

Command and General Staff College

# Organizational Leadership Analysis

4th Armored Brigade Combat Team Scenario

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The 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT), as fictionally depicted in the scenario provided, suffers from issues related to organizational culture, command climate and most importantly professional ethos among the officers of the formation. The scenario describes perceived issues, such as perceptions of perceived and potential sexual harassment, that on the surface seem problematic and perhaps should demand a priority of effort. Sexual assault and harassment are no doubt issues that receive great focus within the Army. As presented within the scenario these appear, without further data, red herrings designed intentionally or unintentionally to drive potential solutions toward those subjects. These issues, if they truly exist as a systemic problem within this organization are not the foundational issue at hand. The current climate and attitude related to the unit and the workload is not the real problem either, it is a mere symptom and perhaps an area of opportunity to address what is really wrong in this unit. The 4<sup>th</sup> ABCT suffers from an organizational culture problem, some of this is a result of bad trends that proliferate the Army as a whole and manifest themselves more prominently in some units. The organizational cultural problems in this particular unit have manifested themselves as a result of prior leadership failures to address them coupled with the crucible of operational stress than exacerbated the display of these bad trends in the overarching organizational culture of the Army in general. The new incoming commander has little time to effect change, and little hope of mitigating much of the operational pressure and stress that will continue to be placed upon his unit. His only recourse and solution in this situation is quickly identify the problem and to set a vision for the organization that is simple, clear and strikes directly at the heart of the cultural issue.

Based upon the historical data available, our new commander, LTC(P) Owens must quickly assess what the nature of the problem and separate the real issue from the noise related to climate. Based upon the data, issues have previously manifested as:

- Operations hampered by communications systems – should he blame the systems or a non-adaptive organization?
- Unqualified and untrained personnel taken “out of hide” to perform mission – is this an issue with manning or with the way people are developed within the organization?
- Commanders and staffs not proficient in branch skills outside their own in combined arms formations – how does the organization develop professional knowledge?
- Failure to fully adapt to SFAT mission – why were leaders not more adaptive in their approach?
- Engineer, artillery and armor Soldiers poorly performing dismounted infantry tasks – what was the mindset of leaders preparing for the last deployment that prevented training this anticipated mission?
- Allegations that *esprit-de-corps* activities bordered on hazing – how can good initiative be turned to good actions?
- Allegations that some environment of sexual harassment could exist – are these allegations a result of the climate (dissatisfaction) or the culture (doing wrong)?
- Non-collaborative, dictatorial staff – where is the officer “corps” in this organization and why is the organization not more professional, inclusive, collaborative and cohesive?
- Junior officers requesting to leave the Army in large numbers – has the organization failed to meet their expectations?

The non-exhaustive list above paints a picture of an organization that has a cultural problem and that problem has likely begun to express itself in a climate of dissatisfaction. LTC(P) Owens has little time, given the short turnaround from deployment to train-up for the next deployment to address the climate issue directly or in large part. The system, the requirements and much of the operational stress will continue outside of his control. His task is to quickly address the cultural problem in a way that will have a quick outcome. Within this organization it seems he already enjoys tacit compliance but this has failed to prevent larger matters from surfacing. He must seek commitment from a significant portion of his leaders. As a tool, the Kotter Model of Leading Change in Organizations would serve him well.<sup>1</sup> Using the

Kotter Model will allow LTC(P) Owens to anchor his change to the organization, avoid the pitfalls that generally cause change to fails, address the problems identified in his organization and by doing so alleviate some of the climate issues that have arisen related only to dissatisfaction.

He must first establish a sense of urgency to all ranks within the unit. This is the simplest task at first glance, the unit is deploying again soon, lives are at stake. Although Kotter lists this as the first step, it is in my opinion an ongoing step throughout the process. LTC(P) Owens can attempt to cajole his formations with the urgency of the situation but the amount of those words that translate into action will directly relate to how much of the vision his team sells and how many converts he gains to full commitment versus compliance.<sup>2</sup>

In order to give traction to his words he must build a coalition that believes and lives the vision. It is in this area that LTC(P) Owens must free his unit from some baggage the larger Army has saddled the culture with over the last several decades; broken NCO and officer corps.<sup>3</sup> The unit seems to lack trust and comradery within each separate rank structure. Brigadier General John Bahnsen and Colonel James Braden noted in 1988 the issue in *The Army's Command Sergeant Major Problem* and that if not corrected this matter would have dire consequences for the Army as a whole.<sup>4</sup> In our Army we no longer enjoy an officer and NCO corps in the historic sense but LTC(P) Owens can and should address this in his unit as he builds a coalition to support his vision. In fact, building cohesive officer and enlisted groups, each that has ownership of their respective lanes and mentors, nurtures and develops their own would alleviate many of the problems the 4<sup>th</sup> ABCT has experienced. This would increase mutual respect, sense of purpose and create a sharing and learning environment.<sup>5</sup>

