

The Army Learning Coordination Council as a Change Catalyst

Exportable Educational Change Management for the Twenty-First Century

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Abstract

The Army learning enterprise is geographically dispersed and is among our nation's largest training and education organizations, surpassing in scope and scale most educational institutions in the number of students and in its impact across the workforce of the U.S. Army. Given the changing dynamic of the current operational environment, change within the learning enterprise is a constant. Army University, however, has a responsibility to adapt to this changing environment while maintaining the rigor of military training and education. Using the principles of organization design's change management, this article examines how Army University is able to make meaningful and timely change while maintaining relevancy and rigor of curriculum.

As noted in the executive order that brought it into existence, "Army University is not a brick and mortar structure; it is a virtual, distributed, constructive, and collaborative learning environment encompassing existing Army education institutions. The Army University connects professional military education [PME] institutions across the Army into a single educational structure."¹ With a charter that impacts the learning opportunities for over three hundred thousand adult learners annually, Army University requires an adaptable change engine that preserves the rigor required from today's PME while leveraging technology and methods that support the modern Army. The Army Learning Coordination Council (ALCC) could provide just the needed engine for Army University, which has a vast and diverse student population in many different subelements and institutions.

The Army Learning Environment

To set the stage for envisioning the ALCC as Army University's governance forum, we first frame the prospective relationship as it pertains to the overall Army learning environment. The *U.S. Army Learning Concept for 2015* describes the Army's learning model as one of continuous adaptability. To achieve the purposes of this model, the Army developed two goals and resourced the means to achieve them.

The first goal was to improve "the quality, relevance, and effectiveness of face-to-face learning experiences through outcome-oriented instructional strategies that foster thinking [and] initiative, and provide operationally relevant context."² The second goal was to create an Army culture of lifelong learning. To help achieve these goals, the Army planned to connect its thirty-two resident educational institutions to the global operating force through the use of improved technology at the same time it implemented instructional methodologies designed to leverage the technology to achieve the desired learning and educational outcomes. Concurrently, the learning concept described the addition of greater rigor to the implementation of the learning model through frequent learner assessments. Such assessments were intended to drive change and allow the Army to gauge its level of success in goal attainment.³

Army Adult Education Overview

The Army operates one of the largest adult education programs in the world in a system that conducts training at each phase of the career cycle of every soldier, from accession as a new member of the Army throughout the remainder of his or her career.⁴

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Almost every month, the Army takes in almost ten thousand new enlisted service members as well as officers through the United States Military Academy, various Reserve Officer Training Corps programs, and direct commissions, all of whom require basic branch or military occupational specialty training as well as other specialty training.⁵ Beyond basic qualifying training, every service member undergoes additional training at each juncture of career advancement. As a result, each year, over half a million soldiers are trained at thirty-two Army training and educational institutions located throughout the Nation.⁶ Given the size of the Army, the Army Reserve, and the Army National Guard, this equates to roughly a quarter of Army-affiliated military personnel trained annually.⁷ In addition to schoolhouses, the Army has invested heavily in technology to develop its long-distance learning capabilities through the internet, which now enables soldiers to obtain training anytime and anywhere there is a need to learn.⁸

The Army as a Leader in Developing Adult Education

As one of the Nation's largest educators of adults, the Army has significantly modified its learning strategy regarding curriculum and faculty development, incorporating the principles of adult education to cultivate an Army culture of lifelong learning.⁹ One result is that the Army has moved away from a large class-size, lecture-based conveyance of curriculum to a small-group, facilitated-discussion methodology. This approach capitalizes on integrating the learner's personal experiences with military concepts and sharing them with other learners. Similarly, the Army has moved away from a content-centric curriculum to a learner-centric educational process.

