Using Simulation to Train Influence

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ABSTRACT

In Full Spectrum Operations, Army leaders need to effectively influence others outside the chain of command. The Center for Army Leadership has built a single-player, self-paced virtual-role-play simulation for Army leaders to learn how to apply different influence approaches in one-on-one leader engagements. The three-hour simulation, called Army Influence Trainer, uses a web-deployable, Adobe Flash-based technology, coupled with a first person perspective, built-in pedagogical support system, and a learner-centered approach. Participants learn the 'look and feel' of various influence techniques by interacting with avatars using techniques outlined in Army FM 6-22 Army Leadership. They receive real-time feedback based on their interactions and techniques applied.   Learners will quickly notice the avatar's reactions, body language, comments and tone; checking for signs of resistance and striving to gain compliance or commitment. This report will describe; 1) the learning goals, 2) the program goals, 3) the simulation development, including the modeling of influencing content, 4) level design, and 5) the deployment, including piloting, making the course corrections, and testing. The results of testing indicate that influence skills (traditionally believed to be unteachable soft power skills) can be successfully trained when simulation is developed with a focus on "learning to do".

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INTRODUCTION

"The plan called for simultaneously engaging local leaders in an attempt to find those who had influence, or "wasta," and to get their support. We recognized this as a critical part of the plan, because without their help, we would not be able to recruit enough police to take back the entire city." (from Anbar Awakens: The Tipping Point, Military Review, March-April 2008, page 43)

The Importance of Influencing Skills

Army leaders at all levels must work in partnerships with other agencies, organizations, and host nation militaries. Leaders engage in activities such as alliance building, negotiating and conflict management to handle complex problems that can't be handled alone. In these situations, more than rank and experience are needed to influence the actions, decisions, and operations of: 1) adversaries, 2) local populace, 3) joint, interagency, intergovernmental and multinational partners, 4) civil authorities, 5) business leaders, and 6) other civilian agencies at the local and strategic levels

Influence Training

The Center for Army Leadership (CAL) conducted an assessment of Army leadership and identified a gap between the capability and the requirement on the leadership competency to extend "influence beyond the chain of command". To address this gap, CAL had the *Army Influence Trainer* developed. Understanding influence techniques documented in FM6-22 Army Leadership is

important. However, actual practice with influence techniques is required to get Army leaders the ability and confidence to influence others in real life. The decision was made to create a new approach to influence training which would allow Army leaders to get the look and feel of various techniques and to consider the varying impacts of different techniques.

A New Simulation

The *Army Influence Trainer* combines a constructivism/learner-centered education approach with a self-contained e-learning approach. The training allows leaders to learn how different techniques "look and feel" through virtual role play with avatars. What follows is an overview of how the simulation was created. This report will describe: 1) the learning goals, 2) the program goals, 3) the simulation development, including the modeling of influencing content, 4) level design, and 5) the deployment, including piloting, making the course corrections, and testing.

Learning Goals

The learning goals for the Army Influence Trainer were both high-level and specific, based on the Army Field Manual 6-22.

These goals include:

- Gain confidence with multiple influencing techniques

- Learn that different situations warrant different techniques

- Become proficient with techniques that gain more than compliance

- Understand the different types of resistance and the difference between compliance and commitment

Most importantly, the learning goals were measured by "learning to do" not "learning to know." They would not be met if a student had memorized a list of terms. They had to have kinesthetic and emotional impacts, not just a cognitive impact.

Program Goals

Along with learning goals, the Army Influence Trainer also had very specific *program goals*. If learning goals are the *what*, then program goals are the *how*, or *how not*. Most importantly, the program was to apply a "learning to do" approach to influencing skills, not just a "learning to know." This meant that the formal learning program would rely significantly on some type of simulation.

The other program goals are as follows:

- The simulation program had to be web deployed in order to provide easy and ready access, minimize impact on over-burdened instructor staff, and provide practice time on a flexible schedule for individual learners. It had to be available on any computer that had a sound card, a current version of Internet Explorer, and Adobe Flash. It could assume a high speed bandwidth, but had to make accommodations for a variety of Internet connection speeds.

