

The History of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) Knowledge Lab
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Overview

DIA leadership approved the creation of the Knowledge Lab in 2005 from an idea proposed by a team of employees supporting the 2004 strategic planning process. The purpose of the Knowledge Lab was to sustain momentum to carry DIA toward becoming a highly networked, knowledge-based organization. It was designed to do that by asking questions that had not been asked and developing capabilities that addressed unmet demands. LTG Maples has strongly and publicly supported the goals, actions, and direction of the Knowledge Lab.

DIA employees from all directorates have participated in projects initiated and led by the Knowledge Lab to:

- Improve workforce flexibility, core mission effectiveness, and business operations by proposing over 100 new ideas to the Director. Many employees have built new networks of colleagues to support and develop their ideas, thirty-nine of which have resulted in new policies, new capabilities, new Six Sigma programs, or other positive outcomes to improve the agency (through the “Crossing Boundaries” project).
- Improve deployment processes, external hiring events, the summer intern program, and the retention rate among acquisition professionals by creating and deploying a dynamic lessons learned process (through the “Fast Learning” project).
- Improve mission effectiveness in DJIOC/Global Force Management, MSIC Critical Mobile Targets, and MIO by building effective virtual networks across organizational and geographic boundaries (through the “Communities of Practice” project).
- Grow a core of change agents by creating a new class of creative thinkers, drawn from multiple professional backgrounds and provided with unique opportunities to network, problem-solve, and collaborate (through the “Full Spectrum Analysis” project).
- Ensure DIA’s use and access to expertise in organizational network analysis by launching a cross-agency community of users (through the “Organizational Network Analysis” project).
- Identifying specific steps DIA can take to improve mission effectiveness by obtaining feedback from CENTCOM, DHS, NGA, NSA, SOCOM, and STRATCOM (through the “Voice of the Customer” project).
- Make mission-focused teams in DH, DT and DI more effective at the leadership and working levels by enabling more effective knowledge-sharing (through the “Critical Discourse” project).

Origins of the Knowledge Lab

The vision for the 2004 Strategic Planning effort was to improve collaboration and integration of relevant knowledge. How to do that was the challenge. We had to learn how to collaborate better, which meant we had to figure out a way to create a learning process. This insight led to the creation of Goal #3 (Become a knowledge-based organization) in the 2004 Plan, which has continued into the 2007 Plan as Goal #4 (Become a knowledge-based culture).

After the 2004 Plan was completed, we began a process to develop Operating Plans for each Goal. Cross-directorate teams supported each goal. The Goal #3 team spent a good part of year researching external efforts in government, academia and industry to search for a way to implement Goal #3.

In the end, we found three principles that would become the basis for creating a self-learning culture:

1) Create an entity that does not reside in any line organization, yet is protected by top leadership – this ensures ideas for agency-wide change do not become thwarted by any specific stovepipe’s unique processes, culture, or procedures, while at the same time the entity has the permission and protection to attempt to make changes

2) Focus the efforts of this entity on making improvements that people at the working level feel are important and, that if improved, would change their behavior and attitude. Implement this effort in short time periods (1-3 month pilot projects) and within the real work of the organization – this ensures people gain experiences in behaving differently and these behavior changes stick in the hearts and minds of employees

3) Because the entity would be so radically different from anything in DIA, create a way for its existence to survive by minimizing competition for resources through minimal staffing, no dedicated physical space (i.e., virtual), and minimal funding. To offset such severe self-imposed constraints, we created a volunteer network of employees to spread the word, very much a viral approach to change – this would ensure that we would not spend unnecessary energy defending resources while at the same time tapping into the hearts and minds of employees who could see new ways to improve DIA.

How the Knowledge Lab Works

From its start, the Knowledge Lab has operated in a new way. The Knowledge Lab business model uses short term projects to address enduring needs in the agency. It has four major components.

