

DSMC's Managerial Development Curriculum

Learning about Learning
Thinking About Thinking
Building Capacity to Improve

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By now, most of you reading this article have heard or read Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen's vision for the Acquisition Workforce of the future:

My vision of the acquisition workforce in 10 years is for a smaller workforce, in fewer acquisition organizations, that is engaged only in the inherently governmental functions of determining requirements; establishing and executing budgets; establishing contractual arrangements that can be accessed by users to meet their needs; overseeing those contracts to make sure that the work gets done within the performance, cost, and schedule needs of the government; and ensuring the maintenance of the public trust. This workforce will be organized to manage suppliers rather than supplies, and will focus on the total cost of ownership to provide and support high-quality goods and services to our warfighting men and women.

**Secretary of Defense
William S. Cohen**

Our Defense Systems Management College (DSMC) Managerial Development (MD) curriculum, which is one of the core subject areas taught in our Advanced Program Management Course (APMC), is specifically structured to develop acquisition managers who *can* and *do* think for themselves – managers who

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“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.”

—President John F. Kennedy

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will be fully capable of carrying out Cohen’s vision for the Acquisition Workforce of the future.

Individual Skills, Team Skills, Organizational Learning
Acquisition Reform is about change and managing change. Toward that end, the MD curriculum emphasizes learning about, and developing increased skills for, leading Integrated Product Teams — with a focus on managing change.

Highly experiential, the MD methodology also includes readings, lectures, and discussions, and emphasizes individual learning through concepts such as the Myers Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI) and the Profilor 360 Degree Feedback.

We also stress team skills, such as the dynamics of interpersonal relationship building; consensus; synergy; and promoting group problem solving/organizational learning in terms of values, vision, conflict management, change management, empowerment, and coaching. This approach allows work groups, and the section as a whole, to coalesce into a performing team in a short amount of time.

MD Project

Jim Clemmer, author of *Pathways to Performance*,¹ repeatedly implies that “You can’t build a team or organization different from you.” Taking that admonition a step further, a major portion of individual focus is each student’s MD Project, which is designed to enable students to build their capacity in a specific interpersonal or personal skill. To assess student progress and demonstrate student competency in MD, we use the MD Project, along with a multiple choice test.

The MD Project encourages participants to integrate theoretical learning with practical application in the classroom, on the job, and in their personal lives. This blend of theory and application allows students the opportunity to practice a new behavior or skill. Moreover, the project environment also provides an opportunity to work on topics that have personal relevancy and meaning

Based on my own philosophy of learning and my experience, I customized the generic MD Project to include generic goals for learning. These goals are prominently displayed on a slide I use to open every class: *Learning about Learning; Thinking about Thinking; Building Capacity to Improve*.

Thinking about thinking is a very different concept than merely *thinking*. Rolf Smith, in *The 7 Levels of Change*,² uses a Mindshift model to describe Innovation. Smith states that to get different (atypical) results, we must do things (approach solutions) differently; to do things differently, we must think differently (atypically); to think differently, we must think about our thinking (consider changing our approach to solutions).

Many styles of thinking are necessary to solve problems. Critical analysis, synthesis, and creativity are all parts of the thinking paradigm. The latest research on brain functioning provides new insight into the ways we think.

Most of us spend little time thinking about *how* we think or solve problems. One of the questions I ask APMC students is, "How do you solve problems?" I ask this question because although learning and thinking are individual processes, they play a heavy role in team functioning and success.

One of the guidelines for high-performance work teams is having a standard process for solving problems and encouraging the use of tools to gather objective data. Building a greater capacity to learn and think, in effect, increases one's own, personal toolkit. This then, is the practical subject matter for each lesson.

Understanding the importance of capacity building means accepting that you know your present capacity through a baseline assessment, and acting on that knowledge by setting personal target goals to reach a higher level of competency in a given area.

Besides using this philosophy as a theme, I find thinking in terms of "Purpose,

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Process, and Outcome" an effective method.

- **Purpose** includes the reason and aim for doing whatever you are doing; this means knowing *why* the topic is included in the curriculum, and the goals for its use.
- **Process** is *how* we will do whatever it is that we do: *How* will we use a vision state? *How* will we develop a team? *How* will I as a leader empower other team members?
- **Outcome** is the expected results. It answers the question, "So what?" and elaborates on "What is it that I expect to do as a result of this experience?"

I provide this background because it is within this context that students develop and execute their individual MD project. Because my philosophy of learning is heavily focused on performance results, I make every effort to link other APMC activities to daily work. I do this by continually emphasizing *how* the students will *do, think, or act*.

