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BEYOND INSTITUTIONAL ICEBERGS: CANSOFCOM, REFLEXIVITY AND THE DRIVE FOR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Major J.A.H. Chorley

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By Major J.A.H. Chorley

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the importance of culture and reflexivity within CANSOFCOM as a mechanism to meaningful organizational change. It considers theories from a number of different areas including business literature, sociology and organizational theory as well some contemporary military writing in order to contextualize how change is best achieved through an understanding of organizational culture. *Beyond Institutional Icebergs* explores the challenges that organizations like CANSOFCOM face in maintaining operational organizational (competitive) advantage and/or parity with contemporary and emerging threats while simultaneously ensuring that they remain legitimate actors within the wider framework of the Canadian Armed Forces.

Chapter One explores a number of key concepts related to organizational theory and relates them to SOF and CANSOFCOM culture. The chapter contends that, in order to remain relevant, organizations like CANSOFCOM must strike a balance between the legitimacy needs of the wider organization that is the Canadian Armed Forces and that of the modern adversary who operates at "The Speed of War." Chapter One also explores how organizations "drift" away from the "The Speed of War" and the consequences of doing so. It concludes by emphasizing the importance of constant and comprehensive organizational introspection as the key to ensuring organizational relevance and instituting meaningful change.

Chapter Two briefly explores CANSOFCOM organizational culture as viewed through the lens of organizational theory. It attempts to explore key periods and events in the Command's young history that either contributed to "strategic drift" or "competitive advantage", identifying key factors that could be used to shape future efforts.

Chapter Three provides a number of general and specific takeaways and recommendations for CANSOFCOM, some questions for further discussion as well as a potential number of areas for future study.

The paper concludes by reinforcing the importance of understanding culture as the primary mechanism to implementing meaningful and enduring organizational change within CANSOFCOM. It challenges key leaders and ordinary members alike to be "students of their profession" and pursue a policy of constant critical and reflective thinking with respect to CANSOFCOM as a critical institution within the Canadian Armed Forces.

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INTRODUCTION

Speed will only increase. A sense of urgency will only become more essential.

- John P. Kotter, *A Sense of Urgency*

In many ways, Spartan culture was superior…save that it could not see beyond its own survival

- Steven Pressfield

Invariably whenever culture is lectured or discussed within the military, the idea of "culture as iceberg" is introduced. Referring to the idea that culture, and specifically organizational culture, is constituted of much more than is readily visible, the metaphor provides a useful visual representation of an extremely complex subject at its most macro[1]. Like all metaphors, however, there are natural limits to its utility. In the case of the iceberg metaphor, the argument can be made that its' inability to adequately capture the impact of a number of supra-environmental factors such as culture, continual adversarial evolution, and/or intra and inter-organizational pressures (i.e. other icebergs) on any given organizations culture is a reflection of the limits of its overall usefulness. Subsequently, the study of culture demands additional study that goes well beyond the proverbial "tip of the iceberg" into the virtual ocean of additional surface and sub-surface factors that define, influence and shape its growth or decline.

Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM) is one such organization that defies easy categorization. As a relatively young but growing (in both size and importance) organization, CANSOFCOM has reached the point in his history where it would

[1] Stefanie C. Reissner, Victoria Pagan and Craig Smith, "'Our Iceberg is Melting': Story, Metaphor and the Management of Organisational Change," *Culture & Organization* 17, no. 5 (12, 2011), 417-433.

benefit from deliberate and critical reflection on both its accomplishments and failures. Recently emerged from over a decade of conflict and already consequentially involved in other areas of the world, the post-Afghanistan timeframe nonetheless provides a fitting and convenient opportunity for CANSOFCOM to participate in thoughtful reflection. This, however, as numerous recent historical attempts within the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) have demonstrated, may be easier said than done[2]. Because the immediate demands of the 'now' coupled with strong and defiant service (Army, Navy, Air Force) culture have tended to overshadow or trump any attempts at meaningful institutional direction change, often resulting instead in myopic self-reinforcement of existing practices and norms, new and innovative processes may need to be undertaken. Furthermore, while many factors may contribute to the symptoms that ultimately manifest themselves as organizational parochialism, biases and/or short sightedness; it is possible to trace the roots of these problems back to one common source – culture. As a result, this monograph will focus its attention on the exploration of organizational culture, specifically as it relates to organizational change in an attempt to determine those critical factors that differentiate between relevant (organizations that maintain the ability to implement meaningful change) and inconsequential organizations (those that do not). It will focus on Special Operations Forces (SOF) culture in general and CANSOFCOM culture specifically, drawing on a number of theoretical, contemporary and historical examples in order to extrapolate a number of relevant observations and recommendations for consideration.

[2] Numerous initiatives have occurred within the Canadian Forces over the last decade plus that have attempted to address institutional change and progress. Some examples include Chief of Defence Staff Action Teams (2005), Joint Capability Assessment Teams, or "Tiger Teams" (2007-present). Their results have been arguably mixed. Despite numerous attempts at emphasizing and creating a "Joint" Force, for example, much of the analysis and recommendations from these teams (however salient) have either been ignored (waiting out a change in senior leadership), delayed or hindered in other ways by the services.

While most theorists concede that culture is a combination of "shared values, beliefs and assumptions[3]", "the way things are done around here[4]" and/or some variant thereof, most concepts lose their power as they are communicated to a wider audience, often oversimplified for general consumption, shedding nuanced complexity in favour of descriptions that favour easy explanation or simple quantification[5]. While useful as a conceptual start point, modern military professionals cannot afford to be satisfied with only this cursory understanding of culture. Instead, an acceptance that the study of culture and all of its permeations, regardless of however elusive or complicated, is a necessity born of an increasingly complex world; one that demands that professional military leaders at all levels capable of understanding, contending with, and contextualizing the friction and dynamism brought about by factors such as changes in information technology, an increasingly informed and demanding public, as well as the changes in the very nature of the threat that are greying the boundaries of traditional conflict and are instead necessitating an increased degree of interaction between a wide range of traditional and non-traditional organizations and institutions.

Culture as a concept manifests itself on both the physical and psychological planes, both individually and collectively[6]. Intertwined and overlapped, individuals can exist within the framework of multiple subculture, organizational or professional networks simultaneously[7]. While, each 'identity' may have its mutually supporting norms, values and beliefs, it is inevitable that some will not, subsequently forcing a measure of introspection, denial, regulation or

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[3] Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Fourth ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 437.
[4] Deal T. E. and Kennedy, A. A., *Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2000), 232.
[5] A great example of an oversimplified explanation of how organizational culture works can be found by watching the '5 Monkeys' experiment, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KZeiSKnhOBc , which attempts to explain how change initiatives are inhibited by existing organizational culture. Useful to a point, the experiment nonetheless does not completely summarize how change is initiated or inhibited in an organization.
[6] Steven Pressfield, *The Warrior Ethos*Black Irish Entertainment, 2011), 114.
[7] Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Fourth ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 437.

compromise. This combination of cognitive, regulative and normative behaviours and beliefs forms the collective and underlying concept of how we, as human beings, interact with one another on a daily basis and can be expanded to help understand how we operate in groups or organizations[8]. SOF groups – whether Team, Detachment, Troop, Squadron, Unit, Command, etc. are an example of different organizational levels within SOF organizations that exhibit many of the same behavioural characteristics as individuals, interacting in meaningful ways with the layers below, aside and above them. Just as individual or small group actions can directly impact the overall health of the organization, so too can the institution or organization shape and influence the beliefs, values or actions of the individuals within them[9]. While Mongolian warlord Yasotay was correct when he said that "When the hour of crisis comes, remember that 40 selected men can shake the world[10]", it is equally true that "the purpose of bureaucracy is to compensate for incompetence and lack of discipline.[11]" This, the crossroads between the study of institutions and organizations, forms the theoretical backbone of this paper.

Organizational culture, the collective behaviour of individuals within a profession[12] forms the particular area of focus for this paper because it is simultaneously the most important as well as the most complex. Regardless of this multifaceted and multilayered challenge, however, understanding organizational culture remains one of the most meaningful undertakings that those seeking to shape their organization towards the achievement and/or maintenance of meaningful relevance and competitive advantage within the contemporary operating environment can pursue. This is because it is only through a comprehensive understanding of

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[8] Richard W. Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests and Identities*, Fourth ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014), 266.
[9] *Ibid, 266.*
[10] Taken from http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a583821.pdf a US Army War College monograph.
[11] Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why some Companies make the Leap...and Others Don'T* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 320.
[12] Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Fourth ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 437.

any given organizations culture that it is possible to introduce, regulate, and normalize deliberate meaningful change and it is only through the progressive implementation of continuous change that environmentally tuned organizations can hope to maintain an institutional edge over their adversaries, and maintain relevance and legitimacy with their allies, whomever or whatever they may be.

Unlike businesses or corporations who can measure their effectiveness against a quantitative economic backdrop of quarterly economic gains and losses, military organizations ultimately measure their collective "bottom-line" as a political one, subservient to the requirements of the political (national) level and executed through either the use of force or other, less quantifiable means. Resultantly military organizations are faced with a unique and particularly "wicked[13]" problem. Specifically, military organizations are entities that spend the bulk of their existence preparing for a variety of threats and scenarios within broad theoretical paradigms without actually executing the majority of them. As a result, readiness, the aggregate assessed ability of a military force to conduct an specific operation or range of operations within a specific timeframe or environment, becomes their primary output and, as one can imagine, quantifying readiness when measured against an unknown and evolving spectrum of adversaries is difficult – particularly when that spectrum includes both conventional and unconventional threats and is considered by many to be interconnected, transnational and asymmetric. As a slew of recent historical examples have demonstrated, real operations have rarely mirrored their doctrinal models. Militaries, bound by the constraints of this elusive and evolving adversary, the false prison of 'peace-time' soldiering, different service visions and understanding of the threat,

[13] T. C. HAMMES GREENWOOD T.X., "War Planning for Wicked Problems," *Armed Forces Journal* 147, no. 5 (Dec2009, 2009), 18-37. Wicked problems are those that defy easy quantification and because of rapidly changing variables and unpredictable consequences tend to introduce more problems as they are tackled. Savvy Risk Intelligence is the mitigation for Wicked Problems.

a culture that traditionally resists change[14], and the difficult task of preparing for an enormous spectrum of conflict are subsequently (and typically) forced to make dramatic change in order to maintain relevance once they have 'crossed the line of departure' into operations.

Described metaphorically, the Cold War paradigm of conventional forces matching up against one another in a predictable and anachronistic boxing match complete with set piece doctrine, 'force calculators', and organizational tables has been replaced (or at least supplemented) by a multi-dimensional fight better aligned with the etherealness of a mixed martial arts fight complete with unpredictability, non-state actors, rapid change and asymmetry[15]. In a general sense, it has been those organizations have that have anticipated or adapted to these new realities the fastest that have had the most success within the Contemporary Operating Environment (COE). In addition, the COE itself has changed, becoming increasingly characterized by the rapid introduction of a variety of new technologies, the (re)rise of non-traditional actors such as Private Military Corporations (PMC)[16], new factors such as global warming and the impact of millennials[17], shift to conflict on the informational plane, as well as increasingly blurred lines between culture and conflict[18]. Expectations from skeptical national populaces for militaries to be not only multi-capable, adaptive, fiscally prudent but also relevant and responsible agencies of their respective nations have arguably never been higher. The result of the multitude of changes over the last decade plus within the COE has arguably been a change

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[14] Peter H. Wilson, "Defining Military Culture," *Journal of Military History* 72, no. 1 (01, 2008), 11-41.
[15] David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2009), 346.
[16] Sid Ellington, "The Rise of Battlefield Private Contractors," *Public Integrity* 13, no. 2 (Spring2011, 2011), 131-148. Although PMC (aka mercenaries) have long been a presence on within conflict, the current COE arguably provides nation-states with a series of new opportunities to exploit the gap the exists between "Peer to Peer" conflict and its less symmetrical cousins.
[17] Kay A. Smith, "Gaining the Edge: Connecting with the Millennials," *Air Force Journal of Logistics* 33, no. 3 (Fall2009, 2009), 52-60.
[18] Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2009), 346.

in how the political "bottom-line" is measured. Afghanistan and Iraq have demonstrated the perils of conducting operations within the "YouTube" universe as much as they have redrawn the tolerance for the loss of "blood and treasure" for war weary domestic populaces. Whether visceral real-time images of war or the acute number of emerging Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD) cases will further change future "bottom-lines" is a question worthy of further study and observation. Despite this and other interesting questions about the future of war, however, the question of regarding the cultural dimension is largely *how* organizations will adjust to changes in the "bottom-line."

Interesting and not at all coincidental to note, the rise of uncertainty and ambiguity within the post 9/11 COE has been there has been a substantial investment in and use of, across most Western democracies, the most unconventional of their military arsenal, Special Operations Forces (SOF)[19]. This is because, amongst all military entities, it has been SOF that has arguably best adopted their organizational culture and practices to the demands of the COE. Effective, agile, adaptive, discreet and relatively cost effective, SOF have increasingly gained the trust of governments as they too have attempted to navigate the delicate realities of an increasingly interconnected and complex world. Since its inception in 2006, the Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM) is no exception to this trend and has steadily earned both a national and international reputation as a trustworthy organization capable of handling the most difficult, dangerous or sensitive operations.

The end of the Afghanistan mission and a decade plus of both sustained Direct and Indirect action, however, finds the Command at a crossroads. New fiscal, operational and

[19] Michael D. Day and Bernd Horn, "Canadian Special Operations Command: The Maturation of a National Capability," *Canadian Military Journal* 10, no. 4 (Autumn 2010), 69-74. Also see http://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2013/10/22/sof-becoming-important-element-of-us-foreign-policy.html

political realities for the entire Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) marked by a general transfer from a 'time of plenty' to a 'time of scarcity', as well as changes in expectations from both the Government and Canadians in general necessitate that CANSOFCOM deliberately revisit its organizational culture including the entire spectrum of existing normative, regulative and cognitive paradigms in order to ensure that it remains an organization that is both relevant and competitive. This caution is unfortunately a necessary one. SOF in general and Canadian unconventional forces in particular, have traditionally and historically suffered a very Hobbesian existence: nasty, brutish and short. The roll call of Canadian 'unconventional' organizations that have ceased to exist is unfortunately a long one and should serve as a prudent warning to every member of CANSOFCOM[20]. This is because that, despite its current position of relevance and popularity within the Canadian security framework, CANSOFCOM is still an organization within the CAF, one is complete with a multitude of norms, values and practices that contribute to both its growth as well as some that invariably contribute towards its decline. Without continual and critical introspection coupled with meaningful, deliberate and consistent change, CANSOFCOM runs the risk that it could fall prey to any number of traps that ultimately spelt the demise of its hereditary predecessors whether it be through institutional hubris or institutional irrelevance. This call to ruthless introspection is one that urges CANSOFCOM to ensure that its aspirations are bounded by a clear and thoughtful understanding of reality or as one senior CANSOF Commander put it: we need to be "bold of vision and incremental in our approach.[21]"

[20] Depending on your characterization of what constitutes SOF within a historical context, Canada has seen the following organizations cease to exist from the Second World War to today: Viking Force (1942), Special Operations Executive (1945), The First Special Service Force (1945), The Mobile Strike Force (1955), 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion (1945), Special Air Service Company (1949), The Special Service Force including the Airborne Regiment (1995).

[21] Email exchange with senior CANSOFCOM Commander 7 April 2014.

As a result, it is critical to recognize and reinforce that CANSOFCOM does not exist as a culture in isolation. Although bearing a number of distinct cultural and organizational characteristics, it remains an entity firmly entrenched within the CAF; drawing upon it for a spectrum of both physical and psychological resources, the primary of which is institutional legitimacy. This relationship, as in all relationships, is replete with both positive and negative characteristics, resulting in a natural but ever present tension with other organizations within the institution. Due is some part to the fact CANSOFCOM, like most national SOF organizations[22], has an ingrained culture affinity towards challenging the status quo, challenging the norms and values of the remainder of the through routine practices and activities, [23] the relationship between SOF and conventional forces (and the sometimes divide between the two) has long been a subject of study[24]. Although the remainder of the CAF for their part has both traditionally quietly resented some aspects of SOF culture (most conventional western militaries tend to have a similar relationship with their SOF elements), they have also benefited greatly from the innovation and agility of the various efforts of the Command, resulting in an uneasy détente[25]. SOF, for their part, have sometimes abused the relationship between, risking the loss of hard won gains for the sake of individual or organizational hubris or cultural pyrrhic victories.

In order to better understand the numerous inter-organizational, and intra-organization challenges, opportunities and subtleties that shape modern SOF organizations, this paper will

[22] SOF, for purposes of this paper is best viewed through the eyes of the "five eyes" nations and their respective SOF organizations: Canada, The USA, The United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand as the cultural norms within these organizations are the most similar.
[23] Jessica Glicken Turnley, *Retaining a Precarious Value as Special Operations Go Mainstream* (Hurlburt Field, Florida: The JSOU Press,[2008]).
[24] Bernd Horn, "When Cultures Collide: The Conventional Military / SOF Chasm," *Canadian Military Journal* 5, no. 3 (Autumn 2004).
[25] Direct SOF contributions to the conventional community (all services) are numerous and include a plethora of technological, TTPs (tactics, techniques and procedures), as well as other and other advancements.

draw on a number of theoretical backdrops. Scott's Institutional Analysis (IA) model[26] provides one component as the normative, regulative and cognitive pillars of the model provide a useful framework within which to explore and subsequently explain the spectrum of internal and external forces that shape contemporary SOF in a manner that most contemporary models or explanations of organizational culture alone do not. Schein's theories of organizational culture afford another useful component particularly when overlapping and contrasting different components and perspectives[27]. Finally a number of additional concepts that can be found in Schein and Scott's work (as well as numerous others) including Legitimacy, Institutional Isomorphism and Coupling are particularly useful for understanding SOF culture and will be utilized extensively within this paper. Combined with a number of complementary concepts that exist outside the IA model including, The Speed of War, The Cultural Web, Precarious Value, Competitive Advantage, Strategic Drift and Reflexivity, *Beyond Institutional Icebergs* hopes to provide a visual and engaging representation of SOF as it exists as a competitive and relevant organization within a wider framework.

This paper specifically argues that that there are a wide variety of both conscious and unconscious forces within the cognitive, normative and regulative planes that continually shape and influence the CANSOFCOM 'paradigm.' While some are passive and others active malevolent, they impact the organization in both predictable and unpredictable ways. Although they exert significant and specific pressure on key commanders and leaders to shape the organization, they are not the exclusive domain of those with formal title or responsibility to address. Instead, all CANSOFCOM members bear a significant responsibility to assist with the sustained relevance of the SOF community. This begins with the considerable and continual

[26] Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests and Identities*, Fourth ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014), 266.
[27] Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Fourth ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 437.

responsibility to contribute to the most critical activity within the institution, *Reflexivity*, a term that will be explored in greater detail later but, in effect, is captured by the idea of deliberate, inclusive and thoughtful reflection within CANSOFCOM as an institution, as well as the continual implementation of incremental and meaningful change; distinguishing those activities and ambitions that differentiate between ambition and arrogance and reality from fantasy[28]. CANSOFCOM, *Beyond Institutional Icebergs* contends, has exercised collective reflexivity inconsistently throughout its existence, allowing periods of organizational drift to erode its overall relevance and readiness to the demands of the COE and deliberate, inclusive *Reflexivity* is the key to ensuring that it does not happen again.

Beyond Institutional Icebergs will first spend some time in Chapter One to explore a number of critical concepts, relating them to SOF in general and, where applicable, the particular CANSOFCOM experience. It will culminate by proposing a hybridized model that helps explain and contextualize organization change with a competitive environment. Chapter Two will focus on a specific analysis of CANSOFCOM with respect to key concepts and the model while Chapter Three will provide a number of general and specific recommendations as well as considerations for the future.

LIMITATIONS, ASSUMPTIONS AND BIASES

SOF in general and CANSOFCOM in particular is blessed with a plethora of strong, experienced and competent leaders, virtually all of whom care deeply about SOF as an institution. As a result, *Beyond Institutional Icebergs* would be remiss if it did not acknowledge the critical role that specific individuals (great leaders) have played, and continue to play, in the

[28] Paul Higate and Ailsa Cameron, "Reflexivity and Researching the Military," *Armed Forces & Society (0095327X)* 32, no. 2 (01, 2006), 219-233.

evolution of the CANSOFCOM 'enterprise' from the Detachment to the CAF level. Their critical impact notwithstanding, however, the scope of this paper is such that it will not focus on the specific acts or impact of individuals, save two important archetypes. The first, taken from various John P. Kotter works is that of the institutional "no-no[29]", those within organizations that resist change and actively embrace the status quo[30]. The second, taken from a variety of sources is that of the "intellectual entrepreneur[31]" or "thought-leader[32]", those within organizations that continually assess and evaluate the organization at various levels, continually looking for ways to improve it[33], often regardless of their formal "power-position" within the organization. Fortunately CANSOFCOM has had an abundance of the latter and few of the former throughout its development. Regardless, both the "intellectual entrepreneur" and the "no-no" continue to play an important part within the dynamics of SOF culture at all levels, particularly with regards to the implementation of change and will be referred to periodically throughout this paper.

