

# A Learning Transformation: The Eglin Learning Organization

Jack Dwyer



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***Maj. Gen. Robert W. Chedister, USAF***

The words “learning organization” are more than just buzz words at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla. They are becoming a way of life for Air Force members at Eglin’s Air Armament Center (AAC). Air Force Maj. Gen. Robert W. Chedister, AAC commander, is leading the charge. Chedister is focused on transforming AAC into a learning organization—a place where people at all organizational levels, individually and collectively, are continually increasing their capacity to produce results.

AAC, the Air Force’s primary weapons and munitions product center, is firmly committed to delivering world-class munitions and weapons to the warfighter. Its products address a wide spectrum of combatant commander needs, from precision guided bombs and air-to-air mis-

siles, to mobile shelters for troops, and B-2 bombers. AAC and its associate units share the largest personnel deployment tasking of any Air Force base.

Based on his experiences as a test pilot, program manager, commander, and program executive officer, Chedister set out to capture and share Eglin’s collective learning assets—both the know-how and know-why. “The dynamic business environment of the 21st century demands that we employ innovative training methods,” Chedister says. He and his Eglin leadership team set out to ensure that “the AAC workforce can make smart business decisions, deliver superior products, and provide agile combat support to the warfighter.”

## **Becoming a Learning Organization**

In his Jan. 5, 2004, *Here’s the Deal* e-newsletter, Chedister writes: “We will become a learning organization, fit to fight, and horizontally integrated with our brothers and sisters throughout the command, the Air Force, and other Services.” Chedister believes his learning organization will provide an environment and opportunities to experiment with new system development approaches, learn from one’s own experiences and those of others, and share knowledge quickly throughout AAC.

Chedister has three strategic learning organization objectives: (1) create and enable the workforce; (2) establish a culture of transformation; and (3) maintain combat-ready forces. These objectives support the following Air Force Materiel Command (AFMC)/AAC goals: (1) develop an expeditionary mindset and culture; (2) be a valued warfighting partner; (3) assure warfighting technological dominance; and (4) be the workplace of choice. To foster the learning organization development, Chedister established the Air Armament Academy, also known as “A cubed,” or simply “A<sup>3</sup>.”

While Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS) program director at Hanscom AFB, Mass., Chedister had established the JSTARS University to enhance members’ skills and knowledge. JSTARS University contributed to his program office’s repeat selection as the Air Force’s best system program office. After assuming command of

Dwyer is site manager at the DAU-South satellite campus at Eglin AFB. He holds a doctorate in adult and continuing education from Virginia Tech.

AAC, Chedister studied results of the 2002 Chief of Staff Survey. AAC people felt the center could greatly improve the content and availability of local training. Enough said.

In April 2003, Chedister chartered the Air Armament Academy to provide “the right training to the right person at the right time.” The A<sup>3</sup> mission is to “sharpen the minds for those who forge the sword.” Each of Chedister’s direct reports is an A<sup>3</sup> faculty member, teaching at least one class per quarter. A<sup>3</sup> training focuses on workforce knowledge gaps that AAC senior leaders directly identify as they execute their mission and programs. An additional benefit: the workforce and its leaders get to know each other better.

Since Chedister chartered the Air Armament Academy, he and other Eglin leaders have offered over 200 presentations to more than 3,000 Eglin personnel. The first class offered was “Agile Acquisition—The Transformation,” an interactive half-day workshop developed under the direction of Marvin Sambur, assistant secretary of the Air Force (acquisition). There are now over 100 separate training classes in the current A<sup>3</sup> course catalog, which was developed using the DAU course catalog as a benchmark. Each A<sup>3</sup> course description includes clearly defined learning objectives and lists primary target audience and any prerequisites. Most classes are intended for a wide spectrum of AAC personnel, but several are specifically focused on highly technical aspects of the AAC mission and armament programs.

### **New Training Policy**

In June 2003, Chedister established a new center-wide training policy. Each month has designated training days when all are expected to attend training. Every other month contains a designated training week to facilitate longer-duration training such as multi-day munitions acquisition workshops. A<sup>3</sup>

presentations are tailored to meet the individual needs of the Eglin workforce while supporting the AFMC and AAC strategic objectives and goals. One of the more popular classes is “The Feedback Process,” taught by Chedister. Another is “Overview of Acquisition Business Practices,” presented by Judy Stokley, AAC deputy for acquisition and former PEO for weapons.

