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Turnaround in the bandits of Bravo Company

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to retroactively study a positive organizational change by showing how the elements of readiness creation and the change strategies in a widely accepted change model applied to a 20-month change in one US Army company.

Design/methodology/approach – The commander was not familiar with many of the contemporary change management models. Retrospective analysis of the change strategies reveals congruence with components of a widely accepted change model. The commander's actions, matched with the model's components, highlighting the model's potential value in the military.

Findings – The most significant finding is that a military commander with limited theoretical experience in organizational change successfully turned around a military unit while unconsciously paralleling an existing change model, suggesting that the military should study the model further.

Research limitations/implications – The paper is limited by the number of organizations studied.

Practical implications – One implication is that military leaders and other professionals can benefit by looking outside traditional sources for tools and inspiration to solve challenging problems in their unique environments.

Originality/value – This application of the organizational change model outside a business setting suggests that the model may have greater utility than previously thought. Additionally, the application of business change management strategy in a military organization impacts on military professionals who are seeking new ways of conducting operations. Finally, the paper is original because of the retroactive change model application, suggesting the model is grounded in leadership and organizational development theory and practice.

Keywords Organizational change, Armed forces, United States of America

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Organizations are increasingly operating in an environment that has become global (Ghoshal, 1987), intensely competitive (David, 2006), and economically volatile (Hoskisson *et al.*, 2000). Simultaneously, organizations are dealing with significant technological changes (Wanberg and Banas, 2000) and workforce changes (Lerman and Schmidt, 2006). Organizations intent on sustained survival and competitiveness do not have the luxury of being content with status quo. Failure to anticipate and respond to these

The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not reflect the official policy or position of the United States Army, Department of Defense, or the US Government.

Pseudonyms are used in this paper to protect the identity of the specific organizational units and/or individuals discussed.



environmental changes can result in loss of competitive position, erosion of shareholder support, and even the demise of an organization (Collins, 2001; Vollman, 1996). Consequently, organizations cannot be content with current success or complacent with dysfunctional units, but must instead look for continual improvements and actively seek to turn-around dysfunctional units (Grinyer and McKiernan, 1990; Pearce and Robbins, 1994; Robbins and Pearce, 1992, 1993). Contemporary organizational change literature typically focuses on corporations, with tangential or anecdotal consideration of selected governmental or non-profit organizations such as hospitals (Nutt, 1986; Rousseau and Tijoriwala, 1999). However, America's military must also deal with change, not only at the organizational level (Hartman, 2007), but also at the unit and individual levels as well (Agency Group 05, 2006; Thompson *et al.*, 2007).

In the US Army, one significant cause of change is personnel turnover in all-concomitant organizations. Army soldiers can expect new commanders approximately every two years at the battalion level and every 12-24 months at the company level. Despite all the official policies, procedures and stacks of manuals, each change in leadership brings consequent changes to the organization, with some organizations becoming more efficient while others do not. One case of a unit increasing its effectiveness during a leadership change was the change of the bandits of Bravo Company (a pseudonym for an armor or tank company) over an intense, eight-month period. This tank company quickly rose from one of the worst of six companies in the brigade to one of the best companies. The purpose of this paper is to retroactively study a positive change in an organization showing how the elements of readiness creation and the change strategies outlined in a widely accepted change model (Armenakis *et al.*, 1999) applied to specific elements of the change, an approach that ultimately enhanced the overall success of the commander's efforts.

The Armenakis *et al.* model was selected because Armenakis *et al.* view the implementation of a change initiative as a process, rather than providing a prescriptive recipe for the change manager to follow. As Burnes (1996, p. 187) observes, "[...] change should not be [...] seen as a series of linear events within a given period of time; instead, it is viewed as a continuous process". Pettigrew (1987) likewise argues that change must be considered through the complex interaction of the content of the change, the process of the change, and the context (both internal and external) in which the organization and the intended change exist. As such, such *n*-step prescriptions for change such as that recommended by Kotter (1996) should be viewed with caution. Process models, such as the Armenakis *et al.* (1999) model are not necessarily as widely discussed as the prescriptive models largely due to the associated level of their complexity. Nevertheless, the Armenakis model is one that has proven viable as a lens through which to view change in organizations (Bernerth, 2004; Holt *et al.*, 2007; Self, 2005; Walker *et al.*, 2007).

