

Advancing Airman and Unit Learning: A Commander's Guide



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Introduction

This Commander's Guide is part of a larger effort by the Air Mobility Command (AMC) Enterprise Learning Office (ELO) to enable AMC to become a premier Air Force (AF) learning organization (LO). To that end, ELO has embarked on a number of efforts to define what being a learning organization means for AMC, specify how AMC can mature along the path to becoming a premier AF LO, and develop metrics to assess where AMC organizations are currently succeeding or are in need of improvement in terms of their approach to learning. One of the primary metrics AMC relies on to assess progress towards its goal of becoming a premier AF LO is the Learning Organization Assessment (LOA); the LOA is a 50-item assessment that captures multiple dimensions of learning within AMC. The LOA is one of a number of important metrics that help to assess AMC maturity on the key dimensions and attributes of a learning organization.

This Commander's Guide is designed to provide leaders throughout AMC with a greater understanding of the LOA as well as valuable strategies and resources that enable improvements to learning within their units based on the LOA results. Commanders at multiple echelons of the organization (e.g., Wing, Group, Squadron) can find explanations, case study examples, implementation steps, resources, exercises, and sample action plans that address each attribute captured in the LOA. The Guide is likely to be helpful to you if:

- ▶ You are looking for more information on what a learning organization is and whether your unit exhibits qualities of a mature learning organization;
- ▶ Your unit is about to take the LOA and you would like to understand its content and relevance for your unit;
- ▶ Your unit has recently taken the LOA and you need some help interpreting the results and deciding what to do about them; and/or
- ▶ You understand your unit's strengths and limitations regarding organizational learning and are looking for ways to leverage the strengths and address the limitations.

The Guide is organized into three parts:

1. Understanding and Measuring Learning Organizations
2. Using the Commander's Guide
3. Maturing as a Premier AF Learning Organization
 - Chapter 1: Building a Learning Organization One Airman at a Time
 - Chapter 2: Leading the Way to Continuous Learning
 - Chapter 3: We're in This Together – The Power of Shared Perspective
 - Chapter 4: Why Fight the System When You Can Fix the System?
 - Chapter 5: Plant the Seeds of Innovation and Reap What You Sow

Part 1: Understanding and Measuring Learning Organizations contains helpful background information on what a learning organization is, why it is important for AMC to become a premier AF learning organization, how the learning organization concepts apply to AMC, and how your unit's LOA data can contribute to your understanding of your unit's capabilities as a learning organization. Specifically, this part of the Guide describes how the LOA maps to the Learning Organizational Capability Maturity Model (LOCMM). The LOCMM is the framework used to define what a learning organization is and AMC's philosophies around learning. As described in this part of the Guide, the LOCMM was developed through the collaboration and

research of AMC's Enterprise Learning Office (ELO) and partner ICF International.

Part 2: Using the Commander's Guide provides a breakdown of the chapters and sections that constitute the remainder of this guide. It includes descriptive text as well as visual aids that illustrate the common features of each section, what you can learn from each element, and how you can use them to improve learning within AMC. Mostly, this part of the Guide illustrates how to get the most out of the content, exercises, and practical strategies that are primarily featured in Part 3.

Part 3: Maturing as a Premier AF Learning Organization is divided into five chapters, each with multiple sections that provide insights, real-world examples, practical strategies, and resources to help you take action regarding the LOA results. The five chapters map to the five dimensions of the LOCMM described in Part 1.



There are 13 total sections across the five chapters; the 13 sections map to the 13 attributes of the LOCMM. The sections share a common structure, but they each provide guidance unique to a particular attribute of a learning organization. These same attributes are assessed through the LOA and highlighted in the LOA matrix (discussed in Part 1) so that you can quickly locate the modules that are most relevant to your unit.

Part 1: Understanding and Measuring Learning Organizations

What is a Learning Organization?

If someone were to ask you what characteristics of AMC would suggest it is a learning organization, you could probably think of a few examples, even if the phrase “learning organization” was not too familiar to you. You might state that Airmen train regularly to be the best at what they do. The U.S. Air Force clearly values education and in fact, provides opportunities to continue one’s education and obtain additional degrees and certifications in relevant fields. Further, most Airmen have clearly defined training and proficiency requirements they must achieve in order to progress within the organization. These are all good examples of ways that AMC supports *individual* learners, and certainly an organization cannot be an effective learning organization if its members are not actively involved in **individual learning**.

However, being a learning organization involves support for not only individual learning, but also *organizational* learning. **Organizational learning** goes far beyond the sum of individual learning within an organization to include the ways in which skills and knowledge are synthesized, stored, shared, and applied across the organization. Thus, an organization “learns” when knowledge is captured and spread across an organization in order to support improvements in the way the organization operates.

Clearly, bringing together individual learners is not a sufficient condition to define a learning organization. Business processes, resource availability, external pressures, and goal and mission alignment can all contribute to the organization’s ability to continuously learn, and therefore its effectiveness. Therefore, a **learning organization** is one that orients itself towards individual learn-

ing in support of mission achievement while also integrating the systems, structures, processes, procedures, and supportive culture that enable continuous learning, adaptation in response to learning outcomes, and development of a “shared vision” of the organization.

Why is it Important for AMC to Become a Premier AF Learning Organization?

Learning is not the only prerequisite for organizational performance, but it is a necessary condition to achieve optimal mission success and improvement which cannot occur apart from the acquisition of new knowledge, processes, systems, and behaviors (i.e., learning). Therefore, consistently high performing organizations are almost always learning organizations.

Becoming a premier AF learning organization is no easy task. Maturing as a learning organization can be especially difficult for traditionally hierarchical organizations like AMC. For large organizations, the capacity to learn can degrade over time, despite a focus on training, as processes and procedures become rigid and people become invested in the status quo. When new challenges arise, people may turn to tried and true solutions that no longer address the issue or only provide a short-term fix. At the same time, organizations like AMC are faced with resource constraints that often force units to do more with less, requiring Airmen to work more effectively and efficiently. To achieve optimal performance of its global mobility mission, AMC needs to demonstrate it is capable of learning from its collective experience and its environment by nurturing and reinforcing a strong learning culture. Airmen within AMC must stay apprised of new technologies and processes, study what is happening throughout the organization and across its joint partners, and

develop creative solutions using their unique blend of knowledge and skills. This goal demands frequent cooperation between individuals, teams, and units; open and honest communication at all levels; and a culture that values learning, continuous improvement, and trust.

How Can AMC Assess its Capabilities as a Learning Organization?

In order to better assess AMC's current support for learning and align its efforts toward becoming a premier AF LO, the Enterprise Learning Office partnered with ICF International to develop the **Learning Organization Capability Maturity Model (LOCMM)**. The LOCMM combines extensive research on characteristics of learning organizations with a framework for implementing and evaluating continuous improvement activities called a capability maturity model. This approach was pursued because the goal of becoming a premier AF learning organization requires a full understanding of the facets of a learning organization. Those facets were ultimately iden-

tified through a comprehensive review of the scientific literature on learning organizations and crosswalk of the unique concepts identified in the literature; this work resulted in identification of 5 dimensions and 13 attributes which is referred to as AMC's LOCMM.

The following table presents LOCMM. The elements of both individual and organizational learning are captured within this LOCMM. The 13 attributes are organized according to the key dimensions; the attributes provide more specific descriptions of the ideal characteristics of successful learning organizations that AMC would like to emulate. While the dimensions and attributes are rooted in sound scientific research and learning principles, the definitional components of each dimension and attribute were tailored to the AMC environment. By evaluating itself against each of these dimensions and attributes, AMC and its component organizations can better understand their current strengths and opportunities for improvement with respect to enabling learning.

Dimension 1 Individual Airman Learner	
Definition	The degree to which the individual Airman seeks out and acquires new knowledge.
Attributes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1: A Mobility Airman is a lifelong learner who demonstrates ownership for self-development. 2: A Mobility Airman demonstrates grade appropriate proficiency in the Air Force Institutional Competencies.
Dimension 2 Leader Facilitation	
Definition	AMC leaders' behaviors that promote or hinder individual, team and organizational development and learning.
Attributes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1: Leaders promote learning by presenting opportunities and necessary resources to Airmen: Tools, learning events, developmental opportunities, and funding. 2: Leaders engage in frequent feedback exchange with Airmen for leader, subordinate, and unit development/learning. 3: Leaders recognize and reward learners' accomplishments. 4: Leaders seek out leadership development for continuous self-improvement.

Dimension 3 AMC Total Force Shared Mission Perspective	
Definition	The mental frameworks held across levels of the organization including the vision and interdependencies held within teams. A shared perspective can help to drive organizational learning by pointing Airmen in the same direction regarding knowledge that must be acquired and goals achieved.
Attributes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1: Teams and units engage in collaboration and knowledge sharing. 2: Airmen have a unified vision about what needs to be accomplished and their role for mission success. 3: Airmen work together to integrate effective learning into their work.
Dimension 4 AMC Systems and Processes	
Definition	These systems and processes include work practices, resources, infrastructure, and functions. To encourage learning and help AMC successfully accomplish its mission, the organization must consider available processes, their functionality and how Airmen implement them.
Attributes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1: AMC has formalized processes that increase effectiveness and efficiency to allow for continuous improvement and innovation. 2: AMC systems support the needs of the AMC total force to enable Airmen learning.
Dimension 5 AMC Total Force Cultural Orientation	
Definition	AMC attitudes and values that either support or inhibit individual and organizational learning. This also includes the extent to which AMC conducts ongoing assessments and incorporates feedback loops to determine how well daily activities in the organization support learning and correspond to the AMC strategic framework and mission.
Attributes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1: Airmen believe learning is encouraged in the organization. 2: AMC promotes innovation and continuous improvement, supported by ongoing measurement.

While the previous table identifies the facets of an LO (i.e., the dimensions and attributes of an LO), it is equally important that an organization like AMC have a rubric or scale by which they can evaluate growth in each of these facets. Thus, a maturity scale was developed for AMC that captures what progress looks like along the 5 dimensions and 13 attributes of a learning organization. This scale was developed by identifying commonalities across existing capability maturity model scales and identifying levels at which learning transforms an organization. One important consideration in the development of the maturity scale is to account for the fact that learning is ultimately a continuous process without any clear “upper limit” (i.e. you can always get better at learning). Thus, the highest

point on a learning maturity scale must capture the notion that growth is still ongoing. Other challenges with evaluating continuous improvement include being able to objectively measure your current capabilities, how much you can reasonably expect to improve in a given area, and progress toward the ‘next level’. AMC’s learning capability maturity scale resolves some of these challenges by categorizing an organization’s evolution along a continuum from *forming* (‘ad hoc’ work processes, little standardization, reactive problem-solving) to *optimizing* (proactively identifying defects, developing optimal processes, and implementing systems for continuous improvement). The following table displays the five levels of maturity included in the LOCMM scale.

LOCMM Maturity Levels and Definitions

5. Optimizing: Progress is continually measured and targeted predictions are made regarding outcomes; adjustments are made as needed to align with best practices. Evidence of this level is marked by ongoing efforts that result in continuous improvement.

4. Advancing: Behaviors are adapted to promote positive change and systematic measurement is used to predict outcomes of change. Evidence of this level is marked by integrated and managed activities.

3. Achieving: Consistent application and measurement of capabilities, standardization of practices and processes has started to occur across the enterprise. Evidence of this level is marked by defined and standardized ways.

2. Emerging: Increased acquisition of capabilities and processes are understood but the execution of activities to address this dimension remains variable. Evidence of this level is marked by occasional repeatable performance and management.

1. Forming: Minimal or cursory attempts to address this dimension; practices and processes are unpredictable and reactionary. Evidence of this level is marked by incidental and inconsistent results.

The LOCMM is valuable to AMC Commanders and leaders as it provides structure for assessing organizational support for learning within AMC. It builds on previously developed capability maturity models and integrates characteristics of learning organizations and the unique qualities of AMC to provide a common language and measurement framework for each stage on the road to becoming a premier AF learning organization.

How can I evaluate my own unit's perspective on AMC as a learning organization?

The ELO has explored several metrics and measures to evaluate AMC on each of the attributes in the LOCMM. Of course, learning across a diverse organization like AMC is so complex that no single tool or data source could fully quantify AMC's capabilities as a learning organization. However, in order to provide AMC leadership and individual commanders with improved awareness of the often "hidden" forces that impact learning within their organization, ELO developed the **Learning Organization Assessment (LOA)**. This 50-item assessment can

be completed by Airmen of all ranks in all units in order to provide their leaders with valuable insight into the unit attributes and individual attitudes that impact personal learning, leadership support for learning, understanding of the larger organization, systems and processes that facilitate or inhibit learning, and the learning culture in general.

In order to help AMC commanders interpret the results of the LOA, data for each unit has been presented in a separate tool called the **LOA Matrix**. The LOA Matrix maps each item on the LOA to the specific LOCMM attribute that the LOA item assesses so that leaders can achieve a highly detailed view of their LOA results and how they impact overall attribute and dimension-level ratings. By identifying areas of relative strength or weakness at the attribute or dimension level and diving down to the individual item level, leaders can more effectively identify root causes of obstacles to learning and pinpoint areas on which to focus any improvements. More detailed instructions for utilizing the LOA Matrix to interpret the LOA results can be found within the matrix itself.

Part 2: Using the Commander's Guide

To simplify navigation of this Guide, its structure mirrors the LOCMC in that each chapter corresponds to one of the 5 LOCMC dimensions and each section pertains to one of the 13 attributes. Each chapter has a brief introduction that describes the topics and tools presented within each section of the chapter.

The five chapters are as follows:

- ▶ **Chapter 1:** Building a Learning Organization One Airman at a Time
- ▶ **Chapter 2:** Leading the Way to Continuous Learning
- ▶ **Chapter 3:** We're in This Together – The Power of Shared Perspective
- ▶ **Chapter 4:** Why Fight the System When You Can Fix the System?
- ▶ **Chapter 5:** Plant the Seeds of Innovation and Reap What You Sow



Each of the sections within each chapter follows a similar structure. The following diagrams illustrate the common features of each section. Alongside the diagrams, we describe the elements of each section and how to get the most out of them.

(1) Why it Matters

This segment provides a summary of the relevant attribute and its relationship to organization learning. It introduces related learning concepts and illustrates how they link to the attribute in question. Most importantly, it discusses the relevance that the attribute has for AMC leaders, the success of his/her Airmen, and how the concepts promote learning within the unit. It can help you understand why a lower score on this attribute should matter to you or leaders under your command.

(2) What to look for in Your Airmen

The LOA results for your unit only provide one indicator of support for learning within your unit, and it can be difficult to tell from the results alone if the challenges they convey are related to specific characteristics of your unit (e.g., available resources, your leadership efforts) or trends across AMC more broadly. This section lists additional indicators that may provide a more introspective assessment of learning within your unit. Many of the indicators relate to specific Airman attitudes and behaviors that would demonstrate whether this attribute is generally a strength area or an area in need of improvement. Some of them may be directly observable, but others may require follow-on discussions or surveys of your Airmen. Note that the indicators are not all equivalent in impact and directly quantifying them or making comparisons to other units may not yield meaningful results. However, they can help you take a closer look at your own unit and enhance your understanding of the relationship between the LOCMM attributes, the LOA results, and your real-world observations of your Airmen.

(3) Case Study

Even with a basic understanding of the LOCMM attribute and related behavioral indicators, it can be difficult to understand how all of these factors interact within your unit. Moreover, it may not be immediately clear how you can take action to resolve these issues given their complex interactions. Therefore, each section of this guide includes a fictional case study that provides a realistic scenario in which a leader confronts a difficult reality conveyed both by the LOA results and observations of his/her unit and develops a practical, end-to-end solution using the advice or resources contained in the Guide. This section may spur your thoughts of how to tackle similar challenges, motivate you to take on equally challenging learning issues in your

own organization, and generally increase your understanding of the ways you can utilize the guide and LOA results.

(4) Determining Root Causes

The indicators described above and the individual LOA items are analogous to symptoms a doctor might use to begin diagnosing an illness. However, just as a fever can indicate any number of maladies, these indicators may reflect a variety of possible underlying factors. A full and accurate diagnosis of the root causes of the results and observations often requires further digging and some tough questions.

This section includes several examples of key probing questions that can help you pinpoint the causal factors that contribute to the challenges observed in your unit. By asking yourself and perhaps other leaders in your unit each question and considering the answer, you can refine your response to the issues you face. In most cases,

Chapter 2 | Leader Facilitation | 2.3 Thumbs Up! Recognizing and Rewarding Airmen Performance

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Determining Root Causes

If Airmen provide low ratings on this attribute 2.3, consider the following questions:

- ▶ Are Airmen recognized for improving their performance? How so?
 - If "yes," move to the next root cause question to dig deeper.
 - If "no," consider what formal and informal mechanisms of recognition currently exist or can be implemented to show strong performance matters.
- ▶ Are Airmen rewarded for taking ownership of their development?
 - If "yes," move to the next root cause question to dig deeper.
 - If "no," consider what opportunities exist for Airmen to benefit professionally from training and beyond the minimum training and developmental requirements; also consider what opportunities might Airmen miss out on by pursuing additional training or development and what can be done to change this.
- ▶ Do Airmen know how their performance improvement contributes to organization mission success? If "no," what are some potential reasons?
 - If "yes," read on to see if more insights emerge as to areas for concern.
 - If "no," consider whether Airmen feel team achievements are valued and whether there is a strong alignment between individual and team achievements.

4



1. Timeliness: Important rewards and recognition must be delivered in a timely fashion to create a strong linkage to the desired behavior or performance. The longer the time lag, the less likely the reward and recognition will motivate future behaviors and performance.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP? As the leader, you can provide informal recognition of Airmen performance any time you see it. For formal reward and recognition that is within your control, try to plan ahead and avoid unnecessary delays, such as administrative processing. Force reward and recognition to be immediate beyond your authority, you can use continuous communication to bridge the gap between when the performance is observed and when the associated reward and recognition are delivered.

5

2. Attractiveness: Similar to the timeliness condition, rewards and recognition that are perceived as attractive are stronger motivators of future behaviors and performance. The same reward or recognition may be more effective on some individuals than others.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP? Learn about Airmen's developmental needs and career aspirations. Incorporate some individualized rewards. For example, for units that are overloaded, time off to complete training may be the most effective way to encourage Airmen to take advantage of available learning opportunities.

Key Steps to Move the Needle

Step 1: Ensure Conditions for Effective Rewards and Recognition

Rewards and recognition can be powerful motivators of desired behaviors and performance. However, there are certain conditions that need to be met for rewards and recognition to be effective in driving Airmen performance. These conditions are described next.

the questions are specifically linked to content presented later in the section. If a root cause question leads you to conclude that it may be relevant to the issues you have observed in your unit, follow the direction provided after the question in order to quickly locate relevant content. If not, proceed to the next question until you close in on the source of the issue.

(5) Key Steps to Move the Needle

This section represents the core of each section of this guide. It includes several major steps that commanders can take to directly address the root causes of issues related to the LOCMMA attribute discussed in that section. The steps are typically ordered in a logical manner so that commanders can first gain some additional perspective or better frame the problem, and then pursue one or more strategies to make improvements depending on the specific issue at hand or available resources. In many cases, the final step may be seen as a capstone that integrates elements of earlier steps or builds on the gains made previously. However, not all steps may be necessary and commanders may prefer to pick and choose those that are most appropriate or practical given their situation.

(6) Where do I go from here?

The steps provided in the Guide can yield some positive results within your unit, but they are not designed to exhaust the subject or function as a cure-all. Fortunately, there are numerous resources available from the U.S. Air Force and a range of reputable literature sources to address issues related to the LOCMMA attributes. Citations for several print and electronic resources have been gathered in each section along with information about their content and how it relates to the attribute in question or specific steps listed in the section. Further, text featured in dark blue represents hyperlinks that you can click on to find the resource named.

Chapter 2 | Leader Facilitation | 2.2 Create a Culture of Feedback Exchange

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Step 5: Encourage Active Listening and Self-Assessment

Encourage Active Listening

Encourage your subordinate leaders to engage in active listening. Active listening is a structured way to listen and respond to others that focuses on the "function" of communicating as opposed to the "forms." There are three main elements of active listening.

- ▶ **Comprehending.** Let the person complete his/her thought. Avoid thinking of what you want to say next and instead focus on picking out important details of what the deliverer is saying. Paraphrase or restate the message to check whether you understood it correctly.
- ▶ **Retaining.** If we remember what we hear, we create more meaning from it. It requires effort to actively listen and find nuggets of information that we can attach meaning to but having the motivation to listen is critical to successful feedback.

▶ **Responding.** Listening is an interactive process. Body language helps convey to the speaker you are listening. Pay close attention to eye contact and head nodding. Avoid "waiting to speak" behavior and instead practice, "waiting to hear."

Encourage Self-Assessment

Those who provide feedback should ask questions that prompt self-assessment. After you deliver feedback, ask: *What is your assessment of the situation? How do you think the recommendations for change I provided will help or hinder you moving forward? What do you see as personal or professional roadblocks to the behavior changes suggested?*

Questions like these reinforce three important development principles:

- ▶ Self-assessment and self-awareness
- ▶ Individual responsibility for development
- ▶ Airman ownership of the recommendation

Use the exercise and sample action plan on the next pages to better plan for feedback exchanges.

Where Do I Go from Here?

Airmen can access [Air Force e-Learning's Business Skills Resource Collection](#), which provides a library of over 940 e-learning courses, simulations, and learning objects that address various development competencies in the areas of leadership and management. It offers a quick and engaging way to learn about a variety of topics, including feedback, coaching, mentoring, communicating, listening, and more.

Also available is [Business Pro By Books 24x7](#), which provides a digital library of the latest publications covering leadership, business, and general management topics that are searchable by topics and can be read in their entirety or scanned for applicable content.

Further Reading:

- ▶ Folkman (2006). *The Power of Feedback: 35 Principles for Turning Feedback from Others into Personal and Professional Change*. John Wiley and Sons.
- ▶ Kegan & Lahey (2009). *Immunity to Change: How to Overcome It and Unlock the Potential in Yourself and Your Organization*. Harvard Business Press.
- ▶ London, M. (2003). *Job Feedback: Giving, Seeking, and Using Feedback for Performance Improvement*. Rutledge.
- ▶ Seashore, Seashore, & Weinberg (2004). *What Did You Say? The Art of Giving and Receiving Feedback*. Bingham House Books.
- ▶ U.S. Dept of Army. "Commander's Handbook for Unit Leader Development." 16-22, 59. <http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/CAL/repository/CommandersHandbook.pdf>

(7) Exercises

Each section contains an exercise that can help you to implement one of the steps listed in the guide or generate ideas for additional actions you might take to address the major issues you are facing.

Chapter 2 | Leader Facilitation | 2.2 Create a Culture of Feedback Exchange

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Exercise: SOAR to Effective Feedback

Encourage the use of the SOAR card to capture key information as you foster a culture of feedback exchange (adapted from the U.S. Dept of Army, "Commander's Handbook for Unit Leader Development." 16-22, 59). On the SOAR card, note the following:

- ▶ Situation and/or conditions
- ▶ Observation of the specific behavior or action
- ▶ Assessment of the behavior
- ▶ Recommendation

Use the SOAR card to guide your discussions with subordinates and subordinate leaders.

Situation: Describe the situation/condition of the assessment

Observation: Describe the behavior and impact on mission and/or Airman

They may take the form of worksheets, questionnaires, or activities to facilitate brainstorming or prioritization of actions. Some may be completed entirely by the commander, but others may benefit from soliciting perspectives from others in your unit or peers within your organization. Although the exercises appear toward the end of each section, it may be beneficial to review them before taking any of the steps provided in the section as they may simplify the process and focus your thinking, saving you time and effort.

(8) Sample Action Plan

The final element of each section consists of a sample action plan that provides an example of how to plan your response to the challenges you uncover through the LOA and subsequent root cause analysis. Like the case study at the

beginning of the section, the sample action plan provides a real-world connection for some of the more abstract concepts and strategies discussed in each section. Unlike the case study, however, it focuses on planning specific interventions and organizes activities within a clearly defined framework. As you plan your own response, you may find it helpful to adopt a similar approach of selecting an area for improvement, choosing a strategy, defining objectives, developing a plan, and identifying required resources. The sample action plan can provide you with a basic idea of content to include, but you will likely need to provide additional detail when you develop your own robust action plans.

Appendix

Following the five chapters, there is an appendix that includes a template for a blank action plan that is referenced throughout this guide. Commanders may print, copy and use this document to aid in planning and executing important improvements. Each section provides sample action plans to illustrate what needs to be completed for an action plan that focuses on a specific area of improvement.

Any additional questions regarding administration of the LOA survey, use of the LOA matrix, or content of this Guide should be directed to the AMC/CCL Enterprise Learning Office (ELO) at amc.ccl@us.af.mil.

Chapter 2 | Leader Facilitation | 2.2 Create a Culture of Feedback Exchange

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Sample Action Plan

Once you determine the root cause(s) for why your unit's culture is not conducive to effective feedback exchange, you should identify 1-2 strategies that will result in noticeable improvements for your unit. Next, turn these strategies into action plans. The example here provides a sample action plan to help improve feedback exchange within your unit. See Appendix A for a blank action plan template to use for the strategy you want to implement.

1 Select an Improvement Area	
Dimension Improvement Area	Dimension #2: Leader Facilitation
Root Causes	Leaders are not providing enough performance feedback to subordinates
2 Choose a Strategy	
Strategy	Roll out the use of SOAR cards through the Wing
Purpose	To increase effective feedback
3 Define Objectives	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Lt. Col. Majors, and Capts will fill out at least one SOAR card per week SOAR discussions will occur within 48 hours of observed action(s) 	
4 Refine the Path	
Target Audience (The people to whom the strategy is being aimed)	Lt. Col. Majors, and Capts in the Wing
Action Leads (The people who will be responsible)	Group leaders
Communication Avenue(s) (How the objectives will be communicated)	VTC with group leaders
Timeframe	Immediate
5 Identify Resources	
Implement Resources	Master copies of blank SOAR cards for each Group
Sustainment Resources	Additional performance metric: Number of SOAR feedback discussions per quarter

Part 3: Maturing as a Premier AF Learning Organization

The following pages contain Chapters 1-5 with 13 sections that align to the 13 LOCMM attributes introduced in Part 1 of this guide. These chapters and/or sections are designed to serve as standalone resources that may be extracted from the guide as needed depending on your unit's results on the LOA and the particular LOCMM attributes you prioritize.



GETTING STARTED: The core content of the Commander's Guide begins on the next page.

Chapter 1: Building a Learning Organization One Airman at a Time

This chapter focuses on the importance of *individual learning*. While a group of individuals learning does not equal a learning organization, individual learning is a key component to any learning organization. In other words, individual learning is a *necessary but not sufficient* condition for organizational learning. For individuals to learn, they must have *opportunity, ability* and *motivation* to do so. *Opportunity* refers to the content and resources provided to individuals as well as the support they experience whenever individuals seek out learning experiences. *Ability* refers to the potential of the individuals within the organization to process the concepts being presented and to make use of them in the workplace. *Motivation* refers to the desire to acquire new knowledge and skills, not just in the classroom, but in the course of performing their jobs every day.

