# CHANGING CULTURE

Moving from Metrics to Readiness

"Whatever we learn to do, we learn by actually doing it." **-Aristotle**

Company commanders are reporting that they spend one or two nights a week briefing metrics to a higher headquarters. Besides the fact that most U.S. Army Reserve (USAR) metrics don't change at that rate, (and they generally don't even change monthly), our best leaders never rank subordinates based solely on their metrics. This hyper-focus on achieving all green metrics is distracting from what really matters: recruiting, developing, and retaining cohesive teams and units that are highly trained, disciplined, and fit to accomplish their wartime mission.

So why do many USAR leaders obsess on metrics and how do we shift to a more meaningful assessment of readiness? The first part is simple. For some, metrics are the easy button: they are quantitative and make for easy rank ordering. Also, our information technology systems enable staffs to generate spreadsheets and multi-color "stoplight" charts based on whether a unit has exceeded, met, or fallen below "the standard" established by a higher headquarters.

These many metrics, though, don't tell what is happening inside our units. Lower echelon commanders need to be able to tell their story.
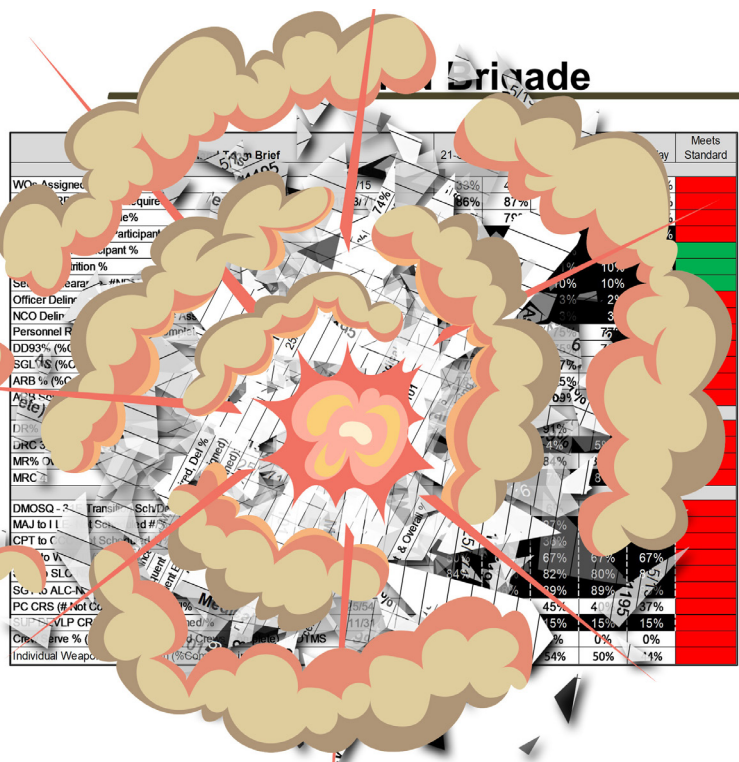
Context matters. Having context and knowing how measures interact provides focus on where and when help is needed.

Lower echelon leaders need to be able to focus on **achieving** readiness. Higher headquarters need to focus on **enabling** subordinates' training.

To do this, leaders need to stop monitoring metrics every week. Instead, they need to adopt a flexible framework for understanding the readiness of their unit. As an additional benefit, this will reduce the resulting workload.

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ASSESSING READINESS
C+P+S+R+T+TIME+$

P–Personnel	S–Equip on Hand	R–Supply/Maintenance	T–Training	Time	$–Money
- On Hand - Welcome - Technical - Professional - Time in position - Medical - Physical - Family - Spiritual - Financial	- Divestiture progress - Conduct of sensitive item inventories - Org Clothing & Indiv Equip issuance	- Opnl Readiness rate - Usage rate	- Mission Essential Tasks	- Training or Admin - Training calendar/ schedule changes & by whom - Timeliness of orders	- Spend plan accuracy

C–Culture
- Command Climate
- Cohesive Teams
- Participation
- Retention

WHAT AND HOW TO ASSESS READINESS?

