

FORT RILEY UNIVERSITY
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TRADOC Commander, General Kevin Byrnes, recently published an article about the Army Future Force Concept with particular emphasis on providing a “vivid picture of how the Future Force will conduct land operations in the future, fully integrated within a rapidly evolving joint framework.” He stresses that today, Army transformation also encompasses a high-performing workforce of employees and contractors, with multiple and integrated skill sets, capable of adapting quickly to a changing Army mission, and competitive with the nation’s best.

There is growing consensus among educators, military leaders and policy-makers that current leadership programs for training future leaders must change dramatically. A different approach is needed if we are to prepare military leaders to meet today’s leadership challenges. The new structure should enhance preparation, allowing for innovation and futuristic thinking in a collaborative setting, as well as prepare leaders to meet new challenges.

This insight by senior leaders encourages dialogue and could be enhanced by a series of ‘forums’ throughout the military community to discuss what needs to be done to improve leadership preparation programs. Instead of ‘management’ or ‘administration,’ what is needed is leadership. General Byrnes suggests that the leadership that’s needed is not the traditional leader/follower relationship, but a newer, more democratic type in which individuals are not only motivated but also empowered.

Recently the Command Sergeant Major of the 24th Infantry Division (Mech) and Fort Riley Kansas described the perfect example of decentralized leadership in “Operation Iraqi Freedom”, where Specialists and 1st Lieutenants are making critical and on-the-spot decisions. The situation in Iraq, he states, is requiring decentralization and shared decision-making in a fast-paced and time-intensive combative environment.

Rather than promoting the traditional top-down leadership style, successful leaders in Iraq are creating powerful, shared visions, thus providing the encouragement and support necessary to streamline the decision-making process. A democratic ‘player/coach’ approach is bringing out the best in team leaders, helping them see the need for dramatic change, designing exciting alternatives to traditional leadership practice. The Command Sergeant Major of the Fort Riley Garrison Command agrees that this type of leadership development is vital and necessary as we confront multiple regional conflicts all over of the world. He states that we must change with the times or be left behind.

Leadership capacity must be developed in teams of leaders, not simply in one individual. These “partnership leadership leaders” all have critical roles in helping soldiers perform at high performance levels. This focus on “multiple” leadership recognizes that the effectiveness of new leadership depends on “ownership” by all participants. As both CSMs added, leadership skills should be fully developed so that future leaders have a strong foundation and belief system on which to base difficult decisions.

Likewise, today's civilian workforce also requires high-performance individuals with multiple and integrated talents capable of adapting quickly to a changing Army mission. In the future, an increasingly essential dimension of leadership in the civilian workforce will be the ability to communicate and collaborate with people inside and outside of their organization. Today, effective organizations are guided by an instructional leader who directly involves staff in the decision-making process, and by a leader who is able to provide guidance, support, and encouragement to team members when requested. Leadership should be seen as a shared process involving leaders, their entire workforce, and community members. Empowerment is a very comprehensive, dynamic process that also has the potential to substantially impact an organization to develop high performance individuals. Recognizing the need to develop the ideal of leading with vision and values, and empowering every individual is key to promoting shared arrangements and decision-making.

The faculty and staff at Fort Riley University, as well as other educational institutions throughout the Army, should be examining the changing demands and qualities for leadership. They should be outlining bold, new leadership programs that embrace vision, risk, and change. They should be promoting programs that motivate and empower future leaders. Emphasis on this essence of leadership needs to guide the Army's transformation. FRU would like to be viewed as an organization that supports this concept of leadership through the training readiness of service members and civilian workforce, and by promoting a more collaborative leadership approach that motivates and empowers. Educational opportunities that enhance critical thinking skills, intellectual reasoning attributes, and analytical traits are absolutely essential for the 21st century.

In essence, transformative learning implies becoming more reflective and critical; being more open to perception of others and accepting of new ideas. To fully support the mission, you must prove yourself everyday as masters of innovation.