

Shane Greenstein:

This is Professor Shane Greenstein with the HBS Digital Initiative, from the 2019 future assembly at Harvard Business School. We are pleased to present Flash Talks: Exploring Technology in a Multidisciplinary World.

Hise Gibson:

Take a moment, just a second. I'm going to say crisis. You've probably thought of something. Business crisis, probably thought about something differently. Personal crisis, I had one last night. I was stuck on the side of the road for five hours. Fantastic. Okay? So as you think about that crisis that you went through, I'm going to share with you today two different things.

Hise Gibson:

One, a framework in which the army leverages to enable its leaders to manage in crisis, no matter what that crisis is. And then second, in 10 minutes or less, early stage research I'm engaged in with colleagues here at HBS and colleagues back at West Point around this idea of how do challenges, or what we call crucible experiences, accelerate human capital development, which leads into enabling the right folks to manage crisis? That's where we're going today.

Hise Gibson:

So the army in its infinite wisdom leverages something called mission command. I'll explain that in just a second. We're a pretty good organization. We're a great organization that plagiarizes everything. We steal stuff, okay? We borrow things. And so the Michigan [Man 00:01:43] idea was borrowed from Napoleon in 1806, when Napoleon went against the Prussian army who outnumbered his forces two to one, and the little guy won, okay? His army beat the Prussians like that. Okay? And so after you get defeated, right, you go back and do some autopsy. You try to learn. And so the Prussians went back and tried to better understand, well, why'd they lose? And what they realized is that Napoleon's officers and soldiers could exercise his intent without him even being there. Now think about this. This is before Slack, Snapchat, Instagram, the Twitter machine, the Facebook.

Hise Gibson:

How did he do that? How did he create an environment where he infused in his organization, hey, I'm going to tell you what I want, and you figure out how to do it. Just go win. We stole that as an army. And it's centralized command, decentralized execution, and we call it mission command. And what mission command is, is the exercise of authority and direction through the use of what we call mission orders that enables discipline initiative within the commander's intent to enable agile and adaptive leaders. All those words will mean something in just a second, okay?

Hise Gibson:

And it's made up of six different principles, one side is the art side, and one side is the control side. And if we think about what that might be, well, I'm an engineer by training. I'm an ops guy. I care a lot about people. But at the core, I'm a helicopter pilot who likes operations.

Hise Gibson:

So there's like soft stuff. Okay? All right? And then there's hard stuff. All right? So some of the soft stuff is around this idea of, well, how do you build trust? That's a soft thing. Very hard to do, right?

Challenging. We all do it very well. We have great trust in our organizations, right? So we think, all the leaders in the room, right? Okay.

Hise Gibson:

And then we have this exercise discipline initiative, and then we have something called prudent risk. In my profession, risk is not a gamble, because we're dealing with lives and stuff. So when we think about risk, it's a calculated decision made when I'm willing to lose life, limb, or equipment in order for some greater good. Those are the soft things.

Hise Gibson:

The hard stuff is mission orders. How do you communicate in your organization? What kind of standard operating procedures do you have? What kind of policies do you use? That's how we communicate across all levels. And then we think about how do you create shared understanding? That's actually a hard thing, right? That's something you can do. You may use Slack, you may use email, you may use Twitter, you may use the Skype machine, WebEx. That's how you create shared understanding.

Hise Gibson:

And then finally, this idea of commander's intent, which is what Napoleon used. He was able to push out his intent and his organization were psychologically safe, as Amy Edmondson would say, and they could just go off and be great.

Hise Gibson:

And just to give you one quick example of what exercise discipline initiative is, back in 2006 we were hanging out in Iraq. We had a bunch of soldiers there. There was a surge. They were going into... getting booby trapped a lot. And so one soldier one day went out on a mission and before he went to a room, he sprayed some silly string that he'd just gotten in a care package. So what do you think happens when silly string hangs in the air in a closed room?

Hise Gibson:

It sticks to stuff, specifically sticks to booby traps. And so when we were having this problem in the DOD, we were going to like buy some drones from dogs. A lot of technology, a whole different type of technological enterprise. But we... \$1.70. \$1.70 innovation from a soldier, he exercised discipline initiative, okay?

Hise Gibson:

And then something from the hard stuff that you can actually exercise is when we think about commander's intent. All right, a perfect example is like the Normandy invasion. Why is that? Because everyone knew what was going on. You have a bunch of folks flying over the channel, they fall out of airplanes, they go take up the German guns, open up the space for them, amphibious assault. Very simple.

