

Adaptive Culture? How does Military Culture Inhibit, Manage, and Engender Organizational Change?



National
Defence
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nationale

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I want to begin my address with a caveat. I am not an expert on British military culture, and as such, much of what I'll speak about is based on my experiences of researching the British Armed Forces for just over 20 years. I hope of course that my points will have some wider relevance, but it is the UK context that I have spent most of my time researching and that largely informs my understanding of military culture.

The observation that I want to make is about positionality, utilising critical analysis, and innovative research methods. When I began researching British military culture and organizational change in 2002 as a doctoral candidate, I quickly became aware that there were boundaries around who produced knowledge about militaries and how they did this. These boundaries largely relied on ideas about insiders versus outsiders knowledge and knowledge-production.

As someone who is not, and has never been, a member of the armed forces, I was an outsider to military culture. However, my doctoral research, and much of my subsequent research, centred the voices and experiences of 'insiders'; of those who do serve, have served, or for whom military service has had a profound impact on their lives, such as the family members of military personnel. In order to better understand military culture and organization, I decided that I needed to examine what the British Armed Forces and Ministry of Defence officially claimed about themselves, but also to spend extensive periods of time with the people who comprised the British Armed Forces to see how they experienced military culture. This entailed visiting and staying on military bases, attending different forms of training. It involved eating breakfast, lunch, dinner, and drinking and dancing with military personnel in different mess halls. Over the course of three years, I interacted with and interviewed men and women from across the services, and of different ranks, trades and corps. These men and women came from a range of racial, ethnic, and national backgrounds, and were of different sexual orientations. I spent time with members of the special forces and infantry, and hung out with cooks and clerks. I listened to those who had deployed - to Northern Ireland, the Falkland Islands, Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq - those about to deploy, and those who had never deployed.

My aim was to share these insights with military leaders, policymakers, and other academics to try to facilitate greater understanding of how individuals and social groupings constitute, negotiate, contest, and reconfigure military practices, culture, and policies. More often than

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Military-Civilian Personnel Integration and Collaboration in Defence Organizations: Insights and Recommendations from NATO HFM Research Task Group 226



CANADIAN
ARMED FORCES





Military & Civilian Personnel Integration

- Most national defence organizations are comprised of military (mil) and civilian (civ) personnel workforces working in partnership
 - Different and complementary roles
 - Same overarching goals (defence and security of nation)
- Civilian and military personnel often **work together closely**
 - e.g., in headquarters, on bases, in academic settings, on missions
- Many defence civilians are **supervised** by military supervisors (and to a lesser frequency, vice versa)





Important Distinctions

- Military & civilian workforces generally have **separate personnel management systems**
 - e.g., recruitment, rank structure & career progression, pay & benefits, ‘conditions of service’
- Military & civilian workforces often have **distinct and different cultures, traditions, values, and approaches to leadership**
 - e.g., military customs & traditions, language, mil may be more hierarchical, authoritarian, chain-of-command focused





NATO Research Task Group – *Military and Civilian Personnel Integration and Collaboration in Defence Organization (NATO STO HFM RTG-226)*

Program of Work

- Cross-national descriptive comparison (e.g., workforce ratios; demographics)
- Organizational policies, procedures, best practices
- **Mil-civ personnel work culture and integration – *Military-Civilian Personnel Survey (MCPS)***
- Application of key theoretical and conceptual frameworks
- Examination in specific contexts: e.g., operational context; headquarters vs on bases; military educational institutions
- Generate **recommendations** and best practices for effective personnel management in this area, including program and policy recommendations

1. Belgium
2. Bulgaria
3. Canada
4. Estonia
5. Germany
6. Netherlands
7. Sweden
8. Switzerland
9. Turkey
10. United Kingdom
11. United States



International Proportions of Civilian to Military Personnel

Nation	Regular Force	Reserve Force	Total Military Personnel	Defence Civilians	Total Force	Civilian Percentage of Total Force
Australia	57,994	22,072	80,066	21,818	101,884	21.4%
Belgium	29,681		29,681	1,709	31,390	5.4%
Canada	65,890	26,711	92,601	26,220	118,821	22.1%
Estonia	2,752		2,957	1,571	4,528	34.7%
Germany	186,459	36,116	222,575	94,708	317,283	29.8%
Netherlands	41,369	5,249	46,618	15,816	62,434	25.3%
New Zealand	9,006	2,312	11,318	2,771	14,089	19.7%
Norway	11,500		11,500	5,000	16,500	30.3%
Sweden	13,838	8,113	21,951	6,616	28,567	23.2%
Turkey	457,677	211,381	669,058	49,215	718,273	6.9%
UK	154,840	36,910	194,890	56,860	251,750	22.6%
US	1,340,766	839,102	2,179,868	724,782	2,904,650	25.1%



