Leading Change: The Military as a Learning Organization

CSC 1998

Subject Area – Professional Military Education (PME)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: Leading Change: The Military as a Learning Organization

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Thesis: Leveraging technology and responding to a fundamentally altered external environment has both forced change on the military and offered significant potential for new warfighting concepts. The capacity to effectively absorb such profound change, and exploit such potential, is possible only if the military organization transforms itself to become a *learning organization*.

Discussion:

The difficulties of organizational change and the conservative nature of the military limits the capacity of the military to absorb any revolutionary change or to adapt via rapid evolutionary change in peacetime. That the prospect of such change is threatening to impede the full potential of military organizations is, therefore, cause for concern.

A learning organization leads change because it is proactive. It challenges the traditional resistance to change and is confident in acting boldly to confront the unknowns of the future. The essence of such an organization lies in an institutional willingness to learn and a climate of intellectual openness which perpetually challenges the status quo.

The military as a learning organization can develop leaders who, by managing the interaction of the fundamentals of vision, culture, and people, can create the conditions necessary for stimulating positive, constructive and perpetual change.

Report Documentation Page

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE **1998**	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED **00-00-1998 to 00-00-1998**
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE **Leading Change: The Military as a Learning Organization**		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
		5b. GRANT NUMBER
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S)		5d. PROJECT NUMBER
		5e. TASK NUMBER
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) **United States Marine Corps,Command Staff College, Marine Corps University,2076 South Street, Marine Corps Combat Development Command,Quantico,VA,22134-5068**		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT **Approved for public release; distribution unlimited**		
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES		
14. ABSTRACT		
15. SUBJECT TERMS		

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT **unclassified**	b. ABSTRACT **unclassified**	c. THIS PAGE **unclassified**	**Same as Report (SAR)**	**41**	

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)
Prescribed by ANSI Std Z39-18

Conclusions and Recommendations:

As the military seeks to ensure its relevance and success into the future, it must adjust its focus to embrace the operational realities of the future. It must be prepared to let go of what was comfortable about the past if it is no longer relevant. Adapting to change, and rapidly, will be vital to success.

The full potential offered by the future is possible only if the military organization has the capacity to absorb the profound changes proposed. The experience of effective organizations has demonstrated that the philosophy of a learning organization provides an excellent framework for institutionalizing the open-mindedness necessary to absorb such changes. To lead change, the military must transform itself to become a learning organization.

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LEADING CHANGE:
THE MILITARY AS A LEARNING ORGANIZATION

> *We all resist change. It is a human phenomenon caused by our search for control and predictability in our lives. We put up protective barriers and turn down the noise in order to survive. People need time to work through the change process. Some people resist change more than others, and many of us experience multiple, overlapping changes at the same time. None of us move through change at the same pace or in the same way, nor are we motivated by the same things. All of this suggests that the leader needs to pay special attention to why and how people deal with change.*[1]

The difficulties of change are acknowledged. The military, however, seems to ignore the reality of this difficulty. Initiatives being undertaken to exploit technological potential and to develop warfighting concepts for the future indicate that profound changes will be necessary. Even more fundamentally, budgetary constraints, changing societal factors and security environments, and expanding roles and missions present equally compelling reasons to force change on the military. These will be no less difficult.

The military organization can be described as traditional, hierarchical, controlled, bureaucratic, and conservative. While suggesting rigidity, the military has generally proven itself capable of evolving through innovation and adapting to changed environments, to overcome setbacks, and eventually achieve mission success. Its capacity, however, to absorb any revolutionary change or to adapt via rapid evolutionary change in peacetime is dubious.

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[1]Robert H. Rosen, "Learning to Lead," in The Organization of the Future Drucker Foundation, eds. R. Beckhard, M. Goldsmith, and F. Hesselbein (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997), 309.

The conservative nature of the military drives that constraint. Progressing change at a greater rate, to *lead change*, is possible through transforming the military to embrace the characteristics of a learning organization.

A learning organization challenges the traditional resistance to change. Rather, it is confident in acting boldly to confront the unknowns of the future. The essence of such an organization lies in an institutional willingness to learn by supporting a climate of intellectual openness and perpetually challenging the status quo. It is then proactive in applying changes and anchoring reforms in the institution. Within some parts of the military, the importance of such a philosophy has already been recognized. The framework envisioned for the U.S. Marine Corps in the future by its current Commandant reflects this: "We must be a forward-thinking, *learning organization* that strives... to challenge the status quo."[2]

Responding to a powerful, shared vision of the future, the military organization would be able to leverage its culture and its people to drive change from within. These changes then are the result of a sense of ownership, and become embedded in the institution. Accordingly, the learning organization involves the entire military, transcending hierarchies and functions. Its key resides in adjusting attitudes and mindsets, challenging the constraints of tradition and superficial excuses to not change.

This paper will demonstrate that the military can successfully respond to the profound changes envisioned for the future if it embraces the philosophy of a learning organization. The paper develops in three stages: understanding the realities of change;

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[2]Charles C. Krulak, General, USMC, The Commandant's Planning Guidance Frag Order 1997, 1. Emphasis added.

analyzing past failures and successes through the experiences of others; and finally, creating and leading a learning organization.

REALITIES OF CHANGE

Why Change is Important

Constrained by the difficulty of measuring success in peacetime, temptations lead people to judge standards or capabilities by those of yesterday; "because it worked yesterday, why shouldn't it work tomorrow?" The obvious and fundamental question then is, "why change?", because "if it isn't broken, don't fix it." This view may be challenged by considering that "if it isn't broken, perhaps it hasn't been pushed hard enough - yet." Laying idle and accepting the status quo may not be the best position from which to confront the future.