- The course had to be totally self-contained. It could not *require* any instructor support (although an instructor *could* add value, and the program *could* be used in a classroom).

- The content had to be highly visual and interactive

Creation Process and Milestones

To enable this product, the Center for Army Leadership (CAL) partnered with the SimuLearn Inc., an experienced developer of civilian leadership simulations. SimuLearn had experience developing real-time leadership simulations using 'artificially intelligent avatars'. Independent case studies have measured the effectiveness, performance improvement, and sustained behavior changes from managers using similar programs.

Creating a Constructivist Framework

CAL and SimuLearn adhered to the major tenets of constructivism described by Dimock and Boethel (1999) to include:

- Learning involves building understanding and making sense of new experiences, not memorizing facts.

- Learning is embedded in the situation in which it was learned. Instead of learning a set of facts, learning should be in the context of a problem to be solved.

- Knowledge is constructed by the learner by making elaborations and interpretations as he or she learns."

Given this, the team first created a *simulation model* of influencing. Then, the team had to create a level design and story around the simulation model to ensure progressive improvement of student capability, increased interest, and more complex context. Finally, the team had to build in significant coaching to minimize confusion, increase the productivity of student time, and balance intrinsic and extrinsic knowledge.

After identifying learning and program goals, the team reviewed existing academic articles and Army doctrine materials used for influence training. Then the team went through iterations of storyboarding and modeling while interviewing subject matter experts. Finally, as the program was created, further internal review provided feedback and guidance for mid-course corrections.

The first core activity was creating the *simulation model*. The simulation of a "learning to do" experience involved three abstracted components taken from reality: the *actions*, the *results*, and the *system*. The *actions* models what a person does in real life situations, and aligns with the simulation interface. The *results* are what a person strives to get in a real-life situation, and aligns with the goal of a simulation level. The *system* is the often invisible, sometimes counter-intuitive structure that connects actions and results. The system can be the most challenging to research, model, and ensure the student learns, but can also provide the most valuable of all of the learning. As the team was making the design decisions around the simulation, it also tried to embrace the ethos of the GenXers and Millennials, those generations that grew up on computer games. These included:

- A *first person* perspective;

- Minimal use of lectures and static slides, with visual cues instructional comments instead being delivered as close to point of need as possible;

- A sense of *real-time* engagement;

- *Short term* connection of actions and results (at least initially, although this could be stretched over time);

- Practical, not theoretical.

Results

The goal of the simulation, (i.e., the results) were identified in earlier research as described in Curnow, Mulvaney, Calderon, Weingart, Nicely, Keller-Glaze, & Fallesen, (2002):

"Interpersonal influence (i.e., influencing others) can produce one of three outcomes (Yukl et al., in press). The first outcome is *resistance*, where a subordinate is opposed to the leader's request and will try to avoid doing it. The second is *compliance*, where the leader provides a direct order to the subordinate and the subordinate carries out the order. This type of influence is often appropriate for the military as the leader faces direct, immediate, high-stakes situations where accomplishing the mission at all costs is what matters. However, Yukl et al., (in press) have found that while compliance may be effective, it may also result in the subordinate becoming more apathetic and exerting less effort to future requests. The third outcome is *commitment*, where the subordinate has a favorable attitude towards the leader's request and puts forth the necessary effort to carry out the request."

The opportunity of the simulation model was to articulate the different forms these outcomes could take.

Actions

The action level of the model presented the students with what they would actually be *doing* in the simulated situations via the interface, in a way that is instructional in the real world. This was both easy and challenging.