A review of Army educational research and literature highlights an increasing understanding and employment of the learner-centric approach.¹⁰ For example, several years after incorporating the adult education principles into its training and education, the Army assessed itself and concluded, "Soldiers and Army civilians who develop training and education must consider future learner capabilities and needs."¹¹ To meet this internal challenge, the Army sought to combine the outcomes of self-directed learning, institutional training and education, and personal experience. While each of these Army education components integrate their assessment methods, the true measures of quality education and training remain the progressive development of individual soldiers prepared for positions of greater responsibility and the overall readiness of the soldiers' units. Therefore, the *Army Learning Concept* calls for inventiveness and advances in learning technologies and methods to meet the stated goals of mission readiness.¹²

While the Army has already adopted a more holistic approach to educating soldiers through the establishment and resourcing of Army University to codify learning strategies and goals, the question remains whether it has done so effectively. Has it established Army University in such a way as to serve as a catalyst for change in an academic environment? This article proposes that it has and provides

concrete examples of relevant outcomes. It proposes a strategy that could be adopted by other academic institutions and learning organizations seeking adaptability in an ever-maturing learning environment.

Army Learning Coordination Council (ALCC)

After nearly two decades of war, the Army understands the criticality of adaptive and agile soldiers, combat organizations, and home-based institutions. The Army's central warfighting function, mission command, has as one of its tenets, "building cohesive teams through mutual trust."¹³ While research indicates that trust among individuals and their supervisors correlates to proximity, the same research indicates this may not be true for organizations.¹⁴ While proximity appears to aid in the building of trust, when subordinates are physically separated from their parent organizations, trust may be established when the subordinate examines the accomplishments of the higher organization.¹⁵ Given the geographical dispersion of Army's centers of excellence and the Training and Doctrine Command's (TRADOC) schools, consideration should be given so that the trust created through knowledge of accomplishment may serve as an enabler to achieve organizational adaptability within TRADOC.

An example of the application of mission command and the building of cohesive teams through trust is the ALCC. The ALCC and its subordinate committees have served as a multilevel, cross-functional virtual gathering space since 2011 for the Army's centers and schools to realize the implementation of the learning model. Army University, in partnership with TRADOC, utilizes the ALCC to codify the effectiveness of PME, ensuring it is sequential and progressive, and providing the desired knowledge and skills at the right place and time. For example, in 2017, the ALCC began examining the process for assessing and approving course growth initiatives, highlighting the forum's utility in ensuring rigor in PME courses while also simultaneously ensuring all avenues to change the courses, other than growth, have been exhausted.

Certainly, course growth within TRADOC has been managed prior to the establishment of the ALCC, and many of the ALCC's accomplishments would have been successfully achieved had the ALCC not been chartered. In fact, three forums that the ALCC may move an item to for resource consideration—the Army Profession Leader Development Forum, the General Officer Steering Committee, and the TRADOC Commander's Forum—all predate the ALCC. Chartering the ALCC provides regular engagement opportunity with senior leaders across TRADOC and is built upon preceding successful processes. The value of the proliferation of proven processes coupled with the regular engagement of TRADOC's corporate leadership results in increased collaboration across boundaries, shortened decision and innovation cycle times, and an increased ability to leverage best practices.¹⁶ The ALCC's committees and subcommittees have created a virtual, matrixed organization capa-

ble of supporting the implementation of strategy, facilitating the flow of work, and permitting effective managerial control.

Educational Change Management

The ALCC achieved success through the establishment of committees and subcommittees as a quasi-matrix organization. Matrix organizations combine the unit structure and functional structure of an organization to increase cooperation and communication across organizational silos, to respond quickly to changes in the environment, and to deliver work across the organizations more effectively.¹⁷ While the ALCC crosses organizational and functional boundaries, the challenge has typically been in achieving the mindset and culture necessary for the matrix entities to achieve their desired outcomes.¹⁸

