

A Playas Training and Research
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Military Role Player Effectiveness and Efficiency
Leveraging Role Player Capacity to Improve Service and
Sustainability

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The Playas Training and Research Center is a division of New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology. It specializes in realistic training scenarios and environments for military, law enforcement, protection and security agencies, and anti-terrorism organizations. It also serves as a research base for private and government entities.

A Glance at the Map

There is no question that geopolitical landscapes have shifted and restructured as a result of increasingly devastating weapons and acts of terrorism. United States military objectives, strategies, and directives have responded to this changing terrain. In 2004, the U.S. Army Combat Training Centers began a “major transformation” in emphasis from large force-to-force combat to counterinsurgency combat and stressed “non-kinetic” tactics: negotiation, cultural understanding, language capabilities, rules of engagement/ escalation of force, tactical interrogation, and that “every Soldier is a sensor and ambassador.”¹

In 2008, the Department of Defense added Irregular Warfare (IW) to conventional warfare as the basis of military training, planning, and operations.² IW objectives call for a variety of methods and resources to meet complex and progressively asymmetrical challenges to US military in preserving geo-political interests.

Military theaters such as the Middle East and Africa demand Soldiers who are not only warriors, but peacekeepers; who not only use force, but also exercise diplomacy; who not only establish a stabilizing presence, but also mentor those who will remain. The focus of warfare is not exclusively on combating insurgent forces, but on interaction with a diverse and sometimes dynamic population as the main objective. Preparing Soldiers for this new world role requires modified training. Training that includes cultural awareness and counter-insurgency response necessitates interaction with culturally correct role players.

While the direction of such training may be logical, the implementation is subject to detours. Thinking in navigational terms, *bearing* (the traveler’s ultimate direction) may not always be aligned to *heading* (the direction of travel at the time). An arbitrary route sometimes leads to “losing your bearings.”

Playas Training and Research Center (PTRC) explored possible routes of role player utilization we believed were more focused on bearing, the ultimate goal of training effectiveness and efficiency. We wanted to not only create a clearer map to reach that destination, but also to improve the trip.

The Itinerary

In 2010-2011, Playas Training and Research Center supported training for more than 6,000 people and utilized about 800 role players for specific exercises. In an effort to better manage role player utilization and sustainability, PTRC implemented changes in contracting, operation, and management processes as part of a study.

The results of PTRC exploration supported these truths:

- It is imperative to minimize contracting and operational limitations.
- There is room for innovation in current standards of role player utilization.
- Organizational flexibility pays off.
- Uncharted territory is prime terrain for new roads.

