



Organizational Discourses during Planned Change: A Resiliency Team Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Researchers have documented the hidden wounds of war and the psychological and emotional injuries that have harmed military members. This study examines organizational planned change to address the growing number of wounded warrior suicides. The purpose of this study is to examine a case study of one Southern State's National Guard (SSNG, a pseudonym) and its Resiliency Team Task Force (RTTF) as they grapple to implement organizational change. This study employs organizational discourse analysis to explore how individuals and coalitions form discursive identities to respond to the challenges that change represents. This study also explores the way discursive and structural contexts enable and constrain the RTTF and change messages as they respond to changes in the group membership. This study highlights the importance of viewing messaging as a process of information transfer as well as discursive constructions that have important implications for the way change agents approach issues of sensemaking during a change process.

KEYWORDS:

Planned Change, Organizational Discourse, Discursive Positioning, Ante-Narrative, Suicide Prevention, Resiliency

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I. Introduction

Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom represent our nation's longest conflicts (National Defense Authorization Act, 2009). Two million members of our Armed Forces have deployed for these operations (National Guard Suicide Prevention Task Force, 2010). These deployments have placed unprecedented demands on the warriors involved in the conflicts. The cumulative effect of these demands is tragically measured by warriors' suicides. In the five years from 2005 to 2009, more than 1,100 warriors took their own lives, an average of one suicide every 36 hours (National Guard Suicide Prevention Task Force, 2010).

The military actively undertook a comprehensive study to understand and address the growing problems of wounded warrior suicides. The focus of their study was to understand the risk factors that precipitate individual crisis, in order to provide critical information in terms of early intervention and prevention. This individual risk-focused program was conceptualized for early intervention and brought to the fore two opposing organizational identities that currently struggle for dominance in discursive position and planned change. The purpose of this study is to investigate how change messages position organizational members to make sense in particular ways and to take up specific identities and relationships that influence the way they experience change.

II. Review of Literature

Organizational change has been studied from three perspectives: behavioral, cognitive and discursive (Tsoukas, 2005). The behavioral perspective is the oldest and continues to be employed in mechanistic explorations (Kotter and Schlesinger, 1979). The cognitive perspective gained status in the 1980's as research began to examine individual and organizational information processing (Huff and Huff, 2000). The discursive perspective has a long tradition, but has recently been embraced by organizational change scholars as an extremely useful tool (Grant, Keenoy, and Oswick, 1998). Over time, each of these perspectives has contributed to the understandings of organizational change.

The behavioral perspective views an organization as objectively orientated toward individuals, structures, systems, and processes that can be objectively described and deliberately altered (Lewin, 1999/1948). Organizational change as other-directional, that is, others need to change through a series of successive states. Communication is viewed as solely informational. According to Tsoukas (2005) behaviorist perspective has four tenets: change is modeled on motion which occurs in successive states as external force is applied; the change agent stands outside the object undergoing change, there is no internal relationship connecting the two; the object undergoing the change has a particular structure that can be affected; the structure and the change can be objectively described and influenced.

This case study demonstrates how the Resiliency Team Task Force (RTTF) members' discourse displays a strong behavioral perspective. The first tenet, change is modeled on motion of successive states as applied by external force is represented by Section 733 of

the National Defense Authorization Act (2009). The second tenet, the change agent is the RTTF and that this group figuratively stands outside the problem. The third tenet, the object undergoing the change has two subgroups, the Southern States National Guard (SSNG) and the Wounded Warriors. Both subgroups are perceived to have a particular structure that can be affected. The fourth tenet, that the structure and the change can be objectively described and influenced represents the RTTF mission. While the individual members of the RTTF all have different perspectives, each member of the group believes that the behavior of others needs to change. In addition, the RTTF's mandate, the Southern States National Guard (SSNG) and the Wounded Warriors, is to provide a change model which supports successive change states as external force is applied. The order is given. The RTTF will execute the order.

The cognitive perspective argues that the study of behavior is insufficient to account for change. Organizational change is based on the individual's mental processes that create schemas and scripts of intentional action. Organizational change occurs when members change their minds: different thinking leads to different behavior (Gardner, 2004). Cognitive interventions examine the intellectual process and focus on how organizational members think. Cognitive communication is viewed as message creation that enables a shared understanding of what change means and how resistance to change can be overcome (Jabri, Adrain, and Boje, 2008). The Southern State's National Guard (SSNG) is intent on overtly obeying the proposed changes, but demonstrates covert resistance to changing their own minds about wounded warriors. SSNG simultaneously moves toward and against the creating of a training plan for organizational change. The training plan, which was created by members of the Resiliency Team Task Force (RTTF), employed the cognitive perspective, but a change in SSNG leadership prevented implementation of the plan.

The discursive perspective, according to Tsoukas (2005), incorporates behavioral and cognitive perspectives to create shared understanding, identity, meaning, and change through language. Tsoukas (2005) advises organizational change researchers to "pay attention not just to the mental content of individuals but to the broader system within that concepts are located and practiced" (p. 98). This broader system is referred to as multiple discourses. Multiple discourses comprise the discursive context for organizations and the success or failure of change initiatives will fall partially on the ability of these change agents to address the opportunities and constraints created by their discursive practices (Bisel and Barge, 2011).