Chapter 1 examines the presence of these core individual enablers of learning among Airmen within their units. It provides insights and resources so that AMC commanders can gain a greater appreciation of how motivational factors and characteristics of Airmen within the unit may influence development of a positive learning environment.

Chapter 1 includes the following sections:

Section 1.1: Helping Airmen Put the “I” in Individual Development

This section focuses on encouraging and enabling Airmen to take ownership of their development. If LOA results or your own observa-

tions indicate that Airmen do not appear to take an active role in learning, the insights provided here can help you understand the motivational and organizational factors that may be contrib-

uting to this situation. It includes a framework that can help you and your Airmen understand how improvements in performance occur. It also includes some tips for enhancing the self-awareness of Airmen so they can identify areas in which they might need to improve. There are also several simple self-development strategies Airmen can pursue each day to grow in their careers. For those interested in taking it to the next level, the

section includes guidance on pursuing an individual development plan to put Airmen on the right track to achieve their goals and those of the unit.

Section 1.2: Power-Up Proficiency to Performance

This is the only section in the guide that does not correspond directly to the LOA items. The focus is instead on Airman proficiency with respect to the Air Force Institutional Competencies. It provides a step-by-step framework for implementing assessments of Airmen proficiency, interpreting the results and the implications for your unit, developing a plan to address critical competency gaps, and suggestions for how to monitor results. By building on the insights from the first section about empowering Airmen to own their development, you can leverage this section to focus their efforts on specific competencies they may need to develop.

Featured Point

Opportunity +
Ability +
Motivation

Learning



Advancing Airmen and Unit Learning: A Commander's Guide

1.1

Helping Airmen Put the "I" in Individual Development

Why It Matters

A learning organization is built on individuals who continually seek out better ways of doing things, reflect on professional goals and opportunities to improve, pursue professional development opportunities, and learn from their mistakes. Individuals cannot be made to learn; true learning requires motivation and action on the part of the individual to gather and apply new information in a way that leads to necessary change. Professional development refers to the growth of an individual based on what is learned. To help your unit function at its best, it is important for you as a leader to understand why Airmen under your command may or may not be taking ownership of their self-development, and how you can encourage them to do so. Find out here how to help Airmen put the "I" back in their development!

What to Look For in Your Airmen

The strength indicators below reveal Airmen are striving to develop themselves; need indicators suggest Airmen have given little attention to self-development.

Strength Indicators

- ▶ Airmen seek out knowledge and resources to improve capabilities
- ▶ Airmen set aside time for self-development and reflection
- ▶ Airmen learn from their experience and correct their own mistakes
- ▶ Airmen determine personal goals and paths to achieve them

Need Indicators

- ▶ Airmen move on from tasks without reflecting on what worked and didn't
- ▶ Airmen rely on the same tactics over and over, whether they work or not
- ▶ Airmen only pursue training or development when required
- ▶ Airmen show little awareness of personal strengths or weaknesses

Case Study

In reviewing your unit's responses to the LOA survey, you notice lower than average responses to the item: "At work, I see myself continually improving."

You ask a few Flight Leaders in your squadron what they think could be causing Airmen to feel that way. They indicate that ops tempo has been so high lately that Airmen do not have time to focus on anything beyond required tasks. They also say that their Airmen want to develop their skills, but often don't know how to go about it beyond attending required training opportunities.

To address the situation, you instruct leaders in your unit to set aside time each month for their Airmen to focus on self-development and work with them to identify three key areas they would like to develop. You encourage leaders to work with Airmen to identify appropriate resources and activities to help reach their developmental goals and discuss with them how these efforts will benefit them professionally. You also ask Airmen to document their progress each month in a journal.



Determining Root Causes

Leaders who find that Airmen in their unit provided lower ratings on this attribute should consider the following questions to better understand the underlying issues:

- ▶ Do Airmen know their strengths and what areas they need to improve?
 - If “yes,” move to the next root cause question to dig deeper.
 - If “no,” review Steps 1, 2, and Exercise: Self-Assessment in this section.
- ▶ If Airmen know what they need to improve, do they know where to find relevant learning opportunities?
 - If “yes,” move to the next root cause question to dig deeper.
 - If “no,” see Step 1 and Step 4 in this section.
- ▶ Do Airmen feel empowered to take ownership of their self-development day-to-day?
 - If “yes,” move to the next root cause question to dig deeper.
 - If “no,” see Step 3 in this section.
- ▶ Do Airmen have clearly defined self-development goals and a clear path (i.e. strategies, timeframes) to achieve them?
 - If “yes,” set up regular times with Airmen to discuss these goal plans.
 - If “no,” see Step 4 for more insight into this challenge.

Key Steps to Move the Needle

Step 1: Set Up A Framework for Continuous Self-Development

Part of the challenge Airmen may face in taking charge of their self-development is a lack of awareness about their own competence or areas where they might need to improve. When attempting to determine why Airmen may not be taking a more active role in their own development, it is helpful for you to consider whether Airmen simply do not know where their faults lie,

know their faults but do not know how to correct them, or simply need more opportunity to hone their skills. The graphic below depicts the path learners take in developing competence, from unconscious incompetence to unconscious competence. It may remind you of the “Johari Window” you might have encountered in PME to demonstrate aspects of yourself that are known or unknown to you and to others. By better understanding where your Airmen fit within this model on a particular competency, you can adapt your approach to “help them help themselves.”



The four stages of the self-development process are described below along with potential actions you might take to support Airman self-development in each stage.

1. Unconscious Incompetence: This is the stage where a person is not even aware he/she is lacking in a needed knowledge or competency. Unconscious incompetence may be classified as ignorance; in this stage Airmen do not know what they do not know.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP? You may want to begin by facilitating self-assessments with Airmen or one-on-one discussions about individual performance and developmental needs.

2. Conscious Incompetence: In this stage, Airmen are aware that there is something they need to learn or an area in which they need to develop because they lack the competence to fully and accu-

rately fulfill their duties. In short, Airmen are now aware of their limitations.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP? Consider various motivational strategies or help direct Airmen to appropriate training or developmental resources, depending on whether the cause is a matter of will or skill.

3. Conscious competence: This stage is reached when a person can perform a particular task competently or has the necessary knowledge, but must be very conscious in applying knowledge or skills. The Airman may be growing in confidence in his/her skills, but performing effectively requires concerted effort.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP? If Airmen perform most tasks well but struggle to achieve mastery, you may need to provide them with more stretch assignments and opportunity to practice their competence.

4. Unconscious competence: In this stage, needed skills or competencies are mastered and become a natural, automatic process. With unconscious competence, the Airman does not need to deliberately think about skills to be able to perform them.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP? Be on the lookout for opportunities to pair Airmen at this level of competence with other, less capable Airmen to develop their skills.

Helping Airmen understand the stages of development they may encounter can give them a better understanding of the development process and a greater appreciation for the fact that individuals must learn how to develop as well as learn from development. Over time, Airmen can become more effective at assessing their own needs and setting goals, so that they can effectively take

ownership of their own development through the four stage process listed previously.

What’s Next

See the next two steps. These can help Airmen improve their self-awareness and prioritize self-development.

Step 2: Guide Airmen To Improve Self-Awareness

One key element that will help motivate Airmen to pursue self-development is self-awareness. Self-awareness is related to improved attitudes (e.g., satisfaction) as well as better performance, but unfortunately those lacking in self-awareness often do not realize they have a problem until they receive feedback from multiple others. Thus, as a first step in encouraging self-awareness, ask the Airman if he/she has sought formal performance feedback from colleagues, subordinates, and supervisors. Other techniques for promoting self-awareness to Airmen include:

- ▶ Encourage the Airman to create a list of 3-5 strengths and 3-5 limitations.
- ▶ Ask the Airman to consider past experiences and describe what was learned about his/her work or leadership style from those experiences.
- ▶ Have the Airman describe recent challenges or difficult conversations. Ask him/her to consider what role he/she may have played in those situations and list alternative ways he/she could have responded (Note: Your role is not to criticize or evaluate the way the Airman responded but to guide the Airman to evaluate his/her own response).
- ▶ Ask the Airman to share his/her thoughts about professional situations that are intimidating to him/her and what professional skills (e.g., communication) or development activities could be valuable to help address the situations.

Step 3: Help Airmen Help Themselves

Although lack of motivation can be one reason Airmen fail to take ownership of their development, it is likely that many Airmen simply do not have effective strategies to engage in meaningful self-development. This step provides several strategies that you can share with members of your unit to enable them to own their self-development. Using these skills can also help you to improve as a leader.

Self-Development Strategies	
Strategy	Description and Benefits
Engage in Journaling	Journaling allows Airmen to engage in self-reflection and can serve as a record of behaviors, outcomes, and progress toward goals. Journals can be used as a learning tool where a list of personal growth experiences can be recorded. The journal can then assist in synthesis of information for deeper understanding as well as personal reflection. Keeping a journal allows the Airman to look back on accomplishments, decisions, challenges encountered, and specific steps that were taken to engage in development toward goals.
Practice Development Everyday	<p>Working on self-development every day will yield better results than trying to accomplish goals all at once. Airmen could find a time each day that will work for them to pursue their development. This could be a specified time, for example after lunch, where they focus on developing needed skills.</p> <p>Alternatively, daily development towards goals could tie into something they already do, such as attending briefings or meetings. Encourage Airmen to think about how they can use existing commitments to work on skill development. Practicing skills that need development everyday will help to ensure continual progress is made toward goals and self-development is accomplished.</p>
Form Habits	Habits are a major contributor to behaviors that are displayed or actions taken by an individual. By understanding areas in which he/she needs to make improvements, an Airman can practice skills or activities daily to develop effective habits. When these habits start to become second nature, it is a clear sign Airmen are on the path to unconscious competence and skill mastery.
Seek Feedback Regularly	Feedback can come from a variety of sources and does not need to be formalized to enhance self-development. In the early stages of development of a skill or competency, it can be beneficial to seek more general feedback so Airmen can make broad-based improvements. When an Airman is more advanced in the skill, he/she may benefit from more specific feedback on any remaining opportunities for improvement. Tell Airmen to encourage feedback providers to be honest, as direct feedback will be the most beneficial for guiding successful self-development.

Step 4: Work With Airmen To Make A Plan

While Airmen may have an Airman Development Plan (ADP) that is established by the Air Force, sitting down with each Airman to develop a personalized and structured development plan can encourage him/her to develop more of a vested interest in his/her development.

A structured development plan should include:

1. a self-assessment to lead the Airman to see where improvement is needed;
2. individual goals with specific steps and timeframes to keep Airman accountable for achieving goals;
3. a list of opportunities that would help the Airman achieve each goal.

The **self-assessment** is the foundation of any development plan. Self-assessment is a process whereby the Airman and his/her supervisor discuss the Airman’s current strengths and developmental areas. The self-assessment exercise provided at the end of this section is one resource you can use to begin this discussion, though you may want to add questions specific to functions within your unit. Other sources of information on developmental areas could include evaluations or feedback from other Airmen in the unit. Further, if your Airmen have not completed the VIA Survey of Character Strengths that is part of the Air Force Resiliency Training, encourage them to access it **here**. This will help them identify their top 24 strengths and further distinguish their five dominant strengths from their limitations.



The **goals** listed in the plan should be S.M.A.R.T. goals. This means specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-specific. It is important that the plan also specifies how each goal aligns with the Airman’s current role, possible future roles, and the AMC mission to help personalize development for the Airman. Through being an active participant in outlining the goals, the Airman will begin to believe he/she has more of an impact on his/her own career path and thus want to seek out ways to develop that will help the Airman achieve the goals in the plan.

For **opportunities to develop**, consider various books, new tasks, or developmental activities (see box below) the Airman might try to develop himself or herself. Remember that “training” does not necessarily equal “learning” and that providing an Airman with additional experiences (e.g., opportunity to lead an important task) can often be more valuable for development than some structured training. This ensures that the Airman is accountable for his/her own development, and it will provide you both with a specified future date to revisit the development plan, assess progress, and make course corrections if necessary.

Where Do I Go from Here?

Airmen can access a robust suite of self-development tools 24/7 through **AF e-Learning**. It contains a large, searchable collection of courses, books, simulations, and other e-learning resources for self-development. Access AF e-Learning via a link on the Air Force Portal home page under Top Portal Links and Education/Training/Force Development.

The Supervisor Resource Center is an online clearinghouse developed to put Air Force tools and no-cost resources for leadership development at your fingertips. Its vast collection of resources includes learning and development road maps that can help you guide Airmen down an appropriate development path.

Further Reading:

- ▶ Pedler, Burgoyne, & Boydell (2013). *A Manager’s Guide to Self-Development*. McGraw-Hill Professional, Sixth Edition
Includes over 50 activities that can be used to help Airmen develop specific qualities and skills, improve performance, and advance their career and personal potential.
- ▶ London (2002). *Leadership Development: Paths to Self-Insight and Professional Growth*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
Helps leaders learn how to gain an accurate view of their strengths and weaknesses, focusing on self-insight. Includes a chapter on continuous self-development.
- ▶ Hiemstra (2001). *Uses and Benefits of Journal Writing*. In *Promoting Journal Writing in Adult Education*. Jossey-Bass.
Provides an overview of different types of journaling as well as journaling benefits.



Exercise: Self-Assessment

A self-assessment can help Airmen reflect upon their development and the areas they need to improve. Ask Airmen to answer the questions below and then discuss with them steps they could take to build on their strengths and improve weaknesses. Consider one-time activities such as a training course as well as ongoing, everyday steps they can take to grow in their roles.

Strengths

- ▶ The skill or ability I am best at is:
- ▶ The personal quality that I rely on most is:
- ▶ I am most knowledgeable about:
- ▶ Others usually come to me for help on:

Weaknesses

- ▶ The skill or ability that is always difficult for me is:
- ▶ I do not know as much as I should about:
- ▶ The situation that causes me the most frustration is:
- ▶ Others think I am not very good at:

Sample Action Plan

Once you determine the root cause(s) for Airmen not taking responsibility for their own development, you should identify 1-2 strategies that would result in noticeable improvements for your unit. Next, turn these strategies into action plans. The example here provides a sample action plan for implementing “journaling” within your unit. See Appendix A for a blank action plan template to use for the strategy you want to implement.

1 Select an Improvement Area

Dimension Improvement Area	Dimension #1: Individual Airman Learner
Root Causes	Airmen are not aware of their limitations, and move on from tasks without reflecting on what worked and did not work

2 Choose a Strategy

Strategy	Engage each Airman in focused journaling activities
Purpose	To encourage Airmen self-awareness and improvement

3 Define Objectives

- 50% of Airmen will engage in reflective journaling
- Each Airman will spend at least 15 minutes per week on reflective journaling

4 Refine the Path

Target Audience (The people to whom the strategy is being aimed)	All Airmen in the Squadron
Action Leads (The people who will be responsible)	Flight commanders
Communication Avenue(s) (How the objectives will be communicated)	VTC with Flight commanders
Timeframe	Flight commanders provide plan of action NLT 3Feb

5 Identify Resources

Implement Resources	Time to develop journaling guidance and brief Airmen
Sustainment Resources	Adjust schedules to include weekly journaling time



Advancing Airmen and Unit Learning: A Commander's Guide

1.2

Power-Up Proficiency to Performance

Why It Matters

A Premier Air Force (AF) Learning Organization is comprised of leaders who nurture excellence in the individuals they lead. As a leader, you can guide Airmen along a trajectory that ensures they develop in the appropriate direction— toward job and mission success as specified in the Air Force Institutional Competencies. In supporting competency development, leaders guide Airmen to relevant learning and nurture greater proficiency required to perform effectively. Read on to learn how you can promote learning that results in increased competency proficiency in your Airmen.

What to Look For in Your Airmen

The strength indicators below suggest Airmen believe learning is encouraged in the organization; need indicators suggest the learning culture could be better reinforced.

Strength Indicators

- ▶ Airmen perform tasks at or above expectations
- ▶ High ratings of proficiency when assessed on AF Institutional Competencies (ICs)
- ▶ Airmen have individual development plans (IDPs) and their IDP goals align to mission achievement, AMC strategic framework, and the Institutional Competencies

Need Indicators

- ▶ Airmen require assistance or perform sub-optimally on tasks
- ▶ Airmen task performance is falling short of the requirements of their position
- ▶ Airmen do not have clear developmental goals or awareness of the competencies they need to develop

Case Study

In response to AFSO initiatives, you restructured your unit's activities to increase efficiency. You implemented new procedures and reallocated manpower across a range of tasks. The result over the first two months was increased operational efficiency and work quality. However, as time passed you began to notice a slow decline in operations. To identify what the problem may be, you conducted site visits to observe your Airmen in their duties.

During your visits, you were surprised to see Airmen were executing old procedures and your subordinate leaders had allowed the new procedures to fall by the wayside.

You see this as a failure of your unit to successfully manage the organizational changes you set forth. You provide your subordinate leaders with feedback on this setback and recommend they work to increase their own proficiency in adaptability and change management to help their units to address the resistance to change. You offer to set aside time for them to identify and participate in relevant trainings and knowledge sharing with other unit leaders.



Determining Root Causes

Leaders who identify a proficiency gap in their unit should ask the following questions to determine what may be causing the gap.

- ▶ Are Airmen aware of the competencies and what is expected of them?
 - If “yes,” move to the next root cause question to dig deeper.
 - If “no,” direct them to become familiar with Appendix C of AFDD 1-1 cited in the “Where Do I Go From Here” in this section.
- ▶ Do the demands of Airmen’s functional duties dissuade their personal development in other areas?
 - If “yes,” think about how you can make time for the developmental activities listed in Step 3 of this section.
 - If “no,” dig deeper by asking the next root cause question.
- ▶ Are Airmen exposed to the types of events, activities, or stretch assignments that promote development in a certain competency area?
 - If “yes,” read on to see if more insights emerge.
 - If “no,” think about how you can expose your Airmen to broadening experiences that promote learning as part of the action plan described in Step 3 of this section.

Key Steps to Move the Needle

Step 1: Gather Unit-Wide Competency Metrics

Part of the challenge in promoting proficiency among your Airmen is obtaining an accurate picture of where they stand and identifying needed points of improvement. To do this you may need to gather metrics of how your Airmen are doing with respect to demonstrating the Institutional Competencies. There are various ways to collect these metrics.

Conduct Meetings with your Subordinate Leaders

You likely already conduct period meetings with your subordinate leaders to discuss unit issues. During these meetings, you can add an agenda item to discuss their perceptions of performance gaps at a high level; avoid discussing specific persons as this can be counter-productive to building a positive culture. You may ask the leaders questions such as:

- ▶ Is Airmen task performance across the unit falling short of the requirements of their position? If “yes...”
 - How wide-spread are the performance gaps?
 - Within which jobs and/or ranks are the gaps most evident?
 - What impact are the gaps having on unit readiness and mission success?
 - Why do you think the gaps exist? Is it because of lack of support? Process issues? Time pressures? Etc.
 - What could we do as a unit to improve in this area and close the gap?

Have Airmen Complete a Self-Assessment

Airmen may face is a lack of awareness about their strengths and developmental needs. To assist them, it may be helpful to have them reflect on their performance and capabilities by requiring them to complete a self-assessment of their performance of the USAF Institutional Competencies. Airmen can gain access to self-assessments based on the USAF Instructional Competencies by contacting the AMC Enterprise Learning Office at amc.ccl@us.af.mil. Note that Airmen should be encouraged to take personal ownership of their self-assessment data so you will need to determine the best way to collect and synthesize the data that will not pose a threat to that sense of personal ownership. One option may be to designate a POC in your unit to whom Airmen can submit their self-assessment results; someone

seen as a neutral third-party who will protect the confidentiality of the data. The POC can then aggregate the data and provide you with metrics that indicate relative strengths and weaknesses on the Institutional Competencies across your unit. Keep in mind the inherent weaknesses of the self-assessment approach. For instance, any lack of anonymity in this assessment process may lead Airmen to inadvertently inflate their ratings. Airmen may also be limited in seeing some of their performance deficiencies so the self-ratings may or may not reflect the most significant gaps. A 360° assessment may be used to help address this concern.

Have Airmen Complete a 360° Assessment

A benefit of a 360° assessment is that it allows for varying perspectives on Airmen performance. Varied perspectives provide a more complete picture of Airmen performance and can aid in more precisely identifying the performance gaps in your unit. As the Unit Commander, you may view aggregate level data to determine points of need for your unit's overall proficiency. With this information you can identify the relative strengths and developmental needs across your unit and implement unit-level initiatives to close proficiency gaps. It is important to ensure Airmen understand the purpose of the assessment is developmental, not evaluative, and it is intended to make their unit the best it can be. To learn more about the 360° assessment, contact the AMC's Enterprise Learning Office (ELO) at amc.ccl@us.af.mil. The ELO will be able assist you in identifying the proper procedures for your Airmen to initiate 360° assessments and in accessing aggregated unit-level data.

Step 2: Interpret Assessment Results

As the Unit Commander, you will need to interpret the metrics you collect (regardless of the format you use to collect that data). When reviewing the metrics, take note of the relative strengths and developmental needs across your unit. Attending

to the largest and most important developmental needs first will allow you to prioritize the developmental initiatives to implement in your unit. That is not to say you should rely solely on the metrics collected. As the Commander, you should take into account your own perceptions and intuition, and select priorities using your discretion and vision for your unit. The exercise presented in this section is a great starting point for evaluating your own perspectives on strengths and challenge areas for your unit.

Step 3: Develop an Action Plan

Once you have identified the most pressing proficiency gaps in your unit, you should formulate an action plan to begin closing the gaps. For example, if you found that Airmen overall appear the least proficient on the competency of "continuous improvement" but the strongest in the area of "change management," perhaps you could include Airmen in AFSO brainstorming sessions to solicit ideas about how to improve process efficiency in the unit.

Depending on the specific needs of your unit, there are a number of developmental initiatives you could implement in these areas: Feedback, Study, and Practice.

- ▶ **Feedback:** Provide information to your unit regarding how well they are doing across the Institutional Competencies. The feedback could include a summary of unit metrics, your own observations, and discussion of how and why unit improvement is critical for the AMC mission. As part of the feedback, you should clearly articulate your vision for improvement that includes both the desired end-state and the means through which it is to be achieved. Feedback does not necessarily have to come from you. You could also enlist the participation of your subordinate leaders to provide individualized feedback to the Airmen they supervise.

- ▶ **Study:** Share additional resources with Airmen for them to use when working to meet your stated objectives. Based on the specific needs you have identified, you may suggest to Airmen they attend training courses, read books or articles, watch relevant videos, observe others on the job, or analyze various sources of information. In addition, you could simply request that your Airmen take time reflect on the identified gap and think critically about what they can do to help close it.
- ▶ **Practice:** Provide Airmen the opportunity to participate in activities to convert their learning (e.g., through feedback and/or study) into action. Practice can include engaging in physical exercises, cross-training, drills, structured teamwork, and broadening/stretch assignments. Allow Airmen to try their hand at a skill or behavior that needs improvement. As the Airman learns the new skill, it could help crystallize the learning for the Airman by having him/her teach the skill to a fellow Airman. This yields double-duty learning as both teacher and student are benefitting from the instructional experience. Thus, you may want to consider formalizing peer-instruction in your unit.

A sample completed action plan can be found at the end of this section and blank action plan template can be found in Appendix A to help you on this step.

Step 4: Implement the Action Plan and Monitor Results

The exact way you implement the action plan is up to you and may change depending on time and resources available as well as the magnitude of the proficiency gap. Regardless of constraints, your first step to implementing the action plan should be to communicate to your unit the overall purpose of



the plan and your expectations of your Airmen in executing the plan and achieving/sustaining results.

You should avoid pointing out proficiency concerns for specific Airmen in group settings. Rather, individual Airman gaps should be addressed one-on-one so the Airman can be candid about concerns that may be inhibiting his/her development in a particular competency. For unit level gaps, as the leader, you should be transparent about the competencies in which the overall unit is doing well and those where work is needed. Thus, as you implement the action plan and try out new approaches to development, the unit will know exactly what is expected of them and what outcomes support proficiency improvements.

After you have implemented the action plan, you should monitor progress toward achieving your stated goals. You can monitor progress through your own observations, reports from your subordinate leaders, and/or iterative assessments. You will want to be sure to leave sufficient time between assessments (at least 6 months) to allow improvements to take hold and manifest desired results.

Where Do I Go from Here?

The AMC Enterprise Learning Office (ELO) is the POC for access to competency assessment materials and resources. To learn more about these tools, contact the ELO at amc.ccl@us.af.mil.

Once you have identified the points of need, you can access a robust suite of Airmen development tools 24/7 through the [AF e-Learning site](#). It contains a large, searchable collection of courses, books, simulations, and other e-learning resources for Airmen development. You may access AF e-Learning via a link on the Air Force Portal home page under Top Portal Links and Education/Training/Force Development. Additionally, The [Civilian Development Resource Center](#) is an online clearinghouse that places Air Force tools and no-cost resources for leadership development at your fingertips. It can also be found in the Force Development tab within the [Air Force Portal](#).

Further Reading:

- ▶ Kotter, J. P. (2012). *Leading Change*. Harvard Business Review Press: Cambridge.

Author provides a framework for facilitating change. This book serves as both a visionary's guide and a practical toolkit on how to approach your unit's need for improvement.

- ▶ AFDD1-1, Appendix C

This doctrinal document contains the complete list and descriptions of the AF Institutional Competencies

- ▶ AFMAN 36-2647: Institutional Competency Development and Management

This [document](#) provides guidance regarding how competencies are to be developed in Airmen

- ▶ Air Force Institutional Competencies Flash Cards

Follow this [link](#) to access flashcard study material for facilitating learning of the AF Institutional Competencies.



Exercise: Tap Your Own Perspective

Asking yourself a short set of questions regarding the performance of your Airmen may help you gain initial insights into the developmental needs of your unit. Answer the questions below to help focus your thinking on potential proficiency gaps in your unit. You can also ask your subordinate leaders to answer these questions to gain additional insights and perspectives.

What are areas for success in the unit?

- ▶ My unit excels at:
- ▶ My unit directly contributes to AMC success by:
- ▶ My Airmen are most knowledgeable about:
- ▶ Others usually come to my unit for:

What are the unit's challenge areas?

- ▶ My unit has struggled with:
- ▶ My unit could be more knowledgeable about:
- ▶ Airmen in my unit exhibit frustration when:
- ▶ In the past, my unit has been criticized for:

Sample Action Plan

Once you determine the root cause(s) for why your Airmen are demonstrating performance gaps, you should identify 1-2 strategies that will result in noticeable improvements for your unit. Next, turn these strategies into action plans. The example here provides a sample action plan to help cultivate an enterprise perspective within your unit. See Appendix A for a blank action plan template to use for the strategy you want to implement.