In the case of Army University, the autonomy of the centers and schools can present a conflict of loyalty between the functional representative and the ALCC project leads. The centers and schools have a general-officer-level command structure and are rightfully empowered to develop the best training and education opportunities for their respective branches and warfighting functions. However, these programs must reflect the overall guidance provided by the Combined Arms Center (CAC) and TRADOC to establish a coordinated educational baseline that promotes readiness across the force. Likewise, project development such as an enterprise library system or the alignment of vocational certifications can prove difficult due to the independence of each center and school.¹⁹ Matrix organizations, however, have been shown to overcome these hurdles when three conditions exist. First, the team—or in the case of the ALCC, the committee—needs to embrace multiple areas of focus such as technology and student requirements. For example, a registrar committee focuses on the inherent technology associated with modern registrar systems and the desire to achieve a trusted Army transcript for every soldier.

Second, work must be especially complex or interdependent. Using the registrar example, the committee must integrate the upcoming fielding of future Army information systems, the integrity of data in a registrar system, and the disparate registrar systems currently in use across the learning enterprise.

Third, resources need to be shared for maximum efficiency.²⁰ In the Army's learning enterprise, centers and schools are resourced and empowered to act with autonomy in regard to their student population and to their respective warfighting function. While this third condition for high-performing matrixed organizations may prove elusive, the trust established through the execution of mission command has likely offset the seeming absence of this third condition. The evidence is in the outcomes and initiatives of the ALCC.

Each organizational design has inherent advantages and disadvantages.²¹ To offset any of the three aforementioned conditions necessary to overcome organizational

silos, organizational designers employ lateral capabilities. Lateral capabilities enhance the connections between groups or divisions, in this case, among the centers and schools comprising the learning enterprise. Lateral processes help organizations share information across boundaries. There are five kinds of lateral capabilities: networks, lateral processes, teams, integrative roles, and matrix structures.²²

Networks. The first two lateral capabilities, networks and lateral processes, can occur naturally.²³ In regard to the committees and subcommittees of the ALCC, members participating in committees bring with them their respective networks and lateral processes. The ALCC committees combine the individual networks of the members and create a powerful lateral capability. This combination of networks begins to break down the silos of information among the centers and schools thereby creating a momentum of information sharing that effects change in what might have otherwise been a rigid organization.²⁴

An example of this capability would be the library enterprise initiative. Each center and school within TRADOC collects and maintains a library of curated resource sets as well as information regarding their community's unique capability and organizational history. These resources exist in a variety of formats including print, electronic, audio, and video; in addition, resources are both owned and leased by the libraries.

Over the past twenty years, these library staffs worked hard to digitize print materials to make discovery easier and better enable research. The curation and digitization work occurred under the autonomy of the schools. As a result of this locality of effort, access to library resources is restricted to the respective geographical location, limiting the ability to conduct research crossing school boundaries.

When Army University was established in 2015, one of the initial tasks assigned was the creation of an integrated library enterprise system that would enable a researcher to discover resources owned and leased by all the enterprise libraries from a single search box from any geographical location.²⁵ Army University subsequently established the Library Enterprise Subcommittee under the ALCC's Learning Systems Committee. This subcommittee worked to identify and build a library management platform capable of digitally linking the libraries of TRADOC's thirteen centers of excellence.

As the subcommittee has moved the initiative forward, it has encountered a number of challenges. Primarily, it discovered that the knowledge and skills necessary to effect this change are not readily available to all libraries. The scarcity of this necessary human resource will require close engagement by Army University's Library Enterprise Division staff to provide technical support. The need to develop multiple communication channels to support a robust exchange of knowledge and information also needs to be addressed.

As a network of individual networks, the Library Enterprise Subcommittee is better able to handle these unforeseen shortfalls by capitalizing on the training, education, and experience of their members instead of attempting to resolve these issues

from a single frame of reference. Additionally, each member is aware of the effort and remains vigilant in identifying shortfalls and stumbling blocks early on to minimize the impact to implementation.

Another benefit to a robust network is the realization of yet unknown possibilities to further capitalize on the effort. For example, as this initiative moved forward, discussions were held with Installation Management Command regarding the possibility of integrating post libraries. While not thought of initially, combining libraries is now under consideration, demonstrating once again the power of networks.