Discursive practice is the sign system of human affairs, patterns of the use of words and their relationship to action. Discursive perspective takes the position that there is a publicly interpretable congruence among saying, doing, and the circumstances in that the saying and doing occur (Bisel and Barge, 2011). From a discursive point of view organizational change is the process of constructing and sharing new meanings and interpretations of organizational activities (Morgan and Sturdy, 2000). Organizational change involves the re-defining, re-labeling, and re-interpreting of organizational activity. Two of the members of the RTTF in this case study are attempting to re-define the practice of help-seeking, re-label the wounded warrior, and re-interpret resiliency, but

they are facing a great deal of resistance, both internally within the group and externally throughout the National Guard.

Barrett, Thomas, and Hocevar (1995) employ discursive practice to analyze large-scale change in the Navy. Discourse is viewed as the core of the change process through which basic assumption are created, sustained, and transformed. Their study adopts a dynamic view of meaning systems where the process of organizing involves the construction, maintenance, and destruction of meaning among organizational members. Their study illustrates that the reflexive nature of discourse views meaning as occurring in relatedness and relationships.

Organizational change researchers have employed three perspectives: behavioral, cognitive, and discursive. Over time, the research focus has shifted from an information transmission perspective to a discourse orientated one that examines the ways that identities and relationships are constructed through language practices and the way this influences how organizational members experience change. In this case study, for example, the RTTF operates as a change agent in a top-down planned change. Change agents are typically described as buffers within organizations as they often have to manage conversations among disconnected internal stakeholders. The top-levels in the military tend to view change in terms of abstract strategic change whereas the lower-levels of the military tend to view change in term of concrete cultural practices (Barrett, Thomas, and Hocevar, 1995). The RTTF was attempting to link the two groups in a common organizational discourse. Behavioral, cognitive, and discursive elements co-exist in this complex organizational change study, but the role of discourse is the main focus of this research.

Organizational change researchers employ an assortment of discursive approaches. Marshak and Grant (2008) suggest that most discursive approaches to change embrace four key components: community, context, power, and frameworks. First, discourses shape community and build the social world in two ways. Through discourses, organizational members construct practical understandings of change, how it might be accomplished, and the possible consequences of the change initiative. Discourses also establish parameters that either rule-in or rule-out acceptable discussion. Second, discourses create context: they comprise and constrain the discursive environment for organizational success or failure. Discourses concerning resiliency, social responsibility, or suicide prevention are situated within larger social settings that bracket context. Third, discourses acknowledge power dynamics. Hardy and Phillips (2004) discuss the reciprocal relationship between power and discourse; discourse shapes relations of power while relations of power shape those who influence discourse. Discourse and power are interdependent and mutually constitutive. Fourth, discourses generate interpretive frameworks in which change may become possible (Hardy and Phillips, 2004). New interpretive frameworks open a space for new ways of acting that can precipitate change in organization. New shared meanings and new possibilities for action can emerge when discourse shifts from problem centered to solution centered, an approach that requires appreciative inquiry.

Harre and van Langenhove's (1999) positioning theory offers a useful approach to begin the study of how change messages position organizational members in terms of their identities and relationships. Harre and van Langenhove (1999) suggest that positioning can be understood as the discursive construction of personal stories. These stories make individual actions intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts. These stories act as a specific location for relationships of conversations called a position. A position-driven analysis explores the connection among position, storyline, and speech act (Bisel and Barge, 2011). From a communication perspective, Harre and van Lagehove's (1999) positioning theory operates at an interpersonal communication level and is employed in this study to help understand the interpersonal communication positions.

Boje's (2001) ante-narrative examines storylines that are multiple, dynamic, evolving, and unfinished. Multiple storylines may exist to characterize a change initiative. Multiple storylines shift over time as new characters, actions, and content present themselves. This case study illustrates narrative and ante-narrative story lines that compete for recognition and dominance. Boje (2001) term, ante-narrative has a double meaning: as being before and as a bet. First, story is ante to narrative. Story is an account of incidents or events which precedes the creation of narrative. Narrative comes after story and adds plot and coherence to the story line. Story is therefore ante and narrative is post-story. Secondly, ante is a bet. A story may or may not be coherent. The creation of narrative may or may not occur and in this manner, may be ante-narrative and on occasion even anti-narrative (Boje, 2001). From a communication perspective, Boje's (2001) ante-narrative approaches the interaction of group members and is employed in this study to help understand the inter-group narratives.

This case study employs Marshak and Grant's (2008) four key components, Harre and van Langenhove's (1999) positions, and Boje's (2001) ante-narrative to explore the planned changes messages as discursive practices. First, this study is framed by the four key components: community, context, power, and frameworks as suggested by Marshak and Grant (2008) to capture the broad organizational level. Second, this study is enhanced by the connections among discursive positions as suggested by Harre and van Langenhove (1999) to highlight the interpersonal level. Third, this study examines the various ante-narrative storylines that are multiple, dynamic, evolving, and unfinished as suggested by Boje (2001) to examine the group level. While organizational change theorists do not frame communication in various levels, per se, these levels are employed in this study to help track the inherent complexity of organizational discourse. Throughout, discourse is viewed as the core of the change process through which basic assumptions are created, sustained, and transformed. This case study examines planned changes messages and the discursive practice of large-scale change in the National Guard.

