Faculty development professionals have much in common with guerilla warriors, and should consider adopting at least some of their tactics and strategies to facilitate the change process in higher education. This paper describes the characteristics of guerillas, discusses their tactics, and explains how these tactics can be utilized to promote the integration of technology in the teaching/learning process.
The integration of technology into teaching and learning has become a topic of concern to those involved in all levels of education, from preschool to postsecondary. Unfortunately, many impediments to the effective use of such teaching tools remain, mired in generations of tradition and exacerbated by a lack of information and understanding. Faculty development professionals, charged with promoting the utilization of a variety of instructional technologies, may be unaware of the resemblance between their task and that of some rather unlikely "colleagues." In this paper, the characteristics of guerilla warriors will be described and their tactics explained, followed by a discussion of how these tactics can be successfully adopted by faculty development specialists intending to effect change among faculty members teaching in the higher education environment.

Definitions

Guerillas will be defined, for the purposes of this paper, as individuals working to bring about change who are not part of "regular" formations of soldiers or combatants. They are typically part of one or more small bands of highly mobile factions who find themselves in a position of weakness against a stronger (and often enormously powerful) system, organization, or psychological perspective.

As a set of warfare tactics, guerilla activities have been compared to a "spreading puddle" in contrast to traditional, top-down military strategies that resemble "water running in a straight line downhill." (Yn, 1998) (It may be useful, at this point, to recall and contemplate historical examples of top-down attempts to promote innovation in educational institutions, from K-12 through postsecondary.) Although some of the tactics adopted by guerillas -- the use or implicit threat of violence, for example -- are not recommended for use in faculty development, many others are well-suited to promoting the use of innovative instructional strategies and technology applications for teaching. How can faculty development professionals determine if they’re in position to adopt such strategies?

Guerilla Characteristics

Determining if one is appropriately situated to use these tactics (or has "the right stuff") only requires understanding the nature of the guerilla and ascertaining one’s resemblance to these warriors. The primary characteristic is that the individual is committed to bringing about change for the betterment of the organization. Modern guerillas are almost always revolutionaries who want to change the current system, as opposed to reactionaries who would choose to protect the status quo. (Hughes, 1962) The current system of utilizing technology for teaching in higher education (ripe for guerilla activism) is often fragmented in its support base, concerned more with hardware than with learning, and lacking in appropriate incentives. Promoting new ways of thinking about technology and new behaviors for learning improvement are the mark of today’s faculty development guerilla.

Another characteristic trait is an aversion to the pitched battle (U.S. Army, 1962) This may manifest itself, for faculty development specialists, in what could be considered stealth activities – those events that have goals beyond the obvious or published. In addition, this variable will exclude those individuals who prefer to engage in confrontational interactions or whose interpersonal manner would be described as aggressive or combative. These characteristics will often result in an “us versus them”
mentality, the opposite of the desired effect of creating alliances. The guerilla certainly is able to engage in direct conflict, but does not seek it out and instead chooses to align him or herself with the group by being helpful, friendly, and sympathetic to the concerns of others.

Agility in a rapidly changing environment is a hallmark of the guerilla and has an honorable place in the history of American liberty. Francis Marion, the “Swamp Fox,” is credited with leading his guerilla band with a mobility that out-maneuvered the British forces and resulted in the regaining of the Carolinas during the Revolution War. (Joes, 1996) As a faculty development specialist, agility would more likely be shown in the swift evaluation of potentially beneficial practices for teaching and learning, requiring a continual review of research in cognitive processing, technological advances, and learning strategies. The expeditious promotion of recently validated practices reveals the guerilla as a credible source and a reliable advisor to faculty.

Because guerillas work in environments shaped and controlled by the opposing forces, a clear understanding of this milieu is imperative. (Guevara, 1961) Being well-informed in the local context can mean the difference between being perceived as one of the group or as a fringe lunatic, tilting at windmills to no apparent benefit. In faculty development circles, this means understanding the obstacles in the path of instructors who attempt to integrate technology applications into their instruction, knowledge of the incentives (or lack thereof) for innovation, and awareness of the multiple (and sometimes contradictory) priorities imposed on the faculty member who chooses to adopt new teaching strategies. Teaching experience, while not mandatory, can be extremely beneficial to the faculty development professional who hopes to appreciate what instructors are facing.

The guerilla band may work independently, but knowing how to utilize the help of external “sponsors” can be of significant benefit. In warfare, guerillas often have the aid of other countries with sympathetic political philosophies upon which to draw. The savvy faculty development group will sometimes rely on private consultants, hardware or software vendors, or colleagues at other institutions who have faced similar challenges. Going it alone is no longer a viable option (if it ever was); implementing wide-spread change - especially when it involves technology -- can be extremely expensive and time-consuming and should not be attempted without the support of others who can lend assistance when necessary.

