

Chapter 7 – DISCUSSION

by

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7.1 GENERAL CONTRIBUTION

The NATO HFM-163 Task Group developed and tested a model of organisational effectiveness in operational NATO Headquarters (HQs). The model included input factors, the operative goals of the organisation, and the relationships between the input factors and operative goals. Initial interviews conducted with military Subject-Matter Experts (SMEs) highlighted structure and processes, people, and culture as important input factors to consider. Effective and timely decision making, information sharing, and shared awareness of task/responsibilities were identified as important operative goals. These aspects were in line with existing general and military models of organisational effectiveness, but our model also emphasised factors of particular relevance to a military HQ, such as rotation practices. The discussion primarily focuses on the second of the two tasks undertaken by the HFM-163 Task Group:

- Investigate potential models and tools for understanding, explaining, and measuring different aspects of effective adaptation and cooperation in multi-national coalitions.
- Make recommendations regarding improvement of education and training of NATO and partner countries' militaries for coalition operations.

We hypothesised the relationships among the input factors and operative goals. Largely, our quantitative results supported our hypotheses, although some did not. Our qualitative results also revealed the importance of the input factors in detecting organisational strengths and weaknesses. The recommendations focus on setting goals for a HQ, leadership and trust factors, and cultural awareness training.

In the following sections, the empirical findings are discussed in more detail including limitations of this study and implications for practice and possibilities for future research are highlighted.

7.2 DISCUSSION OF MAIN FINDINGS

The participants rated the structure of the HQ as less (vs. more) organic, about average in terms of its differentiation and rotation practices, and above average on its flexibility, transformational leadership, team trust, improvement orientation, and openness to diversity. They also perceived the KFOR HQ as operating with above average decision making, information sharing, and shared awareness.

These ratings provide a context to better understand our findings. In this section, we contrast and discuss the quantitative and qualitative in depth-interview findings from the KFOR HQ.

7.2.1 Structure and Process

The hierarchical regression models showed that flexibility was a significant, positive, predictor of effective and timely decision making and shared awareness within the HQ. The set of structure and process variables (i.e., organic, flexibility, and differentiation), entered first in the models, explained a large proportion (i.e., between 29% and 42%) of the variance in the output variables.

Surprisingly, however, the organic variable was not aligned in the expected ways with the flexibility and operational goal variables (i.e., decision making, information sharing, and shared awareness). A less organic organisation was related to greater flexibility and attainment of the operational goals than was a more

organic organisation. The moderating analyses with Power distance (Pd) and alignment (i.e., the alignment between the structure and processes) did not yield any significant results, and could not explain these surprising results.

A possible explanation for our unexpected quantitative results is that the national cultural composition of the respondents affected the results. High Pd defines a culture where people are used to working in hierarchic and centralised organisations [37],[38]. The level of Pd of our respondents may be considered relatively high ($M = 48.4$), or, in any case, too high for the personnel to be familiar with of the concept of an organic organisation and efficiently conduct their work in such an organisation. This explanation is supported by previous research. Results from three different military samples at both the HQ and tactical levels involving low-Pd samples demonstrated the opposite relationships of what we found here, that is, a flat structure and decentralised processes led to increased flexibility and more effective information sharing and decision making [13].

Some support for the explanation that level of power distance influence perception of structure was also demonstrated in the follow-up hierarchical regression and simple slopes analyses conducted, where the organic variable components, structure and processes, were analysed as separate variables. These analyses revealed that Pd was a significant moderator of the relationship between a flat structure and flexibility. The flat structure variable was a positive predictor of flexibility only in low-Pd cultures.

The fact that the qualitative analyses were conducted separately for the organic variable components and that previous research suggested that structure and processes should be seen as separate variables (e.g., [30],[78], see also Chapter 3), motivated these quantitative additional analyses to better understand our main results pertaining to the organic variable.

These hierarchical regression analyses also revealed that decentralised processes showed a consistent, strongly negative and significant relationship to flexibility as well as all of the operational goals variables. Flat structure, on the other hand, demonstrated a positive tendency – albeit not significant – in its relationships to two out of three output measures. Hence, the negative relationships between the organic variable and the operative goals seem to result from the decentralised processes component of the construct.

