

Mike Green  
James Barnett  
Rick Smith  
Cohort 2

## **COMMON ORGANIZATIONAL TRAINING (COT)**

Part One - Thesis: Common Organizational Training (COT) is necessary to build a cohesive, motivated and effective organization. It begins with basic orientation and common skills and progresses through advanced development applications, resulting in comprehensive positive outcomes towards the organization's mission, vision and strategy.

Discussion:

(1) What is "Common Organizational Training" or "COT?" A comprehensive learning and development program that provides training as well as professional development opportunities oriented towards common knowledge, skills, compliance and organizational values necessary for each employee to grow within the organization, contribute to the organization's mission and succeed on an individual level. As employees grow and succeed so does the organization, particularly when organizational values, ethics, vision and strategy are interlinked within the scope of a common training program.

(2) Training starts with a common focus within the organization. Employees do not necessarily share common values, a common understanding of the organization and its purpose, or the specific value each of them brings to the organization as it relates to that purpose. Most would agree that diversity on many levels within an organization is good - in fact, has the potential to provide great strength to an organization through the assimilation of multiple skills, experiences, perspectives, etc. However, all of these influences must align with the organizations vision in order for diversity to add strength. In this paper, many of the concepts and examples are drawn from a military model. Organizations like the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity (MCIA), the Service Level Intelligence Center for the Marine Corps, bring all forms of people, skills, knowledge and experience together - with the institutional goal of building a diverse and multi-talented, highly skilled and capable "team". This has to be

completed at multiple echelons, in order to accomplish its collective responsibilities in an effective and efficient manner.

(3) Approach: "continuous" - the concept of COT must be continuous - just like Ka-Bar stresses "life-long learning," COT must be something that regularly occurs throughout the employee's career. Taking an example from Marine Corps leadership training, both officers and enlisted Marines are required to attend leadership/organizational training at various phases throughout their careers. The Marine Corps places so much emphasis on Professional Military Education that Marines who do not complete that which is considered essential for career progression are not considered eligible for promotion. An MCIA-level COT should consider a similar policy; Ka-Bar, for example, could be a pre-requisite for advancement to GG13 and above. COT must be continuous across the year, across all parts of the organization, and focus on different stages of the employee's career. Furthermore, it should develop with the organization, so as its goals, responsibilities, methodologies evolve, so does the employee's individual and collective understanding of his/her relevance also evolve with the organization.

(4) What is the value of COT? The term "COT" provides a clear perception of something that is both common and continuous and that integrates the values, culture, purpose, vision and strategy of the organization. A COT program is value added within an organization by virtue of the fact that training and learning facilitates a continuous common experience that stresses organizational values, ethics and desired leadership and management principles. These lessons reinforce the value of the individual employee in relation to mission accomplishment and provide organizational sponsored or supported opportunities for individual development beyond the immediate duties and responsibilities of the employee.

(5) Goals of COT: orient, integrate and build a common focus, common culture and achieve a sense of individual and collective value added. Formal training programs such as Onboarding, Community of Interest (COI) and Ka-Bar have been established to meet the training needs of personnel but have been developed separately. Other training requirements such as annual compliance training, Individual Development Plans (IDP), and less formal sub-organizational training programs related to specific technical skills have been established and are managed by separate sections. This paper seeks to identify the need to align all formal

requirements with the command's mission and at the same time instill a sense of belonging and contributing, all the while developing professionally in a manner consistent with the command's vision and strategy. By providing common basic, intermediate and advanced training and developmental opportunities linked to organizational vision and strategy, each employee shares a common experience, thus creating bonds with each other and the organization. It enhances individual and collective understanding and support for organizational values, vision and strategy, thereby focusing the collective energy of the workforce on the common goals of the organization.

Part Two - COT defined. COT consists of multiple activities across the spectrum of an employee's career. A baseline COT program at MCIA should consist of:

(1) Onboarding. The process for introducing new personnel to MCIA and providing common basic knowledge and skills, coupled with an appreciation for the organization's mission, vision, strategy and culture.

Discussion: This is the forum where the organization is introduced. Its purpose, goals, vision and strategy are explained, along with its history and traditions. Critical policies, practices and compliance issues are also accomplished. If done properly, the initial phase should provide all new employees with a sense of the organization's purpose, vision and their individual roles aligned to those things. It will also instill a sense of understanding and purpose behind various policies and compliance in order to promote desired organizational behavior and practices. Additionally, this is the venue where common basic "skills" are introduced such as the command's use of the Defense Travel System (DTS), the time keeping system, and other routine applications for which all new employees must have some level of initial competence and understanding. Beyond simply familiarizing new employees with basic compliance and internal applications use, an effort should be made to underscore "why". Why are compliance topics important in the organization? Why is the use of designated common applications necessary? People are more prone to accepting that which they have been made to understand and have had topics put in the appropriate perspective to enable a desired level of understanding.

