Coexistence or operational necessity: the role of formally structured organisation and informal networks during deployments

Irena Ali

Joint Operations Division
DSTO, Department of Defence, Canberra

Visiting Fellow
School of Business, ADFA

16th ICCRTS, June 2011
Outline of Presentation

- Research data, questions and methods
- Study findings and their implications
- Complexity and sense making framework
- So what?
DSTO Interview Program: 2003-2007

Sample

- combat operations
  - Combat 1: 100 interviews stratified across ranks, Services, gender
  - Combat 2: 30 interviews stratified across ranks & gender

- humanitarian operation
  - 16 interviews stratified across ranks & gender

Interview Focus areas

- Pre-deployment preparation & training
- Duties whilst deployed
- Decision-making processes
- C2 arrangements
- Interdependence
- Information gathering
- Information sharing
- Communication flows
- Skills and competencies
- Lessons learned

HDCT, 2007
Power of informal networks

- Crisis / emergency management

- ‘Real work’ in organisations happens despite formal structures
  - Innovation
  - Communication – connectors and information brokers
  - Knowledge creation and sharing
  - Collaboration
  - Speed and flexibility

- Immunological response & ‘happiness’ factor

- Unconscious reasons
  - Affiliation needs
  - Identity and self-esteem
  - ‘Defence mechanism’ (strength in numbers), group cohesion

- Conscious reasons
  - Need to know
  - Political manoeuvring

Informal structures and the military

• Lack of critical mass of research into informal networks in the military during operational circumstances;
  • anecdotal evidence (Cause, Ritcher et al. 2005; Chin, Reynolds et al. 2007), and
  • some empirical evidence (Burnett, Henman et al. 2008; Talbot and O'Toole 2008)

• Need to develop methodological approaches to study informal networks in military operations

“The importance of the ‘networker’ over the ‘network’ emerged, thus introducing concepts of ‘Networker Centric Warfare’ and the ‘Networker at War’ ”

Lieutenant General David Hurley, Australia’s Defence Capabilities Priorities, 2005
Research Questions

- What gives rise to informal networks activity during deployments?

- Do informal networks contribute to mission goals during military operations?

- What factors need to be addressed in order to harness the strengths inherent to the formal organisation and that of informal networks during deployments?
Research Design

Phase 1 Research

- Thematic/template data analysis in relation to the Task

- Issue of informal nt’rks during deployments needs in-depth analysis

- Template Analysis
  - In-depth thematic analysis of a subset of Combat 1-3 data in relation to informal nt’rks

- Answers to research questions

- Emergent themes

Phase 2 Research

- Final outcomes

- Testing consistency of & extending findings through Sensemaking workshop

DSTO HD Task

Combat 1 interviews

Combat 2 interviews

Combat 3 interviews

Cynefin Framework

- Retrospective analysis of operational context & individual / collective actions / behaviours

- Answers to research questions

- Emergent themes

Phase 1 Research

- Template Analysis
  - In-depth thematic analysis of a subset of Combat 1-3 data in relation to informal networks

- Answers to research questions

- Emergent themes

Phase 2 Research

- Final outcomes

- Testing consistency of & extending findings through Sensemaking workshop

DSTO HD Task

Combat 1 interviews

Combat 2 interviews

Combat 3 interviews
## Findings Phase1 – Prevalence of informal networks activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functional area</th>
<th>Deployment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for deployment</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handovers (getting to know org culture, introduction to networks)</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to information, information / communication flows</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligence needs</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timelines and accuracy of information</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication infrastructure / coalition compatible technology</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources / equipment</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistics / supply chain</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal processes and procedures</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational / time imperative</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2 arrangements</td>
<td>high-medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1 – Voices from the theatre of operations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amount of information you get - you can sit down and get a beer with one of those guys who have actually been in it and had to do it, was just phenomenal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Study Participant, 2001-2007</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In intelligence, informal networks are even more important than in just normal everyday military</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Study Participant, 2001-2007</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The rhetoric is that we are supporting operations, the reality is a different work ethic - a lot of manning of civilians and they don’t understand the operational imperative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Study Participant, 2001-2007</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had a relationship with them and I could call them up or email them about issues and they would help me with certain things</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Study Participant, 2001-2007)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My observations were that every line of communication, every logistic support chain is flawed. Trying to get resupplied from Australia - it was a nightmare</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Study Participant, 2001-2007)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
AUS government / Coalition

ADF Culture / Values

Org / systemic factors

Immediate factors

Outcomes

Informal networks
AUS government / Coalition

AUS govt order to deploy troops
Budgetary constraints
Laws restricting access to coalition info

ADF Culture / Values

Mateship culture
Importance of operations
“Can do” culture
Command mindset

Org / systemic factors

Inefficient processes/procedures
Sluggish info flows
Sub-contracting to civilian org.