As an acknowledgement of potential biases, it is important to note that this paper has been written by a SOF operator who has commanded largely at the sub-unit level and within one particular CANSOFCOM organization. As such it presents, to a great extent a specific and particular perspective. Although great care has been taken to reflect and subsequently remove particular individual and organizational biases as well as to deliberately add consideration of other organizational or "non-operator" perspectives, *Beyond Institutional Icebergs* is undoubtedly imperfect. Given that one of the overall objectives of the paper is to encourage

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[29] John P. Kotter, *Buy-in: Saving Your Good Idea from Getting Shot Down*, ed. Lorne A. Whitehead (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2010), 192.
[30] John P. Kotter, *A Sense of Urgency* (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2008), 196.
[31] Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests and Identities*, Fourth ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014), 266.
[32] Joel Kurtzman, ***ThoughtLeaders****: Insights on the Future of Business*, ed. Joel KurtzmanWiley, 1997), 169.
[33] Charlotte A. Sullivan and Richard A. Cherwitz, "Intellectual Entrepreneurship," *Change* 34, no. 6 (Nov, 2002), 22.

deliberate institutional reflexivity at both the organizational and individual level, the author feels it would be negligent to not engage in a little of his own by acknowledging this up front.

Finally, *Beyond Institutional Icebergs* has limited itself to a study of SOF culture in general and CANSOFCOM culture in particular. While it acknowledges the unique impacts that organizational interplay between CANSOFCOM and the other services (Army, Navy, Air Force), other key OGDs[34] as well as the Government of Canada itself has on the overall culture of CANSOFCOM, it will restrict the analysis of these entities largely to an aggregate level. It will, however, concede one macro observation in advance: shared vision and cooperation between the four services is as powerful a change multiplier as parochialism and competition is an obstacle.

[34] The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) are two good examples of organizations that influence CANSOFCOM culture.

CHAPTER ONE: CORE CONCEPTS

Great leaders understand that historical success tends to produce stable and inwardly focused organizations, and these outfits, in turn, reinforce a feeling of contentment with the status quo

- John P. Kotter

Out of every one hundred men, ten shouldn't even be there, eighty are just targets, nine are the real fighters, and we are lucky to have them, for they make the battle. Ah, but the one, one is a warrior, and he will bring the others back.

- Heraclitus

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

The complexity of organizational culture is perhaps best captured in the variety of different theories and models that attempt to describe it. For Edgar H. Schein culture is "both a "here and now" dynamic phenomenon and a coercive background structure that influences us in multiple ways.[35]" He groups organizations through a combination of size and function with cultures falling into one of four categories: Macrocultures (nations, ethnic groups, and global occupations such as military officers or doctors), Organizational Cultures (Private, public, non-profit or governmental organizations), Subcultures (Occupational Groups within organizations) or Microcultures (Microsystems within or outside organizations)[36]. This categorization is particularly useful in reinforcing the notion that is both possible and highly likely that members of an Organizational culture such as CANSOFCOM will simultaneously have membership within a number of other culture groups, each with their own norms, values and practices that may align or differ from one another. The difficulty that arises when members of a particular culture / sub-culture develop or support norms that are inconsistent with those of the wider

[35] Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Fourth ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010)98.
[36] *Ibid, 98.*

organizations (as a means to subvert it) is known as a counter-culture[37]. Counter-cultures can be extremely dangerous within any organization, but are particularly nefarious within military organizations[38]. Although SOF is sometimes accused of being counter-culture to the wider military, it is largely a misnomer[39]. They should not be confused with the notion of dissonant or disruptive thinkers however; individuals or groups who attempt to openly challenge the norms of an institution or organization in an attempt to improve it[40]. Other theorists favour particular pillars in their attempts to describe culture. Douglas North for example focuses on a regulative, quantitative and economic based analysis of institutions and organizations; differentiating between the two as follows: "institutions provide the rules of the game, whereas organizations act as the players. [41]" While this explanation is useful in capturing some of the transactional and competitive nature of organizational culture, it unfortunately fails to adequately describe the ambiguousness that so often characterizes the SOF paradigm including the shades that so often delineate between success and failure. Distinguished sociologist Philip Selznick captured the power of some of this ambiguousness by connecting the importance of cooperation between organizations in shaping and serving organizational norms and behaviours[42]. Other sociologists such as Frank Dobbin have explored this concept, further embracing the cognitive-cultural

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[37] Joanne Martin and Caren Siehl, "Organizational Culture and Counterculture: An Uneasy Symbiosis," *Organizational Dynamics* 12, no. 2 (09, 1983), 52-64.

[38] Donna Winslow, *The Canadian Airborne Regiment in Somalia: A Socio-Cultural Inquiry* (Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada,[1997]). The Airborne Regiment serves as an unfortunate example of an organization with a number of small counter-cultures within it that ultimately spelt the demise of the organization.

[39] Bernd Horn, ""Love 'em Or Hate 'em": Learning to Live with Elites," *Canadian Military Journal* 8, no. 4 (Winter 2007-2008). The argument that SOF operates outside the boundaries of military convention is one of the typical and convenient refrains that non-supporters use to discredit or argue against the use or existence of SOF. Perhaps the most dangerous notion, however, is that of SOF as "soldiers of the elite." This notion is a dangerous one, perpetuating the myth that SOF units operate outside the chain of command and the rules of war – a fallacy.

[40] Grant Martin, "Disruptive Thinkers: The Disruptive Poets Society: How the Dead Poets Society Advocated Disruptive Thinkers, Why DoD Shouldn'T Encourage More Disruptive Thinkers, and 10 Principles for those that do Think Disruptively," www.smallwarsjournal.com (accessed 04/20, 2012).

[41] Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests and Identities*, Fourth ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014), 266.

[42] *Ibid, 266.*

aspects of organizations as they interact with not only other organizations but society itself in continual attempts to establish not only relevance but also legitimacy. Dobbin contends that "rationalized organizational practices are essentially cultural…very much at the core of modern culture precisely because modern culture is organized around instrumental rationality.[43]" The notion that organizational culture is an extension of societal culture, reflecting the norms, values and beliefs accordingly are a powerful one particularly when considering this notion through a military lens: military organizations that stray too far from accepted societal norms run the risk of losing legitimacy and, if gone too far, ultimately ceasing to exist[44].

MILITARY CULTURE

Military culture forms a very particular form of organizational culture. Far beyond the scope of this paper to describe or explore in detail, the evolution of modern (Western) military culture from its roots in class based, hierarchical, linear warfare to its modern state is aptly captured by historian Peter H. Wilson's 2008 article, *Defining Military Culture*. In it Wilson describes the unique relationship with the state that militaries possess as the legitimate purveyors of violence[45]. He further captures the essence of military culture in general and its relationship to organizational change through the connection of three key ideas, complexity, formalization and centralization as the institutional extensions of power, leadership and communication[46].

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[43] Frank R. Dobbin, *Cultural Models of Organization: The Social Constrcution of Organizing Principles*, 1994).
[44] Donna Winslow, "Between Dream and Reality: The Canadian Mission to Somalia," http://www.bmlv.gv.at/pdf_pool/publikationen/01_11pop_04_wins.pdf. Again, unfortunately the airborne regiment serves as a salient example of a military organization that, when contrasted against Canadian societal norms, was found to be in an unacceptable position.
[45] Wilson, *Defining Military Culture*, Vol. 72, 2008)23.
[46] *Ibid, 23.*

> "As armies grew larger, their internal structures became more complex through their subdivision into standardised, permanent units, and then then grouping of these into intermediate hierarchies of regiments, brigades, divisions and corps. The flow of information, resources, and personnel within this structure became formalised through written regulations that permeated every level. These structures were also highly centralised, reserving key decisions for the senior ranks, and strictly delineating responsibilities throughout the junior levels.[47]"

Anyone remotely familiar with SOF organizations will immediately recognize many of these concepts as antithetic to SOF culture, and that 'unconventional forces' have largely grown out of a deliberate institutional realization that the aforementioned construct was too slow, too cumbersome and not reflective of or responsive to the contextual problem set (of whatever the problem of the day was). Interestingly, this description of continues to influence conventional (army) military culture today, providing a constant source of cultural tension between the two domains[48]. This tension is particularly difficult to quantify as SOF transfers many of its lessons-learned, mission-sets, TTPs and technology to conventional (typically Army and Marine) organizations in order to free up capacity to pursue new capabilities[49].

Rather than simple acceptance of cultural incompatibility or resignation to the idea that perpetual organizational tension between SOF and conventional forces is an extant one, it should be recognized that SOF is not immune to the organizational norms that shape large conventional organizations. As an organization that draws it members almost exclusively from conventional

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[47] Peter H. Wilson, "Defining Military Culture," *Journal of Military History* 72, no. 1 (01, 2008)31-32.

[48] In his important work **Afghanistan and the Troubled Future of Unconventional Warfare (2006)**, author Sy Rothstein describes the early days of Operation Enduring Freedom where, in 2003, Special Forces and SOF found themselves subordinated to conventional forces. In order to gain permission for operations, SOF / SF increasingly had to report to a series of superior HQs, culminating in an army-level HQ (CENTCOM). The consequences of differences in organizational culture were also tragically highlighted during OP ANACONDA in **Not a Good Day to Die (2005)** by Sean Naylor, where dramatic differences in risk-decision making-authority paradigms between SOF and conventional commanders resulted in miscommunication, missed opportunities and unnecessary loss of life.

[49] Derek Leebaert, *To Dare and to Conquer: Special Operations and the Destiny of Nations, from Achilles to Al Qaeda* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2006), 688. A good example of this is the relative proliferation of night fighting equipment. Once the exclusive domain of SOF, the validation of the capability by SOF has been followed by the distribution to conventional forces and its subsequent use in routine operations.

backgrounds and one that remains firmly entrenched as a component of larger institution[50], it is only rational that many of the norms would be carried over. However, that SOF culture remains susceptible to many of the same pressures that 'conventional culture does' is not as important a takeaway as is how and why SOF organizations handle these manifestations and pressures.

INSTITUTIONAL ISOMORPHISM AND COUPLING OVERVIEW

Institutional Isomorphism and Coupling form the final two aspects of organizational theory necessary for brief explanation and exploration. Institutional Isomorphism, the tendency of organizations to look similar will be explored in greater detail later in the paper while Coupling (or it's opposite – Decoupling), refers more to the regulatory and cognitive aspects of an organization as it relates to another, respective of legitimacy, control and power. Decoupling in particular refers to the phenomenon of passive or active cultural resistance to regulative, cognitive or normative change. Scott nicely summarizes how organizations (including sub-units, individuals, etc) can adopt chameleon like conformity to organizational norms as a means to achieving power or control:

> "Organizations under pressure to adopt particular structures or procedures may opt to respond in a ceremonial manner, making changes in their formal structures to signal conformity, but then buffering internal units, allowing them to operate independent of these pressures.[51]"

THE SPEED OF WAR

If SOF culture is a reflection of not only wider institutional/organizational norms, values and beliefs but also of the wider society within which it exists, then it stands to reason a portion of its culture also comes from the other side of the cultural "coin", its adversaries. Although

[50] One of the many myths about SOF is that they are 'paramilitary' in nature, falling outside the rules that govern the wider military.
[51] Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests and Identities*, Fourth ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014), 266.

CANSOFCOM as an organization was born from a domestic law-enforcement paradigm, its coming of age occurred over a decade plus of war in Afghanistan[52]. It was during this time that CANSOFCOM as an entity was formed, incorporating existing organizations (JTF2, CJIRU and 427 SOAS[53]) as well as seeing the formation of a new one (CSOR). Many of the organizations collective views and beliefs on the nature of the contemporary threat were formed at that time and incorporated through lessons-learned deep into its cultural fabric. However, as even casual historians will note, the end of the war in Afghanistan has not seen a slowing in the growth of the contemporary threat. Instead, the threat continues to morph within the tendrils of globalization, regrouping, adopting new processes and structures for future use[54]. It is therefore not reasonable to assume that as adversarial norms, beliefs and practices change so too will there be pressure on and a requirement for CANSOFCOM culture to adapt and conform. Although exactly what level of adaptation is reasonable or even feasible is a question worthy of discussion and will be explored later in the paper, it is first necessary to understand the cultural and pragmatic aspects of the 'Speed of War.'

The 'Speed of War' (SoW) is a term associated with an article first formally written by US Army LTG James Dubik in 2012[55] and has since been supported or referred to by a modest number of articles, authors and noted experts[56]. The term attempts to capture the dynamics of the current adversarial threat facing most modern militaries in a dynamic but relatable manner. Specifically, the Speed of War is characterized by a large swath of non-traditional diverse and

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[52] Bernd Horn, *We Will Find a Way: Understanding the Legacy of Canadian Special Operations Forces*, JSOU Report 2-12 ed. (MacDill Air Force Base, Florida: Joint Special Operations University, 2012).
[53] Day and Horn, *Canadian Special Operations Command: The Maturation of a National Capability*, Vol. 10, Autumn 2010), 69-74.
[54] Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2009), 346.
[55] LTG David G. Perkins and CPT Nathan K. Finney, "Speed of War for Army Knowledge," *Army*, 2012, 34.
[56] Former General Stanley McChrystal utilizes the term here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFaK1GXekjA to capture the challenges facing military leaders in the Contemporary Operating Environment.

capable adversaries that typically have one or more of the following characteristics: operate unhindered by bureaucracy, are capable of unbounded innovation, make use of asymmetry and are capable of rapid dissemination of information, techniques and procedures. Focusing on the rise of transnational non-state actors vice traditional nation-state conventional forces (Peer to Peer), the 'Speed of War' acknowledges that enemy 'doctrine' is as both fluid and continually evolving as it is diverse[57].

The SoW is an inclusive term. It includes both the general trends of current conflict as well as the specific events that define them. Although it recognizes that not all adversarial groups are homogenous, it contends that, thanks to the impact of globalization and the rise of social media, they all are connected. 'New Wars', as they are also characterized by Mary Kaldor from the London School of Economics "are the wars of the era of globalization.[58]" The actions of a suicide bomber from Chechnya on one day are quickly analyzed and disseminated; the lessons learned of which are then learned and incorporated by an AQIP cell for a similar attack on the following day. The term blurs the line between the common doctrinal and planning refrains or catchphrases of 'most likely' and 'most dangerous' and morphs them into something much less predictable or quantifiable and instead into something else more insidious. The SoW demands that military professionals are paying attention. The Speed of War recognizes that most modern terrorist organizations have deliberately distorted the lines between the criminal and military components of their enterprises as well as the lines between pragmatism and religious or ideological cause[59]. It acknowledges that threats are now increasingly transnational in scope,

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[57] Jacob Mundy, "Deconstructing Civil Wars: Beyond the New Wars Debate," *Security Dialogue* 42, no. 3 (06, 2011), 279-295.
[58] Mary Kaldor, "In Defence of New Wars," *International Journal of Security and Development* 2, no. 1 (2013), 1-12.
[59] David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 384.

ignoring traditional nation-state borders and instead maximizing the use of 'cultural camouflage', the execution of activities from within the relative security of anonymity given by small groups, decentralized command and control, and sanctuary in large, urbanized and demographically dispersed locations[60]. "Even though most contemporary conflicts are very local, global connections are much more extensive, including criminal networks.[61]" The Speed of War, therefore, can be characterized as a hybridization and combination of three intertwined kinds of violence: "war (organized violence for political ends), crime (organized violence for private ends) and human rights violations (violence against civilians)[62]. Like the evolution of SOF as a response to the inability of conventional forces to contend with the COE and the a new method of expressing the political "bottom-line", the SoW could be described as the adversarial entrepreneurial response to changes in global dynamics, manifested in new and innovative ways of waging war through a combination of means that range from politics to crime to propaganda.

Prominent futurist John Robb described an aspect of this evolving phenomenon through a description of *systempunkt*[63]. A riff on *schwerpunkt,* the term describes the vulnerability of organizations or systems to adversaries that are enabled by "open source innovation, bazaar transactions and low tech weapons." Robb contends that the complex natures of (nation-state) human systems are vulnerable to defeat by a "swarm of small insults [that] will cause of a cascade of collapse in the targeted system." These attacks may take on many different forms so long as they analyze and exploit critical vulnerabilities within an existing system[64]. The 2008 Mumbai attacks serve as a poignant example of how insurgent groups can, through the use of

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[60] David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 384.
[61] Kaldor, *In Defence of New Wars*, Vol. 2, 2013), 1-12.
[62] *Ibid, 1-12.*
[63] John Robb, *Brave New War: The Next Stage of Terrorism and the End of Globalization* (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2008), 208.
[64] Like a water treatment plant or electrical power grid for example

low-grade technology (cell phones), decentralized command and control (dispersed small teams), simple innovation (multiple venues), and exploitation of critical infrastructure (ports) can quickly outpace traditional security mechanisms and decision making timelines in order to cause a great amount of chaos[65]. Similar principles can be drawn from other attacks such as Anders Brevik in Norway (2011), the US Embassy in Benghazi (2012) or the Algerian oilfields attack (2013) by agents associated with al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Interestingly, similarly tasked 'Western' SOF organizations including CANSOFCOM reacted very differently to these collective domestic and international threat trends; most adjusting their readiness in a manner that reflected acceptable institutional norms as well as political realities and policy limitations but not necessarily the actual SoW. For CANSOFCOM, the resulting 'gap' caused by the difficult business of trying to predict and quantify the future created a measure of cognitive dissonance as the organization struggled to quantify its readiness in terms of not only pragmatic sustainability of readiness but also acceptability with respect to established organizational norms. This 'gap' raises a number of difficult dilemmas for SOF in general and in particular organizations like CANSOFCOM or UKSF (United Kingdom Special Forces), both who have a domestic mandate to respond to terrorist events. If the notion that these types of forces have been legitimized within the eyes of their respective societies as the 'Forces of Choice' to react to domestic terrorist events, then how do they predict potential terrorist threats in a manner that allows them maintain a sustainable level of readiness in a manner that is acceptable to both the SOF organization as well as society in general, their respective governments as well as the various OGDs that support them? Secondly, what happens to SOF organizations that fail to respond to these types of events in a timely or correct fashion? Finally, is there any space for SOF to disrupt potential attacks (domestically or otherwise) in a manner consistent with societal

[65] http://globalguerrillas.typepad.com/globalguerrillas/2008/11/urban-takedown.html

norms and regulations before they manifest themselves? Difficult questions that no doubt make for many sleepless night for SOF commanders.

In his book, *The Black Swan*, author Nasim Taleb captures this increased uncertainty, volatility and unpredictability that further characterize the SoW. Specifically he contends that ". . . the world in which we live has an increasing number of feedback loops, causing events to be the cause of more events…, thus generating snowballs and arbitrary and unpredictable planet-wide winner-take-all effects[66]." As a result, the congruence of randomness and uncertainty combine to make the prediction of catastrophic events a 'suckers bet.' His resulting conclusion is that success will not be found in predicting 'Black Swan' events, for that is impossible, but rather with organizations that develop cultures built around simplicity, resiliency and organizational robustness. While resiliency can be simply described as the ability of a system to cope with change, organizational robustness includes the characteristics of Situational Awareness (SA) or 'alertness', the ability to rapidly respond to change, healthy risk intelligence and "experimentation of new ways of thinking and doing business[67]" as well as "a commitment by organizational leaders to keep their eyes on the mission[68]" through vision and constant communication. Taleb expands upon this theory in his follow-up book, *Anti-Fragile: Things That Gain From Disorder* by expanding upon the concepts that make organizations successful:

> "Some things benefit from shocks; they thrive and grow when exposed to volatility, randomness, disorder, and stressors and love adventure, risk, and uncertainty. Yet, in spite of the ubiquity of the phenomenon, there is no word for the exact opposite of fragile. Let us call it antifragile. Antifragility is beyond resilience or robustness. The resilient resists shocks and stays the same; the antifragile gets better.[69]"

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[66] Nassim Taleb, ***The Black Swan : The Impact of the Highly Improbable***, Second ed. (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2010), 444.
[67] *Ibid, 444.*
[68] *Ibid, 444.*
[69] Nassim Taleb, *Antifragile: Things that Gain from Disorder* (New York: Random House, 2012), 519.

The point of these previous descriptors is not to convey that a sense that the SoW is not simply just a chaotic or random paradigm that threatens to stymie or outpace modern militaries unless they radically adjust their culture or organizational structure. Quite the opposite; most modern SOF organizations, including CANSOFCOM *already* do most of these things and have been building these ideas and practicing these concepts since their inception. Instead, the specific challenge for SOF organizations is to continue to do all of these things *within* the wider acceptable norms of their organizations and nations, recognizing when changes in adversarial culture or practice have happened and then challenging wider unacceptable institutional norms in a logical, consistent and persistent manner in order to realize effective relevant and timely responses.

