Training in the Peacetime Army

Top brass is worried. The competition is getting harder to pin down and yesterday's loyal partners seem disinclined to team up now, preoccupied as they are with their own problems. Europe 1992 and openings in the Eastern Bloc muddy the international waters. Shifting government policies and lightning-fast technological change make predicting future needs difficult. The supply of willing and able workers dwindles.

Making a bad situation worse, years of unfettered growth have given way to budgetary constraints, forcing managers from the top down to explore tough trade-offs. Internal factions are divided, arguing for and against greater investments in plant, equipment, research and development, personnel, and training.

Yes, the managers who shape the American military's organizational strategy face dilemmas that would test the savviest veteran of the corporate wars. The peace dividend may spell abundance for some federal agencies, but the Department of Defense is looking at lean times.

With peace breaking out all over, and Congress and the Bush Administration wrangling over where—not whether—to trim the defense budget, Pentagon planners searching for ways to maintain high levels of military preparedness with relatively low funding levels have begun paying increasing attention to training.

A recent report issued by the Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), for example, details a long-range training strategy designed to maximize human resources in an era of monetary and material shortfalls. Civilian trainers facing the same circumstances might do well to note how the Army plans to cope.

Army Training 21 presents a threefold approach, emphasizing vocational-technical education, distributed training, and simulations.

Almost all enlisted soldiers receive vo-tech training once they complete the physical conditioning, marksmanship instruction, and disciplinary drilling of boot camp.

Schools located at Army posts throughout the nation prepare new recruits to assume jobs within a particular military occupational specialty (MOS). Those requesting or receiving assignments to vehicle-repair MOSs, for instance, might attend the Army's Transportation School in Fort Eustis, Virginia, or the Ordnance School at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland.

This vo-tech training system has proven effective over the years; Army training generally compares quite favorably to that offered by private-sector suppliers. But with dozens of schools (each teaching a limited number of jobs) scattered throughout the country, it has not been particularly efficient.

Therefore, the Army has begun to examine the possibility of teaming with vocational schools and community colleges to maximize return on training investments, "particularly where MOS skills reflect related civilian jobs," says the *Army Training 21* report.

Economics isn't the only factor at work here. If East-West relations continue to thaw, active duty rosters will decline in coming years,

Mark Weber

With peace breaking out all over, Pentagon planners search for ways to maintain preparedness on a tight budget

and Army Reserve rolls will undoubtedly increase. Locally available vo-tech education will make it easier for the Army to train reservists.

That same sort of local availability would result from the Army's plans to expand its distributed training capability. Distributed training

"brings the classroom . . . to the student" by means of computer-based instruction, interactive video, teleconferencing, and good, old-fashioned correspondence courses.

Over the years, the Army has pioneered many of these training-delivery systems, and *Army Training 21* projects increasing use before the turn of the century, with several resulting benefits.

First, these media permit standardized instruction at installations across a wide geographic area, a consideration that is obviously critical to military success. (To get an idea of the importance the Army places on standardization, simply recall that TRADOC groups training and doctrine.) Distributed training also saves money by shortening student and instructor travel time and improves organizational performance by allowing soldiers to spend more time with their units.

Fiber-optic technologies, computer networking, and satellite communications capabilities will expand the reach of distributed training, *Army Training 21* says. Advanced voice-synthesis and graphics packages will make the training more lifelike than ever.

The search for more realistic training drives the most ambitious of the Army's training strategies. Simulators, which harness sophisticated computing power and such gee-whiz concepts as "virtual reality," mimic real-life tasks that are too complicated, expensive, or dangerous for hands-on practice.

Hundreds of military jobs fall into those categories, and not just obvious ones such as defusing land mines or controlling helicopter air traffic. Current Army simulation applications include equipment operation and maintenance, and development of battlefield tactical skills. Simulations save time, money, and land (consider the environmental effects of real-time, large-scale tank maneuvers) in addition to lives.

As with distributed training, Army simulations will tap the power of computer networks that will integrate voice-recognition software, artificial intelligence, robotics, and even holographic projection systems.