Students register for classes through a Community of Practice Web site contained in the AFMC’s “Knowledge Now” master site. Once enrolled, they receive immediate e-mail registration confirmation. One day prior to class, they receive automated messages reminding of their class event. After attending training events, they receive electronic confirmation

of training completion. Completed training is recorded in an electronic individual development plan.

The Air Armament Academy project office is headed by Susan Willbanks. She and her three-person team receive overall direction from the AAC Executive Council. The office executes its charter through two teams: the curriculum board and project team and the A<sup>3</sup> project team. The curriculum board, composed of senior members from all Eglin’s functional areas and organizations, is chaired by Bill Dyess, deputy director of the AAC

Enterprise Program Office. The board determines core and elective hours and the training templates for each of the academy’s colleges, of which there are currently four: science and technology; acquisition; fielding, test, operational training & evaluation; and installation sustainment & management.

Willbanks also leads the A<sup>3</sup> project team, composed of 17 individuals from AAC and associate



***The AAC and Eglin AFB are on the road to becoming a learning organization where each member is a self-directed learner, and learning is part of everyone’s daily activities.***

units. The team meets biweekly to review project execution progress and to evaluate and integrate new tasks. Team members also review student and faculty feedback, course suggestions, and lessons learned.

### A<sup>3</sup> and DAU

Before A<sup>3</sup> became operational, Chedister had a conversation with Frank Anderson, president of the DAU, about what type of collaborative working relationship A<sup>3</sup> and the DAU could have. Based on those discussions, it was decided to establish a DAU satellite office at Eglin that “would be joined at the hip with A<sup>3</sup>.” Thus, on Nov. 3, 2003, a memorandum of agreement was signed establishing the office with Jack Dwyer as the site manager. Thus, the two organizations work closely together to foster the AT&L Performance Learning Model and truly make AAC a learning organization.

Two of the principal tenets that underpin defense acquisition policy today are flexibility and innovation. Senior acquisition leaders want members of the workforce to be flexible in adapting to the program management situations they face daily, and innovative in continuously developing and implementing initiatives to streamline and improve the defense acquisition process. Thus, a working relationship and partnership of the DAU and A<sup>3</sup> provides the workforce at Eglin a single portal for easy access to continuous learning opportunities, performance support, and information. To date, the DAU and A<sup>3</sup> have worked together to provide the Eglin workforce tailored learning approaches and opportunities in meeting their personalized learning strategies.

The Eglin Learning Organization (ELO) team’s AAC and DAU representatives facilitate the sharing of information and resources to promote and equip each individual’s training portfolio. As such, training employs the AF KNOWLEDGE NOW (< <https://afkm.wpafb.af.mil/> >) and DAU (< [www.dau.mil/](http://www.dau.mil/) >) Web sites, which highlight continuous learning modules, communities of practice, and knowledge sharing, and which are available online 24/7. “Training is the cornerstone of my plan to establish a true learning organization,” says Chedister. “This transformation is well under way and is critical to our mission effectiveness.”

According to Peter Senge, a principal architect of the learning organization concept, “the organization that will truly excel in the future will be the organization that will truly tap people’s commitment and capacity to learn at all levels of an organization.” Thus, learning has become part of one’s daily activities at Eglin where everyone is becoming a self-directed learner.

**Editor’s note:** The author welcomes comments and questions and can be contacted at [dwyerj@eglin.af.mil](mailto:dwyerj@eglin.af.mil).

## Simulation & Modeling for Acquisition, Requirements, and Training—SMART



Does your program or project need assistance in implementing Simulation and Modeling for Acquisition, Requirements and Training—SMART? Army SMARTeam contact teams provide information, recommendations, and technical assistance to programs and projects about simulation support planning and implementing SMART. Contact team members discuss how to apply modeling and simulation (M&S) throughout the acquisition life cycle, including how to identify opportunities to reduce risk and costs and accelerate traditional acquisition processes. They share information about models and simulations that could be reused or adapted, as well as SMART lessons learned and best practices from other programs and projects. Contact team members also offer advice on simulation support planning, available M&S products and tools, simulation environments, and advanced collaborative environments. Army SMARTeam contact team customers include integrated concept teams, program and project managers.

For more information on contact team assistance, contact the SMARTeam project director: Leah Treppel/PEO STRI/DSN 970-3563/[Leah.Treppel@peostri.army.mil](mailto:Leah.Treppel@peostri.army.mil).

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