There are a number of key takeaways that can be drawn from and reinforced from further analysis of the SoW. First – the SoW occurs in real time. Threats and events are happening *now* and with unceremonious warning. The ample warning time that has historically permitted militaries to re-tool and re-train prior to engagement in conflict has all but disappeared and those that expect otherwise prior to execution will be those most likely to fail or fade to irrelevance. Preparation, not training must be the mantra of successful SOF organizations as the cost of failure is extremely high, potentially coming at the expense of the institution itself. Second – the SoW operates within multiple boundaries, blurring traditional organizational lines. Traditional nation-state political boundaries have been supplanted to a large degree by tribal, ethnic and criminal network boundaries. Furthermore, "whereas old wars were associated with state building, new wars are the opposite; they tend to contribute to the dismantling of the state.[70]" Consequently, operations at the SoW demand continual and consistent engagement in order to

[70] Kaldor, *In Defence of New Wars*, Vol. 2, 2013), 1-12.

not only understand, but develop the situation. Capacity building, information gathering and pan-organizational SA and communication are as fundamental to success as the ability to prosecute kinetic operations but must occur within acceptable norms. Third – the Speed of War operates on multiple planes simultaneously. Modern physical attacks are supported by sophisticated symbolic messages in print[71] or in cyberspace within the guise of ideological media or propaganda[72] to a large global audience. Psychological or moral plane victory is easily turned into defeat and vice-versa while operating at the Speed of War and it is only through careful complementary efforts that can parity be achieved. Fourth – technology in all its forms has 'leveled the playing field' to a great extent. While it is true that "[the increase in development of]…military technology has made symmetrical war – war between similarly armed opponents – increasingly difficult to win[73]", and subsequently extremely unlikely, it has also created some great imbalances along various unique technical and tactical lines. Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) or 'drone' usage by SOF is counterbalanced with greater dispersion within urban centers by terrorists; while video games serve as both distractions and inexpensive training vehicles for both sides. Operations must develop within their organizational culture the desire to continually improve, adapt, 'break the mold', whatever under the assumption that their adversaries are doing the same with equal zeal and competence. Fifth, finally, and most importantly, the nature of the SoW absolutely *demands* that SOF personnel of all colours must be "students of their profession" more than ever before, omnivorously consuming information and experience in equal amounts whenever possible. Small clues may be the only ones.

[71] A copy of Inspire magazine http://azelin files.wordpress.com/2011/09/inspire-magazine-7.pdf
[72] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIhHxlm_WZE
[73] Mundy, *Deconstructing Civil Wars: Beyond the New Wars Debate*, Vol. 42, 2011), 279-295.

The reoccurring organizational level themes associated with the 'Speed of War' are ones of innovation, resilience, and robustness. Maintaining relevance at the SoW means examining organizational culture carefully and closely, ruthlessly shedding those norms, values and/or practices that do not add value whilst doing so within the framework of the wider acceptable institutional norms. Recognizing the inherent unpredictability of the SoW as well as the different context that govern different organizations, however, groups cannot simply mimic or duplicate existing or emerging structure or practices haphazardly or in an ad-hoc manner lest either risk losing legitimacy or they collapse under the continual strain of lurching from one paradigm to another.

For CANSOFCOM, a junior but growing organization, the challenge lies in balancing its ambition to operate at the SoW with the associated organizational and institutional costs of doing so. The opportunity cost that comes with the pursuit of a new capability or regulative norm in order to operate at the SoW is one of organizational capital. Given that large organizations such as the CAF change slowly and typically only in response to significant crisis or disruption yet at the same time continue to provide the organizational legitimacy that allows CANSOFCOM to operate, great care must be taken in any change initiative within the Command as it invariably costs a degree of social, political and cultural capital to make it happen. Radical departure from this formula of incremental may either occur or be necessitate change from time to time (a 9/11 event), and the subsequent risk it entails, may be necessary some in the community would argue, but it also comes with great potential costs[74]. The thinking organization is the resilient one and the resilient one is not only the one that survives contact but thrives in constant ambiguity.

[74] Philip Atkinson, "Managing Change and Building a Positive Risk Culture," *Management Services* 57, no. 2 (Summer2013, 2013), 9-13.

THE CULTURAL WEB

Making sense of the challenges of the SoW and the why and how organizations implement change demands a closer examination of how they are constructed. As such, *Beyond Institutional Icebergs* will now examine organizational culture through the lens of a relevant and simple model, the cultural web. Developed by sociologists Gerry Johnson and Kevan Scholes in the early 1990's, the model describes organizational culture by dividing it into six inter-related components: *stories, rituals and routines, symbols, organizational structure, control systems and power structures*[75]. Together these six components both shape and influence what they term 'the paradigm', "the core set of beliefs and assumptions which fashion an organization's view of itself and the environment.[76]" The paradigm represents the aggregate of the various conscious and unconscious assumptions, norms, and values of the organization as manifested by the aforementioned components. While these assumptions, norms and values may be "implicitly understood by many within the organization[77]", they may also be equally hard to articulate, resulting in the difficult task of completely and accurately defining every aspect of the paradigm[78]. Stated another way, cultural paradigms are difficult to describe completely as they contain so many dimensions. One further and final note of importance regarding the importance of organizational paradigms is that, because of their very nature, "the internal consistency or

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[75] Johnson, Gerry and Scholes, Kevan, "The Cultural Web: Aligning Your Organizations Culture with Strategy," http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newSTR_90 htm

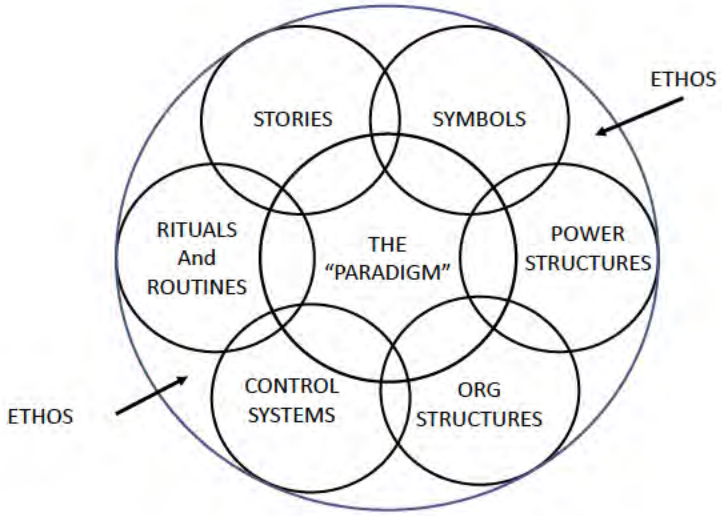
[76] Gerry Johnson, "Managing Strategic Change - Strategy, Culture and Action," *Long Range Planning* 25, no. 1 (1992), 28-36.

[77] Johnson, Gerry and Scholes, Kevan, *The Cultural Web: Aligning Your Organizations Culture with Strategy*, http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newSTR_90 htm ed., 1992).

[78] Gerry Johnson and Kevan Scholes, *Exploring Corporate Strategy*, 5th ed. (London: Prentice Hall, 1999).

'logic' of the paradigm is [both] self-serving and self-legitimizing[79]" and as a result can be extremely resistant to change.

FIGURE 1 – THE CULTURAL WEB



"THE THICKER THE ORGANIZATIONAL ETHOS, THE GREATER THE COHESION AND THE BETTER THE RISK INTELLIGENCE" [80]

This paper proposes a modified version of the cultural web; one that superimposes three additional concepts, ethos, cohesion and risk into the model. Ethos permeates the entire model, acting as a coalescing agent that seeks to unify the six components. Although ethos, by its very definition is difficult to describe completely, it is the one central tenet is that it helps describe the 'moral compass' of an organization – providing cognitive guidelines to what constitutions acceptable or unacceptable practice at both the individual or group level[81]. Generally, the thicker the bonds of organizational ethos within an organization, the greater the degree to which the second concept – cohesion – also exists within that same organization. Cohesion is another

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[79] Gerry Johnson, *Strategic Change and the Management Process* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Blackwell, 1987).
[80] Johnson, Gerry and Scholes, Kevan, *The Cultural Web: Aligning Your Organizations Culture with Strategy*, http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newSTR_90 htm ed., 1992).
[81] Christopher Hamner, "The Warrior Ethos: Military Culture and the War on Terror," *Journal of Military History* 72, no. 1 (01, 2008), 304-305.

inclusive term that speaks to the bond that exists within a specific group as it works towards a common goal or purpose. It transcends traditional definitions of effectiveness or efficiency as they exist on the physical plane to include an emotional component that helps shape both behaviour and expectations thereof. Equally slippery to quantify, cohesion is often described by those observing as groups that are 'in sync', 'tight' or 'a group within a group.' Not surprisingly, strong group or organizational cohesion can act as either an inhibitor or catalyst to change depending on the degree to which it has been shaped by organizational ethos and or the degree to which the change challenges or threatens group, organizational or subcultural norms. The final concept, risk and risk intelligence are the psychological manifestations of the clarity and strength of the first two concepts. Almost as ethereal as ethos to completely capture, risk goes beyond attempts to define it as purely transactional, and is instead another inclusive term for describing how an organization values trust in its members as well as interaction with the wider environment[82]. Risk can simultaneously be encountered on multiple levels including the tactical through strategic, as well as the personal through institutional. Both terms are reflected in the Special Air Service motto, *Who Dares Wins*, and the JTF2 model *Facta Non Verba*[83] and have less to do with physical bravado than with communicating trust as part of the organizational ethos as well cultivating an innate understanding of the cost-benefit of actions within the members of the respective organizations[84].

[82] David Mandel, *Toward a Concept of Risk for Effective Military Decision Making* (Toronto, Ontario: Defence Research and Development Canada,[2007]).
[83] Deeds Not Words
[84] Atkinson, *Managing Change and Building a Positive Risk Culture*, Vol. 57Institute of Management Services, 2013), 9-13.

THE CULTURAL WEB: STORIES

Although all of the sub-components of the Cultural Web are influenced by cognitive, regulative or normative influences, some lean more heavily on certain pillars than other. The Stories sub-component for example, serves to illustrate and reinforce acceptable (and unacceptable) norms within organizational culture. "They distill the essence of the organizations past….[and] legitimize types of behaviour.[85]" Stories play an important role in SOF culture, each organization drawing strength from the lessons learned of other units and organizations, success or failure. The sub-component relationship to ethos, risk intelligence and cohesion is particularly salient when discussing Stories: institutional ethos acts as the scrubber that contextualizes information, such as lessons-learned or the like, as they come into an organizational culture from the outside (or from other parts of the organization). Because it is virtually impossible to control the entirety of when, where, or how stories will filter into an organization, a strong and clear ethos serves as a steadfast guardian and critical reference guide that helps validate or invalidate the story against institutional assumptions, values, beliefs and norms. Tales of heroism or cowardice, from whatever source collectively inform the acceptable limits and expectations of risk acceptance, although they too must be contextualized through the context of ethos, lest they provide unrealistic or counterproductive. Finally, stories can act as a particularly powerful catalyst for cohesion, serving to reinforce both the paradigm as well as any of the other sub-components.

[85] SeonaidhFoster McDonald Richard A., "The use of Johnson's Cultural Web to Improve Under-Standing of Organisational Culture: A Critical Review," *International Journal of Management* 30, no. 3 (12, 2013), 340-354.

THE CULTURAL WEB: SYMBOLS

Symbols, like stories, act as powerful norming agents within organizational culture. They are the "visual representation of the [organization] including logos, how plush the offices are and the formal or informal dress codes.[86]" SOF abounds with powerful examples symbols from the SEAL trident to the JTF2 Assaulter badge. Simply the way that SOF operators dress can act as a powerful symbol and norming agent; regular forces often miming 'the SOF guys' in an attempt to gain both actual and perceived legitimacy. Herein lays the danger and a final point on symbols, however. Symbols become dangerous whenever they become vessels for norms that do not align with accepted institutional values or beliefs. Flaunted or taken to extremes, they can easily act in a counterproductive manner, threatening the overall legitimacy of the organization.

THE CULTURAL WEB: RITUALS AND ROUTINES

Rituals and routines are the "daily behaviour and actions of people that signal acceptable behaviour.[87]" Best captured by the idiom "the way we do things around here", rituals and routines are the expression of the normative pillar of an organization. Rituals and routines are simultaneously an expression of collective behaviour over time (organizational patterns) as well as individual actions in the moment (leadership). One tenet of one SOF unit's ethos, "the relentless pursuit of excellence" is representative of the attempt to normalize the idea of an idealized routine within the organization, one of hard work, determination, perseverance and the notion that individuals will put in 100 percent every day. While this particular sub-category is closely tied to organizational cohesion, expressive of the wider norms of the organization, it is also the one most closely tied to change and change resistance. Explored in detail in following

[86] Johnson, Gerry and Scholes, Kevan, *The Cultural Web: Aligning Your Organizations Culture with Strategy*, http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newSTR_90 htm ed., 1992).
[87] *Ibid.*

sections, the concept that changing organizational behaviour is closely tied to the notion of changing specific rituals and routines is a critical one.

THE CULTURAL WEB: CONTROL SYSTEMS

Control systems shift emphasis to the regulative pillar from the normative one. "These include financial systems, quality systems, and rewards (including the way they are measured and distributed within the organization.[88]" Control systems represent the forces of order (vice chaos) within an organization. They typically reward conformity and are both uniform and predictable in their construct or format. Like rituals and routines and as Wilson notes, these systems can adversely affect the overall culture of the organization, particularly with regard to risk and change:

> Inertia can set in, making it hard for an institution to adapt to new challenges. Procedures become routine, even ritualised, and lose touch with their original purpose. Military institutions are especially prone to this, given their veneration of tradition[89].

Wilson further identifies three particular types of control system resources that affect military culture: money, technology and (the importance of) education[90]. *Beyond Institutional Icebergs* contends that SOF culture is shaped significantly by two more – infrastructure and its' most important - people. While many of the deductions are self-evident (more access to money, better technology and greater education tend to lead to better performance and a healthier overall culture), there are a number of particular dilemmas with regard to the management of resources as they pertain to SOF organizational culture that often manifest themselves as paradoxes, all of

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[88] Johnson, Gerry and Scholes, Kevan, "The Cultural Web: Aligning Your Organizations Culture with Strategy," http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newSTR_90 htm
[89] Wilson, *Defining Military Culture*, Vol. 72, 2008), 11-41.
[90] *Ibid*, 11-41.

whom are encapsulated by the question: "Is it harder to manage excess or scarcity?[91]" Although *Humans are more important than Hardware* stands as potentially the most important 'SOF Truth', it has sometimes been used as a cultural excuse to indulge in the extraneous or unimportant by some SOF organizations. Furthermore, without specific and careful institutional guidance, SOF institutions can run the risk of compromising operational readiness in order to satisfy the egalitarian demands of competing organizations or sub-cultures. A paucity of critical resources, particularly with regards to C4ISR[92] and other low-density resources coupled with an abundance of potential opportunities to pursue individual and small group 'education[93]' form a potentially dangerous concoction, one that introduces the risk of a split between organizational aspirations and reality. Fair does not necessarily always mean equal.

The overall purpose of control systems is to emphasize what is important within organizations, theoretically maximizing efficiency (through a one common rule process) and effectiveness (by deterring those who operate outside established boundaries)[94]. As such, they can be expressed either as more binary 'rule and regulations' or fluid 'tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs)' documents or regulations. Doctrine is an example of a control system that attempts to marry the regulative and cognitive pillars as a desired expression of normative behaviour. At their best control systems should provide a cognitive and legitimizing link to other aspects of the Cultural Web. At their worst, disconnected from organizational ethos, the paradigm or one of the other sub-components of the web, they create a culture of unhealthy

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[91] Turnley, *Retaining a Precarious Value as Special Operations Go Mainstream* (Hurlburt Field, Florida: The JSOU Press, 2008).
[92] Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance
[93] I refer here to the fact that SOF operators (and supporters) typically have a level of access to education and training opportunities that is not mirrored anywhere within the conventional force. The danger, of course, is that these education and training opportunities are often executed by the civilian military-industrial complex and, while valuable, may not necessarily reflect the operational, strategic or political realities and/or limitations that an organization faces.
[94] Johnson, *Strategic Change and the Management Process* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Blackwell, 1987).

competition and unrealistic expectations. The corruption of one particular control system within SOF culture provides a poignant example of how the opposite is also true. Designed initially as a mechanism for allocating funding and resources to differently tasked units, the SOF "Tier" system has instead become a symbolic albatross, creating unnecessary animosity within certain SOF communities[95]. While fair should not be equated as equal when considering control systems, particularly within SOF organizations, it requires a steady institutional hand to ensure that wider organizational isomorphic norms don't undermine efforts to institute effectiveness.

THE CULTURAL WEB: ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

Organizational structures include "both the structure defined by the organization chart, and the unwritten lines of power and influence that indicate whose contributions are most valued.[96]" While the unique nature of SOF organizational structure has been written about at length in numerous other works, two particular characteristics are worth highlighting. First, SOF organizations maintain a unique power-distance relationship[97]. In addition to the "bottom-up" emphasis on problem solving, SOF places unique emphasis, including a degree of trust and responsibility not typically found in regular forces, on its identified institutional commanders (at all levels). That this particular relationship can be the source of organizational friction whenever interaction occurs on the boundaries of conventional and SOF organizations or when misalignment with the organizational paradigm or ethos occurs. Second, infrastructure has a direct impact on SOF culture. Although SOF organizations do not typically invest in large amounts of physical infrastructure (when compared to their conventional brethren), the areas that

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[95] http://sofrep.com/4650/three-sof-phrases-that-i-hate/ provides a tongue in cheek (but accurate) assessment of how the SOF "Tiering" system has been corrupted while the actual roots of the system can be traced to the Goldwater-Nichols act of 1986.
[96] Johnson and Scholes, *Exploring Corporate Strategy*, 5th ed. (London: Prentice Hall, 1999).
[97] Mauk Mulder, "Power Equalization through Participation?" *Administrative Science Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (03, 1971), 31-38.

they do invest in have a distinct impact of the cultural paradigm, serving as strong cultural symbols and, in many cases, are perceived to be warrior sanctuaries. Perhaps because of this and/or the particular tight Operational Security (OPSEC control system) cultural component of the SOF paradigm, the location, layout and accessibility of infrastructure has a very distinct and tangible impact on the overall inclusiveness or exclusiveness of SOF organizational culture, both internally and externally and can directly impact the organizational ethos or paradigm[98]. Furthermore, because SOF invests so infrequently in infrastructure, both domestically and internationally, it can have a direct impact on the less tangible aspects of organizational culture such as cohesion or risk tolerance.

THE CULTURAL WEB: POWER STRUCTURES

The final component of the Cultural Web is also the most elusive to quantify. Power structures are "the pockets of *real* (sic) power[99]" in the organization. While formal power may be reflected in command appointments, rank or position, informal power may be represented by experience. In many (but not all) situations, the two will components of power will be as obvious as they are complementary, typically represented by the common recognition of someone as a 'great' leader. Most military organizations, including SOF, lower the risk of 'power failure' by 'marrying-up' formal power with informal power wherever possible. The 'Command Team' is an expression of this institutional norm. Although 'great' leaders are arguably the most critical and powerful agents with respect to leading change, other individuals and/or groups of individuals can play an instrumental part in leading or inhibiting change: intellectual entrepreneurs and institutional "no-nos." SOF "power-pockets" may also be strongly

[98] The mystique associated with such locations as Hereford (home of 22 SAS) and Dwyer Hill (home of JTF2) serve as examples.

[99] Johnson, Gerry and Scholes, Kevan, *The Cultural Web: Aligning Your Organizations Culture with Strategy*, http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newSTR_90 htm ed., 1992).

influenced by the unique power-distance relationship within most SOF organizations[100]. 'Vertically-Integrated' is a euphemism for the idea that, because of operational necessity, most SOF organizations maintain very clear and short lines of communication between critical commanders from the tactical to the strategic. Although practical in most cases, it may sometimes create an illusion or confusion as to actual delineations between authority and responsibility and must be handled with deliberate care and foresight.

The Cultural Web provides a useful tool for quantifying the various components of organizational culture. Comparing and contrasting various sub-components against one another is a useful exercise to determine the strengths or weaknesses of a particular aspect of the paradigm. Layering the filtering properties of ethos, the coalescing properties of cohesion and the contextualizing properties of risk intelligence across the regulative, normative and cognitive pillars of an organization allows for an excellent baseline of understanding as *Beyond Institutional Icebergs* explores how organizational cultures interact with one another.

PRECARIOUS VALUE AND INSTITUTIONAL ISOMORPHISM

> *The purpose of bureaucracy is to compensate for incompetence and lack of discipline.*
>
> \- Jim Collins, *Good to Great*

The tenuous relationships that exist externally between separate organizational cultures as well as internally between culture, sub-culture, and micro-culture are captured by the connected concepts of institutional isomorphism and precarious value. Developed by distinguished sociologists DiMaggio and Powell, the concept of Institutional Isomorphism contends that organizations and professions tend to adopt similar practices and culture as a result of the

[100] Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Fourth ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 437.

pressures of bureaucratization and competition. "Once a set of organizations emerges as a field[101], a paradox arises: rational actors make their organizations increasingly similar as they try to change them[102]." Because as a general rule, organizations naturally abhor chaos and instead seek to implement order (seeing it as synonymous with efficiency and effectiveness), they tend introduce or favour change initiatives that support the latter over the former[103]. Competition also plays an important role in isomorphic theory as "organizations compete not just for resources and customers, but for political power and institutional legitimacy, for social as well as economic fitness[104]." It should be noted that this competition can also include decoupled organizations whose motivations are not necessarily consistent with the organizational paradigm, but rather symbolic in nature as they seek to gain power and legitimacy for their own reasons[105].

Generally, the higher an organization is within the institutional hierarchy or the larger the size, the greater its ability to exert isomorphic pressure on smaller or subordinate organizations[106]. This tends to be true even in organizations that espouse ethical norms or values that, on the surface, seem to support the ideas of autonomy, independence or flexibility. Max Weber describes the power of isomorphism as bureaucracy as a natural phenomenon, one that is both as powerful as it is unrelenting[107]. As a result, both recognizing isomorphism at work and

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[101] http://knowledge.sagepub.com/view/governance/n371.xml. An organizational field can be defined as a social area where organizations interact and take one another into account in their actions. Organizational fields contain organizations that have enduring relationships to each other." An organizational field could be considered the '5 eyes' SOF organizations.