1 Select an Improvement Area

Dimension Improvement Area	Enterprise Perspective
Root Causes	Airmen don't feel they affect matters outside of their AFSC

2 Choose a Strategy

Strategy	Expose Airmen to other parts of the AMC enterprise
Purpose	To allow Airmen the chance to see how the success of the enterprise is interdependent and how work in their AFSC contributes to larger mission success.

3 Define Objectives

- Each Airmen will participate in cross-training events
- Each Airman will spend at least 40 hours per quarter conducting work outside of their AFSC
- Each Airman will receive guidance from his/her supervisor on their new stretch assignments

4 Refine the Path

Target Audience (The people to whom the strategy is being aimed)	All Airmen in the Squadron
Action Leads (The people who will be responsible)	Flight commanders
Communication Avenue(s) (How the objectives will be communicated)	VTC with Flight commanders/Commander's Calls
Timeframe	Flight Commanders identify stretch assignments by 12 Jan. Check for improvements in 6 months (NLT 12 July)

5 Identify Resources

Implement Resources	Adjust schedules to account for new assignments. Identified list of alternative stretch assignments
Sustainment Resources	Reallocate training budget to support cross-training

Chapter 2: Leading the Way to Continuous Learning

Leaders play a pivotal role in promoting learning throughout their organization, but if they overlook this responsibility, they can actually inadvertently inhibit learning within the unit. Although the entire Commander's Guide is designed to help leaders facilitate Airman learning, many of these sections focus on broader and longer-term efforts (e.g., implementing systems and processes, establishing a learning culture). Chapter 2 provides guidance on some of the most immediate and direct means through which all leaders promote learning on a daily basis. As a commander, you should be sensitive not only to how you exemplify these behaviors, but also how other leaders under your command exhibit them with the Airmen they lead.

An important theme among the sections of this chapter is the leader's relationship to the learner. For example, a leader must provide Airmen with the tools, resources, and opportunities to learn and avoid the temptation to repeatedly place today's tasks above development for the future. Feedback is also critical to motivating Airmen and ensuring that skill or performance gaps do not continue to grow without corrective action. Leaders who recognize and reward the accomplishments of learners help to reinforce positive behaviors and promote continued development. And, of course, leaders who do not take steps to develop their own capabilities as leaders will find it harder to support the learning of others.

To support AMC commanders with these activities, Chapter 2 includes the following sections:

Section 2.1: Promote Learning Among All Airmen

In the same way that Chapter 1 provided you with ways to help Airmen take ownership of their development, this section provides steps



you and other leaders in your unit can take to facilitate the development of your Airmen. Research shows that the relationship with one's supervisor is often the most important in any workplace as it impacts the individual's view of the entire organization and can influence the individual's desire to work to full capacity, and AMC is no different. Leaders who invest in identifying learning opportunities for their Airmen, structuring work in a way that enhances learning, enabling Airmen to pursue new challenges, and promoting the transfer of newly acquired knowledge and skills on the job can make a meaningful impact on learning within their units.

Section 2.2: Creating a Culture of Feedback Exchange

One of the most common barriers to learning in a hierarchical environment like a military organization is a reluctance to give and receive honest and objective performance feedback up, down, and across the command hierarchy. Unfortunately, leaders may find it easier to circumvent Airmen who are underperforming rather than directly addressing their shortcomings. Likewise, Airmen may be reluctant to provide feedback to their leaders about their methods if they feel the leader may take offense or even discipline them for less favorable feedback. This section provides guidance so that you can understand the root causes of such pat-

terns and confront them head on. For example, steps described in this section include how to set expectations regarding feedback, facilitate top-down and bottom-up feedback, lead by example, and employ active listening and self-assessment.

Section 2.3: Thumbs Up! Recognizing and Rewarding Performance

It is easy to fall into the trap of assuming that the mission and a paycheck are enough to motivate every Airman to perform to the best of their abilities and develop their skills, but experienced leaders will concede that this is rarely the case. Sustained performance in the face of adversity demands that leaders recognize and reward the accomplishments of their Airmen, especially when the Airmen go above and beyond. This section provides guidance on how commanders can enhance recognition and reward systems in order to achieve their goals and foster an environment that supports continuous improvement. Elements include characteristics of effective recognition and rewards, strategies for providing them, building trust, and promoting internal motivation. It also includes a sample

action plan for implementing a formal recognition program.

Section 2.4: Continuous Improvement – Be the Example

Taking leadership development seriously can improve learning within your organization in two important ways. First, it can provide leaders with a more robust skillset with which to develop and support other Airmen. Leaders can improve active listening skills, learn how to motivate Airmen to increase their capabilities, and discover new approaches to training and development. Secondly, it shows that leaders are willing to lead by example, which might inspire less experienced Airmen to take their development more seriously. This section focuses on fundamental actions you and other leaders in your unit can take to develop in your roles. It includes specific learning methods shown to be effective at developing leaders such as coaching and mentoring, and emphasizes the importance of setting a good example for others.



Advancing Airmen and Unit Learning: A Commander's Guide

2.1

Promote Learning Among All Airmen

Why It Matters

In today's rapidly changing environment, it is critical that Airmen and their leaders identify knowledge, assimilate new ideas, and then quickly put those ideas into practice. It is often not feasible to wait for a training course to be developed and find a time for everyone to attend; instead, individuals should look to a wide array of learning opportunities such as coaching, mentoring, learning communities, and online and distance learning options. Leaders should leverage everyday experiences and give subordinates challenging job opportunities and other stretch assignments. A focus on continuous learning provides individuals with the knowledge and skills they need to support organizational goals and to ensure personal career development. Read on about how leaders facilitate continuous learning.

What to Look For in Your Airmen

The strength indicators below suggest leaders are helping to promote learning; need indicators suggest leaders could do more to encourage learning in Airmen.

Strength Indicators

- ▶ Leaders recognize the learning needs of their Airmen
- ▶ Airmen throughout the organization regularly participate in formal and informal learning activities
- ▶ Leaders make time to coach and mentor less senior Airmen
- ▶ Airmen are provided with support during challenging job assignments

Need Indicators

- ▶ Airmen do not feel they receive adequate opportunities to learn the skills for their desired career track
- ▶ Training is seen as the only way to increase skills and knowledge
- ▶ Airmen and their leaders feel that they do not have time for learning
- ▶ Challenging assignments are given with a "sink or swim" mentality

Case Study

In reviewing your organization's responses to the LOA, you notice lower than average responses to the item: "Airmen at all levels are directed by their leaders toward relevant training and learning opportunities."

The last two years have seen a steady tightening of training budgets, and the budget is not likely to increase over the next several cycles. Airmen and leaders alike are feeling the pinch.

You address the situation by educating your subordinate leaders on low-cost learning opportunities such as job shadowing, coaching and mentoring, discussion forums, and informational interviews.

After a discussion with subordinate leaders, you insert a goal in the command's annual plan to increase participation in several of these low-cost learning strategies, and instruct subordinate leaders to develop a detailed plan for improving the availability and frequency of learning opportunities organization-wide.



Determining Root Causes

Leaders who find that Airmen in their unit provided lower ratings on this attribute should consider the following questions to better understand the underlying issues:

- ▶ Do Airmen and their leaders recognize opportunities for learning beyond training?
 - If “yes,” continue to the next questions to dig deeper into the cause.
 - If “no,” see Step 1 in this section.
- ▶ Do Airmen feel that challenges they experience on the job are supported as potential learning opportunities as opposed to be looked down upon?
 - If “yes,” continue to the next questions to dig deeper into the cause.
 - If “no,” see Step 2 in this section.
- ▶ Do Airmen know how to work together to learn with others in their unit?
 - If “yes,” continue to the next question to dig deeper into the cause.
 - If “no,” see Step 3 in this section.
- ▶ What are ways leaders can encourage Airmen to better transfer their learning to the job?
 - Read Step 4, Keep the Learning Process Running Smoothly.

Key Steps to Move the Needle

Step 1: Promote Individual Learning Opportunities

One of the biggest challenges of learning on the job is simply recognizing the learning opportunities that are available. A wide variety of methods and resources can be used by individuals to support goals of continuous learning. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) identifies different strategies for learning; these are briefly described.



Increase Awareness of Structured Learning Options

Many individuals feel that their access to structured learning opportunities is limited due to time, duty, or location constraints. It is important to increase awareness within your organization of the many options available for learning, for example:

- ▶ **Job aids:** Tools that give step-by-step guidance for task completion.
- ▶ **Classroom learning:** Work-related training facilitated by an instructor in a traditional classroom setting.
- ▶ **Distance learning:** Similar to classroom learning, but instruction takes place via video or Web-based connections. Typically offered by universities and professional vendors.
- ▶ **Online learning:** Learning available via the Internet, including self-paced courses, real-time presentations, and online reading materials.

Provide On-the-Job Learning Options

The job itself and specific task assignments can be used to enhance Airmen knowledge and skills. On-the-job opportunities can prepare individuals for career advancement, foster job development and challenge, or motivate individuals who have

been in a similar job for a long time. Examples of on-the-job opportunities include:

- ▶ **Job shadowing:** Temporary observation of another person in his/her daily routine.
- ▶ **Special projects and assignments:** Temporary duties performed on a part- or full-time basis.
- ▶ **Delegation of responsibilities:** Transfer of responsibility for how a task is accomplished. The leader sets goals and objectives that must be met. The subordinate determines actions and schedules for meeting the objectives.
- ▶ **Self-directed learning:** Development activities that individuals can pursue on their own. Includes any learning source where the learner has control over topics and/or pace.

Create Opportunities for Individuals to Learn from Each Other

An individual's relationships with other people can serve as a rich source for learning. Think about the opportunities that are available throughout your organization and provide additional support if needed. Interpersonal learning sources can include the following:

- ▶ **Learning groups (teams):** Ongoing meetings where individuals focus on learning and development needs and interests.
- ▶ **Discussion forums:** Groups that regularly meet to share ideas, information, and solutions to work-related issues. Forums can be face-to-face or online.
- ▶ **Informational interviews:** One-on-one meetings held with key people that have specific expertise to gain targeted information, perspectives, and advice.

Build a Learning Culture

Building a learning culture involves enhancing learning opportunities by supporting individuals as they develop skills and assume new job duties. By leveraging the knowledge and experience of those

more seasoned, Airmen can grow in their knowledge and skills. Example programs that help to build a learning culture include:

- ▶ **Coaching:** Observation, feedback, and facilitative problem-solving to enhance performance; typically focused on a specific skill set or area for development.
- ▶ **Mentoring:** Formal or informal relationships where the mentor provides ongoing support, advice, and career direction. These relationships often cross functional areas and provide broader, ongoing career support.
- ▶ **Supervisor as Teacher:** Leader-facilitated learning where regular time is set aside to meet with subordinates and focus on areas where learning is needed; leaders provide advice and guide subordinates to relevant learnings.

Step 2: Leverage On-the-Job Challenges

Recognize On-the-Job Challenges

When your Airmen have challenging on-the-job experiences, their assignments are stretching them and developing their ability to handle new situations. On-the-job challenges create powerful opportunities to learn because they require problem solving and often present real consequences. It is important to recognize challenges as learning opportunities so that Airmen feel their time working through the challenges is valuable. Failure to leverage challenges as learning opportunities often results in individuals burning out on their job. New challenges may result in Airmen mistakes. If those challenges are not valued as learning opportunities, learning from mistakes is subsequently missed and the same mistake may then be repeated multiple times. Five types of challenges that can enhance learning include job transitions, new and higher levels of responsibility, responsibility for change creation, boundary management, and increased diversity. These are further described in the following table.

Work assignments that STRETCH	
Challenge	Description and Benefits
Job Transitions	Each time an individual changes locations or accepts a promotion, she/he experiences new opportunities for learning. Job transitions often affect an Airman's job function and work environment, scope of duties, level of responsibility, and direct-report relationships. Such experiences can lead to new ways of thinking and working.
New and Higher Levels of Responsibility	Jobs with higher levels of responsibility increase job scope, diversify work functions, enlarge budgets, and/or require oversight of more people. Such assignments require resourcefulness and adaptation in the face of changing and often ambiguous circumstances. These stretch assignments provide learners with many opportunities for growth, including (but not limited to) improved strategic thinking, decision-making, relationship-building, prioritization, and integration of different perspectives.
Responsibility for Change Creation	Creating change is a multi-pronged experience filled with ambiguity and undefined actions. It can be a time of stress — and substantial learning. Assignments to create change in pursuit of a defined goal can lead to enhanced learning in many areas. A few of these areas include problem-solving, decisiveness, planning, and taking responsibility for one's own actions.
Boundary Management	Airmen learn a great deal when they work across lateral boundaries and with people over whom they have no formal or direct authority. Situations that require collaboration, whether externally or within organizations, can enhance learning about relationships, handling conflict, and being straightforward with others. These situations can also help Airmen develop many skills, such as negotiation, communication, and conflict management.
Increased Diversity	As the Air Force increases in diversity, Airmen and their leaders often work with and manage people with different values, experiences, backgrounds, and workplace needs. It is challenging to move beyond personal beliefs and perspectives to understand differing (and sometimes conflicting) viewpoints. Increased diversity can lead to learning that enhances relationships between Airmen and with the larger community.

Note: This table is adapted from Ohlott (2003).

Provide Support During On-the-Job Challenges

When Airmen and their leaders experience on-the-job challenges like those listed above, leaders should provide feedback and support to enhance the learning process and reduce unnecessary stress (refer to Section 2.2 for a discussion on feedback). Be mindful that the learner may need additional guidance depending on the level of challenge; in more challenging situations, it may be necessary to increase the availability of experts to answer questions and provide resources.

Step 3: Provide Organizational Support

In addition to the strategies already listed, there are learning strategies that apply at the organizational level and help the larger team or unit address and solve problems, build on lessons learned, and create core competencies. The following text describes organizational strategies that can also increase capacity for individual learning and skills development.

Analyze work problems and develop action plans

- ▶ **Create “action learning” groups:** Action learning is a process for bringing together a group of people with varied levels of skills and experience to analyze an actual work problem and develop an action plan. The group continues to meet as actions are implemented, discusses the implementation to determine lessons learned, and makes mid-course corrections.
- ▶ **Support cross-functional teams:** Cross-functional teams are comprised of people across different divisions or functional units who are brought together to solve a problem or accomplish a task. These teams may use action learning as a process for problem solving. Team members come from different organizational units and may have permanent or ad hoc standing.

Open additional channels of communication

- ▶ **Consider parallel learning structures:** Parallel learning structures refer to groups of representatives from various levels and functions that work outside and parallel to the normal hierarchical structure to complete specific assignments/projects. Parallel learning structures promote innovation and change in large bureaucratic organizations while retaining the advantage of bureaucratic design.
- ▶ **Research potential groupware:** Groupware is any technology used to facilitate a group's communication, problem-solving, and decision-making processes. Some examples include email, calendaring, and web conferencing. Groupware can be used in many ways, for example, to coordinate learning discussions among different parties, or facilitate long-distance meetings and presentations.

Note: Many of these ideas are adapted from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management's guidance on learning strategies (2005, September).



Step 4: Keep the Learning Process Running Smoothly

To keep the learning process running smoothly, incorporate a few high-impact learning opportunities, create supportive processes that encourage learning, and instruct subordinate leaders to use existing work experiences to bolster continuous learning. The following text describes how to ensure learning is continuous and transfers to the way in which Airmen perform their jobs.

Encourage Learning As An Essential Component of the Job

The work environment should encourage continuous learning and support individuals to use what they have learned. Airmen need to see that learning is expected as a fundamental aspect to their jobs; learning should be core to work performance as opposed to be thought of as an extra requirement. It is valuable to have regular check-in meetings to discuss learning that has occurred on the job. It is also beneficial to incorporate the discussion of learning into daily dialogs with Airmen to challenge Airmen to articulate what they have learned from work situations.

Promote Transfer of Learning Back to the Job

Airmen need to clearly see a link between what they have learned and the execution of their day-to-day work tasks. A few techniques that can be used to promote transfer of learning include promoting goal setting around learning at regular intervals, advocating for positive peer networks, providing opportunities to perform new skills (e.g., new job tasks) and following up with enhanced learning and maintenance in areas that Airmen have previously developed. These techniques are further discussed.

- ▶ **Create Learning Goals:** Encourage subordinate leaders to communicate the goals of each learning activity before the learning activity takes place. Once Airmen complete the learning activity, leaders should follow up through feedback, recognition, and incentives.
- ▶ **Provide the Opportunity to Perform:** One of the strongest barriers to successful learning transfer is the lack of opportunity to perform the new skills. Encourage leaders to provide

immediate opportunities to their Airmen to perform newly-learned skills.

- ▶ **Foster an Environment that Encourages a Transfer of Learning:** Encourage subordinate leaders to consistently facilitate the use of new skills by supporting learning activities, encouraging Airmen to apply their new skills on the job, and by providing resources necessary for learning application.
- ▶ **Advocate Positive Peer Networks:** When trainees regularly network and share ideas with peers, their knowledge and skills increase, a “transfer climate” develops and deepens learning, and performance on the job improves. Encourage positive peer networks among Airmen and subordinate leaders.
- ▶ **Follow Up:** Enhance learning by following up after Airmen participate in learning opportunities. Set up a process for gathering feedback about the value of the learning opportunity.

Note: These concepts are adapted from Grossman, R. & Eduardo, S. (2011) who describe the key elements of training transfer.

Where Do I Go from Here?

- ▶ **Learn more about individual and organizational strategies for continuous learning:**

U.S. Office of Personnel Management. (2005, September). Learning Strategies for Creating a Continuous Learning Environment.

- ▶ **Learn more about job assignments that create challenge and learning:**

Ohlott, Patricia J. (2003, November/December). Answering the Call: Job Assignments that Grow Leaders. *Leadership In Action*, 23(5), pages 18-20. http://www.ccl.org/leadership/pdf/publications/lia/lia23_5answering.pdf.

- ▶ **Learn more about how to encourage transfer of knowledge learned to the job context:**

Grossman, R. & Eduardo, S. (2011, June). The Transfer of Training: What Really Matters. *International Journal of Training and Development*, 15(2), pages 103-120. http://www.researchgate.net/publication/228253704_The_Transfer_of_Training_What_Really_Matters



Exercise: Part 1, Identify Individual Learning Strategies

Depending on the situation and individuals involved, different learning strategies and/or multiple learning strategies may be used. The following checklist may be used with Airmen to help them identify specific opportunities they can individually seek out.

Individual Learning Strategies	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Airman Comprehensive Assessments (ACAS): Formal documents that spark detailed communication between supervisors and subordinates
<input type="checkbox"/>	Job Shadowing: Temporary observation of another person in his/her daily routine
<input type="checkbox"/>	Special Projects and Assignments: Temporary duties performed on a part- or full-time basis
<input type="checkbox"/>	Delegation of Responsibilities: Transfer of responsibility for <i>how</i> a task is accomplished. The leader sets goals and objectives that must be met. The subordinate determines actions and schedules for meeting the objectives.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Coaching: Observation, feedback, and facilitative problem-solving to enhance performance
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mentoring: Formal or informal relationship where the mentor provides ongoing support, advice, and career direction
<input type="checkbox"/>	Job Aids: Tools that give step-by-step guidance for task completion.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Manager as Teacher: Leader-facilitated learning where each interaction with subordinates is treated as a learning opportunity
<input type="checkbox"/>	Learning Groups (TEAMS): Ongoing meetings where Airmen focus on learning and development needs and interests
<input type="checkbox"/>	Self-directed Learning: Development activities that Airmen can pursue on their own. Includes any learning source where the learner has control over topics and/or pace.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Classroom Learning: Work-related training facilitated by an instructor in a traditional classroom setting
<input type="checkbox"/>	Distance Learning: Similar to classroom learning, but instruction takes place via video or Web-based connections; typically offered by universities and professional vendors
<input type="checkbox"/>	Online Learning: Learning available via the Internet, including self-paced courses, real-time presentations, and online reading materials
<input type="checkbox"/>	Informational Interviews: Meetings held with key people to gain information, perspectives, and advice
<input type="checkbox"/>	Discussion Forums: Groups that regularly meet to share ideas, information, and solutions to work-related issues. Forums can be face-to-face or online.



Exercise: Part 2, Identify Organizational Learning Strategies

Implementation of organizational learning strategies enhances performance at the organizational level, and also improves performance and learning at the individual level. This checklist may be used with teams to determine ways to promote team/group-level learning.

Organizational Learning Strategies	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Action Learning: A process for bringing together a group of people with varied levels of skills and experience to analyze an actual work problem and develop an action plan. The group continues to meet as actions are implemented, learning from the implementation and making mid-course corrections.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cross-functional Teams: Teams composed of people with varied levels of skills and experience who are brought together to accomplish a task. These teams may use action learning as a process to solve problems. Team members come from different organizational units and may have permanent or ad hoc standing.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Work-outs: Meetings that contain representatives from all levels and functions of an organization or unit, except management, to identify ways the organization or team can work together more efficiently and effectively. Work-outs can last from one to several days.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Parallel Learning Structures: Groups who represent various levels and functions working to open new channels of communication outside and parallel to the normal hierarchical structure. Parallel learning structures promote innovation and change in large bureaucratic organizations while retaining the advantage of bureaucratic design.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Groupware: Technology used to facilitate a group's communication, problem-solving, and decision-making processes.

Sample Action Plan

Once you determine the root cause(s) for why Airmen feel their leaders are not promoting learning, you should identify 1-2 strategies that would result in noticeable improvements for your unit. Next, turn these strategies into action plans. The example here provides a sample action plan for implementing a potential strategy to increase access to learning opportunities within your unit. See Appendix A for a blank action plan template to use for the strategy you want to implement.

1 Select an Improvement Area

Dimension Improvement Area	Dimension #2: Leader Facilitation
Root Causes	Airmen need additional access to learning opportunities

2 Choose a Strategy

Strategy	Publicize and increase participation in low-cost learning opportunities
Purpose	To provide Airmen with a broad array of learning options

3 Define Objectives

- Wing-level identification and optimization of 3 low-cost learning options
- Emphasis at all levels on increased participation in learning opportunities
- Improved use of Airman Comprehensive Assessments (ACAs) to identify Airmen goals and development strategies

4 Refine the Path

Target Audience (The people to whom the strategy is being aimed)	All Airmen and their leaders
Action Leads (The people who will be responsible)	Wing Commanders
Communication Avenue(s) (How the objectives will be communicated)	VTC with Wing Commanders
Timeframe	Wing Commanders provide plan of action NLT 4Apr

5 Identify Resources

Implement Resources	Additional performance metric: Participation in learning activities
Sustainment Resources	Sustained emphasis on the new performance metric



Advancing Airmen and Unit Learning: A Commander's Guide

2.2

Create a Culture of Feedback Exchange

Why It Matters

Feedback is an important step in the development process for Airmen specifically, and for the unit as a whole. Feedback can help leaders gauge engagement, motivation and morale, and also plays a key role in keeping leaders informed of the unit's strengths and weaknesses. Consistent and regular feedback allows individuals to become aware of the areas in which they excel and those areas in need of improvement. Such information encourages individual and group learning, which is fundamental to becoming a premier Air Force learning organization. Read on to learn more.

Feedback is information about *past* behavior that is delivered in the *present* to motivate for the future.

What to Look For in Your Airmen

The strength indicators below reveal leaders encourage feedback; need indicators suggest more emphasis is needed to improve the feedback exchange in the unit.

Strength Indicators

- ▶ Leaders engage in regular and ongoing feedback with subordinates
- ▶ Leaders use feedback to modify tasks and staff roles as needed
- ▶ Airmen feel comfortable sharing performance concerns with leaders

Need Indicators

- ▶ Leaders discuss performance only during official performance reviews
- ▶ Feedback often critiques personal characteristics, not work behaviors
- ▶ Leaders are uncomfortable providing negative feedback to subordinates
- ▶ Subordinates are uncomfortable providing feedback up the chain

Case Study

In reviewing your unit's responses to the LOA, you notice lower than average responses to the statement, "Honest feedback exchange is encouraged both top-down and bottom-up within AMC."

Over the coming days, you pull aside three Commanders and learn that they have seen the need for enhanced top-down feedback in the wing, and two Commanders have set goals for improving understanding of the new Airman Comprehensive Assessments (ACAs).

As you probe further, you learn that the Commanders rarely receive feedback from their senior leaders. Additional discussions lead you to conclude that senior leaders feel uncomfortable providing feedback up the chain of command.

To address the situation, you instruct leaders to ask more questions during wing and group discussions on goals and performance. You ask them to gather information about the issues that influence goal attainment and report to you their findings and recommendations.



Determining Root Causes

When your Airmen provide low ratings on this attribute, you should consider the following questions in order to understand the underlying causes of the ratings:

- ▶ Are leaders in the unit using effective feedback techniques?
 - If “yes,” continue to the next root cause question to dig deeper.
 - If “no,” see Step 1 in this section.
- ▶ Do other leaders and I prepare to provide feedback?
 - If “yes,” continue to the next root cause question to dig deeper.
 - If “no,” see Step 2 and the Exercise in this section.
- ▶ Do other leaders and I give subordinates the opportunity to provide constructive feedback up the chain of command?
 - If “no,” see Step 3 for information on “bottom-up” feedback.
 - If “yes,” be sure to communicate how you are acting on the feedback.

- ▶ Do leaders neglect to provide regular feedback to subordinates because of the time involved? See Step 4 for information on the importance of timeliness.

Key Steps to Move the Needle

Step 1: Provide Expectations for Effective Feedback

Feedback can serve as a management tool by reinforcing or redirecting behavior. Behaviors are *reinforced* when praise or encouragement for desired behaviors is offered, whereas less desirable behaviors can be *redirected* to more positive behaviors through the use of specific examples that illustrate more desirable behavioral choices.

Feedback is most effective when it is timely, behavior-focused, directive, and two-way.

Characteristics of Effective Feedback

Aspects	Definition
Timely	Clarifies performance expectations quickly. Failing to let subordinates know immediately is implicitly telling them that their performance is satisfactory. Further, the longer leaders wait to discuss performance problems, the longer substandard behavior will continue. Ongoing feedback is ideal.
Behavior-Focused	Focuses on an observed behavior, and not an individual's personality traits. It is important to separate the behaviors or outcomes of performance from the individual. By focusing on specific behaviors and/or outcomes, leaders are more likely to be able to help subordinates identify specific areas to improve. Focusing on behaviors rather than the individual also increases receptiveness to the feedback.
Directive	Identifies specific examples of behaviors that are preferred. Provide feedback that will improve tomorrow's performance, not fix yesterday's. Ensure your feedback enables subordinates to determine their next steps for development. Ask, “Given the feedback I have provided, do you have some ideas about how to make improvements?” This will build autonomy and confidence.
Two-Way	Involves both providing and receiving information. Ask the recipient if feedback is understood, and check for understanding. The feedback recipient should clarify what is heard and ask for details to better define needed improvements.

