

NWCG CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT ISSUE PAPER #114
DUAL-TRACK LEADERSHIP CURRICULUM
January 9, 2013

BACKGROUND

The original tasking and vision of L-480 (originally titled “Advanced Incident Leadership”) was to provide “provide potential Type 1 IMT candidates an awareness of strategic leadership issues.” ([*Report of the Leadership Task Group to the Training Working Team \(February 2001 pg. 48\)*](#)). The specific target audience was current and potential IMT C&GS personnel.

The first vendor (Iverson) was approved in 2005 and the course was titled “IMT Leadership.” The course content was patterned after existing courseware used for personal and team leadership with corporate clients. Post-course student evaluations revealed that the course was very well received. However, it was also noted that the course content, although highly valuable and well presented, was much broader in scope than the title would suggest. In fact, several suggestions were made to open the class up to mid to upper level organizational leaders that are not IMT members. Class participation confirmed this suggestion as course participants continuously included WFOSs, AFMOs, FMOs, and some Agency Administrators who may or may not have the time to become IMT members.

In 2010 the government owned course package was updated by another approved vendor (Dr. Curt Braun). The course title changed to “Organizational Leadership in the Wildland Fire Service” and the target audience broadened to include mid to upper level organizational leaders. The package accepted by the Leadership Subcommittee was based on a product with organizational psychology roots – and uses a mixed collection of content from various sources.

Assessment of Current L-480

- The context for L-480 is generic to organizations, and shifts based upon provider.
- It is superficially applied to IMT environment through agency provided coaches.
- The course is generally rated high by attendees with no prior L-series exposure, but is rated less uniformly by operational personnel that were expecting a simulation based course similar to the L-381 Incident Leadership course.
- The current L-480 has minimal content that specifically deals with IMT strategic leadership concepts, frameworks, or problems. It is focused on individual development for persons who have strategic level jobs in the organization. This is similar to L-380 in the objectives, but also different in that L-380 is focused on individual (and some team) development for individuals in operational jobs at the leader of people level.
- There is no ICS or IMT evaluation portion to this course.

The L-480 experience has revealed that:

- **There is a significant need for leadership training to be available beyond the operational functions and job descriptions.** This has been acknowledged by NWCG, but considered to be out of scope. Leadership development is an ongoing problem in non-operational and management positions. Although L-480 was originally intended for IMT C&GS personnel, the demand for the class continues to include mid to upper level

organizational leaders who apply these skills to their day job rather than as a member of an IMT.

- **Experience with the operational ranks reaffirms that leader development requires more than just staple gateway classroom training programs occurring once every few years.** This is an ongoing need, and even repeating existing training courses has proved useful for re-attending personnel, especially when delivered by different vendors. This is a gap which has always been known, but has remained unaddressed. Many operational personnel are expecting a complex simulation based exercise at the L-480 level.
- L-480 has been deemed useful for operational personnel, but mostly within the context of the home unit work. It is an extension of L-380, which works with manager level personnel.
- L-480 is a good “corporate” program contextualized well for agency supervisors and managers.
- The original gap in IMT development that generated the need for the L-480 course was not fully fulfilled by the Iverson package or by the Braun revision.
- The Iverson and Braun L-480 course packages do fill a demonstrated need in organizational leadership development within the agency, but fall short in material specific to IMT strategic management, command acumen, and staff-based decision making and ethos.

CURRENT STATUS

For personnel serving in the C&GS positions, there are specific skills, tools and philosophies that we expect these practitioners to have. Some of these are set up well in the lower level L-series programs, but other more advanced subjects and tools are simply not found anywhere in the current curriculum. Many of our IMT C&GS positions are filled by a militia workforce which does not have access to the lower level L-courses during their development.

While the target audience of L-480 is current ICS unit leaders that desire Type 2 C&GS qualifications as well as mid to upper level leaders, its content focuses more at the individual level. It minimally touches on the staff work behaviors and skills that are specific to building higher level thinking and decision making in the IMT environment. It superficially supports IMT culture and ethos in its current form through the use of agency coaches. At this level, advanced application of the command and control concepts and the functioning of the staff as both unit leaders and as members of a decision team are imperative for success. This needs to be done in a dynamic, high tempo, simulation based environment that tactically practices the leadership concepts taught in the more traditional classroom setting of the current L-480. Incident management experts continue to believe strongly that team functioning and leadership are important to IMT success. This concept is reinforced with other organizations that conduct operations in dynamic and complex environments. The military services are the most prominent example of this, who devote years of leader development education and training to this effort.

The original premise of the L-480 tasking was to address this need, and an advanced course in this subject is still warranted. It is also warranted, such a program be operationally integrated with prior L-series programs. Developing an L-481 specifically for IMT Leadership during

incident response would fall in the line of the L-380 to L-381 migration, and fill this important training gap.

The leadership training needs of day to day organizational leaders needs to be addressed separately (but on a parallel path) from our leadership development for emergency incident response. The table in Appendix A illustrates what a potential dual-track L-series curriculum might look like.

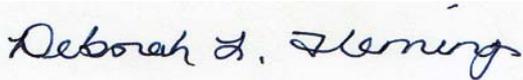
RECOMMENDATION

Expand and re-align the L-series curriculum to enable participation by non-operational, support and corporate management personnel, and also fill existing holes in the operational leader development path at the 400 level. This effort will divide the existing curriculum into two development streams above the L-280 level, and involve the following components:

- Widen the current L-380 Fireline Leadership specification to enable the development of non-operational personnel, including renaming the specification to “Primary Leadership”.
- Retain the existing L-480 program and use it in the non-operational development stream.
- To fill the identified hole in the development path for incident management personnel in the operational stream at the 400 level, task the Leadership Committee with development of an L-481 program to serve as advancement from L-381 for operational personnel. This program would also serve IMT-destined support personnel following their position-specific training and mentoring assignments. This development should be coordinated with ongoing Evolving Incident Management (EIM) succession planning efforts.
- Investigate the cost/benefit of making a similar split in the curriculum at the 200 level in the future.

APPROVED / DENIED

SIGNATURE



NWCG Training Branch Manager

January 18, 2013
Date

cc: Chair, Leadership Committee
Chair, Operations and Workforce Development Committee
Geographic Area Training Specialists
IQCS Program Lead
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APPENDIX A

