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Deckplate View Of The Training Revolution

By Master Chief James P Russell, U.S. Navy

The Navy is in the process of revolutionary change. Organizationally imposed limitations that have prevented it from fully exploiting the potential of its enlisted sailors soon will be a historical footnote in the Navy's journey toward becoming a learning organization. In 2000, Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Admiral Vern Clark chartered a team led by retired Vice Admiral Lee Gunn to review the methods the Navy uses to train its people. In addition, they were encouraged to go to industry and seek the best practices and technologies then in use to train, develop, and retain its workforce. The report generated by the team—the Executive Review of Navy Training (ERNT)—defined several major areas where the Navy needs to dramatically improve its training process.

The most revolutionary recommendation was to shift the Navy's training philosophy to one that holds the sailor, not equipment, as the primary customer. This means training sailors how to use equipment to successfully perform tasks rather than training them to operate equipment. For example, instead of producing a fire control system and determining training requirements from the engineered capabilities of the system, trainers would examine the tasks sailors are expected to accomplish while using the system. Those tasks would be broken into the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to complete them. Trainers would then evaluate the best methods to convey those elements to trainees.

This process will move the Navy from its current emphasis on classroom solutions to other options, such as computer-based training and distance learning, which take advantage of technological advances. Although the human performance approach to determining training requirements and developing responses is not new to industry, it is considerably different from the Navy's traditional methods.

The Human Performance Systems model features a step-by-step process for integrating human performance into the training environment. It defines training requirements in human performance terms, develops solutions

for training interventions (how to conduct training), and produces and delivers those interventions to the fleet. Further, it measures changes in behavior resulting from the training to provide feedback to fine-tune interventions. The process is the cornerstone for future training development and implementation in the Navy.

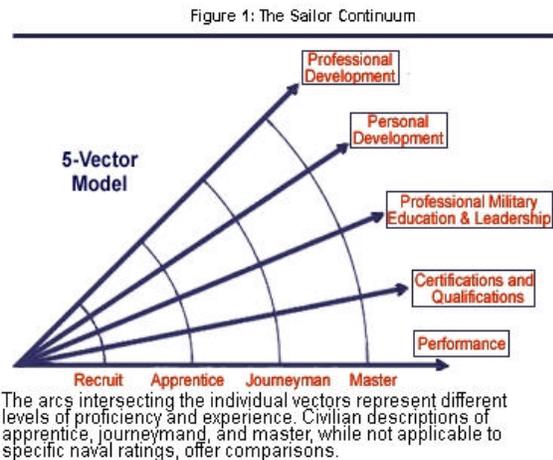
Another ERNT recommendation concerned the Navy's method for allotting resources to training. With 11 major resource sponsors providing funding to at least 12 separate entities charged with conducting training for the fleet, the Navy suffers from efficiencies and duplication of effort. Consequently, the team recommended establishing a single resource sponsor for training sailors – the designated organization was activated in August 2002.

The ERNT also recommended closer coupling of training and the acquisition process. The Navy cannot afford to keep relying on the experience and abilities of sailors to carry the day when new systems, components, and software are delivered to the fleet without training. Studies indicate that, as the Navy evolves into a younger force, the experience level at the middle and senior enlisted pay grades – the backbone of the technical force – will decrease significantly. If the Navy continues to rely on sailors to act as shock absorbers against an acquisition process that sacrifices training as the first option when resources become scarce, it is steering into dangerous waters.

In July 2001, the CNO established a task force to implement the recommendations of the ERNT: Task Force EXCEL (Excellence through Commitment to Education and Learning) began work in the fall of 2001 under the leadership of Rear Admiral Harry Ulrich. One of the task force's many challenges was to put into action the recommendation that the Navy take a lifelong learning approach to training. If the human performance process is the cornerstone of the revolution, the movement toward a lifelong learning continuum for sailors is its heart and soul. The five-vector model in Figure 1 was developed to help meet this challenge.

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It represents the major growth and development areas that shape a sailor throughout his or her naval career.



Each of the five vectors is aimed at a major growth and development area important both to the individual sailor and to the Navy. Embedded in the development process is the keystone to the revolution: unlike the path the Navy took in the past when organizational improvement was expected to drive personnel development this process develops people to their potential and results in organizational improvement.

