

The cadet experience: Training tomorrow's military leaders

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Abstract

The cadet experience plays a pivotal role in shaping future military leaders. Whether in dedicated military academies, officer training schools, or service academies, cadets undergo a rigorous and transformative journey that combines academic education, physical training, and character development. A proper methodology of military training evolves to meet the changing nature of warfare, technology, and global security challenges. It aims to produce disciplined, skilled, and adaptable future officers and leaders capable of fulfilling their roles in diverse and demanding environments.

Keywords: military training, methodology of teaching, university curriculum, cadet experience.

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Introduction

The training of cadets is a crucial process aimed at shaping individuals into competent and principled military leaders. The methodology employed in cadet training combines academic education, hands-on military skills development, and character building to prepare individuals for the challenges of military service. Training cadets involves a multifaceted approach that integrates academic learning, practical skills development, leadership training, and character building. The leadership development of cadets is a comprehensive and ongoing process that molds individuals into capable military leaders. By combining practical experiences, mentorship, ethical education, and a progressive approach to leadership roles, cadet programs aim to produce leaders who are not only skilled in tactical and strategic aspects but also possess the character and values necessary to lead with honor and effectiveness in the military and beyond.

The most effective method to train cadets incorporates key principles, including a holistic approach, progressive learning, experiential learning, leadership development, mentorship, role modeling, physical fitness, ethical and moral training, individualized development plans, realistic stress inoculation, continuous evaluation and feedback, team building and camaraderie, technology integration, and adaptability and innovation.

Holistic Approach

A holistic approach to cadet training involves addressing various facets of an individual's development, aiming to cultivate a well-rounded and capable military leader. This approach considers not only the technical and tactical skills required but also the physical, mental, ethical, and leadership aspects.

On the one hand, physical fitness is a cornerstone of the cadet experience. A meticulously crafted fitness program focuses on building strength, endurance, and agility. Cadets engage in a variety of activities, from traditional exercises to obstacle courses, fostering a culture of physical well-being that is vital for military readiness, but on the other hand, in preparing cadets for the challenges ahead, the training includes stress inoculation exercises. Exposure to controlled stress situations builds mental resilience, enabling cadets to navigate high-pressure environments with composure and clarity.

The cadet experience is inherently rigorous, involving physical challenges, leadership responsibilities, and exposure to high-pressure scenarios. These stressors can impact the mental health of cadets, making it imperative to address psychological well-being as an integral part of their training. Cadet training deliberately incorporates stress inoculation exercises to expose individuals to controlled stress situations. This methodology aims to build mental resilience, helping cadets develop coping mechanisms and the ability to maintain focus and clarity in challenging environments.

To evaluate the effectiveness of integrating stress inoculation techniques into the cadet curriculum in developing mental resilience, the following experiment (Ashley N. Doss Ph.D, 2019) took place to assess the impact of stress inoculation techniques on cadet mental resilience.

Throughout the experiment two groups of cadets from the same academy were tested with different mental conditions. Group “A” exposed to stress inoculation techniques, meanwhile group “B” controlled group without exposure to stress inoculation. Which means group “A” integrated stress inoculation techniques into the curriculum. This may involve realistic scenario-based training, live exercises, and simulations designed to induce controlled stress. In contrast, group “B” continued with the standard cadet curriculum without stress inoculation interventions.

Post-Experiment Assessment

Both groups at the end of the experiment were conducted a final assessment for both groups at the end of the experiment, and the mental resilience, stress levels, and coping mechanisms between the two groups were compared.

Implications

Findings could inform future curriculum development, emphasizing the importance of mental resilience training in military education, and positive outcomes would suggest the potential effectiveness of integrating stress inoculation techniques into cadet training curricula.

Progressive learning

The foundation of the cadet experience rests on a robust academic curriculum. Covering diverse subjects such as military strategy, leadership principles, and ethical considerations, this education is designed to instill a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of military operations. By integrating theoretical knowledge with practical applications, cadets are equipped to analyze, strategize, and adapt to evolving scenarios.

