

A Competence-based Approach to Joint Professional Military Education (JPME) Educating the Joint Force for 2020 and Beyond

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Abstract :

The current Joint Professional Military Education system is centred in an educational paradigm more attuned to the demands of the Cold War era than those of the 21st Century. Although the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 served a critical role to integrate the Services and instill a spirit of 'Jointness' throughout the force, many of its functions have been overcome by social, cultural, and technological changes over the past 25 years. Gone are the days when the Joint Force concentrated solely upon fighting the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. Instead, today's security environment demands a far more expansive education as the Joint Force is asked to be the global security provider, performing tasks and taking on responsibilities clearly outside the traditional military realm. Operating in non-traditional and unfamiliar domains, the Joint Force of 2020 must refocus its education from 'knowing how' to 'knowing why.' Knowing how "...is learning to think other people's thoughts,"¹ and is associated with linear problem-solving. Knowing why, which is learning to think your own thoughts, represents the higher order of learning demanded by today's highly contextualized and non-linear global environment.

Stalled in the 'knowing how' paradigm, the American JPME enterprise continually reacts to emerging issues in a futile attempt to account for an ever-expanding body of knowledge. Current JPME Phase II educational subject areas number over 100, and this list continues to grow. This knowledge-based approach is unsustainable and unmanageable by JPME institutions, overwhelming for students, and indicative of a training mentality. The JPME community must eschew this 20th Century paradigm and develop a competence-based approach that provides students with the abilities needed to operate across the multiple levels of war, traversing multiple domains and disciplines, and is applicable anywhere in the world. A competence-based approach encompasses 'knowing why,' and will better fulfill JPME's broader obligation to prepare officers for policy and staff duties. In addition, a competence-based approach will provide an education that is more adaptable and agile, and which leverages the strengths of andragogy. This short article will support this argument with a short synopsis of the current American educational approach for JPME. It will then provide a comparison of technical knowledge and adaptive competences, which represent the primary modes of thought in the 20th and 21st Centuries respectively. Next, it will give an overview of a competence-based approach followed by a discussion of the approach's strengths and needs. Finally, a recommendation for the JPME community is presented, which may also prove useful to America's allies.

Key Word :

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Volume 15, Number 1, - 2015