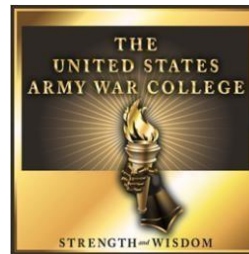# Army Special Operations Forces: The Leader's Role in Innovation

by

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Abstract

Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) are currently confronted with disruptive changes in their operating environment which threaten their ability to provide the value the nation requires in the future. To win the current fight and set the conditions for future success, ARSOF organizations must become more innovative. Through organizational ambidexterity, ARSOF leaders can address the disruptive changes in their operating environment by increasing innovation while maintaining the control required to win the current fight. Like any large organizational change effort, the ARSOF leader is the key to developing an ambidextrous organization. Only the leader can hold the tensions between exploitation and exploration, and lead the strategic renewal necessary for organizational change. This paper proposes innovation leadership priorities for ARSOF leaders, and offers practical ideas on how leaders can lead this change and align their organizations to innovate.

Army Special Operations Forces: The Leader's Role in Innovation

There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.

—Niccolo Machiavelli[1]

Innovation is an incredibly popular term and idea today—so popular, that it almost tends to lose its meaning. It seems as though few organizations, big or small, public or private, believe that incremental change alone will be sufficient to compete in tomorrow's markets. And yet, in the coming years, many of those who champion change and talk of big ideas will fail to adapt in the face of disruptive change in their markets. Why? The short answer is, because we, human beings, tend to resist change. Change involves uncertainty, and we associate uncertainty with risk—the risk of losing something. As a result, people and organizations often deliberately avoid change until it becomes an issue of survival, and by that point it is often too late.

This paper describes how one part of the United States military, Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF), might address disruptive changes in its future operating environment by increasing innovation through the practice of organizational ambidexterity. Ambidexterity is the ability to win the current fight while simultaneously innovating to set the conditions for future success, even though one can inhibit the other. The ARSOF leader is the key to developing an ambidextrous organization. Only the leader can hold the tensions between exploitation and exploration, and lead the strategic renewal necessary for organizational change.

Introduction

Although comparisons between business and the military can be difficult, the business world provides important lessons regarding competitive innovation. Being

unprofitable for very long will kill most businesses. Have you been to a Blockbuster or

RadioShack lately? Commercial markets are competitive and unforgiving. Therefore,

private firms view emerging competitors and disruptive technologies as existential

threats, and as such, their motivation to innovate is high.

In contrast, United States (U.S.) military organizations rarely see threats as

existential, even though their business is life and death. Even in the present "resource-

constrained environment" (like innovation, an overused term), most military units are not

concerned about being deactivated, and it is rare to see a military leader fired merely for

poor performance. The fear that should motivate real change in the military has been

tempered by a forgiving domestic market, and tactical enemies whose capabilities have

been such that incremental improvement has been enough to win…at least tactically.

Consequently, much of the military has become myopically focused on making

incremental changes to win in the current fight. Unknowingly, many of these practices

aimed at increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the Army's current approach to

combat are actually impeding the development of the disruptive innovations needed to

get ahead of its adversaries and set the conditions for future success. The ARSOF is no

exception.

The ARSOF and its commanding headquarters, the United States Special

Operations Command (USASOC), aim to deliver strategic value to the Nation in four

ways: through an indigenous approach to problem solving; through precision targeting

operations; by developing understanding and wielding influence; and through crisis

response.[2] While all four of these values are, and will remain, important; ARSOF's

experience over the last fifteen years has contributed to a disproportionate focus on

perfecting its direct action capabilities at the expense of innovation in other areas. However, as this paper will explain, what the nation will <u>most</u> require from ARSOF in the future is not raids and strikes, but the ability to provide early understanding which identifies opportunities and accelerates action. To provide value in their future market, ARSOF leaders must prioritize their innovation efforts on developing the tools and concepts they need to provide this understanding.

<div align="center">Purpose</div>

This paper proposes innovation leadership priorities for Army Special Operations, and offers practical ideas on how leaders can lead change and align their organizations to innovate. It examines ARSOF's future operational requirements in light of the future operating environment; and in doing so, determines what the nation needs it to do, and what ARSOF leaders can do to ensure it delivers. Due to this leadership focus, the paper necessarily excludes important innovation areas such as acquisition reform. While absolutely necessary and deeply intertwined with all that this paper will discuss, such topics are outside its scope.

At the heart of ARSOF's problem, is what Harvard professor and businessman Clayton M. Christensen calls "the innovator's dilemma." It is the situation where leaders may do everything right to succeed in their current market, and yet lose their position of leadership or fail completely because their competitors were able to seize upon the opportunities provided by a disruptive innovation or technology.[3] By focusing so intently on improving the current thing(s) that they are doing, they fail to adjust to changes in their environment, much less lead change through innovation of their own. Christensen describes "disruptive technologies" or "disruptive innovations" as "those that create new markets through the introduction of new products or services that appeal to a new set of

<div align="center">3</div>

customers."[4] This is the situation in which ARSOF finds itself now. The ARSOF's ability to meet the nation's needs is being challenged by a number of state and non-state adversaries who are seizing upon the opportunity presented by a disruptive innovation—a "new market," if you will. This new market is not a specific technology or tactic, but a result of the convergence of several global trends which this paper will discuss.

<p style="text-align:center">Understand the Environment: Market Analysis</p>

Given the complexity of war and the rate of social and technological change, accurately perceiving the future competitive environment would seem like a difficult, if not impossible task. As former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates once said when asked about predicting the future: "our record has been perfect…we have never once gotten it right."[5] That said, even as the character of war changes, continuities in the nature of war remain, along with some enduring truths. At is essence, war remains a contest of wills between people. As such, conflict is inherently a human endeavor.[6] Therefore, it is possible to gain an understanding of the future "conflict climate" by evaluating the human factors that contribute to it. Like climate predictions, which do not say much about tomorrow's weather but do provide a likely range of future conditions, these predictions may not tell us exactly where or when conflict will occur, but may provide insight into the how and why.[7] A good place to start is by examining existing global trends as they affect people—the generators of conflict.

In Global Trends 2030, the National Intelligence Council highlights four megatrends that will shape our world out to 2030. They are: 1) Individual Empowerment; 2) Diffusion of Power; 3) Shifting Demographic Patterns, including population growth and increased urbanization; and 4) a Growing Demand for Resources

(Food, Water and Energy).[8] The Joint Staff's Joint Operating Environment (JOE) 2035 describes the combined effects of these trends on the security environment in terms of two broad sets of challenges. The first is *contested norms*, in which revisionist actors attempt to challenge the rules governing the current international order. And the second is *persistent disorder*, where "adversaries exploit the inability of societies to provide functioning, stable, and legitimate governance."[9]

Recent events in the Middle East help to illuminate how the convergence of these trends are contributing to the crux of ARSOF's challenge in the future. Over the past several decades, high fertility rates in the Middle East have led to rapid population growth, creating a "youth bulge" and a growing demand for scarce jobs and limited resources. As a result, millions of people have migrated from rural areas to Middle Eastern cities, placing urban infrastructure under immense strain. Under these circumstances, many governments were either unable or unwilling to meet their people's basic needs. Meanwhile, the rapid diffusion of advanced technologies was connecting and empowering people like never before. By late 2010, populations across the region were fed up with poverty, resource shortages, and consistent inhumane treatment by their authoritarian governments.

