

Military Transition Teams (MiTT) consist of eleven to fifteen officers and non-commissioned officers (NCO) led by a team chief at the direct level of leadership, but this team chief and the other members of the team interact with various headquarters to provide leadership, advice, and training at the organizational level as combat advisors. Through training, experiences, and interaction with a multitude of officers and NCOs while assigned to a MiTT, I gained valuable perspective from which to understand and visualize an eventual transition from the direct level to an organizational level of leadership. This opportunity provided experiences in team building first at the direct level within the team and again later at the organizational level with the various Iraqi units we advised. The challenge to establish a shared understanding at the team level during the train-up for deployment continued in country as we tried to influence both coalition and Iraqi organizations through envisioning. All the while, individuals and the team collectively dealt with stresses that negatively influenced both the team and the organizations we advised. These experiences, challenges, and stresses while serving on a MiTT contribute to the ongoing transition in leadership which I started years earlier when assigned to my first organizational level duty position as a newly promoted field grade officer.

While still in command, I received orders to serve as chief of Reception, Staging, Onward-movement, and Integration (RSOI) of a joint task force in support of the Border Patrol and US Customs agencies under Operation Jump Start. Later, this job transitioned into an assignment as the J3 support operations officer at the brigade level. Within days of starting, I discovered that the leadership skills which earned high praise at the company and battalion echelons no longer fit the requirements of influencing this joint organization. My duties required that I gain the cooperation of battalion commanders and staff to identify and justify requisition and distribution of resources, personnel, and equipment. With my inability to team build or negotiate, I struggled throughout the mission. Despite my good intentions, I made many officers and NCOs angry and uncooperative along the way. Upon receiving orders to transfer from the National Guard to active duty, my mentors advised that I take an assignment to lead a MiTT.

Under the circumstances, they advised that I could benefit from the exposure to many different organizations and a high density of field grade officers and senior NCOs on a MiTT.

While still ignorant of the organizational leadership skills required of me, I eagerly and aggressively set out to master the technical skills of combat advising, and again applied the directly level leadership tactics, techniques, and procedures as the team formed at Fort Riley. With inappropriate interpersonal tact, I struggled to build the team. To demonstrate competence with the hope of inspiring confidence, I led the team with firm control by establishing; duties, responsibilities, detailed training schedules, and in-depth counseling folders. I remained oblivious to my lack of empathy and mental agility. Because I merely dictated tasks to the officers and NCOs on the team, they could not envision my intent. Despite adversity and growing conflict with me as their team chief, the team developed strong bonds.

Previously, during the first week of training, my oldest brother developed multiple organ failure. Throughout our MiTT training, he withered and finally succumbed, despite a terrible fight, just weeks prior to the team's deployment into Iraq. The emotional stress I endured during my brother's struggle for life eroded my emotional resilience to the point where I maintained little personal tact. Eventually, I lost self control with outbursts of anger in addressing the shortcomings of two NCOs on the team. To add to the enormous load of stress, the team received a change in mission as we stepped onto the plane bound for the Kuwait enroute to Iraq. The change transformed our battalion level MiTT to a corps level MiTT with the additions of a colonel as overall team chief and two lieutenant colonels (LTC) as staff advisors.

In Kuwait, we met the new team chief, and he determined that I would continue to lead the MiTT while he would advise the Iraqi commanding general and direct the staff advisors. In the few moments available prior to his hasty departure ahead of the team into Iraq, we established a shared understanding of how the team would be led, and I received guidance on how to proceed with training and transformation of the team's duties and responsibilities. Unfortunately, where I saw opportunity to expand our influence with the talented officers and

NCOs assigned to the team, these same officers and NCOs saw opportunity to break away from my direct level leadership style. Again, I attempted to build the team, but without reference to methodology or models such as *The Rocket Model*, I struggled along with poor interpersonal tact and limited mental agility despite the talent available.¹ Once we absorbed the additional field grade officers upon arrival in Iraq, I could no longer influence the team. With the loss of my brother, the conflict within the team, the stress of building a new organization in a combat environment, and long hours of duty during a wet cold winter in Iraq, I lost even more emotion resilience and the complete confidence of the team. To provide me an opportunity to succeed in light of my status as a team leader in a team which I no longer led, the colonel transferred me to a division MiTT to advise an Iraqi commando battalion and a division G3 plans section.

On the division MiTT, I started to notice the difference between direct and organizational level leadership. The team chief and executive officer provided me duties and coached me on improving interpersonal tact as I pursued informal leadership opportunities both within the team and with the Iraqi officers I advised. Some senior Iraqi officers, several Iraqi National Military Advisors (INMA), and two Military Advisory Support Team (MAST) contractors added to the list of mentors whom I gleaned for domain knowledge. I continued my studies, constantly read reports, and attended every operational briefing to gain an understanding of the common operational picture. Eventually, I came to understand that the Iraqi division conducted operations differently, not only due to differences in cultural knowledge, but also because they did not share the coalition vision of the future. Through advising key Iraqi division staff, we learned how to influence the organization by establishing a shared understanding. Fortunately, success finally seemed possible, but with little time before redeployment. Up to the very end of the deployment with new resilience fortified by the efforts of friends and colleagues, we advised the division staff and took part in a great transformation within the Iraqi division.

Throughout my assignment to the joint task force, while serving as on a MiTT, and continuing in my studies at the Command and General Staff College, I came to understand the

differences between direct and organizational level leadership. Even more, I learned that the leadership attributes in which I placed little value as a direct level leader seemed imperative to my effectiveness at the organizational level. To achieve success in the core competencies of leadership, both formally and informally, I must; develop greater interpersonal tact, gain more mental agility, display greater empathy, and fortify my emotional resiliency. Leveraging these attributes may strengthen my ability to build organizational teams and to establish shared understandings through envisioning a common end state for future organizations.

Considering recent assignments, I intend on using a less aggressive style of leadership in the future, but at this point in my career, I will continue to take note of those leaders I admire. My aggressive leadership style in the past resulted in what many perceived as an emotional attachment to an approach to mission requirements. Requirements which I previously believed a unit must achieve to meet a standard. It remains possible that these beliefs contributed too many of the problems we encountered during MiTT training. As an organizational leader, I will place more emphasis in recognizing leadership potential. Trusting in subordinate leadership potential requires less direct control and sets the conditions for a focus on establishing a shared understanding through mission command. With continued study and hard work, I intend on developing confidence in the leadership attributes through and through.

On a future staff and upon the opportunity to command at the organizational level, these experiences, challenges, and stresses will help to shape how I influence others. Today's complex operating environment requires constant change and opportunities to rebuild organizational teams to meet shifting mission requirements just as we continuously rebuilt the MiTT. Throughout the conduct of full spectrum operations, organizations where I serve will need to achieve a shared understanding envisioned by the leadership. From this experience, I will further develop my emotional resilience to endure future organizational stress. In reflection, as a result of my MiTT assignment, I experienced hardship and difficulty, but I now benefit from a new perspective on leadership at the organizational level.

Bibliography

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ⁱ Hughes, Richard L., Robert C. Ginnett, and Gordon J. Curphy. *Leadership, Enhancing the Lessons of Experience*. fifth. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill/Irwin, 2006. Pages 506-513