The Making of an NCO: From Team Member to Team Leader

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ABSTRACT

Noncommissioned officers (NCO) are the backbone of the U.S. Army, and building the next generation of NCOs is an essential component of meeting current and future mission requirements. Recent research has indicated that the transition from junior enlisted Soldier to NCO is often daunting as Soldiers face challenges in professional, personal, and social domains due to the change in status from Soldier to leader. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to identify challenges and barriers to a successful transition and to identify successful strategies employed to navigate the transition. We conducted focus groups and interviews with 76 Soldiers and NCOs to capture their personal experiences leading up the transition, as they were in the midst of the transition, and, retrospectively, after establishing themselves as a leader. We also administered questionnaires to approximately 96 Soldiers and NCOs to quantify experiences that occur during this transition phase. Results suggest that many prospective and junior NCOs struggle with confidence, motivation to lead, and basic leadership skills. However, the results also indicate that junior enlisted leaders report that they generally acquire the necessary skills and self-development aspects as they perform required duties as a leader. Together, the results suggest that earlier exposure to these activities may accelerate and ease the transition process for many NCOs.

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THE NCO TRANSITION PROCESS

Recent research has indicated that the transition from junior enlisted Soldier to NCO is often daunting. Soldiers face challenges in professional, personal, and social domains as they change in status from team member to leader. The purpose of this research was to identify challenges and barriers to a successful transition and to identify successful strategies for navigating the transition. One major challenge is the shift in identity from team member and Soldier to team leader. This shift entails recognizing the rewards of leadership, desiring to be leader, and separating oneself from the prior role as peer and individual contributor along with other enlisted Soldiers. Officers and senior NCOs can encourage Soldiers who they perceive have potential for leadership by providing feedback and mentorship. Such support is likely to be important before, during, and after training for their first leadership assignment. However, NCOs may not have self-confidence in their ability to lead and may not have sufficient support and coaching from Officers and senior NCOs. As a result, they do not adequately transition their self-image to fully embrace their new role and work toward a successful transition. Another issue of concern is whether newly minted Junior NCOs understand and demonstrate the competencies expected of them. Some senior NCOs report that Soldiers are promoted too quickly before they are prepared and motivated to lead. Many new NCOs often have the sense at the time of their promotion that they are not yet adequately prepared to fully take on the roles and responsibilities of leading others.

Developing a Leader Identity

Leader development is dynamic. It is shaped by a range of factors including experience, skills, personality, self-development, social mechanisms, 360-degree feedback, self-other agreement, and self-narratives (Day et al., 2014). Leadership skills and competence (i.e., expertise and effectiveness) are supported by deeper level processes, such as leader identity formation and self-regulation (Day & Sin, 2011). Forming an identity as a leader motivates new leaders to seek developmental experiences and opportunities for deliberate practice of desired leadership skills and competencies. A strong leadership identity motivates leaders to act in more leader-like ways, which further reinforces their leader identity.

Leader identities are not one-sided and static. People internalize an identity as a leader or a follower, and that identity becomes relationally recognized—through reciprocal role adoption—and collectively endorsed within the organizational context (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Crafting a leadership identity, and transitioning to a leader role, entails establishing a new self-identity (Snook et al., 2010). As one is developing this new identity, one is having novel experiences while learning to delegate responsibilities, effectively communicating with team members, and diagnosing situations in order to develop others. As new leaders increase their understanding of their new roles, they develop new behavioral repertoires, which in turn shape their emerging professional identity as a leader. During the transition process, Soldiers conceive of themselves in relation to their old and new roles through processes of separation, transition, and incorporation. These processes are facilitated by factors such as (a) developmental readiness, (b) transitional time and space (e.g., opportunities during training to explore, try new behaviors without

consequences, and receiving feedback to better judge others' reactions and the outcomes these behaviors produce), (c) guides and reference groups, which allow for social comparison (i.e., points of reference and reflective appraisals), and (d) pre- and post-formal program experiences (recognizing that preparation and follow-up are necessary for transfer of training).

Identity and Motivation to Lead

New leaders who emerge from teams in which they were individual contributors shift their identity from team member to leader (Maurer & London, 2018). This process may be incremental or more dramatic depending on whether the organization expects and rewards the leader's individual contribution and/or leader behaviors. The individual's motivation to lead is also key to learning and shifting their identity. The transition is viewed as a creative distribution of old identity and establishment of a new identity. Leader development occurs as new leaders are exposed to new ideas, knowledge, and perspectives, stretching their capabilities as they test and gain insight into their potential. They learn from sharing stories, collaborating with others across functions, seeking challenges, and taking risks. Learning occurs as they are exposed to goals, developmental assignments, risk tolerance, and failure-tolerant leaders.

