Organizational Ambidexterity
Tackling Contradictions in Military Settings

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The problem:
Not enough soldiers... carrying out multiple and varied military missions

"I want a whole team of Michael Jordans who can play any position."

"...operations are often mixed military and civilian... The warrior ethos includes rigid dichotomies such as friend/enemy, victory/defeat, strength/weakness, good/evil, and life/death."

Schoomaker

Soeters
Ambidexterity
...and challenges “endemic to the military”

“The concept of ambidexterity is applied to contemporary military organizations by examining seemingly intractable dualisms...”

- Bonding (unit cohesion) and Bridging (engagement and outreach)
- Structural ambidexterity: assigning units distinct roles and missions
- Contextual ambidexterity: develop both bonding and bridging skills
- Negative peace: the absence of violence
- Positive peace: social justice, freedom, and equality.
Pragmatism Underlying Ambidexterity
Origins of Janowitz

• Conceptualized during the Cold War – United States Context ...
• Here, we apply Janowitz Constabulary force idea to 21st Century Peace Support Operations

“...The military establishment becomes a constabulary force when it is continuously prepared to act, committed to the minimum use of force, and seeks viable international relations, rather than victory... The constabulary outlook is ground in, and extends pragmatic doctrine.” – The Professional Soldier
Pragmatism Underlying Ambidexterity
American philosophy

- A way of thinking that emerged out of the U.S. Civil War (1861-65)
- Charles Sanders Pierce, William James...
- **The Chicago School**: George Herbert Mead, John Dewey, Jane Addams

**Janowitz**:  
- Advanced military sociology  
- Civic republicanism theory of democracy  
- Functional Imperative (meet changing threat environment)
Pragmatism Underlying Ambidexterity
Concepts for military use (1 of 3)

• Response to dogmatic thinking and continual change
• A continual process of discovery and doubt; with a focus on practical effects
• Involves: inquiry, critical optimism, cooperation, and sympathetic knowledge

“The uncertainties of warfare are so great that the most elaborate peacetime planning and the most realistic exercises are at best weak indicators of emerging imponderables. Dogmatic doctrine is a typical organizational reflex reaction to future uncertainties . . . The constabulary concept provides a continuity with past military experiences and traditions, but also offers a basis for the radical adaptation of the profession.” — The Professional Soldier
Pragmatism Underlying Ambidexterity
Concepts for military use (2 of 3)

Soeter’s pragmatism

- Dichotomies provide frameworks and illustrative examples that depict cultural rigidities contributing to violence
- Recognized reciprocal stereotyping... as “ethnic outbidding”
- Explored multinational peacekeeping operations that are imbued with inherent contradictions and tensions
- In fact: peacekeeping-like operations (Stability, Enable Civil Authority, Humanitarian Relief, etc...) exist at all levels of war and during all phases of military operations
- A key challenge: paradox of duality; too much flexibility causes chaos and too much rigidity prohibits adaptation
William James:

“A pragmatist turns his back resolutely and once for all upon a lot of inveterate habits dear to professional philosophers. He turns away from abstraction and insufficiency... he turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts...”

Brendel’s “4 Ps”:

– Practical – focus on problem, thinking and action; wedded to facts, not illusions
– Pluralistic – Diversity of perspectives; bringing in variety of views
– Participatory – Engage in discussion, listen, re-engage and exchange ideas
– Provisional – Learn from actions change when necessary

In applying pragmatism to the military, Janowitz outlined pragmatic versus dogmatic mindsets... NEXT SLIDE
### Operational Codes in the Military Profession (Janowitz – during the Cold War)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circa 1946 to 1989</th>
<th>“Absolute” Doctrine</th>
<th>“Pragmatic” Doctrine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. long-term political goals</td>
<td>Total supremacy</td>
<td>Active competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. political-military strategy</td>
<td>“Gibraltar defense”</td>
<td>Mutual security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. military strategy</td>
<td>Show of strength (massive deterrence)</td>
<td>Measured violence (graduated deterrence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soviet long-term political goals</td>
<td>World domination</td>
<td>Expansionist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncommitted nations</td>
<td>Potential enemies</td>
<td>Potential allies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"When Marines deploy into urban areas today and in the future, they will need the flexibility to address a wide variety of crises. In one city block, a Marine will provide food, care, and comfort for an emaciated child. In the next block, you will see this Marine with outstretched arms, separating two warring tribes. Then, in a third city block, this same Marine will engage in intense house-to-house fighting with hostile forces."

- General C. C. Krulak, USMC
31st Commandant of the Marine Corps
Implications of Ambidexterity

• Ambidexterity is practiced by the U.S. military in Iraq, since 2003
• If the U.S. remains committed to an all-volunteer military, then...
• Striving to develop “Pentathletes” may fall short of perfection, but seeking to accomplish it will require advances in:
  – Personnel: Recruit and advance in rank qualified people
  – Doctrine: Codify/legitimize the concepts that will change “mind-sets”
  – Training/Education: Practice the way you play; think how you act
  – Leadership: Remove the absolutists; promote “warrior pragmatists”

Soeters:
Leaders “need to have a broad view of their work, being culturally intelligent as well as being alert to opportunities and challenges beyond the confines of their jobs. They need to act like brokers, always looking to build internal and external linkages, and if needed they have to be comfortable wearing more than one ‘hat.’ Most of all they need to be able to immediately switch from communicating and negotiating to the actual repelling and use of violence.”