Joy of Learning by Discovery
One of the many benefits of working with APMC students is participating in their learning – hearing them say "Aha!" as they discover answers to their questions.

The MD project is a source of tremendous joy to me. (Sometimes when reviewing projects, I frequently shout with laughter at some of the clever statements and comments.) Because of the time the MD Projects cost students as well as facilitators, my department wrestles with including the project. Generally, it takes a minimum of 40 hours to review 31 projects and to conduct follow-on interviews.

Further increasing the students' and my own investment in time, I impose several requirements:

Although a "term paper" is not required, I do require a written project. The purpose for writing is twofold: I can provide students more value in terms of feedback if I have a written document on which to comment; and I can also think through the project with the student. (The latter purpose, admittedly, is a statement about my own personal learning style!) Writing also adds another dimension to the learning process by, in effect, enhancing retention. Additionally, the students create their own "how to" reference for the future.

I also require students to use a decision-making tool in their projects. Examples of using a decision-making tool in projects include using a Lotus chart to capture ideas; and using a Fishbone chart and the Five Why's to perform Root Cause Analysis. DSMC's current APMC (98-1) students also used Radar Charts (with encouragement from a classmate who had skill in using them) and Capacity Matrices more than previous classes.

Choosing a Topic
Because of the emphasis on personal capacity building, the MD Department waits until after students receive their Profilor 360 Degree Feedback (usually week four) before asking students to

make a decision on a specific topic for their MD Project.

Many students use the information from the Profilor and the MBTI to develop a major Learning Plan. Others take one topic that was listed on the Profilor as an "Area for Improvement" and assess present capacity, do research using the Learning Resource Center (LRC), and then practice some of the ideas.

An example of this is the skill of "listening." My spouse tells me that I am not a good listener. The Profilor confirms this trait. Students commonly start their projects with something along these lines. They choose a particular subject [listening] because they recognize [as I did] that their own listening skills need improvement. At DSMC, they have the opportunity to learn about listening [Learning Resource Center and Library] and to practice the skill of listening with a work group.

As a learning facilitator, I encourage those working on similar topics to share resources, ideas, and methods. This worked extremely well during APMC-98-1. Examples include two topics: assessing capacity for the new Senior Executive Service (SES) Executive Core Qualifications (ECQ) published by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM); and writing a Family Vision and Mission Statement.

SES ECQ Project

Seven or eight students in the Senior Section expressed interest in the ECQs. These students formed a research team to gather pertinent information. To begin, they gathered data from OPM and searched the Internet. The SES ECQs were then put into Capacity Matrix format. Collectively, the students sponsored a Brown Bag featuring a speaker from OPM.

Family Vision and Values Project

With the Family Vision and Values project, the students informally shared "how to" methodologies and resources. A highlight of this project was one student's discovery of a new tape on a subject by Stephen Covey.³ As a result, the Learning

Resource Center ordered copies for student use.

Transition Projects

Another project with notable results is the Transition Plan. Several types of transitions have been used as MD Projects. One is the transition from a military career to a civilian career; another is transitioning into a Command billet.

Students working on the Command Transition generally focus on learning about the new organization, assessing their capacity, and developing a Command Philosophy statement, complete with an outline of an implementation plan. The focus is on learning as much as possible about the present state of the organization, and then determining what legacy the students can leave. The action includes planning how to get to the desired end-state.

This plan is so robust and dynamic that students make follow-up visits to my office to continue working the plan during the rest of their stay at DSMC. I am most fortunate to have one student (97-2) who continues to share with me via E-mail, experiences and anecdotes in implementing the Transition Plan.

Still another is transitioning roles. Students working on the Family Visions and Values project combine information from the Profilor in terms of development, but they also use the Values, Vision, and Goals from other parts of the curriculum.

Most students involve their spouses and use formal exercises or decision tools to perform self-assessments and set goals.

A Transition Plan with a different twist was completed in APMC 98-1. The student personally wanted to transition from being a leader in a unit to being a superior "leader of leaders" for the entire organization. His project involved extensive baseline assessment of personal strengths; reading and research on leadership; and reviewing the lives of famous leaders by visiting historic venues such as Mount Vernon, Monticello, Manassas, and Kill Devil Hill.

Flexibility

If the MD projects are to be meaningful to the students, flexibility is an absolute *must* – flexibility in topic, in process, and in product. An example of flexibility in choosing the topic is the use of technical areas of study.

The purpose of the MD projects is to enhance interpersonal skills, not technical skills. However, once in a while, students really need to learn more about a technical area as part of a change process in their office. By going back to the *Learning about Learning; Thinking about Thinking; Building Capacity for Improvement* philosophy, flexibility can allow coverage of technical topics.

