

Developments within the military profession, ISA 2018

Training for a complex personality in military education and culture

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The military field

‘The technological changes of recent decades have led to a more interdependent and fast-paced world. This creates a state of complexity...Complexity means that, in spite of our increased abilities to track and measure, the world has become, in many ways, vastly less predictable. This unpredictability is fundamentally incompatible with reductionist managerial models based around planning and prediction. The new environment demands a new approach’ (McCrystal, 2015: 74).

Organization and management studies

- Colville et al. describe how 'organizations increasingly find themselves contending with circumstances that are suffused with dynamic complexity'. Because of this context, 'new and unprecedented situation gives rise to the need for novel identities to be enacted' by organizational members (Colville et al., 2013: 1203)
- In order to deal with increasingly complex environments, you need to 'complicate yourself', so that the variety of personality styles and ways of thinking evoked matches that of the environment (Colville et al., 2013, see also Weick, 1979; Gioia, 2006; Tsoukas and Dooley, 2011; Miller, 2015)

Leadership development and management education

- The question is 'whether we can educate managers according to linear principles based on Newtonian laws and expect them subsequently to operate successfully in a world of increasing change and complexity where non-linear processes dominate' (Aram, 1999: 321).
- Others consider the challenges faced by managers 'operating in rapidly changing "edge of chaos" organizations, and discuss how educational programs can be designed to engender the abilities, mental skills and dispositions required in such environments (Buckley and Monks, 2008: 146)

Focus

- While contemporary discourses on complex environments, often allocate an important role to changing the mental attributes and skillsets of people, there is a lack of discussions on how attributes and skillsets are invented and stabilised in specific ways in specific educational programs and practices.
- Furthermore, it is the literature seldom critically discussed what possible effects attempts to improve organizational and operational effectiveness through changing people by the use of images and ideals of specific types of character development have (Paul du Gay et al., 2018).
- Empirically, the paper investigates the 'turn to complexity' and the broad interest in people formation in the training and education of staff officers at a year-long higher command and staff officers' course in Denmark

Understanding the process of occupational socialization and person formation

- Everett Hughes (1928/2015), the term personality refer to 'what the human being becomes when he gains status...by acquiring a place in a series of subgroups with variant versions and refinements of the attitudes and values of the prevailing culture' (1928/2015: 23).
- By the use of the term personality types, I refer to patterns of identity or to particular categories of people, who have certain dispositions and habits in common (Amélie Rorty, 1976; 1988).
- Rites of passage (Van Gennep, 1960/1909) – persons 'in becoming'

Methods

- Velux Foundation Grant: 'Office as a Vocation' project
- Ethnographic fieldstudy of a general staff officers course at the Danish Defence Academy
- Six-weeks observation of operational exercises, classroom teaching, debriefings, official rituals, and social gatherings in various places in Denmark and Germany during the length of the courses (November 2016 – July 2017).
- Intense fieldwork provides an opportunity to understand identities in 'use in an ongoing system of action - reflections on 'becoming a staff officer'
- 26 semi-structured interviews
- Participants' blog posts

Rites of passage

- Moving from one status to another – ‘we now need to move one level up’
- From advanced land operations (ALO) to Joint Campaign Planning (JCC)
- ‘(It) offers rigorous education in the tactical and operational levels of warfare, staff procedures, planning and problem solving’ (Course description ALO)
- ‘Now you will experience that it gets really difficult. Suddenly you won’t have the appropriate methods or tools for problem solving and you won’t have the answers. Neither will we. This will cause anger and anxiety’ (directing staff’s introduction to JCC)

Changing a convergent personality to a divergent personality

- 'We have this idea of that we both as individuals are convergent and as an organization – the army – has a convergent character' (participant)
- 'To confront new threats and approach the increasingly uncertain environment, we as a whole need to be more divergent' (directing staff)
- 'We really need to change from being convergent to divergent, we are far too focused on solutions and goals...why not be non-linear, I mean be open' (participant)
- 'It is utterly important that we have a divergent and holistic approach, both in regard to the mission environment and the collaborative staff work' (participant)

Making staff work through the application of a novel mind-set

- 'I suddenly became very much aware of myself. When I am together with my kids, I'm a very open person. Perhaps I can use some of that here' (participant)
- 'I go out of this door and still don't know, what I'm suppose to do. I know the doctrines, the staff officers' handbook and I can produce an order and present it to the general. But when everything flows, I'm lost'
- 'It is funny, though, that despite the different methods and new approaches we apply, you will not see very much comprehensiveness or amplitude in the final planning analysis...fundamentally, we came up with a solution, which history [read: the invasion of Iraq] has shown us was a major mistake. However, it takes up a lot of our time to try to incorporate the approaches'

Discussion

- What gets introduced in the beginning rites, stays there
- Struggling with taking on an undefined, presently 'glorified' personality type
- The new personality type becomes an extra layer to the occupational identity
- This potentially disturb learning processes, socialization and it adds to a confusing occupational identity