Emphasizing the dangers of not changing, or adapting, is the interesting analogy of the "boiled frog syndrome." A frog that jumps into a pot of boiling water will immediately jump back out, sensing an environmental change that requires a different strategy. Yet a frog lying in cold water that is heated to boiling point will die, because he will fail to notice the gradual change in temperature until it is too late to react.[3] Organizations who remain oblivious to their changing external environment or ignore warnings of danger through complacency and an intellectual status quo will not survive.

The need to adapt to change is both enduring and vital. The result of failing to change can affect those whose complacency from previous successes have lulled them into a

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[3]Stratford Sherman, and Noel M. Tichy, Control Your Destiny or Someone Else Will (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 88.

false impression of their relative capabilities. This is equally true for those who fail to learn from their own shortcomings. Less obviously, the gray area of missed-opportunities may provide a rich source of what could-have-beens and deserves close attention in analyzing why potential was not exploited. Simply stated, the continual challenging of the status quo must endure to ensure relevance and to maintain competitive, if not decisive, advantage.

Dealing with change proactively can permit one to shape the future, by being best prepared to meet it on one's own terms. So as it confronts the future, the leadership of the U.S. Marine Corps is quite clear on why it must change, "To win in the 21st Century, the Corps must 'steal a march' on global change.... (We) must embrace the winds of change, make them our ally, and make them our force multiplier."[4] But it is interesting to consider why, in the face of these winds of change, some people put up windmills, harnessing the potential of that change; while others establish windbreaks, shielding themselves from that change and resisting that same potential. It is because change is not always easy.

Why Change is Difficult

Change is difficult because humans have a quest for control and predictability in their lives. The uncertainty of change challenges that security unless the purpose of that change is well articulated and managed effectively. Typical reasons for resisting change are attributed to: a lack of information or understanding of the proposed change and what its final state will resemble; poor communication about the need for change; a lack of vision, or one which is not shared; fear founded in the perceived loss of position or status; or an inability to cope with the uncertainty of the situation.[5]

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[4]Krulak, 1.

[5]Frank G. Hoffman, LtCol, USMCR, Dr. Gary Horne, "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Organizations." Presentation Slides, 8 Mar 96.

The difficulty of accommodating change in the military is sourced from two areas: the imperative to maintain readiness levels, and its culture. The practical difficulty of maintaining momentum for readiness is acknowledged. A force cannot take time-out in order to redesign itself for the future, nor can it pursue the simpler option of starting anew with a clean slate. Reality dictates the military must transform what it has.[6] Acquiring appropriate characteristics of intellectual and organizational agility is therefore central to a successful transformation. These qualities are manifested in a learning organization.

The military culture also presents a psychological barrier to resist change. Perhaps it doesn't *want* to change. A strong military buoyed by recent operational successes and without a peer competitor can justifiably question the need to change. But even with compelling reasons to change, the influence of culture can constrain it. The military's culture could very well be its own obstacle to change.

Militaries are conservative, and therefore generally resistant to change. Its culture is embodied in its own proud heritage and revered traditions. Its senior personnel can remember the way the military was, not necessarily the way it is now. These people can be the guardians of the past and demonstrate reluctance to "let go" of that past - resisting the need to change with the times. Such institutional resistance to change is particularly dangerous when rapid organizational response to change environments is needed,[7] and reinforces the necessity for the military to adopt a change strategy that adjusts this culture to one which embraces positive change. Understanding the dynamics of the change continuum can be useful to assist in achieving that strategy.

The Change Continuum

[6]Gordon R. Sullivan. The Collected Works 1991 - 1995 (Department of the Army, 1996), 63.

[7]Gordon R. Sullivan, 405.

Change unleashes a lot of mixed emotions. To help people through the turmoil, leaders must understand the psychological dynamics of change for every individual. Organizational psychologist William Bridges' transition framework helps us understand the challenge of continuous change. He has one simple premise: If we do not properly end things in life, we cannot create opportunities for self-renewal and move on to new beginnings. His model describes three stages of transition: the Ending, a Neutral Zone, and the New Beginning.[8] Simply put, the transition stages are analogous to death, grief and mourning, and finally the start of a new life.

ENDING	NEUTRAL ZONE	NEW BEGINNING
Every transition begins with an ending. We often misunderstand them, confusing them with finality. They are actually as much the beginning of the process of renewal as they are the ending of a new chapter.	This is the seemingly unproductive time when we feel disconnected from people and things of the past. Robbed of the predictability of past habits and routines, we feel disoriented. This is an adjustment time when we begin to form understandings of new circumstances.	In the new beginning, we become emotionally secure with the new circumstances and optimistic about the future. This takes more than just perseverance. It requires passages through the ending and neutral zone phases and working through emotions during each.

Table 1. William Bridges' Transition Framework[9]

In explaining Bridges' model in his *Handbook for Leaders Developing Leaders*, acknowledged specialist on organizational change Noel Tichy notes that there are some very

[8]Noel M. Tichy, The Leadership Engine (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 246.
[9]Tichy, 246.

predictable psychodynamics of transitions, which successful leaders must both master for themselves and help others master. Particularly, the ending is a period of creative destruction. It is where irrelevant factors are eliminated, and revitalization for the new occurs. Triggered by an action or event - such as new security environments, new structures, new technology, or new missions - there is the stage of *disengagement* where people begin to separate from their past, realizing things are different. This then leads to a more complex psychological task of dealing with the loss, and *disidentification*. Here people have to come to terms with the fact that they have changed. They will need to untangle their old loyalties with what has ended, and face and accept reality, so that change can progress. *Disenchantment* can be a major obstacle. Tichy contends that many people react to life's difficult transitions by trying to recreate the "good old days" and repeat habits that no longer apply to the new situation. But people must come to grips with what was so enchanting about the past, and then sever themselves from that "enchantment." Another equally destructive process is the psychological state of *disillusionment* where the person is unable to revitalize and becomes a victim of the ending.[10] These people generally leave the organization, or are forced out.