Evolution of the bandits study

Much has been written about how to change an organization, with advice coming from consultants and academics. Further, there are many courses taught on managing change. However, as is often the case at the unit level within an organization, managers are tasked with taking their unit or department through a change without the training or advice and counsel from the experts on what steps to take, what process to follow. In the particular case addressed in this paper through the form of a narrative, a young captain was charged with turning around a failing tank company. If his efforts were not successful the unit

would be dissolved and the soldiers scattered throughout the US Army. To his credit, he was successful in turning around the company, despite having no formal “change management” training.

Subsequently, during a graduate course in management he sought to make sense of what had happened and why he had been successful within a change management context. Sense-making (Weick, 1995) is a critical role for managers when change is called for. As organizational members first learn of, and then begin to grapple with a change, they will attempt to understand (or make sense of) what is happening and why. The role of the manager is to “give sense” to the organizational members of the change. While resistance may still occur once organizational members realize how the change will impact them, they most certainly will be resistant to a change which they do not understand. This discomfort with uncertainty (Palmer *et al.*, 2009) requires sense-making. That sense-making must come from the manager; however, before he or she can “give sense” he or she must make sense of it themselves. Barge and Oliver (2003, pp. 138-9) note that managers need, “[. . .] to be able to provide legitimate arguments and reasons for why their actions fit within the situation and should be viewed as legitimate”.

The approach taken for this study is that of a narrative approach (Cresswell, 2007), in which one of the authors tells his “story” of a change which he not only experienced, but, as commander of the tank company, was required to lead. The story is viewed through the process lens of the Armenakis *et al.* (1999) model and as the lead author and his co-authors worked through the story, that process enabled the sense-making outcome found herein.

Changing a dysfunctional military unit

Defining the problem in the company

The bandits were one of the three tank companies of a battalion in a US Army brigade located at a military post in the USA. During a recent decade, the company earned a solid reputation as a very good tank company often receiving the most difficult and challenging missions. However, just prior to the new commander’s appointment as leader of the company, the company began to slide toward mediocrity in all key operational aspects. The situation became so dire that the battalion commander elected to break the company apart prior to an operational deployment. Rather than deploy and train as a company, the soldiers in the company filled personnel shortages in the rest of the battalion and the company leadership formed an emergency operations cell that handled administrative tasks from a rear area. Upon returning from deployment the company reformed, and gained a new commander.

In general, tank companies are rated based upon a few quantifiable tasks as well as some that are more difficult to quantify. First, the company must maintain its tanks and equipment so they are always fully mission capable or prepared for a mission at any time. The measure of this is called the operational readiness rate (OR) and is expressed as a percentage, with a goal of at least 90 percent. Second, tank companies are expected to meet certain standards in shooting competition, and the qualification scores of each crew and platoon are carefully measured and compared. Crews also strive to qualify their tanks on the first attempt. Every company’s goal is to earn the title of top tank company during the semi-annual qualification exercises.

Physical fitness is a third measure of effectiveness for a tank company. This is measured in several ways. First, the army mandates that all soldiers must take and pass

the army physical fitness test (APFT) two times per year. Companies are evaluated on their overall average, having the highest number of soldiers score above 290 out of 300 points, and on having the fewest failures. Closely related to this is how many soldiers are overweight and do not meet minimum body fat standards.

In addition to quantitative measures of effectiveness, the army values the qualitative attributes of morale and pride. While admittedly difficult to measure, it is readily apparent when collective morale and pride are absent.

Prior to the deployment, the bandits consistently had the worst OR in the battalion. During one training exercise, some of those present joked that the battalion maintenance officer should be the commander since there were more broken tanks than operational ones in the company. On any given day there were from two to six non-mission capable tanks of the 14 assigned to the company. In the past, it had been suggested that the problem was based upon the age of the tanks, but other companies did not post similar results. Other problems were found. Upon inspection of the unit's arms room, the incoming commander discovered broken night vision equipment. This equipment had been broken for a considerable time and there was no apparent plan to repair or replace the equipment.

The company's gunnery scores were deplorable as well. The company had not been the top tank company in nearly three years and had never come close to achieving the goal. Crew scores were low overall and the platoon scores reflected this trend as well. The company had the highest number of Q2s, a term used when a crew fails to qualify their tank on the first attempt, in the battalion.

