

An Overview of the U.S. Navy Sustaining Distance Training

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The U.S. Navy has been conducting a major reorganization using plans and strategies collectively called Sea Power 21 (Clark, 2002) that are heavily dependant on a high-technology environment. Admiral Vern Clark recently completed his assignment as the chief of naval operations (CNO), the Navy's top military leadership position. He was the first CNO to have an MBA degree (Clark, 2004a) and his business process knowledge, along with the transformational initiatives of the Secretary of Defense, set in motion revolu-

tionary efforts that are transforming or replacing traditional Navy systems, using successful business philosophies and methodologies.

Driven by top leadership, the development of personnel capabilities is recognized as crucial for "mission accomplishment," and so individual training in the U.S. Navy has significantly increased in importance and become a significant consideration in the planning, development, and operation of the "workplace." E-learning, along with related concepts of



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knowledge management and distance training, has been wholly embraced by senior leadership and is becoming an integral part of the workspace, along with technological capability, at a phenomenal pace.

COMMUNICATING THE VISION

The U.S. Navy has over 350,000 active duty personnel and 130,000 Ready Reserve. There are regularly over 30,000 personnel deployed (away from their home base or station) at any given time. The Navy also has over 175,000 civilian employees. All of these personnel are an essential part of the Navy's mission, and accomplish their tasks from over 280 ships and a great many bases and stations throughout the continental United States and numerous foreign countries, (U.S. Navy, *Status of the Navy*, n.d.). Communication and coordination can appear to be a phenomenal feat, but it is achieved regularly and more and more effectively as capabilities, processes and procedures improve, following guidance promulgated from the top.

The Navy's long-term vision is encapsulated in Sea Power 21, the Navy's transformational strategy used to develop operational and organizational processes, policies, and related strategies. It is "global in scope, fully joint in execution, and dedicated to transformation" (Clark, 2002). It communicates the vision on how the Navy will "organize, integrate, and transform," and consists of three fundamental concepts that will ensure the Navy continues as the supreme military seapower force in the future: Sea Strike, Sea Shield, and Sea Basing. Sea Strike enables projection of offensive power from the sea, Sea Shield extends defensive assurance throughout the world, and *Sea Basing* enhances operational independence and support for the joint force. Sea Power 21 also provides the critical concept of FORCENet, which will enable information management (through technological capability) among the three

fundamental concepts, and empower all Navy personnel.

FROM THE TOP

Given the size and geographical dispersion of the Navy, a distance learning program capability is critical, and recognized in top leadership guidance. Each year, the chief of naval operations publishes an annual document, titled *CNO Guidance for [year]* which provides an overview on the Navy vision and mission, and assigns critical tasks or milestones to specific organization elements. This year's multipage guidance includes: Develop a postgraduate education strategy centered around the Naval Postgraduate School's resident *and distance learning programs* (italics added) that fully leverages Joint service, inter-agency, and international curricula (Mullen, 2005).

But that is just a small part of the initiative to match skills (and education, and provide training and "just in time" information) to the position. The CNO's 8 Tenets (*What I believe: Eight Tenets That Guide My Vision for the 21st Century Navy*) are further guidance intended for use by Navy leadership. Admiral Mullen (2006), current CNO, stated

New opportunities and security challenges require new skills.... They must also be supported by the right information at the right time.... In a world of growing global connectivity, the volume of information we are able to collect matters less than our ability to identify and understand what is important. Sailors must learn to recognize what matters, to comprehend the implications of the information they gather, and then act on it instantly, with the right capabilities.

This broader concept on personnel skills is supported through a number of initiatives, including FORCENet (for the technological capability) and what has been termed the Human Capital Strategy or "Strategy for our People" (Clark, 2004b).

STRATEGIC SCOPE

The Navy's Strategy for our People has several stated objectives, which may be paraphrased as:

- Develop a competency-focused workforce to link individual knowledge and abilities to demands.
- Align organizations, strategies, policies, and processes to effectively manage the total workforce.
- Attract, retain, and incentivize an optimal workforce (active, reserve, civilian). Set performance expectations against measurable organizational goals.
- Maximize the contribution of every individual. Create opportunities for growth and development while fostering work-life balance.
- Achieve greater diversity throughout the total force workforce.

