

Military innovation and resistance towards change? Well – what's the emergency?

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We analyze resistance to change in the Norwegian Armed Forces through an examination of three cases:

The NAF's handling of notification channels for cases of sexual harassment

A turn-over accident of a new helicopter in the Air Force in 2017

The collision between the frigate Helge Ingstad and the tanker DS Sola in 2018

Methodology

- Research question:
 - How can cultural aspects of the Norwegian armed forces (NAF) explain implementation of changes, or lack thereof, in three cases of organizational failure between 2017 and 2023?
- Grounded theory and case comparison
- Case selection:
 - Evaluated by external actors
 - Evaluation reports address a broad set of characteristics of the military organization
 - Three main branches (Air force, Navy and (mainly) Army) included

Case 1: Notification channels for cases of sexual harassment - ongoing

- Background: Surveys and single cases revealed high frequency of sexual harassment in NAF. In 2022, public scrutiny of alert channels found that misconduct had little or no repercussions for perpetrators' careers, whereas victims felt isolated and chose to leave their jobs and abandon their military career.
- Evaluation (of management of notifications of misconduct) by Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC)
- Examined the handling of 56 cases of notifications about sexual harassment between 2020 and 2023



Case 2: 'Helge Ingstad' 2018

- Background: Collision between the frigate Helge Ingstad and tanker DS Sola in Hjeltefjorden, at night November 2018. Could easily have been fatal. Frigate lost. Captain of vessel on trial for criminal negligence.
- Evaluated by Norwegian Safety Investigation Authority
- Investigated all parties to the accident: frigate, tanker and sea traffic central



Case 3: Helicopter turn-over 2017



- Background: In-phasing of new rescue helicopter in 2017. During a start-up procedure, the helicopter unexpectedly lifted off ground and turned over. No personal injuries.
- Evaluated by Norwegian Safety Investigation Authority
- Examined the entire in-phasing process, including training by the helicopter producer, leading up to the accident.

Main findings: explaining organizational malfunction

- Accepting insufficient education and training on the ground level
- Accepting lacking, inadequate or false procedures/regulations
- Pulverized lines of responsibility
- Too much responsibility placed at the lowest level in the organization/poor knowledge about challenges at the executing level at higher levels/insufficient communication between levels
- “Lean manning” and capacity

Discussion: explaining military culture to support organizational change

- The culture of the NAF is characterised by a strong will to act, rather than to halt or withdraw, which inadvertently supports change
- Changes related to core functions were given priority over more administrative tasks
- Slow response to malfunctioning notification procedures were primarily the result of a lack of understanding of the problem at hand
- Great distance between situational understanding in top and ground levels hinders organizational oversight, conceals deficiencies, and creates an organization which to some extent rely on blind trust in own and others abilities

MAIN CONCLUSION: «PRESS ON!»

There is a cultural element in the NAF to “press on regardless” – of lacking procedures, manuals, knowledge, experience and so on. At the ground level, to press on implies to continue operations despite acknowledged shortages. At the higher levels, to press on implies accepting a lack of oversight and knowledge about the state of affairs in the lower parts of the organization. In such a culture, the challenge is not to induce a culture that support change, but to induce a culture that tempers the desire for change and makes sure that change is diverted in the right direction.