Overall, the interviewees had a greater number of mixed views with respect to the factors related to structure and processes than they did with respect to the factors related to people and culture. Their opinions on the appropriate structure, role specialisation, flexibility, and how these variables affected effectiveness varied, while the responses for the other factors were relatively homogenous. One reason for this diversity may be that the NATO HQ had recently undergone a structural change. The change involved personnel reduction and a move from a less active role in peacekeeping, thereby possibly affecting the HQ's working processes and division of labour.

Drawing on other organisational research, what is considered to be the most efficient organisational structure, may vary with the degree of task complexity. Less complex tasks might be in need of a less organic or networked structure, whereas, more complex tasks might need a more networked structure [64]. Kosovo might entail less complex tasks than Afghanistan, for instance, and necessitate lower degrees of organic structures. This notion constitutes another alternative explanation for the surprising finding that a less organic organisation was related to greater flexibility and attainment of the operational goals.

7.2.2 People

The hierarchical regression models indicated that transformational leadership was a significant, positive, predictor of effective and timely decision making and information sharing within the HQ. The set of people variables (i.e., transformational leadership and rotation practices), entered second in the models, explained a moderate-to-large proportion (i.e., between 4% and 23%) of the variance in the output variables above and beyond that explained by the structure and process variables.

The interview results also reflected the importance of leadership and its links to the operative goals. The interviewees had a remarkably homogenous view of what constituted effective leadership and specifically mentioned the relationship between leadership and the operative goals. A leadership style that was included at a social level was seen to influence information sharing and decision making positively.

This finding resonates with previous research regarding leadership style. Previous studies suggest that military leaders are not merely engaging in planning and analytic thinking. Resteigne and Soeters (2009) [60], studying military leaders at Kabul Airport, found that they often act according to their intuition as well as spend a lot of time building interpersonal relationships. Besides the particularities described by the transformational leadership style, what is also specific to operational HQs is the environmental context and the need to be able to switch immediately from ordinary to crisis management and adapt their leadership accordingly.

Another people factor that the interviewees particularly emphasised was pre-deployment training as a means to reduce the loss in effectiveness caused by the frequent rotations of personnel. Interviewees also mentioned previous experiences and skills as vital to increased effectiveness. The people factor can be enhanced with other aspects of individual competence and training.

7.2.3 Culture

The hierarchical regression models indicated that team trust was a significant, positive, predictor of all of the output factors. Improvement orientation was also a significant, positive, predictor of shared awareness of tasks and responsibilities. The set of culture variables (i.e., team trust, improvement orientation, and openness to diversity), entered third in the models, explained a moderate proportion (i.e., between 4% and 11%) of the variance in the output variables above and beyond that explained by the structure and process and people variables.

The qualitative results suggested a similar positive relationship between team trust and information sharing. However, according to the interviewees, it is also possible for this relationship to be in the opposite direction, with more timely and effective information sharing leading to greater team trust.

With respect to the link between improvement orientation and shared awareness, it is important to note that, from the perspective of the literature on organisational culture cited in the theory section, it is emphasised that attitudes, such as improvement orientation, need to be shared within the HQ in order to lead to positive outcomes at an organisational level.

From the interviews, we noticed that operative goals impacted improvement orientation. Ilgen et al. (2005) [39] suggest models that focus on how team processes develop overtime should carefully consider the possibility that an output factor at one point in time may become an input factor at a later stage in the ongoing processes. This notion appears to support some of our empirical findings.

7.2.4 Summary of Main Findings

Our empirical investigation of the model showed that at least some of the input factors (i.e., flexibility, transformational leadership, and team trust) were important predictors of the output factors. Of note is that team trust reliably predicted all three output factors.

We gained additional insight into the variables and their relationships from the interviews. The qualitative results also alerted us to the notion that the direction of the relationships could be different from that expected. Additional theoretical developments are needed to delve deeper into how alignments or misalignments of input factors may affect the output factors.

7.3 LIMITATIONS

The greatest strength of this study resides in the fact that the theoretical model was developed and tested via a multi-method (i.e., qualitative and quantitative) approach.

We decided to limit our research to organisational effectiveness of Coalition's HQ implementing Non-Article 5 Crisis Response Operation and to focus on evaluation of internal processes in the HQ. Therefore, factors external to the organisation and to the context of the operation were not examined in this study. Its primary limitations concern the scope of the model, the relationships between the input factors, and the various contexts of its application. The model explicitly concentrates on the internal relationships between the input factors and operative goals. This might reduce its validity in terms of different environmental conditions. For example, the same relationships might not exist under other conditions.

