

The Army Learning Model: Changing the Way Sustainers Train

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The Army Financial Management School is implementing several initiatives that support the Army's new emphasis on learner-centric, outcome-based education and training.

“The Army Learning Model—why do I need to know about that? It sounds like an educational topic to me, but I’m not an instructor. So why should I care?”

The answer is that the Army Learning Model, or ALM, will affect not only how Soldiers learn in the institutional education system but also how they train in operational units. Although ALM is an Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) initiative, it will profoundly influence how all Soldiers learn and develop.

ALM is a catalyst for changing the way Army schools train by directly affecting educational outcomes. It will allow sustainment schools to produce improved sustainment officers and enlisted Soldiers who possess a greater depth of knowledge, have faster access to information and job aids, are skilled in their crafts, and are resilient and ready to adapt to an ever-changing environment.

Many of the methods the schools will use also apply to operational force units as they conduct home-station and predeployment training. As newly-trained Soldiers and instructors report to operational units, ALM will begin to enhance the way those units train. Unit training will become more effective as leaders and trainers use multisensory, learner-centric techniques to train Soldiers. Army schools and centers are making training products, including lesson plans and applications, available to the operational force to use in training its units. Improved unit training will accommodate many of the most common learning styles by adapting training for visual, auditory, and hands-on learners.

Since ALM will affect how Army personnel train both at the schoolhouse and in the unit, the curious sustainer may ask, “So what exactly is this Army Learning Model, and what does it look like in real life?” That is a good question. It is also the perfect lead-in for a discussion of ALM and of some of the new educational and training methods being implemented at the Soldier Support Institute’s Financial Management School at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

ALM: The Catalyst for Change

Many sustainers have heard of the Army Learning Concept 2015 (ALC 2015), which has just transitioned from the concept phase to ALM. Others who have been heavily engaged in the current conflicts may have not heard of either ALC or ALM.

Published in January 2011, TRADOC Pamphlet 525–8–2, The U.S. Army Learning Concept for 2015, provides the roadmap for how the Army will transform its training and education system. The latest fragmentary order for ALC 2015 officially moved this initiative from planning to execution by designating it as the new Army Learning Model.

The pamphlet emphasizes “the need for a new learning model . . . to develop adaptive, thinking Soldiers and leaders” who can “operate under conditions of uncertainty and complexity.” It sets forth “a continuous adaptive learning model that instills 21st century Soldier competencies through a learner-centric 2015 learning environment, supported by an adaptive development and delivery infrastructure that enables career-long learning and sustained adaptation.” In short, ALM calls for learner-centric, outcome-based education and training.

To help Army schools understand the initial intent of the learner-centric concept, TRADOC directed that three actions begin immediately. First was a directive for the schools to “convert most classroom experiences into collaborative, problem-solving events led by facilitators (vs. instructors) who engage learners to think and understand the relevance and context of what they learn.” The second action required the schools to “tailor learning to the individual learner’s experience and competence level based on the results of a pre-test/assessment.” Third, the schools were required to “dramatically reduce or eliminate instructor-led slide presentation lectures and begin using a blended learning approach that incorporates virtual and constructive simulations, gaming technology, or other technology-delivered instruction.”

ALM affects development and delivery methods

for all enlisted, warrant officer, and officer training, including initial military training, professional military education, and functional courses. ALM is coordinated through governance bodies such as the Army Learning Coordination Council.

ALM advocates expanding the role of blended learning, which combines face-to-face instruction with on-line learning. By placing more knowledge-based learning into self-paced online modules, time spent in the classroom can focus on more effective training. With more time spent on higher levels of learning, students will graduate with greater knowledge and skills.

Mid-Grade Learning Continuum for 2015

A related initiative by the School of Advanced Leadership and Tactics (SALT) at Fort Leavenworth,

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Kansas, is the officer Mid-Grade Learning Continuum for 2015 (MLC 2015). SALT identified the existence of a training gap for Army officers and recognized that the officer career and education model lacked the leadership training opportunities that exist in the noncommissioned officer developmental model. The officer model includes large gaps of time between the Basic Officer Leader Course (BOLC) for lieutenants, the Captains Career Course (CCC), and Intermediate Level Education for majors.

