, Feild, & Armenakis, 2007). Maybe because of this, they established new departments or commands for organizational development and transformation. The leaders and their staffs working at HQs and dealing with these processes have to be highly creative in their

work so that the armies can keep up with the pace of external environment.

4. Future Security Environment and Creativity

What the future brings in that sense? The main responsibility of military people is to learn from past battles, and anticipate and prepare for future wars. It is quite obvious that there will be new challenges in the future security environment. But unfortunately, these new ones most likely will not replace the old ones, but will add to and complicate it. We already know the old challenges like harsh physical environment, death, fatigue, deprivation, destruction, casualties, stress. These will not go away, but will combine with the new ones. Although it is not possible to predict future precisely, we could see the indications of future today. Examining the current operational environment brings us to the fact that 21st century military operations will most probably be highly complex, dynamic, ambiguous and stressful. In such environments, there will be no fixed clear-cut solutions to leadership challenges, and leaders need to constantly adapt to changing demands and circumstances. We all observe that the military's role has recently increased. While expecting that this role would be reduced after the cold war, the military has been more active in recent years. It seems that this trend will continue in the future. Compared to past, leaders will have to deal with hybrid threats and will need to conduct a wide range of operations (Future Land Operating Concept, 2012; The Human Dimension White Paper, 2014)

A critical challenge awaiting leaders is that enemy may not be clearly defined. For example, the enemy can easily hide among civilians or use civilians as shields. Under such situations, leaders are likely to face ambiguities and uncertainties and have to make difficult decisions with regard to protecting their troops versus not killing any civilians.

Another challenge is the widespread use of technology in warfare. It is certain that emerging technologies will continue to shape future warfare. While it is critical for commanders to adopt the strengths of new technologies, it is equally critical for them to understand the weaknesses, as the enemy will certainly be looking for them.

Similarly, with the advancement and widespread use of communication technologies, in the future, leaders frequently will need to make highly stressful decisions in front of a live global audience. This increased close-watch will require leaders trained in ethical and legal decision-making, professional judgment, and (Leahy, 2013).

To sum up, regardless of the difficulty and the challenges of the future operational environment, it is certain that warfare will remain fundamentally a human contest of opposing wills. So, functioning effectively in this context will require that leaders at all levels have the sophisticated cognitive skills to respond to multiple demands of such an environment. The creativity is one of, or maybe the most important of these skills (The Human Dimension White Paper, 2014).

It seems that the criteria of creativity, as stated before, "novel, complex, and ill-defined problems" will be the characteristics of the future operational environment. There is a common saying that necessity is the mother of invention, I would like to adapt it to future security environment, and say "complexity and ambiguity will be the mother of creativity".

After emphasizing the relevance and importance of creativity for future leaders, I would like to make some practical recommendations on the development of creativity of future leaders; first of all, leader development must continue to foster creativity at every level. Besides developing their core capabilities as military officers, they should have awareness on creativity, and they need to develop an open mindset, acquire broad knowledge in several areas such as politics, sociology, history, psychology, etc. that enables them to produce novel and useful ideas (US Army Publication, 2013).

Similarly, the Army must develop a new training paradigm that incorporates the complexity of the operational environment into training (US Army Publication, 2013). Training scenarios must include open-ended, ambiguous problems with a range of potential solutions that challenge leaders. And, the last point, creativity, like a delicate flower, needs an ideal atmosphere to flourish (Norins, 1990). So, organizations increasingly come to understand that to remain competitive, they need to create a proper

climate, which can encourage their employees to be creative.

While accepting the internal dynamics unique to military, I believe that organizations and leaders overcoming or balancing the organizational obstacles that inhibit creative thinking are more likely to have creative individuals. Furthermore, empirical evidence indicates that creativity of the groups or teams is higher than individual creativity (Michael, Kimberly, & Issac, 2012). Although it is reasonable to expect that senior commanders should be better at creative thinking based on their training, education, and experience, which are enhanced by intuition and superior judgment, they should also know how to benefit from the creativity of their subordinates. For example, in the military decision making process, the creativity of the staff serves to develop highly effective and original plans and orders. So, leaders must create an environment that stimulates individual creativity at all contexts.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, military operations, particularly those involving combat, have always been tough. But, it is obvious that future operational environment will challenge us even more with increasingly complex and ambiguous circumstances.

As in the past, creativity will be the key element for military victory in wartime and a successful transformation in peacetime. The need for leaders who understand the strategic environment, be able to think creatively, and visualize solutions will be critical in the future (US Army Publication, 2013).

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