This was easy, because the Army's Leadership doctrine FM6-22 has established 10 influencing

techniques, based on Yukl, (2002) for obtaining compliance and commitment. These were the learning goals of the program:

- Pressure - Using explicit demands

- Legitimate request - Source of authority is basis for request

- Exchange - A trade of desired actions or items

- Personal appeal - Friendship or loyalty is basis for request

- Collaboration - Assistance or resources are offered

- Rational persuasion - Experienced expert provides evidence or logical arguments

- Apprising - Explaining benefits of specific requested action (benefit not under Advisor control)

- Inspiration- Using strong emotion to build conviction

- Participation - Involving others to establish "buy in"

- Relationship building - Rapport and mutual trust are basis for request

The challenge was that these ten techniques were too disconnected from real world situations to make them good simulation actions. Presenting ten text-heavy buttons in an interface would disconnect the student experience from immersiveness, enabling at best *cognitive* awareness. We wanted to challenge leaders to move beyond familiar techniques of *pressure* and *legitimate authority*.

The team further broke down the 10 influencing techniques into the intentionality and motivations behind the influencing techniques. This was enabled by use of the SimuLearn communication interface whereby players focused on either supporting or opposing a person or an idea to create an emotional connection to the content.

Figure 1 is a visual example from the interface:

Figure 1. Example of the Interface

The notion of intentionality, forcing the player to think in terms of focusing on the idea versus focusing on the person, introduced a core meta-concept: focusing on a relationship can be the fastest way (and sometimes the only way) to accomplish a goal.

Systems

It is the *system* in a simulation that connects *actions* and *results*. Understanding the system helps predict which results can be expected from particular actions. For example, one can give an order to a civilian (*action*), expecting compliance (*result*), but if the civilian is not emotionally engaged in the outcome (*system*), he or she might nod their head in agreement, but then not comply. The implementation of the proper system in the simulation creates the condition whereby, to be

successful, the "the leader will need to develop a deeper understanding of how to determine the best approach to a situation in real time." The system created for the simulation has three components. They were the notion of:

- formal authority/power

- achieving compliance vs. achieving commitment

- different types of resistance.

The leaders, to successfully engage the simulation, had to identify the type of resistance coming from the target and then apply the right technique. The current state of the target determined the type of influence technique that would be successful.
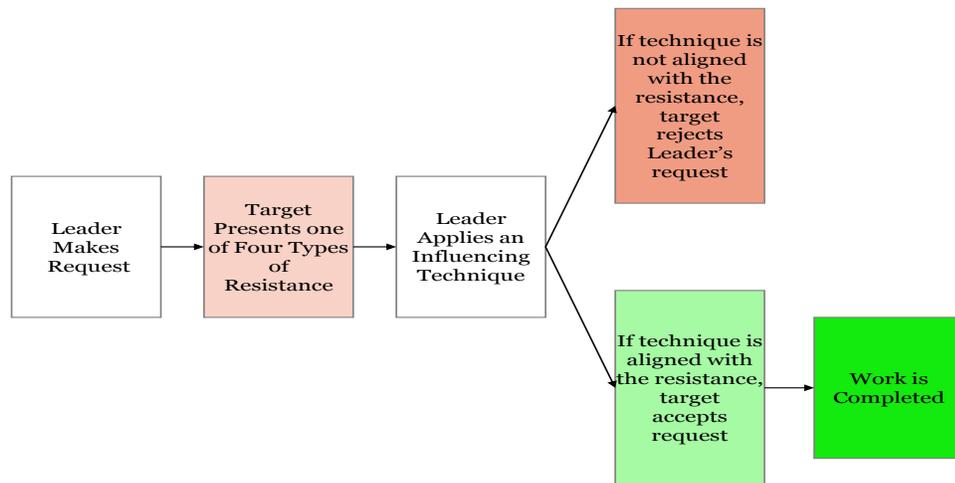

Figure 2. Applying a Technique in the Simulation Process

As with any educational simulation model, the learning goal is not in the intellectual understanding of the pieces, but being able to practice or apply the understanding in a simulation and then perform in the real world. Having said that, to reduce the cognitive load, the students would be able to interact with all of this content through an interactive table on every screen of the simulation as shown in Figure 3:

Figure 3. Chart/Dashboard of Usable Influence Techniques

This chart/dashboard, available during every simulation scene, can be "moused-over" for specifics about each technique, including the combination moves to enact each one. Further, the appropriate part of the table "lights-up" when a technique is correctly used. It is one example of the pedagogy to be explained in the next section.

