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THESIS

**SOF ETHICS AND PROFESSIONALISM:
EXPLORING CULTURAL DYNAMICS AND THEIR
IMPACTS ON UNETHICAL OUTCOMES**

by

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ON UNETHICAL OUTCOMES**

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ABSTRACT

Over the last two decades, Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) have been under immense pressure to conduct back-to-back deployments combating terrorism. The speed of operations and the goal of placing the mission first has slowly changed the norms and behaviors, calling into question the ethics and professionalism within ARSOF formations. The deterioration of ethical performance has fostered an environment that erodes the trust that policymakers and senior leaders have placed in these unique elements. In this work, we identify the importance of organizational culture by asking two overarching questions: How does Special Operations Forces (SOF) organizational culture influence behavior? And why is SOF organizational culture important? The team utilized Edgar Schein's framework on culture to evaluate SOF organizational culture from a qualitative perspective to understand the different SOF organizational culture levels. Then the team analyzed Civil Affairs Officers' survey data to conduct quantitative analysis between organizational culture variables and how these may influence behavior and contribute to building trust. The thesis concluded by advocating for the resurgence of the basic tenets of coaching and mentoring leaders who would steward the legacy SOF profession now and into the future.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADP	Army Doctrine Publication
ADRP	Army Doctrine Reference Publication
CA	Civil Affairs
FORGEN	Force Generation Cycle
PME	Professional military education
PSYOP	Psychological Operations
SEALs	U.S. Navy Sea Air and Land Teams
SOCOM	United States Special Operations Command
SOF	Special operations forces
USAJFKSWCS	U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School
USASOC	U.S. Army Special Operations Command

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I. INTRODUCTION

There is a present concern that ethics and professionalism within the Special Operations Forces (SOF) enterprise are being eroded. In July 2019, the *New York Times* reported that a U.S. SEAL platoon was sent back to the States from their deployment in Iraq because of allegations of sexual misconduct.¹ In the same report, the Commander of Operations in Iraq, Maj. Gen. Eric Hill, stated that his reason for expelling the platoon was due to “perceived deterioration of good order and discipline.”² In the summer of 2017, Dan Lamothe, a reporter for the *Washington Post*, broke the news of a Special Forces non-commissioned officer who was strangled to death by members of U.S. Navy SEAL Team 6.³ In 2012, *Business Insider*’s reporter Michael B. Kelley reported on a pre-dawn car crash that plunged a vehicle into the Niger River in Mali, killing three soldiers and the three prostitutes with them.⁴ Two of the soldiers in the tragic incident were Civil Affairs soldiers from 95th Civil Affairs Brigade (BDE), Special Operations (SO), stationed at Fort Bragg, NC., and the other soldier was a communications specialist stationed at Fort Belvoir, VA. Jeff Schogol, a reporter for *Task and Purpose*, released a story of former Green Beret Maj. Matthew Golsteyn, with 3rd Special Forces Group (SFG), where he admitted during a job interview with the CIA to unlawfully killing a Taliban bomb maker while Golsteyn was deployed to Afghanistan.⁵

¹ Dave Philipps, “A Navy SEAL Platoon Is Pulled from Iraq Over Misconduct Report,” *The New York Times*, July 25, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/25/us/navy-seal-platoon-withdrawn-iraq.html>.

² Philipps.

³ Dan Lamothe, “Navy SEAL Convicted in Death of Green Beret Soldier Investigated for Contact with Victim’s Widow at Party,” *The Washington Post*, July 19, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2019/06/19/navy-seal-convicted-death-green-beret-soldier-investigated-contact-with-victims-widow-party/>.

⁴ Michael B. Kelley, “Three Prostitutes Were Involved in that Fatal U.S. Army Car Crash in Mali,” *Business Insider*, July 9, 2012. <https://www.businessinsider.com/three-us-commandos-and-three-prostitutes-died-in-a-car-crash-in-mali-2012-7>.

⁵ Jeff Schogol, “Former Green Beret Charged with Murder Says He Killed Suspected Taliban Bomb Maker in an Ambush,” *Task and Purpose*, December 13, 2018. <https://taskandpurpose.com/news/green-beret-murder-charge>.