Step 2: Direct and Support Top-Down Feedback

Effective top-down feedback follows a process of observation, assessment, and reinforcement or correction. For best results, employ a standard approach throughout the command (for an example, see the SOAR card in this section).

Set the Stage

Encourage your subordinate leaders to make a habit of purposefully observing their subordinates at work. Leaders should make a point of regularly observing subordinates when they are likely to:

- ▶ Make decisions
- ▶ Resolve conflicts
- ▶ Influence subordinates
- ▶ Apply personal strengths
- ▶ Impact the success of the unit

Observe Airmen in Action

Feedback is actionable when it relates to a specific action or behavior. Provide opportunities that allow your subordinate leaders to directly observe their subordinates. Encourage leaders to pay close attention to exactly what the subordinate did, as well as the impact of that action. Consider the following questions:

- ▶ What task was being performed?
- ▶ What specific behavior and/or action did the Airman exhibit?
- ▶ What was the immediate result of the behavior or action?
- ▶ What broader impacts occurred for the team, unit, or mission as a result?

Make Accurate Assessments

Encourage subordinate leaders to capture complete and thorough assessments. To avoid bias, assessments should:



- ▶ Focus on an observed behavior or action, and not an individual's personality traits
- ▶ Compare against an objective and recognized standard of behavior
- ▶ Take into account alternative perspectives of what occurred
- ▶ Recognize the subordinate's personal goals, strengths, and weaknesses

Reinforce and Correct

Build confidence among Airmen of all levels through positive reinforcement. Identify behaviors that should be continued, and verbalize encouragement after the behavior is observed.

Correct behaviors and actions using effective feedback methods:

- ▶ Describe the specific behavior or action and its impact
- ▶ Describe your assessment of the behavior
- ▶ Ask the subordinate leader about his/her assessment of the situation and behavior
- ▶ Together discuss alternatives and recommendations

Step 3: Lay the Groundwork for Bottom-Up Feedback

Providing feedback to one's superior is difficult. Subordinate leaders and their superiors may have difficulty separating their own emotional responses from the situation or expectation, or they may

worry about repercussions. Alternatively, they may not have the opportunity to share their views.

Commanders can encourage feedback by providing regular opportunities to their subordinate leaders for bottom-up feedback, and by steering those feedback conversations toward constructive information.

Asking for Feedback During Performance Evaluations

During discussions of past performance, ask your subordinate leaders what they need in order to better meet future performance goals. For example, you may ask for input on the following:

- ▶ Personnel availability and personal welfare needs
- ▶ Training and education deficits
- ▶ Equipment issues that may require resources
- ▶ Potential barriers to success

Asking for Feedback on Goals and Metrics

When evaluating past and potential goals, leaders should broaden their sources of information by asking their subordinate leaders for constructive feedback. Ask questions like:

- ▶ What are/will be the immediate results of striving for a goal or metric?
- ▶ What are/were the trade-offs in reaching for this goal?
- ▶ What second and third order effects occurred, or can be expected to occur?
- ▶ What additional criteria should be used to determine success?
- ▶ What additional information should be taken into account when planning for the future?

Creating a Culture of Feedback Exchange

It can be difficult to receive feedback. Leaders can help support a culture of feedback exchange by modeling the behavior they want to see in their subordinates.

- ▶ Ask for feedback, and ask for it often
- ▶ Request examples
- ▶ Act on the feedback you receive
- ▶ Seek out people you trust to tell the truth

Step 4: Set the Example by Providing Timely Feedback

Feedback is less effective if you wait for a scheduled meeting to have a sit-down counseling session. For optimal effectiveness and positive behavior change, provide feedback as soon as possible after the undesired behavior is observed.

Feedback must be behavior-focused and timely for impact. See the “Instant Feedback Formula” below. While this diagram was presented by Dr. Don Warner in his article on Giving and Receiving Feedback, the steps of feedback delivery have also been well supported in the scientific literature as essential for effective feedback exchange.

The Instant Feedback Formula

Here's a handy five step formula for expressing feedback in everyday situations.



Step 5: Encourage Active Listening and Self-Assessment

Encourage Active Listening

Encourage your subordinate leaders to engage in active listening. Active listening is a structured way to listen and respond to others that focuses on the "function" of communicating as opposed to the "forms." There are three main elements of active listening.

- ▶ **Comprehending.** Let the person complete his/her thought. Avoid thinking of what you want to say next and instead focus on picking out important details of what the deliverer is saying. Paraphrase or restate the message to check whether you understood it correctly.
- ▶ **Retaining.** If we remember what we hear, we create more meaning from it. It requires effort to actively listen and find nuggets of information that we can attach meaning to but having the motivation to listen is critical to successful feedback.

- ▶ **Responding.** Listening is an interactive process. Body language helps convey to the speaker you are listening. Pay close attention to eye contact and head nodding. Avoid "waiting to speak" behavior and instead practice, "waiting to hear."

Encourage Self-Assessment

Those who provide feedback should ask questions that prompt self-assessment. After you deliver feedback, ask: *What is your assessment of the situation? How do you think the recommendations for change I provided will help or hinder you moving forward? What do you see as personal or professional roadblocks to the behavior changes suggested?*

Questions like these reinforce three important development principles:

- ▶ Self-assessment and self-awareness
- ▶ Individual responsibility for development
- ▶ Airman ownership of the recommendation

Where Do I Go from Here?

Airmen can access **Air Force e-Learning's Business Skills Courseware Collection**, which provides a library of over 940 e-learning courses, simulations, and learning objects to help supervisors develop competencies in the areas of leadership and management. It offers a quick and engaging way to learn about a variety of topics, including feedback, coaching, mentoring, communicating, listening, and many more.

Also available is **BusinessPro by Books24x7**, which delivers an on-line library of the latest publications covering leadership, business, and general management topics. They are searchable by topics and can be read in their entirety or scanned for applicable content.

Further Reading:

- ▶ Folkman (2006). *The Power of Feedback: 35 Principles for Turning Feedback from Others into Personal and Professional Change*. John Wiley and Sons.
- ▶ Kegan & Lahey (2009). *Immunity to Change: How to Overcome It and Unlock the Potential in Yourself and Your Organization*. Harvard Business Press.
- ▶ London, M. (2003). *Job Feedback: Giving, Seeking, and Using Feedback for Performance Improvement*. Rutledge.
- ▶ Seashore, Seashore, & Weinberg (2004). *What Did You Say? The Art of Giving and Receiving Feedback*. Bingham House Books.
- ▶ U.S. Dept of Army. "Commander's Handbook for Unit Leader Development." 16-22, 59. <http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/CAL/repository/CommandersHandbook.pdf>



Exercise: SOAR to Effective Feedback

Encourage the use of the SOAR card to capture key information as you foster a culture of feedback exchange (adapted from the U.S. Dept of Army, "Commander's Handbook for Unit Leader Development." 16-22, 59). On the SOAR card, note the following:

- ▶ Situation and/or conditions
- ▶ Observation of the specific behavior or action
- ▶ Assessment of the behavior
- ▶ Recommendation

Use the SOAR card to guide your discussions with subordinates and subordinate leaders.

Situation: Describe the situation/condition of the assessment

Observation: Describe the behavior and impact on mission and/or Airmen

Assessment: Address one major item and describe the impact

Recommendation: Note appropriate feedback, praise, or correction. Recommend action to sustain/improve leader behavior.

Sample Action Plan

Once you determine the root cause(s) for why your unit's culture is not conducive to effective feedback exchange, you should identify 1-2 strategies that will result in noticeable improvements for your unit. Next, turn these strategies into action plans. The example here provides a sample action plan to help improve feedback exchange within your unit. See Appendix A for a blank action plan template to use for the strategy you want to implement.

1 Select an Improvement Area

Dimension Improvement Area	Dimension #2: Leader Facilitation
Root Causes	Leaders are not providing enough performance feedback to subordinates

2 Choose a Strategy

Strategy	Roll out the use of SOAR cards throughout the Wing
Purpose	To increase effective feedback exchange

3 Define Objectives

- All Lt. Cols, Majors, and Capts will fill out at least one SOAR card per week
- SOAR discussions will occur within 48 hours of observed action(s)

4 Refine the Path

Target Audience (The people to whom the strategy is being aimed)	Lt. Cols, Majors, and Capts in the Wing
Action Leads (The people who will be responsible)	Group leaders
Communication Avenue(s) (How the objectives will be communicated)	VTC with group leaders
Timeframe	Immediate

5 Identify Resources

Implement Resources	Master copies of blank SOAR cards for each Group
Sustainment Resources	Additional performance metric: Number of SOAR feedback discussions per quarter



Advancing Airmen and Unit Learning: A Commander's Guide

2.3

Thumbs Up! Recognizing and Rewarding Airmen Performance

Why It Matters

To promote a learning organization, it is important to keep your Airmen motivated and help them realize the value of continuous development. As a leader, you can boost your Airmen's motivation to improve and learn by recognizing and rewarding their performance. While you may have limited control over formal, institutionalized reward practices and processes (e.g., allocation of monetary rewards or promotions), there are many ways, both formal and informal, for you to give your Airmen kudos for their individual achievements. In addition, it is also critical to recognize and reward your Airmen for what they accomplish as a team. Find out here how to be more effective in giving your Airmen a big thumbs-up - in a way that reinforces excellence in individual Airmen and teams.

What to Look For in Your Airmen

The strength indicators below suggest effective rewards and recognition are in place; need indicators suggest Airmen performance could be better reinforced.

Strength Indicators

- ▶ Airmen understand how learning impacts their career development
- ▶ Airmen can distinguish among different levels of performance
- ▶ Airmen feel motivated to improve their performance
- ▶ Airmen know how they impact organization mission success

Need Indicators

- ▶ Airmen are unsure about how learning can benefit their career
- ▶ Airmen do not believe their performance makes a difference
- ▶ Airmen feel more motivated to avoid mistakes than to improve
- ▶ Airmen are unclear how their work impacts organization mission success

Case Study

In reviewing responses to the LOA, you notice lower than average responses to the item: "My leadership makes it clear what is required to receive rewards and recognition."

You ask a few Flight Leaders in your squadron what they think could be causing Airmen to feel that way. They mention that some of the Airmen who were recently passed up for promotion seem complacent and unmotivated. After further discussions with Airmen in your organization, you conclude most Airmen are aware of their limitations, but feel they are not rewarded for developing themselves, and thus do not believe it is a good use of their time to focus on learning and improvement.

To address the situation, you instruct leaders in your unit to sit down with the Airmen, learn about their career goals and aspirations, and work with them to understand how their commitment to self-development and learning can benefit them in the long run. You also ask your unit's leaders to come up with ways to recognize Airmen's performance improvement and reward them for taking initiative in learning activities (e.g., give them time off to complete training).



Determining Root Causes

If Airmen provide low ratings on this attribute 2.3, consider the following questions:

- ▶ Are Airmen recognized for improving their performance? How so?
 - If “yes,” move to the next root cause question to dig deeper.
 - If “no,” consider what formal and informal mechanisms of recognition currently exist or can be implemented to show strong performance matters.
- ▶ Are Airmen rewarded for taking ownership of their development?
 - If “yes,” move to the next root cause question to dig deeper.
 - If “no,” consider how Airmen benefit professionally from going above and beyond the minimum training and developmental requirements; also consider what opportunities Airmen might miss out on by pursuing additional training or development and what can be done to change this.
- ▶ Do Airmen know how their performance improvement contributes to organization mission success? If “no,” what are some potential reasons?
 - If “yes,” read on to see if more insights emerge as to areas for concern.
 - If “no,” consider whether Airmen feel team achievements are valued and whether there is a strong alignment between individual and team achievements.

Key Steps to Move the Needle

Step 1: Ensure Conditions for Effective Rewards and Recognition

Rewards and recognition can be powerful motivators of desired behaviors and performance. However, there are certain conditions that need to be met for rewards and recognition to be effective in driving Airmen performance. These conditions are described next.



1. Timeliness: Important rewards and recognition must be delivered in a timely fashion to create a strong linkage to the desired behavior or performance. The longer the time lag, the less likely the reward and recognition will motivate future behaviors and performance.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP? As the leader, you can provide informal recognition of Airmen performance any time you see it. For formal reward and recognition that is within your control, try to plan ahead and avoid unnecessary delays, such as administrative issues. For Air Force reward and recognition systems that are beyond your authority, you may need to use continuous communication to bridge any time gap between when the performance occurs and when the associated reward and recognition is delivered.

2. Attractiveness: Similar to the timeliness condition, rewards and recognition that are perceived as attractive are stronger motivators of future behaviors and performance. The same reward or recognition may be more effective on some individuals than others.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP? Learn about Airmen's developmental needs and career aspirations. Incorporate some individualized rewards. For example, for units that are overloaded, time off to complete training may be the most effective way to encourage Airmen to take advantage of available learning opportunities.

3. Certainty and Consistency: Rewards and recognition shape behaviors through outcome expectancies. People believe when they do certain things, they will get certain outputs. The more confident people are that a behavior will lead to the desired outcome (e.g., reward and recognition), the more likely they will repeat the behavior in order to attain that outcome.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP? If you make a promise on a reward based on a pre-determined performance goal, be sure to deliver it. Make sure you are consistently fair in your reward and recognition practices across Airmen and over time so Airmen know what to expect. Acknowledge similar or equivalent efforts with similar types of rewards.

4. Appropriateness: When rewards and recognition are used too frequently and not selectively, they could backfire. Rewards and recognition work to motivate behaviors and performance by creating expectancies. However, if you go too far and create a culture where individuals expect to be praised for everything they do, then it becomes more difficult to motivate them for specific behaviors that you want to target.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP? Give out rewards and recognition that match the level of effort or performance. Your recognition should be specific, descriptive and measured. While you can be spontaneous in recognizing what you see as desirable behaviors “in the moment,” you should also establish and communicate clear criteria for actions and performance that are eligible for reward and recognition.



5. Clarity and Transparency: The last thing you want is for rewards and recognition to turn into perceptions of favoritism and sap the morale of those who do not understand why they are left out. If a few Airmen are always selected for rewards and recognition without clear explanations, it could be demotivating to others who might feel their work is not seen as important.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP? When giving out rewards and recognition, let Airmen know exactly why they are selected. Always provide explanations for the reward and recognition decisions you make and let Airmen know what they can do to receive the same reward and recognition. Be transparent so all Airmen know what it takes to get rewarded and understand why one person is getting a reward while they may not be. You can also use this as an opportunity to provide feedback to Airmen.

What's Next?

Find out on the next page what strategies you can employ to make rewards and recognition more effective.

Step 2: Create and Implement Effective Reward and Recognition Strategies

When thinking about rewards and recognition, you may immediately associate them with medals, commendations, or time off. However, there are many ways to use rewards and recognition to motivate your Airmen. In this step, we explore the different strategies to help you reward and recognize your Airmen effectively.

Effective Reward and Recognition Strategies	
Strategy	Description and Benefits
Leverage Multiple Resources	<p>Leverage resources within your control. Find out what your Airmen need and value and what would get them excited about learning and improvement. Consider creative options. For example, face time with leaders or opportunities to attend training events to network with Airmen from other organizations can be effective rewards and recognition. Resources that you may not think of as tangible rewards can also be powerful tools of recognition. For example, to recognize Airmen's effort to make improvements, you may give them an interesting task to work on or involve them in decisions related to organization mission.</p>
Informal Rewards and Recognition	<p>Rewards and recognition do not always have to be formally structured. Informal rewards and recognition that are more spontaneous and authentic show that you take Airmen development seriously and are constantly looking for signs of improvement. A simple "pat on the back" or "thumbs up" may show appreciation for your Airmen's hard work. Informal recognition also allows you to use a more personal, sincere and authentic approach. Some examples of informal recognition include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Share your personal developmental experience with Airmen or tell them the story of your career in the Air Force ▪ Spend time with your Airmen listening to their developmental needs and career aspirations
Focus on Actions and Behavior	<p>While it is common to reward and recognize performance, sometimes only focusing on performance can be demotivating if the effort-performance link is weak. For example, an Airman can do an excellent job as a mechanic but the plane may malfunction because of defects in parts or other resources that are outside of the Airman's control. It is important that Airmen do not feel their hard work goes unnoticed and that only outcomes are rewarded and recognized. Focusing on actions and behaviors allows you to reward and recognize individuals' effort and reinforce the value in doing good work.</p>

Step 3: Build Trust and Achieve Mutual Respect through Rewards and Recognition

Rewards and recognition, when applied effectively, can serve to not only motivate Airmen to continuously develop themselves and improve their performance but also help build rapport and trust. When Airmen see that their work is valued, they feel valued by their leaders as well. And this feeling of “being seen” and mutual respect with one’s leader can be a relationship builder and reward in and of itself. To build trust and achieve mutual respect with your Airmen through rewards and recognition, the key is to be genuine and authentic in the execution. Here are some tips to keep in mind to help you deliver rewards and recognition with authenticity:

- ▶ Present rewards and recognition with a genuine expression of appreciation for the recipient’s achievements and contributions. Whether or not the rewards and recognition are tangible, meaningful words of acknowledgement are always well received.
- ▶ Include specific details in the description of the recipient’s achievements and contributions. Also, point out how they have made a difference to others and the organization as a whole.
- ▶ Respect your Airmen’s personal wishes and individual preferences. Not everyone loves to be in the spotlight. Some may feel embarrassed by being “put on the spot.” Try to find out what the recipient feels comfortable with and accommodate if you can.

Step 4: Help Airmen Develop Internal Motivation to Self-Development

As discussed so far, external rewards and recognition can be powerful motivators to promote self-development and improvement. However, it is important to understand the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. The external tangible rewards are mostly what have been discussed thus far in this section. Intrinsic rewards are the internal



feelings or values that an individual places on achievement; these intrinsic rewards can actually be more meaningful than the extrinsic rewards. Thus, to go a step further in helping Airmen want to learn is to help Airmen internalize the rewards in pursuing their developmental goals. In other words, rewards and recognition from you, as the leader, should not be the only source of motivation that drives self-development. Work with your Airmen to find ways to align learning and development to their personal values so that the activities become internally rewarding. What internally motivates one Airman can vary greatly from what internally motivates another, but you can create an environment where this mindset becomes the norm. Some ideas to consider include:

- ▶ Encourage self-reflection. Ask Airmen to reflect what they enjoy the most about learning and development to help them identify ways to sustain continuous improvement.
- ▶ Share with your Airmen what learning means to you and how you find it personally rewarding.
- ▶ Facilitate team sharing. Organize small group activities for Airmen to share with each other what they find intrinsically motivating in their own learning and development.
- ▶ Align individual development to the organizational mission. Help Airmen see how their own development is connected to something bigger than themselves.

Where Do I Go from Here?

Further Reading:

- ▶ Armstrong, M. (2012). *Armstrong's Handbook of Reward Management Practice: Improving Performance through Reward*. Philadelphia: Kogan Page, Fourth Edition
 "Provides guidance on approaches to the development and management of reward systems that contribute to improving organizational, team, and individual performance while respecting and catering for the needs of employees." --Journal of Economic Literature
- ▶ Kouzes, J.M. & Posner, B.Z. (2003). *Encouraging the Heart: A Leader's Guide to Rewarding and Recognizing Others*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
 Gives leaders advises on mutual respect and recognition of accomplishments and helping people find their voice through a mix of research findings and practical observations drawn from the authors' extensive experience with leaders.
- ▶ Lawler, E. (2003). *Treat People Right!: How Organizations and Individuals Can Propel Each Other into a Virtuous Spiral of Success*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
 Helps leaders learn how to attract, motivate, and maximize the potential of people through a set of specific, research-based actions that leaders can take, including a chapter on how to reward people right.
- ▶ Lawler, E., Worley, C.G., & Creelman, D. (2011). *Management Reset: Organizing for Sustainable Effectiveness*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
 Offers principles that enable organizations to be both successful and responsible and is a great resource for leaders at all levels of an organization.



Exercise: Benefit-Barrier Analysis

This simple benefit-barrier analysis can help Airmen think about the benefits associated with their developmental goals and any barriers that may prevent them from reaching those goals. Ask Airmen to answer the questions below and then discuss with them ways to enhance the benefits and/or remove the barriers. Encourage Airmen to consider both short-term and long-term goals, benefits and barriers.

Developmental Goals

- ▶ My short-term developmental goal is:
- ▶ My career goal in the Air Force is:
- ▶ My career aspiration beyond the Air Force is:

Benefits

- ▶ My developmental goals (both short-term and long-term), if achieved, would benefit me in these ways:

- ▶ My developmental goals (both short-term and long-term), if achieved, would benefit the mission and the organization in these ways:

Barriers

- ▶ I need to overcome these barriers to achieve my developmental goals (both short-term and long-term):
- ▶ The organization can remove these barriers to help me achieve my developmental goals (both short-term and long-term):

Sample Action Plan

Once you determine the root cause(s) for why Airmen do not feel rewarded and recognized for learning and performance, you should identify 1-2 strategies that will result in noticeable improvements for your unit. Next, turn these strategies into action plans. The example here provides a sample action plan to build a formal recognition program within your unit. See Appendix A for a blank action plan template to use for the strategy you want to implement.

1 Select an Improvement Area

Dimension Improvement Area	Dimension #2: Leader Facilitation
Root Causes	Airmen don't feel their development is rewarded by Leadership

2 Choose a Strategy

Strategy	Implement a formal recognition program for Airmen development
Purpose	To motivate Airmen in setting goals for individual development

3 Define Objectives

- Each Airman who completes his/her goal setting by the deadline will be eligible for recognition
- 100% of Airmen will be clear on the criteria for the recognition program
- Each Airman will receive guidance from his/her supervisor on completing the benefit-barrier analysis

4 Refine the Path

Target Audience (The people to whom the strategy is being aimed)	All Airmen in the Squadron
Action Leads (The people who will be responsible)	Flight commanders
Communication Avenue(s) (How the objectives will be communicated)	VTC with Flight commanders
Timeframe	Flight commanders provide plan of action NLT 3 Feb

5 Identify Resources

Implement Resources	Set aside time for communication on program criteria
Sustainment Resources	Change recognition criteria periodically



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2.4

Continuous Improvement: Be the Example!

Why It Matters

Your actions speak louder than your words to those under your command. Promoting behaviors that encourage learning begins with you as the leader seeking ways to further your own learning and development. Airmen will be more likely to engage in developmental activities when they believe those activities are supported by their leaders. The example you put forth sets the tone for acceptance and pursuit of learning activities. Further, experience and knowledge do not necessarily translate into effectively leading people. Thus, even the most seasoned leader must identify ways to continuously improve. Read on to learn more.

What to Look For

Strength indicators suggest leaders are taking actions to improve their leadership skills and are setting the right example for their Airmen; need indicators suggest Airmen may not have a strong example to follow.

Strength Indicators

- ▶ Leaders seek out opportunities to improve their own capabilities
- ▶ Leaders actively evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses
- ▶ Leaders regularly express the value of seeking feedback from others
- ▶ Leaders actively mentor, counsel, and coach Airmen under them

Need Indicators

- ▶ Leaders are not interested in receiving or seeking feedback from others
- ▶ Leaders put the onus on other leaders to take full responsibility for the development of Airmen
- ▶ Leaders operate in isolation from others

Case Study

In reviewing your unit's responses to the LOA, you notice lower responses to the item, "AMC leaders have considerable skills for gathering information to cope with demanding and changing management situations."

You reach out to several operation officers to hear what they think could be causing these lower than average ratings. They mention that Airmen in your unit express concern that opportunities to engage in new or possibly better ways of completing tasks are dismissed. After further discussion with your subordinate leaders, you discover that an atmosphere restrictive of development and personal growth exists within your unit.

To address this, you engage in self-reflection to determine what message you are communicating to those under your leadership. You solicit feedback from others to better understand your own personal strengths and weaknesses. In addition, you make a point to engage in regular coaching sessions with other experienced leaders or licensed coaches to set an example for those below you and to reinforce the importance of continuous development.



Step 2: Make a Better Version of You

As a leader, it is critical you engage in continuous development. Results from your self-reflection should provide specific areas where you are doing well and areas that can be improved. Chapter 1 has outlined a number of strategies for improving individual learning; as a leader, there are additional strategies you can employ such as learning by networking with other leaders and learning techniques to engage and manage different types of personalities. You should tap into the experiences and lessons learned from fellow leaders as well as those who may have previously served in your role. Two effective methods to learn from more seasoned leaders include coaching and mentoring.

▶ **Coaching** is a developmental technique used for enhancing skills, tasks, or specific behaviors, typically during the execution of the particular skill, task and/or behavior. A coach is someone that has demonstrated considerable knowledge and expertise in the areas in which they provide guidance. Further, the coach and leaders should:

- Identify smart, realistic, and time-specific goals to help to address the leader's weaker areas.
- Develop strategies for meeting these goals and ways to sustain development; the coach should suggest example courses of action the leader can take to meet desired goals.

▶ **Mentoring** is a developmental relationship between a leader and an individual with greater experience; it is characterized by mutual trust and respect. The mentoring relationship emphasizes broader career development versus coaching that tends to focus on a skill area. Mentors typically have experienced similar jobs but present with strengths in areas where the leader may experience



weakness. A successful mentoring relationship includes:

- Long-term commitment and active participation from both the mentor and protégé leader.
- Matching of the mentor and leader based on the individuals sharing similar demographic characteristics so the mentor understands the leader's unique career challenges and can help the leader work through those.

Based on your developmental needs and professional goals, engaging in either coaching or mentoring can assist in your growth. The success of using either of these options- coaching or mentoring- is linked to your level of effort and engagement. You need to set realistic and achievable goals that either your coach or mentor will help you obtain. You need to commit to following through with the guidance and direction your coach or mentor provides. Lastly, development should never cease—it is a lifelong process. You should continually evaluate your strengths and areas for growth to know where you can improve. The table below provides guidance for determining which option will meet your specific needs.

	Coaching	Mentoring
Purpose	Develop or improve specific skills or knowledge needed for current job or assignment	Provide guidance focused on professional or personal growth for current job with emphasis on future responsibilities
Who	Assigned coach or trainer with specialized knowledge or expertise	An individual that possesses greater experiences and may share similar demographic characteristics that will help with understanding the leader's challenges (e.g., gender; similar age at time in position, ethnicity)
Interaction	During practice or performance of tasks that need developed	Conversation on a personal level
Roles of Coach and Mentor	Provide guidance during direct observation of leader's demonstration of specific skills or knowledge	Apply the mentor's experience to guide the leader
Outcomes	Behaviors identified for improvement, higher performance	Personal commitment to career choices with intent to improve
Requirements	Can be both voluntary or required	Voluntary, requires mutual commitment from both mentor and protégé
Occurrence	Best paired around training or performance events	Can be initiated by either party
Frequency	As needed to help with specific skill development	More frequent initially to establish rapport (as often as 2x per month) and then may taper off to monthly. It is important that the frequency of meetings is made clear up front and agreed upon by both parties.
Duration	Typically a couple of sessions	Can range—a few sessions to a career-long relationship

Step 3: Set the Ball Rolling for Development in Your Unit

One of the most effective and efficient ways to promote leader development throughout your command is to set the right conditions for it to occur. There are three key components to creating an environment that promotes leader development. The most important is that you, the commander, are a role model for leader development. Next, you should establish a climate that encourages leaders to take risks, grow, and develop on their own initiative. Third, get to know the leaders within your command as individuals

with unique and valuable skills, abilities, backgrounds, and goals.