Let's start with the familiar P + S + R + T = C construct used for the Commander's Unit Status Report (CUSR). This is a combination of a unit's Personnel rating, equipment and Supply on hand rating, available equipment Readiness rating, and collective Training proficiency. The C merges these four items and includes the Commander's judgement. These ratings inform the higher headquarters of an overall picture. However, there is much relevant information not included in the CUSR that can help the leader prioritize resources.

This framework takes a twist on the CUSR formula, by moving C to the front of the equation, altering the standard definition of each rating area, and adding in two other factors. The proposal is: C + P + S + R + T + Time + $, roughly equating to Readiness. (Yes, there is irony in using an equation when arguing against using too many metrics.) (Pictured above)

C–CULTURE: DRIVE BEHAVIOR TO BUILD COHESIVE TEAMS

The proposed framework redefines C as Culture. Note that it is shown beneath all the other factors. This is because Culture is foundational. It is the underlying values and behaviors that hold everything together. It is also the hardest to definitively measure, but is critical to understanding the strengths, weaknesses, and implications of the other factors.

The leader and the leadership team set the tone for the unit.[1] While not perfect, command climate surveys, conducted at reasonable intervals, give good indications of whether leaders have succeeded or failed in setting the right tone for all members of the unit. Leaders need to build action plans based on what they learn from their survey. Sharing the results lets the team know their voice is being heard.

A major factor contributing to unit climate is the unit's ability to build *cohesive teams*. According to SMA Michael Grinston, "Building a cohesive team is critical to mission readiness."[2] In fact, the Army is considering adding "Build Cohesive Teams" as a "Mission Essential Condition" across the Total Force. If approved, it will be similar to a Mission Essential Task (discussed under Training) and a part of CUSR.

When a unit has a positive command climate and cohesive teams, it will naturally result in a high satisfaction rate. While the USAR doesn't directly measure "satisfaction," *participation* and *retention* rates are reasonable proxies. The more interesting, worthwhile, and meaningful the

service experience is, the more likely the Soldier will continue to serve and to lead. Soldiers will show up and be committed to the unit, its leaders, and its mission when they know that their leaders care.

Many look at low attrition within a unit as a measure of success. However, there should be a normal, healthy level of attrition as Soldiers move to a new unit for job opportunities, to promote, or to retire. If the level gets to be too low, it could be an indication of stagnation (or a pending deployment). Too high could be an indication of a bad command climate (or many Soldiers rotating at the same time). Leaders should know which scenario is happening inside their unit.

P–PERSONNEL: PRIORITIZE OUR MOST IMPORTANT RESOURCE

Under the CUSR, P, or Personnel, is defined as: the percentage of available personnel (using the required strength), the percentage of available personnel who are considered qualified in their duty position, and the percentage of senior grade personnel. While all useful metrics, they don't completely tell the story of the readiness of the personnel in the unit.

As a baseline measure, we typically look at how the unit is doing against its authorized strength. Does it have the people it needs? Does it have an excess of people? The number "on hand" is a gross indicator of whether there are sufficient personnel. It does not describe whether they are the right people: those at appropriate ranks who are trained and proficient in the specialties each is slated to execute in times of need.

An excellent way to increase the On Hand number is to **welcome** new members to the unit. This goes beyond the traditional

"Sponsorship" that many treat as a "check the block" task.

For new unit members it matters whether they believe that the unit is excited about having them and their family join the team, or if they feel they are a burden for someone who just has to get them through the Sponsorship process. Everyone wants to feel like they are wanted. They want to feel like they are a valued member of the team. If the unit never reaches out to a joining Soldier or simply sends them a battle assembly schedule with a street address, this can have a lasting negative impact.

Yes, onboarding every new Soldier requires effort. However, investing the time and effort to welcome and integrate them will ease the burden down the road when you don't have to do two jobs because both positions are filled. It may also increase the retention rate, leading to greater expertise in the unit and across the USAR.

We typically measure units based on the percentage of Soldiers who get assigned a Sponsor. A far more insightful measurement would be the satisfaction rate of the onboarding process given by the joining Soldiers after a few months with the unit.