Travel Forecast: Challenges in Role Player Utilization

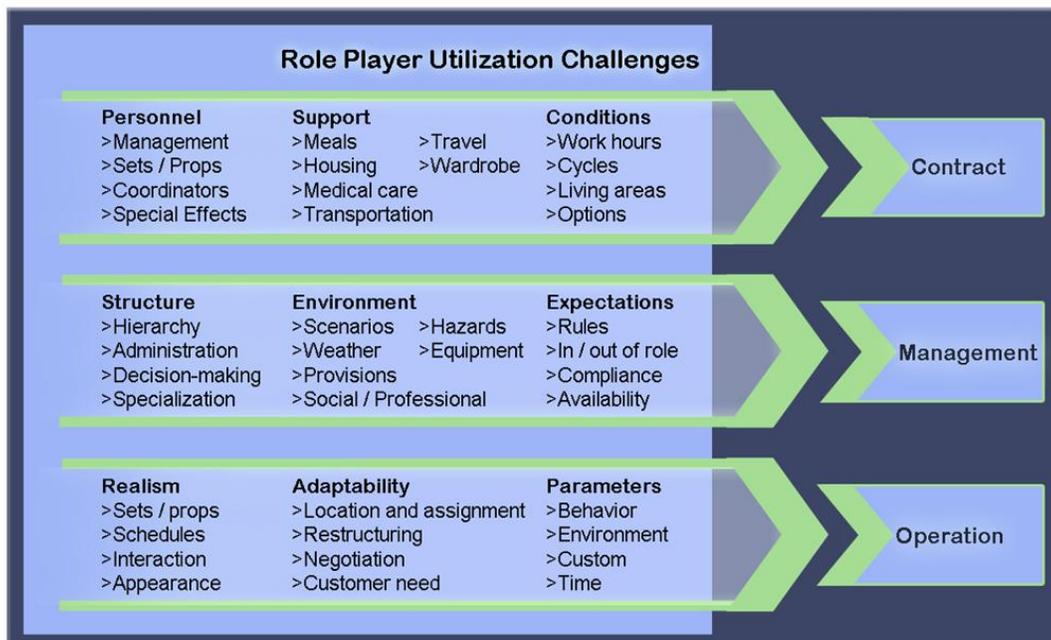
Cost

Problem 1

The use of role players in training exercises has become an accepted and relevant response to deployment in current world theaters, but can be costly when compared to the number of personnel trained. It is apparent that traditional drill, classroom training, and simulation can accommodate more Soldiers in a shorter time. Training with role players has unique dividends, but costs more.

“Training with role players has unique dividends, but costs more.”

Also, contracting and utilizing role players involve more preparation and time than traditional training (Figure 1). Many military and corporate leaders are proposing virtual reality as a solution. The development cost is high, but the experience is reproducible and marketable in ways that role player interaction is not. However, technology has not yet allowed for dynamic interactions and an unlimited number of variables in stimulus and response. The tradeoff for convenience is that the human element in digital simulation can be weak or entirely missing.



U.S. Fleet Forces Commander Admiral John Harvey, Jr. admits that, “we need better representations of human behavior in our simulations. Incorporating cultural anthropology data into our modeling and simulation efforts is a big challenge.”³³

Figure 1. Challenges in Role Player Procurement, Management, and Operation

“The investment in training for a changing world is substantial.”

The investment in training for a changing world is substantial. The Department of Defense spent \$22.2 billion on training and simulation products and services in FY 2009 and estimates spending \$24 billion by 2015.⁴ In 2008, the Marine Corps contracted with one company to supply role players for five years at \$319.2 million.⁵ PTRC’s goal was to use innovative contracting and utilization to reduce costs while maintaining effectiveness.

Quality and Realism

| *Problem 2*

The cost is only one factor. Another is the quality of the training. The gain to Soldiers must drive decisions to utilize role players. PTRC believed that hiring actors or fill-ins as role players was not as effective as using native speaking people from specified areas who could better improve training.

Sensory input also adds value to training. The smell of a meal cooking, the sounds of livestock in the compound, and the taste of tobacco from the hookah contribute to the suspension of disbelief and the immersion into experience. Realistic training should allow visceral reactions to animal slaughter and simulated execution and injury. It should educate soldiers about sanitation, power, and medical issues they are likely to encounter when deployed. It should expose Soldiers to adverse weather and living conditions.

| *Problem 3*

“Realism is a key objective in military training and can only be accomplished with commitment by role player providers.”

Trainers must secure role players who will work in these realistic conditions. Only some role player providers consent to exposing employees to such conditions and others only by charging significant fees. But, the standard is changing. A U.S. Army audit in 2010 directed the National Training Center to cease the practice of paying \$500 to \$1000 “to each role player and site manager to compensate for enduring harsh or austere living conditions,” saving the military \$2.7 billion in less than two years.⁶ Realism is a key objective in military training and can only be accomplished with commitment by role player providers.

| *Problem 4*

PTRC also wanted to enrich scenarios beyond the standard meetings with key leaders and limited engagements with natives. Some role player providers were accustomed to and comfortable with only minor interactions with military personnel. To implement a more complicated scenario, with many characters in the village playing key roles and Soldiers engaged in immersive interaction, we had to contract role players who were willing to involve themselves more with the plot lines and characters in the “story.” They had to make split-second decisions, improvise for contingencies, and “flesh out” believable roles in response to the infinite possibilities that might occur. Not all providers were interested in asking role players to meet such requirements.

Logistics

| *Problem 5*

Utilization of role players is limited by physical conditions. Getting Soldiers and role players to the same location at the same time involves considerable expense, precise scheduling, extensive planning, and resource management. Any training effort involves coordination of military schedules and role player travel and accommodation, as well as negotiation with role players who must travel long distances, such as furnishing housing for days off and arranging transportation, linens, meals, laundry service, and recreation. While these considerations exist in all military training, there was a possibility that tighter and more strategic scheduling could reduce travel costs and that streamlining terms and conditions could eliminate complications. We tried to schedule back to back trainings with the same role players, which reduced travel, and be more specific with planning and contract details so that companies better understood expectations.