The transition to leadership is further bolstered if the prospective leader has role models to whom they can compare themselves and derive a sense of self-efficacy for leadership (an "I can do it, too" feeling) and a stronger motivation to lead (Guillén et al., 2015). This insight is implemented by asking the NCO to identify a leader who has had (or still has) an influence on them. The NCO is then asked to consider the leader's skills and abilities, and how they are like the leader. Such an approach can strengthen leadership self-efficacy and the motivation to lead (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Andersen et al., 1995; Aron et al., 1991) and provide the trainee with the feeling of being equipped to lead (Ritter & Lord, 2007; Kark & Dijk, 2007).

Army Leader Training Processes

In 1993, the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences conducted a study to determine how senior leaders at the Battalion level and below were developing Lieutenants and newly promoted Staff Sergeants at the unit level (Harman et al., 1993). Leader development starts with institutional training, but doctrine (ADP 6-22 and FM 6-22) dictates that units continue leader development as part of their battle focused training. Research indicates that unit performance in garrison, field, and combat strongly relates to the competence of its leaders. Battalion Commanders/Command Sergeants Major and Company Commanders/First Sergeants saw certain skills as important, such as leading from the front, setting the example, caring for Soldiers, counseling, physical readiness training, initiative, communication, and writing.

The study found that senior leaders' methods of developing junior leaders involved professional development classes, Civilian and Military education, pairing a new leader with a strong experienced leader, rotating between staff and line assignments, and assigning additional and special duties. Senior Leaders rated Junior NCOs as relative weak in terms of listening, communication, and writing skills, which contributed to their poor counseling skills and administrative skills (Harman et al., 1993).

Mentoring & Role Models

The *Army Mentorship Handbook* defines mentorship as the voluntary developmental relationship that exists between a person of greater experience and a person of lesser experience characterized by mutual trust and respect. (Headquarters Department of the Army, Deputy Chief of Staff G1; 2005). Although a mentor can be in a mentee's chain of command, it is recommended that they are not for several reasons. The Army believes that in establishing a mentorship, the Army will benefit in improved performance, improved communication, and leader development. Advantages for the mentee include more confidence in their leadership abilities, a sounding board, better career satisfaction, and greater productivity. The handbook suggests that those who select mentors tend to be more successful in their careers.

Transformation of the NCO Corps

Boyce (2008), analyzing leader training in the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC), indicated that USMC small unit leadership focuses on warfighting tasks, not the administrative, caring, counseling, or readiness of troops. In contrast, the Army

has revised its training and education courses to produce a complete NCO that can operate in combat, combat preparation, training, and garrison.

A study from the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Course at Fort Bliss, Texas focused on the transformation of the NCO Corps through institutional training, civilian education, and operational assignments (Wheeler et al., 2008). Though they did not focus on the transition from Soldier to NCO, the concepts discussed are in line with what occurs during that transition. The authors noted that the NCO today has more college education than their pre-21st century predecessors. Junior NCOs and soon to be NCOs are more often using their free time to pursue civilian education.

Gaining a Sense of Control and Power

Recent research has shown that the psychological experience of control is important for (a) reducing leader stress, (b) facilitating leadership behaviors (particularly in high-stakes, stressful situations), and (c) reinforcing one's desire to be a leader (cite). For example, a study of military officers and government officials found that leaders' stress was lower when they had a greater sense of control and had lower levels of stress and reported lower levels of anxiety compared to controls (Sherman et al., 2012).

Another study found that the generalized sense of power—the belief that one is able to influence others in one's various social relationships—served as a psychological resource that enabled leadership in high-stakes, unfamiliar group challenges, such as emergencies or crises (Sherman et al., 2019). The individuals who were studied entered the simulated crisis with a greater sense of power in their social relationships, experienced lower stress, behaved more assertively, and left the simulation with a relatively heightened desire to lead. The results suggest that the psychological sense of power is a key leadership resource.