In the Transition stage, as the organization envisions the future, the individual spends time disconnecting from the past and committing emotionally to the future - the death and rebirth process. This takes time as individuals gain a perspective on both the endings and new beginnings. Moving out of the transition stage, the organization rearchitects and the individuals commence their new beginning. Here they replace old mastered routines with new ones, but are frequently accompanied by failure as this process unfolds.[11] The role of leadership and the strength of a shared and well understood vision of the future is therefore vital in facilitating transition.

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[10]Tichy, 245; Sherman and Tichy, 370.
[11]Sherman and Tichy, 370.

Transition is different from change, and understanding this subtlety is important in appreciating the change phenomenon. Change focuses on the outcome, the new thing, while transition begins with an ending, the psychological condition of letting go of the old before the change can take place.[12] There can be any number of changes, but unless there are transitions, there will be nothing different when the dust clears. This may be particularly difficult in an organization like the military, where strong traditions and emotional ties with the past form a strong foundation of its culture.

The stages of transition underpin the reason why new technology can be easily introduced into the military, and visionary operational concepts can be developed in theory. It also explains why organizational adaptation may not ever be complete, because the concepts are never actually embraced, or institutionalized. Until people are comfortable and accept the new way as the accepted way of doing business, the old way cannot be released, and the necessary psychological commitment to the future cannot be established. This transition framework explains precisely why "the only thing harder than getting a new idea in, is getting an old one out." Effectiveness requires letting go of the past and resisting naive attempts to make old solutions fit new problems. It demands new solutions for new problems.

Successful organizational change management strategies engender an appreciation of the importance of change, and address the inherent difficulties of change through education of the psychology of transition and the change continuum. The realities of change can now be further developed with an analysis of organizational success and failure in relation to adaptation to altered environments.

LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF OTHERS

[12]P.C. Gibbons, Lt Col, USMC, Effecting Strategic Change: The Dragon Can be Led MMS Thesis (Quantico, VA: USMC Command and Staff College, April 1997), 9.

The philosophy of a learning organization advocates the soul-searching necessary for honest self-appraisal and constructive progress. The philosophy is also sufficiently broad minded to look beyond itself to learn from the experience of others - foreign and American, civilian and military, and from historical and contemporary periods alike. A brief review of some experiences is therefore useful.

Examples of Failure

History is replete with examples of military organizations that failed because they did not adapt to a changing environment -- which then suffered because "today was not like yesterday." Where the cost of failure is measured in human lives, the lessons of others provides a logical preventative measure.

In the military sense, the examination of failure is generally at the point of battle. But looking deeper often reveals that failure had emanated from an earlier failure -- to learn, to anticipate, or to adapt -- in preparation for the next war. It is these institutional failures that offer many lessons for the military as an organization.

A classic example of failure to learn is that of the U.S. Navy approach to anti-submarine warfare in the early stages of World War Two. Despite the preceding interwar period to reflect on and absorb lessons of World War One, and the first two years and three months of World War Two of observing the British flounder in attempts to master the German submarine threat, the U.S. Navy refused to adapt its policies and tactics to counter the submarine-induced shipping losses in the Battle of the Atlantic.[13]

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[13]Holger H. Herwig, "Innovation Ignored: The Submarine Problem - Germany, Britain, and the United States, 1919-1939" in Military Innovation in the Interwar Period eds. Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 252.

Fortunately, the U.S. Navy's ability to eventually adapt allowed it to overcome both learning and predictive failures. In the interim, the cost of failure was high - a cost measured in terms of blood, treasure, and time.[14] A military system that is proactive in preparing for the next war, and maintains inherent agility that allows it to adapt quickly, is vital to success.

Other examples of institutional failure can generally be attributed to a lack of intellectual depth and imagination among the leadership of an organization; maintaining a system that had become irrelevant and was not reactive to the demands of modern warfare; or had failed to exploit the intellectual capital of the organization by stifling initiative and openness.

Failure is not the monopoly of the military however, so it can be useful to study other areas subject to failure. Civil disasters have a direct parallel with the military world, where failure may arise from inadequate planning or imperfect anticipation of an adversary's [nature's] actions. Indeed "disaster-provoking events tend to accumulate because they have been overlooked or misinterpreted as a result of false assumptions, poor communications, cultural lag, and misplaced optimism."[15] A thorough and rigorous examination of the possible -- war or a natural disaster -- demands detailed and realistic planning and preparation to successfully deal with the range of possibilities inherent in that field. This examination should not be constrained by organizational culture or ignorance about realities.

The fiercely competitive nature of the corporate world also contributes to a more informed understanding of failure, and in managing change. The post-industrial age of dynamic global economies, international alliances, and technological and information revolutions has driven a "revolution in business affairs." It offers useful comparisons to the military as it confronts similar profound challenges to the way it "conducts business."

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[14]Eliot A. Cohen, and John Gooch. Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War (New York: Vintage Books, May 1991), 94.

[15]Cohen and Gooch, 17.

The examples of corporate failure are numerous, with most resulting from short-sightedness. "It's like gravity, a force of nature. Managers go to sleep, and then comes disaster, because the rules of the game are changing in every business."[16] Such lack of vision and vigilance to a dynamic, competitive marketplace is instructive for the military. It must maintain relevance to demand, maintain an advantage relative to its competition -- both known and latent -- and be sufficiently robust to adapt to change.

But failure should not be the only catalyst to change. Success can also prove fatal to those who have become blinded by their own perceived invincibility; because they were strong "yesterday". Success is a relative term. It is judged against the competition, and competition does not lay dormant. "In order to be in control of your destiny, you must realise that you will stay ahead competitively only if you acknowledge that no advantage and no success is ever permanent. The winners are those who keep moving."[17] Nowhere is this more relevant than the corporate world. But this message may have particular utility for the United States in its post-Desert Storm environment where it could potentially wallow in its own glory, only to experience failure when it becomes too late to adapt.