Contracting

Typically, role players are contracted for each exercise, with specific requirements outlined by customer need. The current process can be cumbersome. There can be varying restrictions from the role player provider: cooking done by caterers, service for a “block” of time, usually eight hours, of role play, after which the role players cease to be in character; compensation for austere living conditions; expectations of support such as wardrobe, props, and sets; provisions such as transportation, food, housing, wardrobe. These stipulations increase cost and preparation for the customer.

| Problem 6

While this procurement and provision model has been accepted within the structure of warfare training, ever-changing training demands shift the paradigm. “Customary” is not always the best choice. PTRC’s goals were to ensure greater realism by providing authentic livestock, venues, and role players who lived in a venue for the entire length of the exercise, functioning in daily and self-sustained routines.

| Problem 7

Also, some role player providers stipulate use of their own specialized personnel at additional cost. One PTRC contract included experts in Make-Up, Culture, Special Effects, Production, Linguistics, and Wardrobe, increasing the cost by over \$1.1 million. PTRC believed that contracting role players who would “absorb” those positions as part of their daily function could lower costs and heighten realism. Role player companies may additionally require use of their own props, even if the customer has props. One contract added \$62,000 for props and make-up and the personnel to manage them. Purchasing our own props eliminated them from contract, which was less expense than renting them for each exercise.

| Problem 8

Finally, contracting one large role player company for one exercise can seem the most efficient option. The practice can be constraining, however. We believed that the contracting process should be driven by customer requirement, not entirely by unwritten protocol. Why not mix and match role player companies to provide the best combination of quality and value for the exercise?

“We believed that the contracting process should be driven by customer requirement, not entirely by unwritten protocol.”

Organization

Most role player providers adhere strictly to an established inner hierarchy. At the top is Role Player Management, consisting of one or more people who mediate, delegate, and manage. There may be assistants and directors in lower strata who manage logistical details. There is usually a scenario manager who assigns roles and delegates actions within the exercise structure. However the hierarchy is set up, the role players usually reside in the lower (or lowest) levels.

| Problem 9

We took the position that the area of expertise was ultimately held by the people who had lived the experience that the military sought to recreate—the role players. Acknowledging role players as experts was a novel concept to some providers. Two stories illustrate this conflict.

Preparing for an exercise, a PTRC manager noticed that the role players were not asked to (and perhaps not allowed to) set up props in houses and compounds. The job was delegated to a set director. When the manager asked why role players were not involved, the set director replied that they wouldn’t do it realistically. In further communication with the company, the suggestion to eliminate set directors and task role players with decoration was rejected. The written justification was, “The role players are not experts.” The argument that role players had evidently set up and lived in their own residences in Afghanistan was not considered relevant.


PTRC believes that training objectives are achieved through immersive training, which calls for role players to remain in role for days at a time, living and functioning in daily routines.


| **Problem 10**

A second incident occurred after role players had been assigned roles by a manager. A PTRC employee noticed that, even though the role of village elder was held by one man, everyone noticeably deferred to another man. When asked, role players revealed that the man assigned to a lower position was actually a relative of the Afghanistan royal family and was highly regarded by his countrymen. In multiple exercises, assigned roles given to role players did not match their strengths, personality, or cultural status within the group.

PTRC attempted to empower the role players themselves to fill dual role positions and control the environment. They, as experts, lived in Afghanistan cultures with inherent and functional hierarchies of power and responsibility. Allowing them to mediate themselves, take responsibility for the scenario, and determine their own roles eliminated management positions and created a more realistic social structure.

Operation

PTRC believes that training objectives are achieved through immersive training, which calls for role players to remain in role for days at a time, living and carrying out daily routines. Colonel Merlo states that the modern Soldier deployed to threat regions “operates at the cusp of extreme stress, pressure and sleep deprivation,” shifting from peacekeeping to combat in minutes and dealing with people in the vicinity who could represent threat.⁷ Keeping both Soldiers and role players viable in an environment for up to five days allows Soldiers to experience and learn to manage sleep deprivation, scheduling, and stress in more realistic ways.

Typically, role players operate in top-down management and provision. Sets, props, wardrobe, food, and living quarters are furnished; role players bring mainly their skills and expertise into the set. The responsibility for providing and managing resources is out of their hands. The scenario is followed closely and if there are deviations from it, role players are advised by managers how to adapt.

In our study, certain conditions were added. Role players were asked to bring some props, their wardrobe, food, and be responsible themselves for inventory of their own and customer resources. They were asked to take more responsibility in reacting to scenario changes. They were given more authority in the daily running of their teams.