Once Soldiers have been welcomed, the next Personnel factor is whether the Soldiers are **technically proficient** in the skills needed for their positions. Getting

Soldiers into their required schools and then giving them the opportunity to regularly practice those skills will build Soldier confidence and expertise. It also improves their perceived value of the time spent with the unit and their desire to continue to serve.

Additionally, every Soldier needs to **professionally develop**. This means acquiring and refining leadership skills, attending schooling, and tackling positions of increased responsibility.

Professional proficiency is independent of technical proficiency. Being a good leader or staff member doesn't depend on technical specialty skills; it depends on proficiency in leading, being a good team member, understanding and employing doctrine and organizational skills. These skills include team building, collaboration, coordination, building staff products, communicating effectively, facilitating a group discussion, etc.

As leaders assess their Soldiers' technical and professional proficiency, they should consider each Soldier's length of **time in position**. As time in position grows, so too should expertise. It may seem obvious, but a leader's expectations of a new person should be much lower than that of someone who has been in position for multiple years.

Soldiers who remain in place for many years are likely stagnating and blocking the position for others seeking upward mobility or a broadening experience. However, to have a continuously improving organization, commanders can sign a local policy that limits the amount of time spent in the same position.

There is no best duration for time in position, but this information helps the leader determine the focus for the unit and for each Soldier. If a unit has many new members with limited experience, the leader will need to set a different set of goals and expectations on training than a unit that has a more seasoned set of personnel.

Leaders also need to monitor *medical readiness* and *physical fitness*. Medical readiness includes behavioral health, dental health, sleep health, physical health, cognitive health, etc. Physical fitness includes exercise that grows muscular strength and endurance, power, agility, speed, aerobic capacity, coordination, flexibility, reaction time.[3]

To assess medical readiness, most leaders default to completion of an annual Periodic Health Assessment (PHA). The PHA is a rough proxy for medical readiness, as it does not assess sleep, nutritional, or spiritual readiness, the other domains in Health and Holistic Fitness.[4] For physical readiness, there is a standard test, but it does not include all the characteristics of physical fitness. Leaders should only use this standard test as a snapshot of Soldiers' physical fitness. The individual's scores contribute to a determination of whether each is deployable. The leader's goal is to maximize the number of
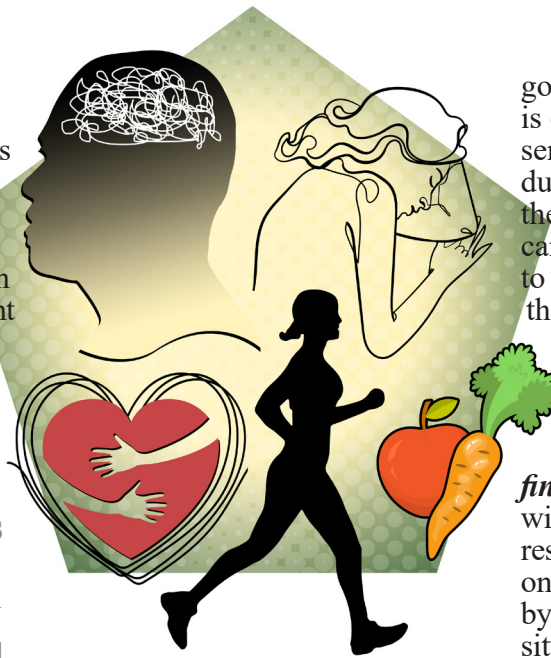
deployable versus non-deployable Soldiers in their unit.

Another Personnel factor is *Spiritual fitness* – the personal qualities needed to sustain a person in times of stress, hardship, and tragedy.[5] Spiritual fitness isn't measured or formally tracked. It's an intangible measure. The closest measure is whether each Soldier participates in a series of Resilience classes. These sessions help build life skills for coping with adversity to enable recovery as challenges arise. Measuring attendance is a weak proxy for whether the Soldiers learned the skills and their resilience increased. However, leaders should listen to the interactions during and after these sessions to gain a true sense of their Soldiers' coping skills. Lack of Soldier engagement may indicate a need for direct leader interaction.

