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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Change Management Strategies

Maintaining strong leadership and command systems, the ability to build and task organize teams, and leveraging highly effective leadership and professional development programs will be essential for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to fulfill its increasingly complex missions in a new fiscal environment.

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Last summer saw a remarkable series of command changes at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). Fully six of nine division commanders or deputy commanders either retired or transferred to new assignments.

Even for an organization long accustomed to personnel changes, this run of retirements and command shifts were among the Corps' most extensive in years.

Beyond the immediate changes, though, these ongoing transitions raise an important long-term issue for USACE—that is, in the coming years, how will command, organization and policies such as implementation of the *Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014* be affected by what is likely to be a more fiscally constrained and uncertain environment? The impact on the Corps' ability to fulfill its increasingly complex missions will be especially significant since projects typically require many years to plan and fully implement, even as the nation's infrastructure needs continue to grow.

While many factors drive USACE's ability to maintain mission and leadership continuity, in our view, there are three factors that have been, and will continue to be, most crucial to fulfilling these goals in the next decade.

- Strong leadership and command systems (including improved regionalization and virtualization capabilities).
- The ability to build and task organize teams (to meet new or unexpected needs).
- The ability to leverage highly effective leadership and professional development programs to enhance military and civilian leadership, management, and technical skills and practical experience.

STRONG COMMAND SYSTEMS

USACE is part of the Department of Defense and U.S. Army's command systems, and its subordinate division and district organizations are commanded by uniformed officers. These officers are supported by a strong and deep Department of the Army civilian cadre, whose leadership and technical expertise ensures continuity of knowledge and mission despite changes in either uniformed or civilian personnel.

To fully take advantage of its leadership and command systems, the Corps must continue to enhance its Regional Management concept, which allows the divisions to use the talent of all of its districts to be more responsive to mission needs without having to build additional capability. This should be enhanced with robust, secure digital/virtual capabilities so that information and knowledge can be distributed throughout the region and the enterprise resulting in more consistent mission accomplishment.

An example of how this type of enterprise-wide collaboration could be used to good effect might be in developing the implementation guidance for the *Water Resources Reform and Development Act*, which authorizes accepting additional public or private funding for the Corps' Civil Works programs where regional and enterprise-wide consistency will be critical to success.

This means that the Corps must learn how to incentivize the private sector to invest in public infrastructure and infuse these lessons learned throughout the command.

BUILDING FLEXIBILITY

USACE will need to leverage enhanced digital/virtual capabilities to build teams (physical and virtual) within a region or from across the enterprise to meet mission needs with more flexibility. This would allow commanders at all levels to better task organize capabilities against requirements, while retaining the ability to tap into the Corps' research and development and knowledge management databases to drive consistency and enhance team performance.

The Chief of Engineers also may task organize USACE resources to meet emerging or surge requirements. This flexibility allows the organization to mitigate the effects of unit-wide change. Furthermore, this validates the notion that USACE must continue to provide broad, professionally rewarding experiences to its employees to build capable and flexible future capacity that is so necessary to meet the needs of an ever-changing and complex global environment.

Examples of how this type of capability has been used in the past include the surge for Afghanistan and Iraq reconstruction, the

design and construction of the Hurricane and Storm Damage Risk Reduction System in New Orleans, and the response to Superstorm Sandy in fall 2012.

In each of these cases, teams were built, trained and deployed—and achieved mission success—by drawing on the talent from across the entire enterprise, while increasing their ability to work with Joint and interagency partners. Such multiple military and civil works contingency operations have created a strong mission-oriented culture that will be critical to USACE's future success.

The design, construction and on-time execution of the Greater New Orleans Hurricane and Storm Damage Risk Reduction System exemplifies how USACE benefits when it can direct resources to meet emerging or surge requirements. U.S. ARMY PHOTO

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT BENEFITS

Both uniformed and civilian personnel follow the requirements of their respective Department of the Army professional development systems. This provides formal, dual and parallel professional development that allows both military and civilian personnel to receive training and mentoring opportunities needed to develop agile leaders that are enabled to operate successfully in complex, global environments.

Furthermore, USACE operates a commander transition and a Leader Development Program that complements the Department of the Army's Leader Development Program, the Civilian Education System, and the Senior Enterprise Talent Management System at all levels (district, division and headquarters). USACE's Leader Development Program is considered to be among the best in the Department of the Army. Additionally, disaster response and recovery and overseas contingency operations deployments provide invaluable practical experience in rapid response, quick decision-making, and leadership that benefits both uniformed and civilian personnel alike.

The Chief of Engineers is the Functional Chief for the Department of the Army's Engineers and Scientists Career Program, which is overseen by a USACE Senior Executive Service leader, ensuring uniform professional development for all in the program.

The Corps should look to its USACE Learning Center in Huntsville, Ala., to produce new and revised learning opportunities relevant to the current rapidly changing environment. And the Corps must enhance the ongoing success of its professional development systems. It must encourage career learning and continue its practice of conducting Leader Development Program lessons learned annually where appropriate program adjustments are made. This will help prepare the next generation of military and civilian servant-engineer-leaders.

In the future, USACE will become increasingly reliant on the use of virtual capability for talent management and to ensure that a broad experience base is available to meet mission requirements. This will further enable the Regional Management concept, ensuring that the right teams with the right knowledge are task organized to focus on engineering and related issues both at home and abroad while operating within a constrained fiscal environment. These tools will enhance the human interaction and teamwork so vital to meeting the needs of an ever-changing world.

Through its professional development programs, USACE will drive greater process consistency across the organization, strengthen its partnerships at all levels, deliver better results for its customers, and maintain and use its body of knowledge more seamlessly.

ASSURING MISSION SUCCESS

There always will be turmoil in any organization. Continuity through change can be properly maintained by giving commanders and leaders the tools and the flexibility to develop solutions based on a strong technical foundation, and to effect those solutions by building the right teams (both physically and virtually) and by promoting a well-trained and seasoned workforce.

With improved digital/virtual tools backed up by a strong cadre of experienced civilian personnel, and the ability to task organize capabilities across its regions and the enterprise, the Corps' command system will ensure readiness and the continuity of its mission within its authorities—despite changes in requirements, funding, policies, programs and personnel.

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