In sum, the factors contributing to learning readiness, the motivation to be a leader, leader identity, and the leader competencies needed by the Army, provide direction for this study of the transition from team member to NCO. In particular, measures are needed of NCO's self-confidence, growth mindset, desire to lead, and identity shift which helped drive the measures created for this study.

METHOD

There were three sources of data: focus groups, individual interviews, and a survey that consisted of a demographic section and scales pertaining to the transition to leadership. We used focus groups to collect qualitative data from junior and senior NCOs. The intent was to learn about the challenges and lived transition experiences encountered so the Army can work to improve this process in the future. Individual interviews were conducted to gather additional information, learning experiences, and examples of the transition from team member to NCO.

Participants

Ninety-six demographic and leadership experience surveys were collected from U.S. Army Soldiers and NCOs located at Fort Irwin, CA and Fort Carson, CO. Seventy-six of the 96 individuals also participated in focus groups or individual interviews for this study. The participants ranged in age from 21 to 53 years ($M = 28.92$, $SD = 6.85$). They were recruited in two ways: 1) Research Support Requests (RSRs) during FORSCOM scheduled "umbrella" weeks, and 2) by soliciting unit leaders through their commands. All participants used in the analysis reported previous promotion or selection for promotion to an NCO. Informed consent was obtained from each of the participants before any data were collected. We assigned NCO/leader participants to focus groups to ensure a mix of diverse leadership experiences.

Data that were obtained from each participant occurred through a one and a half to two-hour, semi-structured, focus group session. Focus groups were conducted with individuals of similar rank with three to four researchers present. In addition to the researchers taking field notes, interviews were digitally recorded as a means of accurately capturing all relevant information. Each focus group session was moderated by an experienced senior researcher.

Focus Group Procedure

For this effort, Cognitive Task Analysis (CTA) was applied based on Klein and Armstrong (2004). CTA is the process of understanding a team's or an individual's cognitive needs and demands during a task. CTA provides a set of tools for eliciting and representing general and specific knowledge pertaining to an activity. The purpose of using CTA methods was to elicit an understanding of the "cognitive map" that guides NCOs in their transition process. Employing CTA allowed us to understand many of the cognitive aspects involved in the leadership transition process, which are critical in an operational environment.

Before each focus group and interview, participants were provided an overview of the project objectives and informed of the purpose for the interview. They were told that the intent of this research was to better understand their transition experience. They were each given an informed consent statement before beginning the interviews and had the opportunity to choose not to participate.

The demographic data form asked for age, rank/MOS, highest level of education achieved, and leadership experiences to determine if any of these factors impacted the transition process. Each item was rated by the participants on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at All) to 5 (Very Much). Questions from this survey emphasized various leadership experiences at different times in an individual's military career (e.g., before, during, and currently). Examples of items were, "Before I was promoted to a leadership rank, I had a strong desire to be a leader," "During my experiences as a leader, I asked my leaders for feedback and advice," and "At this point in time, I have a strong desire to be a leader."

Survey Measures
Unless otherwise noted, multi-item measures were averaged to form a composite.
Self-confidence. Four items assessed self-confidence (e.g., "During my first leadership assignment, I felt confident that I could handle the responsibilities of being a leader.").
Decision-making autonomy. Three items assessed decision-making autonomy (e.g., "I was allowed to use my personal initiative or judgment in carrying out the work.").
Leader identity transition and separation. Two items assessed leader identity transition (e.g., "During my experiences as a leader, I saw myself as a leader.") and two items assessed lead identity separation (e.g., "When I was first promoted to a leadership rank, I worried that I would miss being one of the troops.").
Opportunities for learning. Opportunities for learning was measured with three items, analyzed separately and in aggregate (e.g., "During my leadership training, I had opportunities to practice being a leader.")
Received feedback/mentorship. Four items assessed the receipt of feedback and mentorship (e.g., "During my experiences as a leader, I received frequent feedback from my leaders.").
General Army expectations. Participants answered the single item, "At this point in time, I know what the Army expects from its leaders."
Desired feedback. Three items assessed the desire for feedback (e.g., "During my experiences as a leader, I was eager for my leaders to tell me how I was doing as a leader.")
Growth mindset. Participants answered the single item, "Before I was promoted to a leadership rank, I believed that leadership was something that could be learned."
Fixed mindset. Participants answered the single item, "Before I was promoted to a leadership rank, I believed that a person's leadership ability is something that can't be changed much."
Growth vs. fixed mindset. To compute the relative belief in leadership as learned (vs. fixed), each participant's score on the fixed mindset item was subtracted from their score on the growth mindset item, yielding a single score, with higher values indicating a greater relative belief that leadership is learnable.
Desire to lead. We measured both *pre-promotion desire to lead* ("Before I was promoted to a leadership rank, I had a strong desire to be a leader.") and *current desire to lead* ("At this point in time, I have a strong desire to be a leader.").