Victory and defeat, or success and failure, are not the only alternatives however. Between them lies the often overlooked middle-ground of *missed opportunity*. Analyzing this area permits an insight into the possibilities of what could-have-been, and why it wasn't. Exploring the possibility that opportunities were missed as a result of being held back by an inherent obstacle within the system, or that the potential was never exploited due to an absent or flawed change strategy, is as useful in learning as it is in studying failure.

The most common reasons organizations fail is well summarized by celebrated business leadership expert John P. Kotter in his book *Leading Change*[18]. He offers eight

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[16]Kenneth Labich, "Why Companies Fail," Fortune 14 November 1994. 58.

[17]John Browne, "Unleashing the Power of Learning," Harvard Business Review Sep-Oct 1997, 166.

[18]John P. Kotter, Leading Change (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1996), 16.

well-established factors which contribute to failure: allowing too much complacency; failing to create a sufficiently powerful guiding vision; underestimating the power of vision; under-communicating the vision; permitting obstacles to block the new vision; failing to create short-term wins; declaring victory too soon; and neglecting to anchor changes firmly in the corporate culture. Attempts to achieve successful change should therefore pay particular attention to addressing these shortcomings.

Examples of Success

History proves that an environment of intellectual openness in periods of peace can stimulate creativity, innovation and experimentation which ultimately leads to success in war. The interwar period of the 1920s and 1930s again offers some relevant studies of successful innovation and changes in the conduct of warfare, proven during World War Two.

Profound developments that dictated the terms of warfare in this war include those of radio communications and the radar, carrier aviation, submarine warfare, and amphibious assaults. But the most celebrated example of course is the dynamic, integrated form of warfare developed by the Germans known as *Blitzkrieg*. The conditions in Germany that permitted the development of this doctrine merit analysis to understand the reasons for success.

If both sides possess the same technology, or hardware, why does one succeed at the other's expense? This was the case at the beginning of World War Two, when both the Germans and the Allies possessed the tank and the airplane, yet Germany was to go on and demonstrate overwhelming superiority. Success can be viewed in relation to the failure of the enemy. Germany's early tactical successes may have resulted from its own inventiveness; or it simply may have capitalized on the relative rigidity and inadequate application of lessons learned from World War One on the behalf of the British and French.[19]

Hans von Seeckt's post-World War One vision of mobile warfare executed by a highly professional, well-trained, well-led army illustrates how enduring and powerful the choice of a sound vision of future warfare can be. But vision alone is not sufficient. Apart

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[19]Barry Watts and Williamson Murray, "Military Innovation in Peacetime," in Military Innovation in the Interwar Period eds. Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 318-325.

from being balanced and well connected to operational realities,[20] the vision must be capable of development in an atmosphere conducive to learning, innovation, and experimentation. The Germans fostered such a supportive climate in the interwar period.

Seeckt's influence in improving an already excellent professional military education system, in directing a penetrating and objective study of the lessons of World War One, and creation of an officer corps open to innovative thinking, lively debate, and unconventional problem solving were instrumental in the conceptual development of *Blitzkrieg*. These factors, not armored technology *per se*, brought victory. In contrast, the lack of such leadership, thought, training, and application largely explains the Allied defeat.[21]

This single example captures the essence of the requirements to transform a new form of warfighting doctrine from conception to reality. An intellectual atmosphere that promoted learning, innovation, experimentation, and lively debate reinforced the power of von Seeckt's vision. The institutionalizing of professional military education, the rigorous analysis of warfare, and the opportunity to express opinions in a professional journal without fear of compromise, prompted the conditions for diversity of ideas and ownership of the vision. The intellectual growth and organizational maturity that resulted also ensured perpetual learning - reaching beyond the tenure of any contemporary leadership. The observation that "what may be key to 'winning the innovation battle' is a professional military climate which fosters thinking in an unconstrained fashion about the future war"[22] is entirely correct. An organizational philosophy which addresses the reasons for past failures and draws on the fundamentals of those who demonstrated success are found in a learning organization.

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[20]Watts and Murray, 407.

[21]Brian R. Sullivan, "Are We Really Ready For an RMA?" Joint Force Quarterly Summer 1996, 113.

[22]James R. Fitzsimonds and Jan M. Van Tol, "Revolutions in Military Affairs," Joint Force Quarterly Spring 1994, 30.

CREATING AND LEADING A LEARNING ORGANIZATION

Elements of a Learning Organization

A learning organization is confident about confronting the unknowns of the future. Its confidence stems from the knowledge that it has institutionalized a philosophy of willingness to learn, and to be proactive in embracing necessary reform. It is relentless in challenging the status quo. Its honest self-appraisals are judged against realistic assumptions of the future.

Highly effective organizations are proactive in anticipating needs and stimulate continuous learning, adapting, and innovation. The construct developed by Mr. Hoffman and Dr. Horne in their presentation, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Organizations,* succinctly embraces the elements of a learning organization. They advocate a series of interactive habits, centered around strong core values, that emphasize: tolerance for diversity; open flow of information; willingness to experiment; systemic learning; strategic vision; and investment in training and education.[23] A military organization which exhibits these habits would require a shift from its traditional mindset and demand certain actions to achieve that state.

To generate a willingness to learn, it first must be safe to learn. This implies a tolerance for failure through recognition that errors and mistakes are opportunities for learning. It must also promote an environment where it is safe to disagree without fear of compromise. This challenges traditional leaders and followers alike. Leaders who demonstrate the moral courage to accept these potentially discomforting circumstances are, by their actions, signaling their commitment to change. These actions speak louder than words.

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[23]Hoffman and Horne.