On December 17, 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi, a twenty-six year old street vendor in Tunis, Tunisia, set himself on fire after his unlicensed vegetable cart was confiscated by government authorities.[10] Over the next several months, popular uprisings spread like wildfire across the region in what would come to be called the Arab Spring. While history is full of popular revolutions, these were different in that they demonstrated a change in the dynamic between the state and the people. The rapid diffusion of

technology—and communications technology in particular—had bridged the gap between dissimilar peoples, quickly united them around common grievances, and empowered them to organize against their once unassailable governments to force change.

Defining the Problem for ARSOF: A Disruptive Change in the Market

The importance of these empowered populations to ARSOF's future, and the disruptive change that they present, become most apparent when we view them in light of the convergence of JOE 2035's two challenges: contested norms and persistent disorder.

Since 9/11, the American combat experience has shown how the U.S.' adversaries can combine relatively low-cost technologies and asymmetric tactics into strategies that negate many of its conventional advantages. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is the latest manifestation in the revisionist movement of Islamic extremism, and one that is likely to endure for some time due to the appeal of its ideology in the future conflict climate. However, as General David Petraeus observed in a recent Op-ed article, revisionist powers like China, Iran, and Russia have escalated the challenge to the current international order. Their development of advanced anti-access area denial weapons, complex cyber capabilities, updated nuclear arsenals, and the ability to threaten U.S. primacy in space are now challenging the United States' ability to sustain the order it has worked so hard to create.[11]

While the growing technological sophistication of these revisionist states should be of great concern to ARSOF, there is a commonality between the strategies of revisionist states and non-states that is most concerning. It is their ability to make irrevocable gains towards their goals before the U.S. even recognizes it, by leveraging

influence over dissatisfied, empowered populations. These populations do not just present a threat to corrupt and abusive governments in the Middle East as observed during the Arab Spring, they present opportunities to change the balance of power in regions around the world; and ultimately, opportunities to challenge the current international order as Russia has done in Crimea and is doing in eastern Ukraine.

These populations present new opportunities in a global market with very few barriers to entry. Disadvantaged but empowered subnational populations exist in every country on the planet, and possess an enormous amount of what former SOCOM and current Central Command Commander General Joseph Votel has called "population-based potential energy."[12] They can be organized or have little to no formal organization at all, and engagement with them involves few, if any, of the sovereignty issues that complicate relations between states. These people want change and are motivated to pursue it. They are underprivileged and often marginalized, so they are eager to accept assistance. They also have little to lose, so they will take great risks. They are connected, and therefore accessible and influence-able, both physically and virtually. And most importantly, these populations are empowered by their connectedness and ability to wage war in both the physical and virtual environment. Those who can influence them can direct their "kinetic energy" to advance the influencer's strategic goals.

Undoubtedly, specific technologies will challenge ARSOF's ability to operate in the future, but their impact on land will be less decisive than in other domains, as it is tempered by the adaptability and unpredictability of people.[13] No change will be as disruptive or impactful as empowered populations united by shared grievance.

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Evaluating ARSOF's Four Value Propositions

The USASOC Commander, LTG Kenneth E. Tovo, has stated that ARSOF delivers strategic value to the Nation in four ways.[14] The first is through an <u>indigenous approach</u>, where ARSOF views challenges as "problems to be solved by empowered populations living in the region," and are able to achieve desired effects "with and through partner forces."[15] The second is through <u>precision targeting operations</u>. These operations "involve Direct Action and counter-network activities enabled by SOF unique intelligence, technology, and targeting processes."[16] The third is by <u>developing understanding and wielding influence</u>, where the SOF "network of personnel, assets and formations" provide a means to gain "early understanding of trends, emerging transregional threats, and where opportunities exist"; along with the capability to influence outcomes—particularly in conflict environments short of overt war.[17] And the fourth is through <u>crisis response</u>, using both alert and forward deployed forces to provide rapid options for short notice requirements.[18]

As one would expect, the ARSOF leadership's articulation of these four value propositions is a result of its own careful study of the future operating environment and strategic guidance. Unsurprisingly, ARSOF's contributions to each of these values will remain important in the future, albeit not without significant challenges. Beyond the challenges posed by the environment itself, ARSOF will face stiff competition from external adversaries and domestic competitors including advancements in technology. ARSOF must innovate in all four areas to maintain its competitive advantage in the future. However, this paper will focus on the two values that are in most need of the ARSOF leaders' attention to address the disruptive change in its market. These are

ARSOF's ability to develop understanding, and its indigenous approach to problem solving.

<u>Developing Understanding</u>

The ARSOF's ability to develop understanding underwrites all other ARSOF capabilities and value. It is what ARSOF's customers need the most, and it is unlikely that any other organization(s), future technology, or combination thereof will be able to replicate ARSOF's contribution in this area in the future. General Votel referred to this role as one of "global scouts."[19] In essence, this is ARSOF's core competency and should be the ARSOF leaders' primary focus for innovation.

In this future market, ARSOF's customers—U.S. policymakers and military leaders—will require an early understanding of emerging challenges and opportunities. Without early understanding, the U.S. will miss opportunities to engage early and shape future events. United States leaders will increasingly be held captive by perception (domestic and international) and cede influence and the initiative to the nation's adversaries. The absence of early understanding not only eliminates decision space in terms of time, it eliminates the range of possible outcomes. Policymakers need multiple options with a variety of possible objectives, informed by understanding, in order to bring more of the U.S.' full diplomatic, informational, military, and economic capability to bear.

Through observation over the last fifteen years, the nation's adversaries have determined the United States' critical vulnerability: it is the will of the American people and our desire for international legitimacy, manifested in the decision-making process of the U.S. civilian leadership. To mitigate domestic political risk and garner this legitimacy,

policymakers demand a detailed and comprehensive understanding of problems prior to decision.

Al Qaeda and like-minded violent extremist organizations (VEOs) have attacked this national will directly through a strategy of exhaustion, with the intent of bleeding and weakening the United States while sapping its people's will to fight. This strategy creates domestic political pressure which narrows options and provides additional space for VEOs and other non-state adversaries to operate. Understanding is an essential component in defeating this approach and these organizations. Early understanding provides opportunities to influence the populations that these organizations prey upon, and is the key to addressing the challenges they pose as they gather strength.

State adversaries like Russia, China and Iran, have taken a more indirect approach to exploit the U.S.' national decision-making processes. These adversaries are attempting to exploit U.S. policymakers' desire for domestic support and international legitimacy by operating below our thresholds for military action, in the so called "gray zone" - between the traditional ideas of peace and war.[20] They know that when U.S. policymakers do not understand what is happening enough to justify action to their constituents and the world, then the U.S. will not act. What may be most surprising, is how explicit they are about it.

