

7-3-2019

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### Recommended Citation

Kirchner, Michael J. and Akdere, Mesut (2019) "Exploring Inclusion of Leadership Development into New Employee Orientations: A Proposed Approach from Army Leader Development," *Organization Management Journal*: Vol. 16: Iss. 3, Article 3.

Available at: <https://scholarship.shu.edu/omj/vol16/iss3/3>



## Exploring Inclusion of Leadership Development into New Employee Orientations: A Proposed Approach from Army Leader Development

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### ABSTRACT

Regardless of industry, organization leaders recognize the need for a strong leadership pipeline and a culture of sustained leader development, and the U.S. Army is no exception. Beginning in basic training, Army leaders offer soldiers leader development training through various methods, including defining leadership expectations, providing experience-based developmental exercises, and offering self-development opportunities. The early introduction is part of a continuous leader development regimen engrained in military service, and—as a result—military veterans are often credited by employers for their leadership skills. This paper, through exploring Army leader development, proposes a framework for introducing leadership development during new employee orientations based on U.S. Army strategies. Though the proposed framework offers three leader development strategies for inclusion in new employee orientation, barriers exist which may impede successful application, and are discussed. Additionally, the authors identify three propositions and propose future research opportunities for integrating Army leader development in new employee orientations.

### KEYWORDS

Military; leadership development; new employee orientation; training; onboarding

Leadership development (LD) literature is filled with discussions about best practices for developing employee leadership competencies. Whether allocating time for instruction, hiring leadership coaches, or developing real-life applications through experiential learning, practitioners have an abundance of options to choose from (Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014; Development Dimensions International, 2014; Petrie, 2014). The influx of LD approaches is reflective of the value employers have placed in developing organizational leaders. According to company trends in training and development (T&D), LD is one of the top priorities and concerns CEO's have today (Development Dimensions International, 2014). However, limited information is available which specifies who should be participating and when LD should commence. One area of application almost entirely overlooked is the context of LD in new employee orientations.

Whereas LD incurs one of the most substantial investments in the U.S. company training expenditures, incorporating any LD-related training component at the new employee orientation (the first official step into organizational onboarding) rarely occurs, which

contrasts with the U.S. Army's practice of starting this process early in a servicemember's training. The U.S. Army initiates LD at the earliest stages of a service member's career – often starting in basic training. While new enlistees are learning how to be a soldier, the Army also makes an intentional effort to begin developing leadership competencies in its members. Utilizing the U.S. Army's training approach, this paper (a) conceptually explores the utility of incorporating LD in new employee orientation (NEO) programs in civilian organizations, (b) introduces three LD integration strategies widely used in the Army, and (c) proposes LD implications for both research and practice. The goal of this paper is to examine how HR professionals may begin conducting LD at the earliest stages of employee onboarding to enhance leadership pipelines in organizations.

### Background and significance

Although LD was introduced in traditional schooling sometime around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, substantial interest in studying LD did not rise until the 1950s (Worthy, 1955). Particularly, the last two decades have

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witnessed how investments in developing organizational leaders have skyrocketed as companies strive to survive in today's rapidly changing and competitive environment (Day et al., 2014; Gurdjian, Halbeisen, & Lane, 2014; Kim, 2007). These investments stem from employer beliefs that leadership is a key source to competitive advantage (Development Dimensions International, 2014). In fact, while general training and development budgets were slashed in 2009 during the economic downturn, LD-related activities avoided any substantial decreases or cuts. This resulted in a national LD expenditure of about \$14 billion annually by the American companies (Gurdjian et al., 2014).

LD may be less-scrutinized for return on investment than other training initiatives; however, a high likelihood of a net gain exists regardless of the program. Avolio, Avey, and Quisenberry (2010) outlined their formula for return on LD investment and found that even using conservative estimates, organizations offering LD could expect to see returns of 44% to 72% after 1.5 days of training and 50% to 87% after a three-day intervention over the long term. Even accounting for staffing costs, travel expenses, consultants, technology, and other logistics, participants who completed LD training were more than likely to make up for lost time on the job (Avolio et al., 2010). As such, Avolio et al.'s research (2010) offers support for the possible inclusion of LD in new employee orientations. Furthermore, the findings suggest that introducing the concept of LD for new employees as soon as possible could potentially yield to a number of both employee and organizational advantages including job satisfaction, organizational trust, employee loyalty, succession planning, career development, and performance improvement (Avolio et al., 2010). For example, employee turnover remains a significant issue in organizations and causes leading to employee departures may actually begin during early tenure periods, which coincides with new employee orientations. At least 50% of all hourly workers leave their jobs within a few months (Krauss, 2010). Managers are retained slightly longer, though they too begin new jobs every two to four years (Bauer, 2012). In fact, more than 25% of the U.S. workforce turns over each year (Rollag, Parise, & Cross, 2005). As Bauer (2012) highlighted, strategic onboarding of new employees is a critical component of managing a workforce. While employee retention is a significant issue in the workforce, LD appears to be an even higher priority.