The atmosphere of open communications encourages debate - as a reality check, to seek diversity, and to engender ownership. Noting the paucity of debate in such important times of change, former U.S. Army Chief of Staff General Sullivan recently emphasized the imperative of letting debate flourish in our military organization. Too often, the silence can be deafening, as it can hide underlying resistance. Disagreement is not disrespect, and debate must be encouraged to engage the intellectual dimension of the military, challenging and refining ideas. Without the stimulation of vigorous debate, it is unlikely the military organization will reach its full potential.[24] Debate instills a greater sense of ownership in the changes proposed, and therefore must also become more visible and less compartmentalized among official groups. Healthy debate is an essential part of the military as a learning organization.

Education throughout the military organization must adopt an appropriate focus. "As the rate of change itself increases, learning ability will not consist of the one-time learning of a new system; *perpetual* learning and change will be the only constant."[25] The professional military education system must embrace this fact. Continuous learning should be a way of life, where learning agendas and learning goals are openly discussed and shared throughout the organization every day. In addition to the ethos of through-life learning, specific topics which assist the creation and maintenance of a learning organization must be addressed. These include an informed appreciation of the change psychology and its demands on all members of the organization, and an analysis of alternative leadership methods appropriate for the change environment. Obviously, detailed study of the fundamentals of warfighting remains core.

Exploiting the neutral zone in Bridges' transition framework, a learning organization will also foster creativity and manage its progress through innovation and experimentation.

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[24]Gordon R. Sullivan, "Let the Debate Flourish ...," Army April 1998, 10.

[25]Edgar H. Schein, "Leadership and Organizational Culture," in The Organization of the Future Drucker Foundation, eds. R. Beckhard, M. Goldsmith, and F. Hesselbein (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997), 67.

Larger and older organizations traditionally are less receptive to new ideas and seek certain knowledge as a precondition for action. They often suffer paralysis through analysis, and can potentially be surpassed by previously dormant competition. Learning organizations, however, demonstrate intellectual openness and proactively seek to extend their conceptual and practical limits. Experimentation reduces the unknowns and ambiguity of the future by testing as it moves forward, determining what is likely to work and what is not. In doing so, organizations reduce the risk of net failure and irreversible consequences. Service warfighting labs are tangible examples of the progress that can be achieved, as engines of change, and the sense of ownership that they instill. An open-mind to failure, and strong leadership are again fundamental.

Successful learning organizations then, possess the courage to accept failure and learn from mistakes, and foster a collective willingness to share and grow.[26] The U.S. Army's After-Action Review Process used at their National Training Center exemplifies such an attitude. Following the conduct of a major activity by an element of its forces, the process provides for personal coaching and facilitates a debrief unconstrained by hierarchy. Participants can use the process to understand what happened, what went wrong and why, and determine how to correct these shortcomings.[27] Uniquely, the review involves everyone, all points of view are represented, a collective learning experience is shared, and a strong sense of ownership is developed.

An organizational focus such as this fosters an environment where it is safe to learn. Ideas, perspectives, and expertise can be exchanged freely -- vertically and horizontally -- thereby promoting an honest and open attitude to learning. The result is enhanced

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[26]Gordon R. Sullivan. "Advanced Warfighting Experiment," The Collected Works 1991 - 1995 (Department of the Army, 1996), 325.

[27]Gordon R. Sullivan. "Leaders for a Learning Organization," The Collected Works 1991 - 1995 (Department of the Army, 1996). The benefits of this process are also explored in "Changing the Way We Change," Richard Pascale, Mark Millemann, and Linda Gioja, Harvard Business Review November-December, 1997, 134-139.

organizational integrity and maturity, strengthened by its demonstration of commitment to improvement.

The U.S. Marine Corps also demonstrates many of these criteria. It has an excellent professional military education program that addresses all ranks throughout their career continuum. Its professional journal, "The Marine Corps Gazette" provides the opportunity to participate in open debate via its articles, and actively encourages "every Marine as an innovator."[28] Another avenue of open communication is provided through the electronic mail medium of "Marine Mail". Not the least, providing the real engine for change is the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab - taking far-reaching concepts and undergoing a rigorous experimentation process that engages Marines (the people), demonstrates credibility, and reassures them that their credibility and core values (culture) are not threatened, but enhanced. The Marine Corps demonstrates the habits of a highly effective organization.

Facilitating Change ... Managing the "Trinity"

A change strategy must address three interdependent factors - people, culture, and the power of vision. Applying an extension of a Clausewitzian concept of the "remarkable trinity"[29] is useful in understanding the powerful effects of interacting forces. Contemporary application of this theory uses the trinity of the "government, the people, and the military" to demonstrate the difficulty of balancing the respective tendencies of "rationale, emotion, and chance" in war. With each factor being a magnet, a pendulum swinging between the three centers of attraction will be pulled or attracted in various directions depending on the

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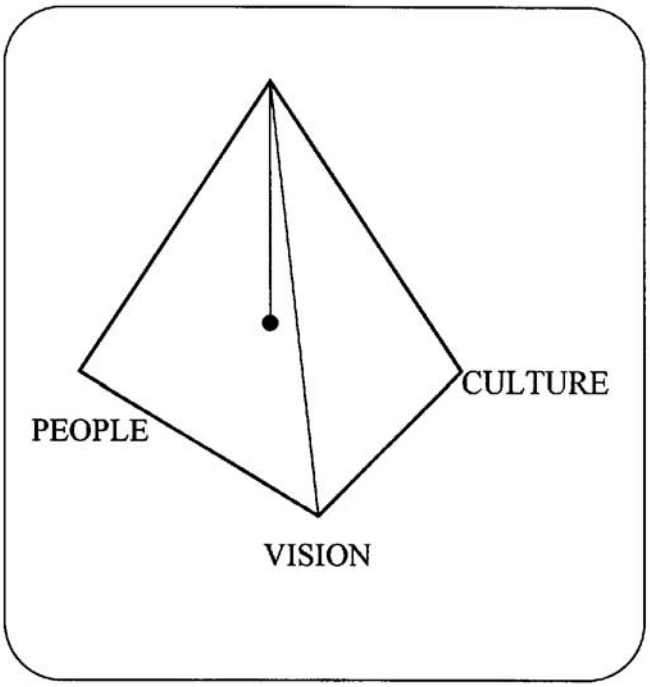
[28]John E. Rhodes, LtGen USMC, "Every Marine an Innovator," Marine Corps Gazette, January 1998, 40-43.