[102] Paul J. Powell DiMaggio Walter W., "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields," *American Sociological Review* 48, no. 2 (04, 1983)147.

[103] DAVID L. DEEPHOUSE, "Does Isomorphism Legitimate?" *Academy of Management Journal* 39, no. 4 (08, 1996), 1024-1039.

[104] Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests and Identities*, Fourth ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014), 266.

[105] Richard W. Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests and Identities*, Fourth ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014), 266.

[106] This isn't *always* true as both the age and experience of an organization also play a factor. The influence that JTF2, the oldest organization within CANSOFCOM, has on the remainder of the Command serves as an example.

[107] DiMaggio, *The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields*, Vol. 48Sage Publications Inc, 1983), 147-160.

harnessing its effects takes both a conscious and deliberate effort on part of organizations and is not simply just a matter of regulative direction from institutional leaders. Because all organizations and cultures are continually both consciously and unconsciously examining, interacting, monitoring and probing one another in competitive attempts to determine best practices and thereby increase legitimacy and reduce uncertainty, there will be constant pressure on organizational to organizational norms, often irrespective practices, stated cultural values or beliefs that may indicate otherwise. Isomorphism can manifest itself in three distinct ways: coercively, mimetically or normatively.

Coercive isomorphism is manifested in the broad, cultural pressures that are placed on organizations. They are best represented by notions such as societal norms and help define the boundaries of acceptable practice within organizations operate[108]. Numerous examples abound of coercive forces at work with respect to militaries in general including regulative changes related to the acceptance of women in combat roles or gays in the military. As societal norms change, so do expectations of organization. This is obviously not a binary or directly proportional relationship in all cases (women in combat roles in the United States) and may occur over a unique timeline (gays in the military). It may always occur differently within different national or societal constructs (Canada or the US). While change may occur on any combination of the normative, regulative or cognitive planes, the consequences of failure to acknowledge or adapt to coercive isomorphic pressures by military forces are typically not positive. For those military organizations that chose to ignore or operate outside of these societal boundaries, the consequences can be catastrophic. The disbandment of the Canadian Airborne Regiment in 1995 serves as a stark example of an organization that, in a period of dramatic

[108] Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests and Identities*, Fourth ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014), 266.

coercive pressure on the Canadian Forces from wider society, was found distinctly lacking in a number of areas; subsequently suffering the consequences of disbandment[109].

Mimetic isomorphism occurs whenever largely whenever uncertainty in the wider environment is present[110]. "When organizational technologies are poorly understood, when goals are ambiguous, or when the environment creates symbolic uncertainty, organizations may model themselves on other organizations.[111]" Most militaries, without wars to fight on a regular basis, tend to succumb to mimetic isomorphism rapidly, duplicating organizational structures from other organizations or militaries that they identify as successful (within the same field) as a comfortable and sometimes cost-effective mechanism to maintain both relevance and legitimacy. As is the case in any duplication effort, however, there is great risk that the 'copy' will not completely resemble the original; particularly as duplication efforts cannot completely take into account the entirety of institutional intricacies, including specific realities, limitations, norms or values. "Organizations tend to model themselves after similar organizations in their field that they perceive to be more legitimate or successful.[112]" The 'stand-up' of the Canadian Special Operations Regiment (CSOR) in 2006 was demonstrative of this phenomenon as the unit was originally organized, equipped and trained similar to Joint Task Force 2 (JTF2), an already standing SOF unit (with similar tasks) utilizing similar training methodologies and techniques. Although this paper does not dispute the necessity or validity of such practices for the initial formation of organizations, it does caution against its continued practice, urging careful

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[109] Winslow, *The Canadian Airborne Regiment in Somalia: A Socio-Cultural Inquiry* (Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 1997), 330.
[110] DiMaggio, *The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields*, Vol. 48Sage Publications Inc, 1983)151.
[111] *Ibid*, 147-160.
[112] *Ibid*, 152.

monitoring of new initiatives and cultures[113]. This is because, if observed or recognized, continued deliberate practice or tacit endorsement of mimetic isomorphic practices, particularly amongst organizations within the same organizational group or field, runs the risk of stripping away the advantages of uniqueness and complementary organizational effectiveness and instead replacing it with decoupling, potential reduced effectiveness and unhealthy competition for finite resources.

Normative isomorphism is closely related to mimetic isomorphism and operates primarily at the professional (macro-culture) level[114]. Specifically, it refers to the "collective struggle of members of an occupation to define the conditions and methods of their work…and to establish a cognitive base and legitimation for their occupational autonomy.[115]" The concept of professions is closely associated with normative isomorphism, each profession not only regulating expectations (qualifications etc) but also subtly and continually communicating the ideals or the collective ideal of what constitutes a profession or professional in a consistent manner that often transcends traditional organizational boundaries. Sometimes represented as archetypes such as the "Quiet Professional" or "Warrior-Diplomat", SOF professionalism is an ideal that often transcends traditional organizational boundaries (although SOF organizations sometimes make claims to their own particular archetypes or brands) and often exists instead as a collective aspirational objective that is collectively cultivated outside organizational boundaries[116]. As a

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[113] Although the text may create the impression that the CSOR-JTF2 relationship is the subject of the mimetic isomorphism discussion, the worst case of mimetic isomorphism the author has observed in the Canadian Forces has not been between organizations within CANSOFCOM but rather between CANSOFCOM and a HUMINT (Human Intelligence) organization known as JTFX. (http://www firstpost.com/fwire/canada-unites-five-military-intelligence-units-1121685 html). In this case, the organization (JTFX) was seemingly 'stood-up' utilizing JTF2 as its model for selection, training, etcetera but with little of the organizational rigour.

[114] Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Fourth ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 437.

[115] DiMaggio, *The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields*, Vol. 48Sage Publications Inc, 1983)152.

[116] Pressfield, *The Warrior Ethos*Black Irish Entertainment, 2011), 114.

result, the achievement of professional ideals is often difficult and elusive task, typically requiring a level of continued introspection, compromise, and re-invention from its members. This aspirational aspect component of professional normalization is further complicated because of the requirement that most members of an organization hold multiple memberships simultaneously. Within SOF, the 'Officer-Operator' or 'Senior Non-Commissioned Officer-Assaulter' serve as examples of particular professional macro-cultures that concurrently overlaps with a number of various sub or micro-cultures. Reconciling norms and values between these sub-cultures is a critical endeavour that should be tackled centrally and directly reflected within the organizational paradigm. Although most organizations tend to collectively norm 'down' to the lowest common denominator[117], as a profession, SOF tends to norm 'up' with the pressure to perform ("The only easy day was yesterday[118]") typically as constant as it is ruthless.

PRECARIOUS VALUE AND CANSOFCOM

While special operations organizations occupy a unique and special niche within modern militaries, they often do so at the expense of some cultural tension with the other services (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, etc). The reasons for this strain have been explored at length in various academic studies[119] and similarly have been celebrated within popular media such as film and television[120]. As SOF have increasingly risen in use, "stealing" operational

[117] The current Canadian Armed Forces Physical Fitness is an example of an organizational norm that supports the lowest common denominator, devoid of incentive and relatively easy to pass.
[118] A common euphemism of the US Navy SEALs.
[119] Horn, *"Love 'em Or Hate 'em": Learning to Live with Elites*, Vol. 8, Winter 2007-2008). Horns article serves as an example of a series of articles within the *Canadian Military Journal* over a number of years that have attempted to socialize Canadian Special Operations Forces to the remainder of the Canadian Armed Forces.
[120] A casual tour of youtube or any similar video site provides a plethora of clips that highlight the clash between the "out of the box" SOF guys and their distinctly "in the box" conventional counterparts.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ab9AAb6zxNk

opportunities from the other services, "robbing" the conventional force of its best people[121], and challenging a variety of service and institutional norms, they have introduced a certain amount of organizational strain between themselves and their quantifiably larger conventional brethren. Exacerbated by wider societal values and norms[122], SOF organizations worldwide have had to carefully manage their position within their respective armed forces. Dr. Jessica Turnley of the Joint Special Operations University has recognized this particular juxtaposition of relevance and legitimacy, terming it a 'precarious value' respective of SOF culture and a 'precarious organization' respective of SOF as an organization. As Dr. Turnley contends, precarious organizations have three distinct characteristics:

a. Core values are undefined;

b. The position of functionaries or those responsible for operationalizing the institution is not fully legitimated; and

c. The organization is unacceptable to a host population.[123]

Of the three characteristics, the lack of core values is perhaps the least impactful. This is due largely to the fact that, as a result of experience and introspection born of the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts, the majority of SOF organizations have made concerted efforts to re-examine and re-emphasize their institutional ethos, norms and values. The reintroduction of the fifth 'SOF truth' in the midst of the Afghanistan campaign – *the majority of SOF operations require*

[121] Bernd Horn, ""Love 'em Or Hate 'em": Learning to Live with Elites," *Canadian Military Journal* 8, no. 4 (Winter 2007-2008).
[122] It could be argued, for example, that Canada has a much harder time accepting the notion of 'elite' special operations forces than the United States. Given that the United States celebrates the hero/warrior archetype much differently than Canada does, it is not surprising that SOF have a much easier time existing within the American cultural fabric.
[123] Turnley, *Retaining a Precarious Value as Special Operations Go Mainstream* (Hurlburt Field, Florida: The JSOU Press, 2008).

conventional support[124] – serves as not a testament to this fact but also perhaps an attempt by SOF to mitigate the ongoing impact of sub-para three above. Furthermore, organizations like CANSOFCOM have consistently invested a large amount of time, effort and resources into not only wider socialization with the CAF efforts but also the formal inculcation values that reinforce the idea CANSOFCOM as a subculture vice an independent organization of the CAF. These facts notwithstanding, however, there is a competing factor that threatens to dislodge, or at a minimum unpredictably manipulate these types of efforts. A surge of print and film media focused on SOF has threatened to compete and/or challenge existing organizational norms. While films like *Act of Valor* or *Lone Survivor*, which included the participation of actual serving USSOCOM Navy SEALs, may have exposed certain realism to an eager public, it is not the exposure of trade secrets that poses the most risk; rather it is the indirect transfer of cultural values. Specifically, the risk is that even if the bulk of the cultural transmission is positive, reflecting the best of SOF ethics and values or acting as a reinforcing agent for SOF as part of contemporary national military arsenals, its message is neither controlled nor particularly shaped by outside SOF organizations. The risk in the case of films like those mentioned above is that SEAL norms, values and beliefs – however positive - are seen by society or other SOF organizations to be reflective of *all* SOF units globally.

The second characteristic of a precarious organization, the actualization and legitimacy of institutional leaders within the wider organization presents an ongoing challenge for CANSOFCOM. Although it does not enjoy the same degree of entrenched legislative security as USSOCOM, who was embedded as a combatant command within the US military with the Goldwater-Nichols act of 1986, each successful year of existence arguably further legitimizes

[124] http://www.soc mil/USASOCHQ/SOFTruths.html

CANSOFCOM within the CAF, the GoC as well as the general Canadian public. Until the formation of CANSOFCOM in 2006, however, the presence of distinct and credible SOF voices who could adequately represent the Command within the CAF was, at best, episodic. The promotion of several high ranking and well respected senior leaders into institutional leadership positions and successive referrals to CANSOFCOM by the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) as the 'fourth' service has helped[125] as have initiatives such as the formation of a Special Operations 'schoolhouse', the participation of field level officers within the CAF professional development system as well as the creation of an independent recognized service trade for CSOR NCOs[126]. Not all aspects of the second characteristic have been mitigated however nor may it be possible to do so. Because some of the very core precepts of SOF culture agitate directly against some conventional ones, there will arguably remain an extant tension. One reason for this, Dr. Turnley explains, may be the result of two different cultures that propagate two very different types of command and control climates. The conventional military is a system with "…a strong set of institutional controls[127]" that sometimes contends with a system that "turns this control on its head[128]". Commonly referred to as the difference between "top-down" and "bottom-up" Command and Control, the difference is as fundamental in culture as it is difficult to reconcile. It is not surprising therefore that Dr. Turnley concludes that "t*he very presence of SOF on the battlefield challenges the legitimacy of the conventional military organization*[129]. Because CANSOFCOM, like most SOF organizations, routinely places an enormous amount of trust within its commanders, pushing as much responsibility as possible down to the lowest practical

[125] Paul H. Chapin, "Into Afghanistan: The Transformation of Canada's International Security Policy since 9/11," *The American Review of Canadian Studies* 40, no. 2 (2010), 189-199.
[126] http://www forces.gc.ca/en/operations-special-forces/index.page
[127] Turnley, *Retaining a Precarious Value as Special Operations Go Mainstream* (Hurlburt Field, Florida: The JSOU Press, 2008).
[128] Jessica Glicken Turnley, *Retaining a Precarious Value as Special Operations Go Mainstream* (Hurlburt Field, Florida: The JSOU Press,[2008]).
[129] *Ibid.*

level, it periodically causes strain with conventional forces as two different sets of norms collide. As a result, SOF Master-Corporals and Sergeants are routinely placed in situations where their direct counterparts are Majors and Lieutenant-Colonels.

The third argument underpinning the notion of SOF as a precarious organization is perhaps an extension of the second. Unacceptability of SOF to the larger, host (conventional) population is primarily rooted in a complex set of value judgments centered on resentment, jealousy, misunderstanding and a fear of the unknown. "If, in fact, SOF are men (people) of the highest quality, by definition that means that general purpose military personnel are not[130]" cuts to the core of the cultural argument between the two worlds. Often manifested in such statements as "they're not better than us, they just think they are", the perception that SOF are 'prima donnas' who are the tattooed, bearded beneficiaries of too much money, equipment and training that could otherwise be spent on conventional forces is a typical refrain heard amongst those who harbour resentment[131]. SOF for their part, have sometimes propagated these myths through deliberate flaunting of some of these cultural differences at inappropriate times and places, with much ado made in conventional circles about different standards of dress, equipment and the like that could otherwise be avoided.

Within the Canadian Armed Forces, any actual or residual resentment that exists is due, at least to some degree, to a number of unresolved historical and functionary issues. The Canadian Airborne Regiment, Canada's de facto unconventional warfare capability for the bulk of the Cold War was disbanded in 1995, leaving a relative operational and cultural void that

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[130] Jessica Glicken Turnley, *Retaining a Precarious Value as Special Operations Go Mainstream* (Hurlburt Field, Florida: The JSOU Press,[2008]).
[131] Horn, *"Love 'em Or Hate 'em": Learning to Live with Elites*, Vol. 8, Winter 2007-2008).

would result in some culture turbulence[132]. Although the subsequent formation of the three Light Infantry Battalions within each of Canada's three regular force infantry Regiments served as an ad-hoc solution an unspoken promise to fill this sudden gap, the rise to prominence of JTF2 and the CANSOFCOM ultimately usurped any aspiration that these the Battalions had of becoming Canada's 'unconventional warriors.' Unfortunately, since the formalization of a number of operational functions (like parachuting) within CANSOFCOM have gone formally unrecognized by the Canadian Army, nor reconciled as a complete capability by the CAF, a significant gap has arisen between the doctrinal theory and operational realities of Canada's SOF and conventional force; the Light Infantry Battalions left in a continual state of flux, uncertainty and reinvention while CANSOFCOM operationalizes the capability. The resulting cultural and operational unresolved tension has not gone unnoticed by members of both communities and continues to periodically manifest itself as resentment towards CANSOFCOM, the Command seen as 'stealing' capability away from the conventional force.

A final comment on the notion of precarious organizations, it is worth noting that the cultural resentment directed towards precarious organizations is not only restricted to external relationships. Although this paper will explore this interplay between subcultures in greater detail later, there exists this some of this intra-organizational 'precarious value' tension within the SOF community as well. Due in large part to many of the same factors including access to resources, operational mission-sets, etc., it is not uncommon for units within the SOF organization to harbour resentment against one-another, particularly if the overall cultural paradigm is not well defined. CANSOFCOM provides a good example of this phenomenon. Beyond healthy competition, this paper contends that the blurring of certain operational lines

[132] Winslow, *The Canadian Airborne Regiment in Somalia: A Socio-Cultural Inquiry* (Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 1997), 330.

(widely overlapping assigned missions and tasks), resource competition as well as some causal cultural institutional stewardship has resulted in some inter and intra organizational cloudiness; a lack of operational clarity that has blurred the overall organizational cultural paradigm and has resulted in a degree of organizational decoupling. This contention, along with some potential mitigation recommendations will be explored in further detail later in the paper.

Addressing inter and intra-organization conflict between and within SOF organizations is an equal measure of art and science. The precarious-value notion recognizes that aligning SOF organizational culture too far in either direction is a likely ungealthy compromise between operational effectiveness and legitimacy. Legitimacy "is a characteristic of an organization whose means and ends *at least appear* to conform to social norms, values and resources.[133]" Simply stated the more a subordinate or smaller organization looks and acts like its parent, the greater the institutional legitimacy that organization will have. This legitimacy is typically manifested in terms of resources, regulations and degrees of responsibility. As a result of the previously discussed mimetic, coercive and normative forces, however, organizations like SOF will always be under continual isomorphic pressure to conform to wider organizational norms and practices. Legitimacy for its part can be achieved in two ways – through changes in substantive management, or through management of symbolic structures[134]. "Changes in substantive management involve real changes in goals, structure, or socially institutionalized practices[135]" while changes in symbolic structures simply involve the appearance of conformity (aka decoupling). CANSOFCOM Headquarters, the representative 'head' of the Canadian SOF enterprise has the unique challenge of walking a line between the two extremes. It must

[133] Turnley, *Retaining a Precarious Value as Special Operations Go Mainstream* (Hurlburt Field, Florida: The JSOU Press, 2008)21.
[134] DEEPHOUSE, *Does Isomorphism Legitimate?*, Vol. 39Academy of Management, 1996), 1024-1039.
[135] Turnley, *Retaining a Precarious Value as Special Operations Go Mainstream* (Hurlburt Field, Florida: The JSOU Press, 2008).

maintain functionary legitimacy with the remainder of the CAF (hence the continental staff system and not something else that could be more efficient and effective) while simultaneously allowing its subordinate units the measure of operational freedom they require in order to operate at the SoW. It could be further argued that both extremes exist simultaneously out of necessity within CANSOFCOM; the Command headquarters playing the role of the 'legitimate' actor while the four units play the role of the 'symbolic' actor. However, this binary description would not do justice to either the complex web of intra and inter-organizational relationships that exist throughout the Command within the wider Canadian and allied security apparatus or the responsibility that the units play in maintaining their own legitimacy as well as that of the Command as a whole. As a result, CANSOF members of all stripes must carefully, skillfully and deliberately maintain the ability to operate effectively in both paradigms simultaneously. Because CANSOFCOM, like its allies to the south, is imbued with certain authorities that allow it to maintain "legitimacy in two communities….simultaneously exhibiting service and command like qualities,[136]" its members must endeavour to understand as much as possible about the organizational cultures that complement its existence. The fact that Commander CANSOFCOM stands alone amongst his peers in that he is simultaneously a Force Generator, Force Developer and Force Employer undoubtedly does not go unnoticed by his peers, resulting in a unique requirement of confidence and humility in order to effectively operate. Similar traits are required of SOF subordinate commanders and organizations at every level.

It is only fair to note that isomorphism is not entirely a one way street. To a certain extent, SOF exerts its own brand of isomorphism on the other services. Emphasis on counter-

[136] Jessica Glicken Turnley, *Retaining a Precarious Value as Special Operations Go Mainstream* (Hurlburt Field, Florida: The JSOU Press,[2008]).

insurgency (COIN) operations in Afghanistan and Iraq coupled with increased SOF presence in popular media mediums has certainly created some pressure on conventional organizations to become both more 'SOF-like' in their construct and culture. Furthermore, the specific transfer of specific skills and technologies has no doubt been accompanied by some cultural norms as well, increasing the mimetic isomorphic pressure on conventional forces, creating a measure of turbulence and aggravating some conventional commanders.

A by-product of most post-war governments has been a return to fiscal conservatism, tighter resource accounting and 'real-war' training and operations. The Canadian Forces has been no exception to this rule and finds itself – mid 2014 – in a position whereby units, fleets and wings face a larger degree of central fiscal control and scrutiny than they did during the height of the Afghanistan conflict. This is perhaps not surprising given that, from a historical perspective, most militaries utilize conflict to break free from institutional norms out of necessity in order to operate at the speed of war, that the resulting 'peace dividend' would be a return to tight accounting, expense oversight and 'last-war' practices. The natural tendency of bureaucracies[137], the return to order and organizational conformity is typically manifested through the organizations center or on the fringes through an onslaught of rules, regulations and policy changes. This is institutional isomorphism at work in its largest, most organizational form. SOF is never immune to these pressures. Organizations that conform to central institutional pressures may gain institutional legitimacy but lose organizational effectiveness through unnecessary formalization. Described another way and with respect to US SOF, "…the very qualities that make SOF distinctive and successful in an operational context do not translate

[137] DiMaggio, *The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields*, Vol. 48Sage Publications Inc, 1983), 147-160.

easily into the administrative or bureaucratic structure within which USSOCOM must work.[138]" The resulting dilemma, therefore, is for organizations at every level to seek the balance between an adoption of those institutional mechanisms that grant the necessary amounts of institutional legitimacy with those unique aspects of SOF organizational culture that make SOF both relevant and prosperous.

