

# Ready, Set, Airlift! Ep 3

## Transforming for the Future Pt. 2

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**Julian Hernandez (Host):** Welcome, everyone, to another edition of Ready, Set, Airlift. I'm your host, Julian Hernandez. On this episode, we are going to continue our conversation about innovation and transforming for the future with Major Paul Lentz and Tech Sergeant Taylor Mogford. This is part two of that conversation, so if you missed the earlier part, please take a listen to our last episode so you know the context for this next part of our discussion.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** From my assessment, the environment for innovation has probably never been better. I mean, it's codified now into, at least for the Air Force Reserve Command into the chief of the Air Force Reserve's task or transforming for the future is one of the two critical line of efforts right now, from your perspective as innovators and, you know, the ones out there doing the work, do you feel like the environment is better?

Is there a more acceptance of innovative projects now than in the past?

**Maj. Paul Lentz:** Definitely over the last couple of years. Yes, it's and it's kind of gone from grassroots ragtags, a bunch of good airmen with good ideas to a bunch of good airmen with ideas and a little bit more support from leadership. Is it where it should be?

I don't know. But there's alright, so there's Tesseract, there's Morpheus, there's places up at the higher levels pushing it. Like I said before, leadership kept saying, Oh, well, we need it centralized and all this other stuff. And to a degree, yes, yeah. But now there's way more resources and different things.

And then some of the offices that were now that were just originating are now pushing billions of dollars into different projects around the fleet.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** For the benefit of those who are not subject matter experts in the field, you mentioned so Tesseract we discussed a little bit is essentially like the galaxy spark at a larger level.

And then you mentioned Morpheus.

**Maj. Paul Lentz:** Yeah. So first I'll say this. All right. I'm an operator and Tesseract has become a bad word in the swing. So I'll ask this expert here as an L and O. Yeah.

**TSgt. Taylor Mogford:** So, you know, what is Tesseract? You've probably heard of, of theory of constraints, right. And I'll give this holistic look at, at TOC, right.

And I like TOC for whatever it's worth. TOC was originally brought up in the nineties by the Air Force Institute of Technology. It didn't take right when they tried to first push that concept. It's catching some good steam. There's some great use cases out there now at bases like McConnell.

There's a few other out there too that have got some, some great ways of kind of moving with the smoothest fast, fastest smooth. But it's only half of what Tesseract is. The other half is essentially special projects. folks who are trying to champion the stuff that's out in the field. and finding the stuff that's going to help be a force multiplier and champion and empower airmen.

So,

**Maj. Paul Lentz:** Tesseract's not a program, it is a place, right? So, it's, it's basically the spark, I think, spark at the air directorate. If I'm saying, yeah, spark it, it's the spark at the air directorate. It's a group of people who are trying to figure out things. And they've kind of pushed this theory of constraint stuff on us for some of our major issues in the wing.

**TSgt. Taylor Mogford:** I'd even say really the same for Morpheus, which for the uninitiated is kind of like Tesseract at A1. They're really pushing talent management, some other stuff in terms of working groups to kind of look holistically across the other directors as well. But there's so much out there.

**Maj. Paul Lentz:** There's probably a few more. Morpheus I know had a pretty good YouTube channel and I think a podcast that they would do. Tesseract definitely has a podcast that they do pretty, pretty regularly. They're pretty active on LinkedIn and they have their LOA. Association that they, they work out through there's the rapid development office, which I think is also kind of in line with Tesseract.

It runs around and tries to figure out better ways to do things.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** And then theory of constraints for the uninitiated.

**Maj. Paul Lentz:** let me see if I can summarize this fairly quickly. All right. If you looked at a process, like how to build a car and you figured out, okay, well, if I, this, this is hard to explain in a short time, but if I figure out a pain point, cause this one bin always gets full, well, I just get a bigger bin.

Cool. I might've, I might've solved that problem in that one particular line. Theory of constraints kind of does that, but on a massive level and looks at a bunch of systems and says, not only where your pain points. And where are your constraints, which is where it all comes from. so say you're trying to, all right, here's a good one.

