

*Crucibles of Leadership*, the article by Warren G. Bennis and Robert J. Thomas defines a crucible as a, “transformative experience through which an individual comes to a new or altered sense of identity.” My experiences in Iraq, specifically leading the Mosul Reconstruction Cell (MRC) as the Fusion Officer is what I will discuss as my crucible experience and the challenges, and lessons learned.

Before describing the crucible experience and the challenges of leading the reconstruction synchronization, I want to set the stage. Ten months into the mission in Iraq, the reconstruction mission was the second change of mission and third move for the Engineer Brigade. Prior to the reconstruction mission, the brigade mission and focus was on provincial engagement and governance in Kirkuk province. Before that, the brigade focus was on only engineer operations when based in Tikrit. I was the brigade executive officer prior to moving to Mosul. While on R&R leave, I learned that upon my return, I was to report to Mosul and establish the fusion cell for Mosul Reconstruction. My first thoughts were: what is a fusion cell? How are we staffing the cell? What was our priority and mission? Is there a plan? What currently exists and what is the end state?

Upon arriving in Mosul, I learned that we inherited eight projects from the previous unit and incarnation of the reconstruction cell. The current effort would be a combined endeavor between the engineer brigade, the maneuver BCT (responsible for the entire province), and the Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). A “plan” was established that set the responsibilities for project development and the time horizon of those projects. The BCT focus was on short term, quick win, projects (focused on employment and 30-60 day timeframe). The PRT was focused on enduring long term projects. The default position of the engineer brigade

was to develop the bridging strategy with mid-term projects that would build on the success of the quick win and build capacity to resuscitate that infrastructure within the city.

I led a section with three LTCs, one who was the MRC chief, one who was the engagement lead, and one who was the design/project development lead. The section was a mix of engineers, civil affairs (CA) teams, civilian translators, and bi-cultural, bi-lateral advisors (BBAs). The section was formed with officers and Soldiers from multiple units, not just the engineer brigade HQ.

The challenges in this construct were the following: the fractured unity of effort, friction between personalities and organizations, marginalization of experts (BBAs, CA), manning and lack of technical capabilities, knowledge / information management. The corollary lessons learned are discussed with detailed look at the challenges.

The “plan” briefed well but there was a divergence in the unity of effort between the engineers, the BCT, and PRT based approach to project development. The plan was for the BCT to conduct the short term projects which would employ many people and have tangible results (trash and sewer cleaned up) while the engineers developed sustainable projects that would build on the quick win projects (develop projects focused on sanitation [trash/sewer], water, electricity) which would add to the existing infrastructure network and build Iraqi capacity and capability. The fractured unity was caused by the differences of BCT and engineer priority and methodology for project development. Also, the funding source was through the BCT. This led to friction and contention between personalities and units as the priorities and methodology changed. The worst part was coalition project fratricide as we worked with the Directorate Generals (DG) in the city. Removal of trash is one example where quick win methods had the

unintended consequence of one DG not removing trash in neighborhoods due to conflict with contracted trash removal which was not coordinated through the DG. First lesson is do not fight “the plan”, be ready and adjust to changes. Continuous assessment and staff synchronization are required to overcome the personal and organizational frictions that hamper progress. The synchronization and communication within a staff and with sister units, host nation, and NGOs is critical to overcome friction and maintain unity of effort.

Next, BBAs were initially marginalized and were not fully integrated in the MRC because of a lack of trust and understanding of the skills and capacity that they brought to the table. This was a mammoth error. The lesson learned is not to marginalize your experts that you are paying for. Integrate them into your plans and listen to them. They bring a wealth of experience and savvy that is critical as we developed relationships during engagements. The BBAs language skills coupled with their engineering background and technical skills in working with government officials (politicians, directorate generals, and their engineers) was a reconstruction multiplier. Another leadership lesson is that you integrate multipliers, in this case, the CA with the engineers. It’s a win-win for the organization as they built relationships with maneuver units and host nation assisting with project development and nominations and conducting site visits and infrastructure assessments.

Manning was a concern for two reasons. First the increase in numbers of project and their scopes and second was the rotation of key personnel in CA teams and later on the engineers. The sheer magnitude of project growth to over 150 projects within 90 days led to a shortage of project officers. This shortage of expertise was mitigated by tasking subordinate engineer units for officers with engineering backgrounds and professional development of staff officers. Project officers had to be trained to work with the BBAs and CA teams and to develop projects

with a focus on statements of work, bill of quantity, cost estimates, and working with contractors and finance. Lesson learned is to harness the *talent (as per the Rocket Model)* within the organization and attempt to find people with the passion for the assignment.

The impacts from this assignment for me are clear. First, people are what matter and I have to build teams, and a bench within the team, and know where to look for people within the organization. Second, give clear guidance and empower subordinates, they will do wonders. Organizationally, it is more important to listen to what the team is telling you and get their *buy-in* as opposed to getting compliance. This will greatly reduce friction within the organization and also increase the morale of your subordinates. Tact and personality do matter, especially when dealing with multi faceted diverse team. Look past yourself when planning missions and clearly understand the end state. In my case it wasn't to fix Mosul, but to work on improving host nation capability and capacity and more importantly develop a long term public works program for city officials. I gained confidence in my abilities to lead such a diverse group and understand that as much as engineering is very science oriented, it has to be integrated with the art of leadership. Leadership at this level is service. Serving the people you lead, taking care of them. It is having the ability to deal with complex problems in a complex environment.