Setting the conditions for leader development is merely performing your job in ways that signal to other leaders and Airmen throughout your command that leader development is highly important. Promoting leadership development results in a big return for minimal time and resource investment on your part. Review the following questions under each initiative and consider how your answers relate to development in your unit:

- ▶ **Model leadership in a way that encourages others to learn and develop**
 - Do you speak openly about your own developmental needs and lessons learned?
 - Can leaders and your Airmen debate with you, exchange ideas and challenge others' perceptions (as long as the tone is diplomatic)?
 - Are you observed engaging in developmental activities?
 - Do you actively serve as a mentor and teacher to others?
- ▶ **Foster an environment conducive for development**
 - Are you willing to accept the ups and downs in unit performance that comes with trying new ideas?
- When mistakes are made, do you focus on assigning blame, or discuss why the mistake was made and how to learn for the experience?
- Are leaders allowed and encouraged to identify new and improved methods for completing tasks?
- ▶ **Get to know your subordinate leaders and Airmen**
 - Do you need to build a strong rapport with your subordinate leaders? Ask your subordinate leaders what they value, what work is interesting to them, and what they want out of the leader-to-leader relationship.
 - Engage with your leaders and Airmen outside of their daily duty performance; ask for their input in decision-making (this results in more effective outcomes and builds buy-in to decisions as well as mutual respect).

Where Do I Go from Here?

As noted in earlier chapters, there is a robust suite of self-development tools available 24/7 from your desktop through **AF e-Learning** (<https://usafprod.skillport.com/skillportfe/custom/login/usaf/seamlesslogin.action>). Additionally, as a leader you should seek out opportunities to receive coaching and feedback from your superiors and peers. To complete the circle, you need to actively guide your subordinates on their paths of self-development through mentoring and coaching.

The Supervisor Resource Center is an online clearinghouse developed to put Air Force tools and no-cost resources for leadership development at your fingertips. Among its vast collection of resources are Learning and development road maps that can help you guide your Airmen down an appropriate development path and ultimately help them take ownership of their own development.

Further Reading:

- ▶ Pedler, Burgoyne, & Boydell (2013). *A Manager's Guide to Self-Development*. McGraw-Hill Professional, Sixth Edition
Includes over 50 activities that can be used to help Airmen develop specific qualities and skills, improve performance, and advance their career and personal potential.
- ▶ Baldoni (2008). *Lead by Example: 50 Ways Great Leaders Inspired Results*. New York: AMACOM
Helps leaders learn how to inspire others to follow them; the first 8 chapters provide lessons for setting the right example.
- ▶ Morgan, Harkins, & Goldsmith (2005). *The Art and Practice of Leadership Coaching: 50 Top Executive Coaches Reveal their Secrets*. Wiley.
Provides an overview of different strategies for conducting effective coaching.



Exercise: Situation Analysis

A situation analysis can help you think about your own development and the areas in which you can improve. Answer the questions below and then discuss with fellow leaders or your supervisor the steps that you could take to build on your strengths and improve in the developmental areas.

- ▶ What was the situation?
- ▶ What was the goal and did you reach it?
- ▶ What did you say and think?
- ▶ What did you do?
- ▶ Why did you act the way you did?
- ▶ What could have helped you handle the situation better?
- ▶ Did you share your lessons learned with others?

Sample Action Plan

Once you determine the root cause(s) for why leaders in your unit may not be actively engaging in continuous improvement, you should identify 1-2 strategies that would result in noticeable improvements for your unit. Next, turn these strategies into action plans. The example here provides a sample action plan for promoting coaching within your unit. See Appendix A for a blank action plan template to use for the strategy you want to implement.

1 Select an Improvement Area

Dimension Improvement Area	Dimension #2: Leader Facilitation
Root Causes	You do not actively engage in personal development

2 Choose a Strategy

Strategy	You identify a coach to develop a specific skill – improve communication with Jr. Staff
Purpose	To develop your skills and to set an example for other Airmen

3 Define Objectives

- Identify specific short-term goal.
- Establish a timeline with coach for engaging in developmental learning.
- Engage in feedback sessions with coach to identify areas for sustainment and areas that need continuous improvement.

4 Refine the Path

Target Audience (The people to whom the strategy is being aimed)	You/Commander/Leader
Action Leads (The people who will be responsible)	Lt Col Jones – your coach
Communication Avenue(s) (How the objectives will be communicated)	Face-to-face sessions
Timeframe	30-minute meeting weekly for 1 month or until skills have been mastered

5 Identify Resources

Implement Resources	Adjust personal schedule to accommodate meetings
Sustainment Resources	Personal commitment to meet goals

Chapter 3: We're in This Together- The Power of Shared Perspective

Given the logistical complexity and careful coordination involved in the timely and safe transportation of personnel and equipment to locations around the world, AMC leaders are valued for their abilities to understand the bigger picture and anticipate the impact of their actions on peers within AMC as well as other partners. A shared understanding and common vision allows the diverse elements within AMC to move together in unison. However, overall LOA results suggest that many Airmen throughout AMC do not feel they have a sufficient understanding of what the vision is or how they fit into it. In addition to the potential impact this issue could have on safety and day-to-day performance, organizational learning is substantially reduced if the perspective of Airmen is "siloed" within their immediate unit.

Chapter 3 marks a transition from the previous two chapters which focus more on the individual (i.e. the Airman and the leader) to an exploration of the impact that shared perspectives and interaction can have on learning in the organization. It provides commanders with ideas and resources on ways to broaden Airman perspectives of AMC, better communicate a shared vision, improve knowledge sharing with other teams and units, and promote effective learning through collaboration and the use of social media.

The following text provides a summary of the guidance found in each section of Chapter 3.

Section 3.1: Building Bridges Up, Down, and Across the Organization

Ideally, Airmen would intuitively recognize the relationships they might need to build across the organization to acquire new knowledge, share information, and effectively coordinate a response to challenges that arise. Nevertheless,



the command structure may constrain this behavior from occurring naturally, and thus the commander's perspective can be critical to identifying and fostering knowledge sharing and collaboration across AMC. This section instructs leaders on possible reasons knowledge sharing and collaboration might be occurring infrequently or ineffectively, means of developing shared solutions, identification and removal of barriers to collaboration, and promotion of a knowledge sharing culture, along with a tool for deciding how best to capture and transfer knowledge.

Section 3.2: Establishing a Vision that Belongs to Everyone

It can sometimes feel that the only way to get your team to execute as intended is to micromanage the process from beginning to end, sapping your time and energy and often frustrating others. Frequently, this is a product of the fact that the team is not operating with the same vision or perspective that you have. By clearly articulating and building consensus around this vision up front, you can minimize the day-to-day direction you must provide. This section provides several means to help you develop and convey a shared vision so that everyone can take ownership of it and work together to implement it. Strategies include developing a

narrative, mind-mapping, and gaining perspective through cross-functional activities.

Section 3.3: Learn, Share, and Connect—Anywhere, Anytime

In order for learning within AMC to support the organization's mission of "right effects, right place, right time," AMC's approach to facilitating that learning should reflect AMC's connected "anywhere, anytime" approach to operations. While this approach is core to the learning organization concept, there are unique challenges involved with integrating learning experiences that extend beyond an individual Air-

man taking a single training course. In addition to building connections across AMC as discussed in Section 3.1, leaders should also facilitate collective on-the-job learning within teams and through various social technology platforms. This section provides strategies that can encourage Airmen to improve learning and performance through constructive feedback within their teams, collective problem solving, promoting use of social media as a tool for organizational learning, and structuring learning through social media to maximize its unique advantages.



Advancing Airmen and Unit Learning: A Commander's Guide

3.1

Building Bridges Up, Down, and Across the Organization

Why It Matters

An important indicator of the strength of a learning organization is its commitment to full and open task-relevant communication and knowledge sharing at all levels of the organization. In principle, all Airmen should be able to communicate with anyone else, and everyone must assume that being candid is positive and desirable. In turn, this willingness to work together and share perspectives among personnel at all levels helps facilitate a 'team perspective' in which individuals within and across units support one another to facilitate achievement of common goals. As a leader, you serve as both a facilitator of collaboration and knowledge sharing for your subordinates (i.e. building connections) as well as an embodiment of the collaborative culture (i.e. leading by example).

What to Look For in Your Airmen

The strength indicators below reveal Airmen are striving to work together; need indicators suggest Airmen have done little to incorporate the knowledge of fellow Airmen.

Strength Indicators

- ▶ Airmen regularly seek and provide expert advice to/from colleagues
- ▶ Airmen collaborate with other units to execute complex tasks
- ▶ Airmen share relevant insights with leaders, peers, and subordinates
- ▶ Airmen actively seek to integrate all team members into the unit.

Need Indicators

- ▶ Airmen adopt a "go it alone" mentality
- ▶ Airmen protect specialized knowledge to avoid losing "ownership" of a task
- ▶ The same small cadre of team members are involved in the decision making process.

Case Study

A safety incident is narrowly averted, revealing troubling discrepancies between operating procedures in your unit and those of another unit with which you regularly fly on airlift missions. You coordinate with the leader of the other unit and ask several members of your staff to work with those selected by the other leader to resolve any procedural discrepancies. When you are briefed about how the meetings are going, you learn that very little progress has been made and both sides are digging in their heels. Both sides feel the way they do things cannot be changed without compromising the mission of each unit.

You sit in on the next meeting and realize that neither side fully understands the mission requirements of the other nor how actions of one unit impact the other. You work with the teams to diagram the interdependencies. You are honest with them about the importance of coming to agreement and ask each staff member to share their knowledge of the technical challenges and ideas for solutions. One of the more junior members of the team has some creative ideas, so you encourage the teams to build on those ideas to develop a common set of procedures.



Determining Root Causes

If Airmen provide low ratings on attribute 3.1, you should consider the following questions:

- ▶ Do individual behaviors and relationships within the team/unit/organization inhibit collaboration and knowledge sharing across the organization?
 - If “yes,” see Step 1 in this section.
 - If “no,” move to next root cause question to dig deeper.
- ▶ Do Airmen have effective working relationships with Airmen in other units? With counterparts in other Service branches?
 - If “yes,” move to next root cause question to dig deeper.
 - If “no,” see Step 2 in this section.
- ▶ Do your communications and actions as a leader convey support for sharing knowledge with other teams and units?
 - If “yes,” meet with your Airmen to gather other ideas for improvement not yet identified.
 - If “no,” see Step 3 in this section.

Key Steps to Move the Needle

Step 1: Conveying the Importance of Win-Win Solutions

Given the high level of collaboration involved in performing the AMC mission, it may seem surprising that Airmen in your unit feel that collaboration and knowledge-sharing are challenging for the unit. To understand why this might be the case, it is helpful to consider the individual motivations for collaboration and understand how they compound to influence collaboration across the wider force. As illustrated at the top of the next column, one's motivation to cooperate must be balanced against their desire to assert themselves or to have autonomy. Consider some times when you have seen the following behaviors



emerge when individual motivations come in to conflict in a team environment:

- ▶ An Airman who places “getting his own way” over and above cooperating alienates his colleagues by being overly competitive.
- ▶ An Airman who focuses more on appeasing others gives in too easily and is taken advantage of by more assertive colleagues.
- ▶ An Airman is reluctant to address a contentious issue and avoids engaging with the other party.
- ▶ Airmen with competing priorities each give up some of what they want to reach a solution that is acceptable to both.
- ▶ Airmen discuss their individual capabilities and how they can leverage their strengths to work together to reach mutual goals.

This final bullet provides an example of collaboration. Using the diagram above can help you work with Airmen in your unit to understand the value of working toward “win-win” solutions and avoid the pitfalls of too much competition, accommodation, and avoidance. While these motivations come into play on an individual level within your own team or unit, they can also be applied on a macro scale to interactions between teams and units with an even more magnified impact on the AMC mission and organizational learning. Consider the following examples of how the above approaches to confronting challenges or conflicts can impact teams and units across AMC.

Approach	Individual-Level Behavior	Organizational Outcome
Avoidance	Neglecting to respond to message from colleague that suggests a different strategy	Lack of coordination, inefficiency, errors, lack of support for approach, delays, wasted resources
Competition	Being “territorial” or arguing over who should take the lead on a critical mission	Delays, damaged working relationships, “loudest voice wins out,” inefficiency, task failure
Accommodation	Always going along with whatever a superior recommends	Failure to identify problems or constraints, slowed progress, hindered development of future leaders
Compromise	Acquiescing (giving in) to another unit’s request for support but with reduced staff	Maintain working relationship, potentially achieve common objective, heightened risk of failure
Collaboration	Teams identify most qualified staff on each team to participate in task force	Effective, informed, efficient response; strengthen working relationships; mutually acceptable solution

Collaboration can often feel like the most difficult approach, but as you can see, pursuing suboptimal solutions can have far-reaching effects on short-term task performance, and long-term relationships with partners, and mission success. On subsequent pages, we will discuss strategies to foster collaboration across teams and units, encourage knowledge-sharing, and model these behaviors for those you lead.

Step 2: Identify Barriers and Solutions for Effective Collaboration

Beyond the individual tendencies toward assertiveness or cooperativeness that may inhibit or promote collaboration and knowledge sharing, there are several interpersonal, procedural, and cultural barriers that could also impede effective cooperation. The table below describes some common challenges that your unit may encounter and steps you can take to help facilitate the collaborative process.

Collaboration Barriers and Solutions

Barrier	Potential Solution
Attachment to existing/ preferred ways of doing things	Sticking with the status quo often seems easier than adapting to accommodate styles or preferences of those you are working with. Remind staff that solving complex or unique problems cannot be accomplished through “cookie-cutter” solutions. Collaborating with those with diverse experience can expose all involved to new and creative solutions.
Focus on competing priorities rather than shared interests	When differences exist, people may default to fighting for their own interests. Refocusing your team on shared goals and strengths of each party can help you to find common ground and identify a solution that helps both parties succeed.
Lack of awareness of task/role interdependencies	Some Airmen may lack the experience to fully appreciate the way their efforts impact other units or the need to coordinate with them. You can help by identifying and highlighting interdependencies within the organization and how an Airman’s ability to successfully perform his or her job depends on the performance of others.
Limited relationships with counterparts in other teams/units	The technical focus of the Air Force can sometimes contribute to an insular culture and Airmen may not appreciate the capabilities of other units or have effective working relationships across the wing, AMC and beyond. As a leader, you may have opportunities to build bridges across AMC and the Air Force and to other services, so try to facilitate connections between teams and units that share interests and mission responsibilities.
Dominance by the loudest and fastest	The recommendation of the most senior Airman, the most vocal, or the first to speak up may not be the best. Actively seek out perspectives from less outspoken or more junior members of the team to ensure everyone feels they are a part of the solution.
Prioritizing the process over the task	Focusing on <i>how</i> the work gets done can distract teams from actually getting it done. Encourage teams to let go of minor procedural issues in the interest of finding common ground and reaching consensus on the larger impediments to the collaborative effort.
Unclear or overly broad goals and objectives	If different teams or units begin with different ideas about the goals or objectives of a task, they may lack a shared mental model from which to define the challenge and develop a solution. Be sure to define and gain agreement on goals, roles, and expectations at the outset, and involve all team members in this process to encourage buy-in.

Step 3: Enable a Culture that Allows Knowledge to Flourish

The strategies above should help you to be successful in promoting collaboration and information exchange to perform the mission day-to-day. However, critical knowledge acquired by Airmen over time (e.g., technical expertise, lessons learned) may still not be actively shared with others without proper incentives, systems, and support from leaders. In the extreme, this situation can result in “knowledge silos” in which knowledge that would be beneficial to a broad audience is hoarded (intentionally or unintentionally) within a particular unit or team, thereby stifling innovation and organizational learning, and jeopardizing safety and mission outcomes. The associated risks can build up invisibly over time, only to be revealed when a failure occurs because of imperfect knowledge or a vital team member leaves and their knowledge leaves with them.

Organizational systems and processes (discussed in Chapter 4) are vital to ensuring efficient knowledge sharing and organizational learning, but they can be difficult to change in the short term. However, there are several ways you can make an impact every day to stimulate development of knowledge networks to improve performance and minimize risk of knowledge loss. These include:

- ▶ **Leadership:** Encourage leaders in your unit to model knowledge sharing behaviors, provide opportunities for team members to share their insights, and break down barriers to knowledge sharing. Research shows that employees are more willing to share knowledge with leaders who adopt a supportive and open communication style.
- ▶ **Trust:** In order to share knowledge, Airmen must feel comfortable that their openness will not be used against them. An individual who believes their peers and leaders are honest, reliable and trustworthy will be more willing to dis-

close knowledge they might otherwise conceal. On the other hand, if they fear they will criticized or punished for their openness, they will be less forthcoming. By being open and sharing information with your team, you can encourage them to be more trusting of you and others.

- ▶ **Incentive:** Airmen may not realize the value to AMC and themselves of sharing their specialized knowledge with others inside and outside the team or unit. You should help them to see that sharing knowledge can help AMC by improving situational awareness, simplifying collaborative efforts, and increasing overall performance. Likewise, it benefits Airmen themselves through opportunities to learn from their peers, be recognized as an expert or knowledge resource, and grow both personally and professionally.
- ▶ **Reinforcement:** If you observe constructive knowledge sharing taking place, make note of it for those in attendance or in communications with your unit to recognize and reinforce the behavior. Be sure to highlight the context, the content of the knowledge that was shared, and the outcome, including how it benefited the unit and will continue to in the future.



Where Do I Go from Here?

Further Reading:

- ▶ Christensen, P. H. (2007). Knowledge sharing: moving away from the obsession with best practices. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 11, 36-47.

The author argues that there is more to knowledge sharing than the sharing of best practices and the closing of performance gaps. It is also about bridging situations of organizational interdependencies and supporting ongoing organizational activities.

- ▶ Harvard Business Review. (2013). HBR's 10 Must Reads on Collaboration (with featured article "Social Intelligence and the Biology of Leadership," by Daniel Goleman and Richard Boyatzis). Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.

Gives leaders advice on mutual respect and recognition of accomplishments and helping people find their voice through a mix of research findings and practical observations drawn from the authors' extensive experience with leaders.

Includes 10 articles from leading experts on topics such as:

- Forging strong relationships up, down, and across the organization
- Building a collaborative culture
- Busting silos
- Harnessing informal knowledge sharing
- Picking the right type of collaboration for your organization
- Managing conflict wisely
- Knowing when not to collaborate



Exercise: Knowledge Capture and Transfer

If you are struggling to get Airmen to share knowledge naturally in the course of their work, it can be helpful to document critical knowledge more formally first as a starting point in order to share it with others. The worksheet below can help you choose your strategy to capture the relevant knowledge and decide how best to transfer it to others. Be aware that tacit knowledge, the unspoken “know-how” people acquire over time, is often much harder to capture and transfer than the more explicit duties, tasks, and processes, that are often based on doctrine or procedural manuals.

Identify Knowledge	
Description of Knowledge	Knowledge Type
	<input type="checkbox"/> Explicit—Codified duties, tasks, and process to perform a job <input type="checkbox"/> Tacit—Unspoken knowledge about how to do something gained through experience
Capture Method	
Methods for capturing Explicit Knowledge	Methods for capturing Tacit Knowledge
<input type="checkbox"/> Job mapping <input type="checkbox"/> Task analysis <input type="checkbox"/> Procedure documentation	<input type="checkbox"/> Incumbent interviews <input type="checkbox"/> Partner interviews <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Incumbent interviews <input type="checkbox"/> Focus group discussions <input type="checkbox"/> Partner interviews <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
Transfer Method	
Capture Method	Example Transfer Method
Job Mapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create a mapping of jobs across units to illustrate interdependencies and opportunities for knowledge-sharing across AMC jobs ▪ Review job map with various incumbents and partners ▪ Share maps via email or electronic knowledge sharing systems
Task Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop a manual (or amend a current one) that captures relevant job tasks and procedures ▪ Develop a performance support tool that provides easy access to procedures and troubleshooting steps
Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ With permission, share video, audio, or transcripts of interviews of subject matter experts with other Airmen ▪ Analyze common interview themes and unique tips or strategies and incorporate into training or study materials
Other Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish “communities of practice” of Airmen with similar roles to share knowledge and discuss how best to disseminate it to the field. ▪ If knowledge is widely applicable, include in a newsletter, DCO, or “all-hands” meeting.

Sample Action Plan

Once you determine the root cause(s) for why Airmen may be struggling to work and share knowledge with one another, you should identify 1-2 strategies that will result in noticeable improvements for your unit. Next, turn these strategies into action plans. The example here provides a sample action plan to increase awareness of how roles impact each other both within and across units. See Appendix A for a blank action plan template to use for the strategy you want to implement.

1 Select an Improvement Area

Dimension Improvement Area	Dimension #3: AMC Total Force Shared Mission Perspective
Root Causes	Low awareness of how role and efforts impact other units

2 Choose a Strategy

Strategy	Institute job shadowing program for technology procurement team
Purpose	To enable team to understand how systems are used in the field

3 Define Objectives

- All procurement team members participate at least one day
- Each Airman shadows at least one current/potential user of system they procured
- Develop a list of 10 recommended improvements to systems or processes based on shadowing experience

4 Refine the Path

Target Audience (The people to whom the strategy is being aimed)	Airmen (mil and civ) involved in procurement
Action Leads (The people who will be responsible)	Procurement team leads
Communication Avenue(s) (How the objectives will be communicated)	All-hands, email, report of recommendations
Timeframe	One month for planning, one month for pilot, 6 months for full rollout

5 Identify Resources

Implement Resources	Time to select and match shadowing participants
Sustainment Resources	Time for scheduling & participation, develop recommendations



Advancing Airmen and Unit Learning: A Commander's Guide

3.2

Establishing a Vision that Belongs to Everyone

Why It Matters

A shared vision enables a learning organization to focus the combined insights, capabilities, and efforts of a diverse workforce into something that is greater than any individual or small team could produce. Leaders at all levels of AMC serve an important role in promoting a shared vision. They not only convey the larger mission of AMC and the vision laid out by higher commands but also translate it into a specific vision for their unit. As the vision coalesces, each Airman gains a deeper appreciation of interdependencies across individuals and teams and how they work together to achieve the mission. When Airman in the unit own this vision and understand how tasks relate to partners across and beyond AMC, they are better equipped to identify and address inefficiencies that degrade performance.

What to Look For in Your Airmen

Strength indicators reveal Airmen have a share vision and understanding; need indicators suggest Airmen may not understand how they fit in to the big picture.

Strength Indicators

- ▶ Airmen can identify impacts of activities or changes on other units
- ▶ Airmen are knowledgeable about other AMC units and functions
- ▶ Airmen can anticipate the leader's thinking and adapt to changing circumstances without need for additional direction

Need Indicators

- ▶ Airmen unknowingly take actions that disrupt efforts of other units
- ▶ Airmen cannot describe how other various units contribute to the larger AMC mission
- ▶ Airmen cannot explain why they do things a certain way except to refer to doctrine or orders

Case Study

You are on the Wing Staff and have been leading a team that developed some new performance targets for squadrons across the wing to improve efficiency and maintain safety. However, members of your team report that the squadrons are resisting the new measures, claiming that they are unrealistic and do not account for what is needed to execute the mission. They also report that the measures punish them for things that are out of their control.

To get a better understanding of the challenges being described, you assign a few of your team members to shadow several Airmen in some of the squadrons. During their observations, your team learns that several tasks are being held up by other units and thus, the performance measures do not effectively evaluate individual unit performance.

Your team developed revised metrics, and then you called meetings with the squadron leaders to articulate your vision for their implementation using narratives that describe the vision in plain language. You gathered feedback on how they address the interdependencies between functions across the wing.



Determining Root Causes

If Airmen provide low ratings on attribute 3.2, you should consider the following questions:

- ▶ Do Airmen understand where their unit is going and how they fit into the larger AMC and Air Force mission?
 - If “yes,” move to the next root cause question to dig deeper.
 - If “no,” see Step 1 for developing a narrative and Step 2 for a mind mapping activity.
- ▶ Do Airmen understand how their role and efforts impact other units across AMC and other organizations that receive AMC support?
 - If “yes,” move to the next root cause question to dig deeper.
 - If “no,” see Step 3 on mind mapping in this section.
- ▶ Do Airmen have opportunities to engage other AMC personnel outside of their unit or functional area?
 - If “yes,” read on to see if more insights emerge as to possible areas of concern.
 - If “no,” see Step 3 in this section.



from their vantage point, the tasks they perform on a daily basis may seem far removed from these broader concepts. Many leaders erroneously assume that their teams understand the broader organization and how Airman efforts contribute to it, but this understanding does not occur spontaneously. It is ultimately the responsibility of AMC leaders to fill in the gaps by communicating a coherent vision that promotes commitment to the mission, self-sufficiency, awareness of role interdependencies, and application of cross-functional expertise. In this step, we describe how narratives can help leaders develop and communicate a shared vision.

Key Steps to Move the Needle

Step 1: Shaping the Vision through Storytelling

Most experienced Airmen are likely familiar with the key elements of AMC and Air Force mission statements (e.g., right effects, right place, right time; fly, fight, win). While these statements reduce the mission to its most fundamental ideas, they do not necessarily tell the story of AMC. They do not capture the myriad of ways that individual and team activities systematically integrate to provide global air mobility and “unrivaled global reach.” Although it may seem obvious that AMC Airmen ultimately support a common mission,

Narratives (stories) are a powerful way to help convey your vision of where your unit is going, how the unit is collectively going to get there, and why Airmen should care. Stories rely on concrete scenarios, realistic context, and analogies and metaphors that resonate with people, linger longer in their memories, and give them a sense of purpose and direction. They enable people to see themselves as actors or “protagonists” in the plot. When people understand themselves as part of the developing narrative of the organization, they are more likely to feel motivated and engaged in their work, than if they are simply complying with orders.