In terms of the empirical scope of this study, we tested our model in the relatively peaceful Kosovo and the KFOR HQ. Other dynamics may be expected in a high intensity conflict situation HQ such as ISAF or in a static HQ such as Allied Command Transformation (ACT). Therefore, the conclusions we can draw from the empirical test of the model are limited to KFOR and other similar HQs only. However the overall model originated through SMEs having served in Afghanistan and so there is a relevance of the factors in various military missions.

As we conducted the study at only one point in time, we cannot infer causality. Future research should thus conduct an empirical test of the model in a longitudinal manner, where the direction of the relationships amongst the input factors and operative factors could be investigated over time. In this way alternative models of causality could also be tested.

Finally, the quantitative results are based upon a single (i.e., self reporting) method of data collection, which might reduce their validity. Moreover, we conducted hierarchical regression analyses despite the small size of the sample, which might have led to unstable regression coefficients and, obviously, low power to detect significant effects. The results should be interpreted with caution until future replication studies with larger samples are conducted.

7.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Several implications for practice can be drawn from this study. Although some of the implications focus on one variable in the model, it is important to understand that multiple variables are related to the implications. The implications are not ordered strictly in accordance with the model.

7.4.1 Congruence Between the Way People Are Used to Working and the Way the HQ is Organised

Discordant attitudes toward organisational structure and processes will likely depend on prior experience and expectations in terms of the characteristics of a mission. We found mixed opinions of organizing from our empirical findings. This could lead to misunderstandings with regard to how to collaborate within a HQ. To this, several modes of enhancing the congruence between the way people are used to working and the manner in which the HQ is organised can be suggested:

- Set clear, stable goals, and, tasks to ensure common understanding of mission end-states among coalition partners.
- Apply a comprehensive approach to doctrines and concepts to enhance the organisational effectiveness of coalition operations.
- Harmonise national and NATO education and training systems.
- Increase the level of NATO pre-deployment training.

- Minimise the capability and technology gaps among the coalition partners, and enhance the “technological interoperability” in national systems to improve information sharing and cooperation among the different contributing Nations in the coalition.
- Eliminate or minimise the restrictive national caveats in the employment of the troops during the operation as a means to enhance the coalition operation’s effectiveness.

7.4.2 Leadership of an Operational NATO HQ Cannot Simply Assume the Staff Shares Common Attitudes

This concerns the structure and processes, people, and culture variables. Ensuring that every member of the organisation is minimally knowledgeable about those variables could be important to reduce the gap among different individuals with regard to common attitudes. Some suggestions to enhance common attitudes would be to:

- Get training in transformational leadership style.
- Moderate the impact of national caveats by a flexible leadership style.
- Understanding the planning process is necessary, but not sufficient for ensuring organisational effectiveness, leaders must take into account other variables (see model Chapter 3).

7.4.3 Managing Processes in a NATO HQ and the Rotation Process

One cannot assume that all HQ staff will receive the same level of handover/takeover information. This suggests that there are not always adequate levels of expertise among those starting to work in the HQ, which could hamper mission effectiveness. As pre-deployment training can vary and be difficult to change, expanding key leader training in the HQ to personnel other than the leaders could help train the HQ better. This could be included as a standard operating procedure in the HQ and best practices of key leader training can be drawn from NATO schools and HQs. Several points are related to managing the rotation process and the processes in a NATO HQ:

- Create cohesion and a common understanding by joint, multi-national, pre-deployment training when possible for all members of the organisation to include leadership.
- Adopt NATO standards as a must for all daily procedures.
- Harmonise the rotation timeframes among national positions in the HQ and synchronise the national rotations of troops to improve the organisational effectiveness of the multi-national formations.
- Build HQs as learning organisations – enhance mutual trust and confidence, encourage members of the HQ to freely express their opinions and beliefs.
- Improve the organisational knowledge through a streamlined lessons-learned process in the multi-national HQs and military formations. Introduce an effective mentoring program to support handover procedures for the key command and staff positions in multi-national HQs.
- Establish a process of social networking and the development of informal networks as a key factor for improving organisational effectiveness and successful task accomplishment.
- Establish a clear and common understanding of HQ tasks and responsibilities.