PTRC Study

We developed a five-month study in which we would collect and analyze data for three main areas:

1. Efficiency (cost) of role player utilization (Figure 2).
2. Effectiveness of role player operation to meet training goals.
3. Sustainability of role player procurement and management.

To prepare for the study, two prior exercises were evaluated to get a baseline cost per role player from the single provider contracted. Effectiveness surveys from military personnel were also collected. During the study period, PTRC conducted five military exercises. However, one exercise in January was eliminated from the study because of weather delays that greatly influenced cost of role players. The previous role player provider was contracted for two



Figure 2. Cost Analysis Inclusion/Exclusion

exercises and multiple role player providers contracted for the other two.

Over 4,000 Soldiers were trained during the study period and 518 role players utilized in six realistic venues: pressed earth block marketplace, 160 room village, and two 17 room settlements; and two nomad yurt (tent) settlements.

PTRC- Charting a New Course

As we explored solutions to address each of the challenges in role player utilization, we began to find “best practices” to decrease costs, increase effectiveness, and build a model for role player sustainability (Figure 3). We documented and analyzed expenses, contracting procedures, organization policies, operational practices, and military customers’ perceptions of training effectiveness.

The PTRC Model

*Solution-
Problem 1*

*Solution-
Problem 2*

*Solution-
Problem 3*

*Solution-
Problem 4*

*Solution-
Problem 5*

*Solution-
Problem 6*

*Solution-
Problem 7*

1. We contracted only role players native to targeted training areas, instead of actors. This eliminated the cost of make-up supplies and personnel, most of the wardrobe expense (since native role players owned and wore their own clothing), many props (since they also brought belongings to “personalize” their environment), and the cost of linguists (since role players spoke native languages fluently).
2. We worked with role player providers to hire personnel who consented to live in adverse weather conditions, with limited water and sanitation resources (we provided portable toilets), often without electricity, cooking outside, for the duration of the exercise. Interaction and realism increased under these conditions. Instead of complaining, many of these role players requested returning to Playas to work again.
3. PTRC project managers increased the complexity of the scenarios. There were multiple story lines, many key players, complicated requirements, and complex interactions to solve problems. This necessitated extensive and continuous involvement. The role players, though called upon to engage more strenuously and to create more realistic and complicated characters, rose to the challenge and maintained both realism and training effectiveness.
4. Role player travel was a large consideration in any exercise. For one exercise, travel expenses for 160 role players were billed at \$69,000. Role players traveled by van, but nine managers flew on commercial airlines, which increased the cost. We experimented with cutting travel expenses by eliminating specialist positions and scheduling operations more tightly to allow role players to remain on site longer and make fewer trips.
5. We modified contracts to include role player provision of some supplies. We provided partial furnishings for venues, housing on days off, some food, and major medical supplies. Role players brought wardrobe, personal furnishings and bedding, food, and basic first aid materials. We tasked role players with more life-related responsibilities. When working with large role player companies with multiple management strata, we found role players to be more dependent for small needs. One was minor health concerns. They repeatedly called medical support for band-aids, aspirin, ice packs. The “culture” of the company created dependency. PTRC asked them to come prepared as they would for a vacation or a personal trip. They should bring supplies for minor health and daily needs. As we increasingly asked role players to become responsible for everyday needs, the realism of everyday life intensified.
6. We eliminated many management positions and absorbed them into role player responsibility. This reduced the number of outside managers who were not part of the scenario, but intrusions. We found that management became “invisible,” not apparent to

“As we increasingly asked role players to become responsible for everyday needs, the realism of everyday life intensified.”

Soldiers. The integrity of the exercise and realism of interactions became more seamless and costs decreased

Solution-Problem 8

7. Multiple role player companies were contracted simultaneously to produce the best mix for the exercise specifications. Customer requirement drove contracts, which were negotiated with competitive companies who could furnish role players for the dialect, culture, and location of training objectives. This practice not only supplied the customer with up to four dialects simultaneously, it supported scenario complexity by requiring Soldiers to develop mediation and peacekeeping skills among hostile cultures. Each provider brought its own energy and specialty to the environment and enhanced the scenario in unique ways. Many role player providers could not simultaneously manage multiple venues, spread out over many miles, without a significant increase in management overhead. The small amount of additional administrative labor associated with multiple contracts was considered a preferable choice.

