

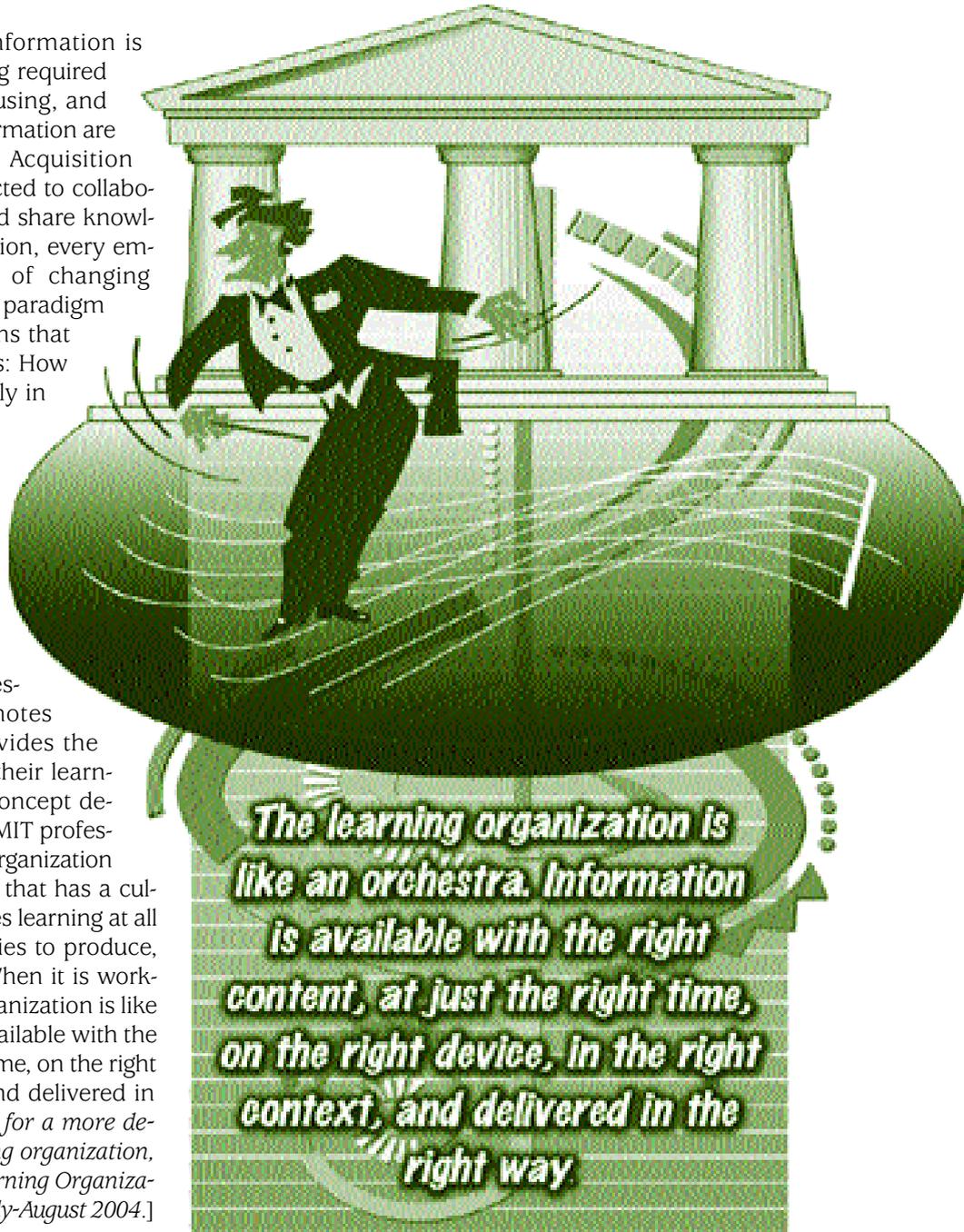
The Hanscom Learning Organization

A Solution for the Information Age

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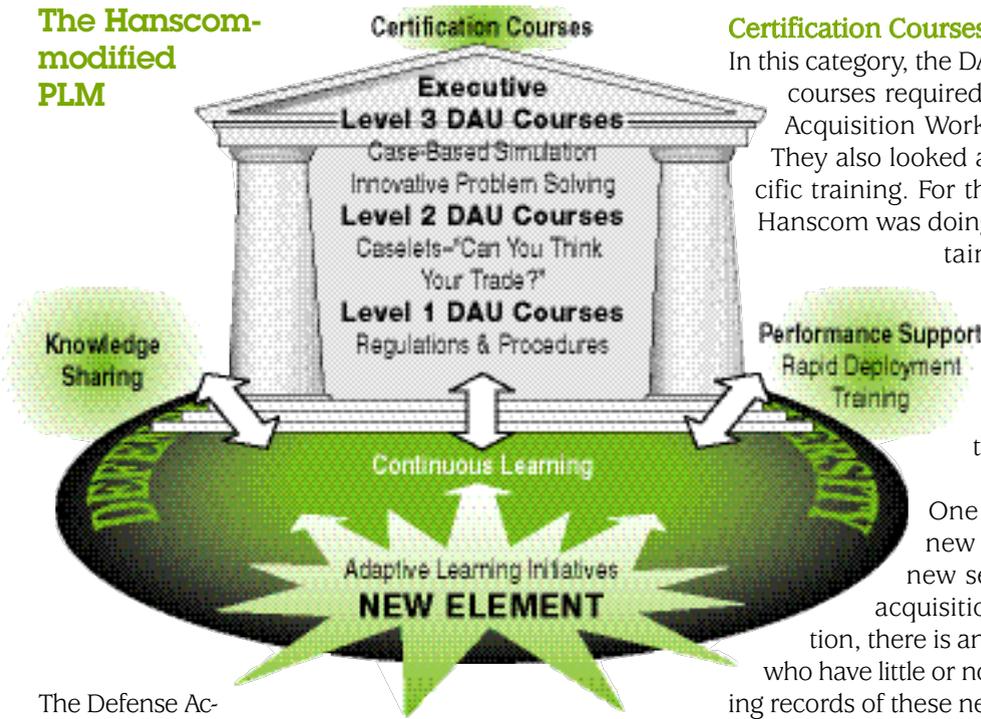
As more and more information is available and is being required on the job, finding, using, and sharing the right information are becoming tougher. Acquisition workforce members are expected to collaborate more, integrate better, and share knowledge more effectively. In addition, every employee is feeling the crush of changing guidance, policy revisions, and paradigm shifts. One of the key questions that many leaders are asking is this: How can we think and act differently in this new era?

Michael W. Wynne, the acting under secretary of defense (acquisition, technology, and logistics) (USD(AT&L)) has proposed a solution. One of his key objectives is to facilitate the development of learning organizations, a capabilities-based approach that promotes career-long learning and provides the workforce more control over their learning/information solutions. A concept developed in the early 1990s by MIT professor Peter M. Senge, a learning organization is essentially any organization that has a culture and structure that promotes learning at all levels to enhance its capabilities to produce, adapt and shape the future. When it is working effectively, the learning organization is like an orchestra. Information is available with the right content, at just the right time, on the right device, in the right context, and delivered in the right way. [Editor's note: for a more detailed explanation of the learning organization, see "DAU South Spearheads Learning Organization Initiative," Defense AT&L, July-August 2004.]



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The Hanscom-modified PLM



The Defense Acquisition University (DAU) has been working with several DoD organizations to implement model learning organizations. One of the more successful efforts has been with the Air Force Electronics Systems Center (ESC) on Hanscom Air Force Base (AFB), outside Boston, Mass. Air Force Lt. Gen. William Looney and then Air Force Lt. Gen. Charles L. Johnson, II, the last two ESC commanding generals, are enthusiastic supporters of training and education. They envisioned the learning organization as a way to improve work efficiency; to share information better; to develop flexible access to training; to encourage continuous learning; to marshal resources for solving problems; to increase options for learning; and finally, to make learning part of the every day office environment. This commitment from the senior leadership was critical to the success of the learning organization.