The tips below can help all AMC leaders develop and communicate narratives that improve commitment and shared understanding:

- ▶ **Provide context:** Narratives without context can leave the audience confused as to why the story is relevant to them or how to interpret the events. Beginning with a brief backstory ensures that your audience is coming along with you.
- ▶ **Make an emotional appeal:** Consider telling stories that account for the emotions and desires of your audience to promote the vision. When facts cannot win people over, appealing to people's emotions (e.g., wanting to feel included, competitiveness) can.
- ▶ **Incorporate metaphors grounded in reality:** Metaphors and analogies can add impact by showing how one situation relates to others the Airman might encounter on the job. However, talking in abstracts can sometimes obscure your point. Try to use metaphors and analogies grounded in the Air Force context so that Airmen can relate.
- ▶ **Avoid clichés:** You do not want to become known as the leader who always tells the same story or who makes the outcome of the story predictable from the outset. Try to avoid clichés and incorporate some suspense or surprise into the narrative to engage the listener.
- ▶ **Incorporate the audience into the conclusion:** The AMC story never really ends. When using a narrative to articulate your vision, try to convey how your team fits into that story and the role they play in continuing it.

Consider the Case Study on the first page of this section. How would you incorporate these strategies into a narrative that relates to the vision you want your Airmen to share.



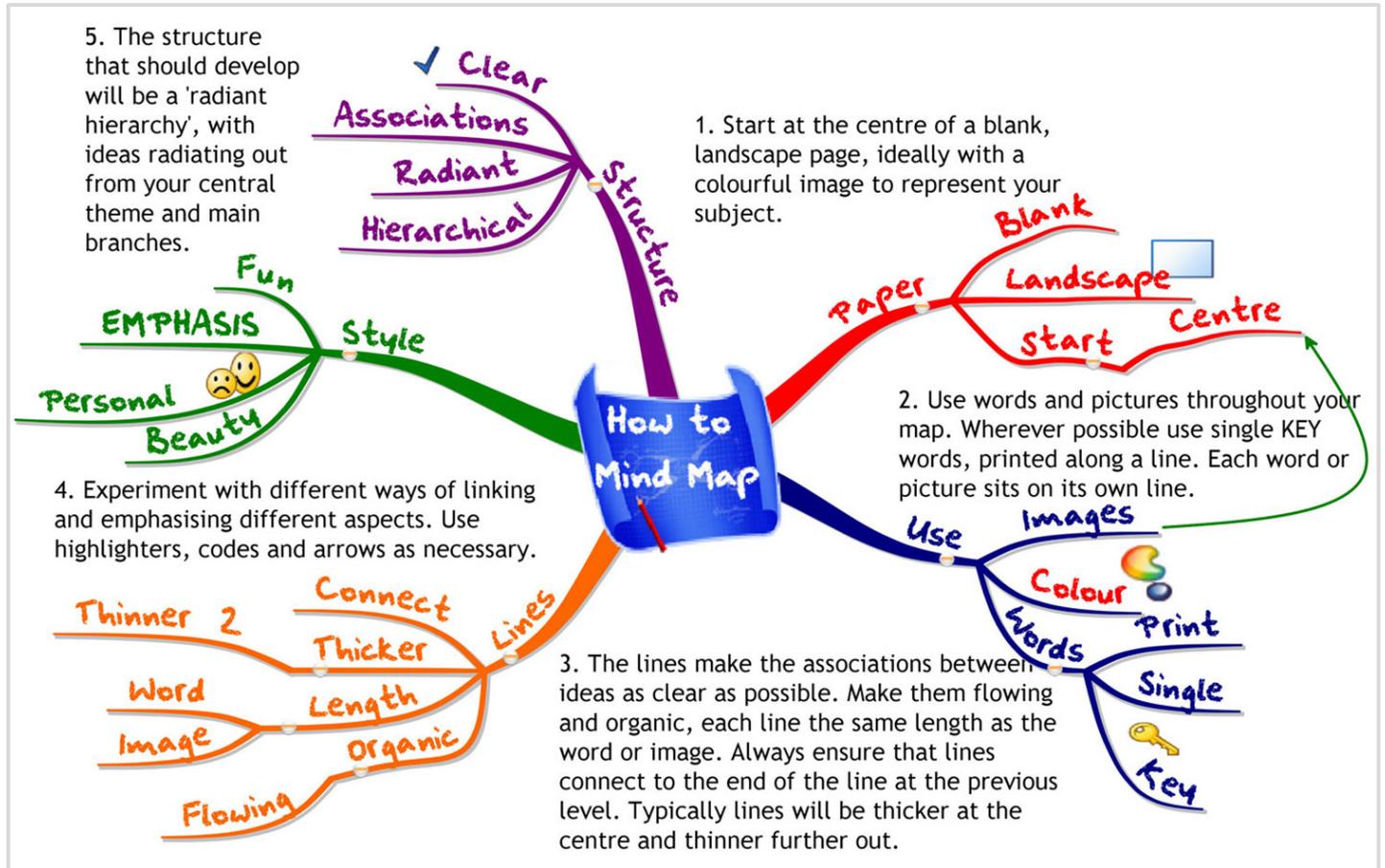
How do you know if the narrative you have laid out is helping to create a shared vision for your team?

One sign is that the stories are retold by others and are retold when conflicts arise. Another outcome of a strong narrative is that Airmen require less guidance on how to respond to unexpected situations since they can better judge the optimal course of action when they understand how their efforts fit into the larger story. Airmen should also become more effective at collaboration as the narrative provides context for how all the elements of the organization contribute to achieving the vision.

Step 2: Visualize Relationships through Mind Mapping

One downside of narratives is that they can often be viewed as one-sided based on the perspective of the "author." They might also be less helpful for those who are primarily visual learners. A way to visually share information is through mind mapping; mind mapping can enable participants from across the organization to visualize and document their understanding of the environment in which they operate and reconcile their perspectives to create a shared understanding of the independencies between units and functional areas. Understanding the interdependencies between roles can be vital to coordination, collaboration, and safety.

The graphic below provides a mind map of “mind mapping.” It also includes the key concepts and steps in the mapping process.



As you will notice above, mind maps are not the same as a flow chart or vertical hierarchy in that they need not have a directional flow. Instead, they connect a broad range of information around a central subject. How broad it should be depends on the topic, but in general, it is better to be more inclusive to start, as you may not know what impacts an issue until you put all the pieces together.

In terms of creating a shared vision and understanding interdependencies, mind mapping could be used with a cross-functional team to understand the various parts of the organization that drive an issue or process and how they relate. For example, the box below illustrates how you could incorporate mind mapping into the case study from page 1.

Start by having each member of the team develop their own mind map of all the factors that impact or relate to performance of the mission. Then, the team could come together to share their individual mind maps and discuss the meaning of similarities and differences between them, as well as how they relate to the performance measures your team developed. If needed, work together to develop a “group mind map” that reflects the consensus based on this discussion. Then, you could adapt the performance measures to reflect the broader context uncovered in the group mind map. Finally, you could share this with each of the squadrons as needed to ensure that the rationale for the change is understood by those who will ultimately be accountable for achieving the results.

Step 3: Develop Cross-Functional and Cross-Unit Expertise

Even with a coherent narrative and opportunities to share mental maps, there is no substitute for actual experience. Gaining experience and knowledge about other functional areas or even how similar functions are performed in other units can help Airmen to understand how the various pieces of AMC fit together. Understandably, Airmen and their leaders may be reluctant to take time away from their core job responsibilities to focus on developing cross-functional awareness, but the benefits far outweigh the costs.

Below, we describe a few key strategies you might employ to develop cross-functional or cross-unit expertise among your Airmen:

- ▶ **Job Rotation:** A job rotation program allows an employee to work consecutively through a series of positions to develop varied skills, prepare for the responsibility of a higher level position, gain a better understanding of how the organization works as a whole, and spread institutional knowledge. The result is a workforce that is more widely skilled, flexible enough to confront a range of workplace challenges, and more motivated and engaged in their work and the success of the organization as a whole.
- ▶ **Cross-training:** Rather than performing a specific job for a lengthier period of time, cross-training enables Airman to receive basic training on a range of positions across units or functional areas. This provides less depth into a particular field than job rotation, but can be useful for those who regularly work with a varied group of stakeholders or who may lead cross-functional teams. In any case, the scope of the program should suit the Airman's job classification and career path.



- ▶ **Job-shadowing:** Shadowing opportunities are typically the least intensive of all, but allow employees to observe others performing their jobs in a realistic context. Typically they are not actually trained to perform the work themselves, but the act of observing the work first hand can still provide an eye-opening experience. The length and number of positions observed can vary, but it is usually helpful to shadow someone for at least a day in order to encounter a variety of events and work activities.

Each strategy has its benefits and drawbacks with respect to the depth and variety of the experience it provides, the time commitment, and the cost involved. Nevertheless, the key steps involved in developing and implementing them are generally similar and include: developing guidelines for eligibility; communicating the value of participation; selecting participants; training and preparing Airmen for their assignments; and evaluating program effectiveness.

Where Do I Go from Here?

Further Reading:

- ▶ Smith, P. (2012). *Lead with a Story: A Guide to Crafting Business Narratives That Captivate, Convince, and Inspire*. New York: AMACOM.

This resource provides both ready-to-use stories from a variety of business contexts as well as how-to guidance for leaders to develop their own organizational narratives. It includes compelling stories from throughout the business world including companies like Kellogg's, Merrill-Lynch, Procter & Gamble, National Car Rental, Wal-Mart, and Pizza Hut. Although not grounded in the military context, the broad lessons and themes of the stories are widely applicable.

- ▶ The following articles provide information, tips, and examples of rotational, cross-training, or shadowing programs:
 - SHRM Q&A on job rotation: <http://www.shrm.org/templatestools/hrqa/pages/whatisjobrotation.aspx>
 - CareerBuilder on how cross-training can benefit your team: <http://www.careerbuilder.com/article/cb-2722-leadership-management-how-cross-training-can-benefit-your-team/>
 - Description of job shadowing program at DLA Aviation: <http://www.aviation.dla.mil/externalnews/news/20111206.htm>



Exercise: Developing a Narrative

The step-by-step exercise below can be used in conjunction with *Step 1: Shaping the Vision through Storytelling* to help you create narratives that carry your vision, resonate with Airmen, and expand their understanding of AMC and their role within it. Whether you are creating an original narrative to convey your own vision for your unit or incorporating real-world examples to improve awareness and collaboration, these steps can help you develop a narrative that inspires action and engagement.

Step 1: Identify the Purpose

What are you trying to accomplish with this narrative? Are you trying to articulate your vision for the unit going forward? What will you say to your Airmen to help them understand how they fit into the larger AMC vision?

Step 2: Choose a Starting Point

Do you start from scratch or build on an existing story? If you are new to your role or trying to craft your own vision, it may be harder to build it from

existing stories. But if you are focusing on helping Airmen to see the bigger picture, you may have several stories to draw from.

Step 3: Identify Your Message

What is it that you want people to understand or commit to? What perspective do you want them to come away with that they did not have before? Considering the background and perspective of your audience, what message is likely to resonate with them?

Step 4: Establish the Context

What background information do your Airmen need to interpret the narrative the way you intend? Are there facts or relationships they would need to understand to draw the same conclusions you do from the narrative?

Step 5: Identify Emotional Anchors

Why should Airmen care about this story? What elements of the vision or narrative could connect with Airmen on an emotional level? What is the most powerful way to convey this?

Step 6: Incorporate Analogies, Metaphors, and Imagery

How does the story relate to other situations Airmen may be familiar with or ones they are likely to encounter? What examples or situations deepen the impact and convey your meaning without spelling it out?

Step 7: Tie It all Together

Do the elements of the narrative hang together around a central theme or idea? Does it ultimately convey what you originally intended? Are there elements that are not needed or that cloud the message?

Sample Action Plan

Once you determine the root cause(s) for why Airmen in your unit may not be operating from a shared understanding or vision, you should identify 1-2 strategies that will result in noticeable improvements for your unit. Next, turn these strategies into action plans. The example here provides a sample action plan to address “low awareness of how role and efforts impact other units” within your unit. See Appendix A for a blank action plan template to use for the strategy you want to implement.

1 Select an Improvement Area

Dimension Improvement Area	Dimension #3: AMC Total Force Shared Mission Perspective
Root Causes	Low awareness of how role and efforts impact other units

2 Choose a Strategy

Strategy	Institute job shadowing program for technology procurement team
Purpose	To enable team to understand how systems are used in the field

3 Define Objectives

- All procurement team members participate at least one day
- Each Airman shadows at least one current/potential user of system they procured
- Develop a list of 10 recommended improvements to systems or processes based on shadowing experience

4 Refine the Path

Target Audience (The people to whom the strategy is being aimed)	Airmen (mil and civ) involved in procurement
Action Leads (The people who will be responsible)	Procurement team leads
Communication Avenue(s) (How the objectives will be communicated)	All-hands, email, report of recommendations
Timeframe	One month for planning, one month for pilot, 6 months for full rollout

5 Identify Resources

Implement Resources	Time to select and match shadowing participants
Sustainment Resources	Time for scheduling & participation, develop recommendations



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3.3

Learn, Share, and Connect: Anywhere, Anytime

Why It Matters

As discussed in sections 3.1 and 3.2, helping Airmen establish a shared perspective in their learning and development requires collaboration and a unified vision. As a leader, you can also help Airmen integrate effective learning into their day-to-day teamwork by providing them guidance on tools, resources and processes to enable and encourage knowledge sharing and feedback exchange with team members. In a highly effective learning environment, Airmen look for ways to improve performance for themselves, their team and for the organization as a whole, especially when they are on the job. Find out in this section how to leverage the Air Force's digital learning environment and social media to facilitate learning, sharing and connection among Airmen anywhere and anytime. Read on to learn more.

What to Look For in Your Airmen

The strength indicators below reveal Airmen are constantly working together to learn from one another and improve performance; need indicators suggest Airmen view learning as completely separate from their work and are unclear about tools available to support learning.

Strength Indicators

- ▶ Airmen actively use technology and social media to share knowledge (e.g., participating in online forums)
- ▶ Airmen regularly discuss ways to improve team performance and provide each other feedback
- ▶ Airmen reach out to others for ideas to make continuous improvements

Need Indicators

- ▶ Airmen are unaware of what tools and resources are available to them to share knowledge
- ▶ Airmen only see the need to correct individual or team performance when something goes wrong
- ▶ Airmen are only focused on getting the job done and allocate little time coming up with ideas to improve

Case Study

In reviewing your unit's responses to the LOA, you notice lower than average responses to the item, "Airmen provide each other with feedback to enhance team effectiveness."

You ask a few commanders in your organization to find out from the Airmen in their units what might be the issue. They mention that Airmen often feel overloaded and are focused on getting the job done. While multiple Airmen report seeing the value in reflecting on team performance improvement, they also said it would be too difficult to get everyone together at the same time outside of their work schedule to discuss new ideas. You also find out that Airmen had heard about SharePoint and milSuite but are largely unaware of their capabilities.

You decide to promote the use of social media to enable and encourage Airmen to integrate learning and improvement into their work. You arrange for a technology expert to come to your organization and provide a demonstration on how to best leverage these systems both for commanders and Airmen. You also start to post some discussion topics on the sites and ask Airmen to provide feedback on a regular basis.



Determining Root Causes

If Airmen provide low ratings on attribute 3.3, consider the following questions:

- ▶ Do Airmen understand the value of learning from and with each other?
 - If “yes,” move to the next root cause question to dig deeper.
 - If “no,” see Steps 1 and 2 in this section.
- ▶ Are Airmen aware of the tools and resources that enable them to share knowledge with each other and integrate learning into their work?
 - If “yes,” move to the next root cause question to dig deeper.
 - If “no,” see Steps 3 and 4 in this section.
- ▶ Do Airmen understand the full features of the AMC or AF-wide systems available to support knowledge sharing?
 - If “yes,” move to the next root cause question to dig deeper.
 - If “no,” see Step 3 in this section.
- ▶ Do Airmen have tools, resources and opportunities to share learning?
 - If “yes,” read on to see if more insights emerge as to why Airmen provided low ratings.
 - If “no,” see Steps 3 and 4 in this section.

Key Steps to Move the Needle

Step 1: Encourage Feedback Exchange Within Teams

Providing individual feedback to your Airmen is critical for their learning and development; however, as the leader, you cannot be there at all times to view their performance and give the necessary feedback. Instead, your Airmen also need to learn how to receive and give feedback to each other. When Airmen in a team provide feedback to each other and are open to the

feedback of others, the overall performance of the team can be strengthened.

To encourage and assist your Airmen in exchanging feedback with one another, you should:

- ▶ Help your Airmen value and understand the importance of the team's performance and how each team member's performance impacts the overall team. Inform them that providing effective feedback to each other can enhance how well the team works together.
- ▶ Teach your Airmen how to provide feedback to each other by teaching them the characteristics of effective feedback and the instant feedback formula that are provided in Steps 1 and 4 of Section 2.2.
- ▶ Ensure your Airmen are focusing on behaviors or actions, not each others' personality traits.
- ▶ Encourage your Airmen to ask each other for feedback and to be open to what their peers have to say. Explain to them that their peers have a different perspective and may not see the same behaviors that you as their leader sees so it is helpful to receive feedback from them as well.
- ▶ Encourage your Airmen to act on the feedback they receive from each other and to seek assistance if needed.

Step 2: Make the Case for Collective Learning to Enable Problem Solving

Collective learning generally refers to multiple individuals learning through social interactions. Similar terms that are frequently used include: collaborative learning, social learning and networked learning. Compared to individual learning, collective learning capitalizes on knowledge sharing and connections among team members, thus achieving team outcomes that are greater than the sum of all individual outcomes. Helping Airmen understand, appreciate, and reap the benefits of collective learning is useful for problem solving and improving your organization as a learning organization.

Start by conveying the importance of collective learning and why Airmen should engage in it. Here are some key points about collective learning:

- ▶ Airmen help improve the organization through collective learning. Help your Airmen share the goal of organizational improvement by encouraging them to engage in dialogue and group tasks with Airmen across units.
- ▶ Collective learning enables Airmen to problem solve together and share their experiences with others across the organization. Point out to your Airmen that when one encounters a problem on the job, it is likely that someone else has also run into similar issues and could either offer help or use help solving that problem.
- ▶ The value of collective learning increases when more individuals are connected and engaged.
- ▶ Collective learning outcomes depend not only on the size but also the diversity of the network. Encourage your Airmen to expand their knowledge sharing network beyond the immediate organizational boundaries, which will allow for cross-pollination of knowledge, skills, and experiences.
- ▶ Active engagement of individuals in the knowledge network is critical to the success of collective learning. Encourage your Airmen to

be active contributors by being a role model and contributing yourself.

Collective learning can take place anywhere and anytime through the use of social media. Find out in the next steps how to help your organization better leverage social media for knowledge sharing and problem solving.

Step 3: Identify and Overcome Barriers to Adopting Organizational Social Media

Once Airmen recognize the value of collective learning and are willing to give it a try, you may still run into pushback when trying to use enablers to collective learning such as social media. This section outlines a few significant barriers to adopting new technology that are often found in organizations and offers some practical solutions. It should be noted that organization-wide adoption of social media will likely require resources and systems support, some of which may be well beyond your control. Nevertheless, as the leader, look for opportunities where you can exert influence on changing Airmen behaviors around social media and help them adopt a new way of integrating learning and information sharing into day-to-day work.

Barrier	Potential Solution
Lack of awareness, understanding and education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communicate clear goals and expectations around social media adoption ▪ Hold informational sessions (e.g., invite an expert to provide a demo on milSuite capabilities during organizational meetings) ▪ Embed instructions in existing training courses and curriculum ▪ Develop resource materials (e.g., job aids) readily accessible for everyone
Initial learning curve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lead by example in the use of social media (e.g., start a discussion thread and ask Airmen to respond) ▪ Set intermediate goals and provide support ▪ Facilitate peer-to-peer sharing of success stories and lessons learned
Fear or risk of information security; loss of control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish clear rules of engagement ▪ Require user identification even if it is not set up to be mandatory in the system ▪ Assign designated contacts for content monitoring and oversight ▪ Provide anonymous channels for reporting social media abuse

Step 4: Structure Social Media Use to Facilitate Collective Learning

While social media is intended to be a tool to help Airmen integrate learning into their work and share knowledge, you can provide some structure around its use to help establish behavioral norms and increase its effectiveness. In the beginning, consider your role to be a facilitator. Then, once Airmen become familiar with social media use, the responsibility for initiating informal activities of collective learning should be shared by the whole group. In fact, you can start asking others to assume the facilitator role after you have set an example and demonstrate how it is done.

Here are some practical tips to help you get started:

- ▶ **Establish your presence in a “woven” manner:** You can start by posing high-level questions online that are thought provoking, hypothetical, and controversial, wait and give others time and space to respond, and then ask follow-up questions to stimulate conversation.
- Your participation in online discussions increases perceived learning. When you participate in the conversations, the quality of posts increases because Airmen feel more accountable for producing quality responses and comments.
- Use provocative subject lines, such as “Three reasons why this viewpoint is dead wrong...”
- Be careful not to give your opinion too quickly—when you as a senior leader start sharing your views, Airmen may be reluctant to share alternative viewpoints.
- ▶ **Enable learning by doing:** Make connections to Airmen’s field experience and look for opportunities for Airmen to practice learning in their work.
- ▶ **Encourage learning by discovery.** Airmen will retain information longer when they are given the opportunity to realize ideas and solutions from their own understanding.
- ▶ **Consider alternatives to the question and answer format:** You can also structure other formats of discussions such as debates, case studies, and after action reviews (AARs).

Where Do I Go from Here?

milSuite Online Support

When learning about milSuite, there are extensive information and resources available to you in milSuite itself, in depth training procedures in the milUniversity learning portal, and User Communities where you can ask any questions you may have and get feedback from other users and members of the milSuite team. Here are some sites:

- ▶ milUniversity: <https://www.milsuite.mil/learn/milsuite/>
- ▶ milBook User’s Community: <https://www.milsuite.mil/book/community/milsuite/milbook>
- ▶ Civilian Development Resource Center: <https://www.my.af.mil/gcss-af/USAF/ep/globalTab.do?channelPageId=sE3494DD04855F471014856506046004D>

Further Reading:

- ▶ Bingham, T., Conner, M., & Pink, D. H. (2010). *The New Social Learning: A Guide to Transforming Organizations Through Social Media*. Alexandria, VA: American Society for Training & Development (ASTD) & Berrett-Koehler. The authors explain why social media is the ideal solution to some of the most pressing educational challenges organizations face today, such as a widely dispersed workforce and striking differences in learning styles, particularly across generations.
- ▶ Bradley, A. J. (2011). *The Social Organization: How to Use Social Media to Tap the Collective Genius of Your Customers and Employees*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press. The author explores the new social technology landscape how it relates to building communities, fostering new ways of collaborating, and guiding these efforts to achieve a purpose.



Exercise: Brainstorming Ideas for Online Discussion

This exercise is intended to provide some high-level questions to help you come up with ideas and topics that can be used for an online discussion. You can work on this exercise alone, distribute it to others and have them work on it individually, or convene a small group of Airmen and work through the questions together to collectively come up with a list of tentative discussion topics. This exercise can be repeated on a regular basis to capture timely issues and changes in Airmen's work or the operational environment.

Topics Related to Technical Job Functions

List any technical issues or challenges that Airmen experience in their work:

List any new methods or techniques (e.g., development in industry standards) that may change the way Airmen work:

List any updates on rules or regulations that need to be applied to Airmen's work:

Topics Related to the Operational Environment

List any recent changes in the operational environment that would affect Airmen's work:

List any future trends in the operational environment that may impact the nature of Airmen's work:

Sample Action Plan

Once you determine the root cause(s) for why Airmen are not integrating knowledge sharing and learning in their work and team interactions, you should identify 1-2 strategies that would result in noticeable improvements for your unit. Next, turn these strategies into action plans. The example here provides a sample action plan to address Airmen not adequately using social media for learning within the unit or across teams. See Appendix A for a blank action plan template to use for the strategy you want to implement.

1 Select an Improvement Area

Dimension Improvement Area	Dimension #3: AMC Total Force Shared Mission Perspective
Root Causes	Airmen lack ways to integrate learning with work

2 Choose a Strategy

Strategy	Provide Airmen with guidance and structure on social media use
Purpose	To help Airmen adopt social media for knowledge-sharing and learning

3 Define Objectives

- Each Airman will receive information and guidance on social media use from his/her supervisor
- 100% of the Airmen will become active users on social media
- Each Airman will at least contribute once a month on social media

4 Refine the Path

Target Audience (The people to whom the strategy is being aimed)	All Airmen in the Squadron
Action Leads (The people who will be responsible)	Flight commanders
Communication Avenue(s) (How the objectives will be communicated)	VTC with Flight commanders
Timeframe	Flight commanders provide plan of action NLT 3Feb

5 Identify Resources

Implement Resources	Need technology structure and system support
Sustainment Resources	Assign designated administrators to provide oversight

Chapter 4: Why Fight the System When You Can Fix the System?

A wide range of AMC systems and processes operate in the background and may go largely unnoticed unless something goes wrong. Many of these processes may be codified in manuals or policies, but others may have simply emerged out of habit or necessity. Formal or not, the sophistication and effectiveness of an organization's systems and processes are one of the drivers of organizational learning. To encourage learning and help AMC successfully accomplish its mission, the organization must continually evaluate available systems and processes, their functionality, and how they help or hinder Airmen in performance of their duties. Further, leaders should consider how to formalize and simplify more prescribed or systemic processes to decrease inefficiencies and allow for focus to be placed back on learning and development versus emphasis on tedious, unnecessary process steps.

Thus, Chapter 4 has a dual focus on continuous improvement of processes across AMC and the development and fielding of systems that facilitate Airman learning. First and foremost, processes should prioritize effectiveness, efficiency, and safety, while allowing Airmen the flexibility to perform in a wide range of operational environments. There should also be mechanisms to promote continuous improvement and innovation, so that processes do not become more of a hindrance than an asset. Likewise, learning systems can support or inhibit learning in unforeseen ways, and careful evaluation is needed to maximize their impact on learning and performance.

Chapter 4 includes the following sections:

Section 4.1: Making Processes that Work

Processes can break down for any number of reasons. They may be poorly designed, unable to keep up with changing times, or simply unpopular among those who must implement them. Regardless of the cause, developing effective processes in the first place and taking responsibility when processes are not working are both vital for effective management. This section helps Commanders understand the fundamentals of business process improvement, including the indicators and root causes of problematic processes, planning process improvement, managing the change, and communicating the outcomes.

Section 4.2: Ensuring Systems Support Learning

The systems that enable learning within an organization can take any number of forms from learning management systems, knowledge management systems, simulators or other training technology, as well as a wide range of policies and programs that can impact individual and organizational learning. Although several of these systems may be implemented Air Force wide, AMC leaders have a role to play in ensuring effective employment of these systems within their units and allocating resources to support them. This section informs commanders about activities involved in evaluating existing training, gauging Airman attitudes and opinions on learning systems and processes, and aligning policies and resources to make improvements to the se systems.