(2) Sub-element common training (unique to specific sections within MCIA). Within each subordinate command or directorate, training programs designed to provide technical or area-specific skills unique to that particular element of MCIA.

Discussion: Examples exist within MCIA that clearly show sub-organizations (MSCs, divisions, etc.) whose personnel have a common form of mission/skill-specific training tend to be more aligned in their activities and to the organization's goals than those who don't. They use common skills, are knowledgeable of the policies which govern their activities and work and employ like methods in accomplishing their tasks - the latter being important as it relates to collaboration within their groups, or elsewhere within the U.S. Intelligence Community or the Marine Corps/Department of the Navy. Programs such as this can be both formal and informal, or a combination of both over time. The benefit of such programs are to familiarize new personnel with successful methods and practices within the organization, as well as provide an understanding of why various things are done in a particular manner.

(3) Compliance training. The introduction to or reinforcement of the values, policies, behaviors, and ethics that are expected of all federal government employees.

Discussion: Many organizations spend a great deal of time and money ensuring "compliance" training is accomplished. They focus on this far more than instilling a sense of commonality and culture, or cultivating individual worth, or for that matter, explaining in practical terms why compliance training is necessary or how it relates to the effectiveness of the organization. Compliance training, while important to educate employees on appropriate policy and associated professional behavior, can in many cases, be accomplished virtually, vice "personally." Some routine initial and annual compliance requirements can be accommodated effectively and efficiently via Computer Based Training methods that are validated and accepted within the scope of the organization's hierarchy. The foregoing can save time for both the organization and employee, yet accomplish the training objective. Critical compliance issues - those areas where the organization desires to emphasize specific behavior and deeper understanding, should be done "personally" - that is, provide formal instruction that allows for personal interaction and deeper involvement of individuals on the topic. Some examples may include:

- Security (particularly when dealing with an intelligence organization where proper security practices are essential to maintaining productivity, efficiency, and trust as it relates to the national security).

- Managing conflict in the workplace (important from the perspective of EEO compliance as well as instilling desired behavior among both employees and supervisors when there is conflict, as well as how to avoid or mitigate friction points).

(4) Community of Interest (COI) activities. The reinforcement of the mission, vision, strategy and values of Marine Corps intelligence. A "celebration" of organizational culture and values, and recognition of key accomplishments and communication of the road ahead.

Discussion: The purpose of COI should be a continuous reinforcement of organizational purpose, vision, strategy - why we are here doing what we do and the impact we intend to achieve, as well as how we, working together, will actually achieve our organizational goals. Should this not be an annual venue to reinforce MCIA's role, Marine Corps intel's vision, purpose and where we're going and why? What does each of us bring to all of that? COI needs to be a "here's why you should feel good about being with MCIA" session - it should highlight and celebrate MCIA's and Marine Corps intel's achievements and successes. COI should also be the venue for annual awards as a means of reinforcing what we do is good and necessary, as well as communicating future issues.

(5) Ka-Bar. Advanced leadership and developmental training and experience designed to acculturate employees with the values, attitudes, behaviors and understanding of principles unique to MCIA and/or Marine Corps intelligence.

Discussion: Intended to teach and promote desired leadership practices, to include desired moral/ethical behavior, collaboration, and trust and confidence among all employee levels. The focus is good leadership/managerial practices, with the intended outcome of instilling these things through a common experience and promotion of self-reflection and lifelong learning. This should be seen as an advanced form of COT and should be open to all employees regardless of grade. Each Ka-Bar Cohort should include at least one mid-level (GG14) and one senior (GG15) manager/leader in order to (a) ensure MCIA's mid level and senior civilian personnel undergo the same training as those they lead (set the example,

reinforce command support for the program), (b) benefit from the training itself, as it is oriented towards best practices, and (c) provide input from mid to senior level experience and knowledge within the context of the Cohort.

(6) Individual Development Plans (IDP). A employee training and development plan that has been established to further all aspects of an individual's professional development. As a component of COT, it should address (collectively and comprehensively) all aspects of technical and developmental training necessary to be successful within MCIA and/or Marine Corps intelligence.

Discussion: The IDP is just as important within the larger context of COT as any other component. Right now its "do whatever you want as long as your supervisor says it's OK." There needs to be more direction on this - identify the goal, purpose and methodology of IDP. Identify that is serves both individual skill development as well as intended to develop professionally in a manner that also supports the organization's values, vision, strategy and mission. In other words, an IDP should be mapped to those organizational issues listed herein, while at the same time providing enhanced training for the employee within their skill set or as it relates to leadership, management, or life-long learning.

(7) Developmental Outcome Program (DOP). A program that seeks to harness the collective knowledge, skills and abilities of every employee by promoting informal initiative, collaboration and innovation focused on furthering MCIA's and/or Marine Corps intelligence goals, missions and outcomes.

