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FACILITATED ARTICLE #7

NCO & Officer Relationship

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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?
On NCOs, officers

“A major factor for success is how you GET ALONG WITH OTHERS, and this permeates every rank Armywide. ... This emphasizes the need for mutual respect, mutual professional competence and reciprocal good will — and for both sides to take into consideration that the problem requires special efforts when young officers are inexperienced. ... The sergeants in your unit can be a new lieutenant’s best professional friends — while both you and they observe proper military courtesy with mutual respect for each other.”

— MAJ. GEN. AUBREY S. NEWMAN, FOLLOW ME II, 1992

“Respect your first sergeant. Do not hang around his office, do not lean on his desk and do not sit in his chair. Remember, THE FIRST SERGEANT is the top noncommissioned officer in your company and DESERVES YOUR RESPECT. Listen to him. He can teach you much.”

— MAJ. GEN. CLAY T. BUCKINGHAM IN “TO SECOND LIEUTENANTS ... AND TO ALL.” ENGINEER, SPRING 1981.

“A lot has been written about the relationship between officers and noncommissioned officers since America’s NCO Corps first came into being during the Revolutionary War. The Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben first established the structure of the NCO Corps in 1779 with his Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States. Although the fundamentals of the officer-NCO relationship haven’t changed drastically since that time, that relationship is constantly evolving.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, along with NCOs attaining increased levels of education, have again sparked the beginnings of an evolution in the relationship between commissioned and noncommissioned officers. And though NCOs and officers say the combination of factors has improved the relationship, they both say areas for improvement remain.

COMBAT

The more than 10 years of combat that began after the attacks of 9/11 have brought officers and NCOs closer together, said Command Sgt. Maj. Rory L. Malloy, commandant of the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas.

“During the past 10 years, I think the NCO-officer relationship and the way they work together has drastically improved,” Malloy said. “Sometimes we find ourselves in certain missions where, simply, good leadership kicks in. It’s not really associated with ‘NCO business’ or ‘officer business’; we just call it ‘leader business’ to make sure the mission is accomplished.”
A lot of the change in relationship comes from the close proximity of the way we’ve operated on the battlefield,” Malloy said. “What you find now is that some of the duties have merged a little bit and are more closely related. But at the end of the day, when you look at what the overall responsibilities of each one are, it really hasn’t changed the big picture. Officers are still responsible for the training-management piece, resourcing — really the whole planning aspect of the larger picture. And the day-to-day execution, the way missions take place, noncommissioned officers still really lead that.

“When it really has blended is in a tactical environment,” Malloy said. “In combat, officers are developing the orders in close proximity and in conjunction with NCOs. Also, we can’t forget that the squad leader is the first person in the chain of command. With a lot of our missions on the battlefield being squad- and platoon-level missions, I think what you see are a lot of the functions being closely connected, which can blur, or make one think that the roles have changed a lot in the past 10 years. But really it’s what it’s designed to look like from the start.”

Working together on the battlefield has led to a higher level of trust between officers and NCOs, said Command Sgt. Maj. Noe Salinas, command sergeant major of the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, at Fort Polk, La.

“With the wars, we trust junior NCOs to be the strategic Soldiers on the battlefield,” Salinas said, “so the trust part has gotten a lot better. We’re not doing stuff at battalion or company level all the time when we do missions. Sometimes we are sending platoons out there, and if a platoon is out there, they have a lieutenant and a sergeant first class, hopefully. So there is a great bond, especially in-theater. We went through ‘the suck’ together. The trust part is there.

“It’s only going to get better as we continue to show the officer community that we really know what we are doing,” Salinas said. “The NCO Corps continues to evolve.”

EDUCATION

Increasing the education level of NCOs has been a focus of the Army in recent years. That education helps NCOs in the Army and better prepares them for life outside the Army, but how does it affect the officer-NCO relationship? It can make communication easier, but some officers worry the changes could blur the roles officers and NCOs have.

Maj. Aaron Francis, plans officer at the leader development and education department at the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., said “education inflation” could cause NCOs to lose focus on their roles as trainers.

“Traditionally, the officers were the managers of the chaos and they were focused on the cranial aspects; the executives were the NCOs,” Francis said. “Training was an NCO’s center of gravity. That’s what they were focused on. I think as education inflation happens, good training can be forgotten. It used to be that the top NCOs were really good executors and then, 

On NCOs, officers

“Most NCOs accept, as an unwritten duty, the responsibility to instruct novice second lieutenants. But they do so only when the student is willing.”