PLM Forms Basis for Hanscom Pilot

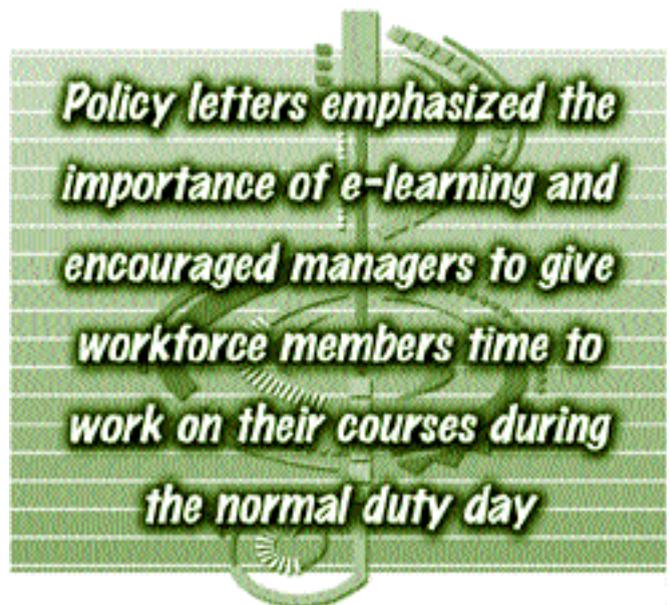
To accomplish those goals, DAU and Hanscom formed a cross-functional team. Members represented the training community, the acquisition workforce, and various functional disciplines. The players came from DAU, the support wing at Hanscom, and the headquarters of the ESC. This cross-organizational team enhanced organizational thinking and brought interaction to a higher level than before. Using the USD(AT&L)'s performance learning model (PLM), the team began building a pilot program. The PLM is a convenient and effective model to identify all the components of learning/information that are essential to establishing a learning organization. It identifies four large categories of efforts: Certification Courses, Knowledge Sharing, Performance Sharing, and Continuous Learning. *[Editor's note: see "The AT&L Performance Learning Model," Defense AT&L, July-August 2004.]*

Certification Courses

In this category, the DAU/Hanscom team looked at all the courses required for compliance with the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA). They also looked at all the required assignment-specific training. For the most part, the team found that Hanscom was doing well in this area. People were obtaining their required certification courses and assignment-specific courses; however, there were no locally required courses. It became apparent to the team that there was a need for some locally targeted training.

One example of this training involved new employees. Every year, over 150 new second lieutenants are assigned to acquisition positions at Hanscom. In addition, there is an annual influx of new civil servants who have little or no acquisition background. The training records of these new employees indicated that it generally took six months or more before they received their first acquisition training. The DAU/Hanscom team talked to many of the new employees and found that they felt they were under-utilized and ineffective during their start-up period. They simply didn't have enough information to be active players in the acquisition process, and the seasoned acquisition professionals didn't have the time to effectively mentor and guide the new folks.

As a result, the team developed the idea of an Acquisition Boot Camp course, a three-and-a-half day-long course for new acquisition employees within their first 30 days on station. It is a very basic introduction to acquisition policy, contracting, systems engineering, financial management, and other topics. The intent is to give the stu-



dents a generalized understanding of the acquisition process and the unique aspects of working at ESC. It provides them with enough information to support the work in their new offices and enables them to be more productive before their first DAWIA course. So far, Acquisition Boot Camp has received high praise from the students and their supervisors.

Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge sharing is where organizations conduct facilitated collaboration and coordinated information distributing. The DAU/Hanscom team found efforts in this category were barely on the radar screen. Most acquisition organizations look internally to solve their problems. They don't share their issues, problems, and concerns outside their offices or look externally for solutions. The team felt that a cultural change was in order.