We need so many people in the air force. Okay, so I either have to keep so many people per year or have to recruit so many people per year. Both of those are constraints. If I only focus on one of those constraints, I'm only working on part of the problem. But if I, the theory would be that I'm working on using both of those constraints at the same time and then balancing to figure out which one works out the best.

So that's kind of what Tesseract was coming down here to use for some of our other issues and kind of looking at a bunch of different systems and supply. I always want to blame supply for a lot of things and they'll probably, they'll probably agree with that, but I

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** think supply does always catch some of the burden because they usually live off somewhere else from where you're working.

And so, you know, they make a good boogeyman for, for the average member of the military, especially when you

**Maj. Paul Lentz:** go out to an airplane, you're like, it's broken. They're like, yeah, but I got the part on order and it's going to be here like in two weeks, or they say it's going to be here when it gets here.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** bringing it back to the task ord, the transforming for the future line of effort, Major Lentz, I know you said it feels like it's moving in the right direction, but maybe the jury's still out on if it is what it needs to be. Sergeant Mogford, how about you? Do you feel like the transforming for the future line of effort is resonating from your foxhole or your perspective?

**TSgt. Taylor Mogford:** Yeah, so I'd say I'm cautiously optimistic, right? It feels like a. Approach to continue with General Brown put in place, which is the accelerate change or lose, right? And if you're not smart on on that, please, please go read up on that, right? Please go read up on those, those action orders, because those are still very real and in moving and they're alive, right?

I'd say, unfortunately, and it's almost ironic, right? We talk about bureaucracy at the air directorate level. It's fantastic. it has never been easier to communicate with an air directorate, which is weird to say, right. And it's still somewhat within your, your middle agency within the enterprise, kind of tough.

Right. I think it's, it's really easy at the bottom right now. As an amateur just to tinker, I think it's really easy to be stuck at the Pentagon, ironically, and tinker, but we've got to figure out how to, to get CNCOs to own this, how to get your, seasoned tech sergeants, how to get our, our seasoned company grade officers on board, right?

And I think once we figure that out, I think that's when the magic is going to really start happening. that's, we've got to get past that.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** Perfect segue into where I wanted to take the conversation next is, you know, any idea, no matter how good it is, is always going to have its detractors, its non believers.

So as to service members who are out there working on innovation, what do you say to those who are skeptics, doubters who aren't bought in yet?

**Maj. Paul Lentz:** my first thought is the airplane was deemed to be. Something not viable and I would never work and never go forward and never change the face of warfare where the air force, they were

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** obviously wrong,

**Maj. Paul Lentz:** but there's a thousand projects that have failed and it will point to each and every one of them.

And there was a, there was a point like you can't just try everything. Everything does have to be done with some kind of sense of, not constraint, but, Keep it realistic, keep it realistic, keep it pragmatic. But half of the job, I think, or maybe even 90 percent of the job is just convincing people that an idea is good and should work.

And they're like, well, it didn't work in the 80s when we didn't have the technology or the people or the guy, the right people in place. So it obviously can't work now. But I'm like, Don't have horse and buggies and we drive, we fly airplanes and everybody said those things would never change too. So perseverance again, is the message on that one.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** Sergeant Mogford. I'm sure you ran into some detractors on that Africa award winning process improvement path. What did you say to them when they tried to shut you down? If they tried to shut you down or maybe change the direction of your project?

**TSgt. Taylor Mogford:** Yeah, of course. So, I mean, here's the magic of the Spark cell, right?

And the magic of having an LNO. We had brought that to the rest of that QA section to, you know, Sandy check it, right? It's good to do a dress right dress before you take things to a higher level in it. Definitely wouldn't say, you know, don't not do that. Right. But, you know, we, I want to say that QA section, maybe less than a fourth were really on board.