[29]Carl Von Clausewitz, On War eds. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 89.

strength of the factor and the conditions at the time. The actual path is never determined by one force alone but by the interaction between them, which is forever shifting.

Expanding on this powerful concept is relevant in the management of change. The intangibles of organizational culture, the human-factors of people, and the power of vision form the *trinity of change*.[30] Aiming to successfully lead the organization through the prospect of achieving positive change must therefore address the interaction of these component parts.



The Trinity of Change

Having stated the broad realities of change and offered a model for understanding the inter-dependencies of the three vital factors within change, their individual components can be further analyzed.

[30]The author would like to acknowledge LtCol F.G. Hoffman, USMCR, MCCDC for this thought, and for his assistance in reviewing this paper.

-- Culture

The warfighting environment too readily reminds us of our own Western culture, and the difficulties it can present when applied both against other cultures, and when working alongside other cultures in a multinational force or coalition. Managing this factor in an environment of change is no less important.

The strength of culture has a powerful influence in supporting or resisting change efforts. As a negative influence, its track record is well documented. A recent Harvard Business Review analysis of change in Sears, Shell and the U.S. Army notes a common thread -- "in all three organizations, the 800-pound gorilla that impaired performance and stifled change was culture."[31]

Culture can be described as "the basic assumptions" that drive an institution. Like the roots of a tree, these assumptions are out of sight yet determine what can grow and evolve in an organization. If these assumptions do not reflect current internal and external diversity, they can sabotage the organization's ability to progress change.[32] Cultural obstacles to change are common for the obvious reason that an impending transformation threatens existing habits, way of life, beliefs, and social prejudices. Individuals within organizations find it difficult to accept altered circumstances: that there are now different ways of doing things and that those new ways are more successful, or hold the belief that what they have been doing in the past is now considered not relevant.[33] They might feel dejected and let down, that their efforts were not valued. This demands strong leadership

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[31]Richard Pascale, Mark Millemann, and Linda Gioja. "Changing the Way We Change." Harvard Business Review November-December, 1997, 128.

[32]R. Roosevelt Thomas Jr., "Diversity and Organizations of the Future," in The Organization of the Future Drucker Foundation, eds. R. Beckhard, M. Goldsmith, and F. Hesselbein (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997), 332.

[33]Paul Kennedy, Preparing for the Twenty First Century (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1994), 17.

and careful management of the trinity, and relies on an informed understanding of the Bridges' transition framework.

The potential of the military culture as either an asset or liability has been stated. Its conservative nature is founded in customs, traditions, hierarchical structure, and discipline. Military culture is also ideological, underscored by core values. Threatening, or any perception to be threatening, these core values may jeopardize a change strategy. Successful change strategies seek to reinforce the strength of core values, focusing on the positive influences of change on these values; that they are not threatened, but strengthened. Ultimately, the changes are anchored in the military culture, completing the transformation.

-- People

People have an enduring quest for control and predictability in their lives. Comfort derives from knowledge of what is happening around them, and how these events will or may affect them. Uncertainty is a natural fear and source of discomfort. The change process, however, challenges many of these basic needs. It must be reiterated that individuals are the vital part of any organization, and collectively they fuel the engine of change. If their concerns are not understood and managed effectively, individuals may well be disruptive and hinder effective organizational transition.

An important step to better understanding people is through their personality types. Military organizations tend to overlook these human-factors because of their demand on personnel for results-oriented, disciplined performance. The military also generally favors one particular type of person that suits combat or high-pressure situations. But when not in this situation, and when attempting to implement a long term plan such as strategic change,

"the roles these personality types may play in the resultant success ..."[34] should not be overlooked.

A study by a team of education and psychology experts[35] into how teachers in the education system are able to grasp the imperative for change, maintains that the dynamic of personality type was a key determinant. Indeed, the study concluded that restructuring efforts within their education system may fail due to an inherent personality type common amongst teachers which makes them resistant to the implementation of change. The findings suggest many parallels with, or at least may offer lessons for, the military.

Reform calls for people who are comfortable with who they are, who are willing to take risks, and who can accept change. A sound self-understanding contributes meaningfully to this process. "The personality assessment ... could provide a starting point to reflect on one's own personality, hopefully leading to an understanding that others are different, how those differences affect world view and actions, and ways to facilitate better interactions among people."[36] One widely used means of measuring these personality types is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, which identifies sixteen personality types based on various criteria.

An informed awareness of the differing personality types and their unique characteristics is important in the application of leadership, particularly in trying to cultivate a different culture and modify individuals' views. Addressing the specifics of each personality type, such as one predominant type's penchant for "concrete specifics, details, routines and schedules, as well as their deference to authorities and the status quo,"[37] is fundamental to satisfying individuals' needs and convincing them of the benefits of contributing to the change.

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[34]Ronald R. Cromwell and Kelly A. Caci, "Leadership, Change, and Understanding Insights Gleaned from Personality Studies of Educators," The Journal of Leadership Studies Vol. 4, No. 4, 1997, 107.

[35]Cromwell and Caci.

[36]Cromwell and Caci, 112.