Discussion. The purpose or "end state" of any form of training is to enable an outcome; skills, behavior or knowledge that is intended to be applied towards the mission of the organization. Some applications are obvious and straight forward. Learning new computer skills (for example software, hardware, web-based applications) allow an employee to perform specific functions. Leadership training results in the application of desired behaviors in directing the activities of personnel within an organization. The company Google provides an interesting example of taking training of all forms to another level with resulting outcomes that are both innovative and functionally effective as it relates to developing new products, processes and markets available to the company. Google employees are encouraged to form

"off-line" groups; unofficial teams of employees who are allowed up to an hour each day to work on initiatives of their own choosing. While there are some perimeters, such as the initiatives must be within the scope of the company's "mission" - employees are allowed to use company resources. This example is beyond the scope of "training" - organizational or individual - but considered relevant within the scope of COT in that the Google example provides a developmental outcome beyond traditional expectations (should the purpose of training ultimately not be to maximize outcome or potential?). Employees at any and all levels across the company are provided time and resources to apply training and knowledge to innovate and develop - "produce outcomes" of potential value to the company. Once employee teams develop a model, it is presented to the appropriate leadership for evaluation and decision. Instituting a similar program within MCIA could easily lead to a series of positive outcomes to further not only the mission of the organization, but also favorably impact Marine Corps intelligence. This last element of COT is the ultimate "outcome" - in that rather than all actions which personnel are trained to do being driven from the top down against defined objectives, it also allows every employee to work "off-line" on initiatives that may ultimately benefit the organization's mission. Again, there should be defined perimeters, as well as an approval process once a basic idea is developed prior to allowing the use of additional resources, however, such an approach to developmental outcome does not formally exist elsewhere within the IC, and could easily be adopted using Ka-Bar cohorts as the basic model. Likewise, the concept of developmental outcome could leverage former Ka-Bar cohorts to take on topics that are considered important by Marine Corps intelligence and develop models for implementation. Again, the end state or outcome is to harness the benefit of COT and other results from training and development in a "free style" manner focused on innovation, development and refinement of issues that further organizational objectives.

Part Three - COT implementation and management. To effectively implement COT, the seven elements above must be integrated, managed and tracked so that collectively and comprehensively, the investment over time produces both the desired outcome in common

organizational development as well as a culture of initiative, collaboration and innovation.

Management of COT would consist of:

(1) Command Training Board. A body within MCIA that meets at designated intervals with the purpose of continuously evaluating the components of COT, its effectiveness, as well as provides recommendations to the command leadership for refining the program. An organizational-level body responsible for determining subjects, content, process, priority and schedule of the overall program. This body should consist of senior leadership from the various organizational components affected or intended to benefit from COT. At MCIA this could be the deputies from all the various major command components (PAC, CI, CE and its major sub-elements such as Security, ISD, RMD, HC, etc). It would be chaired by the Command Deputy. Assignment to this body (Command Training Board - CTB), would be directed by the CO or Command Deputy, and would become a collateral duty of those assigned to participate. The CTB should meet at least quarterly for the purpose of identifying, prioritizing and deciding upon the annual COT composition, as well as review/monitor progress and recommend adjustments to the program as necessary.

(2) Training Officer. A designated, full-time official who was responsible for day-to-day management of training requirements and issues, as well as maintaining employee training records and implementing any training decisions by the command leadership. This person is responsible for actionable COT issues, such as preparing and coordinating an annual schedule for COT, assignment of instructors, arranging logistics (locations, media, materials), establishing class rosters, maintaining training records, etc. The Training Officer will also be a member of the organizational level body, and is also responsible for identifying budgetary requirements necessary to support training. The Training Officer publishes the annual training plan agreed to by the organizational body and approved by the senior organizational official.

(3) Employee Advisory Board (EAB) and individual employee feedback. Within the existing construct of the EAB, it could be used as a venue to report on various training issues, providing input to the COT Training Board and Training Officer. Likewise with feedback from individual employees, all employees should be required to complete a survey subsequent to



participation in any form of COT. The results should be managed and analyzed by the Training Officer and provided to the COT Training Board.

(4) Promulgation of the COT Program. The command should publish a policy or other document that describes the program, its goals and methodologies; how it is managed and assessed, along with descriptions of all the various components. Marine Corps University (for example) publishes a document entitled *The Marine Corps Officer Professional Military Education Continuum*. Within this document are the formal service policies on Professional Military Education (PME) requirements by grade, as well as several other professional development opportunities such as Joint Service and international programs, regional and cultural studies programs, and communications studies programs. MCIA has a number of opportunities that are similar to those identified in the cited Marine Corps University publication, however, these opportunities are not identified in a single MCIA publication, nor are any of those opportunities mapped to specific career or organizational milestones, nor part of an integrated common organizational development program such as COT.

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