Based on a study focusing on training critical thinking skills through an effective curriculum, two distinct approaches were tested on separate groups of cadets. Participants were randomly assigned to either the experimental group (exposed to the new curriculum) or the control group (continuing with the traditional curriculum). The updated curriculum is crafted by incorporating principles such as a holistic approach, progressive learning pathways, and individualized development plans. It also integrates advancements in technology,

including virtual reality simulations and online learning tools, aimed at enhancing the overall training experiences.

The results were deemed satisfactory, indicating improved academic performance among cadets exposed to the redesigned curriculum. Additionally, the outcomes demonstrated enhanced physical fitness levels and practical skills development in the experimental group. The new approach incorporates a platform that facilitates seamless interaction among cadets, fostering communication with both peers and instructors. The objective is to extract valuable information from students and involve them in diverse discussions, ultimately aiming to improve their leadership capabilities and decision-making skills.

Leadership Development

The leadership development of cadets is a multifaceted and dynamic process that goes beyond traditional training. In preparing cadets to assume leadership roles, military academies and officer training programs employ a comprehensive approach, integrating practical experiences, academic knowledge, and character building. This article explores the key elements involved in the leadership development of cadets and the impact it has on shaping future military leaders.

Leadership development for cadets is a foundational element within military training programs, recognizing the pivotal role that effective leadership plays in the armed forces. Cadets undergo a structured and rigorous curriculum designed to cultivate leadership

skills essential for their future roles as officers. This training encompasses a range of competencies, including strategic thinking, decision-making under pressure, communication, and the ability to inspire and motivate others. Through a combination of theoretical education, practical exercises, and real-world simulations, cadets are prepared to lead with confidence and competence in dynamic and challenging environments.

One key focus of leadership development for cadets is the understanding of ethical and moral responsibilities inherent in leadership roles. Cadets learn to navigate complex ethical dilemmas, make principled decisions, and uphold the values expected of military leaders. The development of character and integrity is emphasized, reinforcing the notion that effective leadership is not only about command but also about serving as role models for those under their charge. This ethical dimension distinguishes leadership development for cadets, reflecting the unique demands and expectations of military service.

Team dynamics and collaboration are central components of leadership development for cadets. Training programs incorporate team-building exercises, leadership challenges, and collaborative missions to instill the importance of cohesive and well-functioning units. Cadets learn to leverage the strengths of diverse team members, communicate effectively in high-stakes situations, and foster a sense of camaraderie that is crucial in military operations. These experiences

not only prepare cadets to lead teams but also emphasize the collective responsibility of the group, reinforcing the idea that effective leadership is intertwined with the success of the entire unit.

Leadership development for cadets extends beyond the academic and practical aspects to encompass the cultivation of resilience and adaptability. Cadets are exposed to demanding physical and mental challenges that mirror the stressors they may encounter in operational scenarios. This holistic approach to leadership development ensures that cadets not only possess the necessary technical and tactical skills but also the mental fortitude to lead in diverse and unpredictable situations. As cadets progress through their training, they emerge not only as capable leaders but as individuals who embody the values, ethics, and resilience required to excel in the demanding field of military service.

In 2017, the RAND Corporation conducted a study called “Improving the Effectiveness of Air Force Squadron Commanders” designed to assess the responsibilities, preparation, and resources of U.S. Air Force (USAF) squadron commanders (Ausink et al., 2018). In a follow-on study, the USAF collected data from 14,652 survey participants and 3,886 interviews on three key attributes of vitality—*esprit de corps*, purposeful leadership, and verifiable mission success. The studies concluded that USAF leaders needed to improve their human domain skills when facing complex and emotionally demanding circumstances and to be provided with opportunities to

practice these skills in realistic, pressurized situations (John M. Hinck, 2023).

This research has shown significant role of five major pinnacle of standards in order to develop a leading spirit in a future commander: connection, content, delivery, environment, and experience. Excelling all these factors depend on moving away from traditional classroom approaches of instructor-centric authority and content delivery and focusing on the cadet experience itself. Taken together, the “leadergogy” framework offers new ways by which programs may assess and construct their curriculum, including its application to improve the learning effectiveness of future and current leaders not only in the Air Force and Space Force but other service branches as well, in addition to leadership education programs within higher education and the private sector.