Level Design

As the team finished the simulation model, we had to build out the level design and story. This would take students through the program, slowly and deliberately building up capabilities.

To ensure the program remained true to the *program goal* of stand-alone, the team also had to carefully build in scaffolding. The concept of "scaffolding" in learning has been described in various ways, but the term generally refers to some sort of support system that helps students learn as they move from simple to more complex material. This can take the form of temporary assistance from tutors (which is eventually removed as the student's knowledge improves), in some cases targeted at specific points in a curriculum, or a learning structure imposed by a teacher to help the student learn the material. Thus we divided the simulation into three parts, each with five levels. The framework had the feel of "crawl, walk, run." This chunking of content also gave students a sense of achievement.

Part One - Crawl

The first part provided an overview of the interface and some basic interpersonal concepts. We included tremendous amounts of built-in pedagogy to support the player. We created a coach character who had a very identifiable voice, and

this coach gave large amounts of commentary, including praising the player or telling them why what they did was wrong. This balance of simulation and pedagogy was carefully structured to maintain the best possible user experience; neither too easy nor too hard, and neither too much information nor too little. For example, techniques invisible to the player were employed in which the number of repetitions were reduced if the learner was successful, or increased if they were not successful.

Part Two – Walk

In the second part, students would learn through a first person perspective how to apply each individual influencing technique and multiple techniques in a single influence attempt to experience the look and feel of techniques. Part two applied a linear approach with opportunities for students to make tactical errors and receive quick remediation. While there were false options presented to the player, we did not let the player go down a bad path for very long, nor did we hold it against the player when they made a mistake.

There was an assumption that leaders taking this program would already be comfortable with a *pressure* and *legitimate authority* approach to influencing. They would know how to order someone to do something and have them do it immediately. Therefore, early in part two, we had created some situations where people were asked to use a legitimate authority or pressure technique, and have it not work. The team also created situations where the best approach was the simplest approach which was to simply tell someone what to do without requiring more complicated techniques.

Finally, in one situation at the end of part two, we turned the tables, and had the player be the recipient of influencing techniques used by others. Figure 4 below comes from a situation where a sheik is influencing the player by explaining the benefits of supporting the sheik's needs.

Part Three – Run

The final part allowed players more freedom to apply whatever technique they felt appropriate, given the nature of the resistance. They had to decide the right time to use a given technique. They were not corrected immediately, and saw more organic consequences to actions.

The Story

After Action Reviews

The program also used three different types of after action reviews.

- Linear acknowledgements of success.

- Open ended, reflective questions asked of the player.

- Customized feedback for performance.

Figure 4. Final Presentation of AIF

The team then had to craft the story carefully. The starting point of many of the students was that of a bias toward the techniques of pressure and legitimate authority, and of working up and down the chain of command. To meet the learning goals, the team had to create situations where the relationships between the student and avatar were not hierarchical and chain-of-command centric. This would include people outside of the military and also lateral peers over whom they had no authority.

The team built a story to provide a context for actually applying these various techniques. Because the first target students were in training as Foreign Security Force Advisors, the initial application became that of a transition team member, who goes through initial pre-deployment training at Fort Riley, then deploys to Iraq, where he or she applies different approaches in a more foreign setting, and finally debriefs his or her own replacement. This progression provided rich environments to see how different applications of the content would feel.

The story also was used to pick up some leadership issues that were not presented interactively. For example, the player's character brings in an expert to help him or her make an argument. This is a good leadership skill, and at least we were able to present it.

The goal of all three types was to help the students transition from reality to simulations, learn how to evaluate success or failure themselves, and then transition back to the real world. The open-ended questions also allowed students to express themselves. Finally, to break up the rhythm and review key concepts, we decided to add two mini-games to the simulation that presented a fast-moving, highly interactive review of some of the key concepts.