Solution-Problem 9

8. To deal with organizational issues evidenced in some companies, PTRC empowered role players. We allowed them to assign or choose roles themselves, better matching existing dynamics. We required that they bring some materials and personal items used in daily life. We required that they manage conflict internally. Conflict is a natural part of life and people who live and work in close proximity will have conflict and disagreements. Traditionally, these points are mediated from outside by a human resource manager. However, in natural settings, most conflicts are handled socially. By encouraging and requiring that role players settle conflict more naturally, within cultural parameters, we experienced a reduced number of conflicts that interfered with performance.

Solution-Problem 10

We also encouraged role players to become more active in modifying scenarios, improvising, and becoming responsible for training outcomes. Some even attended military After Action Reviews to learn how to improve their services. We saw that some

role players emerged as natural organizers and problem-solvers when asked to become more independent. This development actually improved performance, since much of the decision-making was transferred to role player response.

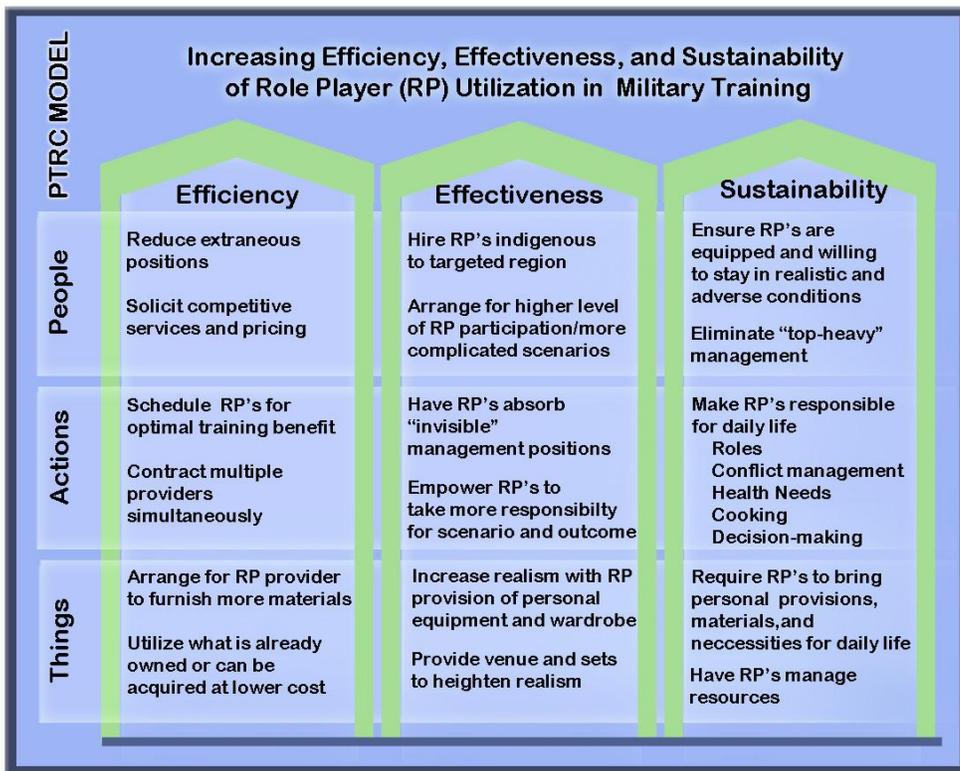


Figure 3: PTRC Model- Efficiency, Effectiveness, and Sustainability

Road Construction

Naturally, in a problem-solving process, new problems arose. We did have detours and bumps in the road we had to address. There were both role player issues and administrative issues.

First, role player managers were not accustomed to everything we asked of them and had to invest time and effort to adjust. The added requirements we placed on them were generally well-received, but not instantly met. Role players found it was more difficult to make operational decisions than trust them to a manager or supervisor. It was more complicated to solve conflicts internally than to have them mediated externally. If not thoroughly instructed by managers, they arrived without bedding and daily provisions, expecting them to be provided. They discovered that knowing and responding to more complex scenarios and modifications required increased energy and involvement. They had to learn to function collaboratively with role players from other providers, often with differing cultures and dialects. There were a few altercations between “groups” which required intervention, usually on days off. However, as they became familiar with our model, performance improved, as evidenced by customer perception (Figure 5). The managers and role players who returned for a second exercise were much more receptive to PTRC expectations.

“The commitment of managers and role players was crucial to the model’s success and to relevant and effective training for military personnel.”