The U.S. Army and National Guard comprise a unique community composed of distinct ethics, core values, codes of conduct, and strict hierarchical roles (Weiss, Coll, Gerbauer, Smiley and Carillo, 2010). The context is the unprecedented number of warrior suicides. While the military is working to address this issue with a solution-focused approach; the military culture, itself, is a block to gaining access to treatment.

Warriors and their families make significant and life-altering sacrifices to maintain the safety and freedom of American citizens and yet have little personal power. Seeking help for psychological injury represents a career ending option. Military service represents a unique framework that emphasizes the adherence to specific guidelines of conduct. Service men and women conform to a core set of values and traditions inherent in military life. The military culture brings a host of environmental, occupational, psychological, and family stressors. The demands that military service personnel face include the following: multiple deployment (often to combat zones), following strict chain of command, frequent family separations, military stigma toward mental illness (viewed as a weakness) and a general reluctance toward obtaining mental health services (Matsakis, 2007). Additionally, warriors may have combat-related stress, including PTSD, traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) and/or polytraumatic injuries involving multiple body systems (Collins & Kennedy, 2008). While it is appropriate that mental health care services should be provided for the warrior, gaining assistance can be an additional battle.

The Secretary of the Defense (top-level manager) initiates a command (storyline) about the need for change. This change is being driven primarily by the increasing numbers of warrior suicides and secondarily by the creating of change messages that focus on the individual risks factors. By creating messages focused on the wounded warrior storyline, the Secretary begins to position one group of the military as competing against deeply held beliefs of warrior heroism. Throughout the rank and file (lower-level organizational members) the idea of wounded warriors is easily connected to a theme of playing the mental health card to get out of pressure filled duty that leads to more pressure filled duty for others. Positioning theory explains that identity and relationships emerge within conversations where notions of selfhood are continuously confirmed and challenged. Ante-narrative storylines emerge as this case study examines planned change process from a discursive perspective. The analysis explores the way the discursive and material contexts enable and constrain RTTF conversations as they respond to upper-level and lower-level audiences. The RTTF remains in the problem-centered framework unable to move the storyline forward.

III. Methodology

The data for this case study was collected during a one year period (2010 – 2011). The purpose of the study was to look at the initial stages of the change effort. Three significant data gathering challenges exist. First, those that can provide the most information have taken their own lives. Second, the Resiliency Team Task Force (RTTF) is made up of people who do not have first hand experience, by definition, with the phenomena. Third the military culture itself has a long and strong tradition with a received view which presents significant obstacles to comprehensive change efforts. The RTTF identified the first data gathering challenge:

The Task Force acknowledges the significant efforts made by the military Services. The Services have substantially increased their focus and investments in suicide preventions over the years to meet current requirements... Unfortunately, those who can provide the most help in understanding why people

die by suicide are those who have taken their own lives and are no longer with us...

The RTTF recognized the second data gathering challenge:

As officers, researchers, and clinicians we can collect and tabulate the myriad factors that contribute to the inability to find another strategy to copy with seemingly hopeless situation. But after decades of research, there is still much we do not understand about the causes of suicide and effective approaches to prevent it.

The RTTF acknowledged the third data gathering challenge that overcoming military culture, leadership barriers, and reducing stigma to seeking help, all three together, characterize considerable challenges to credibility, reliability, and validity.

LeCompte and Goetz (1982) state organizational change processes research occurs in natural settings which represent unique situations that cannot be reconstructed or replicated precisely. They suggest several strategies should be incorporated throughout the investigative process to enhance credibility, reliability, and validity. In this research, credibility is established by systematically identifying and examining the interplay among the variables situated in the natural context (Gobi and Lincoln, 1981). Credibility is created throughout the investigative process by deliberate design (Lincoln and Guba, 1985); and the data is reconstruction through thick description (Geertz, 1973) which characterizes the phenomenon. This research is focused on detailed aspect of a single phenomenon the discourse of the Resiliency Team Task Force.

This research establishes external reliability five ways: research status position, informant choices, social situations and conditions, analytic constructs and premises, and methods of data collection and analysis (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982). A participant researcher was invited to the group as a subject matter expert. Informants were the group members themselves and in their own right subject matter experts. Social situations and conditions included documenting formal group meetings and informal private interviews (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995; Fontana and Frey, 1994). Analytic constructs involve the interplay of interpersonal and group discourses (Spradley, 1979). Methods of data collection involved six evidentiary sources: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2003). Data analysis employs constant comparison method of Grounded Theory (Creswell, 2002; Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

This research establishes internal reliability by employing both low-reference descriptors and local informants (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982). Low-reference description include verbatim accounts of what group members said in meetings and in private interviews as well as narratives of behavior and activity (Whyte, 1982, 1984). In addition, participant researcher enlisted the aid of local informants to confirm written observations (Whyte, 1982, 1984). Confirmation was sought throughout by review of description of events,

interactions, structures, and processes (Creswell, 2002; Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

This research establishes internal validity by accounting for history, observer effects, selection, mortality, and spurious conclusions (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982). The phenomenon studied is a change process (Stake, 2006). History affects the nature of the data collected, so Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's (1995) suggest:

...the researcher is not simply recording witnessed events; rather, through his (sic) writing he is actively creating realities and meanings. In writing field notes, he is not simply preserving those moments in a textual form, for he is shaping observed moments as scenes, characters, dialogue, and recounted actions in the first place. Subsequently, in reworking fieldnotes, and transposing them into a final ethnographic story, he does not simply recount the tale of something that happened; instead, he reconstructs "what happened" so as to illustrate a pattern and make a point (p. 213).