A final risk identified by Dr. Turnley worth mentioning is with respect to precarious organizations is the potential loss of the uniqueness that defines special operators themselves. She frames her concern thusly: "If special operators are relied upon to have "the intellectual agility to conceptualize creative, useful solutions to ambiguous problems[139]" but have either more formalized or less access altogether to resources, the risk of innovative or creative solutions being produced is also placed at great risk. SOF operators, particularly the intellectual entrepreneurs or 'thought leaders' that joined SOF organizations specifically to escape the confines of conformity and normalizing that conventional organizations often contain, may find the bureaucratizing period that comes after sustained periods of sustained conflict or operations (which are typically free or freer from organizational constraint) particularly difficult and may be more prone to seek opportunities outside the SOF community[140].

With all of these various institutional isomorphic forces simultaneously at play, it becomes understandably difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain exactly which one(s) are

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[138] Eliot A. Cohen, "Unconventional Warfare: Rebuilding U.S.Special Operations Forces," *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 2 (Mar, 1998), 149-149.
[139] Turnley, *Retaining a Precarious Value as Special Operations Go Mainstream* (Hurlburt Field, Florida: The JSOU Press, 2008)27.
[140] Simon Sinek, *Leaders Eat Last: Why some Teams Pull Together and Other's Don'T* (New York: Penguin, 2013). See also LINDA ROBINSON, *One Hundred Victories: Special Ops and the Future of American Warfare* (United States: PublicAffairs, 2013), 344.

dominant at any given point in time on any particular individual or sub-culture. Aggregating isomorphic forces into collective trends, therefore, maybe a useful practice for determining and understanding particular indicators and/or warnings of drift towards or away from identified organizational cultural norms[141]. Determining exactly what constitutes a precarious value for an organization is as much an exercise in compromise as it is ambitious in vision. Examining how SOF reconciles its precarious value within the institution with that of the wider COE will be explored within the next section of *Beyond Institutional Icebergs.*

COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

The concept of competitive advantage speaks to the heart of the SOF cultural paradigm. Coined by prominent economist Michael E. Porter, the term describes a state of affairs whereby an organization achieves, through a variety of talents or characteristics the ability to outperform its competitors for an indeterminate period of time[142]. Although competitive advantage may be achieved through a variety of mechanisms or avenues, it can only really be considered as true competitive advantage "only if it can establish a difference that it can preserve.[143]" Simply stated, small victories mean little if they cannot be sustained or come at the cost of the legitimacy or overall efficacy of the greater institution. Furthermore, truly competitive organizations are arguably those that combine this enduring difference with a selective focus in activity. "Strategy requires you not to make trade-offs in competing-to choose what *not* to do.[144]" Because the competitive environment is one of constant change (The Speed of War), savvy organizations are therefore those organizations that are in a semi-constant state of analysis and change; adapting its

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[141] DEEPHOUSE, *Does Isomorphism Legitimate?,* Vol. 39Academy of Management, 1996), 1024-1039.
[142] Michael E. Porter, "What is Strategy?" in *HBR's 10 must Reads on Strategy,* First eBook ed. (Boston: Harvard Business School, 2011), 3-250.
[143] *Ibid,* 4.
[144] *Ibid,* 4.

practices and culture continually to meet the needs of the environment, shedding the routine or unnecessary whilst simultaneously preserving those aspects of its culture that made it successful in the first place.

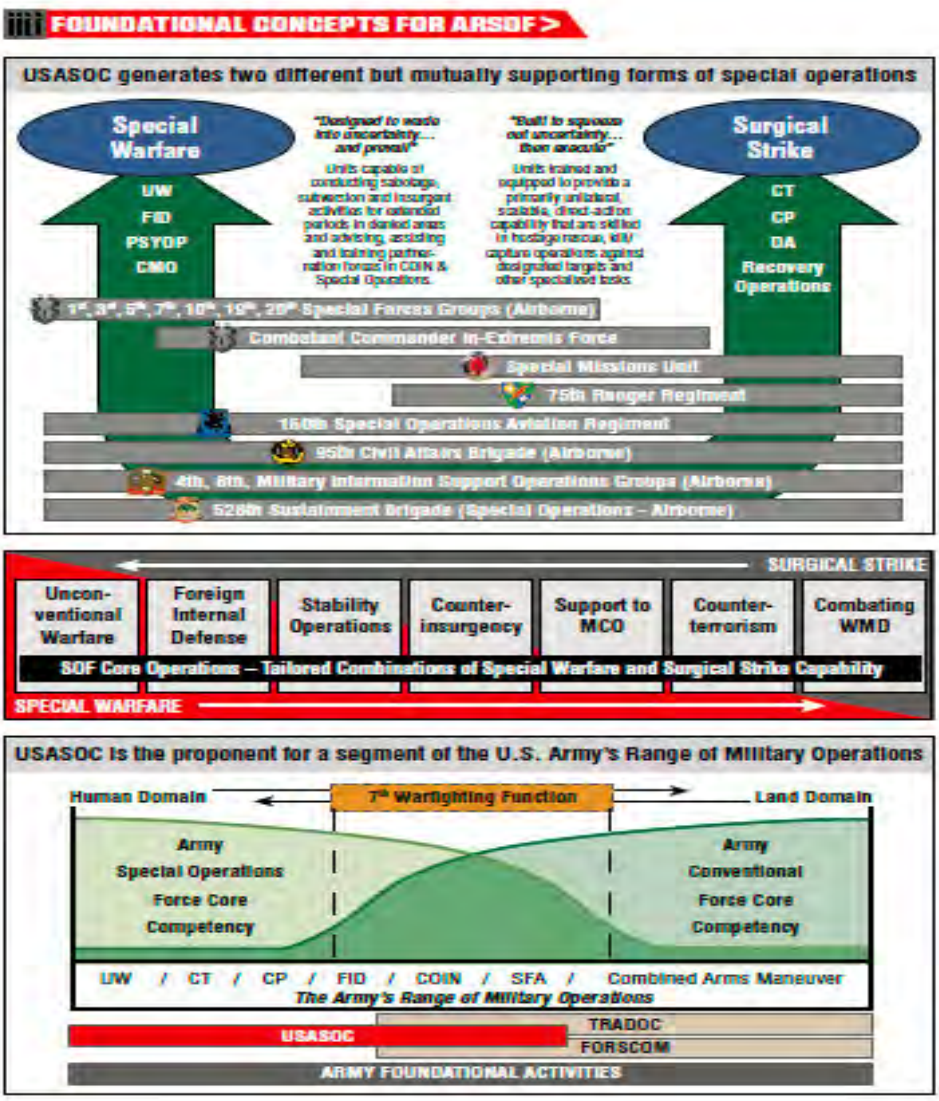
Contemporary military competitive advantage is simultaneously perhaps the most difficult form of advantage to measure. As conflict and the Speed of War have changed, moving steadily from one of dominance of physical to human terrain, so too has the relevance of quantitative 'body counts' or terrain captured. Instead measuring competitive advantage has become one of careful measurement on the psychological or moral planes vice the physical one of various indirect and less obvious indicators such as changes in demographics, economic or educational progress etc…. SOF, not unlike their conventional brethren, have not been immune to the difficulties of such measurements, continually searching for appropriate metrics or vehicles through which to measure and communicate and understand whether they, or their adversaries hold the aggregate advantage.

Surprisingly (or perhaps not), it is not war that provides the greatest organizational cultural challenge for SOF, but rather peace. Because of their adaptive organizational nature, as well as the relative freedom to do so, most SOF organizations undergo at least some measure of organizational change during conflict. This change, which may occur deliberately or reactively, may result in the manifestation of both intended and unintended cultural consequences, resulting in intra and inter-organizational tension. For SOF within the context of the Afghanistan and Iraq campaigns, the doctrinal development and adaptation of the Indirect and Direct approach[145] helped divide responsibilities between SOF organizations that were increasingly looking alike

[145] Although debately not 'new' concepts, the lexicon of Direct and Indirect Action matured as accepted terminology through the duration of both conflicts.

and executing similar missions, the result of which was duplication of effort, lost opportunities and unnecessary competition for resources[146]. As a result, and as a recognition of a requirement to re-establish clear cultural, organizational and operational boundaries, the United States Army Special Operations (ARSOF) Post Afghanistan set upon a deliberately rebalancing assigned tasks as responsibilities amongst its units and organizations, specifically looking to counteract what had occurred over a decade plus of war[147].

[146] ROBINSON, *One Hundred Victories: Special Ops and the Future of American Warfare* (United States: PublicAffairs, 2013), 344.
[147] Special Warfare, *ARSOF 2022: U.S. Army Special Operations Command* (Ft. Bragg, NC: United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Centre and School,[2012]).



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The inability of military organizations to make meaningful quantitative statements about its successes[149] may be due to two primary factors: outputs and the cost of failure. One has already been discussed and is the concept that while corporations operate in a continual and

[148] Special Warfare, *ARSOF 2022: U.S. Army Special Operations Command* (Ft. Bragg, NC: United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Centre and School,[2012]). This diagram provides an excellent summary of how US ARSOF have "re-set' the cultural spectrum respective of assigned tasks post Afghanistan and Iraq. It acknowledges a certain amount of overlap (the grey area), it nevertheless aligns Special Forces with the Indirect and National Mission Units with the Direct.

[149] The exception to this statement may be Direct Action missions, particularly those that are high profile. The death of Usama Bin Laden in 2011 was undoubtedly a quantifiable (with an exclamantion point) accomplishment. This example of validation of time and effort (coupled with the SOF warrior ethos that naturally gravitates towards physical action) may also help explain why so many SOF organizations favored, and gravitated towards Direct over Indirect Action.

tangible feedback loop with, gains and losses, other corporations or businesses to measure themselves by, conventional, nation-state militaries only operate periodically against one another and subsequently rely on qualitative measurements such as 'readiness' as a measure of effectiveness. The second primary difference between corporate and military cultures is, of course, the cost of failure. While failed corporations undoubtedly ruin lives, modern bankruptcy regulations provide a relative 'safety net' that both facilitates some acceptance of risk but primarily allows for eventual recovery if so desired. Military costs, however, come in two general categories. First and most obvious, is the catastrophic loss of life (blood and treasure) and the subsequent institutional repercussions that typically follow said failure. History is replete with both conventional and unconventional force examples of this type of failure with the failure of missions and the loss of individuals or entire organizations causing entire campaigns to falter or governments to fall. Although SOF has suffered its share of failure, it is somewhat encouraging that there is also a strong institutional desire to examine, learn and evolve from these failures as well as a measure of governmental latitude to recover from these failures. Both the reinvention of German Special Forces after the 1972 Munich Olympics and the rise of US Special Operations Forces after Operations Eagle Claw in 1980 serve as two primary examples of this phenomenon[150]. Placing aside the governmental component, it is this, the willingness and ability to critically self-examine, change and adapt after failure that is one of the critical characteristics that defines SOF and arguably sets it apart from conventional forces[151].

The second, less obvious but arguably more nefarious type of failure that haunts military forces, both regular and SOF, is that of irrelevance. Arguably present to a larger degree during

[150] Leebaert, *To Dare and to Conquer: Special Operations and the Destiny of Nations, from Achilles to Al Qaeda* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2006), 688.
[151] *Ibid*, 688.

periods of non-conflict, irrelevance is nonetheless a continual threat, particularly amongst those that are neither in tune with their organizational cultures or the wider external threat. Many obvious factors contribute to irrelevance – decreased funding, resources or training time are some examples – but there are also some less obvious, more insidious forces that at play that threaten to degrade, mislead or misdirect. The siren call of the military industrial complex, isomorphic 'one size fits all' implementation of bureaucratic regulations, or the changing and nebulous nature of the threat itself all serve as examples of stresses that continually and subtly seek to influence them towards their own designs. Although not scientific by any means, the longer any military organization overtly ignores these exists pressures or exists outside conflict, the greater the pressure and influence as well as the greater the risk of irrelevance. This idea of an organization moving further and further away from the 'Speed of War' is known as strategic drift and will be explored next.

STRATEGIC DRIFT

Strategic drift is an indicator of institutional decline and occurs in organizations that, for a variety of reasons, begin to lose legitimacy or drift away from the 'Speed of War.' It is never deliberate (no organization ever *plans* to be irrelevant), typically incremental in nature and initially difficult to measure but cumulative in its impact[152]. Strategic drift is the immediate predecessor to two; increasingly dramatic stages of institutional decline, institutional flux and a dramatic transitional point where the organizational is faced with a dramatic choice-set to reform, live in irrelevance or cease to exist ('evolve or die')[153]. It occurs because of a number of interrelated factors including institutional isomorphism and cultural misalignment or myopia; the

[152] Johnson, *Managing Strategic Change - Strategy, Culture and Action*, Vol. 25, 1992), 28-36.
[153] *Ibid*, 30.

discrepancy between what norms and values are broadcast by an organization vice the ones that are actually practiced and/or the ancillary inability to see change to one's culture as either necessary or possible. Institutional flux typically marks a 'point of no-return' whereby an organization makes a series of dramatic and ever increasingly desperate changes to either its culture or its operating strategies, usually resulting in an escalating loss of institutional legitimacy, customer loyalty (in the case of corporations), populace support (in the case of the military) morale and/or increased bureaucratization (as a mitigation means to 'regulating' itself out of its predicament)[154].

Given the competitive and evolving nature of contemporary and operating environments, most organizations expect to experience some periods of limited strategic drift during their existence, adopting a policy of 'incrementalism' as a means to mitigation; gradually introducing change in response to changes in the wider environment whilst slowly maintaining and shaping organizational norms in a controllable manner[155]. This is particularly prevalent within the military as an institution where various norms and values (hierarchical organizational structure, service traditions, etc) have both been constructed and reinforced over hundreds, if not thousands of years[156]. Incrementalism, of course, does not necessarily automatically equate success particularly if either the operating environment changes dramatically (i.e. a black swan event like 9/11), or if gradual cultural misalignment creates an unacceptable misalignment between societal or wider institutional norms. While the former condition captures the majority of attention for the majority of military planners, it is the latter disorder that is arguably the more nefarious.

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[154] *Ibid, 32.*
[155] *Ibid, 34.*
[156] Wilson, *Defining Military Culture*, Vol. 72, 2008), 11-41.

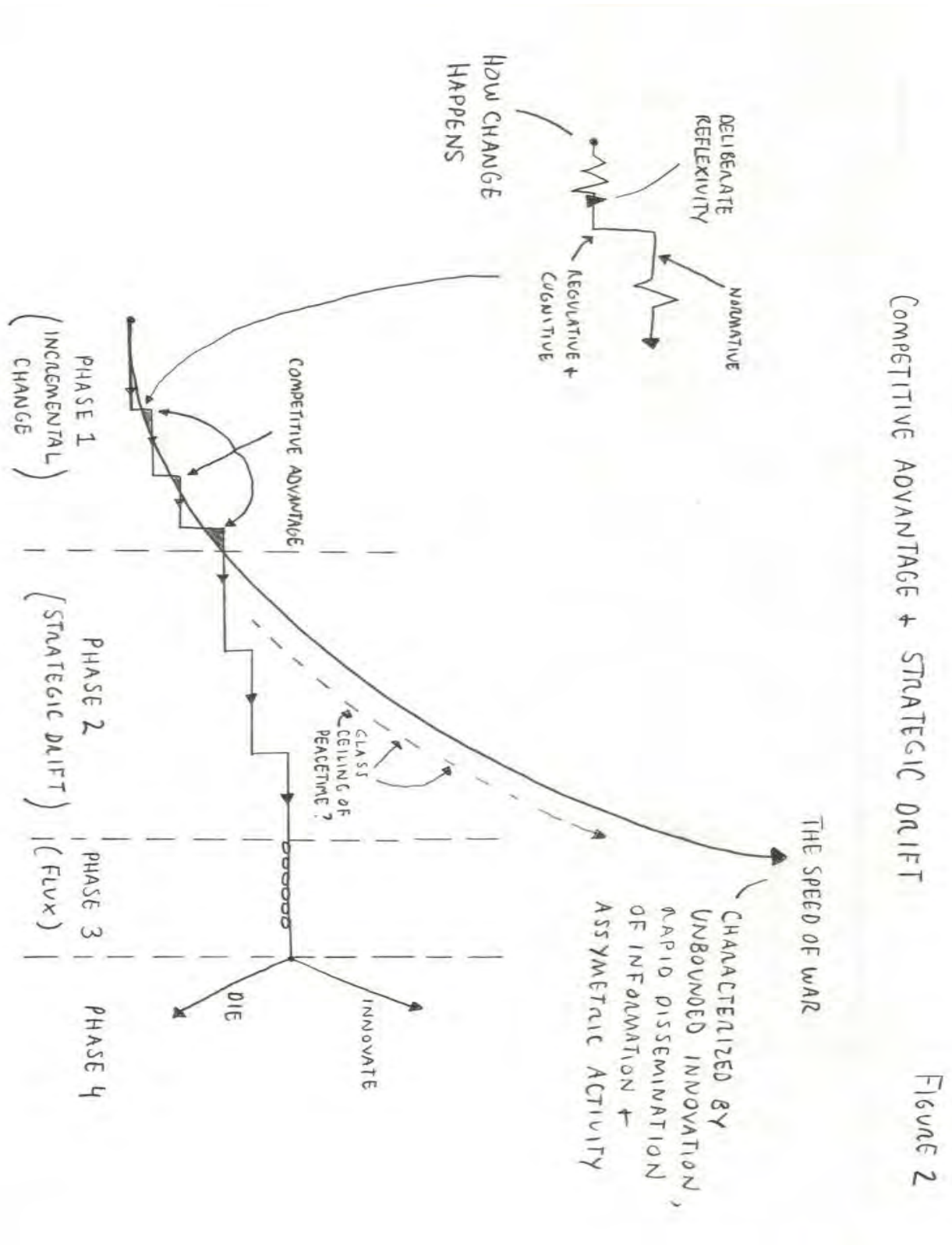
Decoupling may occur any number of reasons including mistuned or missing organizational sensors[157] and is closely aligned with the three types of institutional isomorphism[158].

Reaching the 'evolve or die' point for most organizations or institutions is typically neither a harmonious or obvious occasion. Given that most institutions and organizations only episodically conduct serious introspection, the requirement for serious reform is typically only truly evident once the most serious damage has already occurred[159]. This is aggravated by the fact that most organizations, and in particular military ones, are composed of both a strong normalizing instinct to maintain the status quo and as competing tribes that do not easily seek outside validation or assessment. SOF is no exception to this rule, with various individuals and units (tribes) regularly competing for power, resources and legitimacy on a regular basis. CANSOFCOM, according to noted business analyst, David Logan, who argues that individuals exist within one of five tribal categories within organizations, is most likely composed a combination of Stage two, three and four individuals: "those that are antagonistic, sarcastic, and resistant to new management initiatives" (Stage two tribes), those that want to outwork and outthink their competitors on an individual (unit or sub-unit) basis (Stage three tribes), as well as those who are "excited to work together for the benefit of the entire company" (Stage four tribes).[160]" Extended to the organizational level, it is reasonable to conclude that the Command is composed of a similar number of sub-cultures, sub-units and perhaps even the units

[157] The military 'Command Team' is designed to act as one of these institutional sensors, with the senior non-commissioned officer (SNCO) acting as the cultural sensor for the Commander – providing cues and insight into the effectiveness or misalignment of the various sub-components of the cultural web. Other examples of organizational sensors include various technical 'nets', specific individuals or organizational forums for discussion or dissent.
[158] Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests and Identities*, Fourth ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014), 266.
[159] Johnson, *Managing Strategic Change - Strategy, Culture and Action*, Vol. 25, 1992), 28-36.
[160] Dave Logan, John King and Halee Fischer-Wright, *Tribal Leadership: Leveraging Natural Groups to Build a Thriving Organization*Harper Business, 2008), 320.

themselves that either passively or actively are not only competing with one another but also actively resisting the success of either new organizational initiatives or other unit successes.

This, of course, is not to say that inter-unit competition is neither healthy nor a guaranteed indicator of either strategic drift or flux but rather to emphasize that this tension must be closely monitored and shaped lest it negatively manifest itself as decoupling, organizational conflict or unintentional sabotage. For CANSOFCOM this means that a recognition that JTF2 and CSOR are tribes that are tribes at that have been at odds with one another, particularly in the post-Afghanistan resource constrained environment where they were increasingly tasked, resourced and equipped or at least were given the cultural space to think they were.



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[161] Johnson, *Managing Strategic Change - Strategy, Culture and Action*, Vol. 25, 1992), 28-36. (modified)

True strategic drift occurs whenever an organizations ability to implement logical, incremental and continual change is outpaced by dramatic change in the external environment or internal culture to the point where incremental changes are inconsequential and dramatic overhaul is necessary. Drift may take numerous forms, and within military or SOF organizations indicators or warnings may take the explicit form of dramatic 'release' rates, increased administrative or disciplinary problems or more subtle indicators such as the inability of institutional commanders (at whatever level) to accurately either recount, rationalize or practice organizational norms or values and/or obvious disconnects between the Speed of War, doctrine and capability.