Also, not all role player providers were perfect “fits.” Some did better at adapting to the PTRC model and meeting requirements. Some role players were eager to return for the next exercise and others were reluctant. The commitment of managers and role players was crucial to the model’s success and to relevant and effective training for military personnel. One contractor observed, “Role players are just like Soldiers; they go where they are needed and do what they are told. The bottom line is the quality of their leadership.” Without the customary management presence, some role players did not function at the capacity we envisioned. Some did not consistently stay in character or learn the scenario thoroughly—issues which PTRC addressed by meeting with role players, involving peers in discussions about best practices, use of scenarios to practice skills, or disciplinary response. Role players were usually receptive to suggestions and discussion of issues.

Finally, contracting multiple role player providers for simultaneous exercises and handling operational details took more time and effort than contracting one company. It was more demanding to coordinate role players without the customary top-down management. It was challenging to arrange for multiple companies’ travel and accommodations. We learned quickly what was best practice and how better to navigate contracting and management roadblocks.

For example, PTRC provides housing for role players for days off during exercises at a charge to the customer. The houses are furnished and stocked much like a hotel room would be, with a central kitchen building. During the study, a three-week exercise involved one military group beginning training on Monday and ending late Thursday. Role players were then “off” for three days until the next group arrived. To accommodate role players at a lower cost, PTRC provided free housing in other facilities which included minimal furnishings and amenities and did not provide full kitchen capability, cleaning, or laundry service. Role player satisfaction decreased and negatively affected the business relationship we were building with providers. Balancing satisfactory accommodations and costs to customers is an ongoing process.

We also decided to open the store and grill, usually closed on weekends, to be of service to role players on their days off. The facility is remote and no amenities are available without travel. However, sales did not justify the investment in man hours and the benefit to role

players was minimal. Role players live in cities and preferred to travel to neighboring cities for shopping and recreation.

Our shift to a new model was also a learning experience in management. By avoiding the top-heavy (and costly) supervision by contractors, PTRC took responsibility for managing more conflict. There was some friction within and between role player groups. There was a slight increase in the number of security and police callouts for minor problems (theft from a role player house, presence in restricted zones) and in the amount of corrective action necessary during exercises (personnel out of role, leaving venue without authorization). There were role players who were dismissed and replaced for legal or serious infractions, but that level of mediation was not typical. PTRC considered these experiences as “growing pains” in paradigm shift and as reasonable demands during transition.

“Ultimately, exploration for viable options produced new ideas.”

Ultimately, exploration for viable options produced new ideas. These experiences reinforced PTRC’s belief that flexible and creative approaches to challenges confirmed what could result in greater dividends in all areas of the study: efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability.

Postcards from the Trip: Results

Efficiency

Role player costs are the largest expenses incurred in related military exercises, so a cost reduction without significant drop in effectiveness was the ultimate goal. Working with multiple providers and employing resourceful contracting and management allowed more competitive pricing. We reduced costs by redistributing responsibility for supplies and materials. With role player providers agreeing to furnish more, they increased their competitive worth without significantly jeopardizing profit. The savings indicated in Figure 4, if applied to all role players contracted from a single source for exercises in September through February would be \$1,123,742.



Figure 4. Comparison of Contracted Costs

Note: Since role player provider was the same for the two study exercises and the two baseline exercises, costs were combined.

The company declined using props purchased or built by PTRC and required that they ship their own, adding \$20,000. Wardrobe was \$6,000, despite the suggestion that they use ours or allow role players to furnish personal clothing. Our negotiations to eliminate unnecessary personnel and costs were unsuccessful. However, agreements with smaller, more competitive

Additionally, we scrutinized contracts more closely and eliminated unnecessary equipment and positions. For instance, one company proposed a \$1,500 charge for uniforms. Upon investigation, we found that role players themselves were required to purchase uniforms, but the company was being paid for their use.

Labor charges for company mandated personnel—Safety and Logistics Supervisor, Armorer, Set Director, Make-Up Assistant, Special Effects Supervisor and Assistant, and Wardrobe Supervisor—added \$36,000.

providers allowed us to stipulate required personnel and eliminate contracted items we owned or could provide at lower cost.

“A combination of decisions about contracting and operating practices succeeded in lowering the cost of providing role players for military training.”

A combination of decisions about contracting and operating practices succeeded in lowering the cost of providing role players for military training. Utilization of role players to cut management positions and enhance training objectives increased efficiency.

Effectiveness

For six exercises both before and during the study (Figure 5), satisfaction surveys were collected from Soldiers, usually at After Action Reviews (AAR’s). Because each exercise had unique objectives, we realized that some fluctuation in effectiveness data would appear.