The leadership development of cadets is a comprehensive and ongoing process that molds individuals into capable military leaders. By combining practical experiences, mentorship, ethical education, and a progressive approach to leadership roles, cadet programs aim to produce leaders who are not only skilled in tactical and strategic aspects but also possess the character and values necessary to lead with honor and effectiveness in the military and beyond.

Physical fitness

Physical fitness is of paramount importance for cadets due to the unique demands and requirements of their roles in various cadet programs, such as military academies, police academies, or other training institutions.

Exercise has been shown to have numerous positive effects on brain function. Regular physical activity can benefit cognitive function, mental health, and overall brain health. Single sessions or bouts of physical activity have independent merit, offering immediate benefits that can enhance the learning experience. Studies have found that single bouts of physical activity result in improved attention (Hillman et al., 2003, 2009; Pontifex et al., 2012), better working memory (Pontifex et al., 2009), and increased academic learning time and reduced off-task behaviors (Mahar et al., 2006; Bartholomew and Jowers, 2011).

Although, Incorporating Physical Education (PE) into a curriculum involves thoughtful planning and consideration of various factors. Based on studies on an effective way to integrate bouts of exercises into a curriculum, the bout shouldn't be treated as a standalone subject. It plays an important role in cultivating students and also reinforces concepts in other scientific fields. Exercise increases blood flow to the brain, delivering more oxygen and nutrients. This helps enhance overall brain function and supports the growth of new blood vessels. Physical activity stimulates the release of neurotransmitters, such as dopamine, serotonin, and

norepinephrine. These chemicals play a crucial role in mood regulation, stress reduction, and attention. As cadets are filled with different tasks, even small amounts of “feel-good” hormones can result in proper and effective functionality and a passionate facet towards fulfilling their roles.

It's important to note that the type, intensity, and duration of exercise can all be considered in determining the extent of these cognitive benefits. Both aerobic exercise (such as running or cycling) and resistance training have been shown to have positive effects on brain function. Additionally, consistency is key, as long-term adherence to an exercise routine is associated with the most significant cognitive benefits.

Ethical and moral training

This factor is crucial to develop individuals with strong character, integrity, and a sense of responsibility. Such training is essential in various fields, including military, law enforcement, and other professions where individuals are entrusted with significant responsibilities. This training ensures that future military leaders make decisions based on principles that align with the highest standards of conduct.

Ethical and moral training for cadets is an indispensable component of their overall development, emphasizing the importance of character, integrity, and ethical decision-making in the context of

military service. Cadets undergo a structured program that not only imparts tactical and technical skills but also instills a strong ethical foundation. These training modules often include scenarios and case studies that challenge cadets to navigate complex situations where moral principles are paramount. Through guided discussions, they learn to analyze dilemmas, weigh consequences, and make decisions aligned with the ethical standards expected of military professionals. Cadet training in ethics goes beyond theoretical discussions; it involves practical application in the field. Whether facing challenges during simulated exercises or real-world scenarios, cadets are expected to uphold a code of conduct that reflects the highest moral standards. This hands-on approach allows them to integrate ethical considerations into their decision-making processes and reinforces the understanding that ethical behavior is not just a theoretical concept but an integral part of their responsibilities as future leaders.

Ethical and moral training for cadets also plays a crucial role in building trust and cohesion within military units. A shared commitment to ethical conduct fosters camaraderie and mutual respect among cadets, creating a culture where individuals can rely on each other both personally and professionally. As cadets progress through their training, they not only develop the technical expertise required for their roles but also emerge as leaders with a strong moral compass, capable of making principled decisions in high-pressure situations.

Ultimately, the ethical and moral training of cadets serves not only to produce skilled and disciplined military professionals but also

to cultivate leaders who embody values that contribute to the broader principles of justice, honor, and service to their nation. It lays the groundwork for a military force that not only defends its citizens but also upholds the ethical standards essential for the trust and confidence of the communities it serves.