Expenses related to LD may also be the outcome of a recognized challenge faced by employers. Phillips, Phillips, and Ray (2012) highlighted employer frustrations related to LD are often the result of patchwork

programs inadequately linked between one another. The result is a rapidly-changing workforce filled with employees who are not developing fast enough (Petrie, 2014). The 2006 survey of HR leaders revealed 'identifying and developing leadership competencies in employees' was the number one issue they faced (Fegley, 2006). Nearly 10 years later, CEO's revealed four of the top 10 human capital challenges directly related to LD (Development Dimensions International, 2014; Mitchell, Ray, & van Ark, 2015). The ongoing shortage of recognized workplace leaders suggests that, although employers have increased expenditures toward developing organizational leaders, more can be done to improve leader competencies (Development Dimensions International, 2014; Phillips, Ray, & Phillips, 2016).

As Avolio, Reichard, Hannah, Walumbwa, and Chan (2009) noted leadership theories have been around for more than a century, though theories and research related to LD are substantially more limited (Day et al., 2014). Still, research on LD has contributed toward a plethora of approaches aimed at improving leader competencies (Archichvili & Manderscheid, 2008; Day et al., 2014). More recent approaches include job shadowing, action learning, executive coaching, mentoring, and 360-degree feedback (Petrie, 2014). However, the long-term impact of LD is periodically questioned and calls for innovative LD strategies are frequent (Petrie, 2014). Researchers and practitioners can benefit from scrutinizing the methods used across all organizations – particularly industries and environments that are already recognized for their ability to develop effective leaders.

Perhaps surprisingly, the large amount of funding allocated toward LD aligns well with employees' interest in LD. In fact, Development Dimensions International (2014) found employees are interested in increasing the time spent on LD from an average of 5.4 h to just over 8 h per month. This more than 50% increase suggests current time designated for LD is perceived to be insufficient for both the employer and employee. Considering the increased interest in LD opportunities, employees may also be open to beginning LD early in their jobs. In this context, exploration of the U.S. Army's leader development practices may offer innovative methods for non-military organizations.

Although this paper focuses on the Army, all of the U.S. armed forces have recently been credited for their ability to successfully develop leadership competencies in its members (Kirchner, 2018; Crissman, 2013; Monster, 2016; Wenger et al., 2017). Throughout a service member's enlistment, the U.S. Army provides LD training and professional education opportunities that contribute

toward their ability to lead (LaMoe & Strickler, 2012). In fact, LD begins early in a service member's career – as early as basic training (Kirchner & Akdere, 2017; LaMoe & Strickler, 2012), with the expectation that leaders create a culture and climate that promotes the care for and continuous development of subordinates while maximizing their performance (Department of the Army, 2012). By introducing LD early in a servicemembers' career, the Army begins prescribing its culture and corresponding expectations of its soldiers. A review of the U.S. Army's LD strategies revealed three innovative approaches that may be applicable for civilian companies to incorporate into their existing new employee orientation programs.

### Orientation programs

The first step in orienting employees to a new organization is likely to be through new employee orientation. Though a template for how to effectively orient new employees does not exist, many orientations share similar purposes. Orientation programs serve multiple purposes, including to begin introducing new employees to their jobs and coworkers (Akdere & Schmidt, 2008). The programs address 'big picture' issues in the organization and highlight what leaders deem important. Aspects of new employee orientations include introducing employees to their surroundings; organizational history, values, and norms; and other employees as part of building a sense of pride in their new affiliation (Cable, Francesca, & Staats, 2013; Klein & Weaver, 2000). New employees also learn about policies and procedures, staff expectations, corporate culture, and philosophies of organizational learning (Akdere & Schmidt, 2008; Cable et al., 2013). The importance of this particular training program is often overlooked – particularly how employee orientation programs can add value and create an effective workforce that aligns with organizational goals (Srimannarayana, 2015), demonstrating a long-term impact.