Some resilience can derive from *Family support*. This support

goes two ways: a) if the family is comfortable with the Soldier's service, they can lend support during difficult times, and b) if the family is in need, the unit can provide access to resources to build/help the resilience of the family. There is a saying:

Soldiers enlist, but families reenlist.

Regardless of family status, each Soldier has a level of *financial stability*. This level will affect the Soldier's stress, resilience, etc. Unit leaders can only assess financial stability by knowing each Soldier's situation. For those Soldiers who have debt or are unemployed, underemployed, or seeking a career change, leaders can help provide links to a multitude of resources to assist the Soldier. There are also resources available to assist family members with education, career / job seeking, internship, and mentorship opportunities.
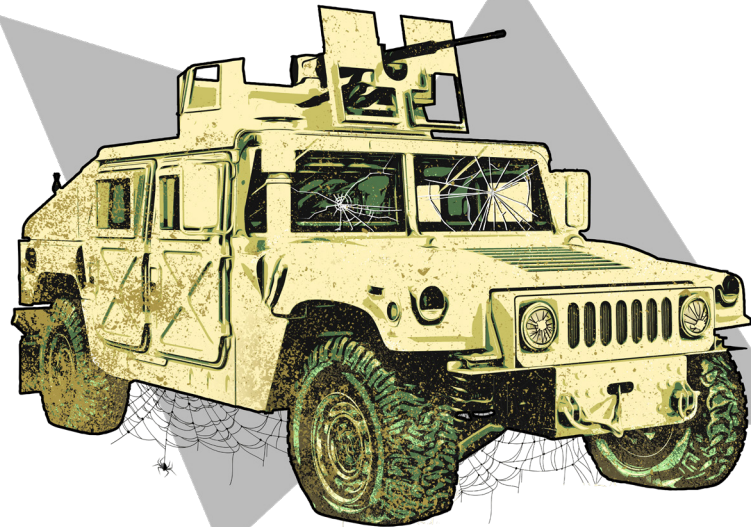
S—EQUIPMENT ON HAND: MONITOR YOUR INVENTORIES

For the purpose of CUSR, having critical equipment ("pacing" items) on hand determines the S rating. The largest constraint on the S value is a matter of DoD funding for new equipment and priority from DA when fielding. Unit leaders don't have much influence over these decisions.

What unit leaders can affect is timely supply transactions to improve their units. Swift execution of directed lateral transfers and timely divestiture of obsolete equipment gives the unit a more optimal set of equipment supply on hand. These actions help to reduce the local maintenance and inventory burden, not to mention freeing up space.

An important, related Equipment factor is the timely, consistent, and accurate conduct of sensitive item inventories. For some units this is a challenge due to the minimal personnel able to conduct the inventories and/or the small amount of unit sensitive items. This means that leaders need to establish relationships with other units to ensure these critical inventories take place.

Another readiness factor in this area is the timely procurement and issuance of Organizational Clothing & Individual Equipment (OCIE) to unit Soldiers. This is mission critical gear that each Soldier needs to have and properly maintain. If the unit hasn't ordered OCIE, or it is sitting in a supply room, it does the Soldier no good when they go out on a mission. Leaders need to build in time for "pre-combat inspections" prior to and after events to ensure all Soldiers have serviceable gear.

R—SUPPLY/MAINTENANCE: USE AND MAINTAIN YOUR EQUIPMENT

R represents equipment readiness / serviceability in CUSR ratings. Defined as the amount of time the unit's pacing items are available for missions over the past time period, this rating does not include all of the unit's equipment. The readiness rating will be incomplete for those units where the set of pacing items does not include equipment necessary for successful mission execution.

The obvious factor of Operational Readiness rate (OR) is typically the default when assessing a unit's R rate. Operational readiness is defined as the percentage of time during the previous time period that each piece of equipment was at a mission capable level. This is a great assessment of readiness, but not if used in isolation.