In 2014, the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation of the Armed Forces, General Valery Gerasimov, published an article outlining the framework for a new Russian operational concept which he described as "The Role of Non-Military Methods in the Resolution of Interstate Conflicts."[21] The entire purpose of this concept is

to exploit the weaknesses of an adversary's decision-making processes through concealment and a systems approach based on "reflexive control." Reflexive control is essentially influencing an opponent's perception in order to generate a desired behavior, which then justifies your corresponding response (see Figure 1 below).[22] Russia proofed portions of this concept in Estonia and Georgia, before successfully employing it in Crimea in 2014.[23] In doing so, they were able to seize Crimea as the United States and international community looked on, caught in the space between inaction and action, due to a lack of understanding.
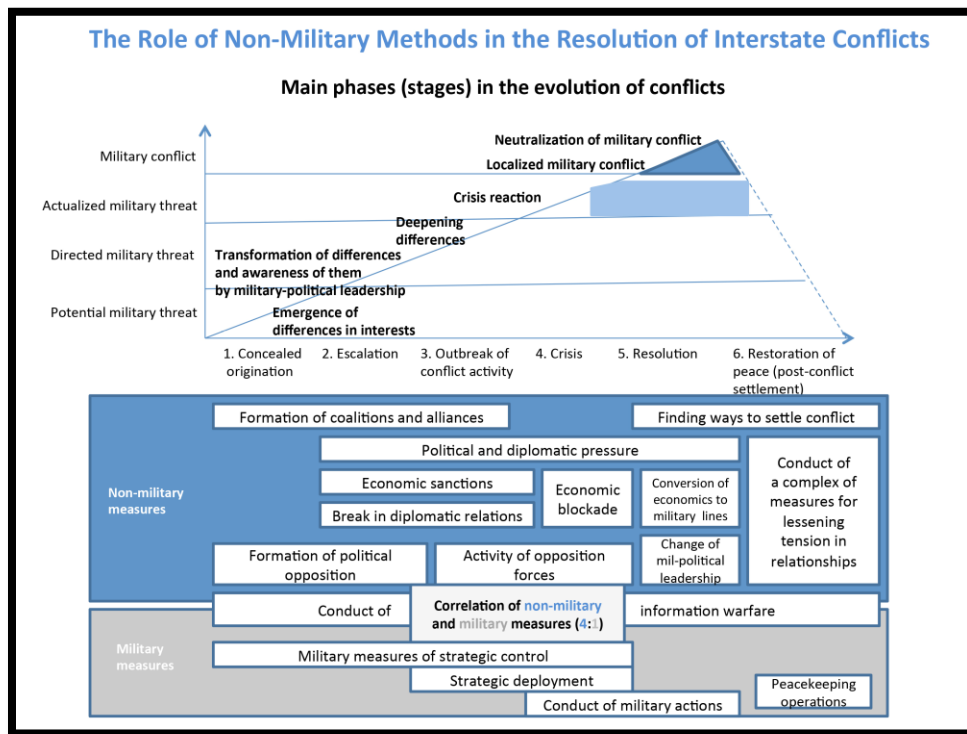

Figure 1. The Role of Non-Military Methods in the Resolution of Interstate Conflicts[24]

Likewise, Iran is also very adept at operating below U.S. thresholds for action. Through its Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps – Quds Force, Iran has grown an extensive transnational network of proxies to extend its influence and pursue its

strategic goals.[25] These proxies allow Iran a degree of separation, albeit slim, that has frequently frustrated U.S. policymakers in search of the proverbial "smoking gun."

Not surprisingly, the success of both the direct and indirect approaches depend upon our adversaries' ability to influence the empowered populations described earlier. The first line of defense against both approaches is the ability to understand where the risk and opportunities lie.

Why is ARSOF's leadership so important to innovation in understanding, when there are so many organizations that also contribute to it?

First, ARSOF is uniquely capable of providing understanding in this future environment. The ARSOF derives this capability from its ability to operate along the full-spectrum of conflict, and especially on the far left of the continuum below (see Figure 2). This area, far to the left, is where strategic trends converge to produce the population groups that will decide the outcomes of future conflicts. What is important to realize is that the entire evolution of Gerasimov's doctrine depicted in Figure 1 above, is intended to fit in the left side of the continuum in Figure 2 below. No other U.S. organization, military or otherwise, has the experience, capability and capacity to identify opportunities and inform the development of policy like ARSOF can in this environment.
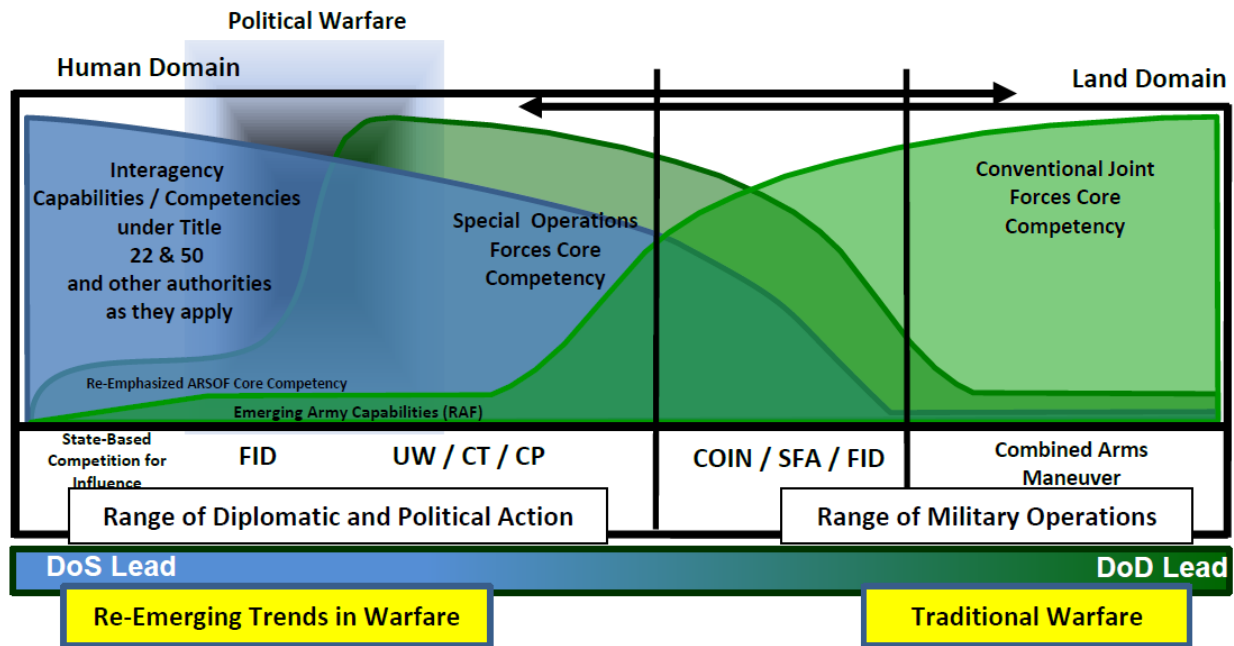
Trends in International Competition

Figure 2: Trends in International Competition[26]

Second, understanding is what ARSOF's customer needs the most. In the broadest terms, the U.S. military's customer is the American people—the nation itself. But practically speaking, ARSOF's customer of concern is the U.S. policymaker. In this future environment, policymakers will need much more than the typical "best military advice." Samuel Huntington's model of "objective control," where civilian leaders determine the objectives, provide policy guidance, and then turn to the military for courses of action, will simply not suffice.[27] Future conflicts will develop more quickly and frequently, and the causes and participants will be less clear. Policymakers will need even more help than they do today to understand the problems, the players, and the possible range of policy objectives. As Major General William Rapp suggested in a 2015 article, improved dialogue between the military and policymakers is necessary to develop "better policy and the strategies to achieve them."[28]

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<u>The Indigenous Approach</u>

The ability to leverage partnerships to solve problems—and particularly local forces for local problems, is the second value requiring the innovation focus of ARSOF leaders. Army Special Operations Forces' indigenous approach to problem-solving not only enables ARSOF's ability to develop understanding, but also provides U.S. policymakers with an expanded array of military options to achieve their objectives.