7.4.4 Trust

Training programs to enhance teamwork and team trust could be necessary in order to foster information sharing. The U.S. Navy program has focused on informal processes for enhancing information sharing. Further research in the HFM-163 context in Bulgaria on U.S.-Bulgarian training might also give input on how to conduct such training. Besides training programs it could be necessary to encourage more dialogue

and more connections among the various NATO RTO Task Groups related to coalition issues and with the operational community.

7.4.5 Reducing the Challenges of a Multi-National Context

When training for operational requirements, personnel should be trained in a multi-national context, in that, the teams that will be working together in deployment should also train together.

The NATO school key leader training may accommodate this. This needs to follow training requirements. In addition, the expectations individuals have toward the mission and the kind of organisation they prefer needs to be taken into account. Several points could be used as a starting point to include individuals in a multi-national HQ.

- Integrate the cultural adaptability education and training as a necessary pre-requisite to take a NATO assignment. Some tools already exist (See for example GLOBE SMART COMMANDER; www.defenseculture.org).
- Strengthen the role of the leadership in order to ensure, commitment to the mission, as a factor that shapes the organisational culture in the HQ.
- Harmonise the different leadership styles within the multi-national HQ.
- Enhance the individual, organisational, and national trust among coalition partners.
- Establish strict qualification criteria for the manning of multi-national HQs, including language proficiency to improve the contribution of all national individuals.
- Enhance the cultural awareness training of the personnel, participating in NATO multi-national operations, and the development of intercultural competences to improve the organisational effectiveness.
- Improve cross-cultural education and training, and build intercultural competencies among the NATO HQ staff.
- Facilitate to the maximum extent the information sharing as an enabler of organisational effectiveness within a coalition HQ.

7.4.6 On Diagnosing the Need for Implementing Advice

In implementing any advice for a specific HQ, it is necessary to identify the specific needs of the HQ. In order to achieve the goal of identifying these needs, the survey and interview guide that was employed in this study can be used in combination with other methods such as observation of the HQ, after action review in the HQ, knowledge of the HQs strategic political goal, etc. It is important to note that in any assessment, additional factors than those explicitly studied might impact the decisions that the personnel are able to make. This could include other such factors as the size of the HQ, staffing, and mission specific factors such as the operational environment. It is also important to note that reliable and valid measurements, or detailed observation, should be employed if possible to ensure that adequate data is gathered for the analysis.

7.5 FUTURE RESEARCH

Our research highlights several areas for further research. Some of these areas relate to the method employed, whereas, other areas highlight the need for further elaboration of the model.

With respect to the methodical aspects of this study, there needs to be further studies of this type to validate the model, and there is a need to develop an instrument which can be administered to other multi-

national settings. This can be done by replicating the empirical study at ISAF HQ and the operational entities which are under command of the HQs of NATO.

Performance measures should be examined in order to further test the validity of the model proposed in this study. These performance measures can be quantitative in nature in addition to the qualitative reports. Definitions of perceived organisational and operational effectiveness among those of the subordinated HQs and forces, as well as, cooperating civilian organisations, local police and military, the local populace and local forces, can also aid in the testing of this model.

In addition to continuing this research from a longitudinal perspective, a fruitful avenue of exploration would be to apply or examine these findings within the context of different operational environments and within different coalition Joint Operations Commands (JOCs). In so doing, we can begin to identify, propose, and demonstrate solutions to coalition interoperability inefficiencies due to human factors, technology, personnel, and procedural characteristics of coalition JOCs.

Several factors related to the commander's role should be taken into account in further research. For example, the different interpretations of effectiveness of various commanders, the commander's role in creating a suitable organisational structure, the effect of change of commander, trust as it is developed by different commanders, as well as the commander's role in enhancing information could be examined further. In addition, flexibility in relation to different environments, knowledge of own troops as a precursor to decision making, information sharing across boundaries, and how rotation processes may or may not impair learning are topics for further elaboration.

The operational environment can be included in future models along with other tactical forces, civilians, and adversaries. Other cultural dimensions such as Pd, time orientation, and national culture differences can be included in future refinements of a model and empirical testing. This could shed some light on some of the surprising findings in the model. Based on the qualitative findings some of the variables can be refined in future models in order to fit NATO HQ even better. It should also be mentioned that the direction of the relationships should be fully explained in future research, as it was not made clear in the empirical testing undertaken so far.

