



SMALL WARS JOURNAL

smallwarsjournal.com

Thoughts on Advising Iraqi Security Forces Using an Organized Development Approach

Decker B. Hains

We have heard in some form or fashion that our exit strategy for Iraq is putting the Iraqis, more specifically the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), “in the lead”. As a Military/National Police Transition Team Chief, working with both ISF and Coalition Forces (CF), I often contemplate what “in the lead” really means. Do we simply say to our Iraqi counterparts, “you are in the lead, please let me know if you need help and we’ll see what we can do?” Of course not. Our focus cannot be just getting them to take the lead; rather, we must enable them to stay in the lead. We must assist our ISF counterparts as their organizations, i.e. battalions (BN), brigades (BDE), divisions (DIV), etc. continue to develop and grow. The goal is long-term stability and growth and we must focus on the systems within the organizations to affect positive and lasting change. In other words, to more effectively advise and enable our ISF counterparts, we must focus on facilitating their organizational development.

This paper will discuss the application of organizational development principles to advising ISF, suggest areas of emphasis that transition teams and CF should focus on to assist in ISF development, and will recommend the ISF BN as the appropriate lower level for advisory efforts.

Organizational Development

Although definitions of organizational development vary, all have one common theme—improvement in response to change. Richard Beckhard, a pioneer in field, defined organizational development as “a planned, top-down, organization-wide, effort to increase the organization’s effectiveness and health through interventions on the organization’s ‘processes’ using behavioral-science knowledge.” Warren Bennis, who in addition to being another pioneer in organizational development served as the Army’s youngest officer in Europe during WWII earning a Bronze Star and Purple Heart, defined organizational development as “a complex strategy intended to change the beliefs, values, and structure of organizations so that they can better adapt to new technologies, markets, and challenges. Clearly, the ISF must increase their effectiveness and have to adapt to the challenges of securing Iraq and fighting an insurgency.

Perhaps the most applicable and compact definition and the one that my Military Transition Team/National Police Transition Team (MiTT/NPTT) adopted is from Dr. Bill McCollum of the Command and General Staff College at Ft. Leavenworth, KS. He defines organizational development as “an organization’s short, mid-, and long-term programs and activities designed

to improve its capacity and capability to accomplish existing and future goals, objectives and expectations.” The short, mid- and long-term aspect provides a timeline framework to organize our efforts. Moreover, the definition includes current as well as future challenges.

Although many models of organizational development exist, six commonly accepted elements of organizational development are: knowledge management, communication and group processes, leadership development, leading and managing change, organizational culture, and organizational learning. These form the lines of effort in our micro-campaign plan as we facilitate the development of our ISF counterparts.

Knowledge management involves ways and methods that an organization processes information and includes both horizontal and vertical information flow. Knowledge management is more than just the raw information; rather, it specifically addresses who the information is shared with, how it is shared, and if it is shared in a timely manner. In other words, knowledge management includes both “battle tracking” and orders dissemination. A sign prevalently displaying in one CF BN Tactical Operations Center (TOC) says it best- “Who else needs to know?” and “What do I do next?” Knowledge management extends across all staff sections as the ISF process, and we track, logistics requests, maintenance requests, personnel actions, etc. We must continue to provide advice to our counterparts on effective knowledge management.

Communication and group processes involve elements of teamwork and the intra- and inter-working of teams. Communication and group processes include staff processes, “who is consulted when”, and how decisions are made. Although we use the Military Decision Making Process (MDMP) for our planning and the British use the Seven Questions, it really does not matter what system or process is used, as long as it is effective. We should be asking “who does what when” when we assess planning and executing so we can advise our counterparts on effective ways of working together as a team. Many ISF units are commander-centric and the staffs are in much need of development. We must continue to teach, coach, and mentor our ISF counterparts as the staffs continue to develop their processes.

Leadership development is a cornerstone of effective organizations and an essential element of organizational development. Leadership development includes the delegation of authority, decision making at the appropriate level, leaders taking initiative, and counseling. Some ISF commanders delegate effectively by ensuring their executive officers or deputy commanders can make decisions in their absence, others do not. Oftentimes, even seemingly simple decisions, such as submitting request for basic supplies, require the commander’s authority. We can affect change by advising our counterparts to delegate authority and I have already seen evidence of this. My counterpart has turned over all Sons of Iraq pay operations to one of his key staff officers. For counseling and evaluations, I was surprised to learn that my counterpart writes annual reports on all of the officers in his BN. Although I have not seen any formal counseling, I did watch and listen as he counseled another officer who came to him with a problem concerning false allegations. I have also seen my counterpart rotate junior officers to the BN Headquarters (HQ) for training and experience. We must continue to encourage and foster leader development with our ISF counterparts.

