

An Assessment of the United States Army's Organizational Culture

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The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief analysis of the United States Army's organizational structure and its culture and how these two elements impact its workers, associates and affiliates. This paper will first examine the Army's history, development and structure to highlight the origins of the Army's. Secondly, a brief history of the Army's organizational development will be followed by a close examination of its philosophy and supporting beliefs. Lastly, this paper will discuss the role of the Army's leadership, their response to critical issues and the organizational structure of the Army. An analysis of the army's top leaders will help the reader to understand the Army culture more thoroughly in the context of the Army's organizational structure. More specifically this section of the paper will examine the Army leadership's response to the current geo-political environment and other related issues. In conclusion, this paper hopes to highlight the Army's overall functioning from an organizational standpoint and emphasize that idea that the Army is like a functional corporation. This will be accomplished by addressing various key questions throughout this text.

### The U.S. Army Organizational Development

#### *Army History and development*

The Army's history includes many unique global events such as World War I and II, the Vietnam War, the Korean conflict and most recently operations Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom. An in depth study of these historical events is beyond the scope of this paper however, the origin of the Army is relevant in discussing the Army's overall culture.

According to David W. Hogan's historical text *Centuries of Service cited* on the United States Army's website the United States Army was born on 14 June 1775 (Hogan, 2004). Members of the early Army forces were largely volunteers drawn from local militias. In light of conflict with

the British Army the Second Continental Congress recognized that a regular military force was necessary if the colonials were to have any hope of standing up to the British Army. On 14 June, Congress adopted the New England army besieging Boston as an American army and authorized the recruitment of soldiers from various colonial states to form the Continental Army. This emerging Continental Army provided the permanent nucleus of a force that would be supplemented by local militia units. Congress chose one of its own, George Washington, as Commander-in-Chief of the new Army (Hogan, 2004).

Since 1775, the United States has grown from a loosely organized confederation of thirteen English colonies scattered along the Atlantic seaboard to a superpower whose influence reaches around the globe (Hogan, 2004 & Schrader, 2003). The U.S. Army has contributed immeasurably to the rise of the American nation, first as the shield of the Republic during its colonial days and later as a means to project power in defense of American interests worldwide. The Army's contributions, however, go far beyond the role of a military force. Its ready availability as a source of disciplined and skilled personnel has made it an attractive option for American leaders confronted with a wide array of nonmilitary demands and crises (Heller, 2004).

### *Army's Structure*

The Army, as one of the three military departments (e.g.: Army, Navy and Air Force) reporting to the Department of Defense, is composed of two distinct and equally important components: the active component and the reserve components. The reserve components are the United States Army Reserve and the Army National Guard. The President of the United States is also the Commander-in-Chief for all U.S. military forces. Although the President is the commander-in-Chief this does not mean that the Army only has one leader. Like many

corporations the Army has various levels of leadership. Although the exact details of the Army's structure are complicated and well beyond the scope of this paper the basic army structure consist of Army personnel who are either ranked as Officers or Enlisted (non-commissioned officers). The Army also has civilian employees as well as Warrant Officers. The Army has a well defined structure called a Chain of Command.

The Chain of Command is the military hierarchy for responsibility. It is the chain of commanding officers from a superior to a subordinate through which command is exercised. It is also referred to as the command channel (cited on [www.train.army.mil](http://www.train.army.mil)). The Army is divided into smaller units. A Division is composed of brigades and is commanded by a Major General. A Battalion is made up of companies and is commanded by a Lieutenant Colonel (with a Command Sergeant Major). A Company is made up of platoons and is commanded by a captain (with a first sergeant). A Platoon is composed of squads and commanded by a lieutenant (with a platoon sergeant). A Squad is composed of approximately a dozen soldiers and commanded by a sergeant or staff sergeant. A Fire Team is made up of soldiers and commanded by a Team Leader (cited on [www.train.army.mil](http://www.train.army.mil)). Regardless of component, The Army conducts both operational and institutional missions.