As one of the first steps, the team established two small knowledge sharing organizations. Using volunteer labor and donated materials, the team was able to establish an e-learning center and an acquisition resource center. The Hanscom e-Learning Center is a central facility with computers, a server, and Internet access to online training, knowledge sharing systems, and communities of practice. It also provides such additional capabilities as a computer laboratory, an automated classroom, a simulation room, and a traditional classroom facility. The Acquisition Resource Center in the base library is a repository for books, periodicals, videos, and other acquisition-related materials, most of them available for checkout to the acquisition workforce. Both facilities are receiving popular support as people attempt to gather job-related information.

Performance Support

Another area at Hanscom AFB that needed emphasis was Performance Support. This category includes all the approaches available to management to enhance office productivity. It includes consulting, mentoring, coaching, facilitation, and tailored training sessions. The latter are timely training events designed to prepare an organization to do new work, such as source selection process training right before delivery of proposals. For select emerging initiatives, there is also rapid deployment training that provides targeted training to large numbers of people. The DAU/Hanscom team found that in the Boston area performance support was not always well represented.

Boston is a long way from the Washington, D.C., Beltway. New policies and process changes can be slow to filter down to the workforce here. The team realized that information on the new acquisition policy and the new resource allocation process simply wasn't being distributed. Hanscom needed to provide a convenient and cost-effective method to deliver that information. Using DAU core material, the team developed a series of tailored pre-

sentations on the changes. These presentations have been delivered to workforce members in program offices and to large cross-functional audiences. To date, over 700 people in the area have attended the briefings, and many others have reviewed the materials on the local Hanscom intranet site.

Continuous Learning

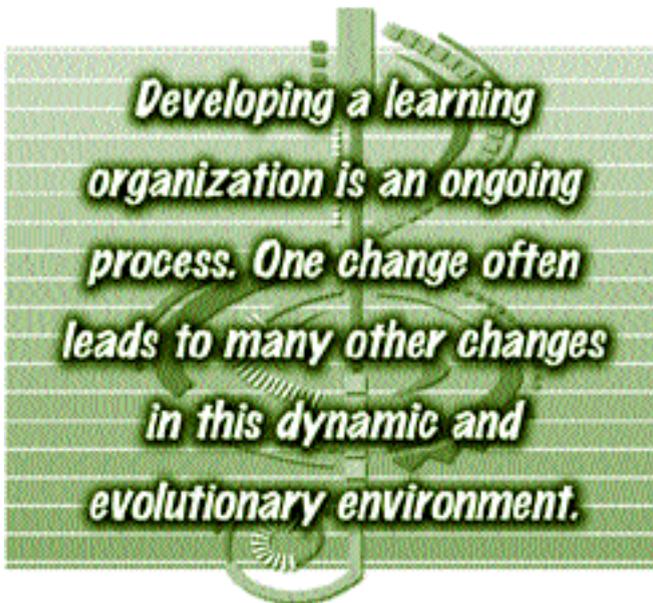
The Continuous Learning category includes all the efforts of acquisition people to maintain currency. It is driven by the Department of Defense mandate that acquisition workforce members must attend at least 80 hours of continuous learning every two years. At Hanscom, continuous learning has a presence, but it needs encouragements. Some offices do a great job of encouraging acquisition members to attend continuous learning opportunities; other offices do not. Overall, there is no systematic review of generalized needs, of methods of delivery, or of unique/local requirements. The team felt that they needed a consistent method to plan for and deliver continuous learning opportunities.

The result was the development of Integration Week, which is a bi-monthly effort to provide speakers on continuous learning topics. The speakers come from DAU, Hanscom AFB, local federally funded research and development centers, other government organizations, and from private industry. Speakers cover many topics in acquisition, general management, and operational issues. While most sessions last 90 minutes, some last for two days. Many employees fit several of the shorter sessions into each day of the Integration Week. During the most recent event, over 1,300 employees attended the 42 continuous learning sessions. Feedback from those employees noted the ease and convenience of meeting their continuous learning requirements in this structured environment.