On the final quantitative measure of effectiveness, physical fitness, the company posted the worst physical fitness statistics in the battalion. The company average was 217 points out of a possible 300, far behind the other companies averaging between 235 and 260. When the incoming commander administered his first APFT, 11 soldiers failed the event. Upon further investigation, there were five soldiers who had not passed an APFT in nearly two years. All of the commanders who received bounty hunter soldiers during the recent deployment noted that these soldiers were poor runners. Additionally, there were eight soldiers who were overweight, as well as over the acceptable body fat percentage. It is worth noting that four leaders were among this group.

The soldiers' morale in the company was very low. Lacking pride in the company, soldiers would not respond with the company motto at appropriate times. The company's breakup for the deployment created part of the morale problem. Many of the soldiers confided that they did not want to return to the bandits after the deployment because they were tired of being in a bad organization. Upon release of the name of the incoming commander, several senior leaders approached him and discussed their concerns about the company and stated there needed to be some major changes. The incoming commander recognized many of the problems in the company. During the deployment, the new commander got to know many of the soldiers in the company and had been pleasantly surprised at their overall quality. The soldiers appeared intelligent and hardworking. Many of them made great contributions to the battalion in other roles. Clearly they had potential.

Creating readiness for change in the company

Prior to assuming command, the incoming commander took stock of the problems in the company and began devising a strategy to change the company. He read leadership

books in the preceding months and focused on leaders who had either made significant changes to their organizations or had maintained a quality organization over time. The two most critical books from this were both written by sports coaches (Billick and Peterson, 2001; Krzyzewski and Phillips, 2001). The Krzyzewski and Phillips book was instrumental in enabling the new company commander to develop the company vision and the Billick and Peterson book provided an outstanding refresher in leadership and organizational change. Armed with this knowledge, personal experience, and years of leadership study, the incoming commander developed a company vision of how he wanted the company to perform with regard to tank gunnery, physical fitness, maintenance, and the family readiness group (FRG). This vision for the company allowed him to write his command philosophy explaining how he would lead the company toward this goal. This philosophy became an implicit contract between him and the soldiers in the company. After completing these tasks, he developed a change plan that would allow him to lead the company to achieve the results they deserved. What remained unknown at the time was the company's reaction to the plan and how to convince them to change without letting them think that the new commander wanted to change everything just for the sake of change.

Of particular interest in this paper is the realization that, after a retrospective analysis of the commander's actions, many of the actions undertaken parallel a widely accepted change model developed by Armenakis *et al.* (1999). What follows is an illustrated summary of the major change strategies undertaken by the commander, matched with the accompanying elements of the Armenakis *et al.* (1999) change model. The first section summarizes actions taken by the commander to create readiness for change, with parallels drawn to the readiness elements of the Armenakis *et al.* (1999) model (Table I).

According to the Armenakis *et al.* (1999) model, the first element (and essential first step) for creating readiness for change is discrepancy. Discrepancy is defined as the organization's recognition that a change is necessary. This is generally portrayed as a performance gap, which demonstrates the difference in the way things are and the way they should be (Armenakis and Harris, 2002). Once organizational members understand that a gap exists, they are taking the first step toward making change. As a new company leader, the commander recognized that he did not fully understand the internal culture of the organization. Additionally, as a new commander, he was concerned about his credibility (Kouzes and Posner, 1993) in the minds of the company's soldiers. However, it was essential to determine if the soldiers recognized the need for change.

Change message component	Description
Discrepancy	An organization's recognition that the change is necessary given the difference in the way things are and the way they should be (Armenakis and Harris, 2002)
Appropriateness	An indication that the change is the correct, proper or right change
Self-efficacy	An individual's belief that they are capable of successfully making the change
Principal support	Recognizable support of the change by formal and informal leaders
Personal valence	An indication that the change has value or is meaningful to the individuals effected

Table I.
Creating readiness:
the change message

In order to gauge the level of perceived discrepancy in the company, he met with all the company's key leaders 2 hours after he assumed command. As they gathered in his office, he introduced himself and summarized his leadership philosophy. Such practice is standard for most incoming commanders, but what happened next surprised many of them. He went to the white board and told the most vocal platoon sergeant in the group to identify two things the company did well and two things the company could improve upon. The platoon sergeant listed his items and discussed them. This engendered further discussion on his choices. The commander continued to go around the room with this method until the board was full of information and it was time to leave for the day. He had planned for this exercise to take 1 hour, but it took 3 hours and he did not get to everyone in the room. At the end of the discussion, the commander had a list of strengths and weaknesses with the unit, clearly indicating perceived discrepancy reflected in the fact that individuals did not like the way things were running in the company and wanted to change.

