Value Modeling Distance Learning and Implications at West Point

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Abstract: Over the past decade, the Army has increasingly relied on online training as a medium for conducting training. Unfortunately, a culture has developed around distance learning in which many leaders accept and value reports of completed training, rather than the quality of its execution. In order to identify the source of this culture of acceptance and indifference, this study surveyed one hundred cadets at the United States Military Academy. A systems engineering approach was then used to value model online training and analyze trends between its various value measures. Based on the survey results and value modeling, online training is valued at a quarter of the ideal score. Additionally, a Spearman rank test for correlations showed that the length of time spent on training is not tied any of the other training objectives. These findings suggest that there is significant room to improve online training and its value to units, thereby reducing the ethical fading in its execution.

Keywords: Value Modeling, Online Training, Ethical Fading

1. Introduction

The Army Distance Learning Program (TADLP) was launched in 1996 to support Army training requirements, minimize costs, and allow training to be conducted instantly and around the world (Wisher, 2002). As distance learning (DL) programs continue to become a more utilized resource, it is important to analyze their effectiveness. This study examines three areas of DL through a bottom-up analysis of cadets at the United States Military Academy (USMA). First, it looks at the Army-wide requirements put on leaders and the implementation of online training. Next, it examines the impact of institutional culture on the effectiveness of DL and its implications on the professional ethic. Finally, it aims to use a systems engineering approach through value modeling to examine the bottom-up value of DL compared to its ideal value.

2. Distance Learning in the Army

Many studies of DL in the military focus on a top-down view of the training. From this perspective, the training is evaluated on its ability to minimize cost, the resources required, and the impact on post-training evaluation criteria (e.g. a driver’s training program reducing the number of accidents). However, few of these studies examine the training from a bottom-up perspective. Understanding how the training is being received and implemented is important since, “an essential element to the success of the DL initiatives described is the acceptance by the population at which they are directed” (Wisher, 2002).

Army online training is currently conducted through multiple organizations. Army Knowledge Online (AKO) is the Army’s main intranet and provides access to a variety of online training modules and to other online training providers. The Army Learning Management System (ALMS) is one such provider that conducts training, manages information, and offers collaboration and planning tools for Soldiers. This service, managed by TRADOC, is accessible to Soldiers and DA civilians around the world. Joint Knowledge Online (JKO) is a platform managed by the Joint Staff in coordination with the Military Services. This program offers mandatory Antiterrorism Training prescribed by DoDI 2000.16. Using these online systems, the Army mandates the training shown in Table 1 be completed either annually or semiannually.