The programs can play a more substantial role in not only helping improve employee satisfaction but other organizational outcomes as well. In fact, a study by Blankenship and Hart (2016) revealed most orientation programs were built to address agency issues and mandates. Similarly, Srimannarayana (2016) reported that educating new employees on the business, organizational structure, processes, HR policies, culture, and organizational ethics were the core objectives of orientation programs. As previously noted, new employee orientations can vary significantly; however, the training often emphasizes the organization's pressing needs; in other words, the orientation is organization-centric (Akdere & Schmidt, 2007; Cable et al., 2013).

Orientation programs have traditionally been implemented through the employer's perspective. Issues and challenges in the organization are identified as essential

training components, as are the policies and procedures outlined in training handbooks. Cable et al. (2013) suggested this employee onboarding practice helps organizational leaders feel like they have control over what to expect from newcomers. In much the same way an HR manager hires to meet company needs, orientations strive to 'fit' employees into organizational norms (Cable et al., 2013). Still, orientation programs offer opportunities for HR professionals to consider the introduction of LD as a viable development approach. Unfortunately, orientation programs have rarely been the subject of scholarly considerations (Wanous & Reichers, 2000).

Onboarding new employees is also an opportunity to integrate and retain new hires. However, only 47% of HR representatives claim their on-boarding process successfully contributes toward retaining employees (Maurer, 2018). Moreover, 24% reported their organization does not utilize any form of onboarding (2018). Perhaps more noteworthy is the lack of research on the impact of new employee orientations in many levels in the organization. In practice, management strives to keep costs associated with employee orientations to a minimum, while getting their new hires to perform as quickly as possible (Dunn & Jasinski, 2009). For LD to emerge as a staple of orientation programs, the perspective may have to shift to increasing the value of onboarding and orienting employees in organizations.

An organization's culture may be a key driver in shaping both new employee orientation programs and LD. Culture can be conceptualized as being shared amongst members existing at all levels of the organization that influences employee attitudes and behaviors, while conforming to collective values, beliefs, and assumptions (Glisson & James, 2002; Schein, 2004). Schein (2004) defined culture as a set of shared and taken-for-granted assumptions a group holds and how said group perceives and reacts to new environments. Participants of Srimannarayana's (2016) study reported their orientation programs were designed to reflect the unique culture of their organization. For organizations committed to the development of leadership competencies in employees, LD needs to be embedded in all aspects of a unit or organization (Crissman, 2013).

### Conceptual framework

The U.S. Army's leader development model drives the conceptual framework for the exploration of incorporation of LD in new employee orientation in this paper. The model operation under the premise that service members learn to be leaders through three

domains: *institutional*, *operational*, and *self-development* (Department of the Army, 2013). Army training, provided in the classroom and field, guides the institutional domain and begins in basic training. The operational domain consists of learning through performance. Soldiers are often presented opportunities to lead, and superiors (or managers) are encouraged to balance leader development situations with risks that may be associated with the opportunity (Department of the Army, 2012). Self-development consists of the attainment of new and relevant skills, attaining task mastery, while leveraging intrinsic desires for life-long learning to challenge servicemembers to read, question facts and assumptions, and clarify complex issues (Department of the Army, 2013). The domains support an integrated LD process. See Army Leader Development Model (Department of the Army, 2012) in Figure 1.

Experiential learning theory contributes to the proposed LD strategies in new employee orientation. The theory suggests adults learn specific behaviors through a process of experience, reflection, creation, and application of new concepts, and future testing (Kolb, 2015). The four-stage application is not situation specific, allowing employees to integrate learning as well as apply new strategies. Exposing employees to leadership opportunities allows for practice and assessment of leadership competencies. Since experiential learning has already been widely used in current LD programs, there may be value in applying to new employee orientations. Furthermore, reflection is a critical LD component (Akdere & Hickman, 2018) in helping employees articulate their existing knowledge, skills, and abilities with their personal vision for leadership development.