Cynics may grouse that Department of Defense planners are pushing these sophisticated systems now so that they can secure funding before military budgets dry up entirely. Indeed, there's no question that military training is already a vast and expensive proposition. The uniformed services last year spent $17.6 billion to provide 249,168 worker *years* of instruction.

Of course, no other single organization comes close to matching that kind of investment, but that doesn't mean the military's training strategies are irrelevant to civilian employers. Any company undergoing a period of retrenchment—with a labor force primarily composed of entry-level workers who will perform a variety of technical jobs in locations spread around the globe—should consider the advantages of locally based vocational education, distributed training, and simulations.

Strange Bedfellows?

Quality-improvement efforts become more effective when human-resource and quality-control practitioners join forces, according to a study conducted by Zenger-Miller, Inc., an international supplier of training programs and services.

Interested in the evolving roles and perspectives of human-resource and quality professionals, Zenger-Miller hoped to identify the individual skills required for a successful quality effort and to learn why some quality efforts fail.

The study—based on a nationwide survey of more than 800 HR and QC professionals—found that in many successful quality-enhancement settings, human-resource professionals integrate nontechnical training with classic quality theory and work with their quality colleagues to maximize the benefits of training.

Zenger-Miller also found that human resource and quality control people share a "surprising" consensus that both analytical and interpersonal skills are critical to a successful quality effort.

"Human-resource and quality-control managers in these organizations have moved beyond traditional roles to work together building on each other's strengths, whether it be in quality deployment or interpersonal skills training," said Jennifer Cauble, the Zenger-Miller research manager who coauthored the study. "By removing cross-functional barriers and cultivating working partnerships, they avoid the pitfalls of communicating mixed messages about quality that can confuse and demotivate employees," she said.

The study concluded that where this partnership between human resources and quality control exists, human resource managers operate under the assumption that quality improvement demands the full involvement of the entire organization. More specifically, they

■ select, develop, and champion training that supports the strategic issues of service and quality
■ advocate skills training in leadership, interpersonal communication, teamwork, and problem solving as critical to quality
■ educate management about the role of interpersonal communication and other nontechnical skills in a sustained quality effort
■ become students of all quality systems and processes operating within their organizations
■ recognize the strengths of quality professionals and seize opportunities to collaborate with them on quality objectives.

The quality-control half of the partnership has to make similar shifts. Zenger-Miller found that in quality-conscious organizations, QC managers understand how such nontechnical skills as interpersonal communication, team leadership, and problem solving form the foundation for technical systems and processes. They also keep HRD informed about their activities so trainers can assess needs and deliver nontechnical instruction that supports a unified quality effort. In short, they recognize the strengths of human-resource profes-

sionals and regularly work with them to resolve quality issues.

When asked to judge the relative importance of various skills to a successful quality program, the two groups' lists were virtually identical (although they placed different priorities on certain skills for employee and supervisory populations). The skills cited as most necessary included problem solving, communicating management commitment, and giving feedback, among others.

Quality respondents indicated that, if faced with a choice, they would select communication skills over any other kind of skills training for employees (including technical skills) to ensure the success of quality programs in their organizations.

Both groups cited "support and commitment of top management" and "focusing on customer needs" as the two most important elements for quality to succeed.

In follow-up focus groups, quality professionals asserted that many obstacles to achieving quality improvement came down to inadequate training and poor teamwork between departments, inadequacies Zenger-Miller said companies seem prepared to address.

The firm reports that HR staff surveyed plan to spend more of this year's budgets on quality and service improvement than ever before, up to 159 percent more than they did in 1985.

For a copy of a white paper about the study, contact Zenger-Miller, Inc., 1735 Technology Drive, 6th Floor, San Jose, CA 95110-1313; 408/452-1244.

Baldrige Entries on the Rise

Ninety-seven U.S. firms will compete for this year's Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, a substantial increase since the competition started two years ago, the Commerce Department announced in May.

The total includes 45 companies in the manufacturing category, 18

service companies, and 34 small businesses. Last year 40 companies submitted applications—23 manufacturers, 6 service companies, and 11 small businesses.

"We are extremely encouraged by the number of applications as well as the increase in all three categories," said Commerce Secretary Robert A. Mosbacher. "This degree of participation indicates a growing commitment by American companies to raise their level of quality management to make them more competitive. It also shows how successful a public-private partnership can be."