The strategy, discussed by the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Manpower and Reserve Affairs in 2004 (Navas, 2004) is to modernize manpower and personnel systems, integrate active and reserve military and civilian systems and coordinate separate manpower initiatives into a single strategically managed plan. It will provide the guidance and tools to assess, train, distribute, and develop the Navy's work force and will also provide use of temporary help (i.e., contractor), which can provide skill sets not available in the permanent work force. The strategy will also provide an expanded opportunity for professional and personal growth, while attempting to maximize technology development and implementation to reduce workload, with all efforts aimed at supporting current and future mission accomplishment.

INCLUDE THE INDIVIDUAL

A coordinating program called Sea Warrior connects the individual sailor with the

parts of the organization responsible for training, education, and career-management systems. The primary interface is Navy Knowledge Online (NKO), a well developed Web-based resource that is available to all Navy personnel. It provides the ability to create Individual Development Plans, provides the opportunity to take many different e-learning courses (a combination of off-the-shelf and Navy-developed), and creates areas for "communities of practice" to share relevant information. It also provides links to certain personnel supporting services (such as admin and pay).

Approximately 4,000 e-learning courses are accessible by 1.2 million Navy, Marine, Department of the Navy (DoN) civilian employees, and dependents. Provided at no cost to the registered user, of which there were 450,000 as of November 2004, are courses in project management, business, desktop, simulation exercises, and foreign languages. In the active duty Navy, NKO creates the conduit between training and uninterrupted operational capability (Persons, 2004)

The Sea Warrior's organizational goal is to provide the Navy the capability to assess, train, and assign (all) personnel to ensure their best contribution to the mission. Sea Warrior's key objectives are summarized (U.S. Navy, 2006) as:

- Make career information and tools readily available to personnel for career-development.
- Combine the strengths of the current manpower, personnel, training, and education responsibilities into one aligned and centrally managed and resourced organization.
- Enable the Navy to create an agile market-like approach to career management, where sailors "compete" in a dynamic marketplace and provide the right skills to the right place.

DEDICATED INFRASTRUCTURE

Berge (2001) wrote: "Along with a strategic planning process, there are management processes such as budgeting, infrastructure development and maintenance, communication, workforce development, and policy making that are used to change the fabric of the organization in desired ways" (p. 22). To enable Sea Warrior, the Navy is undergoing an enormous organizational change to integrate its manpower, personnel, training, and education systems (referred to as MPT&E) into a single "enterprise" (meaning one funding resource) with coordinated "business" processes (Hoewing, 2005).

The Navy's MPT&E enterprise has several key supporting suborganizations. The Naval Education and Training Command (NETC) was established in mid-March 2003 in Pensacola, Florida, to oversee Naval education and training. This activity was created using relevant portions of existing organizations. It will provide strategy, policy, and resource guidance, and allow intermediate activities to manage the execution of relevant training. Most importantly, it reports directly to the CNO (top leadership), which demonstrates its relative importance to the whole organization. NETC activities are staffed by approximately 22,000 military and civilian personnel at more than 190 facilities worldwide. Each day, an average of nearly 40,000 officer, enlisted, and civilian government employees train in more than 3,600 different courses offered through NETC (Goodwin, 2003).

Another training command that has recognized and embraced e-learning as a means to train and enrich without sacrificing time and capability is the Naval Network Warfare Command (NETWARCOM). Their vision is to integrate warfighting and business operations—to fight and win in the information age. It will

act as the Navy's central operational authority for space, information technol-

ogy requirements, network and information operations in support of Naval forces afloat and ashore; to operate a secure and interoperable Naval Network that will enable effects-based operations and innovation; to coordinate and assess the Navy operational requirements for and use of network/command and control/information technology/information operations and space; to serve as the operational forces' advocate in the development and fielding of information technology, information operations and space and to perform such other functions and tasks as may be directed by higher authority. (U.S. Navy, 2006)

In pursuing its objectives, NETWARCOM impacts the technological capability required for distant learning.