These events point to a systemic issue occurring within the Special Operations Forces (SOF) formations. As a result of the perceived increase in incidents involving SOF, the U.S. Congress mandated a comprehensive review of professionalism and ethics programs for SOF, in section 1066 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019.⁶ The mandate highlighted areas of concern, and was designed to assess current approaches to improve both individual and organizational ethics within SOF.⁷

Subsequently, in 2018, the Commander (CDR) of United States Special Operations Command (SOCOM) released his memo titled *Guidance on Ethics*, to examine the underlying causes of unethical behavior.⁸ The decline of ethical behavior had seemingly grown to a point that forced SOCOM to reevaluate its organization's ethical climate. Each supporting command under the direction of SOCOM conducted a 90-day ethics stand down to focus on the importance of ethics in SOF culture. According to an August 2019 *Military Times* report, Gen. Clarke, the SOCOM CDR, upon assumption of command, highlighted the significance of ethics as being the guiding principle for every service member a part of SOCOM.⁹ During a January 2020 visit to Naval Postgraduate School, in Gen. Clarke's engagement with students and faculty, he outlined the importance of leadership and offered several personal anecdotes regarding failure and success; he concluded his visit by encouraging leaders to trust their conscience when it comes to adhering to ethics and core values.¹⁰ He went on to add that his intent was for each member within SOCOM to understand the foundational role of ethics as SOF professionals as they face the nation's irregular challenges. Amid the discussion, Gen. Clarke stressed the value for initiating the

⁶ John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act of 2019, Pub. L. 115–232—AUG. 13, 2018, 132 STAT. 1636 (2018). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-115publ232/pdf/PLAW-115publ232.pdf>.

⁷ John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act.

⁸ United States Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Command Comprehensive Review*, (MacDill Airforce Base, FL: United States Special Operations Command, 2020), <https://sof.news/pubs/USSOCOM-Comprehensive-Ethics-Review-Report-January-2020.pdf>.

⁹ Meghann Meyers, "SOCOM Boss calls for another Ethics Review SOCOM Boss calls for another Ethics Review," *Military Times*, August 12, 2019. <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2019/08/12/socom-boss-calls-for-another-ethics-review/>.

¹⁰ Nathan Serpico, "USSOCOM Commander Explores NPS with Emphasis on Innovation and Industry Partnerships," NPS News, January 31, 2020, <https://nps.edu/-/ussocom-commander-explores-nps-with-emphasis-on-innovation-and-industry-partnerships>.

comprehensive review of SOF culture and ethics in order to identify trends across the formation that influence lapses in ethical behavior.

The SOCOM Review Team assessed in the *United States Special Operations Command Comprehensive Review* that, “a strong ethical and cultural foundation is essential to maintain the trust of the Joint Force, policymakers, and the American people.”¹¹ The assessment also found that an ethically irresponsible and unprofessional force will foster an environment of mistrust between SOCOM and the American people, which will hinder the country’s ability to influence partners and allies positively. According to author Rod Powers, the values and principles of the military cannot and should not be violated, because it will undermine the Department of Defense Directive 5500.7, Standards of Conduct.¹² The SOCOM Review Team concluded that there is not a “systemic ethics problem.” Yet, the number of unethical incidents, such as those stated previously, reveals there may be something far more telling within culture of SOF than just the loss of ethics among these elite individuals. The SOCOM Review Team submitted that the drivers of unethical behavior of SOF was due in part to the improper use of the Special Operation Forces Force Generation (SOF FORGEN) cycle through a high rate of deployments. Also, the SOCOM Review Team’s analysis linked the overemphasis on mission accomplishment, neglect of training, leadership, discipline, and accountability as the causation that resulted in the failure of ethics, and it is this type imbalance which can lead to ethical misconduct.¹³ Although having a proper SOF FORGEN cycle is essential to maintaining unit effectiveness, improper utilization of SOF FORGEN should never override the core ethics of the organization. The SOCOM Review Team went on to highlight the need for the members within its organization to maintain an ethical and professional force to meet the security needs of the nation by emphasizing the inadequacies present within the development of both junior non-commissioned officer (NCO) and

¹¹ United States Special Operations Command, “USSOCOM Comprehensive Review” (Macdill Airforce Base, FL: United States Special Operations Command, 2020), <https://www.socom.mil/special-operations-forces-culture-and-ethics-comprehensive-review-letter-to-the-force>.

¹² Rod Powers, “Military Ethics and Conflict of Interest,” *The Balance Careers*, (blog), December 12, 2019, <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/military-ethics-and-conflicts-of-interest-3332000>

¹³ United States Special Operations Command, “USSOCOM Comprehensive Review,” 2020.

officer. Therefore, the SOCOM Review Team asserted that there is “insufficient development and a unbalanced approach to professional military education (PME) that neglects the career milestone requirements.”¹⁴ We concur with the notion that all PME should devote instructional time re-educating the force during each of the academic phases of professional development for officers and NCOs. According to one respondent, who was a former instructor at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, “placing the burden of responsibility of ethics training upon military academic institutions may represent an unbalanced approach to solving the problem, for there is limited time for training new personnel within SOF individual courses, and every aspect of ethical development cannot be performed by the academic institution alone due to resources and feasibility.”¹⁵ The SOCOM comprehensive review represents a crucial step towards the identification of key drivers that may lead to unethical behavior. However, the review left out some key considerations in their assessment of SOF culture, primarily the importance of organizational values and internalized assumptions. To contribute to the ongoing discussion, this research provides recommendations based on both quantitative and qualitative analysis as a step to aid current and future leaders of SOF in a solution to the problem.