Human interactions remain essential to developing situational understanding. While technological advancements have increased the U.S.' ability to gather intelligence remotely, they have also created greater opportunity for misinformation, misinterpretation, and deliberate deception. As former Army Chief of Staff General Odierno, Former Marine Corps Commandant General Amos, and former SOCOM Commander Admiral McRaven observed in 2013, "Counter-intuitively, while people in general are enabled by technology, the last ten years have highlighted the limits of technical means at providing reliable, predictive intelligence. In the end, human to human contact is the only reliable means of assessing how people will act."[29] This last part is critical.

Determining "how people will act" or react is the gold standard of understanding, and the ultimate goal of any intelligence professional. However, it is also the hardest thing to determine with any level of certainty. Therefore, the unpredictability of human decision-making and behavior remains the greatest contributor to risk in any plan or strategy. The ARSOF's ability to partner with indigenous populations helps to close some of these gaps. These relationships provide first hand understanding of the individuals and groups involved, an understanding of the local culture and situations affecting their behavior, and the context needed to connect the dots between what

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might otherwise appear to be unrelated data. And most importantly, ARSOF's indigenous approach identifies opportunities while providing the means and ways to seize them.

These opportunities exist in the convergence of the land, cyber, and human domains, and there is no other organization more capable of operating or leading in this environment than ARSOF.[30] While wars among people that emphasize influence rather than overt battle are not a new concept, the last fifteen years have seen an evolution in the human and cyber domains, and in their importance in the exercise of landpower.[31] Since its modern beginnings in the 1950s, ARSOF has been specifically designed to operate in the human domain, which is "about developing an understanding of, and nurturing influence among, critical populaces."[32] In fact, as former SOCOM Commander Admiral McRaven noted in SOCOM 2020, "the vast majority of SOF expertise lies in the human domain of competition, conflict, and war."[33]

Now more than ever, the breadth, depth and varied nature of ARSOF's experience and organizations make it ideally suited to lead the innovation efforts required to identify and seize opportunities in this convergence of domains. The ARSOF's wide range of organizations and capabilities including the Special Forces Regiment, the 75th Ranger Regiment, the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR), Civil Affairs units, Military Information Support Operations (MISO) and sustainment units, the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (SWCS), and National Mission Units (NMUs); provide a wide range of perspectives and expertise with which to view opportunities and potential solutions, by organizations that are actively and persistently engaged in conflicts around the world. From a human domain

perspective, a partnered approach to problem solving is a central component in the everyday operational activities for every one of the organizations mentioned above, including the Rangers and NMUs. Likewise, the impact of the cyber domain is appreciated by all. Largely out of necessity, many of these organizations have broken new ground in recent years in areas like remote advise and assist, and remote partner enablement; and in the process, pushed the envelope on the capabilities of existing communications technologies (or at least the envelope on the authorities that govern their use). However, ARSOF's adversaries are innovating as fast or faster in their use of cyber tools and technology to influence populations, and this is an area in which ARSOF must innovate.

These conflicts and battles for influence are fought predominately on land, where people reside. As such, seizing these opportunities will continue to require operations on land which incurs risk. Few, if any organizations can match ARSOF's ability to operate with acceptable risk along the full spectrum of conflict. Effective risk mitigation requires mature, culturally aware operators who are adept in the application of statecraft and tradecraft; expert in assessing risk and developing low cost, low-signature, risk mitigation solutions; and when needed, are able to draw on the large and complex contingency response capabilities that in most environments only the DoD can provide. In the future, other elements of the U.S. government will depend on ARSOF even more than they do today to provide the physical and relationship infrastructure to support a wider application of all forms of national power. The ARSOF teams will work with and provide access for Foreign Service Officers, Central Intelligence Agency paramilitary and case officers, humanitarian assistance organizations, and other International

Governmental Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations to influence the behavior of populations and direct their "potential energy" in support of U.S. objectives. As discussed, the outcomes of future conflicts will increasingly depend on the ability to understand and influence people farther and farther left along the spectrum, and most organizations will need ARSOF to get there.

To continue providing this value, ARSOF must improve its effectiveness as a vehicle for broader U.S. influence with subnational populations. There will be technological challenges—particularly with regard to communications—as the dependence on local cellular networks and distinct electronic signatures make ARSOF members susceptible to collection and targeting by their adversaries. An increase in demand will also quickly exhaust high demand, low density contingency response capabilities. Therefore, ARSOF must pursue technological and conceptual innovation in intelligence collection, tactical communications, mobility, medical capability, personnel recovery, and organic intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance and fire support to increase the capability and survivability of its small teams.

Precision Targeting Operations and Crisis Response

Before moving on to some recommendations for how the ARSOF leader might increase innovation, we will quickly discuss the two values that, to many, would seem to be the most ripe for innovation and worthy of ARSOF leader attention: precision targeting operations and crisis response. While it may be counter-intuitive, precision strike in particular is an area that does not require additional leader focus. First, it is already a focus of innovation and has the attention of ARSOF leaders, and second, the role of ARSOF's people in precision targeting is likely to change.

Fortunately and unfortunately, ARSOF leaders (and military and civilian senior leaders for that matter) are attracted to these direct action-type operations for many of the same reasons as the American public. Daring raids, high risk rescue missions, and kinetic strikes are exciting and make for fascinating stories. In general, ARSOF leaders and organizations who are consistently involved in both partnering and precision targeting and/or crisis response activities, tend to be more intentional about innovation in the latter two. Here are a few more reasons why.

First, ARSOF leaders, like most operators, have a "first in the stack" mentality, and this preference for direct action has been reinforced by their experiences in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Second, direct action operations are more innovation-friendly because the problems are usually more definable and more likely to include a technological solution. This is the kind of innovation that people prefer—definable problems with the potential for the proverbial "silver bullet." Third, there are just more people wanting to help out. The large, and often decisive role of technology in tactical intelligence collection, strike operations, and exploitation draw the exploratory efforts of commercial industry, interagency partners, and the greater military. It also helps that there is a lot of money to be made, and that the military does a better job of translating these capability gaps into its requirements-based acquisition model, than the fuzzy people-centric problems of the partnering world. In the end, it is only natural that ARSOF leaders would focus their innovative energy where there is already interest and momentum, and therefore a greater promise of results (and less risk of sticking it out there alone).

And finally, the biggest reason that leaders focus on innovation in precision strike and crisis response is that they are held accountable for the result. In precision targeting operations and crisis response, the participants' roles are well-defined and there is always someone in charge. Therefore, when something goes wrong, someone is held responsible. Unfortunately, this is often in stark contrast to operations that achieve effects with and through partners, where the partner provides an easy scapegoat when things do not go as planned.

The ARSOF organization should also not over-invest in precision targeting operations, and precision strike in particular; because of the four values that ARSOF provides, it is the most likely to be replaced, at least in part, by emerging technologies. The combination of big data and machine learning, more reliable methods of identifying and tracking people and things, artificial intelligence, and the potential application of autonomous vehicles and weapons will eventually replace the roles of people in many of the functions in the Find, Fix, Finish, Exploit, and Analyze targeting process of the future. This does not mean that this value will not be important to ARSOF. In fact, there is perhaps no area where SOF's leadership in innovation has been more profound over the last fifteen years then in targeting enemy networks, but ARSOF's role will change. In the future, ARSOF's real value in combating transregional threats will be in its ability to leverage technology and create synergy between the intelligence, defense and law enforcement communities through relationships, and not through an excessive focus on the tactical targeting efforts.