Comments from Participants and Mid-Course Corrections

During a pilot run of the program, users found the content to be new, useful, interesting and relevant and they wanted the training to be integrated into the program of instruction right away (a "must have" for advisors). However, some also responded that the program was too complicated and they didn't like having to repeat a scenario three times (using different influence techniques). Others thought the program was too easy. They wanted more influence options sooner and the option to fail sooner. They didn't like the "canned" responses and felt the "green flashing buttons were too limited" and were "just clicking to get through it".

As a result of the comments, the program was tweaked and refined. More instruction was

created, more variety and challenge was added to the second part, and the number of play-throughs of any given scene was reduced from three to two. In order to test the effectiveness of the final product, an experiment was set up to determine if participants were better able to influence others after exposure to influence training.

METHOD

Participants

Participants in this study were 73 Army leaders attending Foreign Security Force Advisor training at Ft. Riley, KS. They were all male and ranks varied from E6 (Staff Sergeant) to O6 (Colonel). Participants were placed into three conditions: 1) traditional training, plus briefing and a 3 hour simulation (N= 16); 2) Traditional training plus briefing (N=31); and 3) Traditional training (N=26).

MEASURES

Pre-Test Measures

The first measure was a pre-assessment that consisted of 32 multiple-choice questions on influence techniques and approaches. The pre-assessment measured how much participants already knew about influence strategies. Another pre-test measure was a set of three vignettes. These vignettes were one-page in length each and included three questions. The three questions were the same for every scenario, requiring the leader to respond with his assessment of 1) the type of resistance identified, 2) the "red flags" in the situation that were most concerning, and 3) how they would influence the situation. The vignettes were developed based on interviews with re-deployed advisors using a cognitive task analysis type interview. The vignettes represent real situations which may challenge future advisors.

Post-Test Measures

The post-assessment measure consisted of the same 32 questions as the pre-assessment, but also included 31 self-report measures. These 31 questions assessed the degree to which the leaders felt they knew how and when to apply the different influence techniques. Questions also included the leaders' assessments of the need for this training, as well as a course evaluation. Another post-test measure was a second set of three different vignettes. The pre- and post-test vignettes were matched for equal levels of difficulty.

Training Materials

The training materials used for this study include a

briefing and the Army Influence Trainer described earlier in this paper. The briefing outlines a series of research-based influence techniques adopted by the Army. The briefing highlights the difference between commitment, compliance, and resistance and approach vs. avoidance strategies. The Army Influence Trainer is set up to allow leaders to practice the influence techniques they were taught in the briefing by interacting with avatars.

Leader Engagements

The primary dependent variables in this study were performance on Leader Engagements and the difference between Pre and Post-Test vignettes. Leader Engagements are role plays of situations that are likely to occur during deployment as security force assistance advisors. These training requirements provide the closest approximation to the true performance of advisors in theater.

In Leader Engagements, the leaders interact with Afghan, Iraqi, or American role play actors in order to better simulate real life situations. Participants are given a brief read-ahead of the situation which they will be playing out at least 12 hours before their Leader Engagement in order to prepare. These Leader Engagements consist of 45 minutes for the actual role play meeting and 15 minutes of an After Action Review (AAR) to discuss what the team did and what could have been done differently. There are nine Leader Engagements during training, however, only two were observed for the purposes of this study. The two Leader Engagements were chosen for their potential to require and extract influence attempts. The learning objectives for the two scenarios were the criteria used by the instructors to grade the leaders' performance during the Leader Engagements. The criteria for the first Leader Engagement are: planning and preparation, working with an interpreter, influence, and conflict resolution. The criteria for the second are: planning, building relationships/rapport with US Partner Force, advising US Partner Force, conflict resolution, and gaining influence.

In one Leader Engagement, leaders are meeting with their Afghan or Iraqi counterparts to prepare for an upcoming Neighborhood Advisory Council meeting. The leaders need to prepare their counterparts to handle serious issues (Ex: a well has dried up in a town, trash is not being collected so security is a risk, etc). In the second Leader Engagement, leaders are meeting with the U.S. Battalion Commander in their Area of Operations to discuss the increase in Improvised Explosive Devise (IED) attacks that led to 3 U.S. soldiers

being killed. Leaders are expected to build rapport with the Commander and explain security measures already in place as well as ways to increase them.