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4.1 Making Processes that Work

Why It Matters

Each organization is a complex and dynamic “system of systems,” including political, economic, social, processing, and technological systems. Processing systems can have a large impact on learning and organizational performance. Processes that are not well-defined or are inefficient interrupt learning efforts, slow down performance and frustrate Airmen. As a leader, you should investigate whether Airmen understand the processes for routine events, if those processes work well and formalize your expectations for how you want the unit to proceed. At the same time, you should strive to continuously improve your processes, through mechanisms such as Air Force Smart Operations (AFSO), to ensure they are efficient and effective. While you may face some constraints from higher-level organizational requirements, you can still take steps to ensure the processes are as clear and efficient as possible. Read on to learn more.

What to Look For in Your Airmen

Strength indicators reveal that processes support the organization; need indicators suggest processes may need to be evaluated.

Strength Indicators

- ▶ Key processes, role and performance expectations are documented in writing
- ▶ Processes are aligned with organizational goals
- ▶ Leaders encourage Airmen to use AFSO

Need Indicators

- ▶ Processes are performed inconsistently or with errors
- ▶ Processes have been the same for years
- ▶ Bottlenecks occur that hinder performance

Case Study

In reviewing your unit's responses to the LOA, you notice lower than average responses to the item: “My unit's processes are adaptable and flexible.”

You reach out to several subordinate leaders to hear what they think could be causing these lower than average ratings. They mention that Airmen in your unit are frustrated with the processes because they are inefficient. After further discussion with your subordinate leaders, you discover that Airmen are unfamiliar with AFSO and do not feel empowered to make changes.

To address this, you provide a informational briefing on AFSO in your next Commander's Call and inform Airmen that you welcome their ideas for improvements to your organizations' processes. You put together a team to solicit feedback from Airmen on where the inefficiencies are and how to address the inefficiencies. In addition, you set up a reward and recognition program for Airmen who identify continuous improvement solutions.



Determining Root Causes

If Airmen provide low ratings on this attribute, you should consider the following questions:

- ▶ Do Airmen understand the processes they are expected to follow?
 - If “yes,” move to next root cause question.
 - If “no,” see Step 2 in the next sub-section.
- ▶ Is there something in your organization’s environment that is hindering a given process?
 - If “yes,” see Step 2 in the next sub-section.
 - If “no,” move to next root cause question.
- ▶ Are Airmen encouraged and supported to find better ways to do things?
 - If “yes,” consider starting a monthly discussion forum where Airmen can share what they have learned.
 - If “no,” see Steps 1 and 3 in this section.

Key Steps to Move the Needle

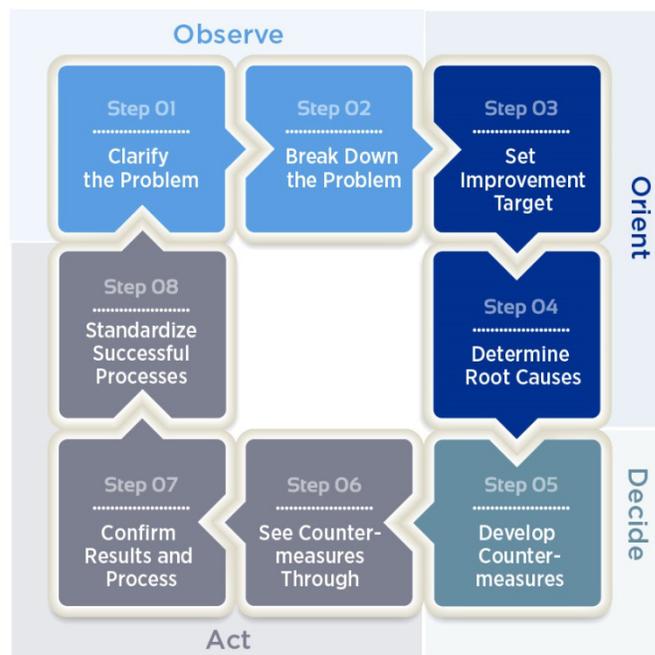
Step 1: Be Knowledgeable about Business Process Improvement

Before you can effectively evaluate your organization’s processes or encourage others to look for business process improvements, you need to understand the what, why and how of AFSSO and business process improvement. AFSSO focuses on generating efficiencies and improving combat capabilities across the Air Force.

AFSSO includes an 8-step problem-solving process, which is depicted to the right. The desired effects of AFSSO are:

- ▶ Increased productivity
- ▶ Greater equipment availability
- ▶ Improved response times and agility
- ▶ Safe and reliable operations
- ▶ Greater energy efficiency

Review the resources under “Where do I go from here?” on the next page to increase your knowledge about business process improvement and AFSSO.



Step 2: Develop a Process Improvement and Management Plan

As a Commander, you know that one critical factor to any successful mission is good planning. If business process improvement is your mission, you will need to begin with a plan. Start your plan by identifying the key or core processes for your organization. These should be 3 to 7 processes that are critical to the strategy or vision you have for your organization’s mission. They are likely a mix of technical, support and management processes.

- ▶ **Technical processes** are processes that produce a product/service visible to your organization’s customers.
- ▶ **Support processes** are processes that support a technical process, such as budget, facilities, or acquisition processes.
- ▶ **Management processes** are processes that provide direction for or status on the organization (e.g., strategic planning processes, performance measurement processes).

Once you have determined the core processes, appoint a Process Team to focus on documenting the core processes and evaluating ways to improve

these core processes. The Process Team should engage in the following activities:

- ▶ Examine input-output relationships for each core process.
- ▶ Map the current “As-Is” state of each core process.
- ▶ Determine the ideal or “To-Be” state for each core process.
- ▶ Identify gaps and barriers in each process.
- ▶ Determine improvements and document final processes.

Step 3: Communicate and Encourage Continuous Improvement

To implement, manage and sustain process improvement, you will need to engage in the following activities:

- ▶ **Communicate about process improvement**
 - Open and clear communication is a key component to ensuring successful implementation and acceptance of new processes.

- Carefully plan communications about process improvement to ensure that the right people are receiving the right messages at the right time.
- ▶ **Ensure needed resources are available**
 - Are budget provisions adequate to support the processes or process improvements?
 - Are Airmen given adequate time to engage in continuous improvement?
 - Are reward structures in place to encourage Airmen towards continuous improvement?
- ▶ **Monitor process performance**
 - Identify measures to track process performance
 - Adjust process improvement and management plan as needed
 - Provide guidance and feedback

Where Do I Go from Here?

Further Reading:

To gain more familiarity with AFSSO, you can read the AFSSO fact sheet, which is available at: <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/af/afso21-fact-sheet.pdf>. You can also access the AFSSO playbook at https://cs3.eis.af.mil/sites/OO-TR-AF-43/AFKN_Docs/Forms/AllItems.aspx. The playbook explains the AFSSO concept and the 8-step OODA loop, and provides tools and templates for using AFSSO. Volume M of the playbook provides 10 key resources to read to gain more information about business process improvement.

- ▶ Rummler & Brache (2013). *Improving Performance: How to Manage the White Space in the Organization Chart*. Third Edition. Jossey-Bass, Inc.
Provides 10 essential steps to process analysis and design. Includes section on developing an action plan for performance improvement.
- ▶ Gilbert (2008). *Human Competence: Engineering Worthy Performance*. Tribute Edition. Pfeiffer
Helps leaders understand performance theory and troubleshoot performance.
- ▶ Robinson & Robinson (2008). *Performance Consulting: A Practical Guide for HR and Learning Professionals*. Second Edition. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
Provides practical tools for identifying, evaluating, and solving performance gaps.



Exercise: Defining a Core Process

Answering the following questions can assist you in determining and finalizing the core processes you want to focus on for your organization.

- ▶ What is this process designed to accomplish?
- ▶ When should this process be used?
- ▶ Who is involved in executing the process?
- ▶ Why is the process necessary?
- ▶ What steps should occur before this process is implemented?
- ▶ What assumptions are involved in the process?

Sample Action Plan

Once you determine the root cause(s) for process challenges, you should identify 1-2 strategies that would result in noticeable improvements for your unit. Next, turn these strategies into action plans. The example here provides a sample action plan for addressing factors in the environment that are hindering a process. See Appendix A for a blank action plan template to use for the strategy you want to implement.

1 Select an Improvement Area

Dimension Improvement Area	Dimension #4: AMC Systems and Processes
Root Causes	Environmental factors are impacting process performance

2 Choose a Strategy

Strategy	Assess input-output relationships
Purpose	To identify barriers in process

3 Define Objectives

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Process team will identify input-output relationships ▪ Process team will discuss barriers with Airmen ▪ Process team will problem solve using AFSO 8-step approach to identify solutions to barriers

4 Refine the Path

Target Audience (The people to whom the strategy is being aimed)	All Airmen in unit
Action Leads (The people who will be responsible)	Process team
Communication Avenue(s) (How the objectives will be communicated)	Meeting with process team; email to all Airmen
Timeframe	Process team provides recommendations NLT 20 Feb

5 Identify Resources

Implement Resources	Adjust workload for process team and allow Airmen time to meet with process team
Sustainment Resources	Performance measure to monitor performance



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4.2 Ensuring Systems Support Learning

Why It Matters

The previous section 4.1 discussed the importance of formal processes that ensure efficient and effective performance and continuous improvement in all areas, including learning. Now, this section focuses on the systems and processes used for learning to ensure they are sufficient to meet Airmen's learning needs. While you may not be able to actually dictate or change many of the systems and processes that are used for learning, as the Commander of your unit, you can take action to evaluate whether those systems and processes are working for your Airmen. Then, you can report issues or concerns up the chain. You can also take actions for the processes that you do have control over, such as those used to support learning within your unit (e.g., Commander's Call; Sergeant's Time). Read on to learn more.

What to Look For in Your Airmen

The strength indicators below suggest that systems support learning; need indicators suggest systems and processes may need to be adjusted.

Strength Indicators

- ▶ Training is relevant to the jobs performed by your Airmen
- ▶ Unit training is continuously evaluated for effectiveness and adjusted as needed
- ▶ Policies have been set that outline expectations for Airmen learning.
- ▶ Airmen have access to technology that supports their learning
- ▶ Airmen are given a set number of hours for learning annually

Need Indicators

- ▶ Leaders are not aware of what Airmen are learning
- ▶ Unit training has not been evaluated or updated as needed
- ▶ Access to computers or simulation devices for learning are limited
- ▶ Workload or other factors prevent Airmen from utilizing time for training/learning
- ▶ Airmen are unclear how their work impacts organization mission success

Case Study

In reviewing your unit's responses to the LOA, you notice lower than average responses to the item: "Policies and procedures are established to support learning across AMC."

You reach out to several subordinate leaders to hear what they think is causing these lower than average ratings. They mention that policies encourage Airmen to engage in self-development but it is not clear when and how they can do so. Following your discussion, you review your unit's policy and see that it does not specify whether Airmen can engage in self-development on duty time or what is considered self-development.

To address this, you consult your superiors and Air Force doctrine to determine what guidelines you can put forth in your unit to resolve this confusion. You document the guidelines in writing as a policy for your unit and post the policy on your unit's website. You announce in your next unit meeting that a new policy has been developed and posted to the unit website regarding expectations for self-development; you also ask Airmen to share any concerns they have about the new policy.



Determining Root Causes

If Airmen provide low ratings on attribute 4.2, consider the following questions:

- ▶ Is unit training effectively developing Airmen's technical skills as well as their competence in the Air Force Institutional Competencies?
 - If "yes," move to next root cause question to dig deeper.
 - If "no," consider why not and review Step 1 in this section.
- ▶ Do Airmen understand what types of learning they can engage in, as well as when, where and how they can engage in learning?
 - If "yes," move to next root cause question to dig deeper.
 - If "no," consider what may be unclear and see Steps 2 & 3 in this section.
- ▶ Do limited resources, including equipment, technology or time, prevent Airmen from engaging in learning?
 - If "yes," think about what you can do to address those issues and read Step 3 in this section.
 - If "no," read on to see if more insights emerge as to possible areas of concern.

Key Steps to Move the Needle

Step 1: Evaluate Unit Training

Throughout the public sector, there is a growing emphasis to evaluate the effectiveness of learning and development activities on a regular basis. The primary goals of evaluation are to determine the achievement of business goals, identify methods to improve the training, and assess the effectiveness of the training to meet business objectives. While the training that your unit provides to Airmen may not be considered formal training, it is worthwhile to evaluate your unit training to ensure it is effective and useful to your Airmen. You can do this by applying the principles of training evaluation.



Review training goals/objectives. To determine if your unit training is effectively meeting its objectives, you first need to clearly define those objectives. The following questions can help to ensure you have a clear understanding of the purposes of your training.

Questions on Training

- ▶ What do you want to change: awareness, attitude, knowledge, skill, and/or behavior? What specific attitude, knowledge, skill and/or behavior do you want to change?
- ▶ What observable behaviors do you believe training should address; have target levels of behaviors been identified?
- ▶ How do you define the success of the training? What behavior or other observable results will demonstrate the training has been a success? Do you currently gather any metrics that you believe might change as a result of the training?
- ▶ Are you aware of any barriers that might hinder Airmen from demonstrating the change when they return to the job?
- ▶ Are Airmen likely to face situations within two to three months after training in which they have to use what was taught during the unit training?

Identify appropriate evaluation level. There are generally four levels of evaluation that are used by training developers. These levels are often referred to as Kirkpatrick's Levels of Evaluation. You should choose the level that aligns with the goals of your unit training and that will be feasible for you to assess. You can choose more than one level.

Evaluation Level	What is Evaluated	How It Can be Evaluated
Level 1 - Reactions	Airmen's reactions to the material, approach, activities, instructor, etc.	Hot wash questionnaire or survey; verbal feedback
Level 2 - Learning	Extent to which Airmen's knowledge has increased from the training	Performance test before and after training to track knowledge/skill gains ; survey
Level 3 - Behaviors	Extent to which Airmen's behavior(s) changed as a result of the training	Performance evaluations several weeks after training; interviews with participants and/or supervisors; survey of participants/supervisors
Level 4 - Results	Impact of the training on the organization	Organizational metrics

Collect evaluation data. Once you have determined which level(s) of evaluation you would like to assess, determine how or where you can collect the necessary data for that level. Do you already have hot wash questionnaires, performance tests, performance evaluations, or organizational metrics that will provide the information you need? If not, you may want to consider creating these types of tools. If you need information on how to develop these types of tools, look at the references in the "Where do I go from here?" section.

Analyze data. Once you have gathered the necessary information, examine the data and determine if the training is meeting its desired objectives. If not, determine what changes to the training are needed.

Implement changes. If changes to the training are needed, implement the changes and then re-evaluate the training to determine if the changes were successful.

Step 2: Assess and Monitor Airmen Satisfaction

You cannot fix a problem without first being aware that a problem exists. To ensure that Airmen's learning needs are being met effectively, you need to continuously assess Airmen's satisfaction with the learning opportunities that are provided to them as well as the systems and processes to support that learning. While Step 1 talked about assessing your unit training, this step will assist you in uncovering broader issues around learning.

There are a variety of ways to learn about Airmen's satisfaction and potential concerns. You can gather information through:

In-person or online discussion groups. Gather small groups of Airmen to talk with you in-person, or start a discussion in an online forum. To start the conversation and ensure it is focused on learning, you should have a prepared set of questions to use that address the things you are most interested in. In-person groups should be kept small with six to eight people. When deciding whether the discussion should be in-person or online, consider

how comfortable Airmen will feel talking to you directly, Airmen's availability, and the extent to which your Airmen engage in online discussion forums.

Meetings with subordinate leaders. You can learn a lot about your Airmen by talking to their direct supervisors. Ask your subordinate leaders what they are hearing from Airmen about the policies for learning, the systems available for learning, and the processes for learning. If they do not know, encourage them to have discussion groups with their direct reports.

Opinion polls. If your unit has an internal website that most of your Airmen access on a regular basis, you could gather information about their satisfaction by posting quick opinion questions for Airmen to respond to with simple response options. For example, you could post questions such as:

- ▶ **Question 1:** Do you have enough access to simulation equipment to learn what is needed for your job? YES/NO
- ▶ **Question 2:** Are you familiar with the Air Force's e-learning site? YES/NO

Step 3: Set Policies and Ensure Resources are Available

Airmen need guidance and resources to effectively engage in learning. As the case study on the first page of this chapter notes, if your Airmen do not understand what constitutes self-development and/or learning or what is acceptable and not acceptable, it will hinder them from engaging in learning. Likewise, if Airmen do not have access to systems, equipment or technology that is needed for learning, they will be unable to learn. This step talks about how you, as the Commander, can assist in these areas:

Define policies at your unit level based on organizational level policies. Work with your superiors and Air Force doctrine and guidelines to identify the expectations that you and your leaders have for learning within your unit. Document those expectations in policies that clearly outline what is considered acceptable and unacceptable learning activities, and when and where those learning activities can take place. Ensure that Airmen receive and have access to those policies.

Provide duty-time for learning and ensure Airmen are able to utilize that time. If you value learning, you need to set aside time for Airmen to engage in it. If not, other competing priorities will take up Airmen's time and learning will not occur. Determine how much time can or should be devoted to learning on a weekly or monthly basis for each individual Airman and communicate that within your unit. Communicate the importance of that time and follow-up with Airmen and your subordinate leaders to ensure that time is being utilized for learning and not other tasks.

Ensure equipment and technology are available. If during your assessment of Airmen's satisfaction with learning systems and processes, you learn that equipment and/or technology is limited or lacking, take actions to address the need. While you may not be able to procure more equipment or the needed technology yourself, communicate the need up the chain and then work on a solution or process for making the most efficient use of the equipment/technology you currently have. If equipment or technology is limited, establish policies or procedures for how those resources will be utilized and shared among Airmen.

Where Do I Go from Here?

To gain more familiarity with training evaluation and Kirkpatrick's Levels of Evaluation, you can read:

Further Reading:

- ▶ Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick (2006). *Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels*. Third Edition. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc. - <http://skillport.books24x7.com/toc.aspx?bookid=11864>

Explains the concepts, principles and guidelines for their training evaluation model. Then provides numerous case study examples, including a case study from the Army and Air Force Exchange Service.

- ▶ Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick (2007). *Implementing the Four Levels: A Practical Guide for Effective Evaluation of Training Programs*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc. - <http://skillport.books24x7.com/toc.aspx?bookid=23122>

A companion guide to the previous book. Provides hands-on advice on how to implement each level of evaluation in their training evaluation model. Discusses analyzing resources for evaluation and building a case of evidence.

- ▶ U.S. Office of Personnel Management (2011). Training Evaluation Field Guide: Demonstrating the Value of Training at Every Level. Available at http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/training-and-development/reference-materials/training_evaluation.pdf.

Step-by-step guide on how to conduct a training evaluation.

Includes section (pg 31-46) on how to design and develop evaluation tools with examples.

- ▶ Goldstein, I. L., & Ford, J. K. (2002). *Training in organizations: Needs assessment, development, and evaluation* (4th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth

Chapter 5 provides guidance on how to develop training evaluation tools and provides examples.

Chapter 6 provides information on procedures for training evaluation.



Exercise: Developing an Evaluation Plan for Unit Training

The exercise below can assist you in developing a plan to gather data that will enable you to evaluate the effectiveness of your unit training.

1. Determine *what* you want to measure

- ▶ **Level 1 Reactions.** Determine which aspects of the training you want to evaluate based on Airmen's reactions.
- ▶ **Level 2 Learning.** Determine what knowledge or learning objectives Airmen should know after the training.
- ▶ **Level 3 Behaviors.** Determine what behaviors Airmen should be doing after the training.
- ▶ **Level 4 Results.** Determine how the training may impact the organization.

2. Determine *where* you will get the data

- ▶ **Level 1 Reactions.** Airmen in the training
- ▶ **Level 2 Learning.** Airmen in the training
- ▶ **Level 3 Behaviors.** Airmen in the training and/or their supervisors
- ▶ **Level 4 Results.** Organizational metrics

3. Determine *how* you will get the data

- ▶ **Level 1 Reactions.** Paper, online or verbal hot wash questionnaire

- ▶ **Level 2 Learning.** Paper or online test

- ▶ **Level 3 Behaviors.** Performance evaluation or survey

- ▶ **Level 4 Results.** Available metrics

4. Determine *when* you will get the data

- ▶ **Level 1 Reactions.** Immediately after training, after each section or topic area, several weeks after training

- ▶ **Level 2 Learning.** Before, during and/or after training. After training is essential, before training can show learning gains, and during training can help you assess developmental needs.

- ▶ **Level 3 Behaviors.** Weeks or months after training. Depends on how frequently Airmen will have the opportunity to demonstrate the new behaviors.

- ▶ **Level 4 Results.** Weeks or months after training. Depends on how quickly changes in Airmen's behaviors are likely to impact organizational metrics and when organizational metrics are assessed.

Sample Action Plan

Once you determine the root cause(s) for why systems and processes are not effectively supporting Airmen's learning needs, you should identify 1-2 strategies that would result in noticeable improvements for your unit. Next, turn these strategies into action plans. The example here provides a sample action plan for learning about Airmen's satisfaction with systems and processes for learning. See Appendix A for a blank action plan template to use for the strategy you want to implement.

1 Select an Improvement Area

Dimension Improvement Area	Dimension #4: AMC Systems and Processes
Root Causes	Unsure if Airmen understand when and how they can engage in learning

2 Choose a Strategy

Strategy	Facilitate discussion groups with Airmen
Purpose	To learn what Airmen understand about engaging in learning and what barriers they experience

3 Define Objectives

- Level of Airmen's understanding and awareness of expectations for learning will be determined
- Barriers that prevent Airmen from engaging in learning will be determined.

4 Refine the Path

Target Audience (The people to whom the strategy is being aimed)	All Airmen in the Group
Action Leads (The people who will be responsible)	Squadron commanders
Communication Avenue(s) (How the objectives will be communicated)	VTC with Squadron commanders
Timeframe	Squadron commanders provide finding NLT 3 Feb

5 Identify Resources

Implement Resources	Adjust schedules to provide time for discussion groups
Sustainment Resources	To be determined based on barriers identified

Chapter 5: Plant the Seeds of Innovation and Reap What You Sow

Individual attitudes and values regarding learning can be highly influenced by the cultural orientation of the organization towards learning. Individuals who believe the organization values learning are more likely to take action to develop their own knowledge and share it with their peers. But talking about the importance of learning is not sufficient to build a learning culture. In this case, the old adage about actions speaking louder than words could not be truer. Even so, not all actions are equal from this standpoint. For example, requiring strict compliance with established training requirements, while important, may ultimately do little to demonstrate a commander's support for learning. In order to achieve widespread acceptance of the principles of continuous improvement, AMC leaders must foster a cultural environment that values learning and innovation, and then recognizes and rewards those who exemplify that culture.

Chapter 5 contains guidance on best practices commanders can implement to promote a positive learning culture, convey the value of learning at all levels, and institutionalize principles of continuous improvement, innovation, and performance measurement. By emphasizing and demonstrating the value that both individual and organizational development can have on the AMC mission, commanders can instill the culture that is characteristic of a premier AF learning organization.

The sections in Chapter 5 include:

Section 5.1: Learning Inspired! Reinforce a Climate for Learning

One of the challenges with creating a positive climate for learning is that the cultural forces that create or inhibit learning within an organization are inherently complex and rarely dis-



cussed. However, research conducted with AMC Airmen at multiple levels of the organization has shown that these forces can have a powerful impact and that leaders have an immense influence over the culture within their units. For example, leaders who severely punish mistakes, quickly suppress dissent, or micromanage their subordinates send powerful messages that AMC does not value learning as much as accountability, deference to authority, and compliance. This section explores these subtleties of the learning climate and provides leaders with strategies to enable Airmen to learn from mistakes, encourage them to express diverse viewpoints, and provide them with the resources needed to learn and grow.

Section 5.2: Better and Better: Promoting Innovation and Continuous Improvement

Innovation and continuous improvement are central to the concept of a learning organization. A learning organization is one that is always striving to do things better and find new solutions to longstanding challenges. Leaders can be a powerful force for innovation and continuous improvement, but the challenge in-

Involved in organizational change can make it tempting to maintain the status quo. AMC requires leaders who recognize the benefits of improving the way AMC operates and are willing to take the steps necessary to make it a reality. This section provides leaders with practical advice to instill a culture of innovation, evaluate the willingness of their units to adopt new approaches, and reward flexibility and adaptability at both the individual and team levels.



Advancing Airmen and Unit Learning: A Commander's Guide

5.1

Learning Inspired! Reinforce a Climate for Learning

Why It Matters

A core foundational component of a learning organization is a culture that promotes learning. Airmen must believe that learning is encouraged in the organization; otherwise, they will not feel comfortable taking the risks that learning requires. As a Commander, you have a crucial role in fostering an environment that supports learning. When Airmen believe learning is encouraged and rewarded in the organization, they feel comfortable voicing different opinions, are open and honest about issues that arise, actively engage in self-directed learning activities, and leverage their mistakes as learning opportunities. To facilitate these outcomes, your role is to ensure Airmen feel safe expressing their perspectives and see that learning is valued within your organization. Read on to learn more.

What to Look For in Your Airmen

The strength indicators below suggest Airmen believe learning is encouraged in the organization; need indicators suggest the learning culture could be better reinforced.

Strength Indicators

- ▶ Airmen share their mistakes openly to use them for positive growth
- ▶ Airmen voice dissenting opinions and engage in productive debate
- ▶ Airmen take time to reflect on what is happening across AMC
- ▶ Airmen engage in self-directed learning

Need Indicators

- ▶ Airmen repeat the same mistakes often and are penalized for mistakes
- ▶ Airmen rarely voice differing opinions
- ▶ Airmen focus solely on day-to-day activities rather than the big picture
- ▶ Airmen take only required trainings and fail to engage in additional learning opportunities.

Case Study

During a meeting you are leading, you ask your Airmen for input on how a strategy you have been using could be improved. After trying several times to probe for new thoughts, you end the meeting and feel frustrated that no one wants to speak up. Upon further reflection, you realize that your Airmen rarely voice new ideas. They generally tend to agree with whatever you say and rarely provide any concerns or alternative approaches.

You decide to ask for input on this issue from a couple of your subordinate leaders. However, when you approach them about it, they provide you with answers such as, "Well, you're the Commander, and we trust your judgment." — but you understand that you do not always have the best answers, and your unit could improve its performance with a more collaborative approach.

To address the situation, you decide to take a more dedicated approach to soliciting input by consistently reinforcing the message that you desire and value your Airmen's ideas and by actively requesting their opinions. It takes some time, but they eventually open up and demonstrate the value that their fresh ideas can bring to the table.