Through empowering and defining roles and building mutually supportive teams that exhibit care, concern and accountability a significant portion of LTC(P) Owens' vision will be realized already but not completely. Empowering NCOs to train and maintain the formation while making it clear that there is no such thing as a command team and officers will take care of officers and officer business provides a sense of purpose generally lacking in most units and provides the opportunity for growth, collaboration and comradery seldom found today. Defining and articulating his clear vision to these two groups and seeking additional buy in becomes easier. Reinforcing the sense of urgency across the formation as more leaders begin to buy in meets less resistance and more commitment. LTC(P) Owens' vision must be simple, perhaps as simple as: "leaders will lead and be accountable to each other, the only unforgivable mistakes are failures or morality and failure of effort, we will learn, grow, anticipate support each other and enable voices from all echelons to be heard with professional respect and dignity".<sup>6</sup> In practical terms he would express his expectation that every Soldier will do his duty, those that do not will be dealt with, those that cannot will be mentored and trained, nobody is indispensable and nobody will make decisions that ought to be passed to a lower level and that everyone is expected to share knowledge up down and laterally.

Such a simple but bold vision and change in organizational mindset about the role of individuals and rank groups would undoubtedly meet with some resistance. Some NCOs would think the "old man" loved officers and hated enlisted instead of seeing that his vision would empower them to perform their historic function. Some officers would resist the idea that they should socialize and get to know more junior officers on a personal level, these people have come to believe that mentoring and developing is something that occurs across email and that a field grade ought not personally know a lieutenant. These officers do not understand our history

and would have to be dealt with.<sup>7</sup> However, success would build success. A small group of committed leaders in each group will make a difference. Increased buy in will allow the commander to enable broad-based action and initiative among his subordinates. Powering down initiative will go a long way toward gaining commitment.

It is important that early on the commander seek a short-term win. He should look for an opportunity after he sees initiative and development begin to trickle downward to make a stand against some onerous tasking from higher. He should not force the S-3 to fight or send the CSM to back channel the requirement but he should personally go and fight for relief. Once he wins, passing the gained time back to the units to engage is family time would serve to temporarily mitigate the climate issue and feed back into gaining commitment to the larger cultural change.

Finally, once he begins to see real change in the way the organization functions, he must make efforts to consolidate the gains and anchor them to the culture. The unit has already built strong community bonds within the officer and NCO corps, these bonds are the tools by which change is to be anchored. Once the unit moves beyond socializing by requirement to a socialization of the cultural norm of association the commander can strength these bonds through professional development that places the change within a historical context and gives it meaning.

LTC(P) Owens is about to take command of a unit that requires serious change if it is to successfully execute its upcoming mission. He does not have the luxury of a lot of time and cannot afford to proceed with the *status quo*. He must quickly identify the real problems and instill a simple yet effective organizational vision.

## Citations and References

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- <sup>1</sup> Kotter, J. P. (1996). *Leading Change*. Boston Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press
- <sup>2</sup> Yukl, Gary. *Leadership in Organizations, Sixth Ed.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc., 2002, p.147
- <sup>3</sup> For an explanation of the composition, prerequisites and definition of military professionalism *vis-à-vis* the officer corps see, Huntington, Samuel P., *Civilian Control of the Military, A Study of Organizational Leadership*. United States Military Academy. Office of Military Leadership, Stackpole Books, 1976, p. 510.
- <sup>4</sup> Bahnsen, John C., and James W. Bradin. "The Army's Command Sergeant Major Problem." *Parameters* 18, no. 2 (1988): p. 9.
- <sup>5</sup> Carey W. Walker and Matthew J. Bonnot, "The Vision Process: Seven Steps to a Better Organization" CGSC (August 2012), p. 2.
- <sup>6</sup> Clark, Barry Lee, *Moral Underpinings of the Military Profession*, (January 31 2016), Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2725608>, for an explanation of what I mean by morality in the military.
- <sup>7</sup> For an example of esprit during the Army's formative period and how socialization amongst all officer ranks contributed to cohesion see, Wingate, Christopher W., *Military Professionalism and the Early American Officer Corps, 1789-1796*, Combat Studies Institute Press, US Army Combined Arms Center, Fort Levenworth, Kansas, p. 83.

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