This year, the National Institute of Standards and Technology—the Commerce agency that manages the program—distributed more than 100,000 copies of application guidelines for the 1990 award. This figure compares with 65,000 in 1989 and 12,000 in 1988. The guidelines also serve as a quality-improvement checklist that enjoys widespread use among companies for self-assessment of total quality management.

In May, 178 quality experts serving as award examiners began scoring the entry forms and visiting the high-scoring applicants. The judging period will end in September and awards ceremonies will take place in Washington, D.C., during October or November.

For more information, contact the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award office, National Institute of Standards and Technology, Room A-537, Administration Building, Gaithersburg, MD 20899.

Random Stats

Shocking News

Employees who survive corporate downsizings and remain on the payroll remain fearful of future cutbacks, are mistrustful of management, and exhibit low morale, according to a new survey conducted by Right Associates.

Almost three out of four managers (74.2 percent) whose companies had downsized in the past four years told pollsters that employee morale suffered signifi-

cantly. Only one in four managers indicated that employees who survived the cutbacks were recommitted to the company's competitive success and confident about the business future of the companies and their own careers.

Surprising News

On the other hand, 77 percent of those same managers said their companies provided career counseling and assistance to workers targeted for layoffs.

A la Carte Benefits

More and more employees will be choosing their own benefits in the next five years, according to a Wyatt Company survey of more than 500 companies. Of those companies surveyed without flexible benefits (360 companies), more than half plan to offer benefits choices to their employees within the next five years.
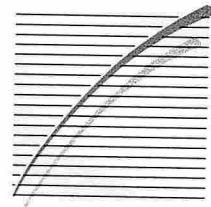
"Many companies feel they no longer have any choice about choice," says Lance Tane, chairman of Wyatt's Group and Flexible Benefits Committee. "Twenty percent of those planning to adopt flexible benefits say they need it to attract and retain good workers in a shrinking labor market."

Companies with more than 5,000 employees and companies with 500 to 1,000 employees are the most concerned about the attraction and retention issue.

"In the past, smaller companies haven't been interested in flexible benefits, primarily due to implementation costs," Tane says. "Now companies [with] between 500 and 1,000 employees feel attracting and retaining workers justifies the expense of implementing a flex plan," Tane concluded. The Wyatt survey shows, however, that implementation costs continue to be a barrier for companies with fewer than 500 employees.

But for most companies, positive effects on recruitment and retention efforts make the costs of flexible benefits easier to bear, and cost control has become a less-important factor in the decision to flex or not to flex.

Thirty-six percent of those that now have flexible benefits say that cost control was the principal reason they adopted the plan. By comparison, 31 percent of those planning to adopt flex in the future say cost control is a key feature.

"Flexible benefits continue to be an effective way to reduce costs, as well as keep employees happy," according to Tane. "Of the companies with a flex program, 39 percent say they have reduced costs—some by as much as 20 percent."

The Wyatt survey also indicates 90 percent of the companies with flexible benefits say that their employees are happy with the plans.

The Wyatt Flexible Benefits Programs survey is available free of charge from The Wyatt Company's Research and Information Center, 1850 M Street, NW, Suite 400, Washington, D.C. 20036-5801; 202/887-4600.

Heard in Passing

"Ultimately, a boss, no matter how exalted, is dependent for his position on his workers; a star, no matter how brilliant, on his fans. One can defy them, scourge them, mock them only to a point—and those who yield to the temptation rarely notice that point as it goes by. That is why we are able to have so many moral tales in which wicked people come to a satisfactorily bad end.

"Miss Manners does not believe that people are ever as pliant out of fear as they are from affection. Whether one wants them to work harder, acknowledge one's near-divinity, or just hand over their money, it is always safest to make them want to do so."

Miss Manners (a.k.a. Judith Martin), Miss Manners' Guide for the Turn-of-the-Millenium, New York: Pharo Books, 1989.

"In Practice" is edited and written by **John Wilcox**. Send items of interest to In Practice, Training & Development Journal, 1630 Duke Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313.