A Leader Engagement Assessment form was used by the experimenters to assess performance as objectively as possible. Leaders were given points every time they used one of the influence techniques that were appropriate for that scenario and points were taken away for influence techniques that should not have been used. The form also included a section for notes and an instructor area that included comments and an overall grade. After each Leader Engagement, the experimenter also recorded a score from the instructors. Instructors ratings, on a 1-9 scale of 1 being "very ineffective" and 9 being "very effective" provided a second measure of performance.

PROCEDURE

Condition 1

The leaders first received a packet of questions (pre-assessment) testing their base knowledge of influence techniques. They then received a set of three vignettes which presented different scenarios and asked what they would do in that situation (pre-test vignettes). After completing the pre-training materials, a 90-minute briefing was provided. This briefing taught the leaders about the influence techniques adopted in Army Leadership doctrine FM 6-22. The first session was then complete and leaders were asked to take the Army Influence Trainer home and complete it that night. The next day, the second session occurred which included a post-assessment questionnaire packet and a set of three post-test vignettes which were different from the pre-test. On a separate day, observations were made during the leaders' Leader Engagements.

Condition 2

This group was exposed to the exact same assessments and briefing materials, but they did not have access to the Army Influence Trainer. The method was the same to include use of the same instructor.

Condition 3

This group did not receive any of the training and did not complete pre-and post-assessments or vignettes. The data collected from these leaders was their performance during the Leader Engagements only.

RESULTS

Overall, the data showed that those who received additional training (Conditions 1 and 2) performed significantly better in the Leader Engagements than the group that received traditional training (Condition 3). Secondly, participants who received additional training responded significantly better on the posttest vignettes compared to pretest vignettes. Lastly leaders from Conditions 1 and 2 reported that this training is relevant, important, and not previously available to them.

Leader Engagement Results

Assessments of performance by the experimenters were consistent with the independent instructor assessment. Experimenter observation of influence techniques used in Leader Engagements indicated that leaders in Condition 1 who received influence training performed better on Leader Engagements than those who did not receive training (Condition 3). This was significant with $p < 0.001$. Condition 1 had an average mean of 6.50, whereas Condition 3 had an average mean of 1.67 (both of these performance scores are out of 9). This means that the group that received training (Condition 1) used more influence techniques correctly during their Leader Engagements than the group in Condition 3. Data on the Leader Engagement performance for Condition 2 could not be obtained because of the training schedule.

The instructors that facilitated the role play and the AAR were blind to the purpose and conditions of this study. Their assessment of leaders in Condition 1 were significantly better than their assessment of leaders in Condition 3. This was significant with $p = 0.03$. Condition 1 had an average mean of 8.25, whereas Condition 3 had an average mean of 5.18. It is good to see that not only did the experimenters see an improvement in the Leader Engagements of the influence trained leaders, but the instructors also noted the overall improvement.
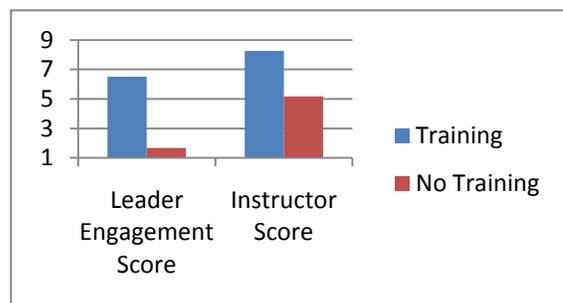

Figure 5. Average Scores for Leader Engagements

Vignette Results

Leaders in Condition 1 who completed the Army Influence Trainer performed significantly better on the post-test vignettes than they did on the pre-test vignettes. This is significant with p< 0.001. This means that the Army Influence Trainer led to an improvement in the leaders' influence technique knowledge and application. The leaders' average score on the pre-test was 12.37 and the average for the post-test vignettes was 13.76. The highest possible score for the vignettes is 24.
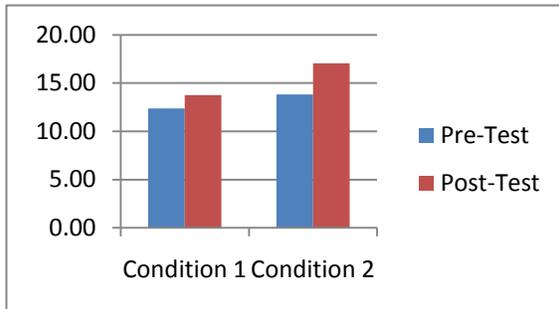