This thesis aims to explore the role of the organizational culture on SOF behavior, principally by analyzing the uniqueness of SOF organizational culture as the primary driver of ethical issues leading to the moral breakdown among individuals and groups in SOF. The thesis will dissect and examine organizational culture to aid SOF leaders in understanding the power and influence of organizational culture and develop a strategy to enhance behavioral performance. The research seeks to address the following questions:

The literature on ethics and organizational culture is widely discussed within the business and academic sectors.¹⁶ It is understood that culture is not a new phenomenon

¹⁴ United States Special Operations Command.

¹⁵ On June 12, 2020, the author spoke with DeAndre McDonald regarding SOF Ethics and Professionalism Interview Questions.

¹⁶ Lynn S Paine, “Managing for Organizational Integrity,” *Harvard Business Review* 72, no. 2 (April 1994): 106–17.

just discovered. Yet, it is something that can have enormous effects on how individuals interact with one another—understanding the essence of why culture matters allow leaders to consider establishing a cultural identity that outlasts their tenure as key leaders of an organization. The challenge for ARSOF leaders is the relatively short duration in which individuals are assigned to command positions. According to Army Regulation (AR) 600–20, the average time for commanders to lead an organization is from 12–18 months, which makes sustaining a moral and ethical culture difficult.¹⁷ However, the reality of maintaining the right culture is often overlooked in the military context, and comprehending its influence on behavior is worth exploring.

The occurrences listed at the beginning of this chapter suggest that something must be done to increase the values of military ethics within SOF. SOF’s organizational culture is a complex bureaucracy that is not easily understood. Still, through careful observation of the organizational culture, this thesis seeks to bring clarity to the idea that building a healthy organizational culture will enable SOF to build an environment that refuses to tolerate anything less than the established standard.

A. WHY ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE MATTERS

Organizational culture is significant and can be interpreted in multiple ways, depending on the context and the entities in question. As for the U.S. Army, the Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 1, defines culture as a “dynamic social system, containing the values, beliefs, behaviors, and norms of a specific group, organization, society or other collectivity learned, shared, internalized, and changeable by all members of the society.”¹⁸ The same publication defines ethics as “the evolving set of laws, values, and beliefs embedded within the Army culture of trust that motivates and guides the conduct of Army professionals bound together in common moral purpose to do the right

¹⁷ Department of the Army, *Army Command Policy*, AR 600-20 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2014), https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/r600_20.pdf.

¹⁸ Department of the Army, *The Army Profession*, ADRP-1 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2015), https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/ARN18008_ADP-1%20FINAL%20WEB.pdf.

thing for the right reason in the right way.”¹⁹ These definitions suggest that culture and ethics are intertwined. However, after analyzing the Comprehensive Report, it is hard to conclude that there is no ethical and cultural dilemma present within the enterprise. These definitions are in line with widely accepted definitions of culture, particularly the definition formulated by Richard Daft, who posited that “culture is the set of values, guiding beliefs, understandings, and ways of thinking that is shared by members of an organization and taught to new members as correct.”²⁰

The definitions previously stated will be utilized as foundational terms for this project’s research into SOF organizational culture. According to Cameron and Quinn, in their comprehensive analysis of prosperous fortune 500 companies, an essential element present in successful entities is corporate culture.²¹ Numerous studies have demonstrated that organizational culture directly affects performance and long-term effectiveness.²² With these baseline assumptions and empirical evidence, it is then the intent of this thesis to explore SOF culture and ethics, especially following the current amplification of unethical behavior by SOF in multiple outlets. As Sinclair argues through his examination of organizational culture, one can find that it has an influence on individual ethics, and leaders are responsible for improving and establishing the culture of the organization.²³ The SOCOM Comprehensive Report assessed that there were numerous missed opportunities for senior leaders to engage units and personnel during their organization’s pre-mission training cycle, providing senior leaders the ability to assist in accurately assessing individual and group preparedness prior to deployment.²⁴ However, our research suggests that the SOCOM report failed to highlight that the current shortcomings of ethics

¹⁹ Department of the Army.

²⁰ Richard Daft, “Organizational Culture and Ethical Values,” in *Organizational Theory and Design*, 2nd ed. (Mason, OH: South Western College Publishing, 2004), 112–27.

²¹ Kim S. Cameron and Robert E. Quinn, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture: Based on the Competing Values Framework*. Rev. Ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006,) 4.

²² Cameron and Quinn, 6.

²³ Amanda Sinclair, “Approaches to Organizational Culture and Ethics,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 12 (January 1, 1993): 63–73, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01845788>.