Lateral processes. Lateral processes cross major organizational divisions and may also occur naturally. In business, lateral processes consider such things as a new product design and involve employees from across the company.²⁶ In the Army, the fielding of new information systems, as early as 2020, will impact soldiers across at least two major commands, the U.S. Army Forces Command and TRADOC. In the future, a single system could combine the functionality of multiple existing stand-alone training systems currently in use throughout the Army.

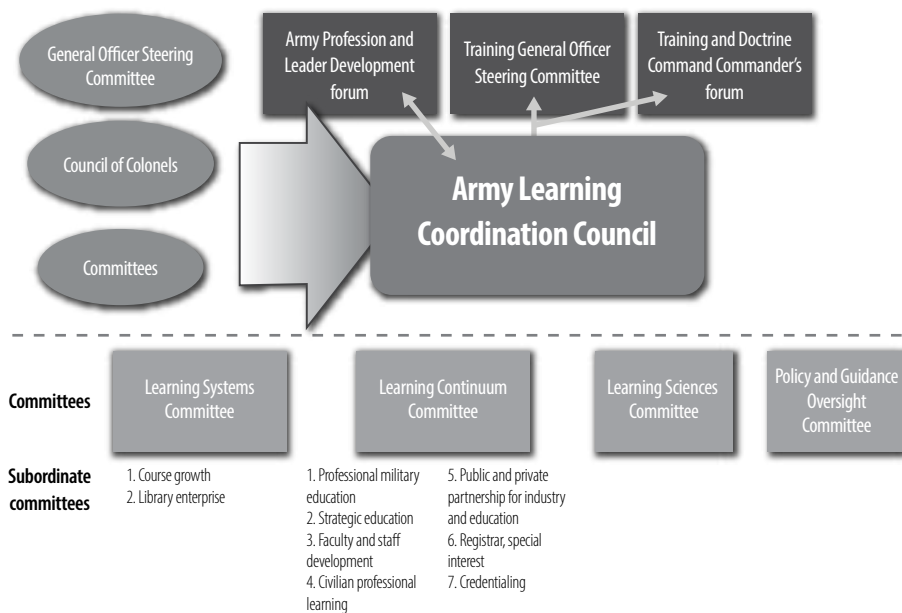
Given the breadth of this fielding across the Army, using the ALCC as a lateral process aids implementation by serving as a means to inform all stakeholders to include both soldiers and civilian employees. Whenever change is required internally or externally, organizations best position themselves to achieve a positive outcome when employees are informed, involved, and motivated to positively impact the transition.²⁷ The ALCC assists the fielding of new information systems through communication, education, and the broadcasting of goals and objectives.²⁸

The Army's vision in establishing an overall enterprise system accomplishes three tasks. The first is to close identified training system gaps. The second is to comply with the Department of Defense's data-sharing policy. Finally, the third is to reduce the Army training systems functional duplication and access points.

To achieve these tasks, the Army established the Requirements Control Board to discover, reduce, and eliminate redundant, obsolete, and unfinanced capabilities. Given the membership of the Requirements Control Board, it can also be considered a lateral process in bringing together the users of systems with the developers of systems.²⁹

At a previous meeting of the ALCC, however, it became apparent that the centers and schools were not all aware of potential fielding of new information systems. While any future system has equities in both Forces Command and TRADOC, the capabilities under development were not universally known to the senior leaders at the centers and schools. As a result, the ALCC coordinated with various system stakeholders with the goal of integrating the information systems planners and technicians with the faculty and staff to successfully achieve all three enterprise tasks.