STRATEGIC DRIFT: AN ANECDOTE

Consider the following brief strategic drift anecdote:

Within the three Canadian regular force infantry regiments (PPCLI, RCR, and R22eR) there exists three 'Light' Infantry Battalions (LIBs). Each of these LIBs maintains a parachute company or 'para coy' composed of the approximately 125 paratroopers each. These 'para coys' are supported by a number of engineer, other combat support organizations and operationally by the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). Airborne 'culture' thrives in these organizations replete with strong symbolism (maroon berets, VF-42 daggers, winged Pegasi and the like) as well as warrior ethos that supports the notion of the airborne solider – paratrooper -- – as stronger, fitter and overall 'harder' than their mechanized or other light infantry brethren. Canadian doctrinal theory states that in the event of an expeditionary requirement, these para coys will join together into an independent ad-hoc 'Airborne Battlegroup' complete with a headquarters and 'Pathfinder' element responsible for proving the way into the engagement

space ahead of a larger airborne force. Although this concept briefs well, it is an unfortunate operational fallacy. In reality, these para coys exist as doctrinal orphans, the remaining collateral from the disbandment of the Canadian Airborne Regiment in 1995, undermanned, underequipped and essentially supplanted in recent years by validated CANSOFCOM capabilities. Despite the absence of modernized doctrine or a cogent threat estimate however, the para coys maintain a stubborn and fierce existence within the Canadian Forces Order of Battle, fighting a determined rear-guard cultural and organizational battle. Although many institutional leaders continue to both tacitly support their existence based on the context of maintaining 'warrior spirit' or for potential domestic contingency planning options, there exists little institutional momentum to fully operationalize the capability, resulting in groups of airborne warriors without an actual capability. Is the existence of the para coys really an example of a true capability / capability in waiting or rather one of institutionalized strategic drift and institutional paralysis – an indicator of an wider organization that cannot rationalize the inclusion or dismissal of a capability against a wider operational and strategic backdrop and a sub-culture that refuses to fade into the background quietly?

This anecdote highlights two strong military themes regarding the spread of strategic drift: First, drift is becomes more prevalent and the longer ongoing environmental change is neither universally recognized, communicated nor understood by the members of the institution and second, the impact of institutional isomorphism is pervasive and can manifest differently depending on which sub-component of the cultural web it impacts[162]. Like the 'evolve or die' point of no return, however, communicating to the members of an organization that they are entering or in the midst of a period of drift is much easier said than done given the subtly of

[162] Katerina Bezrukova et al., "The Effects of Alignments: Examining Group Faultlines, Organizational Cultures, and Performance," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 97, no. 1 (2012), 77-92.

many of the indicators in their initial stages or, strong institutional forces that fight any change initiatives (no-nos) or as demonstrated by the 'para coy' anecdote, decoupling that permeates well beyond the tactical level, making it difficult to determine an appropriate start point for the initiation of change[163].

This institutional challenge of achieving a cultural common operating picture is further complicated by a number of additional factors including the influence or decoupling at the organizational sub or micro-culture level, geography, span of control, available communication methods (technology) as well as competition in informational sources. Finally, militaries have the additional and unique challenge of operating against a 'glass ceiling' of national policy that, as the political instrument of any given nation-states will, allows them to operate only episodically and within necessary but specific regulations that are not necessarily commensurate with the pure nature of the Speed of War. The key to mitigating these factors that contribute to strategic drift begins with effective communication, is accompanied by a strong understanding of organizational culture in order to shape isomorphism, and is concreted through the development of an understanding how change happens.

COMBATING STRATEGIC DRIFT: ESTABLISHING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

Militaries are both blessed and cursed with a plethora of means with which to communicate, including a number of traditional, non-traditional and emerging mechanisms. Traditional tools include written doctrine or 'orders' or their verbal equivalents while non-traditional devices include such things as technical or various technical informational 'nets.' The

[163] Kotter, *Buy-in: Saving Your Good Idea from Getting Shot Down*, ed. Whitehead (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2010), 192.

SOF 'tech-net' forms one such means. Given the relatively small size of the SOF community and the frequency of interaction between the various units, its influence should not be underestimated as a powerful, important and influential cultural communication device. Emerging mechanisms include social media, a virtual explosion of military and SOF 'experts', blogs and Intelligence web sites, increased informational pressure from the military industrial complex as well as a surge of hyper-realistic film and television that includes the involvement of actual serving SOF community members.

The first key to cultural establishing effective cultural communication within an organization such as CANSOFCOM is, of course, not to rely exclusively on one particular mechanism but rather to utilize all three types of communication methods individually or in combination as necessary. More to the point, however, institutional commanders must recognize when selecting a mechanism that efficient does not necessarily equal effective particularly when it comes to matters of culture and institutional 'buy-in.[164]' Written communication such as vision is best suited when it is accompanied by an explanation, as a PowerPoint presentation does not necessarily capture the nuances of the risk associated with an operation or mission[165]. In general terms, however, the best communication mechanisms for achieving a common cultural operating picture within SOF organizations are those that have the following characteristics:

- Includes an aspect of institutional vision
- Provide the necessary strategic, political or operational context and is intelligence (Speed of War) driven

[164] A great example of effective use of modern communication techniques such as social media can be found here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QaqpoeVgr8U. LGen Morrison, Chief of the Australian Army utilized a video to convey a strong message to the entire Australian Army regarding an episode of professional misconduct that within the Australian Defence Forces. The video was disseminated rapidly and with great effect.

[165] The author tends to agree with retired USMC General Mattis when he said: "PowerPoint makes us stupid." http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/27/world/27powerpoint.html?_r=1&

- Includes an assessment of risk in all its relevant forms (institutional through tactical)
- Always starts with and answers the question why[166]
- Is descriptive vice prescriptive while still including a clear definition of necessary limitations
- Is mission command and commander centric (Detachment through Unit and Command) vice staff centric
- Enables and encourages respectful cognitive conflict (at appropriate times and places and within appropriate means), acknowledging competing informational sources as necessary
- Connects the Force Generation, Development, Employment and Management components to the organizational paradigm
- Is continually timely and relevant, eliminating redundant, dated or erroneous information[167].

COMBATING STRATEGIC DRIFT: SHAPING ISOMORPHISM

The second key to combating strategic drift lies in controlling and shaping institutional isomorphism, whether coercive, mimetic or normative. Isomorphic pressures may be either subtle or obvious in form and are not necessarily negative but are both continually active and impactful. Corporations, for example, make use of mimetic isomorphism in order to keep abreast of changes that are occurring within their competitors. Militaries, particularly those militaries that are either not actively engaged in conflict or need to maintain legitimacy with larger, more powerful partners (i.e. The United States) frequently morph their practices and

[166] Simon Sinek, *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* (New York: Penguin, 2009).
[167] https://www mca-marines.org/gazette The United States Marine Corps (USMC) Gazette serves as a good example of such a relevant mechanism, combining administrative information with updates on the corps as well as active dialogue between serving and retired members of all ranks. The disruptive thinkers debate that included senior serving members of the Corps serves as a great example of how timely participation in cognitive conflict by senior leaders can contribute to institutional "buy-in." http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/disruptive-thinkers-defining-the-problem

structures to something that is more congruent with what they perceive to be the 'industry standard'[168]. The almost wholesale adoption of the US COIN manual by the Canadian Forces and CANSOFCOM in 2009 serves as an illustrative example of this point. Although frequently done under the auspices of interoperability, progress or 'Jointness', however, many militaries also simply mimic foreign or competitor practices out of doubt, fear of the unknown, or an unwillingness or inability to confront the requirement to change (i.e strategic drift or flux).

Although a large number of these transactions have been undoubtedly both necessary and positive, some difficulties have also arisen when norms, values or practices are adopted at face value or without a complete or understanding of some of the cultural nuances or consequences. The CANSOFCOM 'stand-up' of CSOR in 2006, for example, was the result of analysis that determined that an organization that was both 'US Army Ranger and US SF like' was required to support JTF2, one that did not exist within the CAF at that time[169]. This unfortunate use of the Ranger/SF hybrid as cognitive-cultural shorthand, however, would ultimately result in a measure of ambiguity and confusion that essentially invited mimetic isomorphism to run rampant within the unit at the lower levels. Although understandable for a new unit to some degree, this ambiguity, ultimately contributed to a measure of unnecessary competition, cultural and a period of operational imbalance and resentment between the two units, divergent from the original vision.

One of the devices keys to the rapid transformation out of this imbalance within CANSOFCOM culture during this time period was its ability to execute After Action Review (AARs) at all levels. This was, however, an imperfect process. At its best throughout the

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[168] DEEPHOUSE, *Does Isomorphism Legitimate?*, Vol. 39Academy of Management, 1996), 1024-1039.
[169] Horn, *We Will Find a Way: Understanding the Legacy of Canadian Special Operations Forces*, JSOU Report 2-12 ed. (MacDill Air Force Base, Florida: Joint Special Operations University, 2012).

Afghan war, reactive active action review processes at the tactical level allowed for rapid incorporation of tactics, techniques, and procedures as well as the rapid prototyping and inclusion of new, game changing capabilities[170]. At its worst, however, CANSOFCOM's AAR process was myopic, defaulting to existing norms and contributing to the possibility that, over a ten year period, ten separate and distinct campaigns were fought instead of one comprehensive one. The next, and final, conceptual section of *Beyond Institutional Icebergs* will explore the third and most critical component of combatting institutional isomorphism, and the maintenance of competitive advantage through the implementation of meaningful change – *institutional reflexivity*.

INSTITUTIONAL REFLEXIVITY

No organizational culture exists in stasis. Instead, as this paper has highlighted, organizational culture exists within a state of near constant change, reacting and adapting to the impact of both the unconscious (isomorphism and culture) and conscious inputs (culture, environment, adversaries and/or leadership) on a consistent basis. Left without meaningful communication, vision or and deliberate change initiatives, however, most organizations would slowly begin to succumb to drift and the gravitational pull of institutional isomorphism; steadily and increasingly adopting the norms of the institutional center, regardless of its actual impact on its the overall identity or performance. This tendency to drift is the natural state of any bureaucracy[171] and is accelerated in periods of uncertainty and doubt, particularly in the absence of strong leadership; favouring those decisions and initiatives that avoid risk and eliminate chaos in favour of those that establish order and support efficiency. Organizational homogeneity is the

[170] Bernd Horn, *We Will Find a Way: Understanding the Legacy of Canadian Special Operations Forces*, JSOU Report 2-12 ed. (MacDill Air Force Base, Florida: Joint Special Operations University, 2012).
[171] DiMaggio, *The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields*, Vol. 48Sage Publications Inc, 1983), 147-160.

objective and natural state of any bureaucracy and efficiency through a 'one size fits all' approach is the surest way to achieve such a goal[172]. As numerous of examples demonstrate, however, the relationship between efficiency and effectiveness is not necessarily a proportional one, particularly when the Speed of War is factored in[173]. SOF, replete with a range of norms and practices that differ from those of the larger organizations within the military is an example of this organizational dichotomy, resulting in the requirement to find a 'precarious value' between the Speed of War and the larger institution. This paper contends that, although it is not currently utilized optimally, it is primarily through the use of *institutional reflexivity* that SOF maintains its competitive advantage and preserves its precarious value.

Institutional reflexivity is the act of deliberate introspection of one's organization in order to improve overall organizational performance, reinforce positive cultural norms and practices[174]. It includes a number of deliberate activities including a regular and critical examination of past successes and failures, ongoing practices as well as proposed future initiatives. If done correctly, these collective activities act to reinforce (positive) institutional norms, values and practices and eliminate negative ones. Sophisticated application of the reflexivity process will provide the additional benefits of both encouraging innovation and reinforcing organizational autonomy (precarious value). The primary psychological goal of any reflexivity activity is increased institutional 'buy-in' for change initiatives and the primary physical output is organizational 'vision.'

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[172] Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests and Identities*, Fourth ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014)loc 3698.

[173] Interestingly, the very nature of bureaucracies and including the impact of institutional isomorphism seems to be one of the key factors that is impacting Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/140273/william-mccants/how-zawahiri-lost-al-qaeda

[174] Higate and Cameron, *Reflexivity and Researching the Military*, Vol. 32, 2006), 219-233.

Unfortunately, reflexivity is both a time consuming business and one that tends to focus on failures more than it does successes[175]. Additional limitations such as time-based vice conditions-based personnel rotations (within or outside of conflict) or cumbersome hierarchies that either disconnect the tactical from the strategic or discourage cognitive conflict mean that few organizations invest the necessary time or effort to truly improve their organizations. Instead, most organizations, including military ones, practice only certain selected aspects of reflexivity, typically in 'stove piped' or similar disconnected efforts. Certain military Force Development (FD) initiatives, for example, often become reductionist activities that focus less on the complete context within which a particular concept or idea is developed and more on the specific piece of equipment that is attached to the initiative. Compounded by a lack of vision from institutional leaders (whether deliberate or otherwise), service parochialism, institutional isomorphic pressures, the military industrial complex, intra or inter-organizational infighting, true reflexivity becomes next to impossible, and is typically replaced instead with a myopic organizational initiatives or reflections that seek to reinforce existing norms or achieve short term 'wins' of equipment or resources.

SOF has a number of unique challenges with regards to institutional reflexivity. This paper will highlight three. First because SOF organizations are both smaller and 'flatter' in terms of organizational size and hierarchy when compared to their parent organizations, they typically have increased access to various institutional commanders. Being smaller allows for a greater degree of familiarity, increased opportunities for mentorship and, as a result – cohesion. This theoretically at least, provides a greater degree of insight throughout the institution as to why institutional decisions are made, answering the fundamental question of 'Why?' and

[175] Paul Tosey, Max Visser and Mark N. K. Saunders, "The Origins and Conceptualizations of 'triple-Loop' Learning: A Critical Review," *Management Learning* 43, no. 3 (07, 2012), 291-307.

subsequently enabling a greater degree of institutional 'buy-in.' The risk is that, without proper institutional stewardship and/or governance, flat, 'shared sense of responsibility' organizations such as SOF can create confusion with regard to who is 'Command' and whom is in 'Control'.[176]

Second, socialized into an organizational culture that supports and encourages both cognitive conflict and independent thought, 'operators' maintain a tactical 'After-Action / Lessons Learned (AAR/LL)' network (both formal and informal) that almost instantly promulgates new lessons learned from operations or training to other SOF community members (both inter and intra organizationally). These isomorphic transactions are slightly double edged in the fact that many occur automatically and with such regularity that that their cumulative impact on organizational culture is sometimes difficult to predict or control. As a result, a 'lesson learned' introduced from one organization into another without the necessary cultural contextual analysis may have the inadvertent effect of corrupting established organizational norms. This informal access to other networks and cultures is further complicated when one considers the murky profit/ideological motivations of the some of the military-industrial complex[177] and the routine interaction that occurs between the two worlds.

The third challenge is exposed when examining the interaction between different levels of the organization. Take, for example, the aforementioned AAR / LL process. Unfortunately the efficiency with which it operates on at the tactical level does not seamlessly transfer to the operational level. This is for both practical and cultural reasons. Most, if not all, SOF

[176] Ori Brafman and Rod A. Beckstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations* (New York: Penguin Group, 2006).

[177] While the authors interactions/observations have been overall positive, with most military-industrial purveyors of goods and services acting in objective and professional manner, there have been occasions where more nefarious attempts to directly or indirectly manipulate organizations into procuring a specific piece of equipment or training were observed, most likely due to a poor estimate within the SOF community. This SOF/military-industrial complex relationship is further complicated when one considers the implications of reverse transactions – the possibility that of information on TTPs is being taken from SOF organizations (Intellectual Property) without the proper safeguards.

organizations lack the organic manpower to staff every organizational position with 'operators' even if they wanted to. This is particularly true at the operational level and above where many key niche speciality positions exist in such areas as finance, legal, administration, logistics, signals, intelligence or force development. As a result, SOF organizations fill these positions from outside its community and then attempt to acculturate new members into SOF culture through both formal and informal means. While the selection and addition of key support personnel from outside the community provides the added bonus of adding a measure of legitimacy to the precarious value, it doesn't always work perfectly, particularly if the individual in question has deliberately sent as a legitimizing agent and/or strongly identifies with another set of organizational values or norms. These scenarios sometimes result in increased intra/inter organizational tribalism or friction. Typically these deviations from the norm result in individual or individuals occupying one of two narratives: passive-aggressive resistance or someone who 'goes native', both counter-productive indicators of organizational misalignment[178]. The final component of this challenge to reflexivity is the nature of the organization itself. Turnover rates in key command and staff positions, that are time vice conditions based most of the time, ensure that reflexivity initiatives are typically challenged by the inability to maintain a constant voice and consistent narrative.

Reflexivity therefore is an inclusive process that looks to provide insight and context to why an organization is either succeeding or failing. It is bigger than any one singular or individual after-action process and, executed properly, acts as a harmonizing force between all components of military activity from Force Employment through to Development. It incorporates a number of concurrent but balanced activities, encouraging and permitting forums

[178] Kotter, *A Sense of Urgency* (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2008), 196.

for respectful cognitive conflict whilst ruthlessly identifying and proposing methods for divesting the organization of obstructionists. Done correctly, reflexivity should act to reinforce organizational norms through continued critical analysis of both success and failure[179]. Properly socialized and bounded within opportune and appropriate vessels, reflexivity acts as both a critical agent for innovation as well as one for institutional legitimacy and autonomy. Above all, reflexivity should provide organizational vision in a meaningful and tangible way, one that enhances 'buy-in' and urgency[180].

CHANGE IN SOF ORGANIZATIONS

At first blush, paradoxes seemingly abound in SOF culture. The frequent idiom of Special Operators as '*the quiet professionals',* for example, seems to be at odds with the overabundance of actual Special Operators that have been represented in popular culture within the last few years. Even the relatively sacrosanct five 'SOF Truths' outwardly maintain an element of contradiction with '*Humans are more important than hardware'* at odds with the fact that most SOF units maintain a variation of "unique access to cutting edge technology" as one of their organizational characteristics. Although neither of these examples represents a complete or thorough portrayal of actual SOF culture, they nevertheless allow for a measure of insight into its complexity.

Given their shared values of innovation, entrepreneurship and relentless improvement, it should come as no surprise, therefore, that both the business world and SOF have focused much of their academic rigour on the same areas of study. In addition to leadership and risk,

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[179] Tosey, Visser and Saunders, *The Origins and Conceptualizations of 'triple-Loop' Learning: A Critical Review*, Vol. 43, 2012), 291-307.
[180] Kristi Yuthas, Jesse F. Dillard and Rodney K. Rogers, "Beyond Agency and Structure: Triple-Loop Learning," *Journal of Business Ethics* 51, no. 2 (May2004, 2004), 229-243.

understanding change and more importantly, change management, has caught the attention of most SOF institutional leaders, resultantly becoming an important part of the institutional lexicon. Given that all members of the Special Operations community increasingly share the burden of guiding and shaping the collective SOF 'brand' as well as their respective organizations this is also not surprising as with failure or success in one community often reverberates across national or service boundaries equally.

While an in-depth comparison of corporate and SOF culture could easily be the subject of further research, the subject is unfortunately outside the scope of this paper. Nevertheless there are a few general and specific key takeaways for *Beyond Institutional Icebergs* when comparing the two. The relative avalanche of material on initiating and managing organizational change within the corporate world has gone relatively unmatched by similar contemporary efforts by modern military writers[181]. As a result, SOF commanders and resultantly SOF culture in general has taken on somewhat of a 'corporate' tone, including lexicon, as a means of understanding and implementing organizational culture and change. The irony of this should not be lost as many of these most relevant writers, such as Simon Sinek in *Leaders Eat Last*, have drawn directly from military examples in order to formulate their various hypotheses on both change and

[181] Some context is required here. While lots of authors, including Canadian ones, write articles, dissertations and the like about military change, most do it from a historical perspective. Many, like *Hellyer's Ghosts: Unification Of The Canadian Forces Is 40 Years Old – Parts One and Two* written by Major-General Daniel Gosselin, CMM, CD and published in the Canadian Military Journal in 2008 or Inside Canadian Forces Transformation written by Lieutenant-General (ret'd) Michael K. Jeffery, CMM, CD provide perspective on change initiatives within the Canadian Armed Forces there are two arguable reasons why Canadian military leaders increasingly look outside. First is the notion that most authors say things such as "change in inevitable" or "change is constant" but stop short of providing recommendations other than "change is required". Second, given Canada's inconcsistent success with implementing change, many commanders have simply chosen to look outsider the ranks for insight. Other articles focus on what can arguably be considered 'symptoms' as opposed to the 'cure'; examining specific components of the institution and providing specific recommendations with regard to specific issues. While both are ultimately useful, neither type of article seems to address change within the wider institutional level in a manner that contemporary corporate, management and business writers are currently doing.

leadership[182]. Finally, for every similarity, there are some distinct and arguably immutable differences that serve as a constant reminder of the dangers that come with assimilating too much of corporate culture. A different system of individual punishments and reward, concepts such as universality of service (and the ability to quit your job) and the aforementioned consequences of organizational failure respective of the military's relationship to the state all stand out as stark reminders of some of the root differences that separate the two domains as well as the context that should be afforded any direct comparison.