After the leader's meeting, the commander met with key leaders individually to gather their thoughts in a private setting. Most agreed that things could not continue operating as status quo. He also had many informal discussions with the soldiers in the company to gauge their level of perceived discrepancy. Most individuals wanted to do well and were willing to change, but did not know how. Some did not see the need to change and the commander knew that his efforts would have to address the perceptions of these individuals (principal support).

During this process, the commander was always prepared to produce empirical data that would support past performance and could ask if this was acceptable. Every individual in the company agreed that they could do better (self-efficacy). Since the individuals in the company had been deployed recently, the current global war on terror provided reinforcement that change was necessary (discrepancy). In their minds, many of the men knew they could be called upon at any time and they were not combat ready.

The degree of perceived discrepancy was not entirely unanticipated since the soldiers knew that organizational changes occur with every new commander. In their minds, change was inevitable but the question was whether the changes brought about by the new commander would be the right ones. This best describes the element of appropriateness, which answers the question, "why is this change the right change?" (Bernerth, 2004). A first step to create appropriateness was the setting of the goal of making the company dependable in everything they did. To do this, the commander focused on two main points. First, he told the soldiers that they were good soldiers (thus, he also began to build efficacy in the unit) and deserved recognition for their hard work and for their accomplishments (providing for valence to answer the question "what's in it for me?"). Most soldiers agreed that they wanted recognition for doing their jobs and wanted to be trusted. Since everything about the change would relate to these two goals, the soldiers saw that this new change would solve some of their problems (again, demonstrating the element of valence).

The next thing the commander had to do was create efficacy in the company. Efficacy is the individual's belief that they can make the change (Armenakis *et al.*, 1999). Everyone in the organization had to believe they were physically and mentally capable of making the company better. The commander stated that he knew many of the soldiers and leaders in the company and that they were all good soldiers, but there was something preventing them from working well as a team. In order to demonstrate their

ability to make the change, he developed a training plan that began with the fundamental principles and skills, culminating in collective task completion.

As an example, the commander set the goal of earning top tank company at the next gunnery. To prepare for this, he mandated training for individual and crew-level gunnery tasks. He coordinated for tank simulators and monitored the training that took place in them. In his first field problem, he set up a training scenario that trained tank drivers how to maneuver cross country. Then he had them move against an opposing force while trying to avoid detection. The culmination exercise for this training was a tank section maneuver exercise. This allowed the drivers to use their skills while platoon leaders and platoon sergeants trained on how to maneuver two tanks prior to maneuvering their platoons of four tanks. As these exercises and this training continued, the company began to gain confidence in their ability to succeed as a team. Thus, efficacy was being created. Additionally, because the training procedures were standard practices in armored units, appropriateness was also demonstrated.

The next element to create readiness is principal support. Principal support means that both formal and informal leaders in an organization support the change and demonstrate it through their actions. The challenge that the commander faced in this case was that he was new to the organization, needing to gain both support for the change and trust as a leader. The first step to gain trust was to demonstrate fairness and absolute honesty in matters pertaining to all organizational changes (Kouzes and Posner, 1993; Collins, 2001). The second step was to gain the support of all key leaders in the company. The commander had to leverage the trust relationship that already existed in the company between the soldiers and their leaders. The initial meeting was one way to gain support for the change from the company's leaders. Since they felt like they participated in the change, they were more likely to support it and to effectively communicate the change to their subordinates (principal support). In order to gain personal trust, the commander led by personal example in all tasks.

Since physical fitness was a problem, the commander began to conduct physical training (PT) with the platoons to observe the quality of their workouts. He also led company-level PT once a week to demonstrate the importance of fitness. The company had a poor maintenance program so he spent additional time in the unit motor pool supervising work on the tanks and other equipment. By remaining in the motor pool and checking on the vehicle maintenance procedures and processes, the commander communicated that he considered maintenance very important. Through his presence, he also influenced the other leaders in the company to remain in the motor pool, ensuring that maintenance was properly performed. The soldiers in the company clearly understood this message (McClenahan, 2002). Additionally, by his focus on maintenance (as well as PT), the commander also employed the elements of appropriateness (the right changes to make) and efficacy (by helping the soldiers to begin to achieve some successes), in addition to principal support.