As an outcome of this nascent lateral process, the Army University registrar and chief of the Registrar, Special Interests Subcommittee attended a coordination meeting at Fort Eustis, Virginia, in the spring of 2018. During that meeting, the registrar worked with other stakeholders to design a prototype event intended to mitigate the



(Figure by Vince Carlisle)

Figure 1. The Army Learning Coordination Council (ALCC) Committee Structure

risk of data migration between systems through research, data analytics, and gap analysis. That meeting should aid in the reduction of transactional and recording errors and inconsistencies in data across the learning system in support of eventual fielding of new information systems. This risk mitigation effort is intended to become a cost-savings approach; it will prepare data and yield analytics for integration, and it is expected to result in a prioritization of capabilities based upon learning needs within the Army. The Registrar, Special Interests Subcommittee efforts are expected to result in the capability to access all Army courses through a centralized hub, including other supportive information technology, thereby improving readiness and the reporting of leadership development and capabilities across the Army.

Teams. While networks and lateral processes can naturally occur in an organization, the other three lateral capabilities are elective, meaning members can be assigned based on knowledge, skills, roles, and responsibilities.³⁰ In the case of the lateral capability of teams, these teams are designed to cross functional lines. Members of lateral capability teams maintain their relationships in their division as well as those they build on the team.³¹ In the case of the ALCC, the committees serve as the learning enterprise's lateral capability teams (see figure 1).

LEARNING COORDINATION COUNCIL

Each of the ALCC committees has a unique role in Army University with respect to the development of the learning enterprise. The roles, while unique, are not exclusive and, in fact, the efforts of one committee can influence the initiatives of another. For example, the Learning Systems Committee's library enterprise initiative, once realized, will have a positive impact on the committee's development of research within the learning enterprise. The policies proliferated through the Policy and Governance Committee will likely impact the Learning Systems Committee's efforts regarding course growth and may also have an impact on the Learning Continuum Committee's registrar initiative.

The initiatives of the ALCC committees come from Army University's charter and the CAC commander's annual guidance, and they can be generated internally based on gap analysis. The committees' initiatives span the learning enterprise, and they are future oriented and complex. In the case of the registrar initiative, for example, each school has an independent registrar system. Some are software based, others are not. Each school conducts their registrar functions with autonomy. While the initiatives of the committees are complex, the desired outcome moves a committee into action—in this case, a registrar-certified transcript covering the career of a soldier. The committee initiatives drive the efforts of the committee members and compel the team. A compelling direction inspires the team to move forward and is shown to be one of three elements capable of enabling a diverse and geographically dispersed team to function as a high performing team. The two other elements are strong structure and supportive context.³²

While each ALCC committee has a compelling direction, they also have a strong structure. In the case of the Policy and Governance Oversight Committee (PGOC), the members represent each stakeholder across the learning enterprise. These representatives include members of the centers and schools, TRADOC divisions, and Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA). The PGOC has specified tasks and processes, and is responsible for the continuous improvement of the learning policy process. While large teams are more susceptible to poor communication, the PGOC maintains a web presence called the Training and Education Developer Toolbox and has a published agenda for their formal monthly meetings.³³

The third element of high performing teams is a supportive context. The efforts taken to ensure good team communication are the recommended means of establishing a supportive team context, while providing training is another means of creating a supportive team context.³⁴ The PGOC typically highlights a best practice from a center or school at its monthly meetings. During one meeting, it introduced the members to the new academic efficiency report and brought in a subject-matter expert to answer questions. Each time the PGOC added an element of training to its meeting, the PGOC chair received emails and phone calls lauding the effort.

Integrative roles. Integrative roles are the second elective lateral capability and are formal positions. The persons who fill these positions have the responsibility to

share information across the structure.³⁵ In the case of the ALCC, members of the Council of Colonels (CoC) and the General Officer Steering Committee (GOSC) perform this integration effort. The learning enterprise centers on TRADOC's centers of excellence, schools, and proponent offices, which function as open systems. While they are delineated by their physical environment, they are influenced by a larger environment acting upon them.³⁶ The environment acts upon the centers, schools, and proponent offices through new technology and orders from TRADOC and HQDA. The learning enterprise centers are also influenced by the changes in doctrine, organizations, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and policy. As the environment acts on the respective centers, schools, and proponent offices, problems crossing center, school, or proponent office boundaries can then be addressed by the ALCC committees.