Role Player Provider(s)	A	A	A	A	B	B
Month	Sept.	Nov.	Dec.	Feb.	Jan.	Apr. May
Number of Responses	121	21	21	21	27	202
Positive	93%	86%	72%	85%	74%	69%
Neutral	5%	14%	16%	12%	14%	22%
Negative	2%	6%	12%	3%	12%	9%
Percent of Total Surveyed	6%	75%	75%	75%	12%	31%

Military Satisfaction with Exercises Involving Role Players

Figure 5. Military Satisfaction Surveys Regarding Role Players
A= Single Role Player Provider B= Multiple Providers

For instance, the September exercise and April-May exercise shared the same counterinsurgency (COIN) objective. However, the design of the exercises and the focus of training were very different. In September, two companies were immersed in population centers to gain cultural exposure and awareness. Almost all Soldiers interacted extensively with role players to learn customs, language, and negotiation skills.

In the April-May exercise, two companies were stationed in population centers while two companies were assigned to surrounding desert areas, away from the population, with an emphasis on combat, communication, and patrolling. Therefore, half of the Soldiers did not interact with role players, although some of those completed surveys to evaluate role players. We knew that neutral responses would increase. Our “tell” would be the percentage indicating negative perceptions. That number did not fall below levels we had experienced with the original provider.

“Because one of our objectives was the impact of expanding role player capacity through more complicated scenarios and training design, we were interested in how military leaders viewed the results of change.”

We also conducted random interviews (during and after exercises) about both role player performance and scenario success. Because one of our objectives was the impact of expanding role player capacity through more complicated scenarios and training design, we were interested in how military leaders viewed the results of change. Leadership most often praised the “fit” of the exercise to what their personnel needed to practice and the contribution of role players to the success of training. Even Soldiers who had previously been deployed to Afghanistan indicated that the training was worthwhile and that they experienced new learning.

One anecdote serves as an example of feedback received weeks or even months after training at Playas. After a battalion served a rotation at the National Training Center (NTC) in preparation for imminent deployment to Afghanistan, a Major commented, “In every way, we were much better prepared for the challenges that the NTC hit us with because of the training we’d received at Playas beforehand. The two training events we did there were significant to

our performance at the NTC and our chain of command recognized that for what it was.” We received many similar comments after soldiers left for further deployment training.

Common suggestions by Soldiers were to limit administrative activity (PTRC maintenance vehicles and military observer visits), to provide more diverse venues (agricultural or in harsher terrain), to extend training periods (most suggested a week instead of four to five days), and to allow all Soldiers to interact with role players.

We felt that training effectiveness was maintained, as evidenced by survey results, and possibly improved, as supported by interviews and comments. One seasoned military officer remarked that the utilization of role players in a realistic scenario was “the best training I have participated in for 20 years.”

Sustainability

A main objective of the study was to establish a sustainability model for role players. We focused our attention on health needs, food, equipment, safety, wardrobe, transportation, work conditions, and support systems. We wrote conditions into contracts which required providers to think about and supply what would better sustain their employees while working. We negotiated with both PTRC personnel and contracted providers to more equitably respond to daily needs, such as minor medical care, food, and furnishings. An analogy could distinguish these shifts in provision: Instead of packing as if they would visit a relative (where amenities and toiletries would be provided) they were to pack as if they would be camping (where most of what they needed would be brought with them). They would need to attend to daily health, meal, and clothing needs and pack accordingly. This mentality was also extended to safety and support systems, including them in the “internal society” instead of being externally provided.

“We wanted to explore ways in which role player groups could take more responsibility in all areas and establish stronger self-sustaining communities.”

We felt that the single role player provider we had exclusively used functioned in top-heavy management that conflicted with our philosophy. Role-players were restricted to limited responsibilities and were dependent on specialists and experts who compartmentalized preparation and operational tasks into small areas. Problems and daily issues were addressed by management and resulting directives handed down to role players. Many role players were not native to targeted areas, but actors supported by linguists, directors, and managers. PTRC felt that a model of role players as responsible and active social group members was preferable.