And the answer really was, well, there's a demand signal here at a match com. So I want to give you the chance to champion this and have a chance to take ownership and accountability to craft the senior likeness where you think it should, because this is your, your area of expertise but we're going to push it regardless, so which is really what we did.

And obviously there's a good demand level out there and there's a good reception for it. So I'd say, you know, try it out, come up with the, with an MVP, which is a you know, a minimal viable product, come up with something you can show and test and try to break it. It's okay to fail. Like Major Lentz is saying, most of this stuff does fail, but it's the lessons you learn.

That we can take from for the next challenge or the next fight, right? And so, you know, you'll fail nine times to get to that 10th one being a win So don't don't let that detract you but you know test that out come up with a prototype And if all else fails just come see us because we'll be able to trust or address you We'll be able to validate that.

There's a demand signal heck We can probably talk to your folks too and try to understand where some of that nays coming from hearing knows actually You want to know where's that resistance going to come from. And the earlier you can get to it, the better it is because it's better to hear no in the shop and let them tear it apart and let's make something bulletproof, whether it's a great after action or if it's something that sees the light of day.

Either way, we're learning together as a team, right, and that boosts team cohesion, .

**Maj. Paul Lentz:** Yeah, and thinking about that, like, not every no is a bad no. Sometimes it's like, this is not a good idea because of X, Y, Z. Oh, cool, now I know that. Let's go fix it. We'll go back to the drawing board, we'll fix it, then we'll go back up.

**TSgt. Taylor Mogford:** 100%. I mean, maybe it was a no, and you look at our enterprise, right, really we have the unique capability to build knowledge and retain it. And you look at other wings, I'm proactive and, you know, maybe you've got a good commander for two years and they're gone. You maybe have a great NCO for two, three years, maybe four and they're gone.

Like there's a lot of lessons and institutional knowledge we can build and keep in this wing and absolutely just make us rock stars. So I think that's, that's really where, in a weird sense, the innovation ecosystem is almost. Uniquely beneficial to us more than is anybody else because we've got these, these elements where we can prototype and have this comfort zone to fail within to really build something excellent.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** So I think we've talked a good deal about how the way things are, but I think there's also a good intellectual exercise in talking about the way things should be. So as to members working on innovation pretty much on a daily basis. What would you like to see as far as a good innovation environment?

When will you feel like, okay, we're really in a good place now when it comes to innovation?

**TSgt. Taylor Mogford:** Who that's, that's a tough one to tackle, right? And I feel like we'll both have very different answers here, but really I'd like to see in everyone's training plans where they've got maybe one or two initiatives to go after to just find how we can get 10, 30 percent better, right?

And it could be process improvement, it could be removing redundancy, it could be a policy change, right? Like, policy changes aren't that bad. Like, I saw a team out of Kadena in less than 14 months change the defense travel regulation. Which, to my knowledge, the last big change came after like 9 11. So you think about the impact and the weight it took the last time, it's much easier now, right?

I'd say I'm a, I'm a sucker for whiteboards, right? Show me a whiteboard with some crazy thoughts put on it. They don't need to be super concise, but as long as you understand it, show me that you've got hopes and dreams and you've got some, some hard action steps to try to see that through an experiment.

It could be something as simple as, Hey, what if we tried X in this process? It could be anything within your, your world, right? Where you say, if I could only do this, then I could do this, right? So there might be some mad living happen there, but just people getting after it. It doesn't have to be pretty.

It doesn't have to be perfect. And I think that's, what's magical about it. Especially when we look at the constraints we live under, it's just getting the thoughts out there.

**Maj. Paul Lentz:** Probably my biggest one would be if, as long as the culture continues to exist, where. We're empowered to do the things that we need to do. And that's probably the best part about being an airman is that's kind of the job, right? It's always continuously making everything better for yourself, for the country, for whatever.