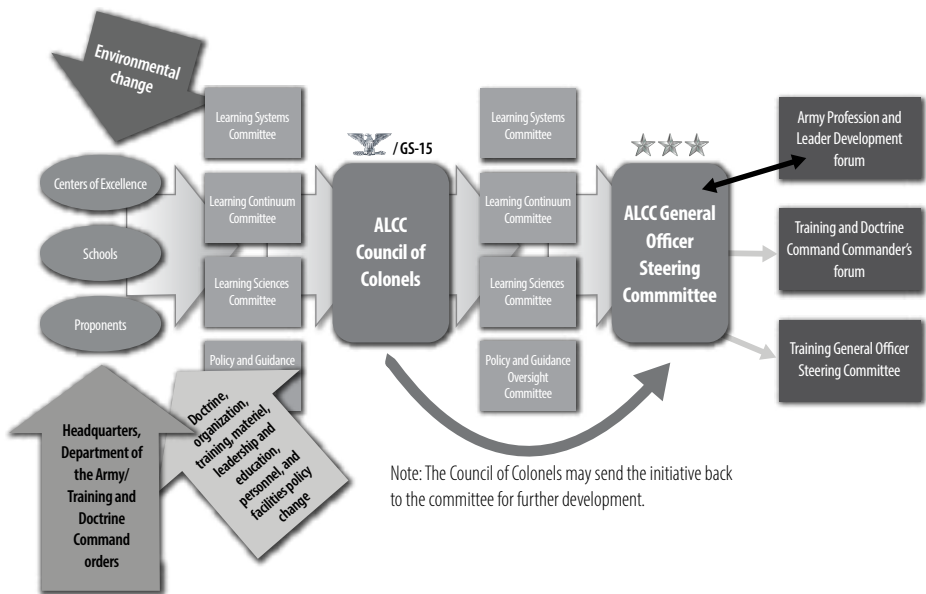
These committees bring the power of lateral capability of teams in developing and implementing solutions. They submit their proposals to the CoC for approval, and the CoC, acting in their integrative capacity, ensure the proposed solutions are adequately developed to ensure successful implementation. The CoC meets once per quarter and can either recommend a committee initiative be sent to the GOSC for approval or be sent back for further development.

Because of the CoC's pivotal role in the process, it is significant to note the composition of the ALCC's CoC. The primary membership is comprised of the directors of training (or equivalent) for each center and school. The CoC is cochaired by the TRADOC director for leader development and Army University's director for strategic policies and plans. In addition to the center and school directors of training, strategic staff section directors from the offices of the TRADOC deputy chief of staff for the G-1/4 (personnel and logistics) and the G-2 (intelligence) as well as from TRADOC's Quality Assurance Office sit on the ALCC's Council of Colonels. Members from the Combined Arms Center include the deputy chief of staff for the G-3/5/7 (operations, plans, and training), the G-8 (resource management), and the Army Reserve and National Guard.

The GOSC performs an additional integrative role by either approving the action for implementation or moving the action to a resource committee (see figure 2, page 119). In the case of the ALCC, the resource committees are the Army Profession Leader Development Forum, the TRADOC Commander's Forum, or the Training General Officer Steering Committee. In some cases, the GOSC may return an initiative to the committee for further development. The composition of the GOSC primarily consists of the center and schools commanders and commandants. The cochairs of the GOSC are the commanding general of CAC and the TRADOC deputy commanding general/chief of staff.