Of these two values, ARSOF's ability to provide agile and responsive options to resolve crisis situations is a more worthy investment of an ARSOF leader's exploratory

focus and resources. Crisis response operations, ranging from hostage rescue, to personnel and facility recovery, to operations necessary to counter-weapons of mass destruction; will remain an enduring national requirement. Fortunately, due to the "no-fail" nature of these missions, crisis response capabilities have the leader's attention already and benefit from a deliberate focus on innovation by external partners as well.

In the future, crisis response will only get more difficult. Recent terrorist attacks like Al Shabaab's 2013 Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi, Kenya, which lasted four days, killed sixty-seven people, and wounded another 200 including five Americans; and ISIL's 2015 Bataclan Theater attack in Paris which killed eighty-none and injured scores of others, highlight the difficulties of modern day crisis response.[34] Sophisticated enemies in an increasingly connected and urban world, will challenge ARSOF's ability to achieve operational and tactical surprise, and it will be difficult to resolve crisis events like the ones above with minimal loss of life. Beyond the physical destruction and loss, these terrorist acts provide opportunities for victory in the information realm, while causing people to doubt their government's ability to protect them.

Value Proposition Wrap-up

Given the uncertain nature of the future operating environment, there are no guarantees that ARSOF will continue to provide any of its value propositions in the years to come. The convergence of global trends and opportunistic adversaries demand that ARSOF innovate to meet the Nation's needs, and this paper has provided one assessment of where ARSOF should focus its exploratory efforts. Regardless of the organization's specific role within the larger ARSOF, SOF, and military enterprise; it is important that the ARSOF strategic leader recognizes that they are facing a disruptive change in their environment, and that this disruptive change demands leader action to

ensure that their organization can win now, while innovating to set the conditions to win in the future. The remainder of this paper will provide ARSOF leaders with a framework to address the challenge of "the innovator's dilemma."

<center>Organizational Ambidexterity: A Framework for Innovation</center>

People in the military, and Americans in general, have a natural fascination with technology. So much so, that many associate innovation almost exclusively with the development of new technologies. As a result, we have this perception that the key to innovation is the creative genius with the big idea—the Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein, or Steve Jobs. This perception, which is promulgated by the media and our own popular versions of history, ignores the reality that more often than not, innovation looks a lot more like hard work than epiphany.[35] Leaders who believe that innovation requires the singular brilliant idea, or worse yet, that the idea must be theirs; are not only selling themselves short on the potential impact of their leadership, but are also failing their organizations.

In the book, *Lead and Disrupt*, professors and respected innovation experts Charles O'Reilly and Michael Tushman provide a framework for solving the "innovator's dilemma" through an idea called organizational ambidexterity.[36] Organizational ambidexterity refers to an organization's ability to exploit and explore simultaneously. It is the ability to win in the current fight, or in the current market, where incremental improvements and efficiency are most valued; while also experimenting to develop the capabilities needed to win in the future.[37] The key to organizational ambidexterity is the ability of the leader and their leadership team to align their people, culture, and formal structure with their strategy; while holding the tension between exploratory and exploitative alignments that "may be toxic for one another."[38]

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To be successful, ARSOF organizations must employ two modes of ambidexterity: contextual and structural. Contextual ambidexterity is focused on fostering an environment where members throughout the organization are willing and able to explore and innovate. This mode views "alignment and adaptability as a function of a culture that promotes both flexibility and control" within the organization, rather than a function of structure.[39] Structural ambidexterity emphasizes the use of separate exploit and explore units, where the explore unit leverages the assets of the larger organization to gain an advantage and mature.[40] In the end, these two approaches are by no means mutually exclusive, and many successful organizations transition between modes as they go. The issue of structural vs. contextual is ultimately "a leadership issue more than a structural one."[41]

Organizational ambidexterity is most appropriate when an organization is operating in a dynamic market with potential for disruptive change—the situation that ARSOF organizations find themselves in now.[42] However, succeeding at ambidexterity is not easy and will require significant organizational change—change that must be led. Through the process of strategic renewal, ARSOF organizations must re-invent themselves while drawing on the values and capabilities that comprise their core identities.

Strategy and Organizational Alignment

Lou Gerstner, former Chief Executive Officer and savior of IBM, stated that while strategy formulation is important, execution will determine how successful it will be.[43] Before ARSOF leaders can begin to align their organizations to execute their respective strategies, they must first translate the strategy and objectives into the key success factors (or measurable targets) that the organization must accomplish to achieve its

objectives. These are the three or four things that the organization must do over the next twelve to eighteen months to implement its strategy.[44] Like the individual organizational strategies within ARSOF, these key success factors will depend upon the unit's role, how the leader views the challenges posed by the environment, and the strategy the leader has developed to attack those challenges. Once understood, the leader can then tackle the difficult task of execution; aligning their people, culture, and formal structure with their strategy. The remainder of this paper will focus on these three areas, and the model in Figure 3 below which depicts this process may provide a helpful reference.
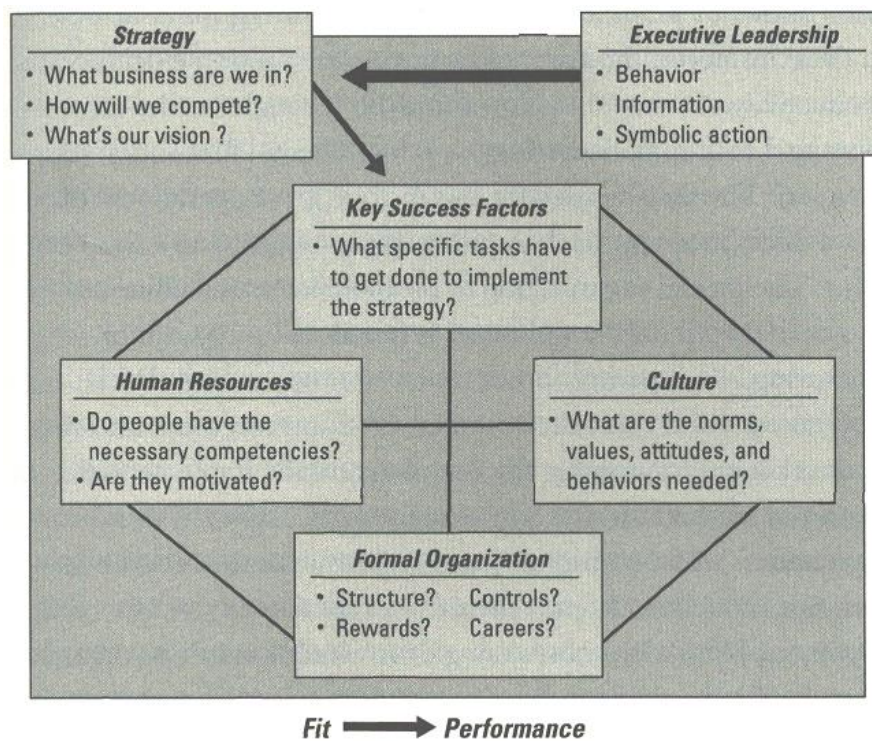

Figure 3. The Congruence Model[45]

Aligning People

It is often said that the best hedge towards an uncertain future, is talented people. Jim Collins, author of the bestseller *Good to Great*, stated that when great

leaders are faced with a challenge, they put the "who" before the "what".[46] Through

extensive research, he found that organizations that focused on the "who" were more

adaptable in the face of change, and that organizations who did not focus on people first

did not achieve greatness regardless of how brilliant their vision or strategy was.[47] To

align their people with their adaptive strategies, ARSOF leaders must first determine

what constitutes the right person for their ambidextrous organization, and then optimize

their impact by developing them and putting them in the right seat.