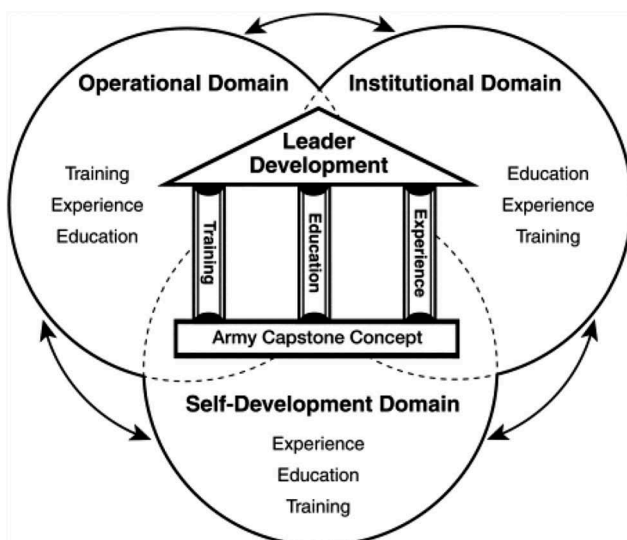


Figure 1. Army leader development model.

### Integrating leadership development in orientation

The U.S. Army offers service members frequent exposure to leader development throughout their enlistment. The exposure is integrated into service member training while they are learning to perform their jobs as early as basic training. A review of Army leadership doctrine revealed three LD strategies which may be applicable to non-military organizations and are presented below. Each of the proposed strategies is introduced by the Army during basic training and immediate period afterward. The three strategies: (a) *introducing employee leadership expectations and traits*, (b) *offering experience-based learning*, and (c) *providing self-development opportunities* complement one another and contribute toward consistent LD within the Army for new soldiers. These integration strategies do not encompass all LD strategies that may be appropriate in new employee orientations; instead, they offer insights into how the Army introduces LD to its members for the consideration of HR managers in the organization. Figure 2 is a depiction of the proposed approach toward integrating LD in new employee orientation, which has the potential to be utilized by non-military organizations.

The model suggests all new employees, regardless of position, should be included in the LD process as part of their orientation. As employee’s progress through orientation, they are introduced to the organization’s values and corresponding expectations attributes and competencies of workplace leaders. At the same time, new hires are offered opportunities to develop their competencies through experiential learning exercises, such as adventure training courses. After these experiences, employees are encouraged to participate in a period of reflection to examine how the training has contributed toward the development of the organization’s identified leadership competencies. Finally, the model integrates self-development opportunities for

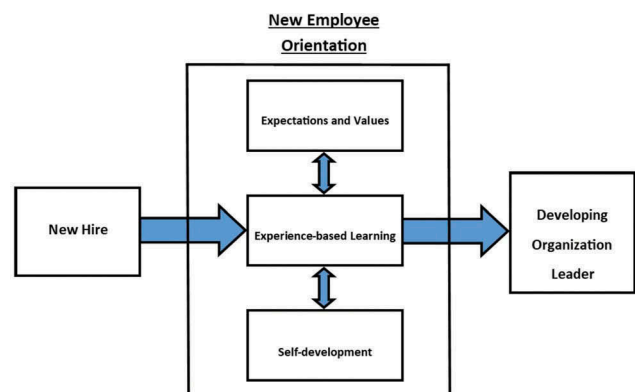


Figure 2. Leadership development in new employee orientations.



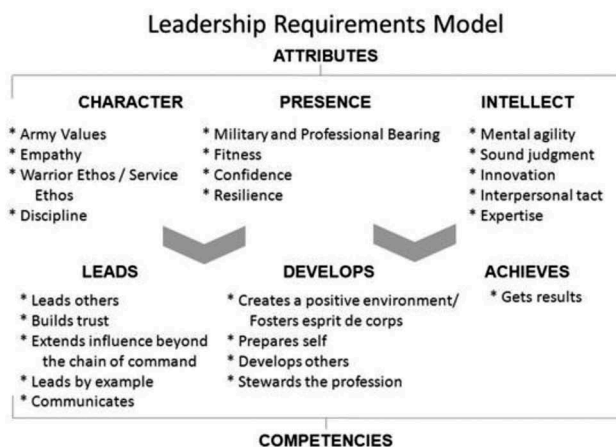
new employees during their orientation, which is both promoted and supported by the organization. The outcome of engaging in these opportunities is that employees may experience rapid LD that aligns with the organization's expectations of its leaders. Table 1 outlines military-based strategies in introducing LD activities and the implications for civilian organizations. The following are the specific strategies illustrating how LD can be introduced during employee orientation programs based on the military's model.