Figure 6. Average Scores on Vignettes

Leaders in Condition 2 who only received the briefing performed significantly better on the post-test vignettes than they did on the pre-test vignettes as well. This is significant with p< 0.001. The briefing also helped in the performance on using influence techniques. The leaders' average score for the pre-test vignettes was 13.82 and the average for the post-test vignettes was 17.04.

Self-Report Measures on Post-Assessment

For the next few results, leaders were asked to respond to the self-report measures on the post-assessment. The items were on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 being "Strongly disagree" and 5 being "Strongly agree". All improvements were significant with p< 0.001.

This study found that leaders in Conditions 1 and 2 feel that it is important for leaders to seek out skill development tools to improve abilities and productivity. The average response to this measure for Condition 1 was 4.20 out of 5 and 4.71 out of 5 for Condition 2. Leaders feel that learning influencing skills will help their career and effectiveness as a leader. This had an average of 3.87 out of 5 for Condition 1 and 4.77 out of 5 for Condition 2. They also felt this influence training was relevant to the current requirements for military leadership (Condition 1: 3.27; Condition 2: 4.58). The leaders also stated that they have not previously received training on influence (Condition 1: 2.67; Condition 2: 2.90).

DISCUSSION

These results indicate that influence training can improve performance in choosing and applying appropriate influence techniques, based on a better understanding of resistance and the difference between compliance and commitment. While the Army Influence trainer created improved performance, it was expected to create a larger effect in terms of improved performance as compared to Condition 2 (briefing only). However, the conditions of the testing have to be considered. Specifically, during the administration of condition 1, all of the instruction (briefing and assessment) was significantly rushed to meet the leader's schedule. This was not the case in Condition 2, where more than ample time was provided for instruction, engagement, and questions. Additionally, the entire 3 hour program of AIT was provided to the leaders to complete as "homework", and the assessment occurred the very next morning. Unfortunately, this is not an optimal condition for learning or for measuring the learning that occurred. Leaders have very little time at the end of the day and must deal with a significant amount of fatigue. An optimal learning condition would have been to have the leaders plan for and complete the training in chunks, perhaps an hour a night for three nights, and then assess learning. The difference in the learning environment also manifested itself in all of the self-report measures of the pre and post assessment measures, and the comments and disposition of participants, which indicated much less effort and enthusiasm from the leaders in Condition 1. Perhaps the leaders assume that important training is given ample time, while less important training is crammed into the schedule at the last minute, and hence don't engage as actively when training is rushed. Nonetheless, those who completed the Army Influence Trainer commented positively on its usefulness, relevance and ability to convey the differences between influence techniques and the outcomes of compliance and commitment.

Criticisms

There will always be criticisms of simulation-based experiences. This is in part due to our tremendous comfort level with learning 'to know' content, and a relative inexperience with learning 'to do' content.

Early research suggests that about 20% of students who engage in a simulation-based activity get frustrated and confused by it. This number seems

high, and is reason for some concern. However, that number may be very comparable to students who sit in classrooms but don't effectively absorb that content either. The big difference is that students in a simulation-based activity are caught earlier on, and not allowed to progress.

CONCLUSION

Influence skills are "soft power skills" that were traditionally thought to be unteachable. The Army Influence Trainer version 1.0 provides practice sessions to build skill and confidence in a self paced safe environment. The value of this "learning to do" approach (as opposed to "learning to know") is only possible with well developed simulation containing the features described in this paper. As the process of simulation development is refined, we will find more use of simulation to train the critical interpersonal skills used to build relationships necessary for partnering and alliance building.

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