Analyses

After the completion of the focus groups and interviews, the digital voice recordings were transcribed. Researchers compiled their field notes and converted them into Word and Excel documents. The researchers who were present at each interview analyzed notes from all interview transcripts and retrieved qualitative data regarding the challenges of the NCO transition process as well as the strategies for making the process more effective. The qualitative data were then divided into positive and negative comments and classified by rank. Participants' terms and phraseology were retained to ensure the results would reflect the combined voice of the NCOs. The data from the transcript analysis were combined into a master list.

The next phase of this analysis required researchers to work together to group data according to similarity through a card sort process (Nielsen, 1995). The cards were categorized by similar theme, task, characteristic, and rank. Leveraging the collective experience shared among the researchers on CTA and NCOs, we identified the key challenges and opportunities.

Descriptive statistics and correlations were used to analyze the survey responses. Simultaneous linear regression models (with simple slopes analysis used to decompose statistically significant interactions) and mediation models (indirect effects with bootstrapped confidence intervals) were computed to examine how predictor variables (e.g., decision-making autonomy) related to outcome variables (e.g., desire to lead).

RESULTS

Interview & Focus Groups

Inputs from participants were organized into issues of concern, impact, opportunities, and recommendations to improve the transition. Table 1 includes examples dealing with leadership, managing relationships, and the disconnect between training needed and training received. The table includes results from Specialist (E4s). These were used to construct a summary of the actions that would be most helpful to the transition process. Similar tables were constructed for Sergeants and Staff Sergeants (E5s–E6s), and Sergeants First Class, Master Sergeants/First Sergeants, and Command Sergeants Major (E7s–E9s). Table 2 includes examples of direct quotes that reflect the participants' reactions during the focus groups.

Table 1. Example Issues, Impacts, and Advice from Specialist (E4s)

Leadership		
Issues	**Impacts**	**Advice**
When senior leaders are not modeling good leadership.	Incapable of selecting/following a good role model.	Mimic the qualities of good leaders and avoid mimicking the bad qualities.
Needing to accept responsibility for your team's mistakes.	Impacts unit and Soldier morale and productivity.	You need to be able to handle the responsibilities and consequences of your actions. Put others above yourself.
Being a leader adds stress, extended workday/workload, and increases responsibilities. You are responsible for not only yourself but others as well.	Learning to adjust to new stress and responsibilities.	Choose how you react to negative situations. You choose if you let them get to you or not.
Managing Relationships		
Issues	**Impacts**	**Advice**
Relationships change as you move up in rank. Friends one day and then in charge of those friends the next day.	Impact team and unit morale and productivity.	Respect needs to be earned. Do not just expect it.
Difficult to earn and maintain respect from Soldiers.	Feeling isolated from friends; Loss of friendships.	Learn the personalities and work styles of new team members.
Dealing with Soldiers who have a sense of entitlement.		Show compassion, be approachable, and avoid fraternization.
Disconnect Between Training Needed and Training Received		
Issues	**Impacts**	**Advice**
Receiving training on writing skills, but desire training on helping Soldiers with personal problems.	Impacts unit and Soldier morale and productivity.	Understand that everyone learns and thinks differently.

There can be an overload of information in a short period.	Soldiers' expectations are different than reality.	Engage in continuous learning.
BLC focuses too much on drill & ceremony.	Soldiers are isolating themselves because they are not succeeding	Seek out online resources and unit training areas as learning opportunities.
Feel under-prepared for NCO role and increased responsibilities.	Affects unit-readiness and Soldier skills.	Improve BLC to include more scenario-based training.