The operational Army consists of numbered armies, corps, divisions, brigades, and battalions that conduct full spectrum operations around the world. The institutional Army supports the operational Army. Institutional organizations provide the infrastructure necessary to raise, train, equip, deploy, and ensure the readiness of all Army forces. The training base provides military skills and professional education to every soldier-as well as members of sister services and allied forces. It also allows the Army to expand rapidly in time of war ([www.train.army.mil](http://www.train.army.mil)). The industrial base provides world-class equipment and logistics for the Army. Army installations

provide the power-projection platforms required to deploy land forces promptly to support combatant commanders. Once those forces are deployed, the institutional Army provides the logistics needed to support them. Without the institutional Army, the operational Army cannot function. Without the operational Army, the institutional Army has no purpose.

([www.train.army.mil](http://www.train.army.mil)).

### *Army Philosophy, Beliefs and Slogans*

The Army has many formal and informal statements such as slogans, mottos, cadences and chants that are often used as recruiting or motivational tools for new and existing soldiers. Recruiting efforts are on going and positions in the world's largest military force are regularly filled with new soldiers everyday. Some people are motivated by the money the Army offers for college, others by the job opportunities and yet others because they want to be leaders or fight in a war. A soldier's motivations are his own and the Army trainers are experts at motivating soldiers with a variety of techniques and training methods.

According to Army brochures, websites and training material cited in this paper "The Army's mission is to fight and win our Nation's wars by providing prompt, sustained land dominance across the full range of military operations and spectrum of conflict in support of combatant commanders" (<http://www.army.mil/organization/>). As evidenced by current world events, this means that the Army will defend the United States by following the directives of the Commander-in-Chief, the President of the United States. This aspect of following directives or following orders is an important aspect of the Army's culture. Consequently, soldiers are trained and conditioned to follow orders but think critically and independently, and practice autonomy in the context of the larger organization. These beliefs are reinforced by the Army's heavily marketed slogans and mottos for prospective recruits and through training for new and existing

soldiers. The ability of the Army to tailor a discrete package of force elements makes its land forces flexible, scalable and adaptable. The ultimate Army value is the value of teamwork. This value is central to Army's culture and is at the core of most slogans and mottos.

The Army's newest slogan "An Army of One" is an oxymoron in the sense that a single person cannot be an army. This slogan promotes the idea that a soldier is well trained and can function on their own if needed. This slogan does not promote individualism but does promote autonomy in critical situations. This concept, the concepts of empowerment, autonomy and belonging, are important to members of a team or group within a larger organization.

Another popular slogan of the United States Army is "Be all that you can be". The jingle in this message is resounding and rings loudly in the minds of U.S. citizens. Even though this saying is no longer used within the Army's advertising, most people still immediately recognize it as an Army slogan. This slogan emphasized job training and career opportunities; personal development and growth; and leadership development. Although these slogans are well known and heavily marketed, the Army's culture is based upon a number of other slogans, mottos and informal sayings such as "Kill them all and let God sort them out"; "Don't call me sir, I work for a living"; "Kicking Nazi Tail Since 1942"; or "Don't Ask, Don't Tell".

#### *Reward System & Status Symbols*

Information retrieved from the army's official website discusses the Army's system and structure. Status symbols associated with the U.S. Army are given through rank. There is a wide range of rank within the two primary groups of officers and non-commissioned officers (enlisted) soldiers. The highest position for enlisted soldiers is Sergeant Major of the Army whereas the lowest ranking or entry level rank is a private. Enlisted soldiers typically follow the commands and orders of officers which must also be extended military courtesies such as

saluting the officers or standing at attention until otherwise ordered

([http://www.goarmy.com/about/enlisted\\_soldiers\\_officers.jsp](http://www.goarmy.com/about/enlisted_soldiers_officers.jsp)). Officer rank differs in many ways from enlisted ranks including pay grade, insignia, responsibility and status. The highest ranking of the Commissioned Officers is the five star General of the Army. Training and discipline are two essential responsibilities of the officers. They have to ensure that their subordinates are well trained and have a high standard of discipline. There should be no compromise in these two fields as they are absolutely essential for success in war.

The different ranks within the Army are represented by the insignia worn on the soldier's shoulder. A private, the lowest rank in the army, wears no insignia. These status symbols are widely recognized throughout the culture and even within many civilian cultures.