The perspectives of the group members are demonstrated in the participant-driven constructs and are grounded in the data (Spradley, 1979). Glaser and Strauss' (1967) theoretical sampling (collecting data chosen for relevance to emerging theoretical constructs) is the strategy employed. The group membership did change overtime; loss and replacement, as they naturally occurred, are part of the study itself. Every plausible reason and alternative explanation is examined through discussion with informants (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982).

Data was gathered at four day long meetings. These meeting were held at the beginning of each quarter. All the quoted material presented in this study represents verbatim comments collected in face to face meetings and interviews. The quoted material is used as snap shots of benchmarks throughout the change process. The researcher and Dr. Greene met before each meeting to review notes and narratives. After each meeting the researcher would meet for an hour to interview members of the core team and guest members as they entered the study. Working drafts of this research were presented to members of the team for their review and comment.

The goal of this research is explication of meanings during a change process. Six data collection techniques are employed: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts. The data was assembled and analyzed though the constant comparative method to provide an understanding of how each Suicide Prevention Task Force (RTTF) member was making sense of this change effort. The RTTF membership changed over the course of this investigation. But five RTTF members were consistent throughout: the researcher, (the following are all pseudonyms) Dr. Magnolia Greene, Colonel Able, Major Fact, and Lieutenant Just. Dr. Greene is a licensed clinical psychologist who focuses on suicide. The officers are part of the National Guard Human Resources office.

IV. Case Study

The following case study illustrates common problems associated with introducing a large-scale organizational change. This case study highlights the early stages of change process where the paradigm begins to disconnect and the possibility of transition is uniquely visible (Barrett, Thomas, and Hocevar, 1995). The comments are quoted verbatim and used as snap shots of major benchmarks of the change discourse.

More soldiers are killing themselves than are killed in battle (National Guard Suicide Prevention Task Force, 2010). The Resiliency Team Task Force (RTTF) is charged to understand and mitigate warrior suicides for the Southern State's National Guard (SSNG). The military culture of classified information and overall privacy in the name of security "no-talk" affects all aspects of the RTTF's interaction.

The Army approach has been to identify the correlates, commonly referred to as risk factors that wounded warriors may display. Understanding the risk factors that precipitate crisis may provide critical information in terms of early intervention and prevention. However, risk-focused program planning for early intervention and prevention represent a behaviorist/cognitivist approach. This approach is rooted in individual change which effectively hides the need for organizational change. Focusing on individuals can be helpful, but this focus leaves the organizational constraints in tact.

The National Guard takes its lead from the U.S. Army but often has to adapt Army directives. The National Guard only has contact with its members a total of 39 days a year whereas the Army has contact with its member 24/7 365 days a year. Consequently, the National Guard must tailor and convert each directive to address fewer contact days.

In 2009 the Secretary of Defense ordered a report containing recommendations regarding a comprehensive policy designed to prevent suicide by members of the Armed Forces. This case study tracks one Southern State's National Guard (SSNG) response to that order. Even as the RTTF began a serious and focused attention on resiliency, suicides continued.

This study begins with Section 733 of the National Defense Authorization Act (2009) for fiscal year 2009 that directed the Secretary of Defense to establish a task force to examine matters relating to the prevention of suicide by the military. A portion of that charter follows:

NDAA Requirement Matrix

- 1) Not later than 12 months after the date on that all member of the task force have been appointed, the task force shall submit to the Secretary a report containing recommendations regarding a comprehensive policy designed to prevent suicide by members of the Armed Forces.
- 2) Task force shall take into consideration completed and ongoing efforts by the military department to improve the efficacy of suicide prevention programs.

3) The recommendations (including recommendations for legislative or administrative action) shall include measures to address the following:

- A) Methods to identify trends and common causal factors in suicides by members of the Armed Forces.
- B) Methods to establish or update suicide education and prevention program conducted by each military department based on identified trends and causal factors.
- C) An assessment of current suicide education and prevention programs of each military department....

This portion of the charter is presented to illustrate two ideas: the comprehensive nature of the Army approach and the level of commitment to addressing the problem. This charter also illustrates how the language is embedded within a mechanistic discourse community. Addressing any issue is monumental for the United State Army considering its size and entrenched bureaucratic and mechanistic traditions. Communication is extremely formal, hierarchal, and tends to be downwardly linear, and the message is clear: the Army will conquer suicide.