Using the concept established by ALM, SALT is designing a "tailored, student centered, life-long learning continuum" to shift away from the current resident instruction paradigm. MLC 2015 is establishing a system of resident and self-development opportunities that close the training gap while designating a common core of decisive action skills. The combination of ALM and MLC 2015 will establish a culture of lifelong learning among officers that fosters doctrine-based training using common scenarios, simulations, gaming, and other ALM strategies.

Connecting Soldiers to Digital Apps

Another TRADOC initiative that serves as an enabler for ALM is Connecting Soldiers to Digital Apps

(CSDA). The purpose of this initiative is to improve the ability of the Army to produce technology-enhanced products to support education, training, and job performance. Schools are currently developing the in-house capacity to build more interactive multimedia instruction (IMI), including mobile applications (apps) for use on smart phones and mobile devices.

Army centers of excellence have developed CSDA pilot programs to build expertise in IMI and education technology. The Sustainment Center of Excellence at Fort Lee, Virginia, and related schools are already producing apps and other products that improve how Soldiers are learning and performing their jobs.

Application of the Army Learning Model

Now many sustainers who have read this far may ask, "Why should I continue reading? I noticed the authors are from the Financial Management School, but I am not a financial management Soldier." Although this article provides a financial management perspective, the application of ALM is universal across the Army, and not only for use in the schoolhouse but also in operational units, which is where most sustainers add value to the execution of the Army's mission.

The following initiatives are similar to many that the sustainment community, as well as all Army branches, will implement under ALM. Sustainers will begin to notice many of these techniques being implemented in their units, enabling them to conduct more effective training programs.

FMS Army Learning Model Initiatives

The Financial Management School (FMS) at the Soldier Support Institute (SSI) is fully engaged in implementing ALM to improve the quality of Soldiers and leaders who graduate from FMS courses, including resident and distributed learning. With the full support of the SSI command and staff and SSI's Capabilities Development and Integration Directorate and Training Development Directorate (TDD), FMS pursues its mission to train and educate financial management personnel as a part of the sustainment warfighting function.

One of ALM's implementing steps is to review all courseware, looking for portions of courses suited for delivery by means of distributed learning (dL). The goal is to shift this training to the unit or the point of need and remove it from resident courseware, thereby reducing the time Soldiers spend in schools away from their operational units. All sustainment schools have conducted the initial review of courseware. FMS will

continue this process to look for even more opportunities to place relevant and timely information in the hands of financial managers and other sustainers.

The pre-assessment is another ALM tool that enables courses to become more learner-centric. Students will

courseware available through the SSI Learning Resource Center (LRC). The SSI LRC provides access to the latest adjutant general, financial management, and recruiting and retention training materials.

Updated live within the SSI SharePoint website, these training resources are available to common access card and Army Knowledge Online users for individual, collective, and distributed learning. FMS resident and functional courseware is available, as well as the warfighter training support packages (WTSPs) that support unit operational training. All FMS WTSPs are available to financial management and sustainment units through the Army Training Network.

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get the opportunity to complete a pre-assessment at their home stations before they arrive at scheduled resident training. The results of the pre-assessment will allow facilitators to identify prospective students’ current levels of knowledge and experience and use this information to begin shaping the course early. Knowing the areas of precourse knowledge strength and weakness also affords the opportunity to provide dL products to correct knowledge deficiencies and allows facilitators to pair strong and weak students for peer assistance.

Classroom Facilitation Skills

FMS continues to develop the skills of its instructors by ensuring that they receive training in facilitation methods, especially for instructors of professional military education like the CCCs. Facilitators of CCCs use many of the techniques in the experiential learning model (ELM) to enable discussions and enhance peer-to-peer learning. The classroom thus becomes a platform for critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration.

Instructor-facilitators for courses like advanced individual training (AIT) and BOLC use their skills to facilitate practical exercises and hands-on training. Although AIT students and new lieutenants do not yet have the depth of experience to fully benefit from some ELM methods, skilled facilitators can still enhance their student’s learning by ensuring that the training materials they present use multisensory techniques to assist visual, auditory, and hands-on learners. By using practical exercises and group projects, facilitators can ensure that all students participate in “collaborative problem-solving events.”

