

THE CONTEXT OF MILITARY ENVIRONMENTS: SOCIAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS

Board on Behavioral, Cognitive, and Sensory Sciences
Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education
National Research Council

Background

In light of changes in the demographic composition of the population in the U.S. and the embedded nature of contemporary warfare, there exists an urgent need to embark on new research programs to examine how behavior is influenced by context. Contextual factors (broad, macro-level influences like culture, socioeconomic standing, and demography) include the groups or teams in which individuals work, the local system or collection of teams or groups that must interact in order to accomplish objectives common to all of them, organizational factors that define or constrain approaches to performance, and societal factors. Contextual factors may also include both deterministic factors (i.e., those factors that have a direct effect on behavior) and shaping factors (i.e., those factors that have an indirect effect on behavior, including broader outcomes of participation in the military society). Recent inter-disciplinary work on the relationship between cognition, affect, and behavior reinforces the position that military policies must be guided by an understanding of the interplay of multiple factors as they affect the individual in a social context. Therefore, as the study examines groups, teams, systems of teams, organizations, and societies, it will focus upon many disciplines within social and organizational sciences.

The urgency to develop an efficient and effective research program on the influence of contextual factors on human performance is heightened by competing demands on already insufficient research funds. “The situation is serious because if these deficiencies continue, the military will lack sufficient understanding of human behavior in social and cultural contexts pertinent to their needs, and fall behind military forces of other nations and groups in this regard. Military funding must match the urgency and the nature of the challenges that the military faces” [1, p.17]. For this reason, recommendations for a future research agenda require an assessment of the funding level needed for implementation.

Statement of Task for the National Research Council Study

An ad-hoc committee of inter-disciplinary experts will synthesize and assess basic research opportunities in the behavioral and social sciences related to social and organizational factors that comprise the context of individual and small unit behavior in military environments. The committee will focus on tactical operations of small units and their leaders, to include the full spectrum of unique military environments including, for example, major combat operations, stability/support operations, peacekeeping, and military observer missions, as well as headquarters support units. Based on a careful review and collation of a variety of data, the committee will:

1. Identify key contextual factors that shape individual and small unit behavior. Assess the state of the science regarding these factors. Specifically, the committee will assess whether there are recent or emerging theoretical, technological, and/or statistical advances that have enabled or may enable new approaches and/or measurement capabilities to better understand social and organizational factors.
2. Recommend an agenda for U.S. Army Research Institute's (ARI) future research in order to maximize the effectiveness of U.S. Army personnel policies and practices (e.g., initial processes of selection, recruitment, and assignment as well as career development practices in training and leadership development). This is related to contextual factors that influence individual and small unit

behavior (including, but not limited, to task/situation, team, organizational, cultural, societal, and life cohort factors). In developing this research agenda, the committee will identify immediate research opportunities in the most promising topics; that is, those which are likely to have the highest near-term payoff in achieving organizational effectiveness.

3. Specify the basic research funding level needed to implement the recommended agenda for future ARI research.

Committee Membership

The Committee includes members with expertise in areas such as judgment and decision making, organizational behavior, anthropology, behavioral economics, behavioral modeling, econometrics, history, industrial/organizational psychology, labor economics, social psychology, and sociology.

- ◆ **Reid Hastie**, *Chair*, Chicago Booth Business School, University of Chicago
- ◆ **Catherine H. Tinsley**, *Vice-Chair*, McDonough School of Business, Georgetown University
- ◆ **Burt S. Barnow**, Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration, The George Washington University
- ◆ **Corinne Bendersky**, Anderson School of Management, University of California at Los Angeles
- ◆ **Edward J. Coss**, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College
- ◆ **Leslie DeChurch**, School of Psychology, Georgia Institute of Technology
- ◆ **Jonathan Gratch**, Department of Computer Science, Psychology, and Institute for Creative Technologies, University of Southern California
- ◆ **Douglas H. Harris**, Anacapa Sciences, Inc.
- ◆ **Lee D. Hoffer**, Department of Anthropology, Case Western Reserve University
- ◆ **Alair MacLean**, Department of Sociology, Washington State University, Vancouver
- ◆ **Charles F. Manski**, *NAS*, Department of Economics and Institute for Policy Research Northwestern University
- ◆ **Robert S. Rush**, U.S. Army Center of Military History
- ◆ **William Schulze**, Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management, Cornell University

Preliminary Work Plan

The 24 month consensus study will be carried out by an ad hoc committee, with administrative oversight provided by the Board on Behavioral, Cognitive, and Sensory Sciences. The committee will meet four times during the first year, to include a small public data-gathering event to assist the committee in developing its findings, conclusions, and recommendations for their final report, expected to be published in summer 2014.

Study Sponsor

U.S. Army Research Institute

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