Equally important as context for OR is the Usage rate. If the equipment isn't being used, then the OR should be quite high. If the unit is training on the equipment, then there is a natural tendency for repairs to be needed and leaders should expect a drop in the OR rate. The higher the level of use, the greater the expectation of lower OR rates. This drop in OR rates should stabilize and then improve as the unit's maintainers become more proficient in their technical skills.

T—TRAINING: PLAN AND EXECUTE CREATIVE, MISSION-RELEVANT TRAINING

The percentage of the unit's Mission Essential Tasks (METs) that they can perform to standard drives the T rating within the CUSR construct. There are additional factors of required training days, squad/ crew/ team member manning levels, weapons qualification status, etc. that contribute to the METs assessment made by the commander. This assessment needs to be honest so that higher echelon units can assist with acquiring training resources.

Gaining and maintaining proficiency in METs ensures that a unit is ready to go to war. Adequately measuring that proficiency is challenging. The
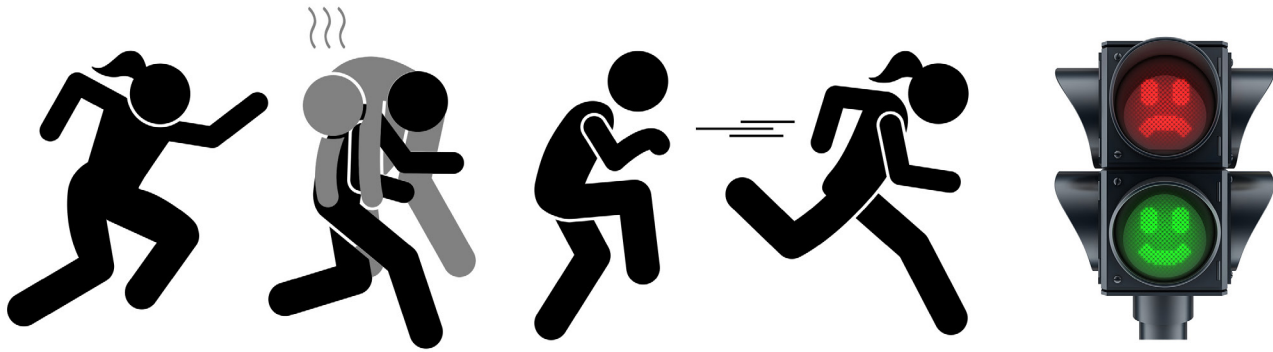
unit leader's goal should be to put the unit on a path of continuous improvement in METs.

To improve METs proficiency, unit leaders need to understand and execute good training management. Training proficiency isn't just about the amount of time spent in the field or doing one's technical job. It includes all of those activities undertaken to ensure that the training safely achieves maximal benefit. Good training management includes planning, risk assessment, issuing orders, rehearsals, after action reviews, post training maintenance, etc. Proficiency in these tasks can influence training effectiveness.

Be creative with Battle Assembly training. Pulse your Soldiers for their ideas and let them plan, execute, and lead the training. This has the bonus that they are now invested in the outcome. Recent creative examples include:

• Land navigation where parts of a Santa suit are located at the various points. The team with the most items is declared the winner.

• Conducting motor stables, driving the vehicles a short distance to a park, having a discussion on a Foundational Readiness topic, and then returning.

• Squid Game PT where any "dead" participant has to be buddy carried. (Top illustration)

• Conduct a competition to correctly erect a tent in the

quickest time while tying pairs of Soldiers' legs together to promote coordination and teamwork. An alternate version could be to permit only the leader to give verbal instructions, or having a time limit to encourage planning ahead of mission execution.

TIME: OPTIMIZE THIS LIMITED RESOURCE

How much training time is depicted on your unit's training schedule? A good Battle Assembly allocates the bulk of the time to functional and professional training, gives some time to cover high-priority administrative tasks, and leaves a sufficient buffer for emergent requirements. A leader's challenge is to find the right mix while also assessing risk. Be careful, administrative tasks will fill in all available time if you let them. (Bottom illustration)

Given the amount of mandatory training and administrative tasks required by a unit's higher headquarters, a leader has to clearly understand the priorities of the higher headquarters. Typically, leaders make a "contract" with higher regarding what the unit can and cannot accomplish and for

which mandatory tasks the higher headquarters will assume risk. For USAR units this normally happens during a Yearly Training Brief.