The final step taken by the commander was require his leaders to be present with their soldiers at all times. He counseled all platoon leaders to be with their soldiers as much as possible, but always during unpleasant conditions or during difficult tasks. He then did the same and got involved in the task. For example, during a rail loading operation two days after assuming command, he worked with the a team engaged in loading tanks onto railroad cars during their task because it was the most physically demanding task and was one of the most important ones. Overall, the commander communicated the change

message and gained trust through the principle of shared suffering, an indication of principal support reflected in Table I. Because he was with the soldiers constantly, he was able to gain their trust and speak to them about the coming change. By the end of his first month of command, everyone in the company had a clear understanding of his expectations and knew what the organizational goals were.

Keeping in mind that a key goal was for the company to become the top tank company at the next scheduled gunnery, the commander challenged the company to succeed by telling them that he was going to shoot superior which meant he would earn at least 800 of 1,000 possible points. Then he told the crews that he needed three other crews to join him and asked who they would be. All of the soldiers responded that they would do it and would actually shoot distinguished which is at least 900 out of 1,000 points. His challenge was a demonstration of principal support and efficacy.

The final element of readiness is valence, which answers the question, “what’s in it for me?” (Bernerth, 2004). This element considers that all members of an organization will assess the change and determine its effects on them. If the change does not adversely affect them, then they are more likely to support the change. Members of the organization who will lose something as a result of the change are more likely to resist the change. This is a very important element of readiness because it most often follows the other elements evolving throughout the change process. In many ways, valence is a result of how well the organization’s leaders have communicated and demonstrated the other four elements. As such, valence can be shaped, but must be fully considered when creating readiness. In this case, the commander knew there would be some resistance to the change because of the way the previous commander had conducted business. In the past, it had been easy to do very little in the company and to not face any consequences. For example, there were soldiers who had failed four or more APFTs in the past, but there had been no consequence for their failure. After the first APFT the commander administered, he counseled all of the soldiers who failed the APFT and told them they would be separated from the army if they did not pass within 90 days. To these individuals, there was little valence to support the change (Spence, 2005). However, the commander knew that the majority of the soldiers were doing their best and wanted to succeed. By demonstrating resolve to evoke consequences on those who were not meeting standards, he affirmed that everyone had something to gain by doing the right things. There were incentives for doing well on the APFT as well, so soldiers had an additional reason to improve their fitness. He also made a point of telling the soldiers that they would be the best in the battalion if they worked together and achieved results. In the army, one of the few things that leaders can give their soldiers is pride in the organization. Soldiers typically want to be proud of their unit, but this pride only comes through accomplishing meaningful and difficult tasks. This desire to be the best provided the valence for most of the soldiers in the company. For those who were not meeting standards, the negative aspect of their punishment or pending administrative actions provided valence because they did not want to lose their jobs.

Application of the implementation strategies

The elements of readiness are shaped by the strategies employed in implementing the change. Armenakis *et al.* (1999) posited there were seven strategies to be employed (Table II).

The use of active participation by the new commander occurred with the initial meeting that he had on his first day as company commander. By getting the company

Table II.
Implementing change:
change strategies

Change strategies	Description
Active participation	The involvement of those impacted by the changes in planning and implementing the changes
Persuasive communication	Ongoing efforts of leaders to provide information about the changes
Management of internal and external information	Intentional efforts of leaders to provide information about internal attributes of the change and also pertinent information about attributes of the external environment related to the changes
Formalization activities	Includes organizational structure, policies, procedures, job descriptions, etc. Changes in the formal activities of an organization may be necessary to complement the requisite changes
Diffusion practices	Efforts by leaders to extend the changes throughout the organization
Rites and ceremonies	Official events intended to reinforce or promote selected issues of value to the organization
HRM practices	Formal activities of selection, compensation, training and personnel development, and appraisal of performance within organizations

leaders engaged in discussing what they thought was right and wrong about the company, not only was the need for change made clear (discrepancy), but ideas of how to change were brought to light (appropriateness). Additionally, through these sessions and a concerted effort by the commander to consult with the first sergeant on all significant decisions regarding the company the commander provided principal support for the forthcoming changes.

