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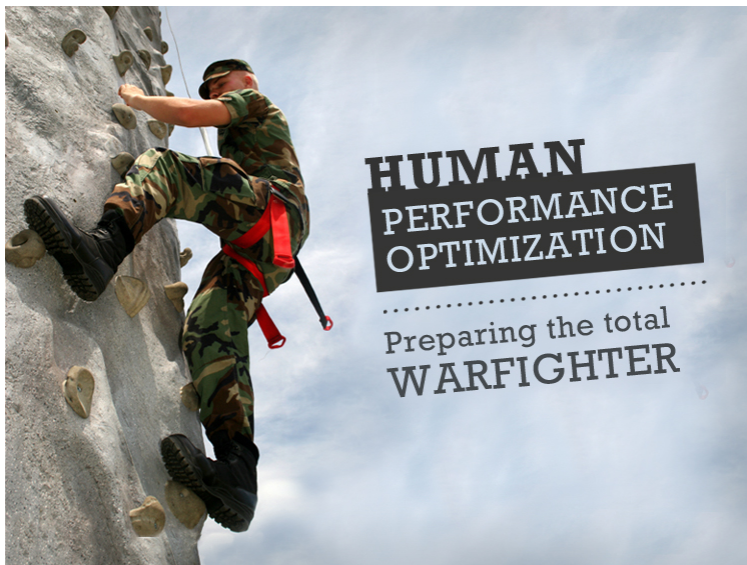
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So What Exactly Is Human Performance Optimization?

Posted by: Col. Lex Brown | Director, Human Performance Integration Directorate, 711th Human Performance Wing, Air Force Research Laboratory

Thursday, July 22, 2010

An exact definition of **Human Performance Optimization** is like the abominable snowman: never captured and witness details vary. However, two of my colleagues and I mounted an expedition to capture the slippery beast and published a paper in the Summer 2009 Air and Space Power Journal entitled "Managing the Human Weapon System: A Vision for an Air Force Human-Performance Doctrine." We laid out for full public view three aspects of human performance: sustainment, optimization, and enhancement. Human performance sustainment maintains defined target performance levels throughout a career; optimization efficiently uses limited human resources through the process of Human Systems Integration (HSI); and enhancement takes the human beyond established and sustainable performance thresholds, most commonly through science and technology research.



Why, you may ask, should I care about a human performance yeti? Well, unless you have been living in a 1950s nuclear fallout shelter, you can appreciate the rapid advances in technology, from iPhone 4 to cars with integrated GPS, computers, and Bluetooth. In the military, advanced technology coupled with complex, network-centric systems places high demand on physical and cognitive resources while maintaining situational awareness. If, for example, demand has sapped a fighter pilot's cognitive reserve, the mission may have to be aborted, or the weapon may miss the target, or, even worse, there may be nothing but a smoking hole in the ground. So it's vital to integrate the human into systems, to define human performance capabilities in order to sustain the warrior throughout a career, and to assess them periodically to make sure they are still up to performance standards. To that end, the Military Health System plays a critical role in maintaining superior performance.

But there is a lingering problem: the military services are desperately in need of sound human performance doctrine and human performance practitioners. In fact, I would go so far as to say that the MHS paradigm must shift to one of human performance rather than a health model. Although health is a prerequisite for performance, the presence of health does not guarantee performance. We excel in caring for the wounded warrior – now we must excel in sustaining, optimizing, and enhancing the warrior. Through performance enhancement research, human systems integration, and a health system that sustains human performance, the American soldier, sailor, airman, and Marine can effectively and efficiently execute the mission.