### Integration strategy one – introduce leadership expectations and values

The U.S. Army's leadership requirements model (Figure 3) provides an outline of the expected attributes and competencies of servicemembers (Department of the Army, 2012). During basic training, soldiers are introduced and required to memorize the Army values, which spell out the acronym, "LDRSHIP". The acronym stands for loyalty, duty, respect, selfless-service, honor, integrity, and personal courage (Department of the Army, 2012). The attributes are the same for all organization members, regardless of rank or responsibility level (Department of the Army, 2006). Throughout basic training, soldiers are taught the Army's expectations in accordance with the core values, which can range from uniform appearance to proper interactions with superiors and sacrifice of self. Drill sergeants test and ensure each new service member has memorized these terms prior to completing boot camp. Additionally, soldiers learn personal discipline from strict standards and expectations which outlined as part of the Army's approach toward breaking down a civilian and developing them into a soldier (Department of the Army, 2012; Jackson, Thoemmes, Jonkmann, Ludtke, & Trautwein, 2012). These attributes are identified and expected outcomes by the conclusion of basic training. Each branch of the armed forces identifies traits their members are expected to develop and maintain as part of their indoctrination into the military. Figure 3 is a diagram of the Army's leadership requirements model (Department of the Army, 2012).

**Table 1.** Military sector practices of leadership development and implications to the civilian sector.

Military Sector Practices	Civilian Sector Implications
Introduce leadership expectations and values	Identify and describe leadership expectations for employees.
Experience-based learning	Adventure training to foster communication, trust, and develop skills for overcoming challenges and problem-solving.
Offer self-development opportunities	Lifelong learning activities to promote individual development pertaining to leadership competencies.



**Figure 3.** Leadership requirements model.

Other government-operated organizations have introduced a similar approach toward developing leadership attributes early in a new employee's career. For example, the U.S. Department of State offers the Federal Orientation Program, which includes training in basic leadership skills including but not limited to self-awareness, emotional intelligence, interpersonal communication, resilience, and managing conflict (Blankenship & Hart, 2016). The training is a balance between organizational needs and personal development. Employees learn skills that are transferable to many environments while the organization builds its leadership pipeline (Blankenship & Hart, 2016). The leadership skills training is completed within 90 days of an employee being hired, and the initiative serves as the foundation for excellence in both leadership and followership (Blankenship & Hart, 2016). This intentional process serves as a model for introducing LD for new employees in non-military organizations.

New employee orientations are the first opportunity to identify and describe leadership expectations for employees. As noted earlier, orientations are often used to outline an organization's values and culture; however, identification of a list of leadership traits for employees may not be as prevalent. Leadership principles inform soldiers how they are supposed to act and should be supported by identified leadership traits while working in concert with an organization's meaning (Department of the Army, 2012). Organizations can begin establishing leadership expectations by introducing new employees to principles and values all hires are expected to maintain.

Organizations interested in integrating LD in new employee orientations may find it beneficial to leverage their existing mission, vision, and goals as part of identifying required leadership attributes and competencies. The practice – likely already included in some organizations – helps identify the leadership attributes

deemed essential for mid- and upper-level management to be successful. From there, HR professionals and organization leaders can promote the leadership requirements through various communication mediums for all employees – regardless of the position they were hired for – during new employee orientations. The early exposure to leadership attributes and competencies begins establishing expectations and criteria for how new employees can successfully advance in the organization, which can be complemented by the second implementation strategy.

### **Integration strategy two – experience-based learning**

Experience-based training is used in the Army to develop leadership skills while engaging participants in situations requiring cognitive thinking and problem solving (Widemond, 2013). The Army expects all participants to complete the obstacles as a member of a team. The training builds cohesion and camaraderie amongst participants while outlining the strengths and weaknesses of each member (Widemond, 2013). Experience-based learning exercises may be a feasible approach toward developing leaders in civilian organizations.

In addition to incorporating LD during orientation, experiential learning opportunities such as adventure training may be added. Outside of the military, experience-based training programs are relatively new. In the 1980s and 1990s, adventure-based training increased substantially as the novelty and excitement of a new approach toward development were recognized (Neill, 2006). Adventure Training, also known as Outdoor Management Training, Outdoor Experience Training, Outdoor Leadership, High Ropes Courses, and Outdoor Experiential Development, is a frequent component of LD programs in schools, colleges, and the contemporary workplace. Like the Army, the courses challenge participants to work as a team to proceed through and resolve obstacles. Participants may find themselves navigating rough terrain, climbing ropes, rappelling off walls, and creating structures to solve challenges while being pushed outside their comfort zone (Stuhr, Sutherland, Ressler, & Ortiz-Stuhr, 2016). Communication, trust, overcoming challenges and problem-solving strategies are often essential to successfully completing the courses – attributes that are reflective of effective (Stuhr et al., 2016).