So if we have that if the culture is continuously changing, which is kind of what it's evolving into, and instead of this, we can never do it because this is the way it's always been. It's a, all right, we all have the tools now to change things. And if we have a little bit of training on how to do it, if we have a little bit of buy in from everybody at every level, If they see that the culture is, hey, so and so does have a good idea and it could, it could be come to good fruition and then we have the support and the tools that are available for us to continue to do that.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** So on that point, you hear from Washington a lot that we need to keep up with China. We need to keep up with Russia. Those are

the adversaries that are always named, right? And there's concern, perhaps a lot amongst a lot of the higher echelons of the military that we are not moving at the right pace, innovation wise, to keep up with those adversaries.

From your positions, would you agree with the assessment that innovation isn't where it needs to be right now to keep up with the named adversaries?

**Maj. Paul Lentz:** Are we doing enough to do the things that we need to do? I think we're trying. I don't think we'll ever do enough, really, right? A lot of the problems that we have, and well, let's kind of get to the crux of a couple of things, is a lot of times we just move at the speed of government.

And that's kind of a bad point on ours. One of our biggest issues, and I think anybody in this space would agree, is our acquisition process is woefully broken. And this has been announced from any time I go to an event or whatever. And half the time, I think that's what, not even half, probably 95 percent of the time, I think really what we're trying to do is fix that acquisition process.

Cause there's a lot of rules in place and they're built to protect the budget and the processes and make sure we're spending it correctly and all those good things. But then we've tied our hand behind our back to spider face. I think I'm mixing metaphors there, but so if we can fix our acquisition process so we can get the things that we need, and that's a lot of what innovation kind of does and that sometimes that's like, how do I innovate and get a better process or like just a new app for my iPad all the way up to.

What they're trying to do now, which is how do I buy thousands upon thousands of drones in the, one of the projects I have to overwhelm our enemy, if that's the case, But figuring out all those acquisition processes and how they actually work has been the biggest challenge. And I'll probably mention later some of the things that have come about that have helped us with fixing that.

But it's probably a wordy question to a, to a big answer that probably could be its own paper, to be honest with you.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** Sgt. Mogford, your thoughts on room of defense, if you will?

**TSgt. Taylor Mogford:** Yeah, I think we've got to call a spade a spade, right? That's, that's the situation I think we're in. And I think Major Luntz hit the nail on the head there.



I'll, I'll have to, it's such a broad topic. And such a pain point, right? Especially where we're at with things now out there and what the landscape looks like. So I would say, you know, there's a great army colonel from army futures that said something that's resonated with me. And so I'll use his words since he put it poetically, we have from now to the next conflict to be ready.

That could be tomorrow. That could be years from now. That could be whenever, but at this point, you know, as a country, we primarily lived in a landscape where there's been a conflict. Right. And. There's, there's been some, some great army buddies and major loans, and I were talking about this on the way here, but I don't believe there's ever been a conflict.

We trained for, and then fought that exact conflict. And I hope that's the case here because we're woefully unprepared. However, that's also scary because we could be woefully underpaired for wherever the next fight looks like. So, you know, you look at, the big elephants in the room, right?

You look at, China, which, you know, we will, we look at UAS, we, we MQ 9 and Reaper. The heck out of people. We could do that real good. We can do kinetic conflict pretty good. However, we're still postured for mass. We're still postured to move as a big machine and much of what you could argue is more of a Cold War error.

And, you know, in an innovation ecosystem with folks at stuff such as replicator currently just came down, we've been to some collider events. We fought this last big conflict in mass, like it was the Cold War. And there's some, we really need to pull from those lessons because we're not going to necessarily be afforded the same opportunity to fight that next one the same way, which the good news is we've got great people.

We've got the people for it. We just need to figure out how to tie into those thoughts. So I'm a project manager. I run a project management office during the day. I'm a TR, right? So I'm here because all this stuff is extremely important to me because it's just such a force multiplier, right? But I'll say this assumptions I had to learn as a project manager.

I know the military, you hear assumptions, you're automatically coming to the assumption of what you're going to do with that. Assumptions as a project manager has been magical for me, right? You oversee trades, you oversee facets and SMEs where you have no idea like how their world operates. And so I've been able to use assumptions.