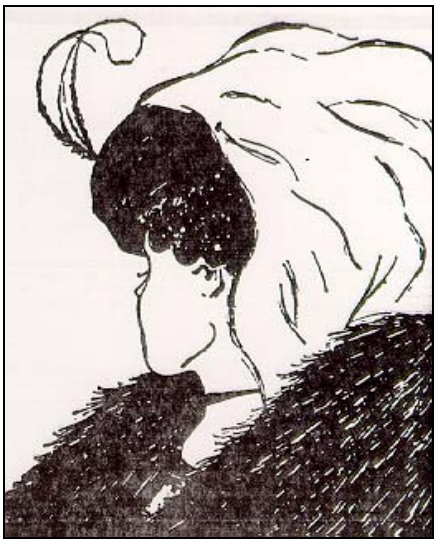
[37]Cromwell and Caci, 116.

Using personality assessments, therefore, can be a key tool to assist an organization's understanding of people and their attitudes and beliefs. In military parlance, it equates to understanding the "ground" and the "cultural terrain" -- the environment in which to conduct military operations. Gaining an intimate self-understanding through this process is vital for leaders to understand their own feelings, perceptions, and attitudes to change. Knowing yourself and appreciating that everyone is different, allows people to more effectively exert their influence in a positive manner toward achieving constructive change. The psychological and sociological dynamics which attempt to explain the resistance to change can be useful in providing a basis for understanding how to circumvent or overcome this resistance.

Paradigms and Perceptions

The way we perceive things, as individuals and collectively as an organization, is core to our beliefs and forms our paradigms. Paradigms commonly refer to a model, theory, perception, assumption, or frame of reference. In the more general sense, "it's the way we 'see' the world; not in terms of our visual sense of sight, but in terms of perceiving, understanding, interpreting."[38] The picture below should be carefully studied as an example of what different people see in the one thing.

[38]Stephen R. Covey, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People (Australia: The Business Library, 1995), 23.



A careful examination reveals that there are in fact two images: one of an old lady, looking down to the front-left; and one of an attractive young lady, looking away to left-rear - a completely opposite view.

The picture provides a useful example of different ways of seeing the same thing. Indeed, "two people can see the same thing, disagree, and yet both be right."[39] These perceptions can reveal deep insights into our own personal and interpersonal effectiveness, because paradigms are the source of our attitudes and behaviors. Paradigms make a silent and unconscious impact on us and help shape our frame of reference. They also remind us of the need to articulate clearly any proposed changes, because of the scope for things to be interpreted differently.

As clearly and objectively as we think we see things, "we begin to realize that others see them differently from an apparently equally clear and objective point of view. We each tend to think we see things as they are, that we are *objective.* But this is not the case. We see the world, not as *it is*, but as *we are* - or, as we are conditioned to see it."[40] When we

[39]Covey, 27.
[40]Covey, 28.

communicate a point of view then, we in effect describe ourselves, our perceptions, our paradigms. We can even reflect our own culture.

Paradigms can constrain the way we view the future, because we see it the way we want to see it. They can force us to look backwards instead of forwards, and even attempt to apply old solutions to new problems. This is evident in our routine existence today, particularly as militaries try and transform from the Cold War-world to a much different future, yet with traditional structures and doctrine.

The more people are aware of their basic paradigms or assumptions and the extent to which their experience has influenced them, the more they can take responsibility for those paradigms. They can examine them, test them against reality, listen to others and be open to their perceptions, thereby gaining a larger picture and a far more objective view.[41] Understanding paradigms also assists in understanding organizational culture, and permits an insight to the powerful effect a positive paradigm shift can have in effecting change.

The silent nature of paradigms dictates that opinions remain subdued unless they have the opportunity to be voiced - the deafening silence. Expressing alternative views and providing diversity from those with different experiences, and from those who sit in different places, can assist in clarifying opinions and perceptions. This is best achieved in an environment of open and honest communication where debate is encouraged.

Overcoming Resistance from People and Culture

Resistance can be viewed in a similar context as that of another Clausewitzian concept -- *friction*. As in combat, friction can be overcome by the vision provided in commander's intent, solid training, adaptability, and decentralization of execution. The

[41]Covey, 29.

characteristics of a learning organization are again instructive, as are the tenets of maneuver theory.

Military organizations which subscribe to the philosophy of maneuver warfare as a warfighting doctrine theoretically should have personnel able to cope with and thrive in an environment of chaos and uncertainty -- such as that of change. Maneuver theory demands an environment of centralized planning and decentralized execution; of directing what to do, but not how. It practices directive control, actively delegating responsibility and allowing subordinates to apply their own initiative to satisfy tasks in a more timely manner. It maximizes freedom of action, allowing opportunity to be exploited in a dynamic environment. It is, of course, underscored by self-responsibility and accountability. As this philosophy is embedded into contemporary military thought, so too should that mindset be applied to the "peacetime" environment of adapting to change; they should be complementary. Indeed, the very fact that business management now applies much of the literature of Sun Tzu, an acknowledged forefather of the maneuver philosophy, is revealing. External validation of the application of maneuver theory as a method of coping with profound change, through its use in the competitive and dynamic world of business affairs then, should not be ignored. The application of maneuver philosophy for the military should not be reserved only for the battlefield; it should be part of its everyday routine.

Commitment to change and overcoming inertia to change is best achieved by recognition of the change as being successful, and that the journey is worthwhile. A shared vision, supported by realistic goals and small victories en-route, can sustain the momentum of a successful change strategy.

-- Vision

It is true that "the trouble with not knowing where you are going, is that you don't know when you get there; equally, you will never know if you don't get there." A vision provides the roadmap that is imperative for the leap into the future. A vision engenders an understanding of what the destination looks like and suggests a strategy for attaining it; it establishes goals and a purpose. A vision says something that clarifies the direction in which an organization needs to move.[42]

A vision on its own, however, is not sufficient. That vision must be shared. A top-down vision that provides a focus does not necessarily inspire ownership by the organization responsible for effecting change. A shared vision seeks to embrace commitment over forcible compliance to drive significant change. There is no substitute for commitment in bringing about deep change. No one can force another person to learn if the learning involves deep changes in beliefs and attitudes, and fundamental new ways of thinking and acting."[43] Shared vision, therefore, is vital for the learning organization because it provides the focus and energy for learning, and this learning only occurs when people are striving to accomplish something that matters to them; something they are committed to. Traditional, hierarchical military structures may have difficulty adopting this view, yet its applicability remains. The success of the far-reaching visions of the Commandant of the Marine Corps in his *Commandant's Planning Guidance* and of the U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs' *Joint Vision 2010* may be resisted in some areas because of the *perception* of no shared vision.[44] These visions have, however, provided the necessary kick-start to awaken their respective

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[42]John P. Kotter, "Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail." Harvard Business Review March-April 1995, 63.