Finally, in case it isn’t obvious, the guerilla needs to maintain high morale for him/ herself and associates in order to work against what can seem like overwhelming odds. Faced with promoting change in higher education, an environment not known for its flexibility, the faculty development specialist must avoid fatalism, cynicism, and stagnation, while maintaining a healthy balance of realism and hope. Joes (1996) attributes the positive morale of guerilla warriors to “belief that the cause is both just and destined to triumph.” (p. 6) So must faculty development guerillas hold firmly to the raison d’etre of their enterprise.

The preceding discussion of guerilla characteristics (committed to bringing about change, aversion to the pitched battle, agility in a rapidly-changing environment, well-informed about the local context, awareness of external sponsors, and high morale) provides a general profile of the individual who could be classified as a guerilla. However, it is important to note that these traits were not articulated to promote or reinforce arbitrary categorization of faculty development professionals, but rather to suggest that individuals recognizing themselves in this description may, as a
consequence, choose to employ guerilla tactics to enhance their professional effectiveness.

Tactics

There are no guerillas without action, and tactics are what truly defines guerilla undertakings. The five specific tactics that will be discussed include moving among the people, use of persuasive techniques, constant activity, judicial use of retreat, and working with “regular” forces. As a side note, the use of terrorism or personal assaults - although adopted by some modern guerilla forces - were never promoted as the most useful or effective activities by Mao, Guevara, or other well-known guerilla chieftains. Moreover, their use in faculty development settings is of limited benefit and not encouraged by this author.

Moving among the people, as a tactic, has its roots in Mao’s teachings. He considered the guerilla a fish and the people “as the water in which he swims.” (Hughes, 1962) This enables the guerilla to recruit followers from among the local population, and to identify the opinion leaders within the social structure. These strategies are essential to building a base of local support for later activities and for gleaning helpful information on potential obstacles.

For faculty development guerillas, moving among the people requires discarding any viewpoint that fosters an “us versus them” classification of the [good] innovators and [bad] faculty who need to be overhauled, transformed, or somehow repaired. This unfortunate taking of sides will occasionally result from top-down sorts of tactics that impose clear-cut dichotomies of those who fall into line and those who resist. Tactically, moving among the people is a way to recognize and value resistance as a signal that additional education is required or that there is a need to work more closely with opinion leaders. The image presented earlier of guerillas working like a spreading puddle, rather than a stream running downhill, is appropriate here. The idea is not to sweep faculty up in the onrushing deluge but to introduce change in a deliberate and continuous evolution of applications that is compatible with their existing values and practices.

This philosophy runs counter to the popular argument that only by abandoning our current practices, reorganizing the traditional structure of higher education, and wholly adopting new paradigms of teaching and learning will true innovation occur. This may be true; however, such an event does not appear to be on the horizon and promoting “small ideas” that work within the existing structure while concurrently introducing revolutionary germs into the system is likely the best interim strategy.

The effective guerilla uses persuasive techniques to create a favorable opinion of the cause, win over the local population, and ensure longevity for the effort. (Guevara, 1961; U.S. Army, 1962) Without a favorable opinion of the cause, locals will relegate the guerillas to the status of rogue gangs who are not acting for the benefit of the general population, thus making it unlikely that support or information will be forthcoming. Winning over the locals requires that the guerillas build credibility and inspire confidence. Ensuring longevity means persuading members of an intact social system to support or join forces with a group whose goal is to challenge the status quo -- a system that, for some, may have direct or indirect benefits. For others, the existing structure may not be optimal, but it is familiar, and venturing into the unknown is not something to which humans are predisposed.

The guerilla’s true goal is to target the minds of the people, but for the faculty development specialist, this can be a formidable challenge. Expecting individuals who
are the successful products of the existing educational system (i.e., faculty members) to embrace teaching strategies that may appear to run counter to this tradition can be a frustrating experience. Techniques for winning over such a group include building professional credibility and emphasizing the similarities in values held by the guerilla and the local population. For example, when promoting innovative practices, research findings supporting such instructional strategies should be discussed, along with examples from other institutions where such strategies have been successfully implemented, followed by a discussion of how these strategies complement the jointly-held values of the group.

If new ideas about how technology can improve teaching and learning are to be adopted, and ultimately manifested in the classroom, the identification and persuasion of opinion leaders is also critical, for these are the individuals who have the greatest influence within the group. Building a cadre of respected faculty members who support the guerilla’s activities is an invaluable part of the diffusion process and will exponentially extend the initial efforts at persuading others to join the movement.

The guerilla does not rely on winning a few major battles, but is in a state of constant action, wearing down the opposition through persistent effort, meaning that no single, isolated act determines the outcome of the overall movement. Francis Marion’s group cut off supply lines to the British troops, provoked them night and day, and disrupted their communications, among other things, in order to physically and psychologically fatigue the enemy. (Joes, 1996) Thus, no single event (a major battle, for example), but rather many small skirmishes led to a successful result.