After agreeing to an annual plan, leaders should monitor how often the training calendar/ schedule changes, and why. There is much to be learned by how unstable the calendar and schedule are, and whether these are internally or externally imposed changes. If your higher headquarters is sending too many requirements for you to achieve, there needs to be a conversation about priorities. Leaders need to tell their boss what cannot get done if they spend time on whatever emergent requirements just arrived, thereby ensuring the prioritization matches Commander's Intent.

Higher headquarters leaders have an obligation to know what requirements their staffs are sending out to subordinate staffs. There needs to be an appreciation of how disruptive this/these new tasks will be. Leaders also need to ensure that if the requirement is sent, that it's clear where it fits into existing priorities. Without that clarity it's too easy to incorrectly perceive that the new requirement has the highest priority.

Related, it sometimes happens that the higher-level staff is requesting information that it already has systems access to. In this case, there should be few reasons to request subordinates provide information that is already available. Higher level leaders need to monitor this to enable subordinate units to stick to their training schedules.

Going back to the agreed upon calendar, leaders and subordinates can use it to inform families and employers of their expected time commitments. For predictability and trust, Soldiers need a published calendar and written orders that show the dates they will be attending unit activities. (Top illustration)

Measuring how soon before an order start date each Soldier receives their order can give an indication of the level of risk imposed on the Soldier vice risk to the budget. There are various reasons why an order can't be published until close proximity to the report date, but these should be by exception and upon agreement with the Soldier as to why (a school in "wait" status converts to a reservation, an emergent mission, etc.).

MONEY: FORECAST AND SPEND TO YOUR PLAN

Without sufficient funding, achieving true readiness is almost impossible. Leaders at echelon should understand finance and budgets. Not every command will power down a budget to the lowest level, but those leaders still need to understand the implications and costs (money and time) required to execute the training plan that they propose. Further, that plan must be resource informed and therefore, realistic.

As each leader develops their yearly plan, there should be a corresponding yearlong spend plan. Throughout the year, each leader should be conducting checks to see if spending is on-plan or if there is a variance. When a significant variance is noted, the leader needs to understand why. Are priorities

being followed? Are there impacts or risks to executing the overall training plan? They may need to request additional resources or may be able to return funds to higher.

CONCLUSION

"The Army is its people, and a strong, healthy, resilient, trained force is the most important indicator of our readiness."
-Secretary of the Army Wormuth[6]

This proposed framework, using $C + P + S + R + T + Time + \$$, provides areas and thoughts on how to assess unit readiness. It isn't an exclusive list of factors to consider when assessing the readiness, but it does provide a framework for leaders to assess overall readiness.

Some factors are objective and easily measured and monitored over time. Some may be measured, but the measurement may not directly correlate to a better or a worse value (e.g., length of time in position has no "best" score). The point is to not obsess over metrics, but to understand the dynamics of your unit and set the command climate and priorities for success in achieving your wartime mission.

Lower echelon leaders need the space to know their units. Then they can prioritize their efforts, energy, and limited resources for tough, realistic training.

Higher echelon leaders and staffs need to support subordinates' efforts in accomplishing their training plans. Further, they need to understand the impact and minimize the potential disruption of requirements sent to lower echelon leaders.

For all leaders, your ability to understand and lead your unit through training will ensure our Soldiers and units are truly improving. It will enable their success beyond the stop light chart.

Endnotes:

[1] The Army has codified its thoughts on leadership in Leadership and the Profession (Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-22). It describes a leadership requirements model with core attributes and competencies. When leaders' actions align with these competencies and they demonstrate the Army Values, a positive command climate emerges.

[2] (Twitter 7 Apr 2021).

[3] U.S. Army H2F Operating Concept, 1 Oct 2020, pg 6.

[4] U.S. Army H2F Operating Concept, 1 Oct 2020, pg 3.

[5] Army Regulation 600-63, Army Health Promotion.

[6] Honorable Christine E. Wormuth. "Message from the Secretary of the Army to the Force." February 8, 2022