As an example, one student was in the beginning stages of a change process involving Activity Based Costing (ABC) and wanted to learn about ABC. During a discussion, we recognized the reason he needed to know about ABC was to develop strategies to implement ABC in his command. Working through this aspect, his project became "How to Implement ABC – the People Side of the Equation." He realized that managing the change process was as important as the technical aspects of ABC. He incorporated the Force Field Analysis decision tool into his project to analyze drivers and resisters. From this vantage point, he saw that internal communication was a key answer.

Another aspect of flexibility is the format of the product. Many of the projects are actual documents or tools.

An APMC 97-3 student wanted to learn more about leadership. Her project included reading and applying principles from Warren Blank's, *The 9 Natural Laws of Leadership*.⁴ The process she used involved Mindmapping®.⁵ She also used a Lotus Chart and then compared the two tools.

Next, she prepared an executive summary of Blank's ideas and how she would use them at her duty station. To complete her project, she made suggestions on using the Blank concepts and Mindmapping® in the MD curriculum.

So What?

While some students do the minimum requirements for the MD Project, most students impress me with the scope and detail of their projects. Many put time, effort, thinking, learning, application, and *heart* into the project.

Several have dropped by the office and said, "Here is my project. I just had to stop," because they became so involved, it was taking all of their time. Others write that they started the project as a "to do" requirement from the school and me; however, they finished it learning about themselves and gathering new ideas for building their capacity.

Some will say "I have been pleasantly surprised to realize that these techniques are, in fact, effective." Others discuss the difficulty with personal reflection...and yet praise how much they learned from the experience. Still others relate personal excitement and enthusiasm from the reaction they get when they take their Learning Plan, Capacity Matrix, or Portfolio on an interview.

The MD Projects allow me to serve the students as a coach and consultant. I provide references, contacts, ideas, and resources, thus adding more value to the learning experience. From the projects,

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I learn first-hand the realities of individual learning, teaming, and organizational challenges. I get great ideas from the students and build those into the curriculum. I get suggestions for books that I can pass to others.

Some former students put their ideas together and submit articles to *Program Manager* magazine. Other students present

their efforts in the DMSC Elective program (*Think 101* started out as a student project).⁶

With every class, I am impressed with the talent and dedication students display. But most of all I am thrilled to see their joy in learning and gratified to be a part of their learning experience.

REFERENCES

1. Clemmer, Jim, *Pathways to Performance* (Prima Publishing: Rocklin, Calif., 1995), p. 40.
2. Smith, Rolf, *The 7 Levels of Change* (Arlington, Texas: Summit Publications, 1997). Currently, DSMC uses this textbook in DSMC Elective 136, *Think 101*, taught by Navy Cmdr. Bill Olsen, Professor of Logistics Management.
3. Covey, Stephen R., "How To Develop A Family Mission Statement," Videotape #RE 41 (DSMC Learning Resource Center, 1997).
4. Blank, Warren, *The 9 Natural Laws of Leadership* (AMACOM: New York, N.Y., 1995).
5. Mindmapping® is DSMC Elective 313, currently taught by Dr. Al Beck, Professor of Systems Acquisition Education.
6. DSMC Elective 136, *Think 101*, taught by Navy Cmdr. Bill Olsen, Professor of Logistics Management, was originally Olsen's own MD project while attending APMC.

CLINTON NOMINATES DSMC FRIEND AND LONG-TIME SUPPORTER, "NORM" AUGUSTINE

Norman R. "Norm" Augustine, a long-time DSMC friend, supporter, and guest lecturer, is poised to add still another title to his impressive résumé. On March 3, 1998, President Clinton announced his intent to appoint Augustine as Principal Officer and Member of the Board of Governors of the American National Red Cross.

The Board of Governors of the American National Red Cross is the governing body of the Red Cross. The American National Red Cross is a humanitarian organization, led by volunteers, that provides relief to victims of disaster and helps the American public to prevent, prepare for, and respond to emergencies.

Augustine is currently Chairman of the Lockheed Martin Corporation in Bethesda, Maryland. A distinguished author, lecturer, and former Under Secretary of the Army, he is also a professor at Princeton University, a Trustee of Johns Hopkins University, a former President of the Boy Scouts of America, and a former National Chairman of the U.S. Savings Bond Campaign.

Augustine is co-author of *The Defense Revolution* and is best known throughout DSMC for his *Augustine's Laws*, printed in four languages, and his popular lecture, "A Day in the Life of a CEO."