The Missing Link: Adaptive Learning Initiatives

At this point the DAU/Hanscom team had substantially addressed all the categories of the USD(AT&L) PLM; however, the team was not done. They felt that at Hanscom something was still missing. They called this new element "adaptive learning initiatives." This category included the adaptations, changes, and feedback loop from local customers to impact the various projects in the other categories. The result may be seen in the diagram "The Hanscom-modified PLM" on page 49.

For example, the team heard from the local training monitors that there were problems for employees taking mandatory DAWIA online classes. When they tried to work on their classes from the office, there were multiple interruptions—the phone would ring; the boss would call; other employees would wander into their workspace. As a result, employees were discouraged, and online train-



their results. They take responsibility for their actions and outcomes. This buy-in and involvement has a positive effect on quality that far outweighs any potential redundancy of effort. As we pointed out in the first "Heroes" article, process helps avoid re-inventing the wheel—but it doesn't do to forget that sometimes the old wheels do need re-invention.

A final comment on process was inspired by *Re-Imagine!* Tom Peters' latest book, which devotes much of a chapter to the importance of heroes. It is true, we must have processes. And equally true, we must hate them. That is, we must not love our processes unduly; and when compared with our feelings about results, customers, and so on, our attitude toward process should look an awful lot like hate. In practical terms, that translates to a willingness to challenge our processes, refining or replacing them as necessary—"re-imagining" them, to use Peters' term. And heroes? Gotta love 'em.

ing was suffering. To complete their mandatory online courses, most employees had to work at home—on their own time, on their own computers. The team felt that this situation was sending the wrong message to the acquisition workforce.

Leadership at Hanscom came to the rescue. The team developed several training policy letters for the commanding general's signature. The policy letters emphasized the importance of e-learning and encouraged managers to give workforce members time to work on their courses during the normal duty day. They also helped to develop the proper learning environment by establishing a quiet and comfortable e-learning center where interruptions are minimized.

Evolutionary Process

DAU and Hanscom AFB are well on their way to developing a model learning organization. The structure and processes are in place; improvements are continuing; attitudes are changing; people are seeking new and innovative ways to gather and use information; and over 30 sub-projects are under way.

The DAU/Hanscom team, however, cautions that developing an learning organization is an ongoing process. One change often leads to many other changes in this dynamic and evolutionary environment. The keys to success appear to be a dedicated team working the project and consistent leadership support. As with most things, the organizational leader sets the tone. Information age changes, like developing a model learning organization, start with and are the products of leadership support.

Editor's note: The authors welcome comments and questions. Anderson can be reached at frank.anderson@dau.mil, Dare at robert.dare@hanscom.af.mil, and Stillman at richard.stillman@dau.mil.

Heroics and Process—Call a Truce

It is tempting to ask who makes the greatest contribution to organizational performance, the solid citizen who keeps his head down and unquestioningly follows the process, or the heroine who challenges, changes, improves, or replaces that process? That's the wrong question. Surely *both* contribute, and neither should look down on the other. Process and heroics are part of the same team, and ultimately it's about people. People can demolish a great process or salvage a lousy one.

Heroes are often unpredictable, but that shouldn't be confused with being unreliable. You may not know what the hero is going to do next, but there is great certainty about how things are going to turn out in the end. Reliability is important. Predictability is less so.

If we've said too few good things about process, that's only because so much has already been said by others far more experienced than we are. Program management literature is full of articles proclaiming the virtues of various processes, maturity models, and so forth. There is much to be said about those articles and ideas. We've aimed to provide not a counterpoint, but a complementary point, addressing a dimension of programmatic excellence that hasn't received much press—and of that, some undeserved bad press.

We only hope that J. Jonah Jameson will someday come to see the good things Spiderman contributes to his city.

Editor's note: The authors welcome comments and questions. Quaid can be contacted at quaidc@nga.mil and Ward at wardd@nga.mil.