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Submission: Submission 2

Executive summary

This submission is the second of three submissions that collectively address issues related to ADF personnel (and unit) capability development; "Submission 1" Building Adaptive Capacity "Submission 2" Military Academic Faculty "Submission 3" Military sociology

Biographical notes

Keith Thomas is a Visiting Fellow at the Defence and Security Applications Research Centre, based at Australian Defence Force Academy (UNSW) and at the Centre for Defence Leadership Studies, at the ADC. He lives in HK and works at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. His research interests are primarily in leadership development and Strategic Human Resource Management.

Military Academic Faculty at the ADC

This submission is concerned with the development of intellectual capital and to a lesser degree social capital. It argues Defence needs to build a Military Academic Faculty that can provide the continuity and skills base to enable effective organisational learning, defined as the capacity to change existing "routines" and includes a merger of individual and collective learning.

A military faculty will replace the current problematic approach of relying on well intentioned, but in the context, novice uniformed Directing Staff (DS). This overall flawed "educational training" approach, as research suggests, results in more of the same learning that acts largely to reinforce status quo behaviours counter productive to desired change (Thomas 2005; Thomas 2008).

Learning: Ends and Means

The issue for learning, both individual and organisational, is to connect activity to "learning outcomes" defined in terms of desired "Operational (unit or personnel) Capability" (ADF(a) 2003). There are several crucial educational considerations:

" First, while individuals are given primacy in organisational learning development is not solely an individual issue. It also concerns social context, which is a powerful determinant of knowledge appropriation and transmission (Ainsworth 2002; Moore 2004).

" Second, conceptually development involves three parallel tracks: technical (theory based), social (business application) and self (transformative). While the first suits training, the latter two tracks require very different methods.

" Third, the ability to recognise the value of new or external information, to assimilate it and apply it to organisational ends (Cohen and Levinthal 1990; Lane, Koka et al. 2002) is important. This attribute, called absorptive capacity, is created and developed by effective internal knowledge sharing and integration. It is also a cognitive barrier (Minbaeva, Pedersen et al. 2002). If for example, people lack subject matter knowledge or intellectual capacity, it will be difficult to recognise

new information, to assimilate and then facilitate successful knowledge transfer.

As noted in submission 1, there are many reasons why "learning" cannot be assumed to be inherently good (Contu, Grey et al. 2003). In the context of developing essential cognitive skills, the practice of relying on generalists staff officers (DS) chosen because of their operational experience and leadership has questionable utility. Moreover, knowledge retention by DS is problematic because of high turnover and the routine of installing a new program coordinator each year, which commits the institution to incrementally reduction in knowledge, as each module relies on excessive process, with little internal flexibility and uncertain integration across programs. Other consequences include over-prescriptive practices (tick the boxes) and passive learning by students, who are spoon-fed, over-busy but under challenged intellectually, and paradoxically discouraged from thinking! The influence of social context is key and assessment practices further militate from learning objectives.

To cite General Petraeus, we need people who know how to think and not what to think (Coll 2008). It is time to challenge some myths and organizational practices.

### Officer Education and the Rhetoric of a Learning Culture

Leadership development is crucial to providing "an important competitive edge" (Gates 2001: 2). Similarly, Defence urges the need for officers "who can challenge strategic orthodoxy and create new practices" (DPG 2006). Conversely, how does the ADO perceive learning? Yet, as the Defence Learning Culture Inquiry report (Podger, Harris et al. 2006) reveals, there is difficulty in matching rhetoric with practice. The inquiry notes: "there was not a similar focus on the importance of the learners' needs, nor an orientation towards how best each learner could master the competencies required of him or her" (Podger, Harris et al. 2006: pg 11, para 46). The true nature of the learning culture is evident in the following comment:

"We also consider it is time to move away from an exclusively compliance and process driven approach [emphasis added] to a true values-based [unspecified] approach" (Podger 2006: pg v, para 10).

The issue is also more than a pedagogical concern; it involves an organisational tendency to keep issues and activity within distinct programs. The effect of pervasive thinking in separate programs or "stove-pipes" also has an interesting parallel with recent US operations in Iraq, where the lesson has been to "never again treat forging peace as phase IV or talk about post-conflict operations as if it was a secondary objective" (Kelly 2004). Effective organisational learning is crucial if this lesson is to be learned and diffused through military culture and related practices.

### A Military Academic Faculty

What might Defence want in the establishment of a Military Academic Faculty? Assuming primacy of desired learning outcomes and NOT staffing problem, the solution proposed is to implant a body of teaching capable, PhD qualified military academics on a full-time and part-time basis at the ADC. This notion, seeks to combine teaching skills, academic rigour and research methodology, within culturally credible and experienced ex-military people. Such a measure is a logical extension of the commitment by Defence to education and offers well-performed qualified officers a second career, instead of relying on academe or consultants.

Three key attributes distinguish this proposal:

- First, well performed ex military officers who post retirement are keen on giving further satisfactory service, but on contract (to avoid complacency and stagnation), and
- Second, have completed PhD's and are active researchers in ideally military related areas and with a demonstrated commitment to good teaching practices.
- Third, this Faculty works with and is not subordinate to the DS military structure.

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