As the common theme in organizational development implies, leading and managing change is another key element. Both external and internal changes must be addressed. The ISF are constantly undergoing rather rapid change as they adapt, learn and grow while fighting the insurgency. External challenges include movement to a new Operational Environment (OE), which happens as frequently as once a year, logistics system support from higher headquarters, short-notice search operations dictated by higher headquarters, minimal infrastructure and force protection support, the availability of qualified leaders, and of course, enemy forces that always represent an external threat. Internal challenges include effectively assigning troops-to-task, personnel management within their leave policy, training management, and resource management. Some of the external challenges will take much time to address and may never be completely solved. However, we can affect change in areas such as assigning troops-to-tasks and training management. There are many ways to solve these problems. We must remain creative and work within their systems even as we gradually affect changes to the systems themselves.

The fifth element of organizational development is organizational culture which is broadly defined as a complex set of expectations, values, beliefs, goals, assumptions, attitudes, history, and behavioral norms that members share. Although there are obvious cultural differences between CF and the ISF, organizational culture is much more than social culture. We cannot use “culture” as an excuse for not assisting in the development of our counterparts. We can and should help affect organizational culture changes within the ISF so they become more effective. Characteristics of a positive culture include strong positive leadership, high morale, and the enforcement of standards and discipline. We can influence our counterparts in all of these areas in order to assist them in developing and maintaining a positive climate in their units. For example, many think the ISF always use harsh disciplinary methods indicative of negative leadership. However, I was very impressed with my counterpart’s response to personnel who extended their leave and were technically AWOL following major security operations. Instead of reverting to strict disciplinary measures and harshly punishing them, he appealed to their sense of professionalism and created a positive, thriving environment during the counseling session. He stated that the battalion needed them to accomplish the mission and he appealed to their sense of duty for the country, for the people, for the battalion, and for their fellow Soldiers/Policeman. He said he knew that the recent security operations over the last two months had been tough and he asked them for their patience as their duty would soon return to more normal operations. He concluded by stating that he suspended the punishment and expected them to be better Soldiers/Policeman. When he asked me about it, I congratulated him on doing exactly the right thing.

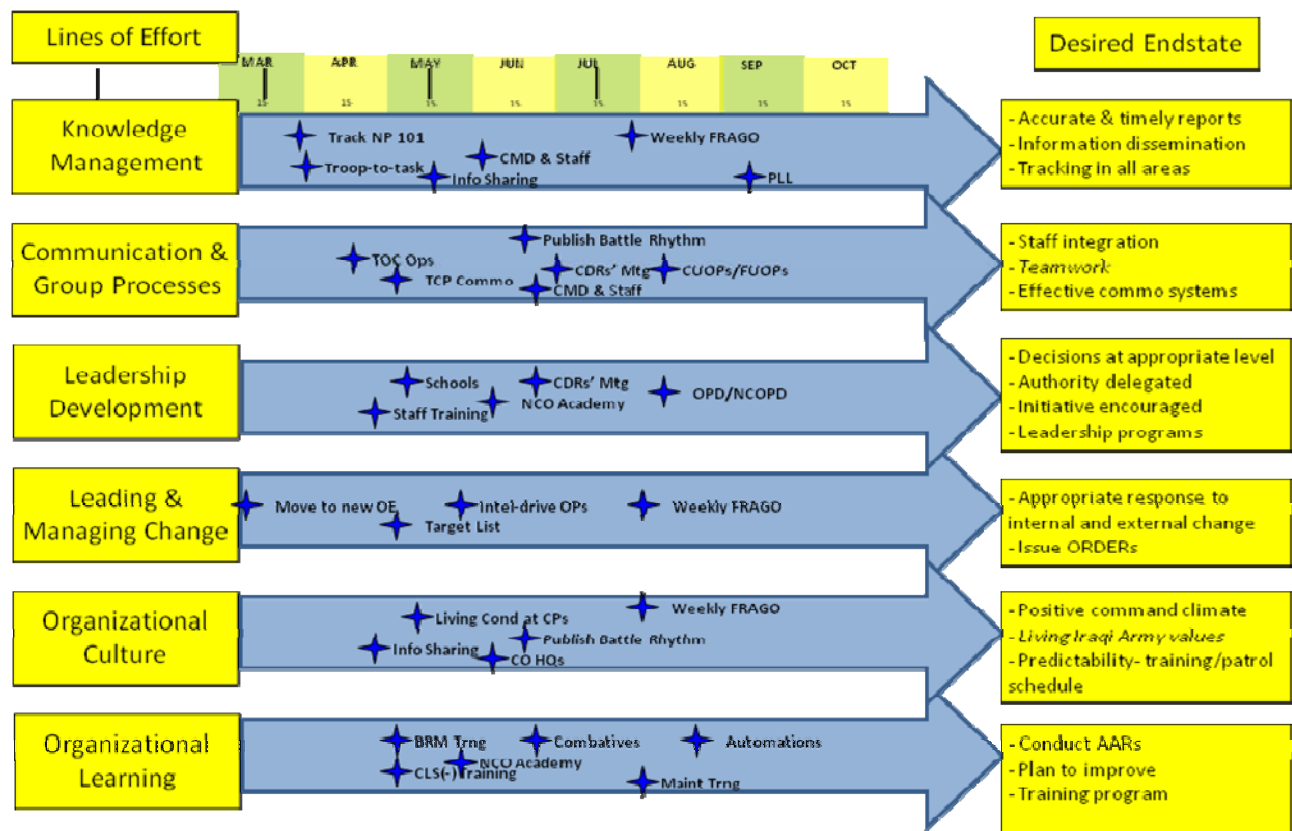
Perhaps the most significant component of organizational development which is essential for lasting growth is organizational learning. Learning organizations actively seek to monitor change in the environment and adapt and learn from change. In learning organizations, learning is continuous, knowledge is shared, and the culture supports learning. Characteristics of learning organizations include a culture that fosters teamwork, encourages initiative, tolerates mistakes, and leaders who are open to feedback and consider the needs of individuals. The ISF are undergoing rapid change and we must continue to advise them as they learn and grow. In essence, as advisors and partnered units, we are feeding their organizational learning and only