Early in the autumn of 2010, the first of the quarterly meetings for the Suicide Prevention Task Force (RTTF) began. A meeting of the Southern State National Guard (SSNG) was called by General Flag (a pseudonym) to announce the importance of the new RTTF. This was one of General Flag's final duties as he was getting ready to hand over command and retire. Attendance at the meeting was mandatory, so the conference room was packed: two generals, 20 colonels, 20 aids of various rank, Dr. Greene, and the researcher. All the commands were present.

Military meetings are completely choreographed and communication is exclusively stylized. The General opened the meeting with a serious tone and made three points. First, he commented on the overall importance of the RTTF effort. Second, he explained why the command had been moved from the medical group to the human resources group. Third, he commanded that no stigmatizing of wounded warriors would be tolerated.

The meeting proceeded with the RTTF commanding officer, COL Able assuring the General that his group would accomplish the mission. MAJ Fact and LT Just were selected to be RTTF members who would train all the commands in SSNG and the officers had already been scheduled for their train-the-trainer sessions.

After the meeting, Director Dud, the civilian suicide prevention contractor was interviewed. The Army provides civilian suicide prevention counselors as a nonmilitary route for soldiers to make contact and get help. However, each civilian suicide preventions counselor must contact the soldiers' commanding officer if the soldier mentions suicide. Director Dud made several comments to indicate her job would be easier if the National Guard had better recruiters and tougher soldiers:

This is really the fault of the recruiters, they are just not doing their job...Soldiers today are just not what they used to be, my father was a very high ranking officer and he would have never allowed these slackers to get away with it.

Throughout the interview, Director Dud continued to blame the wounded warriors as “just playing the mental health card” to discount any real need for help. She also believed that the unit commanders created additional problems, stating “And I can never get ahold of any of the commanders.” It was clear that Director Dud felt that it was impossible for her to be successful in her job because of the problems that everyone else created. Dr. Greene, MAJ Fact and LT Just recommended that Director Dud’s civilian contract not be renewed.

As the second quarter meeting was approaching, MAJ Fact and LT Just were laying out a strategy to train every member of every unit of this southern state. MAJ Fact and LT Just had attended three “train the trainer” seminars: comprehensive soldier fitness, resiliency training, and family resiliency training. The two had developed a plan to train all the member of the Guard in this Southern State. In addition, there was an “out of darkness - suicide awareness walk” that many uniformed Guard members attended. Director Dud’s contract expired and a new Director, Director Eagle was hired.

The second of the RTTF quarterly meetings was scheduled for early 2011. This meeting was interactive with all the remote commands on teleconference. At that meeting COL Able opened with “I want this problem solved, now, today. There has been a spike in the number of suicides and I want to know why....” Everyone just froze for a minute and then each uniformed RTTF member present offered a comment. Master Sergeant Hip said “I am confident that all of you (the remote sites) can Google *Comprehensive Soldier Fitness* and follow the guides given!” The Master Sergeant’s order is a typical behaviorist solution, an order has been given, follow though. Chaplin Incentive talked about how his faith in God helped him through rough times and offered belief in God as a possible solution. Director Eagle suggested that a spike was a normal outcome of the increased attention to a new problem.

After everyone had a chance to comment, the next agenda item was a report from Chief Glump. Chief Glump, unaware of the dictum against stigmatizing, reported the 98% of the cases are “just playing the mental health card.” Again, a frozen moment ensued. Finally, it was time for MAJ Fact and LT Just to introduce their training schedule and plan. Although MAJ Fact and LT Just were poised to begin the comprehensive training, they were told to stand down. The training would not move forward. The RTTF had been following the U.S. Army’s training solutions, but now General Neuvo spoke and stated that the RTTF would now change direction. General Neuvo was designated to relieve General Flag and was present at the meeting as a guest.

After the meeting, as the uniformed personnel left, Director Eagle, the new civilian suicide prevention contractor was interviewed. She said “I want everything to come through my office. I want to know everything before it gets to be a problem. I want my office to be so good that they won’t need the other efforts...” She was particularly

interested in corralling Chief Gump. Director Eagle was very proactive in establishing her office and began visiting all the commands.

The third of the RTTF quarterly meetings was scheduled for Spring 2011. General Neuvo began the meeting with an announcement that he “had a plan!” He thanked the RTTF for their work and said the RTTF would be renamed the “Resiliency Leadership Team.” General Neuvo said that he really liked The Jason Project – a high school resiliency program for at risk teens and he believe that was a better program for the Guard. LT Just sat frozen and stared straight ahead.

After the General spoke, it was COL Able’s turn to speak and he said even with the name change the team would continue to move forward. LT Just updated the RTTF on the stalled training efforts. As the meeting adjourned COL Able talked with General Neuvo. LT Just was interviewed. He said:

The military culture is slow to change and it will take time for the mindset to shift. The military is really good at breaking things and killing people. We are not good at restoring people back to health. So, it will take a long time and a lot of work for all these changes to get to the local level. What’s going on right now is political. It’s political, and I cannot talk about it yet, but I’ll fill you in when I can. I’d tell you but I’m not going to jeopardize my military career.