Access to Financial Management Training

Access to knowledge and learning is a key enabler in ALM. FMS, in collaboration with TDD, has made

Interactive Multimedia Instruction and Technology

The military occupational specialty 36B enlisted AIT course at SSI has received TRADOC funding as part of the FMS’s CSDA effort, and a pilot study is underway. TDD has developed an in-house capability to enhance courseware with higher-level IMI. By leveraging lessons learned and their success in integrating IMI and mobile technology into the Human Resources Plans and Operations Course for the Adjutant General School, TDD has a jump-start on where to look for CSDA opportunities in the 36B course. Since this pilot is longer and more complex than the Human Resources Plans and Operations Course, TDD and FMS will build even more capability within SSI to incorporate technology-delivered instruction into remaining courseware.

Many of the resources used by financial managers and other sustainers are currently under development for universal access. The newly-updated Field Manual (FM) 1–06, Financial Management Operations; other sustainment-related FMs; and Army tactics, techniques, and procedures (ATTPs) are being prepared in Adobe PDF, interactive ePub, and mobile download formats. At SSI, as the Capabilities Development and Integration Directorate revises FMs and ATTPs, TDD is using IMI and mobile technology to provide these publications in multiple formats to enhance learning and improve accessibility through the SSI Digital Library and the LRC.

To reduce legacy-style slide presentation lectures, TDD is incorporating more multisensory media and interactive methods in lesson plans to provide more realistic and robust training materials for the facilitators to use. Some of the enhancements include more problem-based practical exercises that use common scenarios, facilitated discussion, simulation, gaming, and other IMI technology.

Field Training Exercises

In recognition of the importance of capstone, or culminating, training events, FMS is conducting a complete evaluation of its field training exercises (FTXs). FMS conducts its FTXs at SSI's Warrior Training Area at Fort Jackson, which includes a mission simulation center and a tactical training area.

FMS personnel are collaborating with simulations personnel to incorporate the right level of simulations and mission command systems so that Soldiers conducting financial management operations in a field environment will have to use critical thinking and problem solving to adapt to ever-changing situations. By adding complexity and rigor, the FMS exercises will continue to become more realistic, thus producing a level of experience for financial managers that rivals an actual deployment.

Systems Training Requirements Platform

Financial management Soldiers in garrison normally do not coordinate with the full complement of Government organizations that participate in deployed operations. These organizations include the Defense Finance and Accounting Service, U.S. Army Central, the Army Financial Management Command, national providers, FMS, and deployed operational units. Neither do financial management Soldiers train directly on the systems that other organizations own.

The financial management community needs the capability to "train as it fights." The Financial Management Systems Training Requirements Platform overcomes this critical training gap. This platform is an integrated training database comprising the full suite of financial management applications and U.S. Treasury peripherals. We recently completed development of the database after more than a year of complex coordination led by SSI's Capabilities Development and Integration Directorate.

The training database allows Soldiers to train on the many systems and applications using self-contained training data, either in preparation for deployment or to maintain critical financial management skills to better support sustainment in the Army community. It also allows the FMS, in coordination with TDD, to support ALM directly by designing realistic virtual systems training for use within the school and by operational units.

Virtual Training Environments

The ALM learning and training environment will employ virtual simulation, stimulation, and gaming tools in both institutional and operational applications. FMS, in direct coordination with the Army Financial Management Command, has begun an effort to review training materials and develop opportunities to leverage this virtual training environment to enhance realism

and increase complexity in capstone and predeployment exercises.

From this collaborative effort, financial management leaders expect to develop a training environment that not only can be applied within the traditional "brick and mortar" schoolhouse environment but also can be exported to operational sustainment units for use in both individual and collective training applications.

ALM is changing the way schools educate and train Soldiers. While the specifics of implementing ALM throughout the Army may vary, the objective remains the same: to create "a continuous adaptive learning model that instills 21st century Soldier competencies through a learner-centric 2015 learning environment, supported by an adaptive development and delivery infrastructure that enables career-long learning and sustained adaptation."

TRADOC Pamphlet 525-8-2 has now codified the doctrine of learning. Not only is ALM changing the way all sustainment and other Army schools train, but it has already affected the way sustainment Soldiers train in their units. Initiatives at the Financial Management School highlight effective implementation of the key tenets of the Army's learner-centric, outcome-based education model.

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