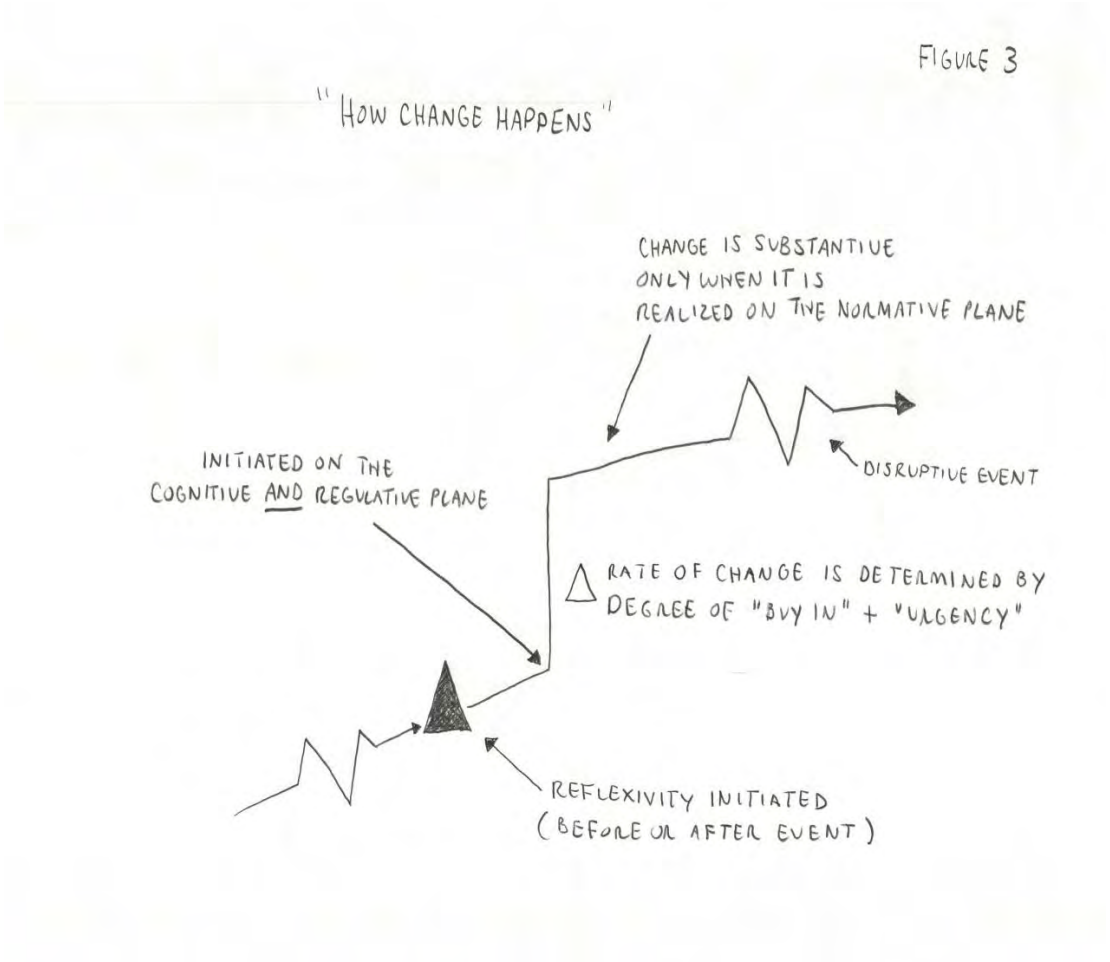
Of the specific similarities between SOF and corporate culture, three general themes are worthy of note. These themes, in turn, highlight a number of specific observations about SOF culture and its relationship with both reflexivity and organizational change. The general themes relate to an acknowledgement from within competitive organizations that *the only constant that permeates organizational and environmental culture is change*. Both SOF and corporate culture recognize that rapid advances in accessible technology, coupled with increased global urbanization, resource demands and populations growth have combined to create a period of increased (and immediate) interconnectedness, global change and uncertainty, the consequences of which are difficult to predict with great certainty. This resulting *ambiguity* demands that organizations continually and critically examine every aspect of their organization in order to shed inefficient processes, cumbersome structure and unnecessary practices. Organizations that manage to adapt to the demands of the global environs whilst simultaneously protecting their core cultural paradigm are those that demonstrate effective *resilience*[183].

[182] Sinek, *Leaders Eat Last: Why some Teams Pull Together and Other's Don'T* (New York: Penguin, 2013).
[183] Taleb, *Antifragile: Things that Gain from Disorder* (New York: Random House, 2012), 519.

While quantifying a common frame of reference may not be an exclusive requirement of SOF alone, it is nonetheless a critical component especially when the ambiguous nature of the threat environment. Establishing a shared sense of the Speed of War as well as that of organizational culture within SOF organizations is a critical tool to both establishing resilience and ensuring innovation but also maintaining competitive advantage. "It's not reality unless it's shared[184]" is a salient and succinct piece of wisdom from Pete Blaber, a retired 'Delta Force' officer. SOF organizations that operate without a common understanding of the threat, operating environment or culture will find that entrepreneurs within the organization will rush to fill the resulting void with a reality (or competing realities) of their own. This resulting divergence between 'realities' creates the risk of introducing organizational drift. It should be noted, however, the requirement to establish this common framework does not eliminate the requirement for cognitive dissonance / cognitive conflict. In fact, the opposite is true[185]. Given the very nature of the operators and supporters within most SOF organizations, organizational 'buy-in' and meaningful change is only possible if both the cognitive and regulative levers are pulled simultaneously (or if the cognitive lever is pulled slightly in advance of the regulative one). As a result, continual healthy debate and 'push-back' within respectful and time appropriate environments are critical[186]. Related to the notion of the common frame of reference, the establishment of a 'need to share' vice 'need to know[187]' culture helps further facilitate 'buy in.' This notion should not be oversimplified as a 'everyone needs to know

[184] Pete Blaber, *The Mission, the Men and Me: Lessons from A Former Delta Force Commander* (New York: Berkley Caliber, 2008), 319.
[185] Satyanarayana Parayitam and Robert S. Dooley, "Is Too Much Cognitive Conflict in Strategic Decision-Making Teams Too Bad?" *International Journal of Conflict Management (Emerald)* 22, no. 4 (12, 2011), 342-357.
[186] Covey, Stephen M.R. with Merrill, Rebecca R., *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing that Changes Everything* (New York: Free Press, 2006).
[187] Dawes, Sharon S.Cresswell, Anthony M.Pardo,Theresa A., "From "Need to Know" to "Need to Share": Tangled Problems, Information Boundaries, and the Building of Public Sector Knowledge Networks," *Public Administration Review* 69, no. 3 (May, 2009), 392-402.

everything' statement but rather an acknowledgement that, given the glut of informational sources as well as the very individual characteristics of SOF operators, informational gaps without context will most likely be filled to result in an incomplete or incorrect understanding of the wider picture[188]. More importantly, however, if organizational leaders can connect the FD, FG, FM and FE in meaningful and relatable ways, they will reasonable a rise in institutional 'buy-in.[189]'



[188] Fortunately, the notion of compartmentalization within most SOF organizations means that the wider context can usually be given whilst simultaneously maintaining the necessary measure of operational security.
[189] Kotter, *Buy-in: Saving Your Good Idea from Getting Shot Down*, ed. Whitehead (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2010), 192.

Although difficult to manage given the overall transitory nature of the military, change in SOF organizations should be viewed as *condition* vice *time* based wherever possible. Rapid rotation of individuals, particularly of commanders and key institutional leaders, only contributes to an increase in cognitive dissonance and, left unchecked, can lead to organizational decoupling and/or strategic drift. For SOF operators, rapid rotation can perpetuate a particularly acute risk of the decoupling at the tactical level[190].

This last point speaks directly to the SOF 'Truth' - '*Humans are more important than hardware* 'and a final, brief diversion to the connection between organizational ethos, the organizational paradigm, change and the Warrior Ethos. SOF members tend to be entrepreneurial in nature. SOF selection and training regimes tend to favour individuals who personify the typical entrepreneur – healthy appreciation for risk, innovative, motivated and independent and then shape those raw individual qualities into a collective culture of small and cohesive teams through an equally rigorous socialization process[191]. As a result, most SOF operators become deeply emotionally invested in their organizations, unwilling to play a passive role. Variations on regular or 'conventional' norms are often the result, with different emphasis placed differently on the various sub-components of the Cultural Web, resulting in different manifestation of values within the SOF paradigm. For example, and although not quite Machiavellian in nature, SOF operators tend to weigh and balance risk and opportunity

[190] An unfortunate refrain passed anecdotally to the author by a SOF Officer from an allied nation as a Troop Commander was about to execute a Direct Action mission overseas was 'you may be commanding this mission, sir, but I'm leading it", an indication that of disconnection not only between subcultures but potentially of disharmony within the organization.

[191] Blaber, *The Mission, the Men and Me: Lessons from A Former Delta Force Commander* (New York: Berkley Caliber, 2008), 319. This book provides an excellent summary of both the rigors of selection and the types of individuals who populate SOF organizations.

differently than their conventional counterparts[192]. "The main fight in SEAL Team was to *return* to Vietnam[193]" wrote a US Navy seal of the Vietnam War, similar to the CANSOF zeitgeist throughout the duration of the Afghan War. This eagerness to seek and accept the ultimate responsibility of their profession forms part of the Warrior Ethos that also serves to highlight the inexorable link between SOF culture and change:

> The will to fight, the passion to be great, is an indispensable element of the Warrior Ethos. It is also a primary quality of leadership, because it inspires men and fires their hearts with ambition and the passion to go beyond their own limits[194].

The desire to change, to improve, therefore, is an extant one within SOF – not easily contained by the boundaries of organizational bureaucracy and less of a choice than it is a cultural imperative. Shaping the '*relentless pursuit of excellence*[195]' so that it allows SOF organizations to retain a 'precarious value', however, is exactly the challenge that institutional leaders and commanders face as they tangle with harsh organizational fiscal and operational realities and other military (sub)cultures that do not share the same values as SOF. Instead, while there must be a recognition and celebration of this innate and persistent pressure to improve, the modern SOF paradigm also demands that that its members temper this drive with patient understanding of the wider paradigm within which they operate. This is easier said than done, of course, but nevertheless serves to emphasize the importance of "starting with why[196]", when considering how change occurs in SOF.

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[192] Sean Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die: The Untold Story of Operation Anaconda* (New York: Berkley Books, 2005). This books provides an equally excellent summary of how SOF and conventional commanders assessed risk very differently during the events surrounding Operation Anaconda.
[193] Christopher Coker, *The Warrior Ethos: Miltiary Culture and the War on Terror* (New York: Routledge, 2007).
[194] Pressfield, *The Warrior Ethos*Black Irish Entertainment, 2011), 114.
[195] JTF2 ethical tenet.
[196] Sinek, *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* (New York: Penguin, 2009).

CHAPTER TWO: CANSOFCOM CULTURE

Let us be, then, warriors of the heart, and enlist in our inner cause the virtues we have acquired through blood and sweat in the sphere of conflict-courage, patience, selflessness, loyalty, fidelity, self-command, respect for elders, love of our comrades (and of the enemy), perseverance, cheerfulness in adversity and a sense of humor, however terse or dark

- Steven Pressfield, The Warrior Ethos

Out this door, nothing

- Lycurgus[197]

As the junior member of the 'Five-Eyes' SOF community, CANSOFCOM has been both uniquely privileged and challenged during its existence. The ability to leverage both best practices and 'lessons-learned' from other SOF units and organizations has been counterbalanced by a history of inconsistent reflexivity practices as well as the impact of negative isomorphism that impacts most new organizations as they try to establish themselves within the bigger fold. As a result, CANSOFCOM has experienced periods of both competitive advantage and strategic drift, although not enough of the latter to consider it ever have been in danger of entering flux. Because the rise of Canadian SOF and the establishment of CANSOFCOM have been well documented in a number of other works[198], as well as briefly throughout this paper, this section of *Beyond Institutional Icebergs* will provide only a brief overview of pertinent events, those that

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[197] Lycurgus, a Spartan warrior and king "decreed that no man under thirty could eat dinner at home with his family. Instead, he instituted "common messes" of fourteen or fifteen men who were part of the same platoon or military unit. Above the threshold of each mess was a sign that said: Out this door, nothing. The point of the common mess was to bind the men together as friends. "Even horses and dogs who are fed together," observed Xenophon, "form bonds and become attached to one another." Taken from http://www.stevenpressfield.com/2011/03/how-the-spartans-became-the-spartans/ . Translated for the modern SOF warrior, the term can be taken to reinforce the ideals of "the relentless pursuit of excellence", "leaving nothing" on the proverbial table, cognitive conflict and speaking "truth to power."

[198] Horn, *We Will Find a Way: Understanding the Legacy of Canadian Special Operations Forces*, JSOU Report 2-12 ed. (MacDill Air Force Base, Florida: Joint Special Operations University, 2012).

shaped CANSOFCOM as it existing in both a period of competitive advantage and one of strategic drift.

The creation of CANSOFCOM as an organization came about as a result of wider CAF transformation efforts from 2004 to 2006. One of the resulting 'dot-coms' that came out of the analysis, CANSOFCOM formed a new service in 2006 alongside newly formed expeditionary, domestic and support commands[199]. JTF2, then a member of the Vice Chief of Defence Group (VCDS) group was pulled to populate the Command along with the Joint Nuclear Biological Company (expanded and renamed the Canadian Joint Incident Response Unit (CJIRU)), 427 Special Operations Aviation Squadron (expanded to include multiple squadrons) and the aforementioned and newly formed CSOR[200]. Already experiencing a fair amount of cognitive, regulative and normative turbulence from the other services before this point, the establishment of the Command came at a critical time, acting as a legitimizing agent for the units and establishing it with 'precarious value' within the CAF – in particular the army who viewed JTF2 and CSOR (specifically) as both unnecessary and poachers of their best men and missions[201].

The cultural zeitgeist of CANSOF from 2003 until sometime in 2008/9 can be characterized as one dominated by JTF2. As the oldest and most experienced unit within the Command, JTF2 operators permeated virtually every critical area of the Command. The other units, in the midst of inception, growth and/or transformation acting in a largely supporting role, with many JTF2 norms duplicated, transferred or simply accepted at face value. Isomorphism, particularly in CSOR, a unit largely constructed and trained by JTF2 operators, was extremely

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[199] Day and Horn, *Canadian Special Operations Command: The Maturation of a National Capability*, Vol. 10, Autumn 2010), 69-74.
[200] Horn, *We Will Find a Way: Understanding the Legacy of Canadian Special Operations Forces*, JSOU Report 2-12 ed. (MacDill Air Force Base, Florida: Joint Special Operations University, 2012).
[201] Adam Day, "In Conversation with Andrew Leslie," *Legion Magazine* (2009).

prevalent[202]. As the conflict in Afghanistan progressed, however, a change in CANSOFCOM organization culture began to take place. First and foremost, CSOR organizational maturation created a number of both predictable and unpredictable impacts. Originally envisioned as a supporting unit of 'Rangers/SF' to JTF2, the unit was initially directly operationally subordinated to JTF2 early in its establishment. Although this construct proved to be successful, CSOR elements, infused with a unique Warrior Ethos of their own, quickly began to challenge the organizational limits placed upon them, eager to emerge from the shadow of JTF2 cultural and operational domination. The inevitable cultural tension between the two organizations was exacerbated by a number of changes in the operational environment that constrained participation on operations as well as the fact that, early in their Afghan experience, many CSOR officers were left out of battle as a means to 'tactical efficiency', establishing an 'us and them' credibility divide between CSOR officers and SNCOs that would slowly manifest negatively itself and would only be addressed later[203]. The second cultural impact on CANSOFCOM during this time was related to the relative absence of 427 SOAS and CJIRU members within the ATO. Although domestically busy, the absence of these two organizations in any meaningful amount in Afghanistan introduced a slow manifestation of a cultural divide between the 'home and away' players of the Command; the result being a measure of cultural aloofness that played itself out whenever the units got together on Canadian soil[204].

Despite these initial negative indicators, CANSOFCOM experienced a period of overall competitive advantage during this time period. A clear organizational vision, tangible adversary, strong leadership at the operational / strategic level and a tactical / operational climate that

[202] Authors own assessment based on personal experience, observations and reflection.
[203] *Ibid.*
[204] *Ibid.*

allowed for the cultural JTF2 versus CSOR or lack of CJIRU / 427 SOAS overseas operational exposure and experience to be mitigated to a large degree, the Command shared a unity of 'thought, purpose, and action' during this timeframe that was directly reflected in both its continued growth and operational successes at both home and abroad[205].

2010 marked a cultural turning point and a period of transfer for CANSOFCOM, however, one from competitive advantage into one of incremental strategic drift. Beginning with a focus on a critically important domestic operation, the 2010 Vancouver Olympics (VAN2010), the Command began a deliberate transfer in emphasis from the pursuit of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan to one of domestic security and the pending Olympic Games. However necessary (and it was), this 'pause' marked a shift away from pursuit of a tangible enemy and was received with mixed reviews and understanding at the tactical level within the 'operator' community, introducing a creeping angst that "the war was getting away from us[206]". This angst was perhaps exacerbated by wider changes in the war in Afghanistan, marked by a period of increased scrutiny and criticism regarding coalition efforts from an increasingly war weary domestic populace[207]. Specific subsequent introspection on SOF efforts within Afghanistan to that point began to point out a troubling lack of an overall unified effort and over focus on "Kill/Capture" missions[208] that may have also been beginning to introduce a measure of self-doubt into the entire community about the overall role of SOF. There was:

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[205] Horn, *We Will Find a Way: Understanding the Legacy of Canadian Special Operations Forces*, JSOU Report 2-12 ed. (MacDill Air Force Base, Florida: Joint Special Operations University, 2012).
[206] Interviews conducted with several senior CANSOF (JTF2) members conducted on several occasions from Oct 13 until Feb 14.
[207] Hy Rothstein, *Afghanistan and the Troubled Future of Unconventional Warfare* (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 2006), 218.
[208] ROBINSON, *One Hundred Victories: Special Ops and the Future of American Warfare* (United States: PublicAffairs, 2013), 344.

> "….a more existential question of what special operators were for, that became increasingly cloudy over the decade in Afghanistan, and for that matter in the "global war on terror." Were they meant to work with tribes and local forces, or were they meant only to hunt and kill? And were they clear enough in their own minds about how they should be used to win wars, or at least how they were to successfully hand them off to others?[209]"

It should be noted that while CANSOF Special Operations Task Forces (SOTFs) were not guilty alone in of fighting a series of independent campaigns in six to nine month stints focused primarily on Direct Action, the overall impact of the murkiness of the overall end-state of the war began to fray the edges of the SOF cultural paradigm. As Special Operations analyst Linda Robinson notes, "none of the constantly changing cast of [SOF] commanders even bothered to write a campaign plan for Afghanistan until 2009[210]", undoubtedly leaving SOTF Commanders in the tricky position of having to 'figure it out for themselves.'

Unfortunately, the VAN2010 pause came at this critical time when the entire nature of the SOF operations in Afghanistan also entered into a period of significant change, the impact of which would manifest itself directly upon CANSOFCOM organizational culture in two particular ways. First, the United States 'surge' of 2009/10 dramatically changed the operating environment within the ATO. CANSOF went from being in a position of relative geographical and operational freedom, unburdened by other units, both SOF and conventional, within their particular Area of Operations (AOR) to one where they had to both readjust to a plethora of new players and re-establish operational credibility[211]. The resulting impact on the overall cognitive confidence on the SOTF in particular and CANSOF in general, as it was unceremoniously

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[209] *Ibid, 23.*
[210] *Ibid, 40.*
[211] The surge in 2010 brought with it a number of UK and US SOF and conventional organizations from Iraq, most of whom had never worked with, or in some cases heard of CANSOFCOM. That, coupled with new Command and Control and operational limitations as well as geographical separation from some of the key commanders meant that the CANSOF SOTF had to essentially 'start-over' in a number of operational areas, in some cases currying favour with senior positional commanders who made no illusion that they preferred using their own 'organic' (national) SOF forces over Canadian ones.

transferred from a position of relative dominance to one of 'just another player' is one that should not be underestimated, as it manifesting itself as varying degrees of both frustration and fear of irrelevance[212]. The shift in emphasis within the Afghanistan conflict from Direct Action to Indirect Action during this time would also mark the second change in the CANSOF organizational culture 'paradigm.'

The VAN2010 'pause' marked the rise in prominence of CSOR as an independent unit. Leading the collective CANSOF Afghanistan SOTF for the first time, CSOR members embraced the newly (re)emphasized Indirect Action aspect of the overall Counter-Insurgency (COIN) strategy, training indigenous forces and frequently participating within them on 'kinetic' operations. Busy and increasingly independent from their tactical subordination role to JTF2 elements (who were occupied with VAN2010), CSOR has begun to openly embrace the belief that they were ever so much the equals to their older brethren. Coupled with the increased theatre-wide operational difficulties of executing Direct Action that so often placed the JTF2 in a 'holding pattern', the tension between the two organizations grew. Not unnoticed by many junior and senior commanders alike, the absence of a comprehensive institutional reflexivity mechanism – i.e. a collective 'rethink' of the Commands role in the mission - meant that the slow tension between the two organizations continued to percolate well into 2011, resulting in an increasingly inwards focus, organizational infighting and a slow decline into organizational drift.

CANSOFCOM regained a measure of competitive advantage in the latter stages of the war due in large part to the introduction of some badly needed capabilities (notably 427 SOAS) and the slow rebuild of tactical and operational credibility with the predominantly skeptical (and

[212] Interviews conducted with several senior CANSOF (JTF2) members conducted on several occasions from Oct 13 until Feb 14

sometimes parochial) US AOR commanders that allowed for a measure of freedom to be returned to the operational space for both Direct and Indirect operations. Unfortunately, this advantage was hindered somewhat by three factors/events. First, operations within the ATO writ large had become over bureaucratized, to the point where operations routinely demanded 100 slide+ PowerPoint approval decks and two hour Video Teleconferences (VTC) for coordination and approval[213]. The CANSOF SOTF HQ, despite an intricate Command and Control (C2) network, strained under the weight of both working and 'gaming' the system in order to ensure its SOTF remained both busy and relevant. Second, the conflict made a transition from direct action (DA) as the primary effort to one that favoured the indirect or capacity building for its SOF. CANSOF, possessing both capabilities organically, nonetheless struggled in making the clear transition from one to another, with JTF2 and CSOR elements vying for dominance and role clarity; one not wanting to be subordinate to the other and vice versa. Third, the Canadian SOF war ended before any of this building cultural tension could be definitively resolved[214].