Time for the fourth quarterly meeting came and went. MAJ Fact and LT Just were reassigned to new positions outside the Human Resources office in non-training roles. Their training plan was never implemented. An interview was scheduled with COL Able. Drafts of this research were presented for his review and comment. He said that he had not had time to review the draft. He seems very concerned about the topic, but very tired, he said that he hoped to find time to read the draft. He said:

This topic is really important to me, personally, my dad committed suicide. We, my brother and I were just kids, and I’m not sure we really understood, but it really affected our lives. I can’t understand why people kill themselves. I care really deeply about all these soldiers. I just wish I knew the answer.

The RTTF did not meet again.

V. Discussion

The Resiliency Team Task Force (RTTF) in this case study is attempting to re-define the practice of help-seeking, re-label the wounded warrior, and re-interpret resiliency, but they are facing a great deal of internal and external resistance. Planned organizational change literature suggests that organizations must create stories of urgency to facilitate change (Kotter and Schlesinger, 1979) and despite all the signs of urgency, change seemed nonexistent. All the members of the National Guard memorize and live by the US Army code. This code is compelling and creates strategic ambiguity when practiced.

The communication in the Army/NG is constrained by its vertical nature. The creed further constrains thought and action.

The U.S. Soldier's Creed
 I am an American Soldier
 I am a Warrior and a member of a team.
 I serve the people of the United States (taxpayers), and live the Army Values.
 I will always place the mission first.
 I will never accept defeat.
 I will never quit.
 I will never leave a fallen comrade.
 I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient in my warrior tasks and drills.
 I always maintain my arms, my equipment and myself.
 I am an expert and I am a professional.
 I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy, the enemies of the United States of America in close combat.
 I am a guardian of freedom and the American way of life.
 I am an American Soldier.

The creed contains elements which are behavioral, cognitive, and discursive, as well as individual, group, and organizational. Not leaving a comrade behind while completing the mission is behavioral. The national level ordered a behavior change. But the RTTF members aligned along two behavioral groups, one that identified with “cannot leave a comrade behind” and the other with “I will always place the mission first.” This problem as LT Just explained “is that when anyone tried to get help, they are no longer a comrade, they are immediately ostracized, so there’s no need to help them.” This is the first discursive conflict that they RTTF would have to acknowledge to address. But this theme and others like it remained a “no-talk” issue. The re-defining of help-seeking must begin with the re-labeling the wounded warrior as having a legitimate wound and being a legitimate member of the group. But the no-talk conditions were so strong that even to begin to discuss the topics of legitimate group membership were problematic.

The Secretary of Defense Charter illustrates a cognitive element that the RTTF had to content with: the National Guard planned to create fundamental change by mandating a large-scale paradigm shift. The charter and subsequent communications on the subject mandate that the Southern States National Guard (SSNG) redesign its fundamental assumptions regarding help-seeking behaviors. This case study illustrates that mandating a cognitive shift will not guarantee that members comprehend the new policy. Sergeant Blast suggested “guys would rather die than let the team down” in other words there are no cognitive options for the wounded warrior with the fundamental assumptive framework. The RTTF second discursive challenge was to create a verbal enactment of sensemaking around the fundamental values and assumptions which underlay the policy itself. But there was not internal group agreement about the new policy. Task Force members openly discredited legitimate wounds as “just playing the mental health card” to discount mandated policy.

The tension between competing discourses was clear in the first RTTF meeting. General Flag, the COLs and the RTTF declared the major restructuring was underway. They

were fully committed to it and were sure of its success. However, many of the most deeply cherished military values and norms were challenged by the new focus on help-seeking and resiliency discourse. Employing Harre and van Langenhove's (1999) positioning theory demonstrates Director Dud's comments were not unusual. Many military members position themselves as individuals against the policy change. COL Core, who has served five tours of duty in Afghanistan and Iraq, stated during an interview, "I do not believe in any of this crap. I don't think its right to take our taxpayer's money and support people, for the rest of their lives, who just tried to get out of doing their jobs." COL Core positioned himself as defending the tax payer against those just trying to get out of doing their jobs.

The tension between competing discourses was also clear at the group level. This case study also demonstrates group ante-narrative storylines that are multiple, dynamic, evolving, and unfinished (Boje, 2001). The RTTF members' multiple storylines characterize this stalled change initiative. General Flag commands the RTTF to address and find a solution. But the key contact for wounded warriors was Director Dud, who did not believe the soldiers had legitimate complaints. MAJ Fact and LT Just worked very hard to get her replaced with a sympathetic Director and they were successful in finding Director Eagle. But Director Eagle saw her mandate as exclusive. She did not see herself as part of a team. MAJ Fact and LT Just were removed from the RTTF without explanation.

The tension between discourses was also evident at the organizational level. Marshak and Grant's (2008) four key components: community, context, power, and frameworks were exhibited in COL Core's comments. COL Core's discourse signaled his community does not need to be changed and strongly suggests that there would be negative consequences for the proposed change initiative. His discourse clearly established who was ruled-in and who was ruled-out. His discourse also created a constrained context signaling change efforts would fail. COL Core has a powerful position from which to influence the change discourse. Finally, COL Core's discourse generated interpretive frameworks within which change would not become possible.