After completion of an obstacle or course, participants may be encouraged to engage in a reflection, which is part of the experiential learning model (Kolb, 2015). Mezirow (1998) highlighted reflection can be applied to integrate theory and practice while

facilitating learning and self-discovery. In fact, reflection is considered one of the key components to developing effective leaders (Roberts, 2008). During reflection exercises, participants make sense of the experience by discussing the assigned task(s), strategies tried that were ineffective, and tactics that ultimately proved successful (Stuhr et al., 2016). Reflections may be led by a facilitator of the organization or by the course operator. Participants are then encouraged to transfer their learning and leadership attributes back into their work and organization.

### **Integration strategy three – offer self-development opportunities**

The third domain of the Army leader development model is *self-development* which consists of any educational training that a soldier participates for the purpose of developing oneself without being required to do so (Department of the Army, 2012). Structured self-development is a mandatory component in learning modules for learners to meet outlined objectives while acknowledging life-long learning in schools or operational units does not meet everyone's needs (Department of the Army, 2013). Self-development includes partaking in college courses and earning professional licenses that contribute to the advancement of soldiers (Kreie, 2014). The U.S. military, regardless of branch, expects its members to develop themselves through reading handbooks, doctrine, and other related materials. Hindes and Steele (2012) noted self-development is consistently rated high in its ability to prepare leaders for future roles. Still, self-development is the responsibility of the individual and thus can be used as a criterion in understanding a soldier's level of commitment (Department of the Army, 2012).

Self-development is an LD strategy used in both military and non-military organizations. Self-development extends beyond the physical well-being of a soldier to include the improvement of intellectual capacity and knowledge within certain domains (Department of the Army, 2012). Employees who engage in self-development do so at their own discretion. Reichard and Johnson (2011) proposed a multi-level model of leader self-development that described how non-military leaders are transformed into continuous self-developers. Successful self-development begins with investment from the soldier [or employee] who is supported through a team effort (Department of the Army, 2012). Self-development is closely associated with personal leadership which “is a term that is associated with personal development as a leader in terms of technical (know-how and skill), psychological (caring attitude for followers

and others), and moral (self-mastery) development” (Akdere, 2015, p. 491). Examples of self-development opportunities for employers to present to their employees should be tied into a lifelong learning frame and may include but are not limited to offering books or courses on LD free of charge, inviting speakers to present on leadership topics, and establishing mentorships that help employees align their self-development with organizational needs. New employee orientations that offer LD begin demonstrating their commitment to empowering and developing their employees.

### Benefits to incorporation

Orientation programs have historically been overlooked by scholars and practitioners as a viable opportunity to develop employee leadership competencies. The programs are nonetheless impactful and a critical aspect of the experience employees have when transitioning into an organization. “Orientation programs have been shown to socialize newcomers and increase their knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA) upon completion” (Acevedo & Yancey, 2011, p. 349). The knowledge, resources, and leadership focus of the orientation program is the foundation for retaining and empowering employees in their careers (Blankenship & Hart, 2016). More specifically, experience-based trainings may have a host of associated benefits in both LD and new employee orientation.

Research has suggested a number of positive benefits associated with participation in adventure training (Rickinson et al., 2004). Participants who complete the courses increase confidence, independence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, personal effectiveness, and coping strategies as a result of completing these types of trainings (2004). In addition, participants may significantly develop stress management skills and increase their overall emotional intelligence as a result of completing such training (Hayashi, 2006). The effects of the programs vary as younger participants often experience a greater impact on their development; however, when executed properly, the programs can still have a positive impact on all learners across generations (Rickinson et al., 2004). Each of the identified benefits closely relate to attributes and competencies required of a leader, and many are reflected in the Army leadership requirements model (Department of the Army, 2012). In fact, adventure-based learning may be the most underutilized form of LD while having the greatest potential for impact (Neill, 2006).

On a related vein, outdoor engagement training brings various social groups or people together as they attempt to work through problems as a team (Beames & Atencio, 2008). New employees may have difficulty socializing with others in the organization – particularly in organizations

that do not offer a great deal of employee onboarding opportunities. There is not a one-size-fits-all approach toward experience-based learning, though the supporting evidence for positive outcomes has made the method favorable amongst both employees and their employer. Orientation programs which include experience-based training offer employees a chance to both develop leadership attributes and build relationships with coworkers. Heightened feelings of connectedness with an organization or team have shown to reduce turnover, and ultimately save employers significant expenses related to hiring, training, and retaining employees (Bauer, 2012).