Hise Gibson:

Or you can think about the big cyber attack that happened. I think NotPetya, if I'm saying that correctly, happened with FedEx a couple of years ago, but shutdown their operation for a little bit. But when you think about the commander's intent of the chairman/CEO Fred Smith, basically get the package to the

customer when the customer wants it. That's the intent and is made up of a purpose, key task and end state. Purpose, the why, key tasks, how do I do this thing, and the end state, which is the hardest thing for leaders to do. How do you want it to end? And communicate that in a way in which others can understand.

Hise Gibson:

So this is a great framework but it doesn't work if you don't have people to do stuff. And so some early stage research, which is what I'm excited to share with you is this idea of crucible. So we got this framework to manage crisis, but you need people operating in that framework to manage crisis.

Hise Gibson:

And then when we think about who's ran a marathon, probably a bunch of folks in here, who's gone through something hard? I mean, I went through this place in a doctorate program that was a crucible. Flying helicopters is a crucible, being shot at is a crucible. I mean, all those things are crucibles and you're better off afterwards, right? After you go through something really hard, you're better.

Hise Gibson:

And so we're interested in, well, how do crucible experiences accelerate human capital development, and how can we enable leaders to better understand where to employ and deploy, employ and deploy, their human capital in a way that's more effective? That's what we care about. That's very hard to try to do some kind of econometrics around.

Hise Gibson:

However, we were able to come up with something because we have access to data and our crucible that we're leveraging similar to, if we think about combat journalists in combat, because we have those, embedded reporters, someone, a NGO, operating in a humanitarian effort, right?

Hise Gibson:

We think about all the different humanitarian relief efforts that have occurred over the past few years, or if you've just gone through a Spartan race, right? We're using a combat zone as a crucible experience. That is extreme, yes. But we know when the individuals in that situation, what part of his or her career they're in, what position they're in. And so we can do some really in depth empirical analysis on what happens. Okay?

Hise Gibson:

And so in our early stage research, which we were very excited about, is that yeah, crucible matters. I was told in any of these talks I got to have a chart. Yeah. So here's one chart. It just shows us that it matters. And how much does it matter? Well, it matters about 31% more likely for that individual who experiences a crucible at some point in their career, go into combat somewhere, there's 31% more likely they're going to get promoted early.

Hise Gibson:

So that highlights a signaling store, a human capital development story versus signaling story. And we understand that more because we dis-aggregated that even more and looked at, well what about later in your career? Because in the army, like all your organizations, you have turnover, right? Or does

everyone just stay with you for like 30 years? No, not really. So we happy with that leave, right? You go through the organization, they leave. So we were curious about those who stay. All right?

Hise Gibson:

And so there's a 40% more likely that those people who are later in their careers stay. And we also found out that there's ones who stay, there's 80% more likely that if they have a crucible experience, they're going to stay within your organization. Which kind of is interesting because that highlights that if someone goes through something tough, there's some kind of organizational commitment that's happening with them.

Hise Gibson:

Which is, huh, they're still here. Now whether you're promoted or not, well, you know, we'll see. But they'll stay. And sometimes that's what you want committed individuals to stay in your organizations to be in these processes in order for you to manage crisis. And we went a little bit further because, again, I'm an aviator. I'll use my colleague here who was a signal officer. So if we're in a combat zone, we found out that those folks who have combat related jobs. So think about your customer facing finance folks. Well the customer facing finance folks have a whole army of people behind them who are actually making things happen to support those deals, right?

Hise Gibson:

Well what we found out is that the people who get the bump or the non combat people or the non forward facing people get a bump in acceleration, acceleration in their career development, which we thought was kind of interesting and it's probably because if they're going through a hard thing, there's something about that person whose job is not to be in that area doing that thing that causes them to be better and it shows up in our promotion process, which is a very random thing, is a external board. So you can't say that if Bob says that, hey, he should be promoted, that's going to happen. In my organization, that's not what happens. It's a very separate agnostic kind of experience. Either he thinks you're good or you're not, kind of thing. Almost a pure meritocracy, not quite. All right?

Hise Gibson:

And so I hope that during the breakout session I have an opportunity to talk to you and get your thoughts on this idea of the crucible or challenges. And again, give me your feedback because that would help us as we go through this journey together to figure out how we can impact the world. Thank you for your time.