Flawed logistics/supply chain
Lack of understanding of op imperative
C2 arrangements

Immediate factors

Resource poor
Intel / info needs
Insufficient pre-depl. info
No access to coalition info

Lack of IT infrastructure / coalition compatible infrastructure

Outcomes

Informal networks
AUS government / Coalition

ADF Values / culture

Org / systemic factors

Immediate factors

Outcomes

- Widespread socialising/rel'ships bld
- Spontaneous/serendipitous informal n'rks
  - Trust /rapport / loyalty
  - Tangible outcomes

- Self-organising
  - Targeted/Strategic/Goal oriented networking
  - ‘Hastily’ formed n'rks
  - Dormant & revived n'rks

- By-passing chain of c'nd
  - Ops efficiency

- Individuals face dilemmas with disclosure/non-disclosure of info
  - Impaired SA
  - Troops safety
  - Impaired interoperability

AUS govt order to deploy troops

Budgetary constraints

Laws restricting access to coalition info

- Mateship culture
- Importance of operations
  - “Can do” culture

- Inefficient processes/procedures
- Flawed logistics/supply chain
  - Resource poor

- Lack of IT infrastructure / coalition compatible infrastructure

- Sluggish info flows
- Intel / info needs

- Insufficient pre-depl. info
- No access to coalition info

- Sub-contracting to civilian org.
- C2 arrangements

- Impaired SA
- Troops safety
- Impaired interoperability

- Budgetary constraints
- Troops safety

- Trust /rapport / loyalty
- Tangible outcomes
Example of analysis of a humanitarian operation using Cynefin framework

Ali, 2009
Phase 1 – What needs addressing to harness the strengths of formal and informal structures

- Accountability (hierarchical, legal, political, professional)
- Responsibility / autonomy (ability to respond, ownership of endeavour)
- Structure of command and control (adaptability of organisational structures)

The chain of command was always used, but there was also a side channel used as well.
(Study Participant, 2001-2007)

You would always start with informal, but the formal would be always after…
(Study Participant, 2001-2007)
Phase2 – Requirements for effective formal / informal coexistence

- **Education (6*)**
  Greater education and understanding of when and how to use such networks and how they can best complement formal networks

- **Doctrinal guidance (7)**
  Acknowledgement that informal networks exist and doctrinal guidance on how best to approach informal networking

- **C2 Arrangements (10)**
  Clear direction of left / right of arc; command understanding of informal networks

- **Organisational systemic issues (4)**
  Culture of feedback to fix broken formal networks

- **Handovers and LOs (3)**
  Improved liaison methods - i.e. early embedding of LOs.

* Number of responses
Summary - Reconciliation of top-down hierarchy with social networks
Summary - Organisational Architecture & External Environment

Adapted from Verdon, 2009

Complex

Adaptability Focused

- Customised / Network Architecture
- Mission Command / Commander Intent / Boundary setting
- Emergent leadership
- Informal/social networks
- Interaction & Professional Mastery
- Self organising
- Exploration / Collaboration

Complicated

- Modular or Heterarchical Architecture
- Mix of Mission Command and C2
- Professional Mastery (Professional / Logical)
- Cooperation

Orchestrated

Action

- Bureaucratic
- Structured
- Traditional C2 Architecture
- Coordination

Chaos

Improvised

Action

- Need Agility with all Architectures and judgement to apply them usefully
- Innovation

Stability

Focused

Known

- Performance / Place / Cause-Effect Centric
Conclusions...

- Widespread utility and reliance on informal networks during operations

- Complex and uncertain environment
  - Utilise benefits of formal & informal organisation → must understand their co-existence
    - Education → responsible autonomy
    - Doctrinal guidance → command and control arrangements
    - Commander’s intent → accountability
  - Transform personnel management by providing responsible autonomy
  - Design architectures of participation to harness human capital

“…no formal organization will operate effectively without an accompanying informal organization” (Simon, 1976, 148-149)