The introduction of leadership expectations and values in new employee orientations can also have a lasting impact. Employees desire to know what is expected of them and are more likely to perform with clearly outlined expectations. With effective communication of such norms and expectations, employees are more likely to be retained, be satisfied with their job, perform higher, and experience lower levels of job stress (Bauer, 2012; Bauer & Green, 1998). Because LD in new employee orientations introduces leadership early in an employee’s organizational tenure, employers have a unique opportunity to influence employee perceptions prior to starting to work. The addition of LD in employee orientation programs presents a series of challenges to consider.

### Challenges

A handful of challenges related to introducing LD in orientation sessions exist. First, training initiatives cost the U.S. employers over \$160 billion a year (Beer, Finnström, & Schrader, 2016). Roughly the third of all T&D budgets is allocated to LD – a disproportionately high percentage. As such, resistance from senior leadership to increase allocations toward LD may be likely without substantial evidence on their contribution to the organization’s bottom line. Especially with increased levels of employee turnover, added resources toward LD of employees that may less likely to stay with the organization would create significant concern with respect to return on investment by the organizational leadership. The financial impact is not the only direct cost to the organization, as organizations may feel pressure to maintain the length of orientations, as opposed to increasing the overall time allocated toward employee on-boarding.

Whether considering the length of orientation or length of LD programs, time requirements may be an issue. Although LD can take place in less or more time, Avolio et al. (2009) noted the time frame for LD interventions in their study ranged from one to seven days. Organizations will need to identify how much time they are willing to



allocate toward LD as part of their orientation. Two hours of LD during employee orientations may not be enough for new hires to exhibit an immediate improvement in their leadership effectiveness. Additionally, depending on the organization, orientation programs vary significantly in length. Organizations interested in adding an LD component may consider some revisions such as increasing the total length of orientation to include all prior content as well as LD and eliminating existing components to create room for LD. Each revision offers consequences to consider, and employers will be challenged to identify the needed balance between LD and other critical components of new employee orientations based on the attendees and their organizational needs.

Any experience-based training that requires physical activity will also pose challenges. Instructors will need to consider accommodations for physically impaired or older employees, as well as new employees who may be resistant to participating in the activities. Experience-based training often involves exercises or obstacles which may be difficult for some employees to complete due to physical limitations. An introduction to the exercises beforehand will provide instructors the opportunity to receive feedback from participants and develop appropriate accommodation strategies. The employer should consider notifying employees of the prospective risks involved with the experience as well as the intended benefits. After completing experience-based training, instructors need to incorporate time for reflection as well as create opportunities for new employees to apply their learning within new roles (Hickman & Stokes, 2015). By doing so, employees are more likely to successfully transfer learning while employers increase their likelihood of a positive return (2015). The outlined challenges should be considered prior to incorporating LD in new employee orientations.

### Implications for practice

Leaders at all levels of an organization need to consider the long-term outlook of their workforce. Development Dimensions International (2014) found that only 15% believed their employers maintained a strong leadership pipeline. By incorporating LD in new employee orientations, organizations may begin moving the needle toward improving perceptions of leadership pipelines. At the same time, organizations may experience increases in employee satisfaction, retention, and engagement, if employees are exposed to LD early. Organizations that demonstrate a commitment to LD early may be more likely to see employee's embrace subsequent training than companies that neglect the opportunity early. In fact, many prospective employees often seek organizations that value workplace learning

(Akdere & Schmidt, 2008). The approaches outlined offer the opportunity to learn about organizational expectations and values, promotes autonomy to complete extended LD, and adds a component of LD within orientation.

Finally, integrating LD in new employee orientations supports establishing a culture of organizational learning and development. Every organization has its own culture and helping employees navigate and understand the culture is essential (Kim, Cable, & Kim, 2005). As Akdere and Schmidt (2008) outlined, orientations offer employees information about the company's philosophy on learning and demonstrate a commitment to LD. An organization's culture is established through organizational norms, values, and behaviors (Smith, 2015), which may be demonstrated for new employees during orientation. By including LD in new employee orientation, a culture is introduced that can be maintained with ongoing LD exercises. Most importantly, the LD approaches identified aim to address frequent areas of concern from HR professionals (Kirchner & Akdere, 2017; Development Dimensions International, 2014). The implications of introducing LD in new employee orientations also present several research opportunities.