Transorganizational systems such as the ALCC have characteristics that can prove challenging, especially when change is considered continuous.³⁷ Hierarchy and structure are characteristic of Army organizations, and this hierarchy and structure

LEARNING COORDINATION COUNCIL



(Figure by Vince Carlisle)

Figure 2. How the Army Learning Coordination Council (ALCC) Works

cause member organizations to govern the conduct of their respective organizations without outside influence or assistance.³⁸ This has the potential to disaggregate the membership.³⁹ By increasing shared norms and values, as is accomplished in the ALCC committees, this disparity or independence of action can be overcome by enabling change.⁴⁰ In cases where members' interests conflict (e.g., ALCC leadership), acting in their integrative roles serves as a type of network choreographer.⁴¹ The structure of the ALCC itself appears to enable a process of continuous change as regards the Army's complex learning enterprise.

Matrix structures. The third elective lateral capability is a matrix structure. The concept of matrix structures dates back more than fifty years as organization designers attempted to compensate for the shortfalls of the unit structure and the functional structure. One characteristic of a matrix structure is that it shares resources.⁴² It would be a stretch to consider that any part of the ALCC organization is a matrix structure, but what is interesting is that some of the issues worked by the ALCC appear to have matrix structure characteristics. As was the case with the lateral capability teams, matrix structures optimize performance when three conditions are present.⁴³

The first is a pressure to focus on multiple areas. This condition exists within the ALCC area of responsibility—course growth. The schools must balance their functional training with Army common-core subjects. Course growth must take

into account all components of the Army, both active and reserve. Course growth requests must take into account performance in the operational force and require cost-based assessments. These elements require a depth of knowledge and understanding that are characteristic of a matrix structure and likely represent a “shadow” matrix structure.⁴⁴

The second condition is that the work is especially complex or interdependent. The description above demonstrates the complexity of course growth. The interdependence of course growth is demonstrated by the following constraints, bearing on course growth decisions, within TRADOC. Course growth requests must demonstrate that a thorough search for trade space has been exhausted or, if one exists, the use of it does not result in cost savings. An example would be that if one school desires to grow a course by three days, another school could consolidate curriculum and save three days that could then be applied to the school seeking growth. This condition tends to reveal itself in centers with more than one school. In addition to trade space, a single-day course growth requires the approval of the reserve forces. This approval is required due to the increase in funding for reserve force salary while attending a course.

The sharing of resources is the third and final condition required to optimize a matrix structure. This condition has been demonstrated in the previous description regarding trade space among centers. Ultimately, all course growth comes from TRADOC’s allocated funding. This condition, however, is not fully realized due to the geographic dispersal of schools. Schools typically do not share classroom facilities, which is typical of civilian institutions of higher learning. Schools also do not share faculty in the form of faculty exchanges, although it is worthy to note that faculty exchanges are an element of the ALCC’s initiative to increase academic partnerships. Overall, however, it could be claimed that the ALCC, operating at full capacity, is itself a matrix structure as it dissolves the traditional hierarchical and functional structures.⁴⁵

Conclusion

The dissolving of traditional structures within a university setting should be considered a strategic accomplishment for any university and could potentially serve as an example for nonmilitary university systems (e.g., state university systems). Regarding the application of lateral capabilities in a global context, there are examples of where the principals and theories of organization design have applied in other countries around the world.⁴⁶ It may, therefore, be possible for university systems in other countries to employ an ALCC-like capability to achieve the same goal as Army University in connecting geographically dispersed educational institutions into a more integrated educational structure.⁴⁷

In this regard, the ALCC appears to have served as a proof of concept, demonstrating the organization design principle of employing lateral capabilities to achieve efficiencies, increase innovation, and overcome organizational barriers.⁴⁸

The accomplishments of the ALCC already include a comprehensive instructor course and recognition program, an overhaul of the Warrant Officer Education System and Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development System, and a consolidation of hundreds of discrete general learning outcomes into just over a dozen. In the near future, the Army should realize a library enterprise system, begin fielding the Army Training Information Management system, and embark on proof of principal for an Army University-wide registrar system.

The future of the ALCC remains to be seen. However, if the research regarding organization design and associated lateral capabilities remain relevant within a military educational system, then the Army has achieved one of its goals in establishing Army University. ☞

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