

A Retrospective Review of Research on Adaptive Organizations*

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Abstract

The U.S. military is implementing new operational and organizational concepts for operating with Joint and Coalition forces. These new concepts include the goals of finding the most effective methods for integrating and improving interoperability with allied and coalition partners and implementing new organizational concepts to capitalize on the capabilities of joint and combined forces during an operation. The overarching hypothesis for the A2C2 program is that changes in the mission, or task structure, will incite changes to the structure of an organization. Prior team decisionmaking research indicates that highly effective teams adapt to stressful (i.e., high-workload) situations by using coordination strategies that effectively reduce the effort required to accomplish the mission while maintaining high levels of performance. Extending this research to the arena of dynamic, distributed team decisionmaking spawned research on new ways to organize military forces and motivated the inception of the Adaptive Architectures for Command and Control (A2C2) research program. In past situations, multiservice and multinational organizations have often formed without an established structure that typifies any single organization. Thus, traditional elements of structure (e.g., mission, roles, authority relations, control and coordination mechanisms) were negotiated as part of the formation of the multi-organization system. The goal of the A2C2 research program is to investigate new model-based approaches for designing C2 organizations and explore processes conducive to enabling adaptation. A model-test-design-model approach has been employed to conduct empirical research on organization design that can assist in positioning the Joint community to face the diverse challenges and dynamic changes that are projected for the future. This paper will review some of the research results, accomplishments, and lessons learned during the past several years of research on adaptive organizations.

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