When ARSOF leaders, or those in the larger military for that matter, discuss

talent issues and innovation today, the conversation inevitably turns toward the difficulty

in recruiting and retaining technical talent (cyber operators, scientists, computer network

engineers, etc.). And for good reason, these people and their talents are in high

demand and everything about the future environment says that ARSOF and others will

need them badly. But the real key to aligning people with the adaptive strategies that

ARSOF needs to win in the future is not just about getting the right skills and

knowledge—technical or not, it is about getting the right people and then optimizing

their talent—putting the right people in the right seats. When it comes to determining the

right person and optimizing their talent, cultivating the right mindset—a "growth

mindset"— is often more important than skills and knowledge.

<u>Aligning People - The "Right" Person and Optimizing Talent - Growth vs. Fixed Mindset:</u>

The ARSOF leaders are blessed in that most of their people self-select to join the

organization and have met the unit's standards for selection. This combination of

motivation and aptitude is a gift, but motivation can wain and aptitude can be wasted if it

is not cultivated by the organization and its leaders. To optimize the value and talents of

their people, ARSOF leaders must look for and cultivate a growth mindset. Stanford

University psychologist Carol Dweck describes a growth mindset as someone's belief

that their abilities are not fixed or predetermined by their basic qualities, but can change

and grow through effort and experience. This is opposed to the person with a fixed

mindset, who believes that their qualities (or talent) are "carved in stone."[48] What

ARSOF leaders must understand, is that a person's mindset affects how they view risk

and effort, how self-aware they are, how resilient they are, and how creative they are

likely to be.[49]

To compete and win in their uncertain and rapidly changing environment, ARSOF

leaders should put their best people against their biggest opportunities, and not just

their biggest problems.[50] Maximizing impact has a lot to do with having the right people

in the right seats. The opportunity-seizers are not afraid of criticism or so concerned

about failure that they will not take risks. They are explorers and experimenters who are

not afraid to challenge current policies and standard operating procedures (SOPs).

While a person with a fixed mindset is likely to view challenges as things to avoid

because they may expose their inadequacies; a person with a growth mindset views

challenges as opportunities for gain. Most leaders have many people capable of

handling their problems, which can make an organization good; but very few with the

right mindset and talents to seize opportunities, which can make an organization great.[51]

To optimize talent, leaders must also move swiftly when they need to make a

people change.[52] Fortunately, it would seem that most ARSOF members would be of

the growth mindset already, right? After all, they sought out and overcame challenges

just to get in the door. Unfortunately, this is not the case. As Dr. Dweck points out,

success can induce a fixed mindset in once growth mindsetted people. John Wooden

called it being "infected" with success.[53] Sadly, some ARSOF Soldiers and civilians met their own criteria for success when they were selected or hired. At that moment, they hit a plateau, and everything since has been an effort to avoid losing the status gained. To compete in this demanding future, there are no seats for folks who just want to tread water. If these people cannot alter their mindsets and embrace the challenges posed by the environment and ARSOF's adversaries, then the leader must move them out to empower those who will, regardless of their rank or position. Keeping the wrong people on, or in the wrong seats, not only limits the value of their position, but can poison the mindsets (read: attitudes) of those around them. This is especially damaging with fixed mindset leaders. A leader's attitude (mindset) determines their behavior, which determines their influence, which determines the outcomes of their units. The ARSOF leaders need growth mindset people to lead their teams and develop the innovative solutions required to win.

Aligning People - Recruiting Talent:

While fostering a growth mindset is critical to getting the most out of each unit member, ARSOF organizations also need talented people with the right skills and knowledge to address their specific challenges. It is this powerful combination of a growth mindset and people's individual talent that best mitigate the risk of an uncertain future. Recruiting and retaining the right talent, especially in high demand tech-centric fields, is difficult and will require innovative approaches. Just recently, former Secretary of Defense Carter outlined several initiatives intended to increase service opportunities for technical talent via more flexible on and off ramps, and to expand opportunities for lateral entry and promotion based on superior performance.[54] The ARSOF leaders must be poised to seize on these and other opportunities to acquire people with high demand

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or niche skills and knowledge that are not normally attracted to, or even aware of, the service opportunities in the military. However, to do so, ARSOF leaders also must do a better job of exploiting a key advantage that they already have—a uniquely attractive opportunity to serve.

Crossfit founder Greg Glassman has described business as "the art and science of finding uniquely attractive opportunities for other people."[55] The ARSOF's compelling advantage over its private sector competitors when it comes to recruiting talent is that all people have a "desperate craving for meaning" in their lives. ARSOF's "purity of mission…protecting our freedom, has the power to ignite passion and commitment."[56] People want to serve something bigger than themselves, and ARSOF provides a uniquely attractive opportunity to do so. Unfortunately, the biggest hurdle to acquiring the people ARSOF needs is not money or other bureaucratic service hurdles, but ARSOF's own closed culture. Partly due to security concerns, but mostly due to arrogance and ignorance, ARSOF organizations do not tell their story well.

To get the high demand talent they need, ARSOF leaders must develop their organizations' stories, and then send the right people (operators and practitioners…the doers) to share those stories in Silicon Valley, on college and high school campuses, or at the World Drone Racing League championships (for example). The ARSOF must meet the people they want, where they are at, and there is a big difference between testimony and advertising. Testimony is personal and has the power to engage the heart, while advertising is impersonal and aims for the head. Incentive pays and more flexible service models will absolutely help, but to acquire the right talent to align their

people with their strategy, ARSOF leaders must effectively communicate their uniquely attractive opportunities for service via personal testimony.

<u>Aligning People - Growing Talent:</u>

Just as ARSOF leaders have a responsibility to cultivate a growth mindset and recruit the right talent, they also have a responsibility to grow that talent once onboard. One way to do this is through broadening experiences—another term whose usage rate is not far behind innovation and "resource constrained environment" in today's military lexicon. All kidding aside, there is great value in gaining a different lens with which to view problems, and with it, the potential to develop different solutions than the "old number six." However, the best way to develop talent is by providing people with challenging experiences, and especially experiences where people are out of their comfort zone, make mistakes, and fail.

In his book, *The Talent Code*, Daniel Coyle describes this type of experience as "deep practice," where by operating at the threshold of your abilities, you make mistakes which then make you better, smarter, and more skillful.[57] Deep practice is one of three elements in Coyle's formula for developing mental and physical skill, and it applies to both simple and complex tasks. The other two elements are ignition, described as the "motivational fuel" required to persevere through the difficulty that comes with sustained, deep practice; and expert coaching, which maximizes the talent-building benefits of the deep practice experience.[58]

In the book, Coyle goes on to describe a fascinating relationship between the talent code and the growth of a neural insulator called myelin as it relates to the development of skill. While this potential psychological to physiological relationship is interesting, the real value for the ARSOF leader is that the elements of the talent code

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provide a blueprint for building talent. First, create a hunger in your people to take on challenges (cultivate a growth mindset…ignition). Second, put your people in situations that stretch the limits of their talents (challenge them...deep practice). And third, help them make sense of their experience so that they grow and improve (leadership (coach/teach/mentor them)…expert coaching).