Determining Root Causes

If Airmen provide low ratings on this attribute 5.1, consider the following questions:

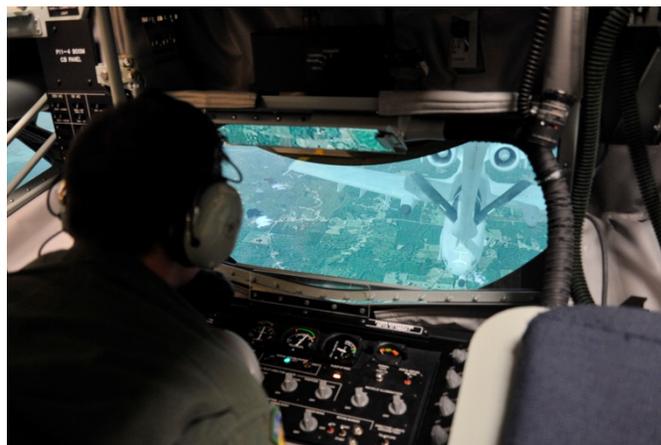
- ▶ Do Airmen actively try to learn from their mistakes?
 - If “yes,” move to the next root cause question to dig deeper.
 - If “no,” consider what might be inhibiting their learning, and take some time to review Step 1 of this section.
- ▶ Do Airmen speak up to voice new ideas, unique perspectives, and “hard truths?”
 - If “yes,” move to the next root cause question to dig deeper.
 - If “no,” consider what might be holding them back, and take some time to review Step 2 of this section.
- ▶ Do Airmen voluntarily engage in self-directed learning activities?
 - If “yes,” read on to see if more insights emerge as to possible areas of concern.
 - If “no,” consider why they may not be taking the time or effort for learning, and review Step 3 of this section.

Key Steps to Move the Needle

Step 1: Encourage Airmen to Learn from Mistakes

Given the intense safety culture within AMC, fear of making mistakes is natural but could indirectly inhibit learning within the organization if the environment becomes too punitive. Mistakes are an integral part of learning. When fear of mistakes characterizes the environment, Airmen will fail to take the risks inherent to new ideas. In fact, showing understanding when Airmen make small mistakes and treating them as teachable moments can facilitate learning that may prevent a more serious error. Taking the time to reflect on what went wrong makes the way for improvements in the future. Start by sharing your own past mistakes and

establish a culture where Airmen feel they can be open about mistakes. Then, encourage your Airmen to discuss what they have learned from their own mistakes, as well as the mistakes of others.



“You don't learn to walk by following rules. You learn by doing, and by falling over.”

—Branson

Reduce fear of mistakes

- ▶ *Why?* Everyone naturally dislikes making mistakes—it never feels good to find out you did something wrong. However, the level of fear that Airmen have about making mistakes can largely be changed based upon the way you communicate about mistakes. When Airmen are particularly reluctant to make mistakes because they feel they will be punished or embarrassed, they will be less likely to take risks and present innovative ideas. In other words, learning from mistakes requires putting oneself in situations where it is possible to make mistakes in the first place. Additionally, when mistakes inevitably happen, your Airmen will be less likely to be open and truthful about the mistake, attempting to diminish its significance (and potentially exacerbating negative consequences), rather than capitalizing on it as an opportunity to learn and improve in the future.

- ▶ *How?* Consider the following strategies to reduce fear of mistakes:
 - Openly communicate that you understand mistakes are bound to occur and that they can be valuable learning opportunities.
 - In situations where you desire innovative ideas and consequences of failure are low, be especially vigilant in communicating that mistakes are okay.
 - Act as a role model by openly communicating your own mistakes. Talk about what you did, the assumptions you made, what went wrong, and what you will change next time.

Set up a learning process for mistakes

- ▶ *Why?* Mistakes can serve as valuable learning opportunities; however, if they are not thoughtfully reflected upon, their potential benefit will likely be missed. As a Commander, your role is to encourage your Airmen to walk through their mistakes, identify problems that occurred, and work out solutions that can lead to better outcomes in the future.
- ▶ *How?* When mistakes occur, set up open lines of discussion to reflect on what went wrong. Ask the Airmen involved to reflect on what happened and set aside dedicated time to discuss it. Even though it should be framed as a positive, constructive discussion; in general, it is best to limit the discussion to only those involved in the mistake, so that the Airman who made the mistake does not feel called out for a wrongdoing in front of their peers. Consider the following discussion questions:
 - Why did you make this decision? Did you have the right goals? Were you attempting to solve the right problem?
 - What assumptions were involved? Did any of these turn out to be incorrect? Could any erroneous assumptions have been identified earlier?

- What went wrong? Were there multiple small mistakes that led to a larger one?
- How can you improve next time? What are the lessons learned?



These same types of discussion questions can also be adapted to learn from the mistakes of others. For example, if a mistake occurs in another unit, having this kind of discussion within your own unit can help to prevent similar situations from occurring within your unit in the future.

Step 2: Encourage Open Communication and Expression of Diverse Views

One of the hallmarks of a climate that encourages learning is that open, truthful communication is supported and diverse viewpoints are welcomed for discussion. While acting as a role model in communicating openly with your Airmen and actively soliciting their input can greatly assist with this issue, there are also a number of other strategies you can implement to help facilitate open communication and the expression of diverse views. Review the table below for common attributes of environments that encourage open communication, a description of what these attributes look like, and some strategies for what you can do to implement each attribute.

Attribute	What it looks like	What you can do
Challenge	When Airmen feel emotionally involved with the unit's goals and challenged by their work, they will be more likely to invest in creative thought and voice new ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide stretch assignments to challenge your Airmen Make goals clear to help Airmen understand the big picture and why their work is important
Autonomy	Airmen take initiative with their work, discuss problems and alternatives freely, and have decision making power when appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively solicit input from your Airmen Involve your Airmen in the decision making process when appropriate Delegate responsibility for important activities down to lower levels as appropriate
Idea Support	Leaders pay attention to ideas and suggestions; Airmen listen to each other, encourage new initiatives, and create ways to test new ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be receptive to the ideas of your Airmen; be willing to try ideas that may work and provide rationale without criticism for ideas that won't work Act as a role model; by being open and approachable, it will encourage your Airmen to behave in the same manner with peers Be open to new ways of doing things; provide trial periods to try out something new
Trust and Openness	Ensure that the team shares a mutual trust and everyone feels open to sharing their ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide open and direct communication Let your Airmen know it's ok to fail Be respectful of everyone's ideas and opinions, and address situations in which your Airmen are not doing the same Be careful not to chastise Airmen for honest mistakes in the heat of frustration, as it only takes a few such actions by a leader to kill trust that has been built up over time
Dynamism	New developments are constantly occurring; things move at a quick pace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continually think, and encourage your Airmen to think, about potential improvements
Productive Debate	Many voices are heard; people are interested in putting forth their ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask your Airmen to speak up against proposed ideas Have someone play the role of devil's advocate
Risk Taking	People engage in new opportunities; uncertainty is tolerated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take risks when appropriate; after weighing risks and assessing potential consequences, don't be afraid to try something new if it may result in an improved outcome
Idea Discussion and Implementation	Suggestions that are not planned or included in task assignments are often mentioned; it's possible to discuss and test fresh ideas; people use the possibilities around them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give your Airmen the opportunity to provide their input Allow time to test out new ideas
Constructive Conflict	Conflict centers around idea debates and limited personal and emotional tensions occur; people control their impulses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Address emotional and personal tensions immediately Encourage constructive criticism

Step 3: Provide Your Airmen with Resources for Learning

In any organization, learning takes time and effort. It is often easy to get in a regular routine, focusing only on typical duties without setting aside time for learning. Some Airmen may not perceive self-directed learning as part of their jobs or may not understand the value it brings. Others may have a strong desire to engage in more learning activities but may have a hard time carving out time in their schedules. As a commander, it is your job to communicate that Airmen are not only “allowed” to take time for learning, but are actively encouraged to do so; providing the resources that are necessary to engage in learning activities. Consider the suggestions below to help provide your Airmen with resources for learning.

Maintain a list of self-directed learning resources.

You may find it helpful to create a list of resources that your Airmen can refer to, which may include resources such as trainings, books, articles, guide-books, websites, and so forth. Keep the list in a central location that is easy for Airmen to access, and add to the list over time to keep the resources robust and ensure the material remains up to date.

Encourage Airmen to set aside dedicated time for learning.

Emphasize the importance of scheduling sufficient time to step back from day to day activities, reflect on what is happening with AMC, and utilize resources to build knowledge and skills. For example, you may want to ask each Airmen to develop specific learning goals for the year, which you will follow up on. This can help Airmen to provide thoughtful consideration about what they want to learn, as well as motivation to actually dedicate time to it.

Where Do I Go from Here?

Further Reading:

- ▶ Anderson, A. R. (2013, April 17). Good Employees Make Mistakes. Great Leaders Allow Them To. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/amyanderson/2013/04/17/good-employees-make-mistakes-great-leaders-allow-them-to/>

This brief article provides perspective from a business leader about the importance of allowing your team the freedom to make mistakes and helping them turn those mistakes into future success.

- ▶ Institute for Employment Research. (2001). Self-directed learning at work. *Institute for Employment Research Bulletin*, 58, 1-4. Retrieved from <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/publications/bulletins/ier58.pdf>

This journal article discusses the factors that influence self-directed learning at work, including the employment relationship itself, the individual's occupational identity, work-group attachments, and interpersonal relationships.

- ▶ Puccio, G. J., Murdock, M. C., & Mance, M. (2007). *Creative Leadership: Skills that Drive Change*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This book gives leaders the tools they need to understand and employ creativity in their leadership by fostering learning and creative problem solving in the workplace, as well as building a creative climate that inspires open communication and the expression of diverse ideas.

- ▶ Schein, E. H. (2010). *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (4th Ed). CA: Jossey-Bass. Third edition available online from http://www.untag-smd.ac.id/files/Perpustakaan_Digital_2/ORGANIZATIONAL%20CULTURE%20Organizational%20Culture%20and%20Leadership,%203rd%20Edition.pdf

This influential book helps leaders to apply the principles of culture to their organizational goals, as leaders serve as the main architects of culture. The principles discussed in this book can be applied specifically to creating and reinforcing a culture that values learning.



Exercise: Learning from Mistakes

This simple exercise can help Airmen think about the learning opportunities that result from acknowledging mistakes. Ask Airmen to think about a mistake they recently made or one they witnessed someone else make, and then complete the questions below. Once they have completed the exercise, take some time to discuss their answers and help them understand how the mistake can help them learn and lead to improvements in the future.

Situation

- ▶ The situation I was facing when I made the mistake OR the situation when I witnessed another Airman making a mistake was:
- ▶ The assumptions I made when considering how to address the situation OR how the situation could have been better addressed by my colleague included:

Incident

- ▶ The mistake occurred when:

Outcome

- ▶ The results of the mistake included:

Lessons Learned

- ▶ In the future, I can improve in similar situations by:
- ▶ The lessons learned from this mistake include:

Sample Action Plan

Once you determine the root cause(s) for why Airmen do not believe learning is encouraged in the organization, you should identify 1-2 strategies that will result in noticeable improvements for your unit. Next, turn these strategies into action plans. The example here provides a sample action plan to address the issue of Airmen not feeling comfortable to express their opinions within your unit. See Appendix A for a blank action plan template to use for the strategy you want to implement.

1 Select an Improvement Area

Dimension Improvement Area	Dimension #5: AMC Total Force Cultural Orientation
Root Causes	Airmen don't feel comfortable expressing their opinions

2 Choose a Strategy

Strategy	Implement quarterly open discussion forums
Purpose	To encourage Airmen to voice new ideas and present concerns

3 Define Objectives

- Quarterly discussion meetings will be scheduled
- 100% of Airmen will be invited to attend the meetings
- Each meeting will result in at least 30 minutes of productive discussion about current processes, identified issues, and potential improvements

4 Refine the Path

Target Audience (The people to whom the strategy is being aimed)	All Airmen in the Squadron
Action Leads (The people who will be responsible)	Flight commanders
Communication Avenue(s) (How the objectives will be communicated)	VTC with Flight commanders
Timeframe	Flight commanders provide plan of action NLT 3Feb

5 Identify Resources

Implement Resources	Time to communicate the purpose of the forum
Sustainment Resources	Time to prepare for and participate in meetings



Advancing Airmen and Unit Learning: A Commander's Guide

5.2

Better and Better: Promoting Innovation and Continuous Improvement

Why It Matters

Fostering a culture of innovation and continuous improvement can be a major contributor to unit effectiveness. As a Commander, you have a crucial role in ensuring innovation and improvement are encouraged within your unit. Your responsibilities involve fostering a climate of innovation, assessing change readiness, implementing and encouraging continuous improvement techniques, and demonstrating adaptability while also promoting adaptability in your Airmen. By implementing such techniques, you will help your unit to continually strive to be performing at its best. Read on to learn more.

What to Look For in Your Airmen

The strength indicators below suggest you are promoting innovation and continuous improvement; need indicators suggest innovation and continuous improvement could be better reinforced.

Strength Indicators

- ▶ Airmen frequently voice new ideas and approaches
- ▶ When changes are implemented, transitions are relatively smooth
- ▶ Airmen demonstrate adaptability in the face of changing circumstances

Need Indicators

- ▶ Airmen fail to engage in creative problem solving
- ▶ Changes are met with substantial resistance
- ▶ Airmen demonstrate rigidity and a tendency to stick to the status quo

Case Study

In reviewing your unit's responses to the LOA survey, you notice lower than average responses to the item: "Continuous improvement is practiced as well as preached."

You ask a few Flight Leaders in your squadron what they think could be causing Airmen to feel that way. They admit there is a tendency to keep doing things the way they have always been done, without putting much emphasis on continuing to improve performance. Airmen don't feel there is any expectation to innovate, so they are not motivated to do so.

To address the situation, you determine that continuous improvement and innovation need to be emphasized by leadership, and the importance of these factors needs to be communicated to Airmen. You meet with your Flight Leaders to discuss a simple model of continuous improvement that you believe will be effective in your squadron, and ask each of them to meet with their Airmen about it and begin implementing it. After only a few weeks, you can already see some noticeable performance improvements, and Airmen appear to be motivated to be more innovative with their work.



Determining Root Causes

If Airmen provide low ratings on this attribute 5.2, consider the following questions:

- ▶ Is innovation promoted and encouraged in your unit?
 - If “yes,” move to the next root cause question to dig deeper.
 - If “no,” consider what might be inhibiting innovation, and take some time to review Step 1 of this section.
- ▶ Is your unit ‘change ready?’
 - If “yes,” move to the next root cause question to dig deeper.
 - If “no,” consider what might be holding your unit back from responding well to change, and take some time to review Step 2 of this section.
- ▶ Do you follow a model of continuous improvement in your unit?
 - If “yes,” move to the next root cause question to dig deeper.
 - If “no,” consider the benefits that continuous improvement could provide, and review Step 3 of this section.
- ▶ Do your Airmen demonstrate strong adaptability?
 - If “yes,” read on to see if more insights emerge as to how to better position your unit for continuous improvement.
 - If “no,” consider why they may have difficulty being adaptable, and review Step 4 of this section.

Key Steps to Move the Needle

Step 1: Foster a Culture of Innovation

As a first step in promoting innovation and continuous improvement, it is important to ensure that the environment within your unit supports and facilitates innovation. By fostering a culture of innovation, you will encourage your Airmen to gen-

erate new ideas that may lead to improvements. A few strategies you may want to consider implementing to foster innovation include:

- ▶ **Focus on outcomes.** When discussing the tasks that your unit must carry out, focus on describing the desired outcomes. Make the expected end result clear and hold your Airmen accountable, but avoid mandating how the outcomes should be achieved. This strategy ensures your Airmen understand the overall goals but have the flexibility to come up with innovative ways to achieve them.
- ▶ **Develop reciprocal trust.** Work toward developing a shared confidence with each of your Airmen. Trust them to do a good job with their work, and allow them to trust that you will support them in what they do, including when they try out innovative ideas.
- ▶ **Challenge the status quo.** Don't give in to the tendency to keep doing things the way they have always been done, just for the sake of maintaining the status quo. Be willing to try new things when it could potentially result in an improvement. Approach your leadership when necessary to discuss new initiatives.
- ▶ **Be inspiring.** When people feel inspired by their leader, they are more motivated to put in extra effort on their work—and this type of extra effort is often a source of innovation.

Innovation can be generated on many levels, and fostering a culture of innovation puts the responsibility on your entire unit as it should be.

Step 2: Assess Extent of Change Readiness

For change to occur successfully, five elements should be in place. These elements are: **vision, skills, incentives, resources** and **an action plan**. Without any one of these elements, Airmen may experience confusion, anxiety or some other negative emotion created by inadequate preparedness for change. Next, it is important to ensure your

unit is 'change ready' to maximize the potential for success as new improvements are implemented.

What is Change Readiness?

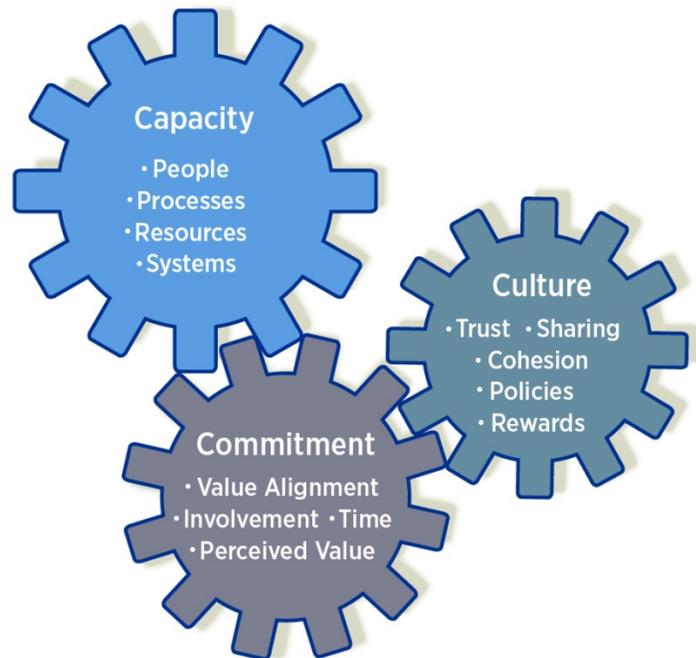
Change readiness is a subjective concept but is very important to successful adoption of a new approach or receptivity to culture change. For example, you should consider: *Who or what needs to be ready? How ready do they need to be? Who is judging the level of readiness?* Change readiness can be considered a measure of confidence that is based on perception and backed by defensible data and information. There are three key drivers that impact change readiness: capacity, commitment, and culture.

Capacity Readiness

Capacity readiness is the degree to which the organization is able to bring the required work processes, knowledge and skills, and resources needed to support the implementation and sustainment of the change.

Consider the following components of capacity readiness:

- ▶ **People:** Think about the people involved, including who can champion (support) a new approach, other leaders, and impacted Airmen. Do they have the knowledge/skills/abilities, experience, and availability to make it work?
- ▶ **Processes:** Think about the processes involved, including decision making, communication, and programmatic processes. What is the familiarity, complexity, clarity, consistency of use, and required skills for use?
- ▶ **Resources:** Consider technical resources such as software and hardware, as well as physical resources such as finances, space or equipment. What is the availability and adequacy of these resources?



- ▶ **Systems:** Think about accountability and knowledge transfer. What is the level of efficacy and support of current goals?

Commitment Readiness

Commitment readiness is the degree of resolve of the organization and its leaders to see the change through to completion and sustainment, including the following factors:

- ▶ **Value alignment:** How does the change align with the organization's values?
- ▶ **Involvement:** Are the affected parties involved in the change? Are they accountable for its success?
- ▶ **Time:** Do the involved parties have adequate time to implement the change?
- ▶ **Perceived value:** Is there confidence that the change will result in a benefit for the organization with minimized risk?

Cultural Readiness

Cultural readiness is the degree of alignment between cultural norms and the change, including the following:

- ▶ **Trust:** Consider the degree people believe they will be respected, the degree of transparency about the change, the level of accountability, and the consistency of behavior in implementing the change.
- ▶ **Cohesion:** Will people be able to work together during the change through coordination, collaboration, and open communication?
- ▶ **Sharing:** Are there shared priorities, shared decision making, and shared knowledge?
- ▶ **Policies:** Do existing policies support the change in terms of fairness, flexibility, and unnecessary burden?
- ▶ **Rewards:** Do formal (e.g., compensation, performance systems, advancement/promotion) and/or informal rewards (e.g., autonomy, professional growth, social acceptance) support the change?

Assessing your unit's change readiness by considering these factors can help you to minimize obstacles and maximize the potential for success before even beginning to implement a change.

Step 3: Implement a Continuous Improvement Model

Even when a unit has an innovative culture and is well positioned for change, it still takes a conscious effort to make changes successful. The use of a continuous improvement model, such as AFSO, can help you to regularly implement change, methodically monitor changes, adjust changes to maximize their success, and continue making improvements to your unit's effectiveness.

See Chapter 4 (section 4.1) of this guide for more information on how to implement continuous improvement techniques.

Step 4: Encourage Adaptability

Finally, in order for innovation and continuous improvement to be successful, you and your subordinate leaders should practice adaptability and en-

courage it from your Airmen. Adaptability is comprised of two components: *flexibility* and *versatility*.

- ▶ **Flexibility:** Flexibility involves the willingness to be adaptable. Flexibility can be fostered through the use of the following attributes:
 - **Confidence:** Demonstrate that you believe in your Airmen.
 - **Tolerance:** Be accepting of your Airmen's opinions and practices that differ from your own.
 - **Empathy:** Show empathy in your interactions with your Airmen.
 - **Positivity:** Demonstrate a positive attitude when dealing with challenges and situations that may warrant change.
 - **Respect for Others:** Seek to understand your Airmen's choices, commitments, and needs.
- ▶ **Versatility:** Versatility involves the ability to be adaptable. Versatility can be fostered through the following attributes:
 - **Resilience:** Lead your unit with resilience through setbacks, barriers, and obstacles due to limited resources.
 - **Vision:** Communicate your vision, be creative, and facilitate discussions of alternative solutions.
 - **Attentiveness:** Stay attuned to elements in the environment that indicate when changes are needed.
 - **Competence:** Demonstrate expertise as well as a willingness to seek out the expertise of others.
 - **Self-correction:** Ask for feedback on your decisions and actions, while maintaining a focus on achieving the best outcome rather than on being right.

Overall, encouraging adaptability in your unit will help to increase the likelihood that your Airmen will seek innovation, implement change, and make continued improvements.

Where Do I Go from Here?

Further Reading:

- ▶ Alessandra, T. (2008). Do you have adaptability? *Success*. Retrieved from <http://www.success.com/article/do-you-have-adaptability>

This brief article discusses the concept of adaptability as a two-part process that involves both flexibility and versatility.

- ▶ Combe, M. (2014). Change readiness: Focusing change management where it counts. *Project Management Institute White Paper*. Retrieved from <http://www.pmi.org/Learning/~media/PDF/Knowledge%20Center/Focusing-Change-Management-Where-it-Counts.ashx>

This white paper provides an overview of what change readiness is and why it is important, the primary drivers of change readiness, how to assess change readiness, and how to address the identified change readiness gaps.

- ▶ Deming, W. E. (1986). *Out of the Crisis*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Center for Advanced Engineering Study.

This classic management book presents 14 key points for successful management that help in planning for the future, including the use of the Plan, Do, Check, Act cycle of continuous improvement.

- ▶ Edinger, S. (2012). Don't innovate. Create a culture of innovation. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/scottedinger/2012/11/20/dont-innovate-create-a-culture-of-innovation/>

This brief article discusses strategies that leaders can implement to foster a culture of innovation within their organization.

- ▶ Kotter, J. P. (1995). Leading change: Why transformation efforts fail. *Harvard Business Review*, Product 4231.

This article discusses eight common mistakes when leading change and provides a corresponding eight step change process.

- ▶ Rao, J., & Weintraub, J. (2013). How innovative is your company's culture? *MIT Sloan Management Review*. Retrieved from <http://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/how-innovative-is-your-companys-culture/>

This article discusses the six building blocks of an innovative culture and describes an assessment tool to help pinpoint innovation strengths and weaknesses.



Exercise: The Six Building Blocks of an Innovative Culture

This exercise can help you think through different aspects of an innovative culture, including what is going well and what could use improvement. For each of the six building blocks of innovation, write down a brief summary of how your unit is doing in terms of that innovation aspect. After you are finished recording your responses, reflect on how you can act on the identified opportunities for improvement.

<p>Resources</p> <p>How do the people and systems involved contribute to the innovation culture?</p>	<p>Values</p> <p>How do the values espoused in the Air Force, AMC, and your unit impact innovation?</p>
<p>Processes</p> <p>What are the processes for implementing innovations as they are developed?</p>	<p>Behaviors</p> <p>How do your Airmen and leaders react in response to innovation?</p>
<p>Success</p> <p>How successful are innovations in terms of external recognition, unit effectiveness, and individual satisfaction and motivation?</p>	<p>Climate</p> <p>How does your unit's climate and working environment impact innovation?</p>

Sample Action Plan

Once you determine the root cause(s) for why your unit may be resistant to change, you should identify 1-2 strategies that will result in noticeable improvements for your unit. Next, turn these strategies into action plans. The example here provides a sample action plan to help better orient your unit towards continuous improvement. See Appendix A for a blank action plan template to use for the strategy you want to implement.

1 Select an Improvement Area

Dimension Improvement Area	Dimension #5: AMC Total Force Cultural Orientation
Root Causes	Airmen maintain the status quo rather than making continuous improvements

2 Choose a Strategy

Strategy	Implement continuous improvement model
Purpose	To encourage the unit to keep striving for better performance

3 Define Objectives

- 100% of Flight Commanders will implement continuous improvement model
- Improvements implemented while using the model will be tracked, and in one year 100% of Flight Commanders will be able to identify specific improvements that have been achieved

4 Refine the Path

Target Audience (The people to whom the strategy is being aimed)	All Airmen in the Squadron
Action Leads (The people who will be responsible)	Flight Commanders
Communication Avenue(s) (How the objectives will be communicated)	VTC with Flight Commanders
Timeframe	Flight Commanders provide plan of action NLT two weeks after VTC

5 Identify Resources

Implement Resources	Time to communicate the purpose and details of the model
Sustainment Resources	Time to implement the model and track progress of changes

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APPENDIX: Action Plan Template

Use this blank action plan template to design strategies that will help to move your organization closer to becoming a premier AF learning organization. For successful implementation, it is optimal to engage Airmen in the initial formulation of a strategy and in populating this action plan. The greater extent to which Airmen in your unit are involved in development around these concepts, the higher the level of buy-in will be for implementing the practices identified.

1 Select an Improvement Area

Dimension Improvement Area	
Root Causes	

2 Choose a Strategy

Strategy	
Purpose	

3 Define Objectives

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4 Refine the Path

Target Audience (The people to whom the strategy is being aimed)	
Action Leads (The people who will be responsible- champions)	
Communication Avenue(s) (How the objectives will be communicated)	
Timeframe (specify start date; milestone dates; months to develop; time to implement; time to results)	

5 Identify Resources

Implementation Resources	
Sustainment Resources	