HUMAN RESOURCES
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COURSE
42A

FACILITATED ARTICLE #12

8 Ways To Be An Adaptive Leader

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Facilitating the Discussion

Facilitators can orchestrate discussions using the following questions to help choreograph group discussion/class participation. The sequence of the questions builds logically from a taxonomy point of view, i.e., a lower level of learning/thinking to a higher level of learning/thinking, by moving from comprehension of the material to a synthetic or evaluative discussion of the material. Facilitators should ask open-ended questions and allow the students to respond. Facilitators should also ask questions that cause students to interact. A facilitator’s goal should be ensuring that students do not participate in synthetic or evaluative discussion until confirming that the basic concepts and key points of the article are clarified and fully understood. Don’t forget to be patient after posing a question and use silence to your advantage. Lastly, remember it’s the facilitator’s job to include everyone in the discussion. Adapted from The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking: Concepts and Tools, Richard Paul and Linda Elder, Foundation of Critical Thinking, 2001.

1. The main purpose of this article is _____________________________.
   (State as clearly as possible the author’s purpose for writing the article.)

2. The Key question that the author is addressing is _____________________________.
   (Figure out the key question in the mind of the author when s/he wrote the article.)

3. The most important information in this article is _____________________________.
   (Figure out the facts, experiences, data the author is using to support his/her conclusions.)

4. The main inferences/conclusions in this article are _____________________________.
   (Identify the key conclusions the author comes to and presents in the article.)

5. The key concept(s) we need to understand in this articles is (are) _____________________.
   By these concepts the author means ______________________________.  
   (Figure out the most important ideas you would have to understand in order to understand  
   the author’s line of reasoning.)

6. The main assumptions(s) underlying the author’s thinking is (are) _____________________.
   (Figure out what the author is taking for granted [that might be questioned].)

7. a) If we take this line of reasoning seriously, the implications are _____________________.
   (What consequences are likely to follow if people take the author’s line of reasoning  
   seriously?)

   b) If we fail to take this line of reasoning seriously, the implications are___________________.
   (What consequences are likely to follow if people ignore the author’s reasoning?)

8. The main point(s) of view presented in this article is (are) _____________________________.
   (What is the author looking at, and how is s/he seeing it?)

9. Last and certainly not least, what’s the point of reading this article and how can it be applied  
   to our profession and for improving critical thinking?
Adaptive Soldiers are critical and creative thinkers, innovative problem solvers, confident, and in possession of the skills needed to operate in an asymmetric warfare environment, where strategy and tactics differ significantly from what most Soldiers learn about conventional warfare.

The 10-day Asymmetric Warfare Adaptive Leader Program, conducted four times a year at Fort A.P. Hill, Va., teaches eight dimensions of adaptability. By learning how to better interpret their commander’s intent and learning how to observe, operate, analyze, predict, counter and defeat asymmetric threats, AWALP graduates help enable their units to overcome the challenges inherent in modern battlefields.

AWALP is heading into its third year, and the program — the only one of its kind in the Army — centralizes many of the lessons the Army has absorbed during the past decade of war.

“The big thing we saw in Afghanistan and Iraq: The enemy created challenges, and sometimes as a military, we were slow to adapt,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Cordell Ackley, squadron command sergeant major of C Squadron at the Asymmetric Warfare Group. “So the motivation here at AWALP is to be able to expand the comfort zone of the students and expand their horizons. When they look at problems at various angles, then with some analysis, they will be able to apply various methods to solve the problem.”

The AWALP staff comprises active-duty Soldiers, Department of the Army civilians and contractors who are subject-matter experts in asymmetric warfare. The group falls under the Asymmetric Warfare Group, headquartered at Fort Meade, Md. The AWG reports to the U.S. Army Training & Doctrine Command.

Operating in an asymmetric environment “is not all kicking down doors and shooting people,” said Hugh Roberts, a retired command sergeant major who is now an AWALP senior civilian advisor. “It’s also engaging with people, finding out who can help, who can hurt, what a population of people values and what the key infrastructures are in that community. It takes a certain level of interpersonal adaptability to be able to do that. We want the Soldiers to complete the task, but we also want them to think about the ‘so what’ of the problem.”

Adaptability 101

Before Soldiers can successfully operate in an asymmetric environment, they must learn how to be adaptable.

“One of the main concerns that the Army has right now is resiliency — the power or ability to return to original form or position, the ability to recover readily from adversity,” Ackley said. “What makes a Soldier resilient against internal or external stressors? The program answers those questions. If the Soldier is more adaptive, maybe those external stressors won’t be as effective.”