through continued advising and learning will the ISF continue to develop the capacity and capability to accomplish existing and future goals, objectives and expectations.

To apply the organizational development concept to my team's advisory efforts, I first defined the short, mid- and long-term timeframes so they had a framework to shape their objectives. These timeframes shift through the deployment and eventually our mid- and long-term goals become recommendations for the follow-on team. I then had each team member/staff section provide three specific goals for each timeframe. I challenge them to be creative and think hard about what specific things they can do to help their counterparts become more effective. I remind them that we are not trying to get the ISF to do exactly what CFs do or even use the same type of systems, but rather, we are assisting them in becoming more effective within their systems. Changing some of their systems for the better will take much longer than the year we have on the ground. For example, although a computerized supply system is generally more effective than a paper-based system, we are not likely to have Standard Army Maintenance System (SAMS) computers in every ISF BN or BDE motorpool anytime soon.

After each team member determines the goals for their section, I review them and look for common themes. We then present our thoughts in a "Way Ahead" brief so that each team member knows what the other is trying to accomplish. This greatly helps to synchronize the team's effort as a whole. I also remind the team that the goals they set are works in progress. I direct that each team member record weekly progress on the goals. This forces them to reflect on what they have done and where they should be heading. If they are not making much headway on one goal and see an opportunity for a different goal, I encourage them to pursue it. For example, one of my goals with my counterpart, the BN CDR, was establishing weekly commander's meetings that I hoped would lead to a weekly command and staff meeting. On numerous occasions he told me that he prefers to talk to each of his company commanders in sector at their HQs and not call them all in for a meeting once a week. He will only have meetings for major events. So far, he seems to be effective in issuing guidance one commander at a time, so this goal may not be realized with this commander.

The brief concludes with two summary slides. One of the summary slides from the briefing lists the elements of organizational development as the lines of effort in our micro-campaign plan and shows the specific events and goals that support progress to the desired end-state. An example is shown below:



The other lists the overall team goals that I developed by examining the common themes. The first three goals are specific to the ISF BN. The last goal is focused on the team internally, although it directly relates to our advisory efforts. The overall goals are:

- Develop effective systems to process and track information.
- Develop leaders, staff and effective staff processes.
- Establish and execute effective training plans and classes.
- Establish and maintain effective CF and team synchronization of effort.

Adopting the organizational development approach across the levels of command, e.g. BN, BDE, DIV, etc. would assist with the last goal- synchronization of the advisory effort. Transition team goals at all levels should be nested as best as possible much like we nest our own higher headquarters mission and intent. The new Advisory and Assistance Brigade construct may result in better synchronization of effort in terms of advising and the organizational development of the ISF.

Areas of Emphasis

In addition to the organizational development approach, there are several areas on which both transition teams and CF should focus to facilitate the growth of the ISF. The first major initiative which is already gaining ground is the establishment of joint operations centers at ISF BDE-level HQs. Operations security will obviously be a primary concern; however, we need to work through those issues so we can effectively share information with the ISF. We must also

continue to work with our counterparts on effective knowledge management in the JOCs/TOCs to include forms of battle-update briefings and analysis, tracking of significant activities, and effective and timely dissemination of information.