Commanders and instructors should integrate ethics education into the cadet training curriculum. Develop specific courses or modules that focus on ethical decision-making, moral reasoning, and the application of ethical principles in real-world scenarios. Clearly define and communicate the organization's core values. These values should reflect principles such as integrity, honesty, respect, responsibility, and accountability. Emphasize their importance in shaping the cadets' behavior and decision-making.

In addition, they should serve as ethical role models. Cadets learn not only from what is taught but also from observing the behavior of their mentors. Demonstrate the values and principles being emphasized through consistent and ethical leadership. Ethical training should be ongoing throughout a cadet's career. Provide opportunities for continuous education and reinforcement of ethical principles as cadet's progress in their roles.

Team building and camaraderie

Team building and camaraderie are essential elements that contribute to the success and cohesion of any group, whether in a professional

setting or a social context. Building a strong team is not just about assembling individuals; it involves fostering positive relationships, trust, and a shared sense of purpose. Through well-designed team-building activities, members learn to communicate effectively, appreciate each other's strengths, and work collaboratively toward common goals.

Camaraderie within a team goes beyond mere cooperation; it embodies a spirit of mutual respect, support, and friendship among its members. This shared bond often translates into increased morale, job satisfaction, and overall productivity. When individuals feel a sense of connection and belonging within a team, they are more likely to contribute their best efforts and go the extra mile to achieve collective objectives. Moreover, camaraderie creates a supportive environment where members feel comfortable expressing ideas, providing constructive feedback, and facing challenges together, leading to a more resilient and adaptable team.

Team building activities serve as catalysts for fostering camaraderie by breaking down barriers and encouraging open communication. Whether engaging in problem-solving exercises, outdoor challenges, or collaborative projects, these activities provide opportunities for team members to discover each other's strengths, build trust, and enhance their interpersonal dynamics. Effective team building not only strengthens professional relationships but also creates a positive and inclusive atmosphere that extends beyond the

workplace, contributing to a more harmonious and enjoyable team culture.

In the long run, the benefits of team building and camaraderie extend to the overall success and sustainability of the group. A cohesive team that values collaboration and mutual support is better equipped to navigate challenges, overcome obstacles, and achieve shared objectives. By investing time and effort into building strong interpersonal connections, teams can create a foundation for success, where individual contributions are recognized, and collective achievements become a source of pride for all members involved. Teamwork among officers is critical for the success of military or professional organizations. Therefore, cadets as future commanders are forced to foster a sense of unity, mutual trust, and effective collaboration within a group. There are some useful strategies in order to promote team building and camaraderie among cadets.

First of all, instructors should incorporate icebreaker activities at the beginning of training to help cadets get to know each other in a relaxed setting. These activities can include name games, team-building challenges, or sharing personal anecdotes. In addition to the previous point, introducing team challenges that require cooperation and problem-solving is another possibility. These challenges can range from physical activities to mental exercises, encouraging cadets to work together to achieve a common goal. Research shows that

setting a leader for each team provide opportunities for different cadets to take on leadership roles within the group. This allows individuals to develop leadership skills while also fostering a sense of shared responsibility.

By incorporating these strategies, cadet training programs can create a positive and cohesive team environment, enhancing camaraderie and teamwork among cadets. These experiences not only contribute to their professional development but also create lasting bonds that can benefit them throughout their careers.

Realistic Training Scenarios

Realistic training scenarios are essential for preparing cadets for the challenges they may face in military service. These scenarios simulate real-world situations, enabling cadets to apply their knowledge, skills, and decision-making abilities in a controlled environment. This aspect is at the core of the experience, and if an individual cannot excel in the diverse scenarios created by mentors, the entire training may be considered futile.

Cadets should be exposed to realistic training scenarios that simulate the challenges they may face in operational settings. This includes field exercises, simulations, and scenario-based training designed to test their decision-making and problem-solving skills. They should also be encouraged to practice reflective techniques, such as after-action reviews and self-assessment. Cadets need to learn from

their experiences, both successes and failures, to continuously improve their skills and leadership capabilities.