([http://www.goarmy.com/about/ranks\\_insignia\\_officer.jsp](http://www.goarmy.com/about/ranks_insignia_officer.jsp)).

The general public is fairly familiar with many of the Army's ranks such as a General, Colonel, Sergeant or Private. Likewise, the general public is familiar with awards like the Purple Heart, a reward often given to soldiers who are injured during combat. However, the Army ranking system and the system which governs awards and recognition is very intricate and dates back to colonial America's European military roots. There are numerous rewards for various reasons. There are rewards for valor, for length of services, for community service, for accomplishing training et cetera. There are rewards given to individuals for their individual achievements, to individuals for their participation in a group effort, to groups for their achievements or to leaders within a group for the group's efforts. One of a soldier's most prized accomplishments is being promoted by an increase in rank and consequently an increase in pay, status and responsibility.

*Army Personnel Development*

Army culture is based on specific training. Army personnel go through exhaustive tests and training such as that found in their first introduction into military culture called basic training or boot camp. The infamous “boot camp” experience is a common bond shared by Army personnel. In fact, where you trained is often more important to another soldier than a person’s religion, race or even political beliefs. Because each person that attends boot camp (basic training) shares a common experience, boot camp is considered as the core of the Army team building that is required to build an organization that is as large and as functional as the U.S. Army. (Lodi, 1998)

Soldiers are required to be psychological and physical fit in order to remain in the Army. Fitness tests are administered regularly to members of active and reserve components starting with basic field and physical fitness tests administered in basic training. Since the Army is a fighting force its work environment is largely outside; however, there are classrooms and offices that still demand that rigorous decorum be observed such as seeking permission to be seated, orderly formations, set lunch times et cetera. On completion of basic training the army receives a trained soldier and a leader. However, each soldier must learn a secondary skill or specialty. This specialty requires additional training and is called Advanced Individual Training (AIT). After AIT, depending on their specialty, a soldier is assigned to a unit or group. From their basic training to their advanced individual training a soldier’s initiative and individuality is not altered or destroyed, but enhanced and preserved and allowed to develop along constructive lines. This empowers the soldier to become a leader who can look at a problem objectively and come to a sensible conclusion but still operate within the framework set up by the Army (Lodi, 1998).



*The Army's Organizational Culture*

The Army has common stories, myths and legends that are shared by its past and present member. These shared stories are typically based upon common shared experiences such as boot camp, or cleaning weapons, or the harsh weather conditions during field training exercises at specific locations such as the hot desert of Ft. Bliss in El Paso Texas or the steep hills of Ft. Dix New Jersey. These experiences make up the core of the Army's shared culture. The common experiences are vast and often personal.

These stories extend from historical accounts of the American Revolution to the Civil War. Survivors of modern conflicts such as World War II, the Vietnam War, the Korean Conflict, Desert Storm and other major world events have a common bond, common stories, shared myths and legends. However, no experience is more common than the encounters with your first Drill Sergeant during basic training, a G.I. Joe action figure or playing with little green plastic Army men.

Culture includes the customs, heritage and achievements of a particular segment of society (Geertz, 1973). In this case the Army culture is based on the total range of activities and ideas, shared by a group of people (i.e. Army personnel) with common requirements, customs, laws and traditions. These are transmitted within the group by the thoughts and feelings of the people concerned and are reinforced by actions of individuals and sub-groups to present a whole picture of a common and shared perception of a uniform blend of ideals working and striving towards the achievement of a common goal. This group ultimately working in accordance with and in response to a single 'will', political and military, attains the objectives laid down for it in peace, and particularly during operations in war (Lodi, 1998). From the highest position as the Commander-in-Chief to the individual soldiers still in basic training, reinforcement of Army

culture has been a key factor in development and strength of one of the world's most powerful branches of military. The essential solidarity and cohesiveness of the Army and its personnel presents a functional model of team building, leadership and organizational structure that is often emulated in the corporate sector (Lodi, 1998).

