

# MBA Leadership Training, French Army Style

BY: ANUBHAV SHARMA ON APRIL 05, 2017 | [0 COMMENTS](#) 1,014 VIEWS



HEC Paris MBA candidates take part in a military-style training exercise at the Fort de Penthièvre, walking a tightrope to overcome their fears — a metaphor for business

These days, the skills required to be successful in the corporate world are diverse. The dynamic environment in which companies operate puts ever-changing demands on leadership. Companies have to adapt to unpredictable markets to stay economically viable. Work has become more dynamic and unpredictable. Employee-employer relationships are weakening and becoming more global. Work patterns have become more interdependent. Cross-functional teams are assembled and disbanded quickly to tackle urgent projects.

In such an environment, the best learning a business school can give to its students is to teach them flexible and adaptable team leadership skills, to help create corporate

leaders with the cognitive and behavioral complexities to respond to a wide range of situations that might require contrary and opposing responses.



The military, which teaches its officers to exercise command in challenging circumstances whatever the combat situation they might face, offers a good model for business schools in this regard. At HEC Paris, where I am an MBA candidate (Class of 2017), students learn by interaction with managers who are constantly taking on challenging projects in complex and difficult conditions, where one wrong decision can be the difference between life and death. Through the Saint-Cyr Leadership Academy, they also learn from the military.

The training regimen at the *École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr*, a French military academy in Fontainebleau, combines well with the experiential learning curriculum at HEC Paris, teaching students how to approach problems on the ground, find solutions, and involve the team in executing the tasks.

Sometimes in corporate situations, pressure — time pressure, performance pressure — is very high, and you need to work together quickly to find solutions and execute your strategy. This is the kind of environment the two-and-a-half-day Saint Cyr Leadership Academy simulates — one that is very conducive to learning and growing leadership skills for future leaders at HEC Paris.

No doubt, the training that we underwent helped us sharpen our decision-making and teamwork skills. It also taught us to build trust and collaboration within our teams, and develop mutual respect and understanding of each other's differences. It proved to us that team goals precede individual ambition. We worked together to build rafts and bridges — literal bridges — which required a lot of coordination and quick decision-making. We simulated an emergency flood situation where we had to get the whole team across a simulated flooded area using only wooden planks. In another exercise, we simulated a crisis management center and coordinated efforts to house refugees, manage their food and rations, and set up hospitals and medical facilities, all with the “emergency situation” slowly unfolding. In some circumstances we had to predict how a situation would unfold — and this in particular was a great learning experience.

The mission was to succeed most efficiently and effectively as a team. The seminar was physically exerting and tested our strength and stamina. But it tested more than that. All the tasks required delegation, conviction, motivation and perseverance of the whole team. The tasks seemed tough when we set out to do them, but they became easier as

we worked together, helping and learning from each other. We encountered hurdles, but every setback made us get better to achieve our goal — an experience, and a feeling, that is indescribable.

It is true that in the military, in the corporate world, or simply in life we need to develop a certain set of skills to survive and succeed. For the various activities at the Saint-Cyr Leadership Academy — which ranged from building rafts and bridges to scaling walls, solving crisis scenarios, and getting an injured person to safety — students also took turns serving as team leader, which offers a whole new set of challenges. As the leader, you need to explain the situation to your team, designate the right people to do various tasks, and motivate the people — especially when things are not going well. It is the leader's task to keep the team committed and focused on the main objective. As the leader for the wall climbing exercise, I learned how important it is to designate the right people for the right job, and to do so quickly. If we had designated people with more muscle and weight to climb the wall first instead of helping push lighter people up the wall before them, we would have failed. And if I had not been motivating the team and pushing them to do that task, despite everyone being exhausted, we would not have been able to complete the task of getting everyone up the wall within 10 minutes.

The Saint-Cyr Leadership Academy was an important learning experience, and it gave me and my colleagues confidence to deal with the kind of pressure situations I am sure we will face in the corporate world. In future, when I am called upon to lead a team, motivate a team, and deliver results, I'm sure the Saint-Cyr training will prove to have been great preparation.

*Anubhav Sharma is an HEC Paris MBA student (Class of 2017) specializing in strategy with previous degrees in marketing and finance (IIT-Delhi, India) as well as electronics and communications engineering (Anna University, India). Originally from India, he has more than seven years of pre-MBA work experience in financial services and IT, having worked in such multinationals as Citibank, JP Morgan and Infosys Technologies Limited. He is passionate about business leadership, change management, and digital strategy and innovations, especially in the financial services, e-commerce, and luxury industries.*

TAGGED: [ANUBHAV SHARMA](#), [FRENCH ARMY](#), [HEC-PARIS](#), [LEADERSHIP TRAINING](#), [MBA](#), [MILITARY](#), [ST. CYR](#)

[HTTP://POETSANDQUANTS.COM/2017/04/05/MBA-LEADERSHIP-TRAINING-FRENCH-ARMY-STYLE/](http://poetsandquants.com/2017/04/05/mba-leadership-training-french-army-style/)