SUPPORTING SYSTEMS

The most critical implement for the availability and delivery of individual training is the Navy Marine Corps Intranet (NMCI), which is considered the largest corporate intranet in the world (U.S. Navy, DON CIO, 2006). It provides the Department of the Navy and all its (shore) personnel with a full range of network-based information services on a single, enterprisewide intranet. Eventually, the massive network will link more than 350,000 workstations and laptops for Navy and Marine Corps users in the United States and permanent sites in foreign countries. A summary from the limited access NMCI *Homeport* Web site (www.homeport.navy.mil [limited access]):

NMCI applies the speed and might of world-class Internet technology to everything from performing routine administrative tasks to facilitating global communications and logistics during wartime. This program of unprecedented scale ensures the secure and reliable transmission of voice, video and data information worldwide, helping the Navy and Marine Corps meet the following critical objectives:

- Enhancing network security
- Ensuring interoperability across commands and with other services
- Facilitating knowledge-sharing around the globe
- Increasing productivity
- Improving systems reliability and quality of services
- Reducing the cost of voice, video and data services.

NMCI is a key component of FORCENet, the DoN's strategy for implementing network-centric warfare, and it supports the DoD's goals for information technology superiority. In addition to moving the DoN to an e-business model, with common corporate applications and databases, NMCI supports new processes and technologies, such as knowledge management, distance learning and telemedicine to improve the quality of life for sailors, Marines and the DoN's civilian employees and support personnel.

SUPPORTING WORKFORCE

The technology, both hardware and software, and the personnel trained in the application of technology that are needed to achieve the Navy's information management (and personnel development, FORCENet, and NMCI, etc.) requirements are coordinated through the office of the Department of the Navy's Chief Information Officer, or the "DON CIO" (U.S. Navy, DON CIO, 2006). The DON includes the office of the Secretary of the Navy, who is senior to the CNO. As the Navy advocate for IM/IT initiatives to the Department of Defense, the DON CIO has become one of the integral authorities for Navy requirements. From this office, the increased training opportunities through e-learning were conceived.

The DON CIO produces an annual publication that provides the DON's Information Management (IM) and Information Technology Strategic Plan, and provides the vision and addresses the change

needed to achieve it (U.S. Navy, DON CIO, 2006). Summarizing from the DON CIO Web site (U.S. Navy, DON CIO, n.d.), the DON CIO is devoted to IM/IT Workforce Competency Management (competencies are defined as knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors). Using an enterprise approach to managing the IM/IT workforce, it provides a strategy for leveraging human (IM/IT) capital by considering four key issues:

- recruit, retain, and train the IM/IT/KM workforce needed to fulfill core capabilities,
- establish IM/IT/KM competency guidelines for the non-IM/IT/KM workforce,
- develop IM cognitive skills through integrative competencies, and
- *ensure the IT infrastructure will support eLearning* (italics added), document best practices, and expand the use of eLearning technologies.

The DON CIO has created several teams to work focus areas. It is the sole responsibility of one of these teams, the Knowledge Management Team, to author, monitor, and safeguard DoN policy on portals, content management, information management, and related areas (U.S. Navy, DON CIO, n.d., Knowledge Management). Additional portal development undertakings are also the purview of the team: Task Force Web, an early initiative designed to Web-enable all essential Navy applications and databases; Navy Knowledge Online; and the Navy Marine Corps portal, which forms the basis of the Navy, have been established to encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing within the DoN and with other agencies and activities. Supported and promoted at the topmost levels of the Navy and Defense departments, the growth and expansion of these undertakings are integral to increased distance learning capabilities within the Navy.

SUPPORTING CULTURE: LOCAL IM FLEXIBILITY

The strategy and policy provided by the DON CIO and CNO are also used by other Navy suborganizations to create IM capabilities tailored for their mission needs, adding only those resources required (or allowed).