Table 2. Examples of Verbatim Comments from Specialist (E4s)

Motivation to Lead	
Components: Wanting to be a leader; selfless engagement in leadership; focus on positive outcome & avoiding failure; being a continuous, self-directed learner	
Challenges	• I just wanted to be my own person and take responsibility for my life. • Those who are not ready for promotion simply take direction and seem content just doing their job. • Your first-line supervisor can guide you, but you have to be motivated to learn. Take responsibility for self-directed learning and continuous learning.
Opportunities	Support from the Environment: • At times, I reached out to the Gunner for advice and information about his job. He had several suggestions: he guided me through laying the piece and following fire commands; he advised me to keep my nose clean and do my part; he suggested spending free time in the learning center instead of playing video games; he explained how to communicate with others and make them my friends; and he admonished me to work hard and to standard. At least someone was willing to help me advance. • I am an SSG Section Chief who learned many lessons, which I pass on to my Soldiers and NCOs. I have shaped the careers of several Specialists and put their needs first. Their training and professional development prepares each of them for the next level up.

Developing Leadership	
Components: Transactional leadership (structuring tasks, giving orders, and evaluating results)—leading through dominance and reward (tit-for-tat) management; transformational leadership (creating a vision and gaining commitment)—leading by gaining others respect and concern for others' welfare	
Challenges	• For the first time, I was put into a leadership position where I was expected to lead and train others in my crew. I was inexperienced in the art of counselling. I lacked communication and writing skills. • As part of the train up, I was moved to another Platoon and had to adapt to new leader, which was not difficult. But this meant that I had to identify new role models and prove myself to a new team.
Opportunities	Supportive Leaders and NCO Training: • I was inspired to learn by my first-line leader (the Gunner), who prepped me before I attended. Read this, bring that, stay alert, open that mouth of yours. He was all of that plus more. I dedicated myself to the learning process. I picked up new skills and insights. I learned about how the NCO Education System was supposed to work as I progressed as a leader. • I left nothing to chance: logbooks, technical manuals, lubricants, tools, and parts were available. I supervised and managed by walking around. When asked, I always had an answer. My confidence and credibility were established. We completed our work and moved to the Section room, where I talked to my Soldiers about my expectations and standards.

Identity Transition
Components: Acquiring a self-image as a leader & recognizing that others see you as a leader; relinquishing identity as a Private with task responsibilities and squad member with fellow-members as peers

Challenges	• I was saddened and felt guilty that I was leaving my team while they were in combat. I was not prepared for the impact of leaving those with whom I had developed strong bonds created in combat and the build-ups that preceded the deployment. It made no sense to me. I maintained contact with the unit through emails, letters, and care packages because I realized how difficult life in the desert could be. • Those who are not ready for promotion simply take direction and seem content just doing their job. This group builds strong bonds with other Soldiers, which makes their Army experience fulfilling. They are satisfied being part of the team, but do not want to lead the team.
Opportunities	• I believed in myself and worked to fix what was broken. I adopted deep breathing for self-regulation. It calmed me down and sharpened my focus. I paced my presentation and responses, which resulted in a more composed posture; and, had a peer help me prepare my uniform. • My Platoon Sergeant and Tank Commander knew I was ready. I had checked all the boxes that the system required. More importantly to my leaders however was that I had demonstrated tactical proficiency as well as leadership skills. My counselling statements showed a positive trend in my development. I was learning from my mistakes and practiced thinking.

Survey Results

All analyses below, which highlight two key outcomes (leader identity transition and the desire to lead), include all participants—Specialist through Command Sergeant Major—unless otherwise noted and control for relevant trait-level variables that could be confounds (e.g., pre-promotion desire to lead, age, rank, and prior leadership experience). All significant findings remain significant when analyses are restricted to junior NCOs (i.e. E4 to E6).

Leader identity transition. There was a statistically significant linear relationship such that increasing rank among junior NCOs was associated with greater transition to a leader identity, $F(1,81) = 4.22$, $p = .04$. Beyond rank, several factors were significantly related to greater transition to a leader identity: desiring feedback ($r = .44$, $p < .001$), self-confidence ($r = .27$, $p = .009$), decision-making autonomy ($r = .30$, $p = .009$), and opportunities for learning ($r = .32$, $p = .002$). Knowing what the Army expects of its leaders predicted leader identity transition for NCOs who believe that leadership can be learned (Knowledge of Army Expectations × Growth vs. Fixed Mindset interaction: $\beta = .42$, $p < .001$). Knowledge of the Army's expectations of its leaders positively predicted leader identity transition among NCOs who viewed leadership as relatively learnable (1 SD above mean: $\beta = .76$, $p < .001$) compared to NCOs who viewed leadership as relatively more fixed (1 SD below mean: $\beta = -.11$, $p = .40$). In short, the NCOs who were most likely to identify as a leader were those who believed (before being promoted) that leadership was learnable and reported knowing what the Army expects of its leaders.