In a study conducted by Carina Lindgren (2012), individual interviews were conducted with 11 teachers and 8 student police officers, organized into focus groups of 2-3 students. The results indicated that, in the examination scenario, students' learning primarily occurs before the training, with teachers focusing on assessment and grading. Conversely, in the training scenario, students' learning is associated with during and after the training, and teachers prioritize aspects such as learning climate, feedback, and reflection. These findings suggest that the difference between the two scenarios constructs different approaches to future professions.

All those involved, both students and teachers, express high satisfaction with the training they participated in. Students and teachers who underwent training with an examination view it positively, considering the examination as a valuable component. Conversely, those who experienced training without an examination believe it to be the most effective approach. Overall, the consensus among all teachers and students is that these training sessions are highly appreciated and instructive. However, it's important to note that when everyone is uniformly satisfied with an activity, the inclination to critically examine it decreases, and there's an increased risk that unintended outcomes may occur. Students entering the workforce after receiving reality-based training that emphasizes the learning

process and reflection are likely to bring with them not only knowledge but also an attitude that sees their profession as an ongoing process. In this perspective, developmental tools such as feedback and reflection become crucial for lifelong learning and professional growth. Particularly in professions involving interactions with people, making mistakes is inevitable. Therefore, possessing the knowledge of how to prevent and learn from mistakes based on previous experiences becomes essential and should be ingrained as a trained attitude.

Continuous Learning

Continuous learning is a lifelong journey that involves the ongoing acquisition of knowledge, skills, and experiences beyond formal education. In today's rapidly evolving world, where technology, industries, and societal dynamics constantly change, the importance of continuous learning cannot be overstated. Individuals who embrace this mindset recognize that staying relevant and thriving in their respective fields requires a commitment to staying informed and adapting to new developments.

One key aspect of continuous learning is its role in personal and professional growth. Engaging in continuous learning allows individuals to broaden their horizons, explore new interests, and develop a versatile skill set. Whether through formal courses, workshops, online resources, or hands-on experiences, the process of continuous learning not only enhances expertise in a specific domain but also fosters adaptability and resilience. This proactive approach to

education empowers individuals to navigate uncertainties, embrace innovation, and seize opportunities for advancement. Organizations that prioritize continuous learning also benefit significantly. A culture of learning within a workplace cultivates a dynamic and forward-thinking environment. It encourages employees to contribute fresh ideas, embrace change, and collaborate effectively. Moreover, by investing in the ongoing development of their workforce, organizations can stay competitive in the market, foster employee satisfaction, and adapt swiftly to industry trends. The concept of continuous learning, therefore, becomes a catalyst for organizational success and sustainability in an ever-changing landscape.

Continuous learning is a vital component of the development of cadets, ensuring they remain adaptable, knowledgeable, and well-prepared for the challenges they may face in their military careers. This factor includes learning different skills such as language and methodology in research. It helps the cadets to stay up-to-date and resourceful at all times.

Encouraging language training programs, especially in languages relevant to potential deployment locations is vital in this process. Proficiency in local languages enhances communication and cultural understanding during missions. By implementing these strategies, military academies can create a culture of continuous learning, ensuring that cadets remain adaptive, well-informed, and equipped to excel in the dynamic and evolving landscape of military

operations. Continuous learning is not only a professional responsibility but also a key factor in maintaining a high level of effectiveness and readiness within the military.

Conclusion

In conclusion, cadet training plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals into disciplined, resilient, and skilled professionals. Through a comprehensive curriculum that encompasses physical fitness, leadership development, and technical skills, cadet training instills values of integrity, teamwork, and a sense of duty. The immersive experiences provided during cadet training not only prepare individuals for the challenges they may face in their respective fields but also foster a strong sense of camaraderie and commitment to service. As cadets emerge from their training, they carry with them a foundation of knowledge, a sense of responsibility, and the confidence to navigate complex situations. In essence, cadet training serves as a transformative journey, molding individuals into capable leaders who are ready to contribute meaningfully to their communities and professions.

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