- **Identify Problem:** use interviews, studies, current projects, inputs from the network, DIA leadership at DDFOR level.

- **Identify Solution:** seek successful intervention technique used outside DIA in academia, industry and government that addressed problem.
- **Test Solution:** customize the solution for application in the context of DIA through the execution of pilot projects and iterate until value confirmed and capability mature.
- **Institutionalize:** transition capability developed by the Knowledge Lab to appropriate process owner within DIA.

The Office of the Chief of Staff provided a connection to leadership and protection for the Knowledge Lab's resources and independence. The Knowledge Lab used a variety of strategies to build a network of volunteers from across DIA, including creating a Knowledge Council, and inviting employees to participate in new pilot programs. The Knowledge Lab continues to grow a network of change-focused DIA employees. It has a small core group of volunteers from DI, HC, and DH. An extended network of past and current pilot participants, including those from Crossing Boundaries, numbering several hundred employees reaches into every directorate in the Agency. The network also includes pilot participants from NGA, NSA, and State/INR.

The Knowledge Lab does not create databases or systems, and does not map processes. The Knowledge Lab, rather, works at the *behavior* level. The Knowledge Lab identifies, tests, and implements new modes of behavior that will enable DIA to succeed in the future.

- On the behavior level, some of the results we have accomplished were:
- Enabled a DH component to accomplish significant improvement in mission results by enabling more effective *collaboration* between team members across directorates (DH and DI) and within their own directorate. (Critical Discourse)
 - Created changes in policy and capability by encouraging the *formation of small networks* of employees working together to overcome persistent issues facing the agency. (Crossing Boundaries)

Key Pilot Programs:

The Knowledge Lab has developed and executed more than 40 different pilot projects or related activities using solutions developed inside and outside DIA. Some pilots have run in multiple iterations over time, impacting multiple generations of participants from across DIA. Following are examples of key pilot programs.

Critical Discourse

- The problem it addresses: Prevalent personal communication patterns in many organizations limit effectiveness and lead to unintended consequences such as employees withholding critical information, acting on inaccurate assumptions, and shutting down discussions.

- The solution: A series of highly interactive workshops and individual coaching sessions to help participants improve and apply growing interaction skills.
- Outcomes: Participants gain a common set of tools that enable them to communicate more effectively and improve the effectiveness of their interactions. Participants have described positive mission impact resulting from reduced rework and more effective alignment.
- Participants: The Knowledge Lab has conducted 15 Critical Discourse workshops impacting approximately 230 individuals from DA, DI, DH, DHMO, DS, and DT (including leadership teams of DH and DI).
- Impact: The Critical Discourse program offers a proven methodology for improving collaboration at the working, teamwork and decision-making level.

Crossing Boundaries

- The problem it addresses: In order for DIA to become a more highly networked, collaborative organization, employees need to start to reach across the organizational lines that have traditionally separated them. Until employees begin to *make* DIA more highly networked and collaborative, it cannot become so. In a traditionally rigid command-and-control culture, this is not a characteristic employees will demonstrate easily.
- The solution: Each month LTG Maples hosts an agency-wide meeting where he invites DIA employees to propose solutions to the problems that impede mission performance. Employees who propose ideas are then recognized as the “owners” of that idea, and encouraged to build relationships with potential supporters. The Knowledge Lab provides coaching, mentoring, and other support to help idea owners find allies, develop their solutions, and win positive outcomes.
- Outcomes: A number of Crossing Boundaries ideas have led directly to new actions by the agency, including:
 - Creating a new award program to recognize employees who demonstrate significant collaborative behavior
 - Reinstating random security checks at building entrances to raise the level of employee vigilance about protecting sensitive information
 - Holding a “Leadership Day” to provide training and educational opportunities to help employees at all levels improve their leadership skills
 - Bringing in adjunct faculty to improve training opportunities at the agency’s Joint Military Intelligence Training Center
 - Investigating ways to improve the agency’s antiquated paper-intensive time-and-attendance reporting system
 - Reviewing the process for allocating office spaces in the agency to develop a more efficient and effective space management system