The guerilla hoping to introduce faculty to instructional technology applications would be wise to adopt this attitude of persistence, albeit with a focus on constructive deeds. By saturating the faculty with constructive ideas for technology integration, numerous opportunities for training, and useful information on the advantages of such applications, the faculty development professional prepares the ground for adoption. These minor, but frequent, reminders will gradually create a sense of the unremarkable about various technologies – a necessary step toward their diffusion throughout the organization. No single workshop, seminar, brochure, presentation, discussion forum, demonstration, Website, or consultation will win the minds of the faculty, but the continual dripping of good ideas onto the rocks of tradition will eventually wear away the resistance.

By definition, guerillas are fighters who are in a position of weakness against a more powerful enemy. Realistically, this means that knowing when to retreat has strategic value - Guevara put it succinctly when he said, “The essential task of the guerilla fighter is to keep himself from being destroyed.” (Guevara, 1961, p. 21) Complementing this is the idea that a skirmish that cannot be won should not be undertaken by the guerilla – why waste the few resources available on a futile effort?

This tactic has great value in faculty development. One should never plan to achieve complete adoption and diffusion of an innovation throughout a group – it is unrealistic and almost always unachievable. One way to look at this is with a triage philosophy, determining how best to use the finite resources of time, people, equipment, and facilities; i.e., should all of the available bandages be used on patients who are sure to die, or should they be distributed among those who may be saved by the attempt? If there are individuals who are staunchly determined to avoid change, one may be tempted to continue trying to win them over, meanwhile using up time or other resources that could be put to more effective use elsewhere. The key is to distinguish between the truly
resistant and those who would eventually come around given time and motivation, and for this, unfortunately, there are no easy guidelines.

Knowing when to retreat also requires the ability to evaluate past efforts to determine how best to proceed in an ambiguous environment. If earlier attempts to engage faculty in technology integration activities were unsuccessful, there is something to be gained from analyzing why and determining how things may have been done differently. Retreat doesn’t necessarily indicate surrender – it can instead provide a space for reviewing strategy and reforming later events.

Guerilla activists sometimes work independently of any organized military forces, although they are more effective if their efforts are combined with traditionally trained and deployed units. Each form of warfare has strengths complementary to the other’s weaknesses, allowing greater flexibility for the regular troops and added support for the irregulars. This alliance with conventional military ranks also lends an air of credibility to the guerillas, providing validation from a larger (and probably more organized) system.

One only has to review the history of education in the United States to realize that efforts at instructional innovation are most effective when a combination of top-down and bottom-up strategies is used. Wiring campuses (k-12 through postsecondary) is an excellent example of this. Grass-roots campuses campaigns involving teachers, students, and parents have worked to promote the use of the Internet in schools, while administrators have operated from a big-picture perspective to ensure that funding and infrastructure concerns were addressed for long-term viability. Such a project could not be accomplished successfully with only one part of the equation – without high level support to fund the capital improvements required for networking, nothing would happen; without the grass-roots support to focus on the most effective uses of a network, the hardware quickly becomes irrelevant. Technology integration has become too expensive for anything resembling autonomy to drive it – guerillas will, in many cases, need the support and resources that an administrative entity can provide before they’ll make a noticeable difference in the status quo. Creating alliances with the administrative faction (while maintaining loyalties to the people) is also a path to greater credibility, as well as a sometimes-grudging respect, for guerilla forces.

Summary

It should come as no surprise that there are similar ideas and tactics linking guerilla warriors and those who work for change in large organizations. Their motives, in a broad sense, are often similar and they share many personal traits, as well. Learning how to facilitate change and promote innovation (particularly under difficult circumstances or in a hostile environment), therefore, may mean adopting guerilla tactics. These methods can facilitate the diffusion of innovations throughout a system in a manner not unlike that described by Rogers (1995), including the identification of opinion leaders, careful use of existing communication channels, and emphasis on the relative advantage of adopting the innovation.

Although this perspective utilizes a warfare metaphor, it is important to remember that these tactics don’t presume (or encourage) an “us versus them” dichotomy of change agents and faculty. The “enemy” in this situation, would instead be the collected obstacles that deter faculty from adopting technology applications to improve the teaching/learning processes in their courses - lack of training or tech support, outmoded classroom facilities, nonexistent incentives, or opposition from administrators are just a
few examples of typical deterrents to innovation. Faculty development guerillas work with faculty, not against them, to surmount these hurdles.

Finally, the techniques described could be applied to any form of innovation or change - the process leading to improvement, whether radical or modest, remains a constant. Guerilla activism is open to those committed to the cause.
References


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