

The Learning Experience Army Room Netherlands (LEARN!): 'Room' for innovation in education and training at the Royal Netherlands Army

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1. Introduction

The Royal Netherlands Army promotes a culture of innovation, rapid adaptability and continuous learning in the education and training field. To stimulate this culture, the Army created the Learning Experience Army Room Netherlands (LEARN!): a platform for creative ideas to innovate education and training. This paper will focus on the establishment of LEARN!. Note that LEARN! is still under construction: a few elements noted in this paper will be implemented later this year.

2. Background

'Education and training' is one of the key foundations of the Royal Netherlands Army: it creates, establish and continuously improves the combat readiness of the Armed forces. It is important to operate successfully in highly complex, dynamic, unpredictable, and ambiguous operational environments and to prepare for a full range of traditional and non-traditional threats. Having an education and training field that adapts and innovates fast is highly necessary in this era of uncertainty. As the variety of threats and the environments continuously changes, education and training products need to adapt and change automatically to support the new, operational needs of combat readiness. An education and training field that can adapt quickly and can stay at the front of learning science, is able to retain a (learning) advantage over adversaries. Therefore they're able to use these advantages before other advisories can create counter-measures or adapt these advantages as well.

Learning science evolves very quickly. While many of the traditional education and training methods will endure, others will be supplemented or replaced by new improvements. With these improved methods, the Army is able to educate and train more and more efficiently and effectively. The Army needs innovations that continuously improves the needed learning outcomes to provide combat readiness. In this era of uncertainty, the ability to learn faster and faster to win in this complex world is more important than ever. Therefore, innovation in the education

and training field is an ongoing goal in the Army: they want to stimulate a culture of continuous learning, innovation and adaptivity.

3. Issue

However, there is a gap between this goal to innovate education and training and how many militaries are actually learning. The adoption and exploration of innovative ideas in the education and training field is slow. Instead, the personnel in the education and training field hold on to old and ineffective methods. In order to stimulate and promote innovation in the education and training field, a culture change is needed. LEARN! is one of the tools to stimulate this change.

4. LEARN!

LEARN! is a platform that allows 'innovators' to share creative ideas to improve the education and training products within the Army. Innovators will be valued and rewarded for their ideas. LEARN! offers the education and training field the opportunity to get closer to their students/employees within the Army: they understand them better and they know better where to innovate so they can create more efficient and effective education and training products. With LEARN!, the education and training field uses the full potential of their students/employees and never let a good idea go to waste. Ideas to innovate education and training products does not only mean new technology (like simulation or e-learning). Those ideas can also be found in processes, methodologies, curricula, collaborations, instructors and so on.

However: LEARN! is not only a generator and collector of creative ideas. Collecting creative ideas doesn't automatically stimulate and nurture a learning and innovation culture. A platform can result in a lot of good ideas, but not in implemented innovation. That's why LEARN! isn't only a platform, it's a 'room' full of different resources to help innovators to take their idea from concept to experiment to fully implemented change. There is 'room' for trying new ideas, failing without punishment and learn from experience. LEARN! is based on different fundamentals which are presented in the following paragraphs.

4.1 'Room' for failure: "If I fail I learn, if I win I don't"

LEARN! provides a safe environment for innovators where they can research, test and implement their idea. The key component in LEARN! is that it doesn't punish 'failed' experiments: LEARN! stimulate innovators to fail, so they can learn from it. Failures gives the opportunity to transform

experience in lessons learned and get back on track towards successful innovation. That's why LEARN! embraces failure, instead of being afraid to fail. "Success is 99% failure," Mr. Honda said once. Experimenting and implementing ideas will have many failures, but by trying different attempts we improve the chances that one of those attempts will be successful.

4.2 'Room' full of resources

Resourcing is also incredibly important. If creative ideas are not properly resourced, innovations will take a long time to research, test and implement. Lack of resources can also cause lack confidence and enthusiasm to come up with more creative ideas. That's why LEARN! provides innovators all resources needed to implement these ideas like finances: LEARN! has a budget to make investments on a number of ideas. Moreover, LEARN! provides a network of experts: LEARN! stimulates collaborations of colleagues, companies, institutions and other organizations to help innovators developing their idea.

4.3 Class'room' for innovators

In this era of uncertainty, the competences problem solving, critical thinking, creativity and innovation more important than ever to operate successfully. Innovators are the ones who have those competences: they are able to come up with creative solutions in response to uncertain problems and developments. LEARN! sees those innovators as the future leaders the Army needs, because they have the courage and skills to lead change and innovation in the Army and other unpredictable environments. That's why LEARN! supports the innovators and stimulates them to develop those competences further while researching, testing and implementing their ideas. Therefore, LEARN! is like a 'school' where innovators can develop their competences in a practical way and in the operational context. LEARN! will also reward and recognize the innovators for their ideas, so it will become an incentive to actively look for other ideas to innovate the education and training field.

4.4 'Room' for an innovation strategy

Innovation starts with an innovation strategy with specific types of ideas. Without an innovation strategy, militaries can come up with many ideas but don't have the support of their leadership teams because innovation was never on their agenda to begin with. That's why the Army is developing a roadmap for education and training: it will provide the Army a visualization of the future learning environment and describes a

systematic approach to future learning. The goal is to outline the key trends impacting education and training and how the Army plans to use innovation to get ahead of those trends. The roadmap provides managers a focus on future learning and it helps and inspire innovators to come up with ideas that fits in this visualization of future learning.

5. Example: MORPHEUS

LEARN! received an idea from the Royal Netherlands Army Simulation Centre. Due to the lack of availability of equipment, the Royal Netherlands Army Manoeuvring School and the Royal Netherlands Army Signal School couldn't properly educate and train their students to operate the boxer command post and the military satellite communication tactical trailer. Together, they developed a full immersive and interactive virtual environment where students can work with simulated systems, without the need for real equipment. This project is called 'Morpheus'. LEARN! provided all resources (finances, their network) needed to fund this project. This project is a great success: different other schools within the Royal Netherlands Army wants to use Morpheus for their own equipment. For more information, please consider reading the paper 'Virtual Reality Learning Environment: Morpheus', written by major Zijp and captain Van Dort.

6. Conclusion

The Army wants to promote and stimulate a culture of continuous learning, developing, innovation and adaptivity in the education and training field. This will help empower the Army to rapidly adapt to unpredicted and uncertain developments. However, it's extremely difficult to change a deeply embedded traditional culture and mindset: the adoption of new ideas will not help if militaries still have a traditional mindset in education and training and they still hang onto traditional practices. But, remaining passive and accepting this situation is not an option. That's why the Army is developing LEARN! as a tool to start this culture change. LEARN! wants to act like a 'movement': it will give innovators the opportunity to develop their idea. Then, these developed ideas will inspire others in the education and training field to come up with other ideas. The LEARN!-community will become bigger and bigger, and will convince others to innovate the education and training field. Meanwhile, the traditional mindset will hopefully change into a mindset of innovation. Time will tell if LEARN! will be a success or will fail. But if LEARN! doesn't become a complete success, valuable lessons will be learned for future development.