By letting them be known so that I can learn and get better. So so long as we can drive this culture where people can let their assumptions be known On how we might be able to get better or what if we did this or hey this process or why do we do it this way? I think we need to champion some of that and allow ourselves to use it for two reasons, right?

For one people are talking with us. So then see if my everyone want to come and ask me questions That means they're willing to come to me, right? So great i'm going to have a more enriching feedback when we come for performance reports and we can drive future ncos and senior ncos of tomorrow golden, but the second thing is Might be able to find something real, some hidden gem that we might be able to take a second look at.

But you know what, I think he might be onto something there. Why don't we look at that. Why don't you go, hop in vision. Let's teach people how to fish, right? Hop in vision, type in some buzzwords like you would if you were going to control find in the AFI on pubs, right? And see if there's some merit to that.

And if there's not, that's okay too. Why, why do you think we need this, right? And let's, let's test that out. So we've got to figure out How to be more susceptible to going from a, what used to be a one mistake Air Force. Be willing to be a little bit more vulnerable. And I think, you know, from a wing standpoint, I think we're there.

I think we've got some great leaders. I think we've got the right people. Now it's just, it's time for us at those middle levels down to pick up the baton and be like, I see you, I got you. I'm going to, I'm going to go take this in. I'm with it.

**Maj. Paul Lentz:** I'll jump on that a little bit too. So I think one of the things is a lot of people do get gunshy cause they've been burned in the past.

They've seen that one mistake and leadership has not supported them or whatever. And then we have this, you cannot fail mentality. So, yeah, I'm not saying go out and do anything illegal, but, you know, as long as we can encourage our airmen to say, Hey, man, let's, let's try something and I'll support you and I got your back and I'll take the risk for you.

That's, that would be good to ask and say for, for him and like, Hey, it's, it's okay. We can do this. We can try. Let's go ahead and go, go try. Let's just try. So, because a lot of people are still burned and afraid to even try because they've, they just have been burned in the past and I just said that like 15 different ways.

**TSgt. Taylor Mogford:** Yeah, I mean, even try to 10 X that, like, we've got the ability. To say time out when something's not safe, right? What's keeping us from saying, doing the same thing, timeout. Is this the best way to do this? You've heard of the hot wash, the after action review, the retrospective. Why can't in the mid of us doing an action or a task.

Can we say, Hey, how do we think this is going before we complete this thing? You know, you don't want to lose those thoughts as they happen because people do have some real thoughts, but when there's pain, people will express pain pretty real and pretty genuine and how they, and how they message that and it's skills for the audience of just how painful it is and what that sounds like when they express it.

So, you know, why don't we start doing some during action or during action reviews, instead of waiting till that thing to elapse or eclipse itself. Let's get in the habit of that.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** The last part of this three part series will be coming to your podcast feed in the weeks ahead. Please make sure to subscribe or follow our podcast on whichever platform you prefer so you can get the newest episodes and updates right to your feed. Some quick announcements before we go. Airmen, please be advised the wing will be conducting an exercise during and after the upcoming February UTA in the area around Hangar 826.

A reminder to all who bought tickets, the Wing Annual Awards Banquet is Saturday night of this upcoming UTA. If you are set to deploy soon, there will be a pre deployment briefing Saturday, February 3rd from 09 to 1130 at Building 910 in the CE Conference Room. And if you are getting ready to retire soon, Military and Family Readiness will be hosting a virtual pre retirement workshop.

Sunday, February 4th, from 08 to noon. Check your military emails for details on how to sign up. And finally, we want to congratulate our 2023 Quarter 4 award winners. The list of winners is posted on the Wing Facebook page and was emailed out.

That's all we have for you on this episode of Ready, Set, Airlift!

Thanks for joining us. Remember to send us an email to [airliftpodcasts at gmail.com](mailto:airliftpodcasts@gmail.com) with any feedback or suggestions about the show. Until next time, I've been your host, Julian Hernandez. Stay safe and stay sharp.