Professional development is what the Navy asks a sailor to know that is directly related to mission accomplishment. It is related to the qualifications and certifications vector. In examining requirements for personal and professional growth, the task force asked why the Navy did not offer civilian certifications to sailors. The usual answer was, if it did, they would take them and leave the Navy. This was the intuitive response, but the numbers both in and outside the Navy indicate that when organizations invest in people, those people tend to stay and they become better performers.

The personal development vector is comprised of life skills and personal areas that sailors need to know or be exposed to to be successful. Topics presented in general military training (such as sexual harassment and alcohol abuse), combined with management of personal finances, physical fitness, and progress toward a college degree, and good examples. While more than 200 programs currently provide this type of information, pointing them all in one direction is the intent of this vector.

The professional military education and leadership vector raises two important issues. First, the leadership training offered to enlisted leaders is not a true continuum. We must provide continual education, growth, and development that are not connected to advancement in rank. By directly connecting leadership training with the level of responsibility that the sailor is assigned versus the rank structure the Navy can ensure he or she has the opportunity to master the knowledge, skills, and abilities related directly to job performance. The second issue relates to the Navy's obligation to give professional military knowledge to sailors. It currently asks them to take a "trivia pursuit" type of exam on military knowledge as part of their advancement exam; performing badly in that section impedes advancement. Administering this kind of exam without formally offering sailors the required knowledge does not pass the commonsense test. The Navy can do better especially at the senior levels, where nontraditional tools may be used to assist enlisted leaders in making higher level recommendations to their officers.

The performance vector explores how to evaluate sailors both in technical proficiency and personal performance. If the Navy truly values learning and encourages sailors to follow the vectors, their performance must be rewarded. The military generally rewards good performance with promotion. But the Navy's advancement scheme must change if it is going to use the five-vector model as the basis for developing career paths. One proposal would reward both technical proficiency and personal performance and bring those two parameters together to make up advancement potential. The milestones measured on the professional vector would not have to consist of knowledge tests they could be performance tests that verify proficiency in the ratings. This would unseat the advancement exam as the primary determining factor for enlisted advancement and promote a system that rewards those who could actually perform in their rating not just talk about it on paper.

Until recently the Navy was dominated by a cultural belief that any education or training at

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the enlisted level that did not support mission accomplishment amounted to inefficient use of resources better spend on ships and aircraft. Because most people enlist in the Navy with the idea that they will be able to pursue personal growth through some kind of higher education, this single-minded belief has discouraged first-term sailors from staying in the navy. Personnel planners tried to slow the exodus with the Navy College Program, which offers an excellent opportunity for sailors to translate military experience into academic credit. The main problem, however, is that the navy's culture did not change to support the intent of the program.

In short, a college degree for an enlisted sailor remains an interesting but not necessarily relevant exercise and the level of encouragement leaders give to sailors who pursue their degrees reflects that view. It is not uncommon for sailors who seek degrees to be challenged by their superiors and peers about their commitment to their duties because they spend so much time going to college. Sailors are asked to make a choice between two disparate paths: one leading to professional development and job performance; the other leading to personal growth desires. In the Navy today, progress on one path can come only at the expense of progress on the other.

Max Depree, author of *Leadership is an Art* (Dell Publishing, 1989), says, "What we can do is merely a consequence of what we can be." Thus, we can conclude that an individual's performance for an organization is limited to the degree that the organization allows him to develop to his potential.

The CNO's commitment to the five-vector model for each enlisted rating in the Navy will ensure the personal and professional development paths are in concert with each other. By making attainment and maintenance of equivalent civilian certifications a matter of course, the Navy will guarantee that sailors gain a return for the investment and sacrifices they make for the Navy. In return, the Navy can expect expanded capabilities of sailors and improved mission accomplishment. It will be common for sailors to attain associates degrees by the end of their first enlistments, bachelor's degrees about the time they make chief, and master's degrees before they retire.

Obviously, this vision involves answering difficult questions. Is the Navy ready to accept an environment where there could be more advanced degrees in the chiefs' mess than in the wardroom?

Should a window of opportunity be opened for a direct transition of qualified candidates from chief to officer without the current restrictions placed on the warrant officer and limited duty officer communities? Is the Navy prepared to appropriately employ sailors who have developed to their full capabilities and potential? Is it prepared to commit to changing the pay and compensation system to meet the quality of sailor it has developed?

The fact that the Navy wrestles with these kinds of issues demonstrated it is coming to grips with the real meaning of investing in people. Much remains to be done but from the deck plates, the revolution is looking pretty good.