One of the change initiatives was to change the PT program so it would create the conditions for APFT improvement and increased fitness. Even though the commander knew what needed to be done, he still gathered the three platoon leaders together and had a meeting to discuss improving fitness in the company. In this meeting, he identified running performance as the most serious weakness in the company, and said that the plan must focus on cardiovascular improvement. He outlined a general weekly plan that increased running mileage and offered variety while still focusing on muscular strength and endurance. After listing the types of workouts, the platoon leaders had an opportunity to voice their opinions and objections to the general plan. During this part of the operation, the commander made adjustments to the general plan to reflect the group's thoughts. Once this general plan was approved by all of the platoon leaders, the commander tasked the platoon leaders to consult with their platoon sergeants and to create specific workouts that would fit into the general plan. Using past performance reflected the management of internal information on the part of the commander. Additionally, by seeking input from the platoon leaders and letting them design-specific workouts showed a use of the active participation strategy to gain ownership for the change. Finally, having the platoon leaders work with the platoon sergeants to implement the workout program in the individual platoons represented the use of diffusion practices. Diffusion practices involve how change-related projects and practices are spread through the organization. This occurs as organizational members learn about successes that have already occurred in implementing the change. Diffusion practices lead to feelings of positive efficacy, an understanding that

the change initiative is appropriate, demonstrates principal support through the message bearers of the change initiative, and valence, as well.

Because the platoon leaders and sergeants developed the workout plans, they accepted the change with minimal resistance and conducted better training (Roth, 2002). As a result, the company PT became predictable and challenging and the APFT scores began to improve.

The company commander also effectively used persuasive communication as a change implementation strategy. Communication is the most important thing that a leader can do when dealing with his subordinates (Luthans, 1998). They must remain informed and must understand what is happening as it relates to their interests. In this case, the commander effectively employed persuasive communication in several ways. First, he was completely honest with the soldiers at all times. He did this both to keep them informed and to prevent the rumor mill from spinning out of control and damaging morale, thus effectively managing internal information as reflected in Table II.

Similarly, he ensured the soldiers' family members had access to accurate information. Additionally, reflecting the unique relationship that the military has with military families, he gave his wife all of the notes from the weekly training meetings so she could publish and distribute a monthly newsletter to all of the families in the company. This newsletter also told the family members when there would be FRG meetings. The commander attended every FRG meeting and answered the wives' questions honestly and openly. Many of the questions related to the change that the company was undergoing. Some wives were concerned that their husbands were working later than they had in the past and were complaining about how much the company was running during PT. The commander answered all of these questions honestly by explaining the necessity of the change and how much better their husbands were doing since the change began. Next, the commander effectively communicated the change message through the use of positive and inclusive language. He always described the change as something that would make the company better and would allow the soldiers to gain the recognition and pride they deserved. Never framing the discussion around himself, he described all goals as the team's goals, not his goals. All achievements were the team's achievements. When describing good things, the commander always pointed out the soldiers who had done the best and deserved recognition. Such practices differ from corporate or non-military organizations; engaging spouses in the process of change is not a typical practice in such organizations.

The commander also managed internal information to see if the change was effectively occurring. First, he examined the scores on every APFT that the company completed. He learned that since the new PT plan had been implemented the company showed steady improvement in the scores and most importantly, the 2 mile run times were improving. This provided him with the necessary feedback to continue the plan and allowed him to demonstrate to the soldiers that their efforts were paying off. The commander studied reenlistment numbers and found that he was consistently reenlisting 200 percent of his assigned reenlistment mission. The interesting fact was that he had not specifically addressed reenlistment and had not deliberately followed the procedures in the reenlistment plan. However, through his communication with and knowledge of the soldiers, he created the conditions for soldiers to want to remain in the army.

A powerful signal that the commander had effectively changed the organization occurred was when a soldier from another battalion reenlisted on the conditions that he

would be transferred into the bandits. The commander also managed the gunnery data and concluded that the company was positively changing when they earned the top tank company honors and several other achievements during a five-month period of gunneries. These improvements and several others had earned the company a good reputation. The commander knew this based upon feedback from his superiors, and from comments made by other soldiers about the company. The company received the tough missions and soldiers were consistently asking to join the company.