In the end, a big part of innovation is the ability to combine opportunity with the right talent (who) and motivation (mindset) to seize it. As such, ARSOF leaders should put their best people against their biggest opportunities, and not just their biggest problems.[59] But just putting the right people in the right seats is not enough. To really increase exploration and innovation in a business where winning now is essential, also requires leadership that is able to "understand and own the tension" between exploitation and exploration.[60] The ARSOF leaders must provide their people with the space and resources they need to explore and innovate, even as the siren's call (and their own natural bent) towards current operations threatens to choke it out. Successful ambidextrous leaders foster innovation through the development of an organizational culture that views exploration and experimentation as vital to its success, even as it continues to prosecute the current fight. And when necessary, these leaders change their structure to pursue more radical exploration activities.

<div align="center">Aligning Culture</div>

As Machiavelli said, people do not inherently embrace change. Change brings uncertainty and uncertainty increases risk—the risk of losing what you have with no guarantee that it will result in something better. But "developing ambidextrous organizations is almost always associated with significant organizational change."[61] For the vast majority of ARSOF strategic leaders, the most difficult aspect of aligning their

organization for ambidexterity will be changing their organization's culture to embrace the conflicting strategies of exploit and explore. But it is essential. Developing a trusting, empowering, risk-taking, experimenting, opportunity-seizing culture is critical to building an organization that can innovate not once, but time and again. To do so, leaders and their leadership teams must renew their organizations by generating a sense of urgency to change, and then fostering an organization where people are willing and able to innovate.

Aligning Culture - Contextual vs. Structural Ambidexterity:

While structural change is an important component in increasing exploration, it is not a substitute for the difficult work of cultural change. The ARSOF leaders seeking sustained innovation cannot just designate an innovation sub-unit or staff function and call it good. To identify opportunities and develop the innovative solutions needed to gain and maintain a competitive advantage, every ARSOF person and element must be willing and able to innovate. It must become part of the unit's DNA. The ARSOF's long-term success will depend on the ARSOF leader's ability to foster a culture of sustained innovation.

Aligning Culture – Obstacles, the Success Syndrome and the Attacker's Advantage:

The ARSOF's tactical success in the current fight has undermined its ability to explore and develop the disruptive innovations that leap it ahead of its adversaries. In Coach Wooden's words, many ARSOF units have been infected by success on an organizational-scale. They suffer from the success syndrome. While these organizations may perceive themselves as agile, adaptive, and future-looking, their cultures have become rigidly aligned to execute a strategy focused on the short-term—the current fight. Leaders pay attention to, measure, and reward current-ops activities; and they

promote behaviors to accomplish key success factors geared towards winning now. Over time, ARSOF organizations have fine-tuned their "win-now" alignments by codifying lessons learned in OIF, OEF, and elsewhere to develop new SOPs, better metrics, refine command and control structures, and define the norms and values that set expectations for how people will behave in order to succeed.[62] In a static and predictable environment, this might be fine. But when facing an uncertain and dynamic future, a strategy that promotes exploitation at the expense of exploration, resulting in incremental innovation at best, is a losing one.

The ARSOF's adversaries, on the other hand, do not suffer from this same affliction. Instead, they are operating with the attacker's advantage and are much quicker to change strategies and seize emerging opportunities.[63] They are not wed to their current ways, will take risks to gain a competitive advantage, and most are far less concerned about international legitimacy and less encumbered by domestic political pressures.

Aligning Culture - Strategic Renewal:

So how do ARSOF leaders break out of the success syndrome and become the attacker again—the innovator? The answer is through strategic renewal. The ARSOF organizations must re-invent themselves while drawing on the values and capabilities that comprise their core identities. Strategic renewal "requires a new way of working – a deliberate effort to enable the organization to lead change in its market," but it is not a complete overhaul where everything about the organization is open for change.[64] It requires the development of an "organization learning mind-set"— a growth mindset on an organizational-scale, connected to the organization's overarching identity.[65]

The key for ARSOF leaders is to lead their strategic renewal before the crisis strikes, and before a complete overhaul is required. The best time for renewal is often when the current strategy is mature and possibilities to reshape the market exist.[66] The end goal of strategic renewal is to make the organizational changes necessary to seize opportunities and address challenges before they spawn a crisis. Through ambidexterity, ARSOF organizations can lead change in the market and be the disrupter and not the disrupted. But to lead the change required to succeed at ambidexterity, especially in the absence of a crisis, leaders must provide a sense of urgency to change, and then foster an organization where members are "willing and able to innovate" over and over again.[67]

Step 1 - Create an "Emotionally Engaging Aspiration" by Focusing on Opportunity:

Army Special Operations Force members, and people in the military as a whole, do not believe that they are in a crisis, despite the best messaging efforts of senior military leaders. At best, they perceive their challenges to be more along the lines of the disruptive changes in the market we discussed earlier. Without a crisis, it is very difficult to generate the sense of urgency required for change, and particularly a change towards increased innovation which is inherently risky and inefficient. So, if developing a sense of urgency is step one in leading change, as John Kotter and nearly every other change expert believes it is, then how should the ARSOF leader do it?[68]

The answer is to stop trying to sell a crisis, and instead, focus on seizing opportunities—opportunities that can transform the organization into what it aspires to be. To make the necessary emotional connection and develop a sense of urgency to innovate in the absence of a crisis, the leader must communicate an "emotionally

engaging aspiration" that is tied to the unit's core identity and can only be achieved by seizing opportunities through innovation.[69]

These aspirations should define "who we are and what we do." They should also be short, emotionally engaging, tied to the unit's strategy, and the leader and his/her leadership team must own it and live it.[70]

Step 2 - Foster an Organization Where People are "Willing and Able to Innovate":

To make the aspiration a reality, the leader and his/her leadership team must then provide direction and foster conditions that encourage and enable innovation.

Leaders must provide their organization with direction, but they cannot be the lone commander carrying the stone tablets down from the mountain. Leaders must develop strategy through an ongoing dialogue with their leadership team, with ample input and feedback from the organizations' members and external partners.[71] They must develop a strategy that not only addresses the problems posed by the environment and ARSOF's adversaries, but is also adaptive enough to seize opportunities. The nature of the future operating environment is such that the problems and opportunities will change constantly, and therefore leaders must remain in dialogue with their teams so that they are able to adjust the direction and their reinforcing behaviors as required.

In his book *Team of Teams*, General Stanley McChrystal describes how as a Task Force Commander in Iraq, he came to learn that effective leadership was more a function of his ability to nurture his organization's culture by tending to its ecosystem, than through the exercise of direct control. The leader should be more gardener, and less chessmaster. "Within our Task Force, as in a garden, the outcome was less dependent on the initial planting than on consistent maintenance." "The gardener cannot actually "grow" tomatoes, squash, or beans—she can only foster an environment

in which the plants do so."[72] This same approach applies to ARSOF leaders seeking to increase innovation. They cannot drive innovation any more than General McChrystal could personally outmaneuver Al Qaeda in Iraq. Instead, ARSOF leaders must diligently tend their gardens to ensure that their people are not only exploiting to win now, but that they are encouraged and supported to explore. So what does this look like?