Senior leaders frequently talk about Soldiers being “adaptable.” But when a Soldier is asked, “What is adaptability?” Soldiers will give a range of answers, Roberts said. Most Soldiers will say being adaptable means “being able to react to something.” But it’s more than that, Roberts said. “It’s
critical, creative thinking, innovate problem solving; it’s being confident.”

Part of being adaptive is being familiar with the threats you face.

Whether involving the enemy or the environment, Soldiers need to know what the threats are and understand how to handle the enemy’s capabilities.

“The enemies we face are very adaptive,” Roberts said. “How do you train Soldiers to consider the asymmetric environment in an adaptive manner? We start with what we call Adaptability 101. We bring the students to the same page, knowing what adaptability is, and then we build from there.”

Students are taught what an adaptive leader is and how to build an adaptive team. Then they are taught how to integrate and teach adaptability at their home station.

Threshold of failure

AW ALP pushes Soldiers out of their comfort zones, but the education is intended to systematically build confidence in their ability to manage uncertainty.

“The threshold of failure is a scale,” Ackley said. “One end is simplicity, and the other end is chaos. If Soldiers are constantly trained in the simplicity side, then there’s no thinking involved. They’re always doing the crawl, walk, run. The conditions never change. But if Soldiers operate too far in the chaos side, then it becomes too confusing.

“So we have to find that spot in between the simplicity and the chaos that promotes adaptability — the critical, creative thinking and problem-solving,” he said. “When Soldiers become more experienced during the training event, then we can move toward that spot on the chaos side. How can a Soldier improve if they are not challenged and pushed a little further than what they’re used to? How can our Soldiers get better if they are used to everything being the same, the task, conditions and standards? AWALP pushes them further.”

Operating in an asymmetric environment

The AWALP course focuses on what the AWG has identified as the eight dimensions of adaptability: physical adaptability; cultural adaptability; handling crisis and emergency situations; interpersonal adaptability; dealing with change or ambiguity; handling stress; thinking creatively; and learning task, technology and procedure. Only about a quarter of the program is in the classroom; the rest of the training takes place in a field environment.

“The classroom training really focuses on teaching the actual tasks,” said Master Sgt. Michael Crosby, AWALP’s NCO in charge. “When we take the students in the field, it’s really focusing on how to apply that task to a dynamic scenario or situation.”

The course is conducted in two phases. In Phase 1, the first five days, students learn and demonstrate an understanding of adaptive team performance and leader attributes.

“We first teach Soldiers what adaptability is, what the eight dimensions of adaptability are,” Crosby said. “Then we teach about what the different inhibitors are. There is a build incentive — train to build confidence — then everything is tied together by accountability,” Crosby said.

In Phase 2, students bring all the skills they’ve learned during Phase 1 into scenario-based exercises.

“In the end, training...
this way will make the Soldier more confident, and we want to build those intangible attributes," Crosby said.

Soldiers who have taken part in the training saw immediate benefits.

“My thought process is now completely different in regarding how I would approach any mission,” said Staff Sgt. Oral Pierce, a student in AWALP’s program from B Troop, 1st Squadron, 38th Cavalry Regiment, 525th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, at Fort Bragg, N.C. “In the traditional Army, we are told what to do and how to do it, but here at AWALP, I have been taught to step out of the box of traditional problem-solving and to take a look at all the options of what I can do to approach a problem.

And Staff Sgt. Eliezer Morales, a student from the 525th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade at Fort Bragg, N.C., is ready to take the lessons he’s learned at AWALP back to his unit.

“As a group leader, the training I have received here at AWALP will help me teach my Soldiers how to perform well in battlefield situations they are not normally used to encountering,” he said. “Also this training will help my Soldiers to be more proactive on a daily basis when doing their duties.”
Encouraging individual responsibility is built into the structure. During the program students are divided into teams, but the teams change each day.

“What is unique about this training is we do not appoint a leader,” Crosby said. “This is how we teach the adaptive team processes method. If there’s a designated leader then everyone turns to that leader and waits for that leader to make a decision. If no leader is appointed, then they have to figure it out.”

Roberts said this creates an interesting dynamic in the teams.

“You have the type-A personalities: staff sergeant, sergeant first class, first sergeant and lieutenants. “They all have been in leadership positions,” he said. “So here you have this group of leaders in a team together, and they all have ideas and think they have the best ideas. We want that conflict, and during the review process we will bring that out. They will say that there was no leader appointed and everyone wanted to do it their way.”

When students return to their units, they often have much to think about regarding their own leadership style, Roberts said.

“Are they the type of leader that no other input is allowed?” he said. “What does that do to their team? Does it promote incentive? Your leadership style may have a negative impact on confidence.”