Another change strategy that the commander effectively employed was that of rites and ceremonies. Rites and ceremonies influence and reinforce a change in an organization (Armenakis *et al.*, 1999) and demonstrate what is important to the organization. In the bandits, the commander publicly recognized soldiers who did well. Soldiers who met certain standards in the PT program earned time off and were publicly recognized for their improvement in front of the entire company. Soldiers reenlisted and were promoted in public settings. All of these actions created positive valence. These ceremonies were well planned and family members were encouraged to attend.

The commander also recognized the family's contributions to the soldier's success at these ceremonies. For gunnery, the battalion had public ceremonies to recognize the significant accomplishments and the company commander sought more ways to recognize his soldiers. He discovered an overlooked policy in the gunnery standing operating procedure that set conditions for soldiers to earn recognition from the commanding general. He told the soldiers what they had to do to accomplish these tasks and when they did it, he coordinated for the general to come to the company to award the soldiers. This ceremony was quite meaningful to the company because no one had ever met this standard and been recognized for it in the past.

One other ceremony that the company began was that of the "hail and farewell." In this ceremony, the company and families would gather and formally welcome new members of the company and would formally say good-bye to members who were leaving. These ceremonies ensured that everyone would feel welcome and feel like part of the team.

The final ceremony that the commander employed was the annual company luau. While there were many parties throughout the year, the luau was unique because it was a very high-quality event and it was cost-free to all of the soldiers. Through fund-raising and donations the luau had over a \$2,000 budget and was a way to show the leadership's appreciation for the company's hard work.

Armenakis *et al.* (1999) define formalization activities in terms of organizational structure, policies, procedures, job descriptions, etc. Typically, such changes occur at the organizational level and impact all within the organization. For this change, while the commander could not change army policies and organizational structure, he was able to implement new local policies and procedures that had a positive effect on the tank company. For example, improvement was gained in PT scores by the implementation of a new workout program. New policies reflected in the use of various rites and ceremonies to reward high-performing soldiers also were an application of this strategy. Finally, creating a process to engage family members in supporting the soldiers in becoming high-performing soldiers reflected a particularly creative use of the formalization activities strategy.

The final change strategy that the commander used to implement the change was through the use of the human resource management (HRM) practices. There are four HRM practices and the commander applied all four of them in changing the company.

The practices are selection, training and development, performance appraisal, and compensation.

Selection focuses on getting the right people in the right positions and on removing people who are not positively contributing to the organization's success. Upon taking command, the commander knew there were some personnel problems in the company. He knew some soldiers from their reputations and others from their inability to perform. For example, one soldier had failed to qualify his tank in the last four gunneries. He clearly was not going to improve and needed to find another job. With the battalion commander's approval, the company commander removed that non-commissioned officer (NCO) and gave the tank commander's position to a more qualified soldier. When removing that NCO, the commander was compassionate and helped him find another job in the battalion for which he was more suited, which allowed him to retain some of his dignity.

The commander also used the HRM practice of training and development. Through this practice, the commander ensured both the immediate success of the change and ensured he had sufficient depth to maintain the change over time as personnel moved out of the company through natural military attrition. In the army tasks are broken into three echelons. The first echelon involves individual tasks, the second echelon is leader tasks, and the last echelon is concerned with collective tasks. Leaders have to be proficient in all of these tasks, but need to have a firm foundation before attempting to learn and master collective tasks. In the bandits, the commander implemented a training program that initially focused on individual tasks. Simultaneously, he trained leaders in their tasks through a professional development system and additional training conducted after traditional duty hours. This training ensured that collective training would be most effective and the training value would be maximized in every training event.

Performance appraisals are another aspect of HRM practices that the commander employed in the bandits. The army has a built in process for performance appraisals, but it is not often used as effectively as possible. The commander insisted that leaders at all levels in the company give their subordinates regular formal counseling on their performance. This counseling was required in all cases of misconduct or when a soldier failed to meet established performance standards. The commander also reviewed all of the non-commissioned officer evaluation reports (NCOERs) for every NCO in the company before it left the company. He insisted that the NCOER be accurate based upon the NCO's performance during the rating period. He kept a log of good things that the NCOs had done and expected those things to be reflected in the NCOER.

