

It is difficult to single out a particular event in my career as being significant in that I have had many experiences which all in some measure have provided me with incremental transformation in my journey to become a more mature leader. One job in particular however comes to mind as being exceptionally challenging and rewarding in terms of accomplishments and in my preparation for service as an organizational leader. That job was serving as the Director of Human Resources (DHR) for the US Army Garrison, Japan. My crucible experience begins with my assignment to take over the DHR from a lieutenant colonel who after a year in the position remained in survival mode as the only individual working at the directorate level. After describing the job and some of the particular challenges I faced, I will share some of the key lessons learned from the experience and close this paper by reflecting on how that experience has contributed and shaped me to be a better leader at the organizational level.

Prior to and during my tour of duty in Japan, the Army underwent a series of reorganizations and realignments in an effort to unencumber senior mission commanders of garrison type operations by placing those functions under the purview of the Installation Management Command (IMCOM). IMCOM established, on paper only and without resources, the Directorate of Human Resources. This new directorate would be comprised of five pre-existing organizations providing human resource type services and support to all Army organizations and personnel in Japan: The Education Services Division (aka the Ed Centers), the Military Personnel Division (MPD), the Army Substance Abuse Program (ASAP), the Administrative Services Division (ASD) (publications/forms management & official mail), and the Postal Services Division (military post offices/APOs). Unique to garrison operations in Japan, the garrison was split between Camp Zama, near Tokyo, and Torii Station, in Okinawa, over 1,000 miles away. This meant that each division in the DHR was actually two, with their own unique challenges and customer base. The DHR was also expected to function as a fully operational garrison HR support office handling workforce development and assisting other directorates and the commander with hiring and other civilian

personnel actions in coordination with the Civilian Personnel Advisory Center (CPAC) and the Japanese Employment Services Office (JESO) for our local national support.

After taking over the job, I found myself completely overwhelmed with keeping up with the routine housekeeping issues, responding to information requests and suspenses, working customer and employee complaints, and attending almost non-stop meetings. I realized very quickly that unless I could extricate myself from the daily onslaught, I would never be able to develop and implement the necessary change in the organization and would suffer the same fate as my predecessor. I needed time: time to create a vision, to assess the capabilities and needs of the directorate, to develop a strategy, to create buy-in from the employees, and to win advocates from outside the DHR to assist with resources and other support. I needed to implement transformational change in an organization yet to be acknowledged or accepted by its subordinate divisions and unresourced by its command. Operating in a resource constrained environment, getting additional manpower and financial resources from outside the directorate was unlikely. I had to look within for ways to reorganize and create efficiencies which would allow me to make the directorate fully operational. Initiating transformational change which encompasses resource reallocation is a highly emotionally charged issue as no one wants to lose resources. Harvard Business School Professor John Kotter, who I was unfamiliar with at the time, developed a model outlining eight stages leaders must work through for successful and permanent change.<sup>i</sup> Creating a sense of urgency, creating a guiding coalition, developing a vision and strategy and communicating the change vision are four of the steps which I found to be particularly important.

As an officer trained and experienced in working in Army units, change is something I was used to and expected to be good at dealing with. Our soldiers are also expected to be able to adjust quickly and adapt. However, when working in more diverse organizations comprised of civilians, contractors and foreign national employees, culture has a tremendous impact on how each individual and/or group in the organization deals with change. All of my employees in the DHR were civilians and over half were Japanese. With a soldier, you can impose a change on him or her and expect an immediate adjustment

and accommodation. Civilian employees tend to be a bit more resistant and require more time to let the change sink in and to accept it. The Japanese employees working for the Army in Japan tend to be very change adverse and in order to avoid major long term problems and resistance, the possibility of change and the reasons for it need to be communicated as far in advance and possible. Several months lead time from initial discussion to actual implementation would not be unreasonable. Understanding these differences in culture in relation to change enabled me to keep each group at ease while pursuing integrative solutions.<sup>ii</sup>

Prior to taking on this job, I succeeded primarily by being an expert at my job and by getting my organization to accomplish its mission by the force of my will. This new challenge required a totally different skill set. I had to envision what the organization needed to look like, how it needed to function, how the divisions needed to relate with each other and with the community, etc. I then had to create excitement for the vision and establish the need for change. Recognizing the problem, developing a solution, and implementing it on my own wasn't going to get me anywhere. My direct reports were all GS12 and GS13 supervisors who would be in place years after I departed. The organizational changes I sought would have to be carried out by those supervisors and their employees, funded and resourced by the Directorate of Resource Management and approved by the commander. I had to exercise an incredible amount of patience and maintain an open mind while developing relationships and trust with the key people who would be critical to implementing and maintaining the changes. It is important to note that the "key people" are not necessarily those in charge, but rather those who have the influence. Critical was my selection and empowerment of an extremely bright and motivated young Japanese clerk to be my admin officer who, I discovered, was known and highly regarded by all the influential Japanese employees. I won her trust and buy-in, which in turn won the support of other key people.

In reflecting on how this experience will help me be a better organizational leader, I am left with the realization that this job was my first experience working at the organizational level. I realized that neither the organization nor I would be successful if I was bogged down in the daily business. My value

to the organization was in my role as the strategic planner, visionary, salesmen, motivator, resource provider and mentor to my senior leaders. As I go forward into more organizational level positions, I take with me the understanding of the importance of being an ambassador to outside organizations and being that integrating and coordinating force between those external and the internal interests.

Was the experience as the Director of Human Resources a crucible experience? It does not seem significant when compared to combat or other type of life and death trial. For me though, it was the single most significant and rewarding job so far in my career. The experience of taking an organization from vision to fruition was awesomely challenging and rewarding. The style of leadership required for that job was much more collaborative and involved a good amount of negotiations. The amount of time I devoted to understanding the commander's intent, developing vision, assessing the organization, and developing a plan to get the organization and the staff from current state to future state so they would be prepared for what would be required several years down the road was worth more to the organization than working on daily actions and putting out fires. The sheer scope and diversity of responsibility of this job gave me my first taste of organizational level leadership. The lessons learned will have a continued impact on me and has changed how I operate.

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<sup>i</sup> "Leading and Making a Transformational Change" by Yvonne Doll and Billy Miller, L103, pp 59-63

<sup>ii</sup> "Influencing Organizations through Negotiations" by Edward Wertheim, L109, pp 269-281