[43]Peter M. Senge, "Leading Learning Organizations," in The Leader of the Future Drucker Foundation, eds. R. Beckhard, M. Goldsmith, and F. Hesselbein (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997), 43.

[44]Paul L. Damren, Major, USMC, Changing Our Corps -- Will Sea Dragon Succeed? MI Essay. (Quantico, VA: USMC Command and Staff College, 1996), 9.

organizations and initiate progress. Persistent and careful management of the pendulum swing of the trinity of change will be key to their success.

While ownership of vision is critical to successful organizations, the role of leaders in communicating that vision is imperative. As failed organizations may attest, "[Troops] will not make sacrifices, even if they are unhappy with status quo, unless they believe that useful change is possible. Without credible communication, and a lot of it, the hearts and minds of the troops are never captured."[45] The credibility of that shared vision is then presupposed on its connection to operational realities, and the words of that vision must be supported by deeds; the other aspect of communication. For demonstrated effectiveness, credible action and short-term wins must reinforce the vision's message.

Sustaining the trinity (vision, people, and culture) requires balancing the vision while simultaneously addressing the fears and the resistance of the people. As demonstrated by the Germans in the interwar period, engendering a willingness to experiment -- to demonstrate openness, validate the objectives of the change, and to further reinforce ownership by having the people participate in the experimentation process -- should prove an effective strategy to successfully embrace change.

Leaders in a Learning Organization

The chaos of a changing environment, and the military system necessary to exploit that chaos, demands a different style of leadership that challenges traditional methods of control. Historians Barry Watts and Williamson Murray note in their study of military innovation in peacetime, that innovation is necessarily an untidy business that cannot be controlled or managed through a rigidly centralized system. Further, any efforts to eliminate

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[45]John P. Kotter, "Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail," Harvard Business Review March-April 1995, 63.

such messiness are actually likely to stifle innovation.[46] Leaders intending to be successful in reform should set aside traditional hierarchy and the control it afforded, and be effective in an environment of chaos and uncertainty. They must also resist the temptation to provide all of the answers. Instead, solutions should be encouraged to come from the ranks.[47] Leaders should sell the problem, not the solution.

Leaders in a learning organization demonstrate a significant amount of moral courage. They must be able to stand squarely in the zone of discomfort and ambiguity, dealing with the unknowns and uncertainties of the future. The management of risk must be supported throughout the organization by a positive attitude to any errors and mistakes made in striving to innovate and achieve progress. The courage to act, while recognizing the consequences of both failure to act and of the potential for short-comings, must be fundamental to leadership in an open and progressive military. Such a military can cope with this freedom and potential for tactical setbacks because of its maturity and integrity as an organization.

The role of leaders in a learning organization is to make it happen. Through their own transformation, they inspire others and engender collective responsibility for achieving changes. Leaders control the pendulum swing of the change trinity. By using their influence, they must *lead* in establishing a shared vision, creating the appropriate atmosphere to control the emotions of people, and reassuring the organization that core values are not being challenged. They provide the psychological safety net. Leaders must provide the example, and demonstrate support by being relentless in removing obstacles that prevent change from proceeding. Actions will continue to speak louder than words.

The vital role of leadership, however, is to build a learning organization that *institutionalizes* productive change. Alternatives exist in applying change strategies to either implement a single change or to apply a strategy that seeks to create an environment with

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[46]Watts and Murray, 415.
[47]Pascale, Millemann, and Gioja, 134.

manifestation of perpetual change. In their significant work, *Built to Last*, James Collins and Jerry Porras apply the analogy of creating either time-tellers or clock-builders.[48] As the title of their work suggests, building a clock that continues to tell the time long after the current leader has gone is fundamental to a successful and enduring organization -- beyond the tenure of any one commander. This is the very essence of a learning organization, and is what the military should strive to be.

[48]James P. Collins and Jerry I. Porras, Built To Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies (New York: Harper Business, 1994), 22-42.

CONCLUSION

The Twenty-First Century promises both opportunity and challenge. Non-traditional threats are assured to impact the nature of warfare and challenge the conduct of traditional military operations. Domestic reforms and technological developments imply equally compelling reasons for our military to adapt to an altered external environment. The enormity of this potential change is daunting. But resisting necessary changes because they are too difficult can no longer be an option. Successful militaries will be those who acknowledge that traditional methods may no longer be appropriate, who are open to the prospect of change, and who possess the inherent qualities that enable them to adapt rapidly to a changing environment.

Western militaries are at a critical juncture in time. They must decide how, when, and where to undergo these fundamental changes. Once decided however, traditional and conservative militaries are unlikely to reach their potential because of an inherent inability to cope with profound change. The rate and extent to which these changes can be absorbed, therefore, will be instrumental in future success. The intellectual transformation necessary for that success is to become a learning organization.

Learning organizations clearly understand the dynamics of change, and effectively manage the transition through control of the change trinity. They inspire change to be generated from within because they are not satisfied with accepting the status quo, and subject it to constant and ruthless challenge. They are receptive to change because they know it is for their benefit, and that the proposed changes have been openly debated and tested. The changes are owned by the organization. They are confident about confronting the challenges of the future.

Building a robust, agile and responsive military able to thrive in the chaos and uncertainty of the future is imperative. The military as a learning organization is that key to success.

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