First of all, we should not confuse gardening with passive leadership. Just as General McChrystal found that only the "senior leader could drive the operating rhythm, transparency, and cross-functional cooperation" that his Task Force needed to succeed, ARSOF leaders must focus their tending on the aspects of their culture that are not consistent with the exploratory alignment that they seek to establish. As General McChrystal experienced, it takes constant pruning and shaping to get the behaviors a leader desires, and over time change culture to achieve a better alignment.[73] In Edgar Schein's words, General McChrystal was changing his Task Force's culture through the use of embedding and reinforcing mechanisms. The embedding mechanisms include "what leaders pay attention to, measure, and control on a regular basis;" how they react to crisis events or when something goes wrong; how they allocate resources; what they role-model and teach; what they reward; and how the leader manages their talent.[74] Though it was exhausting, General McChrystal was determined to be consistent in both word and deed, as he used these mechanisms to embed the basic assumptions that would inform the norms and values, and ultimately the behaviors of his Task Force in the execution of their strategy.

The ARSOF leaders now face the same challenge as they must embed new assumptions in order to achieve an alignment that encourages and enables disruptive

innovation. This will not be easy, as many of the basic underlying assumptions that constitute ARSOF's current culture run counter to an exploratory spirit—despite the values that the organizations may espouse. In many ways, ARSOF's overall culture has become overly risk averse, which has led to rigid and standardized risk management practices which stifle innovative thinking and make many options too expensive and/or resource intensive to pursue. Army Special Operations Force has also saddled its units with unnecessary levels of staff bureaucracy, often times in order to accommodate the larger Army's perspectives on unity of command. This leads to elevated approval chains, reduces the value of ARSOF's staffs and external networks, and most importantly, messages a lack of trust to subordinates that runs contrary to the spirit of mission command. This lack of trust is especially damaging, and is reinforced by the reactions of senior leaders' to mistakes and failure; and particularly those that garner negative media attention.

This environment stifles experimentation and reinforces the message that only perfect solutions will suffice. It also creates an environment where failure is unacceptable, which results in leaders who do not give honest assessments and often continue pursuing failed programs and failing strategies long after they should have cut away. This lack of honesty and assertiveness is both an internal and external problem. Internally, it creates an environment where people don't challenge authority or provide their best recommendations. Externally, ARSOF is often way too eager to get to "yes" in order to do something, and so leaders often settle for insufficient authorities and flexibility which curb operator initiative and prevent them from seizing opportunities. And finally, ARSOF culture has a short-term orientation, manifested most explicitly by its

focus on current operations and tendency to measure time in terms of rotations, command tours, and at best, maybe Program Objectives Memorandum cycles. Without a long-term orientation, it is difficult to see the value in exploration and experimentation that could result in failure. A short-term orientation breeds an exclusive focus on quick wins.

If one agrees with any of the above, then ARSOF leaders have their work cut out for them. But the good news is, as one can see from the embedding mechanisms, the role of the leader in changing culture is huge. Schein also highlights several reinforcing mechanisms that, when aligned with the embedding mechanisms, can assist in cultural change. These include changing an organization's design and structure, changing its systems and processes, altering the physical layout of its workspace, creating explicit organizational philosophies and creeds, and sharing the organizations' rituals and stories.[75]

In the end, to align their culture to succeed at ambidexterity, ARSOF leaders must be able to identify and target the cultural attributes that foster an organization where people are willing and able to innovate. In the short-term, this means changing behavior, with the intent that over time, a change in assumptions will follow as those behaviors produce positive results. This requires the same intentionality and consistency displayed by General McChrystal as he led change in his Task Force in Iraq, and by Lou Gerstner as he led strategic renewal at IBM. And it begins with strategic renewal of the leaders themselves.

Aligning Formal Structure

While contextual ambidexterity is necessary to increase innovation in ARSOF organizations, it is also likely that it will not be sufficient in and of itself. Rapid changes

in technology and the need to address capability gaps requiring entirely new skill sets will also necessitate the creation of new organizational structures and units.[76] The growing importance of the cyber domain is the most obvious area requiring new exploratory structures, but there are many others as well. In fact, the Special Forces Regiment's 4th Battalion redesign is an example of structural change intended to foster innovation to close a capability gap.

O'Reilly and Tushman outline four ingredients for structural ambidexterity that, along with the cultural changes already discussed, help to ensure the success of these units. Paraphrased and in order of importance, these four ingredients are: a clear strategic intent justifying a need to explore and exploit; a commitment by the leadership to resource and protect the exploratory unit from those who might kill it; adequate separation from the exploitative core unit and the practices that govern it; and "a vision, values, and a culture that provide for a common identity across the explore-and-exploit units that helps all involved to see that they are on the same team."[77]

For the most part, these are pretty straight forward, and likely resonate with those who have been part of an innovation unit and experienced the tension that exists. But it is worth highlighting a few points. First, ARSOF leaders must clearly communicate their strategic intent when forming an exploratory unit, to include identifying the resources and capabilities that the core organization must make available to it, because it will not be self-evident to others in the organization. Unless the larger organization receives additional funds and resources, it will require the diversion of resources from the current fight towards exploratory activities that are by nature, inefficient.[78] This can breed resentment across the organization.

Second, Leaders must commit to resourcing and supporting the exploratory unit or it will be starved out and/or fall prey to current operations.[79] There can be no ambiguity about the equal importance of the exploitative and exploratory units, and this may require that leaders change the metrics that they use to evaluate performance (i.e., embedding mechanisms).[80]

Third, it is important that these units are structurally separated so that they can develop their own alignments, while still drawing on the "assets and capabilities of the larger organization." So while these units are separated, they must also be integrated.[81] The leader's challenge is to ensure that the exploratory unit is sufficiently integrated, while preventing it from being stifled or over-burdened by the demands of the larger organization. The ARSOF's current-ops focused culture and natural Army bent towards equity and uniformity will tend to pull exploratory units back towards the core. The organization's senior leaders are the key in holding this tension to prevent assimilation of the innovative unit.

And finally, to avoid unhealthy competition and adversarial relationships among exploit and explore units, leaders must develop a common vision that justifies the need to cooperate. This vision must provide the organization as a whole with a shared long-term orientation.[82] The leader's job is to foster a common identity based on shared values across the organization, even though the behaviors associated with those values may manifest differently between the explore and exploit units.[83] For example, the training requirements and operational activities of 4th Battalion members and teams will be different than that of the standard Special Forces teams, but the leader must

communicate a vision and foster an organizational identity that makes both of their

activities equally valuable and necessary for the organization's success.

Conclusion

In the past decade or so, the increased accessibility of advanced technologies

and growing international disorder have provided many state and non-state actors with

the means and opportunity to challenge the United States position of global

leadership.[84] By capitalizing on the effects of several global trends, these opportunistic

revisionist actors have created a disruptive change in ARSOF's operating

environment—a change which threatens ARSOF's ability to provide the value the nation

requires in the future. To win the current fight and set the conditions for future success,

ARSOF organizations must become more innovative. Through organizational

ambidexterity, ARSOF leaders can address the disruptive changes in their operating

environment by increasing innovation while maintaining the control required to win the

current fight. Like any large organizational change effort, the ARSOF leader is the key

to developing an ambidextrous organization. Only the leader can hold the tensions

between exploitation and exploration, prioritize the organization's innovation efforts, and

lead the strategic renewal necessary for organizational change. As the 18th Chairman of

the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, said in his closing remarks in the

2014 Quadrennial Defense Review: "Innovation is the military imperative and the

leadership opportunity of this generation. It's a fleeting opportunity."[85]

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