The Army expresses its culture through its shared and endorsed values and mission statement. Its mission is: To fight and win the Nation's wars by providing prompt, sustained land dominance across the full range of military operations and spectrum of conflict in support of combatant commanders (Lodi, 1998). The Army accomplishes its mission by organizing, equipping, and training forces for the conduct of prompt and sustained combat operations on land (Lodi, 1998).

The Army's basic functioning unit is its individual soldier. Soldier realizes that they are part of a larger organization. The personnel that make up the Army are employees of one of the world's largest organizations. Through advanced recruiting practices, marketing strategies, training opportunities and leadership development the U.S. Army has become one of the largest employers in the world. (<http://www.goarmy.com>). Moreover, the U.S. Army employs more minorities than any other organization in the world. Despite its diversity, size, and intricate structure the Army has a noticeable dominant culture. However, inevitably there are cultural conflicts.

Soldiers, equal to the working class in a corporate setting, are often in conflict with their leadership's decisions, philosophies, beliefs and behavior. This is a normal part of Army culture; conflict with the leadership and the manner in which the organization functions. Unfortunately, as witnessed in many of the world's conflicts, the culture of the Army includes the fact that soldiers must sometimes kill or be killed (Kazin, 2004). "Despite the grave sacrifices involved,

the battle against terrorism in Iraq and elsewhere around the world is eminently worth pursuing” (Rumsfeld, 2004).

This is a prime component in the Army’s culture; a soldier is trained to kill another human being through direct contact or some other means (i.e. technological warfare). Often dubbed “The Most Efficient Killing Machine in the World” the army is a functional organization the is heavily reliant on cooperation with an integrated team of other organizations such as the Navy, Marines, Airforce, CIA, NSA and a number of other entities contained within the United States government.. This collective force is respondent to the will and orders of its leader, its Commander-in-Chief, the President of the United States, George W. Bush.

#### Army Leadership and Responses to the current Geo-political Environment

##### *Leadership’s Response to Terrorism*

Military decisions are not made in an arbitrary manner. They are the result of conscious deliberation and consideration of the options available. Unlike military dictatorships like Cuba, the United States has system of checks and balances that have assigned the Commander-in-Chief specific powers. With its intricate organizational structure the President of the United States holds a position similar to that of the Chairman and C.E.O of a major corporation. Although the President is at the top of the chain of command, the Army has a number of other executive level positions; many of which are held by civilian personnel such as Donald H. Rumsfeld, the current Secretary of the U.S. Department of Defense and his second in command Paul D. Wolfowitz.

In a recent radio address on September 11, 2004 President Bush stated that three years after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 memories have not faded. "We remember the images of fire, and the final calls of love, and the courage of rescuers who saw death and did not flee," President Bush also said the United States, in pursuing the war against terror, is safer now than it

was three years ago, but not yet safe (Bush, 2004). He vowed that the United States would stay on the offensive until terrorists are defeated. President Bush vowed to advance democracy in the world.

More specifically, President Bush's remarks were directed at the current geo-political situation involving Iraq, Afghanistan and many other Middle Eastern countries. As the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, the President sometimes has made unpopular decisions that may result in the loss of life for members of the Army. Due to the diversity and complexity of the United States government opinions often differ; however, Army culture generally supports the idea of dying for a noble cause or going to war for your country (Kazin, 2004). Regarding the same crisis Donald Rumsfeld told the defense industry leaders in Washington "I am interested in the idea of our leading, or contributing to in some way, a cadre of people in the world who would like to participate in peacekeeping or peacemaking" (<http://usinfo.state.gov>). Rumsfeld, one of the top leaders in the United States is in full support of the President's decisions to go to war with Iraq in pursuit of eradicating world wide terrorism.

### Conclusion

As the world's largest employer the Army effectively manages its human resources through an intricate system and organizational structure. The Army's organizational philosophy, mission, vision and values suggest that the Army is a functional organization whose purpose is to defend the rights of U.S. citizens and protect the country. The method in which the Army accomplishes this task is often at the core of controversy; however, the Army and other armed forces have been a key component in the growth and development of the United States. During intense military training the Army reinforces its existence through establishing a dominant culture based on shared experiences, philosophies, traditions, and structure.

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