Desire to lead. Two factors—leader identity transition and knowing what the Army expects of its leaders—helped explain why decision-making autonomy and feedback were important for shaping the desire to lead. Specifically, the relationship between receiving feedback and change in the desire to lead was mediated by leader identity transition (indirect effect: $\beta = .11$, $SE = .06$, 95% CI: [.02, .25]). Likewise, the relationship between decision-making autonomy and change in the desire to lead was mediated by knowing what the Army expects of its leaders (indirect effect: $\beta = .16$, $SE = .08$, 95% CI: [.03, .35]). That is, having decision-making autonomy increased the NCOs' desire to lead because it increased their sense that they know what the Army expects of its leaders.

Finally, decision-making autonomy mattered disproportionately for NCOs who reported a relatively low desire to lead before they were first promoted (Pre-promotion Desire to Lead × Decision-Making Authority interaction: $\beta = -.25$, $p < .001$). For those high in pre-promotion desire to lead (1 SD above the mean), decision-making autonomy was not a significant predictor of current desire to lead ($\beta = .11$, $p = .36$). For those low in prior desire to lead (1 SD below the mean), decision-making autonomy was a strong positive predictor of current desire to lead ($\beta = .53$, $p < .001$).

DISCUSSION

The results suggest that many prospective and junior NCOs face three key challenges: (1) being promoted before they acquired the necessary maturity and skills for leading others, (2) identifying positive role models, and (3) lacking a motivation to lead. First, Soldiers struggled with being promoted before they believed they were ready; some Soldiers

believed they are promoted based on their time in service rather than their readiness to lead. Nevertheless, junior enlisted leaders reported that they ultimately acquired the necessary skills and self-development aspects as they performed the required leadership duties. Second, many junior NCOs were looking for role models but instead found many leaders who did not want to lead or had not acquired or comprehended the training to lead effectively. Third, many Soldiers simply lacked a motivation to lead. In some cases, they joined the Army to escape a family situation or to qualify for educational benefits; few joined with the goal of becoming a leader. Moreover, the Soldiers who developed a desire to lead after their initial experiences in the Army were not afforded the opportunity and felt discouraged because superiors micromanaged and placed constraints on them.

The results suggest that certain factors may accelerate and ease the transition process for many NCOs. Specifically, giving junior NCOs clear and frequent feedback could ease the transition by helping the NCO develop their identity as a leader and bolstering their desire to lead. Likewise, providing clear guidance about what the Army expects of its leaders could be particularly helpful, especially for the NCO's motivation to lead. An NCO who is uncertain about the Army's expectations may quickly lose their motivation to be a leader in the Army. In addition, the results suggest that it may help to give junior NCOs some autonomy and latitude in their leadership decision-making. In other words, ensuring that junior NCOs are not just a conduit, passing information from their leaders to their team members and focused on transactions, but also becoming a more transformational leader who communicates clearly and motivates the team. Such autonomy may be critical for maintaining and bolstering their desire to lead.

Recommendations

The methods we recommend to support the growth of individuals into leadership roles fall in line with those which are understood fairly well at this point: (a) provide formative experiences, preferably phased to allow for interim growth and lessen the chances for the prospective leader to be overwhelmed, (b) provide feedback on performance as the new leader navigates the challenges of their new role so that they can learn from those experiences and grow as a leader, and (c) empower new leaders to make decisions and respect their authority and responsibility to do so.

The challenge is to infuse these developmental processes into a system in which leaders at all levels have time constraints and demands on their and their Soldiers' time. In some ways, this approach to NCO transition requires a shift to an older paradigm, in which these developmental experiences and interactions are given greater priority. The challenges of garrison life are much more diverse and often more subtle than those in combat. With the shift back to a more home station centric approach, many Army leaders are having to adopt a new type of leadership. Innovative use of technology in leader development processes may provide an avenue to reach the digital native Soldiers of today where they are, while still allowing the Army to reinstall the best parts of previous developmental processes for junior leaders.

Junior NCOs face many challenges as they transition to a leader role. Fortunately, the results suggest that several important factors that predict better outcomes (greater transition to leader identity, greater desire to lead) are ostensibly within the control of Army leadership. These include providing feedback/mentorship, clarifying expectations, and reaffirming junior NCOs decision-making autonomy.

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