The final HRM practice is that of compensation. Compensation has a direct relationship with acceptance and implementation of any change (Bandura, 1986) and it was critical to the transformation of the bandits. The commander used compensation very liberally within his capacity. In the army, there is little opportunity to pay a soldier additional money, but there are many other rewards, both intrinsic and extrinsic. Primarily, a leader in the army can offer his soldiers time off, official awards, pride, and negative reinforcement. In this example, the commander established incentives and compensation that supported the change. Because he was trying to improve the company's fitness and APFT scores, he instituted a series of rewards based upon APFT performance.

For example, in order to ensure the maximum effect of this compensation, the commander held a ceremony following the APFT and individually recognized the soldiers who earned these distinctions. The most popular of the incentives was the last one

because soldiers wanted to earn time off from work and could do so relatively easily. He also worked to get compensatory time for soldiers who worked over weekends away from their families. Additionally, the compensation for gunnery from the division commander was a very effective form of compensation that directly supported the change.

Results of the change

Through this process, the commander implemented many techniques that were directed at improving the company's performance. Since this case study occurred in the past, it will be useful to see how the intervention worked.

First, the commander identified a problem with the unit's physical fitness. When he assumed command, the company average was 217 out of a possible 300 points. Eleven soldiers failed the first APFT that he administered. Only two soldiers earned the army physical fitness badge (APFB). Once the commander implemented the new PT program, the company began to improve. Ten months after beginning the program, the company APFT average was 252, with only one failure and seven soldiers earning the APFB. The company also experienced fewer fallouts during long runs and there were fewer soldiers on the overweight program.

Regarding the company's gunnery scores, the company made significant improvements. After the commander assumed command, the company went to gunnery several times. The company earned the top tank company award three months after the commander assumed leadership of the company and repeated the performance six months later.

The company's next major problem was that of maintenance. Through hard work and diligent focus, the company maintained an OR above 90 percent for 12 consecutive months and had the highest monthly OR of the 12 tank companies on the assigned depot three times. Most significant, the company always had tanks to train on. Part of the commanding general's gunnery award program focused on organizations that qualified gunnery on their own tanks without having to borrow tanks from other crews. The company had platoons earn this distinction seven times in three gunneries. Additionally, when the company was alerted to deploy to Operation Iraqi Freedom, it was the only company in the battalion that had 100 percent of its night vision equipment and weapons fully mission capable.

Finally, the company initially suffered from low morale and a general lack of pride in the unit. Once the company began accomplishing significant tasks, the soldiers became more proud of the organization. They would openly state that they were bandits. When greeting officers from other organizations, the soldiers would always respond with an enthusiastic "Bandits, Sir!" Through the course of the change, the soldiers came to realize they were part of a special team and became proud of their accomplishments. New soldiers were immediately told that they were now bandits and they had to meet high standards and expectations as such.

The overall reason for the change was to make the company more combat ready. During the period of the study, the global war on terror was beginning and the invasion of Iraq was looming. The commander knew that his company and soldiers could be called into action at any time. That call came, and the battalion was given a warning order to deploy in the near future. Handling the stress of a short notice deployment demonstrated that the company's change was in fact complete and working as soldiers and family members prepared for the next 12 months. The company had to adjust to a number of

changes, most notably deploying without its tanks. That meant the commander had to develop a training plan to train his soldiers and leaders to fight as infantrymen in urban combat. The characteristics of this changed organization allowed this training to occur and allowed the soldiers to be trained in additional tasks. As a result of this training and because of the change that had occurred in the company, they were assigned to the most dangerous part of the Iraqi city of Ramadi. In two short months, the company made considerable progress in their area of operations (AO) by reducing violence, capturing insurgents, installing a working police department, and improving security for all residents of the AO. In those two months, the company did not suffer a single casualty.

Conclusion

While the bandits' change is significant and reflects a successful transformation in an organization, the company commander was unfamiliar with many popular change models. Nevertheless, in an effort to effectively lead the tank company through the necessary changes, the underlying logic of the Armenakis *et al.* (1999) change model was demonstrated as the commander unknowingly applied the model in implementing the necessary changes for the company to become successful. Although the commander was unaware of the model, he used all of the elements to create readiness: discrepancy, appropriateness, principle support, valence, and efficacy. In effecting the change, the commander demonstrated elements of all of the seven change strategies: active participation, persuasive communication, diffusion practices, management of internal and external information, rites and ceremonies, formalization activities, and HRM practices. By doing this, he was able to positively affect a change in the company that allowed it to succeed in peacetime training and in combat.

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