### Future research

The incorporation of LD in new employee orientation may be further supported with research. Although this paper emphasized Army leader development, a distinction has yet to be offered regarding how the other service branches begin developing their own leaders. Studies examining Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard may contribute toward additional LD opportunities in new employee orientations. In non-military organizations, scholars have not considered how LD may be incorporated into employee orientations or assessed corresponding short- and long-term benefits. Exploration of effectively integrating LD may not only improve leader competencies but also positively impact employee engagement and reduce turnover (Cable et al., 2013). Findings from future studies may also challenge HR professionals to consider reformatting new employee orientation programs. A total of three propositions to identify directions for future research is offered.

*Proposition 1: Incorporating an LD component to new employee orientation training may help increase employee beliefs about employer commitment to workplace learning that may suggest a broader benefit than competency building.*

HR professionals would benefit from understanding the relationship between LD in orientation and the

resulting effect on how employees perform over time. Studies that report employee productivity increases after participation in orientation programs with an LD component would suggest the addition may be fiscally responsible. Demonstrating organizational commitment to develop future organizational leaders early in an employee's entry to the organization would help develop a positive employee perception and enable the individual employee to begin career planning early during their organizational tenure.

*Proposition 2: LD activities, however early they can commence in the organization, may have an impact on recruitment and retention.*

Scholars in the field of HR should consider how incorporating LD in orientation programs may also influence their recruitment and retention efforts. Considering the costs associated with employee turnover, any reduction would be substantial. At the same time, the number of applicants for job openings may increase after candidates learn of an organization's commitment to LD. Each research area would benefit from understanding which LD strategies generate the highest impact and return on investment. Developing a holistic LD program that is tied to organizational succession planning is critical. Communicating this approach to potential employees as part of the recruitment effort will likely attract more candidates. Employees who build their career plans around organizational succession planning will be less likely to leave; thus, increasing employee retention.

*Proposition 3: LD activities may support organizational performance goals.*

It is critical for the organization to assess the types of LD training that would be most beneficial for impacting employee and team performance. Orientation programs present the first opportunity to introduce employees to an organization's culture and values. By including LD in new employee orientations, employers have a chance to begin teambuilding amongst employees. Furthermore, employees and teams may increase their overall performance after being exposed to LD during the orientation. Employees increasing their leadership competencies will more likely be engaged, demonstrate effective communication and team skills as well as higher levels of organizational commitment.

These conceptual propositions offer strategies based on prior research; however, this paper highlights the potential impact of integrating LD as a component of new employee orientations. Specifically, new employees would learn their organization's commitment to LD,

learning and development, succession planning, employee development, and employee empowerment. The addition of LD would potentially help develop a very strong organizational image among employees. Further, utilizing experience-based learning (i.e., adventure training activities) would present developmental approaches typically not offered by traditional orientation programs. However, future research is needed to develop organizational models of new employee orientation training that effectively incorporates LD.

## Conclusion

LD is an extensive process requiring the acquisition of many attributes and competencies. As LaMoe and Strickler (2012) noted, LD is a continuous process that extends beyond a single event or course. Day, Harrison, and Halpin (2009) added LD occurs at multiple levels across an entire lifespan and can take up to 10 years of extended practice before reaching a level of expertise. The U.S. Army similarly suggests leader development is achieved through a lifelong synthesis of knowledge, skills, and abilities (Department of the Army, 2012). New hires have been influenced by many factors – their education, families, friends, and prior coworkers and supervisors. As such, new employees bring their own understanding of leadership – regardless of experience – to the workplace. Organizations concerned about their talent pipeline and leadership succession should consider the appropriateness of engaging employees in training earlier than the established norm.

Orientation programs are generally the first opportunity a company has for onboarding a new employee. Organizations invest a great deal of resources each year for helping their employees successfully learn and operate within its culture. The considerable expense combined with a desire to successfully welcome and prepare employees to be effective in their new roles lends itself to further exploration of LD as part of orientation programming (Acevedo & Yancey, 2011). This paper identified three LD strategies for HR practitioners to consider when conducting new employee orientations. The model may lead to increased employee satisfaction, productivity, and retention, while contributing toward improving the leadership pipeline and succession planning for organizations.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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