Topline Findings: Positive Findings

- Military and civilian personnel across nations reported generally positive relations at the personnel level
 - E.g., civilian personnel were seen as being both necessary and important to the success of defence organizations, both from their own perspective and from that of their military counterparts
 - E.g., both civilian and military personnel indicated high quality relations, good communication, and perceptions of mutual workplace respect
- Case studies in a multinational operational setting (NATO KFOR Headquarters) and in strategic multinational setting (NATO SHAPE) indicated very similar findings



Topline Findings: Areas of Concern

- Many civilians thought that working for defence affected their career progression and training opportunities
- Civilians reported that their work was disrupted by the military rotational cycle
- Issues arose in cases in which civilians were supervised by military managers (and vice versa, although this occurred much less frequently)
 - Understanding and adherence to conditions of employment or terms of service, as well as personnel appraisal systems
 - Military supervisors do not always appreciate the roles of civilian personnel or fully capitalize on their skills and abilities



“I love your bling.”



Topline Findings: Correlational Results

- Military-civilian work relations are related to important outcomes
 - Personnel (both mil & civ) who reported more positive mil–civ relations were more likely to be satisfied with their jobs, engaged in their work, and committed to the organization
- These correlations were consistently stronger for civilian personnel
 - Civilian personnel are minorities in defence organizations
 - Role of civilian personnel is often understood as *supporting* the military
 - Greater proportion of civilian personnel are directly supervised by military personnel than vice versa
- Nevertheless, optimal military–civilian relations appear to be related to important employee outcomes for both workforces, making these important considerations for the optimal personnel management of all personnel



Topline Findings: Qualitative Data

- **Challenges:**
 - lack of understanding of each other's roles, personnel management systems, cultures, and perspectives
 - fair/equitable treatment
 - military rotational cycle affecting stability of civ work environment
- **Positive aspects:**
 - Complementary knowledge and expertise
 - Diverse perspectives and ways of thinking
 - Filling complementary roles; Support to one another's objectives
 - Stability and continuity provided by civilians in light of military rotation
- **Factors for establishing and maintaining positive military–civilian relations:**
 - Increasing understanding and familiarity with the other's roles, cultures, and personnel management systems
 - Increasing opportunities for collaboration and integration
 - Enhancing communication and information exchange
 - Ensuring fairness and equity



Recommendations

- Given that the quality of military-civilian personnel relations are related to important organisational outcomes, this **issue should be a priority** within defence organisations
- Enhancing military and civilian personnel's **understanding of one another's cultures, roles and unique management systems** is required for enhancing their partnership
 - **Forums for intergroup meetings** should be established to provide an opportunity to discuss similarities and differences in their leadership approaches, as well as ways to enhance working relations and address stereotypes and misperceptions
 - **Intergroup contact**, such as through joint work and training opportunities, as well as joint social and organisational activities, should be encouraged
 - Shown to reduce stereotypes and misperceptions
 - Intergroup activities should be tailored to suit all groups, otherwise they can be counterproductive and divisive and serve to exacerbate differences
 - Initiatives aimed at fostering military-civilian familiarity should be implemented during the **early phases of individuals' employment** in defence establishments as part of their onboarding



Recommendations

- Focus on developing **super-ordinate identities** (e.g., One Defence Team) that emphasize joint military-civilian identification and include focus on shared values and common goals
 - Concurrently, it is important to promote unique subgroup identities (e.g., as military personnel or defence civilians)
 - Particularly important for defence civilians who are likely to have less salient organisational identities as compared to military personnel
 - Superordinate and subgroup identities should be clearly communicated by senior leaders and in organisational messages and materials
- **Senior leaders should play an active role** in emphasizing the value and importance of both military and civilian workforces and explicitly endorse military-civilian collaboration within defence organisations
- Military-civilian collaboration should be emphasized at all levels, including by those in direct supervisory roles
 - **Resources, such as training, tools, and instructional material** to facilitate optimal management
 - **Policies and directives** to provide direction to military managers of civilians and vice versa



Recommendations

- Ensuring **equitable treatment**, to the degree possible considering different personnel systems and operational requirements
 - Clear communication and transparency in cases of divergent benefits, policies, practices and working conditions is beneficial for dispelling misperceptions
- **Efforts to enhance workplace continuity and knowledge management, optimal handover of tasks/roles, and consistency in management practices** (when it is a supervisor that is rotated).
 - **Consistency in management practices** (when it is a supervisor that is rotated), including **handovers** among military managers should explicitly focus on ensuring continuity in the approach to supervision for civilian employees
 - Efforts to facilitate communication and trust among new supervisors and their personnel as expediently as possible may also be beneficial
 - If frequent rotations are likely to result in insufficient supervision or performance evaluation for civilian personnel, consideration of **supplemental supervision/evaluation** may be beneficial to avoid this unintended effect
- **Issues related to the management of military-civilian personnel integration and collaboration should be considered in the formulation of general personnel strategies and policies in defence establishments and international missions**