- Participants: DIA employees have proposed over 100 potential improvements to LTG Maples. Successful idea owners have built networks of supporters across DIA numbering close to 300 who are helping them implement their ideas.
- Impact: Through Crossing Boundaries, LTG Maples has demonstrated trust in the judgment and capabilities of the DIA workforce. He has gained (and continues to gain) the trust of those employees who have joined the program. Through them, the DIA is growing a new culture of breaking down barriers, seeking knowledge, and learning new ways to scope and solve problems.

Full Spectrum Analysis

- The problem it addresses: Internal studies such as the 2004 OIF Lessons Learned Study identified critical challenges facing analysis such as a need to improve collaboration, recognize and account for biases, and improve interaction with customers.
- The solution: FSA is a twelve week part-time (1 day per week) experiential learning program that combines iterative learning, interactions with outside experts such as In-Q-Tel and others, and a collaborative CAPSTONE exercise designed to address a real intelligence question as a test of their new approaches. Participants learn to challenge assumptions, understand biases, build and test hypotheses, exploit all sources of knowledge, and explore non-military and political drivers that affect an adversary's behavior.
- Outcomes: FSA participants comprise a network of change agents across DIA and partner agencies. They have the experience of importing new approaches and using those approaches in a permissive environment. Participants applied their new techniques to a real intelligence question, and briefed the outcome to senior leaders in the CAPSTONE exercise. They now have those proven tools to use in their day-to-day work.
- Participants: Through three iterations of FSA, 36 participants have come from DIA, NGA, NSA, State/INR. DIA directorates represented have included DI, DH, DS, and DT. Participants in the CAPSTONE session have included analytic leaders from NGA, NSA, ODNI, and State.
- Impact: FSA is creating holistic approaches to improve the art and science of all source analysis. Creating a cadre of change agents at the grass roots level, problem solvers and future leaders who can help transform the agency in the long term. LTG Maples sent a letter to Dr. Fingar, DDNI-Analysis, after the second FSA iteration suggesting it as a model for developing the analyst of future. Mr Cardillo (DI) has very quickly embraced the objectives of the project.

Fast Learning

- The problem it addresses: The 2004 DIA OIF Lessons Learned Study generated many recommendations for improvement. The results of many lessons learned studies are difficult to implement for a variety of reasons.

The primary reason is that managers and employees do not feel ownership of the solution.

- The solution: Provide a packaged capability to employees at the working level to self-assess what they plan on doing, how they are accomplishing their tasks, and reflect on how their efforts matched their original expectations. In other words, give employees the permission to make rapid changes to the processes/procedures they can change to improve the outcome.
- Outcomes: For the deployment effort, the Fast Learning results caused DA (as OP) to bring together various parts of the support process into one facility to improve effectiveness. For Fresh Look, the team operated in a permissive, fully-resourced environment. Fast Learning helped to allow it to self-organize and define its own approaches to solving an intelligence problem, Fresh Look provided a view at how the All-Source Intelligence Process should function. Dr. Fingar, DDNI-Analysis, commented: "I was struck by it and the way you could strip away the biases. We need to build in the community." LTG Maples indicated that the creativity of the Fresh Look approach would help address issues in the DJIOC.
- Participants: Fast Learning has been used within DI, DH, DA, HC, and AE involving about 150 personnel to analyze DIA's deployment process, the summer intern process, the acquisition workforce assessment, integrated into other pilot projects such as Fresh Look, and communities of practice.
- Impact: By allowing employees to own the lessons learned process at their own level, they make the right changes rapidly, on the spot, and do not have to wait until a formal study is generated. Fast Learning has become a tool primarily for cross-organizational teams or employees who work in the same organizational unit to be more effective team by taking ownership of the goals, objectives and measures of effectiveness of their effort.

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