We wanted to explore ways in which role player groups could take more responsibility in all areas and establish stronger self-sustaining communities. The willingness of managers and leadership to explore alternatives was a significant factor in success. Health needs could be managed internally, except in the case of serious injury or emergency. The burden to supply food could be shared and role players could provide what they thought was appropriate or desirable for the situation. They learned to bring common supplies and equipment and provide their own wardrobe, furnishings, and even hookahs to personalize their environments. They became more safety conscious, knowing that a Safety Supervisor would not be available to handle mundane matters. They accepted PTRC transportation instead of insisting on their own. They acclimated to operational demands and conditions and even appreciated the similarities of daily life to living in their native lands. Some commented on “returning to life back then” and the camaraderie developed with members of their troops.

The direction of sustainability we pursued was not without hindrances, however. Change is effected slowly and humans naturally resist modifications to the familiar. It was a continual

process to educate about and reinforce what we expected managers and role players to accomplish. It involved daily adaptations and problem-solving. We tried to view frustrations as opportunities to discover better solutions and to communicate to role players that they were valuable assets.

“*The nation-building in which current military forces must engage necessitates understanding of and respect for the cultures of indigenous populations.*”

The Road Ahead: Destinations and Directions

Warfare must always change in response to world situations. Lieutenant General Chiarelli and Major Smith observed that the United States “entered the War on Terrorism after the 9/11 attacks with armed forces well suited to defeat opposing armies and topple political regimes, but significantly lacking the depth suited to the longer term requirements of stabilizing and rebuilding nations.”⁸ The nation-building in which current military forces must engage necessitates understanding of and respect for the cultures of indigenous populations.

For the 2012 fiscal year, the Army budgeted \$30,091,000 for role players solely at Combat Training Centers and revealed plans to utilize them in 10-day (increased from 5-day) full spectrum war fighter exercises. “The budget funds increased numbers of Opposing Forces (OPFOR) and role players at combat training centers to provide the realism of the complexity and uncertainty in today’s environment and to fill leader engagement training gaps.”⁹ The Army Training Centers account for only a part of role player use; Marine training at Camp Pendleton, Ft. Irwin, and Twentynine Palms utilizes thousands of role players annually.

Role player providers also see increased business. Lexicon, a company based in California and Washington, expects \$35 million in revenue in 2011.¹⁰ It is one of dozens of successful providers to the military. Acclaim Technical Services provides role players for Ft. Irwin, Ft. Bragg, Ft. Riley, Ft. Hood, and Camp Bullis.¹¹ Tatilek, an Alaskan corporation, offers a database of 6,000 role players with language choices of Arabic, Pashto, Dari, Turkish, Urdu, Kurdish, Persian, Farsi, German, Italian, Spanish, and French.¹² The inclusion of role players in military exercises is a relevant and critical issue in both business relations and success in world theaters.

So, what are the next steps in role player operation? One possibility is responding to the U.S. military need to effectively recruit, equip, organize, and train local security forces in occupied nations. These forces will be responsible for maintaining established government, providing security for citizens and dignitaries, and establishing policing and peacekeeping protocols and policy. If Soldiers are tasked with this objective, it is necessary that they are trained and allowed to practice skills to succeed. They must learn effective ways to mentor recruits in weapon use, manning checkpoints, conducting surveillance, patrolling security parameters, and responding to threats and contingencies. Role players must also be equipped to respond in realistic ways in order to expedite problem-solving and best practice for that military focus.

It is also pertinent that military spending cuts may eventually preclude current practices in role player utilization. Training effectiveness must remain stable, but innovative method and design can decrease cost simultaneously. Providers will need to be more competitive and willing to work within shifting parameters to increase efficiency. Companies compliant with diverse customer demands can make more intelligent business decisions and sustain military training and role player efficiency and effectiveness.

The Rearview Mirror

PTRC began providing military training venues and support in much the same way any entity does, by following protocol and standards accepted in the field. It wasn't long until we took steps to improve and adapt both to better fit customer need. Those steps soon led us into new terrain and the realization that we could improve routes to the destination of efficient and effective service. So the trip began.

Those steps soon led us into new terrain and the realization that there may be better ways to get to the destination of efficient and effective service. ”

Today, we are in a different place, a location nearer to our destination. We have learned valuable lessons by both advances and missteps. At this time, we know:

- There are ways to minimize contracting and operational limitations.
- Innovation in current standards of role player utilization is possible and productive.
- Organizational flexibility is worth the investment in time and energy.
- New roads are sometimes preferable to familiar roads.

The answer to the proverbial question is, “No, we are not there yet.” But, ask a different question and we can answer, “Yes, we are much closer.”

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Morgan Language Services	Potomac, MD	http://www.morganlanguages.com/1.html
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