The cumulative impact of these cracks in CANSOF's cultural shell overseas began to manifest themselves domestically well before the wind down of the war. In addition to the rise in prominence of the other CANSOFCOM units (and in particular CSOR) to a level that challenged the old 'JTF2 led' paradigm, there were a number of other factors that directly contributed to organizational confusion. First, CANSOFCOM did not share a common understanding of the international or domestic threat. By 2012/2013 and combat operations in

[213] LINDA ROBINSON, *One Hundred Victories: Special Ops and the Future of American Warfare* (United States: PublicAffairs, 2013)386.

[214] One aspect of CANSOFCOM culture that was cultivated within Afghanistan that is worth mentioning but is somewhat outside the scope of this paper is that of Loss Aversion bias. Born from the fact that CANSOF did not lose an operator during the conflict (due to both skill and a measure of luck and despite numerous close calls), a cumulative and collective norm slowly permeated the community, one that favored caution over audacity in mission selection and execution. Although some operators, commanders, and tours certainly bucked this trend, the palpable fear of being the first SOTF to lose an operator certainly affected the collective CANSOFCOM understanding and appreciation of risk (to mission and to force), manifesting itself both overseas and domestically.

Afghanistan all but ceased, CANSOFCOM was looking for a new threat against which it could refocus its efforts. Because of the complicated and nuanced nature of the domestic threat environment, and the very nature of the Command's role as a supporting agency within the wider Government of Canada security apparatus, however, an obvious one did not present itself, nor was one presented to it[215]. The resulting lack of a coherent picture or understanding of the threats pan-command created a gap; one that was not backfilled from the Command by a central, unifying view. As a result, Units, Sub-Units and individuals filled this gap themselves; fed by a combination of mimetic isomorphism of other organizations' viewpoints (USSOF, UKSF or Canadian OGDs), salesmanship from the military-industrial complex or independent individual analysis.

The cognitive absence of a common understanding of The Speed of War, was further aggravated by an imbalance in readiness/risk for many of the Command short notice forces and an awkward, ad-hoc force employment mechanism that was not scaled to the size, timelines or potential of potential threat scenarios. Instead of determining force readiness based on an exclusive and calculated assessment of risk, CANSOFCOM instead undertook an inclusive approach, training as many of its forces for as many of the potential missions as possible. Instead of adding capacity and enhancing readiness, however, the approach arguably only created confusion, strained FG capacity within several units and added to what was already a

[215] Although documents such as http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrcs/pblctns/trrrst-thrt-cnd/trrrst-thrt-cnd-eng.pdf or http://www.forces.gc.ca/assets/FORCES_Internet/docs/en/about/CFDS-SDCD-eng.pdf provide a general and useful backdrop, a unified CAF or CANSOFCOM threat analysis that details a unified and unified hierarchy of threats is difficult to ascertain.

tense cultural relationship between several of the units, particularly at the tactical level and between notably JTF2 and CSOR[216].

The two final, and major, contributors to the CANSOFCOMs entrance into strategic drift in the 2012/2013 timeframe were related to the Command and Control and Force Development (FD). Before the creation of CANSOFCOM in 2006, SOF Force Development (FD) was essentially JTF2 FD. Relying on a combination of 'bottom-up' innovation, a healthy tolerance for trial and error, a unique relationship with industry and peer units, the system was a healthy balance of one that allowed for inefficiency in order to facilitate effectiveness while simultaneously distinguishing between 'want' and 'need.' The creation of CANSOFCOM, however, changed the dynamics of the system from one that privileged JTF2 to one that necessarily serviced the present and future needs of the Command in a collective manner. More to the point, however, the centralization and empowerment of CANSOFCOM FD acted as a legitimizing agent for the fledgling Command, unifying FD efforts into system that was recognizable for the remainder of the CAF[217]. Unfortunately, the precarious value benefits provided by Command FD were unfortunately counterbalanced by a number of additional factors that, by the end of 2012, had begun to create a decoupling effect throughout some organizations within the command, further accelerating the strategic drift. The primary reason for this gradual decoupling of combined understanding was, again, the aforementioned lack of a common definition or understanding of the threat or operational environment. Units (and entrepreneurial individuals), left to interpret on their own, began to stress the system as a means of competition

[216] I refer to the operational construct of the Command and a personal assessment of the limits of a Force Employment model based on 'Grouping for Force Generation' vice one based on 'Grouping for Force Employment.' It is the authors opinion that without a specified assessment of the threat and risk, placed against a specific operational backdrop that there is a risk of cultural ambiguity that can lead to an inconsistent cultural and operational narrative.

[217] DEEPHOUSE, *Does Isomorphism Legitimate?*, Vol. 39Academy of Management, 1996), 1024-1039.

and assertion and gaining privileged access, power and control; risking the precarious value of the organization by pursuing risky FD initiatives independent of the chain of command. This cultural angst and competition was aggravated by the presence of a key institutional 'no-no' as the Command steward for FD. The secondary factor in the decoupling and drift process, this individual was infused with a notion of universal fairness; attempting to transfer a traditional hierarchical, 'top-down', 'one size fits all' approach to the FD process, treating all units and missions as equals and essentially. Admittedly an oversimplification of the problem, one that does not completely or fairly take into account the various fiscal and bureaucratic pressure facing CANSOFCOM and the CAF at that time, the combative and aloof climate of this particular aspect of the Command subculture nevertheless did not go unrecognized, subsequently resulting in a loss and trust from the units. FD is, of course, more than simply procuring items and instead, as a comprehensive discipline, includes the spectrum of activities that "harmonize, synchronize and integrate the force development activities of the Canadian Forces in order to develop the capabilities required to produce strategically relevant, operationally responsive, and tactically decisive military forces.[218]" Command and Control (C2) systems and methodologies form a critical aspect of this process and are the second component of CANSOFs slide into strategic drift.

Like FD, there was a precarious value in the construct of the initial CANSOFCOM C2 structure. Instantly recognizable to any outside member of the CAF, the CANSOFCOM HQ was organized along continental staff lines (J1-J8) in a manner that further legitimized through familiarity. Through the initial period of competitive advantage, the détente between autonomy and control that existed between the units (and in particular JTF2), enabled by strong leadership

[218] Taken from http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/about-org-structure/vice-chief-defence-staff.page

at the unit and command level, allowed for a relative period of peace and effectiveness both internal and external to the Command. Other than some notable exceptions – collective training and exercise oversight (J7) which was met with a combination of indifference and active resistance from the units[219], there was a natural self-synchronizing effectiveness that existed with the Command C2 paradigm. Towards the end of 2012, however, there arose a desire to 'tweak' the effectiveness of the system through the introduction of new efficiency measures. Specifically, CANSOFCOM attempted to operationalize the hitherto ad-hoc FE paradigm that, admittedly not without its weaknesses, had served to drive CANSOF operations until that point. The endeavor failed, met by a sequence of active then passive resistance and finally organizational decoupling on behalf of the units and organizational Sub-Units[220].

Although the Command continued to maintain the outward appearance of effectiveness at this time, the failure of the revamped C2 / FE endeavor became tangible and traceable to four distinct and interrelated reasons. First, the initiatives had the appearance of being Command vice *Commander* driven. For SOF organizations such as JTF2, CSOR and the like that are built and thrive on the precepts of Mission Command including the empowerment and trust of subordinates and in particular subordinate commanders, the absence of a clear Commander driven impetuous in the form of an overarching vision was met with immediate suspicion at some levels of the organization. The failure to include an overarching description of the threat aggravated this suspicion as the endeavor and the endeavor was seen by some to be an exercise in managerial 'desk-shuffling' vice a reorientation for the next phase of the GWOT. 'Buy in' was not achieved. The second contributing factor was the ineffective execution of reflexivity

[219] Interviews conducted with several senior CANSOF (JTF2) members conducted on several occasions from Oct 13 until Feb 14 and personal observations and reflections.
[220] Authors own assessment based on personal experience, observations and reflection

regarding the process. Overall, the process of examining the complete CANSOF zeitgeist at that time was inconsistent, potentially over-compartmentalized and pre-situated to support a number of existing estimates. Institutionalized cognitive conflict was equally episodic and of questionable value, only rarely leading to any substantive changes or conclusions. The third contributing factor was the continual cultural and structural pressure of mimetic, coercive and normative isomorphism. Instead of the effective, albeit inefficient, regulatory system that had governed CANSOFCOM until that point, a number of regulatory measures were slowly introduced into the Command over this relatively short period of time. Perhaps because of the uncertainty that existed within the system, and although some were unquestionably necessary (supporting precarious value), many of the new rules and procedures seemed to be designed to regulate uniformity throughout the units, favoring efficiency over effectiveness. Most were introduced with little to no explanation and for a culture built on the principles of autonomy, trust and cognitive reasoning; their introduction seemed akin to the conventionalization of SOF. Sub-unit commanders who once operated within a system of advantaged readiness now found themselves suddenly competing for missions and resources with one another and with other units in a tightly and centrally controlled system. Again, decoupling and system 'gaming' became routine. Like a family constituted solely of kids of divorce, CANSOFCOM seemed determined to enforce a policy of forced integration and egalitarianism despite the clear cultural and operational differences between the units.

A PERSONAL ASSESSMENT

The difficulty with assessing strategic drift is that it is hard to do from the inside. As a member of the community for over a decade in both support and operator roles, I am confident that I contributed to periods of both drift and advantage during my tenure.

Determining which efforts contributed to which paradigms is perhaps more difficult as the complexity of the problem belies any ability to easily quantify as 'drift' or 'competitive advantage.' Viewing organizational culture, particularly military culture where output is often measured in readiness, is equally a challenge. Often a measure of perspective, effectiveness can fall into the cliché of 'perception is reality' very quickly. Nonetheless and although my perspective on CANSOFCOM during its formative period has and will continue to morph, I reinforce the assertion that the Command, despite the efforts of an enormous number of extremely talented and determined individuals, slid into a period of strategic drift. What CANSOFCOM can do to emerge from this period of drift will be the subject of the final section of *Beyond Institutional Icebergs.*

CHAPTER THREE: KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Let us conduct ourselves so that all men wish to be our friends and all fear to be our enemies.

- Steven Pressfield, *The Warrior Ethos*

People don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it.

- Simon Sinek, *Start With Why*

If there is such a thing as a SOF truism, one well may be that the presence of so many innovative, cognitive warriors in one concentrated group means that the status quo does not remain that way for long. Subsequently, *Beyond Institutional Icebergs* will deliberately avoid speculation on whether CANSOFCOM remains in a period of organizational drift or specific prescriptive "course of action." Instead, this paper will now concentrate its efforts on providing a number of general and specific takeaways, questions for further consideration and areas for future study that can be applied to the CANSOFCOM cultural paradigm in a general and non-time contingent manner.

GENERAL TAKEAWAYS

Institutional Cultural Risk is greatest at home. CANSOFCOM maintains its organizational "precarious value" based largely on a reputation earned during a decade plus of combat in Afghanistan. Largely untested with regards to domestic Crisis Response (i.e. a terrorist attack on Canadian soil), CANSOFCOM relies on this status as well as a measure of organizational legitimacy gained/transferred through its relationships with other international peer organizations that have successfully executed domestic Crisis Response (i.e. 22 SAS) as a means to maintaining its privileged position within the Canadian security paradigm. There is a real risk

that, in the event of a successful domestic terrorist attack CANSOFCOM is either unsuccessful, unprepared or seen to be either that the organization could suffer a dramatic drop in legitimacy as well as its organizational precarious value. Realistic, timely and effective Crisis Response forms a critical piece of the CANSOFCOM vital ground.

Reflexivity is the key to change. An inclusive process, reflexivity should be a deliberate and regular component of the CANSOFCOM arsenal. Critical self-analysis and respectful cognitive conflict across the spectrum of the FD, FG, FM and FE is the pathway to meaningful organizational change and sustained competitive advantage. Meaningful change in CANSOFCOM starts by pulling on the cognitive and regulative levers simultaneously (or the cognitive lever slightly ahead of the regulative one), always starting with and answering "Why?" and doesn't end until it is completely normalized within the Command. The psychological output of reflexivity is organizational 'buy-in' and the physical output is the organizational vision that accompanies it.

Vision provides the energy that drives the organization forward. "It's not reality unless it's shared.[221]" While SOF relies on the existence of an adversary against which it can prepare, SOF organizations are also sophisticated enough and SOF operators smart enough to recognize that they exist in a world with real limitations and that preparation will most likely involve continual contextual compromise. Being "bold of vision and incremental in our approach" is the recipe for long term success. That said it must also be recognized that SOF are also intellectual entrepreneurs and, left without a common understanding of the world, will fill it themselves, creating unintended consequences that will spill into capability and resource conflict. Framing

[221] Blaber, *The Mission, the Men and Me: Lessons from A Former Delta Force Commander* (New York: Berkley Caliber, 2008), 319.

the problem without fantasy, speculation, unrealistic desire, or in a manner that alienates or outpaces the Government of Canada is critical. "See the world as it is, not the way you wish it was" must be the cognitive space of every SOFCOM member.

Isomorphism is both real and continuous. The dynamic world of SOF coupled with the impact of the impact of globalization and information means that organizational culture will continually be subject to influence from a plethora of other organizational cultures, organizational field as well as the institution itself. Instead of denying or retarding its impact, SOFCOM leaders should instead look to shape its impact through continual contextualization, accepting and encouraging the good and ruthlessly eliminating the bad.

Maintaining a Precarious Value is difficult. Institutional pressures to conform to bureaucratized institutional norms are a form of isomorphism that will continue to challenge CANSOFCOM. No organization can do it all and competitive advantage is often measured by privileged readiness and deselecting organizational activities vice an approach that tries to 'get everything for everyone'. CANSOFCOM staff and commanders alike must recognize that not all things are created alike, and not all organizations need be resourced, manned, trained, equipped or tasked equally. Fair does not mean equal and attempting to integrate separate organizational cultures hap hazardously will most likely result in organizational decoupling. CANSOFCOM units must recognize the same and work with the Command HQ in order to translate norms and activities into languages that are recognizable and compatible with the remainder of the CAF and other key organizations.

A measure of organizational chaos is okay. Imbalance within an organization will invariably create a degree of chaos and ambiguity. This is okay and even desirable if is shepherded

properly. Innovation is typically the useful by-product of such an allowance. Institutional leaders should preserve and, in some cases, create the space for a certain amount of organizational chaos to exist. Because ambiguity and chaos will undoubtedly be the hallmarks of the vast majority of all future CANSOFCOM missions, it must be reflected to some degree within organizational culture – particularly within the training, and command and control paradigms. CANSOFCOM leads at the edge of chaos.

Beware the Military-Industrial and Military-Media Complexes. Private Military Corporations (PMCs), civilian retailers and other military-law enforcement companies have forged a unique relationship with most SOF organizations, including CANSOFCOM. Innovation in any number of areas including training and equipment are regular and important contributions to the continual communities' maintenance of competitive advantage. However, like the interface with any similar entrepreneurial entity, there are additional costs beyond the pure exchange of material or drills. CANSOFCOM should maintain a specific vigilance regarding these cultural transactions, paying particular attention to those superfluous actors that aim, directly or indirectly detract, mislead or proselytize. Intellectual property theft poses a specific danger. Finally, the Military-Media complex is one that has increasingly focused on SOF through both traditional (TV and film) and emerging means (video games). SOF institutional leaders should pay particular attention to the consequences, both intended and unintended, of such exposure.

SPECIFIC TAKEAWAYS

A forum for cognitive conflict. CANSOFCOM should implement a meaningful and accessible forum for continuous and respectful cognitive conflict. This forum should celebrate successes

and highlight failures while simultaneously providing insight into initiatives, limitations, activities and priorities across the FD through FE spectrum. Furthermore it should allow senior commanders to communicate to the organization in a method that resonates with every member but one that also continues to respect the existing Command and Control systems.

Understanding Culture is difficult. CANSOFCOM is chockfull of different sub-cultures, tribes and probably one or two counter-cultures. Making sense of all of them, how they inter-relate and overlap is a difficult task that demands specialized expert examination. As a result, CANSOFCOM should strongly considering hiring either a full or part-time a sociologist and/or anthropologist to examine the community in its entirety.

Timing is everything. Recognizing the demands of the wider institution with regards to governance mechanisms like the Annual Posting Season (APS) and other career management mechanisms, CANSOFCOM should nevertheless attempt to mitigate their impact by, whenever and wherever possible, tying turnover to specifically identified conditions.

A Specific, Universally Understood Threat Architecture is Required. Recognizing that no assessment of the threat, either domestically or internationally will be perfect, CANSOFCOM nevertheless should quantify the threat in a manner that allows for a measure of universal understanding across the Command. This definition, of course, must ensure that is both inclusive enough to accommodate for future threat developments as well as exclusive enough to ensure that it does not outpace or counter the Government of Canada in any manner.

QUESTIONS AND AREAS FOR FUTURE STUDY

How do communication methods impact culture? Broader than just a CANSOFCOM issue but impacting it nonetheless, the explosion of technology based communication methods has

fundamentally changed the way with which organizations communicate with one another. While email, VTC and PowerPoint have all been identified as mechanisms that provide oversimplified solutions to complex problems and/or reductionist approaches to risk, what are the alternatives? How does their implementation and use both hinder and enhance SOF culture?

How is CANSOFCOM precarious value impacted by other, non-military, cultures? CANSOFCOM interacts with a wide variety of military, law-enforcement and civilian organizations on a regular and consistent basis. How do these cultures impacting the CANSOFCOM 'precarious value' and how, given the changing nature of the 'Speed of War', does the Command successfully adopt elements of other organizational cultural webs?

A CANSOFCOM "Skunkworks?" "Skunkworks" is a euphemism used to describe describe a "group within an organization given a high degree of autonomy and unhampered by bureaucracy, tasked with working on advanced or secret projects[222]." Born from United States Air Force efforts to create 'cutting-edge', 'game-changing' aircraft and capabilities, the term is used to describe deliberate organizational efforts at creativity. Although the "Skunkworks" continues to work today, responsible for the F-22 Raptor, the term has become somewhat ubiquitous for deliberate "out of the box" thinking and practices. A number of Google, non-traditional office routine practices could be considered as being institutionalized "Skunkworks." Is there a place for such activity within CANSOFCOM – either as a separate project or institutionalized routine?

The Impact of Millennials on CANSOFCOM Culture. The increased presence of millennials within the ranks of CANSOFCOM has the potential to both challenge and shape its organizational culture in any number of interesting ways. The idea that Millennials in

[222] Ben R. Rich and Leo Janus, *Skunkworks: A Personal Memoir of My Years of Lockheed* (USA: Black Bay Books, 1996), 400.

adulthood" are "detached from institutions and [instead] networked with friends.[223]" could provide both a number of advantages and disadvantages for CANSOFCOM Command and Control, innovation and socialization efforts.

[223] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millennials

CONCLUSION

CANSOFCOM must, and does, continue to evolve and transform and develop those organizations, capabilities, and processes that will allow it to retain an advantage over those who seek to impose their will upon Canada or its allies.

- MGen D. Michael Day

Great vision without great people is irrelevant

- Jim Collins. *Good to Great*

Understanding CANSOFCOM's place within the wider Canadian security diaspora is no easy task. While globalization has blurred the lines between peace and war, it has also significantly reduced the timelines within which the CAF can prepare for future conflict. The requirement to be a 'student of one's profession' has never been higher and SOF military professionals of all stripes must actively pay attention and participate if the command is to remain relevant. If 'hope is not a course of action' then military professionals cannot afford to be passive with respect to their chosen profession or that of the organization. This demanding task, however, must be seen from an inclusive perspective and not an exclusive one. Amateurs are those that practice service or cultural parochialism while professionals are those that continually contextualize their organization within realities of the wider one. That being said, while CANSOF success cannot come at the expense of the other services, and should not ignore challenges or attempts to undermine its legitimacy, it must continue to be bold, humble, resilient and adaptive.

The Speed of War is not constant. Threats to Canada and its allies are manifesting themselves as these words are being written. Rather than just hyperbole, the idea that CANSOFCOM exists *now* within the contemporary operating environment and is *preparing* for

the future vice merely *training* for it is one that should resonate with all its members. Recognizing both the specific and general nature of contemporary and future threats, however, CANSOFCOM members at all levels must see with 'eyes wide open' the limitations of the Canadian security dilemma, working within vice against them. Wishing for unlimited resources and unbounded opportunity is not only foolhardy but counterproductive as is inter-organizational competition for the same operational or cultural space.

If resilience and robustness is the key to successful navigation at the Speed of War, then culture is the vessel that will get us there. Understanding culture through deliberate practice of Reflexivity, involving consistent and meaningful cognitive conflict is the perhaps the most critical activity that we can undertake. Truly engaging in this activity demands that its members remain as humble, as they are open-minded. Furthermore, CANSOFCOM must continue to develop an institutional 'thick-skin'; junior members recognizing that the Command or the other units are not 'the enemy' and senior members recognizing that sometimes cognitive push-back is not a sign of disrespect but rather of potential misalignment or misunderstanding within the institution. In any case, all members of CANSOFCOM should disavow themselves of any notion that there is any room for passengers.

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