Kenneth Percell attended the first session of Harvard Business School’s General Manager executive education program along with Brigadier General (now Major General) Terry Gabreski, who is in charge of Logistics. The two Air Force leaders are leading change efforts in the Air Force Materiel Command, and thus they were particularly interested in the concepts of *Leading Change & Organizational Renewal* taught during the course. Both leaders wanted to try using the LCOR frameworks with their respective teams at home. They collaborated by purchasing a multi-user network license of the first module of the multimedia resource, *Solving Today’s Problems*, for their teams. This is Ken Percell’s story.

Percell is involved in a major effort to redesign information technology business processes in the Materiel Command. He made it easy for members of his team to find the LCOR multimedia resources via links on their desktops. He then issued a general invitation to the team to explore the material. They did, and he soon observed a difference in his team meetings:

> They began talking about business issues with a common lexicon. There are a thousand different frameworks that they might use, and they probably all came into the room with a different one. There are a thousand different lexicons of “process-speak” and “business-speak,” but since they’ve all been exposed to the common LCOR framework they’re essentially thinking from this one model—even though we’re focused on specific processes and action plans. We didn’t burn a lot of energy as a group trying to get common understanding.

After an initial test period (about forty-five days), and buoyed by the response to the first module, Percell (and Gabreski) licensed the additional modules and added these to the LCOR links on the targeted employees’ desktops. The Air Force network is quite robust, and Percell reports that speed of access to the material is comparable to access via CD, with the added benefit that content from all four modules is available without any switching of media in and out of the disk drive. For people who traveled—and there were a quite a few—the CDs were made available.

Because the second, third, and fourth modules are more targeted to specific issues—culture, leadership, innovation—Percell soon began suggesting particular stories or lectures to his redesign team as they worked through the Business Process redesign steps. “I’m kind of hopping them around, if you will,” he says, and the modular design of the resource makes this possible. When the group gets together, they have already
absorbed the lectures and cases. Percell and others in the group sometimes refer to these case stories or lectures, but they don’t review them together as a group. The team’s meeting processes are modeled after the kinds of exercises recommended in the LCOR workbooks, although Percell has sometimes modified these exercises to fit his specific situation.

Not surprisingly given the enormous task before them, team members had a lot of different ideas related to diagnosing and changing certain business processes. Percell faced situations where the team had massive disagreements over aspects of certain business processes, such as the appropriate authority level. By giving the team a framework through which to describe and debate the differences of opinion, he was able to get the team to share their differences in a much less threatening, impersonal way. This had enormous positive consequences, giving the team the necessary tools to quickly look at alternative points of view, assess them, make decisions, and move on. Percell describes the experience:

People put their beliefs into a neutral common model that they didn’t have to agree or disagree with: They used it to put down their points of view and communicate their desires and wants and opinions. It got them into an unemotional, more logical framework for sharing thoughts that they might have been hesitant to contribute before, for fear of putting themselves at risk.

Returning to the theme of multiple models, Percell notes that the LCOR frameworks were not the only model available to, or used by, them. “Our Command has been using a different framework, one based on Michael Hammer’s process enterprise business outcomes approach, and this LCOR framework is a very rich business operations model. The two blend together very nicely,” he says.

Percell comments that his own attendance at the General Manager program was key to his ability to use the material, because he had the benefit of experiencing the case discussions and could now leverage that knowledge with his team.

Because the material is on the Web (within the Air Force intranet), and because it is designed to be explored by individuals on their own before they use the concepts in group meetings, Percell believes that others who’ve heard about the initiative think of the material as just another individualized e-learning tool. But “it’s more about education, not training,” he says. “We’re giving the team an educational experience and applying that knowledge in real time.”

More information: Ken Percell  
Information Technology Director  
U.S. Air Force  
E-mail: Kenneth.percell@wpafb.af.mil  

Web site: http://www.gsb.hbs.edu/lcor

Judy Uhl, Chief Learning Officer  
Harvard Business School Interactive  
Phone: 617-495-6765  
Fax: 617-384-7224  
E-mail: juhl@hbs.edu

Web site: http://www.gsb.hbs.edu/lcor