Several levels of discourse were operating concurrently. Officially, suicide prevention was an important issue. Efforts to extinguish stigmatizing evaluations were endorsed. There was significant pressure to solve the problem immediately as suicide numbers continue to climb. Officially, everyone agreed it was important to find a lasting solution. However, private conversations relayed a very different set of concerns. Blaming was a useful strategy to avoid responsibility or action. Saving the taxpayer framed the discussion in terms of preferencing working for the greater good, rather than not leaving a comrade behind. And the most candid was the confession that the help-seeking soldier was not fit for duty.

Patterns of discourse reinforced the interlocking sets of assumptions that guided the military interpretive community to re-select and re-state traditional beliefs. This automatic exclusion of the help-seeker from the community demonstrated Harre and van Langenhove's (1999) positioning theory. There was a tremendous burden placed on the

help-seeker as he was required to construct a story that somehow bridged help-seeking while placing the mission first. In order to seek-help he must position himself as a member of the group even as the group would not allow him continued membership. It was next to impossible to construct a personal story that could knit all of these paradoxical identities.

At this point there were no linguistic categories consistent with an interpretive schema for help-seeking. Nevertheless, as the RTTF continued the contest between alternative discourse patterns, a different pattern of words begins to emerge to constitute what may become legitimate. COL Bravo comments:

And that's the reason the Army is in the straights that it's in, COL Core has a limited world view. He is in a responsible position and should really know better. OK, it is really difficult to understand something you haven't gone through...I was in charge of the rear guard and I saw it. I took care of soldiers returning from battle. And just because I enjoy good health does not mean that I cannot understand pain, the real pain of PTSD.

The real pain of PTSD becomes an ante-narrative to always placing the mission first because once the combat mission has ended, a new mission, to not leave a soldier behind, begins. Boje's (2001) ante-narrative of storylines are multiple, dynamic, evolving, and compete for recognition and dominance. The National Guard can only talk about one type of mission, combat; the other mission, saving the wounded warrior, could not yet be fully articulated. The unwillingness to discuss multiple storylines also permeated the RTTF and characterized the stalled change initiatives.

At the organizational discourse level, there remain real structural issues. A unit is a highly interdependent cohesive group in which each member is a part of the group's capability for survival. Losing one member puts the entire group at risk. And the procedure for reassigning group members is cumbersome. COL Bravo comments:

The army places its people in pressure situations and when the unit members see that one person is being given special treatment it demoralizes the rest who are placing their lives on the line....

Even when soldiers have the courage to seek help, there is a wide standing belief that help-seeking marks the end of their military career. COL Able stated privately:

Yes, if a soldier came to me and needed help, I'd make sure that he got help, but honestly, privately, I'd also be thinking, this soldier cannot do his job...he cannot take care of his men and their equipment, of course, I would never say that to him, but that's what I'd be thinking...now I've got to replace that guy."

This section discussed the tensions between discourses at the individual, group, and organizational levels about behavioral, cognitive, and discursive planned change. The RTTF's main purpose was to implement the Army's directive to establish suicide

prevention directives. Rather than articulate a solution, the RTTF failed, the command changed, the name of the group was changed, and another new program was started.

While the investigation of Resiliency Team Task Force (RTTF) offers a compelling case study, it is important to recognize the limitations of this research. Although RTTF is made up of dedicated people, military culture itself is quite self-protective and access to information is difficult and limited. The military culture of classified information and overall privacy in the name of security affects finding. The National Guard takes its lead from the U.S. Army but often has to adapt directives. The National Guard only has contact with its members a total of 39 days a year whereas the Army has contact with its member 24/7 365 days a year. Consequently, the National Guard must tailor and convert each directive to address fewer contact days.

The constant comparisons and review process helped to ensure the accuracy of the narratives, but the study is limited by the potential preferencing of one interpretation over others. Additional limitations are related to the study design: observer's paradox, selection effects, settings effects, history effects, and construct effects. Constructs may be specific to this group only. Constructs generated in this context may not be comparable in others because they are functions of the context under investigation. Cross-group comparison may not be possible. Definitions and meanings of terms and constructs may not be shared across time, settings, and populations.

There is still much we do not understand about the causes of suicide and effective approaches to prevent it. While diligent officers, researchers, and clinicians search for complex and interlocking factors that contribute to warrior suicide, we must acknowledge the situated group and cultural factors which exacerbate both the problem and the possible solutions. Understanding military culture, leadership barriers, and ongoing stigma to seeking-help continues to perplex.

VI. Conclusions

Another suicide on February 15, 2012; the soldier leave a young wife husbandless and six month old son fatherless. The Resiliency Team Task Force (RTTF) in this case study was attempting to re-define the practice of help-seeking, re-label the wounded warrior, and re-interpret resiliency. They were not successful. Discursive boundaries could not be re-drawn and a new discursive template could not be constructed.

This case study reported and analyzed one Southern State's National Guard (SSNG) Resiliency Team Task Force (RTTF). The RTTF case study demonstrated how organizational members create discourses that create community, context, power, and frameworks. Although the RTTF officially viewed change messages as an attempt to foster compliance among organizational members, unofficially they resisted change agents by discursively constructing positions that made change impossible. The Secretary of the Defense initiated a storyline about the need for change, but by creating messages reflecting the wounded warrior storyline, one group of the military must now

compete against deeply held beliefs of warrior heroism. Ante-narrative storylines emerge as this case study examined planned change processes from a discursive perspective.