Adaptive Soldiers are able to look at all options to solve a problem, Pierce said.

“I have learned that even though someone’s perspective of approaching a mission or a problem may be different than how I would handle that situation, their perspective can work for me also,” Pierce said. “There’s more than one way something can work. I would say interpersonal adaptability — working with others and accepting their plan aside from mine — is the skill I will benefit most from.”

During the student selection process, AWALP advises units to send Soldiers ranking from staff sergeant to major — “those who have an influence in training,” Crosby said.

“That’s so that at the end of the course, these students can go back and are able to inject and tweak the training so it can produce those attributes that make their Soldiers more adaptable in the end,” he said.

Students are also asked to bring their units’ training schedules with them to the course.

“We help the students look at their long-range training schedule and how they can integrate the methods and competencies they have learned,” Crosby said.

Ambiguity can lead to adaptability

A big part of AWALP’s training success is because students are kept in the dark about the exact curriculum.

“Ambiguity is key to this program,” Crosby said.

Morales said, “From day one during the course, I never knew what was going to happen. Before I arrived here, I tried to look the course up online, but there was no information about the program. I just had to adapt to whatever the situation was on any given day. That’s why I love the course. I never knew what would happen next.

“We encounter so many situations that we are never prepared for,” he said. “AWALP has trained us to be adaptive to any environment by using the eight dimensions of adaptability, to think outside the box when we find ourselves dealing with the unknown.”

Crosby noted that the course is designed to create that ambiguity.

“It is a scenario-driven event, where Soldiers can find themselves anywhere in the world — places other than Iraq and Afghanistan,” he said. “They have to figure out what they are supposed to do. They are not given a direct mission; they build their own mission, based on who they talk to, by using key-leader engagement skills. Through the information they gather, they can identify what’s going on in the scenario.”

25th ID models their own adaptive leader program

To prepare its Soldiers for asymmetric threats, the 25th Infantry Division plans to incorporate Asymmetric Warfare Adaptability Leader Program methods into its own program at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. In August, the division sent senior NCOs who have graduated from AWALP to observe the course in order to develop a similar program at home.

“When we return, we can take the principals of the course and develop it for our leaders on a smaller scale,” said Sgt. 1st Class James Falls, the operations sergeant major of the 225th Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division. “Our plan is to develop a five-day course designed for our Soldiers. Our intent is not to copy AWALP. Our goal is to teach our leaders adaptability. We are going to look at those key important things that bring out those intangible qualities in our Soldiers that will give them some critical thinking skills and make them better leaders.”

AWALP instructors will help the division get the course started, Falls said.

“As we get the course going and more established, then we will stand on our own,” he said.

The 25th Infantry Division’s course is intended to teach its senior leaders adaptability skills without the expense of sending them to AWG’s facilities in Virginia.

“We want our Soldiers to break the habit of being so rigid with their decision-making,” Falls said. “We want to give our Soldiers some critical-thinking skills so that when they’re on the ground and something happens, any decision is better than no decision. We want our Soldiers to process what’s going on around them and make the best decision based on their situational awareness.”

Falls said the adaptability training is important because the division’s Soldiers are operating in an ever-changing and ever-evolving battlefield.

“We are dealing with urban terrain and mountainous terrain, and the enemy is looking at what we do and, in some cases, mimicking us or changing their normal procedures to combat what we normally do. It’s important to our leadership to have the perspective of almost planning for the unknown.”

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AWALP assists the warfighter in looking at problems at a slightly different angle,” Crosby said. “Those problems could be IEDs; it could be an enemy ambush; it could be the local partner force.”

The training is so important, because at any time, Soldiers can be deployed to unpredictable situations around the world.

“To be an adaptive Soldier means that I can deal with any situation given to me and make the decisions needed to get to the commander’s intent, even without having all the information I need,” said Sgt. 1st Class Reggie Fox, a student from the 203rd Infantry Battalion, 158th Infantry Regiment, at Camp Shelby, Miss. “I can use my interpersonal adaptive skills to get missing information I can use to help piece together key facts I can pass on to my commander.”

Roberts said that initiative and self-reliance is exactly what the Army needs and what the course conveys.

“A Soldier will not always have their commander there or their senior leaders to tell them what to do,” he said. “Soldiers will have to think for themselves — think critically, think creatively. They will have to be innovative problem-solvers. The benefit to the Army is it will have Soldiers who are thinking more, not just waiting around to be told what to do.”

The program builds confidence so that when Soldiers are placed in those unpredictable environments, they will perform well, Ackley said.

“If we can shorten the distance between threats and resiliency, and shorten the distance it takes the Army to adjust, then I think that’s success.”

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