“Gentlemen (officers), you don’t accept us. We were here first. We accept you, and when we do, you’ll know. We won’t beat drums, wave flags or carry you off the drill field on our shoulders. But, maybe at a company party, we’ll raise a canteen cup of beer and say, “LIEUTENANT, YOU’RE OK.” Just like that. … You do not wear leadership on your sleeves, on your shoulders, on your calling cards. Be you lieutenants or generals, we’re the guys you’ve got to convince, and we’ll meet you more than halfway.”


“It is the job of the senior NCO to mold, guide, and educate the officer to the subtleties of Army life. [Do this right and there will be] fewer problems in the future. THE NCO SHOULD SHOW THE OFFICER HOW EACH JOB COMPLEMENTS THE OTHER. He should be shown propriety and the unwritten laws of professional Soldiers. These are things that aren’t taught in any school — except the one in which the NCO lives.”


“Let [a CSM] do his job, and your job will be much easier.”

— LT. COL. JERRY H. HOGAN IN “ONCE YOU ASSUME COMMAND, COMMAND!” ARMY, JAN 1979.
On NCOs, officers

“A new lieutenant is a precious thing. ... Don’t take advantage of him, but train him, correct him when he needs it (remembering that diplomacy is part of your job description), and be ready to tell the world proudly that he’s yours. If you are ashamed of him, maybe it’s because you’ve neglected him or failed to train him properly. DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. Show a genuine concern that he’s learning the right way instead of the easy way. But be careful not to undermine his authority or destroy his credibility. Remember that order and counter-order create disorder.”

— 1ST SGT. JEFFREY J. MELLINGER IN “OPEN LETTERS TO THREE NCOs,” INFANTRY, MAY/JUNE 1989.

“Treat the new young officer like a freshly forged piece of steel. A skilled craftsman, who cares about his work and takes pride in it, can hone that metal, sharpen the edges and polish the blade into a quality, long-lasting sabre that will serve the Army and its Soldiers well.

... DEVELOPING JUNIOR OFFICERS IS OUR JOB. Senior officers in the unit will mentor young officers. Peers will also provide advice and guidance. However, only senior NCOs can guide them through the maze of motor sergeants, supply sergeants, first sergeants and Soldiers.”


“I wanted the officers lying awake at night trying to figure out how to fight better. ... [NOT SPENDING] THEIR TIME ON THE THINGS THAT SERGEANTS OUGHT TO DO.”

— GEN. WILLIAM E. DEPUY IN AN ADDRESS TO THE TRADOC COMMANDER’S CONFERENCE, DEC. 10-11, 1975.

as an afterthought, they might have had some education that set them above their peers. Now that education has become the standard, and I don’t know if that’s really a good thing, because it’s an education focus instead of, ‘Is this NCO an excellent executive and an excellent trainer?’ If that degree just gets him promoted, versus making him a better trainer as an NCO, maybe you’re getting it for the wrong reasons.”

With increased education levels, senior NCOs need to step into new responsibilities, something Maj. Dale Destefano of the leader development and education department’s visits and ceremonies office said he didn’t see enough of during his time on a G-4 staff.

“What I didn’t see is the follow-through,” Destefano said. “It’s almost the standard now where NCOs have degrees and are even getting advanced degrees. But they weren’t taking the next step and assuming those leads. I won’t say leadership, because in a lot of ways they still did their NCO leadership. But the lead on projects didn’t happen. We had a weekly meeting in the G-4, and the officers did all the talking. As the deputy G-4, I ran the meeting. It was like pulling teeth to get the NCOs to say anything.

“Even as the education level increases across the board, there is still not that interaction where the NCOs and officers sit down and talk about stuff,” Destefano said. “There is talking one-on-one, but not as a group.”

Malloy said he talks to students at USASMA about the feedback role and how to make sure an NCO’s voice and feedback are heeded and respected.

“One of the things I stress to those sergeants major at the academy is that you won’t always be invited to have a seat at the table,” Malloy said. “You have to fight to get that seat. And then, when you get it, you have to be value-added. You have to be a productive member of that team. You have to contribute. You can’t sit back and be a naysayer. You can’t always find the negative in things and identify why things can’t be done. You have to enable them to accomplish the mission.”

Command Sgt. Maj. Jimmy Sellers, the commandant of the 7th Army NCO Academy in Grafenwöhr, Germany, said he’s seen the value that increased NCO education brings and has seen it help the NCO Corps’ relationship with officers.