Another area ripe for improvement is planning processes. These take time and we must acknowledge that there are many methods for planning. Nonetheless, our ISF counterparts must be able to effectively plan and execute a wide variety of missions. Essential to the planning of operations is intelligence. We should continue to share as much intelligence as we can. I have even heard several CF brigade commanders say to the ISF leadership, “your targets are our targets.” However, intelligence sharing is not enough. We must also teach and model effective intelligence analysis, specifically the concepts associated with putting together the pieces to target cells and systems versus just individuals.

An effective Information Operations (IO) campaign is essential for the Counterinsurgency (COIN) fight. Most of our Iraqi counterparts understand the concepts. In fact, when I asked my counterpart about his strategy when they moved to a new OE, he said that the first stage of the operation is to gain the trust of the people so they will be more likely to come forward with intelligence and tips. He also stressed the importance of serving the people and that the people are the center of gravity in the COIN fight. Additionally, my counterpart was featured on a news story for a road opening in his old OE and the battalion was featured on the local news within a month of moving to the new OE. Clearly, they understand the COIN concepts and like using media. We can assist by helping to coordinate humanitarian assistance distributions and by helping to mass produce tip cards and banners as they develop the capacity to do so themselves.

Finally, as many would agree, we must continue to help our ISF counterparts work through the challenges and improve their logistics systems. Challenges exist at every level and we must be tracking requests at all levels if we want to help them affect change. At the higher level, we must focus on developing effective systems, and at the lower levels, we must ensure that our counterparts can use the systems effectively. The logistics problems require both top-down and bottom-up support and advisory effort.

Battalion-Level Advisory Teams

We need to have dedicated advisory teams at the battalion level for several important reasons. These teams need not be external teams fielded by the Security Forces Assistance (formerly the Iraqi Assistance Group (IAG)); however, a dedicated advisory force assigned to facilitate the organizational development of the ISF BN should be formed. The “MiTT/NPTT-UP” concept where most external advisory teams were removed from the BN level has slowed the development of many ISF BNs.

First, the building block of the ISF formations is the battalion. Although the ISF will task organize battalions outside of their parent brigade, the ISF will not task organize companies or platoons from their parent HQs. The ISF BN is the executing agent for most missions and we can and must be affecting change at this level. Current policy which eliminated the requirement to assess command and control and sustainment/logistics at the battalion-level is misguided. We should continue to assess ISF BNs in both of these areas. Command and control consists of

intelligence operations, command post operations, and the ability to communicate both internally and with higher headquarters. The ISF BNs must be capable of conducting effective command and control and I am quite certain that many ISF BNs are not as proficient as they should be in these areas. Moreover, sustainment/logistics includes supply, maintenance, transportation, infrastructure, and medical support. The argument that the problems in these areas are at higher levels does not alleviate the requirement to have solid systems at the battalion level. Furthermore, we must work to improve the system from both the bottom-up and top-down. As the systems do get fixed at higher headquarters, the battalions will need assistance in gaining confidence in and working through these systems.

Second, and perhaps most important, the ISF BN is not only the building block of the ISF formations, but the leaders and staff officers in the ISF BNs are the future ISF BN, BDE and DIV commanders and staff. If we intend on building the ISF capacity for the future, we need to develop the leaders and staff at the BN-level so they grow into positions of higher responsibility. Finally, simply assigning a company commander to partner with an ISF BN is not effective. Even the best company commanders do not have the internal company assets to effectively affect and monitor change for a BN-level staff. A dedicated advisory force is required to cover the major staff functions in the battalion headquarters.

Conclusion

As the ISF take the lead, we must continue to provide advice and counsel and we must facilitate their organizational development. The goal is long-term stability and growth and we must focus on their organizational development to affect positive and lasting change. We have many enablers to offer and should focus on joint operations centers, intelligence sharing and analysis, information operations, and civil affairs. Finally, since the ISF BN is both the building block of ISF formation and the current home of the future leaders and staff officers for ISF BDEs and DIVs, we must have dedicated advisory teams at the battalion level.

Major Decker B. Hains, Ph.D., PE, PMP, is a Transition Team Chief in Baghdad.

This is a single article excerpt of material published in Small Wars Journal.

Published by and COPYRIGHT © 2009, Small Wars Foundation.

Permission is granted to print single copies for personal, non-commercial use. Select non-commercial use is licensed via a Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and per our Terms of Use. We are in this together.



No FACTUAL STATEMENT should be relied upon without further investigation on your part sufficient to satisfy you in your independent judgment that it is true.

Contact: comment@smallwarsjournal.com

Visit www.smallwarsjournal.com

Cover Price: Your call. [Support SWJ here.](#)