Warriors and veterans are seeking mental health services due to a variety of psychosocial issues. The military is working to address these issues with a solution-focused approach; the problem is that the military culture is itself a block to gaining access to treatment.

Organizational discourse has a central role to play in organizational change. But the current dominant models for understanding large-scale change prescribe a sequence of steps or stages that emphasize only rational planning and analysis. This was the model employed by RTTF. The model included identifying the need and goals for change, targeting change strategies, implementing change, monitoring and evaluating change, and finally, institutionalizing or reinforcing the change outcomes. The dominant assumption in these models is that leaders and members have the behavioral and cognitive capabilities to achieve rational adaptation.

The case study confirmed the ineffectuality of those assumptions while demonstrating the effects of a deeply entrenched no-talk culture. This research confirmed the need to reconceptualize the change process to one of communicative involvement and discursive enactment. To that end, the case study employed Marshak and Grant's (2008) four key components, Harre and van Langenhove's (1999) positions, and Boje's (2001) ante-narrative to investigate the planned changes messages as and the discursive practice. Throughout, discourse was central to the concept of organizational change. But the military "I cannot talk about it...I'd tell you but I'm not going to jeopardize my military career" worked against this strategy. This polarizing of talk restricts the possibility of transformation.

Discourse is the core of change processes through which basic assumptions can be challenged and organizational transformation created. This study framed discourse as: community, context, power, and frameworks (Marshak and Grant, 2008) to capture the organizational level. This case study demonstrated that a mechanistic orientation alone cannot manufacture change. This study also confirmed the connections among discursive positions (Harre and van Langenhove, 1999) as expected at the interpersonal communication level. Through discourse, individuals co-created and re-created reflexively their social reality. But the RTTF was taciturn "we're moving slowly right now, but expect to call another meeting soon..." Calling meetings are only effective if the group is willing to risk the examination the various ante-narrative storylines that are multiple, dynamic, and evolving (Boje, 2001).

Changes in meaning are possible. New discursive repertoires can lead to change. There are various successful suicide prevention plans in place across the nation. One of the success stories is the Buddy to Buddy hotline where recovering wounded warriors council other warriors who are in crisis. These commands are in various phases of accepting and implementing resiliency. Meanwhile at the Southern State's National Guard (SSNG) the suicides continue.

The new Resiliency Leadership Team began meeting again (a year after the RTTF was disbanded). MAJ Fact and LT Just were replaced by Dr. Reba Butts who was given the title of Coordinator. The new team was comprised of COL Able, Director Eagle, the researcher, and Dr. Butts. LT Just suggested that Dr. Butts refused to invite Dr. Greene to any of the sessions:

Some team members really want to help the individual Guardsmen, but other just want to help themselves, and if they happen to help a Guardsman along the way, then that's great too. Dr. Greene isn't interested the Guard, she's just interested in self aggrandizement.

Suicide is a difficult concept and the RTTF existence challenged deeply held military values and norms about hierarchy and authority. The Secretary of Defense declares a major policy change and orders a restructuring. Generals and Colonels say they are fully committed to the change. But the concepts of suicide prevention and resiliency challenge defined patterns of behaving, thinking, and interacting. There is obvious tension between task force members as they grapple to comprehend and enact the order. Task force members could not openly questions the authenticity of policy change, but they could, and did speculate on the authenticity of other group members. Dr. Greene is the national link for this state-based group. She is an internationally recognized suicidologist who has dedicated her life to treating at-risk patients. She is a light in a dark place. Her words:

People kill themselves because they are in pain; excruciating pain. No one can see the pain, but it is real and consuming. They believe that death is the only way out; the only cure. Often the test of courage is not to die but to live.

Suicide does not easily fit within the familiar categories of meaning, but stretches every capacity for understanding. The mission now is to help the fallen comrade and to honor the wounded warrior. The Guardsmen of the National Guard must stand ready to deploy, engage, and enact resiliency as a team effort so that they can truly say we “will never leave a fallen comrade.”

VII. Future Research

This research is ongoing. The new Resiliency Leadership Team meets quarterly. Coordinator Butts is in the process of implementing a training plan that is very similar to the one that MAJ Fact and LT Just developed. Dr. Butts is an expert in assessment and has established a method for tracking serious incidents and suicides. Southern States National Guard (SSNG) can now boast that they are in compliance with directives of the policy.

Throughout the planned change organizational members' familiar discourse patterns were challenged and while SSNG proved particularly resistant, the on-going work will continue to engage and operationalize. Organizational members “cognize situations with the terms they have available” (Barett, et al, 1995). The terms the SSNG have available are now broadening. Change may occur, first when SSNG members realize that it will

not end their career to talk about suicide, and second “when one way of talking replaces another way talking” (Barett, et al, 1995). This reflexive dialogue cannot be contained in a linear or static formula, but rather in the complex recursive nature of meaning systems. The most powerful change intervention occurs at the level of everyday conversations, when the interpretive frame of the mission includes making sure every soldier gets home safely.

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