“I think officers rely on us a lot more than they did before, because they feel confident in our ability to handle a lot of different things because of our education,” Sellers said. “Prior to 9/11, there wasn’t a lot

2nd Lt. Megan Donahue packs parachutes under the watchful eye of Sgt. Jessie L. Jaworsky, rigger NCO with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 173rd Airborne Brigade, on July 28, 2010, during Donahue’s two-week summer clerkship with U.S. Army Africa in Vicenza, Italy. PHOTO COURTESY OF U.S. ARMY AFRICA

Have your say

Do you have your own words of wisdom about the officer-NCO relationship? Send your thoughts to NCO Journal. Director Master Sgt. Antony M.C. Joseph by email at antony.m.joseph.mil@mail.mil or let us know on Facebook or Twitter.
of emphasis being placed on the development of NCOs. So the officers, depending on what they had seen, didn’t always have a lot of confidence to put a lot of responsibility on the NCOs. But as we’ve proved ourselves in the past 10 years, and increased our education, the relationship between officers and NCOs has grown.”

TEAMWORK

Through all the years, changes and wars, one thing has stayed constant: the need for teamwork to be the cornerstone of the officer-NCO relationship. A strong command team is the basis for any successful Army mission, Malloy said.

“The biggest thing I advise [sergeants major at USASMA] is that you really have to appreciate and understand what each one’s roles are,” Malloy said. “Then, you can never segregate the two. If you take something and say, ‘This is NCO business, and you have no business looking at it,’ you’re probably going to fail, because it really takes a team. That’s the reason they put two together, to really execute the mission. They need to embrace that, realize it’s ‘leader business’ and be enablers to help each other. It’s never one or the other, because NCOs are assisting officers in the planning and officers are assisting in the execution. It has to be a good tradeoff. If you try to alienate yourself and protect your world, then what you’ll find is you’ll struggle and there will be relationship issues. It really is a command team that you enter into as you continue to go through your career.”

Maj. Michael Soyka, tactical officer of F Company, 4th Battalion, 4th Regiment, at the U.S. Military Academy, at West Point, N.Y., said he makes sure cadets — future officers — see that the relationships he has with NCOs are important to accomplishing the Army mission. Soyka said he would fail at his job without the support of Sgt. 1st Class Edmund Saldarini, his tactical NCO instructor.

“I could not do this job without Sgt.

On NCOs, officers

“The Soldier, having acquired that degree of confidence of his officers as to be appointed first sergeant of the company, should CONSIDER THE IMPORTANCE OF HIS OFFICE — that the discipline of the company, the conduct of the men, their exactness in obeying orders and the regularity of their manners will, in a great measure, depend on his vigilance.”

— MAJ. GEN. FREDERICK WILHELM VON STEUBEN, REGULATIONS FOR THE ORDER AND DISCIPLINE OF THE TROOPS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1779.

“It is imperative that the company commander and the first sergeant work as a close-knit team and that they also include the executive officer in the team. THESE THREE MUST STICK TOGETHER through thick and thin, even if they don’t like each other.”


“[Company commanders:] Talk with your battalion CSM. … Develop a rapport with the battalion CSM to last throughout your command tour. If you’re having problems with your 1SG, seek the battalion CSM’s advice. MAYBE YOUR FIRST SERGEANT’S OK AND YOU’RE DOING SOMETHING WRONG.”


“My many years in the army have demonstrated that WHEREVER CONFIDENCE IN NCOs IS LACKING and wherever they are continuously bossed by the officers, you have no real NCOs and no really combat-worthy units.”

On NCOs, officers

“There is nobody who wants you to succeed more than your command sergeant major. But YOU HAVE TO LET HIM INSIDE TO MAKE THAT HAPPEN... He is the first individual you ought to see. I have not taken command of any job, to include having been the chief of staff of the Army, that the first individual I did not spend time with was my command sergeant major.”

— GEN. CARL E. VUONO IN AN ADDRESS TO THE PRECOMMAND COURSE IN COLLECTED WORKS, 1991.

“Develop a good relationship with your command sergeant major, one of open confidence between the two of you. Share your views; listen to what he has to say. HE PROBABLY KNOWS MORE ABOUT THE ARMY THAN YOU DO. He clearly knows more about Soldiers than you do. And he clearly knows a lot more about how to get things done through the NCO chain than you or I do. Harness his talent in support of what you’re trying to do. The whole NCO Corps in your unit will feel enthusiastic about that relationship and they’ll see it as one of strength.”