For example: the Navy Supply Systems Command (NSSC) with headquarters in Mechanicsburg, PA

is responsible to provide U.S. Naval forces with quality supplies and services. Employing a worldwide workforce of more than 24,000 military and civilian personnel, NAVSUP oversees logistics programs in the areas of supply operations, conventional ordnance, contracting, resale, fuel, transportation and security assistance. In addition, NAVSUP is responsible for quality of life issues for our naval forces, including food service, postal services, Navy Exchanges and movement of household goods. (Source: http://www.navsup.navy.mil/portal/page?_pageid=477,261535&_dad=p5star&_schema=P5STAR)

NSSC has a Command Information Office, which is an intermediary with the DON CIO that interprets policy for NSSC senior leadership and provides their input to DON initiatives. It develops, coordinates, and disseminates a shared strategic vision among the NSSC's top-level management and information activities to champion the organization's information initiatives to effectively manage information and provide for information systems that add value to the organization. It also provides technical advice to ensure information technology is acquired and information resources are managed in a manner that best supports the organization and meets any associated legislative requirements, such as specific information reporting requirements (Source: <http://www.navsup.navy.mil/portal/>)

[page?_pageid=477,267309,477_267592&_dad=p5star&_schema=P5STAR](http://www.navy.mil/portal/page?_pageid=477,267309,477_267592&_dad=p5star&_schema=P5STAR)).

Using the technology and IT professionals trained by the DON's IM/IT initiatives, NSSC has created its own intranet for local information and training relevant to its business needs, and has provided what it calls the *NAVSUP Collaboration* site which allows NSSC employees the ability to easily communicate and share information in a secure, Web-based environment. "It can be accessed by any device—desktop, laptop, or PDA—that uses an HTML-based browser. Users can host online discussions, share and revise documents and files online, conduct virtual meetings, and so forth. NAVSUP Collaboration facilitates business processes such as: Knowledge Management, Project Management Communities of Practice, and elearning" (source). This technology and foresight goes well beyond the once-worshipped, yet still essential video teleconference for transmitting information and training.

CONCLUSION: IMPORTANCE OF STRATEGIC POLICY

After reviewing numerous e-learning related case studies, Berge (2001) noted that cases focused on using sustained distance training to achieve organizational goals concentrated on workforce development, infrastructure, and budget as success tools, but they appeared to neglect the aspect of company policy.

One key to the success of initiatives in the integration and implementation [of] technology-enhanced learning and distance education is the support of the organization's top leaders.... The most important function of organizational leadership may be to create a shared vision that includes widespread input and support ... articulates a clear training or educational purpose, had validity for all stakeholders, and reflects the broader mission of the organization. Both top-down and bottom-up support is needed for success-

ful, sustained distance training and education at the higher stages of organizational capability. In addition to the establishment of a vision, leaders link strategic planning and specific program implementation and monitoring using such tools as budgeting, infrastructure development, communication, workforce development, and policy revision. (p. 351)

Navy leadership is clearly achieving those activities on a recurring basis. The Navy's ability to manage information, including the NSSC intranet capability and others like it, is made possible and successful through top-down support and clear, well communicated strategies and effective policies that are enabled through coordinated resource requests. A necessity for a large, dispersed organization to share effectively and efficiently share a common capability.

The precepts that have guided the evolution of Navy e-learning are sound. The development of the Navy's distance learning program has been uphill, but remarkably, lessons learned have been lessons heeded. The most important strategic step into providing enterprise-wide e-learning via IM/IT has been the development of the Navy Marine Corps Intranet, which has allowed a single system to provide whatever had been made available to whoever needs it when it is needed. Without this advancement, each individual command throughout the system would have been on its own to plan and develop training models. Distance learning would clearly have taken a back seat and the subsequent successes would not exist.

A continuous effort is called for, to link project management, program management, change management and strategic planning (Berge & Smith, 2000). This has been undertaken within the Navy and the enterprise has continued to sustain change and restructuring, following guidance from top leadership, and is building e-

learning capabilities into the fabric of the organization.

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