— GEN. JOHN A. WICKHAM IN REMARKS TO THE PRECOMMAND COURSE IN COLLECTED WORKS, 1987.

“You must tell your command the truth — the good, the bad, and the ugly. THE GOOD NCO WHO IS LISTENED TO WILL ALWAYS LEVEL WITH THE COMMANDER. Then it is up to the commander to take heed or ignore it, remembering that he or she has to live with the outcome. There is a lot of material on what should be done, reference leadership. But it takes intestinal fortitude to do what is right.”


On NCOs, officers

“The 4th Financial Management Company’s command team, Maj. Davien Hayward and 1st Sgt. Jessica Taylor, discuss a coming brief during a meeting Oct. 10 in Heyward’s office at Fort Bliss, Texas. The company provided financial support during operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. It also supports the Fort Bliss Defense Military Pay Office. PHOTO BY STAFF SGT. JASON STADEL, NCO JOURNAL

Saldarini. There’s no doubt in my mind,” Soyka said. “To do this job right and to give the cadets the right picture of the Army and how it works, it can’t be done as a solo officer. There’s no place in the Army where that could be done. I think we would set the cadet up with a totally wrong view of what the Army is if I did not have Sgt. Saldarini here by my side. Our relationship is paramount.

“We try to model for our cadets what it’s supposed to look like,” Soyka said. “We do occasionally disagree about things, but the cadets do not see that. When we disagree, we will sit and talk about it. But when we leave the office, we go out with one voice. We go out and execute what needs to be done, and we have a great time doing it.”

Part of making the command team work the way it should is providing feedback. Saldarini did. “Maj. Soyka and I are always talking to each other,” Saldarini said. “We are always checking in with each other to make sure that what we are doing is right. I call it the sanity check.”

As the war drawdown progresses, NCOs must continue to provide good feedback to the officers, Francis said.

“That’s a crucial role for NCOs that I want to see survive the return to garrison,” Francis said. “They have to provide that feedback loop. We need to hear, ‘Hey, this officer is full of great ideas, but this is reality. This is what it looks like from the execution.’ That professional, tactful feedback from the executor is crucial for an officer to do his job, even if he doesn’t want to hear it sometimes.”

1st Lt. Robert Anderson of the leader development and education department’s visits and ceremonies office said he saw the officer-NCO relationship work like it should while he was deployed.

“I come from a military intelligence background, and we have to rely a lot on the specialist and the PFC to get the intel. Then the officer would go and brief the senior officers,” Anderson said. “My experience was we were using the NCOs to write the reports, get the intel and explain everything to us. They were doing a lot of the work, and then the officer would be the one compiling the reports. We had the understanding that the NCOs were in charge of the troops. They were the ones getting the information and providing that to the officers so we could write the orders and get those decisions made.

“It’s necessary for those senior NCOs to bring up, ‘Hey, this is going to have this kind of effect on the troops,’ because as officers, that’s not our main focus,” Anderson said. “Our focus is we need to accomplish this, and this is the plan to do it. Then the sergeants major or first sergeants, those senior NCOs, need to say, ‘Did you think of this effect on the troops?’ That’s something we really need from the senior enlisted folks.”

“When you are sitting there, it’s not us against them,” Malloy said. “It’s all of us, working together to put together the best mission possible.”

SPECIAL ROLE

In most armies around the globe, enlisted Soldiers who get a college degree
On NCOs, officers

“It is not enough that you and the CSM understand your relationship. Your staff and most particularly your subordinate commanders must also understand it. While he is first and foremost your CSM, HE IS ALSO THEIR BATTALION CSM. Encourage them to use his advice and counsel. A healthy open relationship between your CSM and your key officers will make them more effective. The ultimate payoff will be stronger companies and, correspondingly, a more combat-ready battalion.”


“When someone once asked me how I plan to use my sergeant major in combat, my answer boiled down to this: THE SAME AS I USE HIM IN PEACETIME — TO SHOW THE WAY. … There is no substitute for the influence he exerts, which in itself is as much of a combat multiplier as a minefield or a good intelligence network.”


“One of [the CSM’s] most effective ways for advising me was to SCHEDULE ITEMS ON MY CALENDAR. If he found a weak area in the battalion that needed my attention, he advised me, through my calendar, on when and where to visit that unit or section. Invariably, he was correct in focusing me into that area.”


“Don’t bypass your noncommissioned officer to demonstrate how busy you’re being by doing his job.”

— GEN. BRUCE C. CLARKE, 1954. CLARKE OF ST. VITH.