²⁴ United States Special Operations Command, “USSOCOM Comprehensive Review,” 2020, 4.

and professionalism are heavily influenced by the current organizational culture. For this reason, it is critical to show why leadership is vital to providing a vision that is consistent in educating the force and communicating ethics and professionalism that can then be utilized to diffuse a positive organizational culture.

There is limited research on the topic of SOF ethics and culture, and the associated works on SOF in a cultural context only focus organizational performance and application of SOF in war. As an example, David Hawk's work centered on the effects of organizational culture on performance and effectiveness, with emphasis on how U.S. Special Forces (SF) need to reshape its organizational culture to adapt to the new challenges of the future.²⁵ On the other hand, Bart Kennedy's research concentrated on defining SOF as a practice by understanding military ethics in a SOF context using moral reasoning.²⁶ As part of the study, Kennedy examined the concepts of selection, narrative, and traditions and their role in ethical behavior. One of his key conclusions was to conduct further examination and reform of SOF culture to enhance ethical behavior across SOF.²⁷ This thesis aims to further the discussion on SOF ethics by researching SOF's organizational culture, utilizing a framework to strengthen a collective understanding of the current state SOF culture.

As such, to fully understand the effects of ethical issues, this thesis utilizes Edgar Schein's work on *Organizational Culture and Leadership* by explicitly focusing on one component underneath the SOCOM umbrella, namely the United States Army Special Operations Forces (USASOC or ARSOF). By examining ARSOF's organizational cultural factors, we seek to provide a framework to better understand the cultural DNA of SOF and shed light into how individuals and groups are influenced by SOF culture. The in-depth understanding of organizational culture gained through the utilization of this framework is

²⁵ David Hawk, "Sexy Is What You Make It: Organizational Culture and U.S. Army Special Forces" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2014), <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/42641>.

²⁶ Bart Kennedy, "The Practice Of Special Operations: An Analysis of SOF Ethics" (Monterey, CA, Naval Postgraduate School, 2019), <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/63991>.

²⁷ Kennedy.

essential, as culture is one of the forces that shape ethical behavior in organizations.²⁸ Also, according to Schein's research, it is imperative to dissect organizational culture into the following layers: artifacts, espoused beliefs, and values, and basic underlying assumptions in assessing the true nature of any given culture. The thesis compares aspects of several organizations utilized in Schein's research as case studies as a way to evaluate SOF organizational culture. Through Schein's paradigm, the thesis provides an inside-out perspective of the culture, which may contribute to the moral and ethical dilemmas SOF members face.

B. RESEARCH APPROACH

In order to address the research questions, our team utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze SOF organizational culture. In order to evaluate SOF culture from a qualitative perspective, the research utilized Edgar Schein's framework to evaluate organizational culture. Schein's organizational culture model evaluates three levels of organizational culture: artifacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions.²⁹ The application of Schein's framework to our research methodologies is critical to decipher the basic assumptions which shape the values of the SOF organization, which in turn influence behavior. The interviews administered to SOF Officers enrolled in the Defense Analysis (DA) curriculum provided valuable insights from the various subcultures within SOF represented by SF Officers from 1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th and 10th Special Forces Groups (SFG), as well as representatives from Psychological Operations (PSYOP) and CA.

In addition to interviews, the study also utilized case studies and data from a survey conducted in 2017 with Civil Affairs Officers. The quantitative analysis identified the relationship between organizational culture variables and how these may influence behavior and the establishment of norms that may be inconsistent with the values and ethics expected of military professionals.

²⁸ Daft, "Organizational Culture and Ethical Values," 21.

²⁹ Edgar H. Schein and Peter A. Schein, "*Organizational Culture and Leadership*," 5th Ed., (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=4766585>, 17.

C. CONCLUSION

As stated, the primary goal of this research is to contribute to the ongoing conversation on ethics and professionalism within SOCOM, by identifying additional elements that may influence the ethical and moral compass of America's most trusted warriors. Thus, the significance of this analysis of SOF organizational culture aids in developing and maintaining the force for the future. For without a morally and ethically resilient culture, SOF will erode from the inside out. Yes, SOF provides the Joint Force and policymakers with a combat-focused force that is prepared to offer solutions to any complex situations, but neglecting to address the root cause of ethical issues may result in more high-profile incidents. If the unethical events that occurred within SOF formations are allowed to persist unabated, the lack of morality will eventually erode the social credit that SOF has forged with the American people, and policymakers will be forced to act. Examining the depth of impact that organizational culture has on individuals and groups is vital for SOF leadership to construct an appropriate response to promoting an atmosphere that refuses to give into unethical and immoral behavior.

Chapter I provided a brief summary of the ethical challenges facing SOF, as well as the main findings presented in the SOCOM review mandated by Congress, and established the necessity of conducting an assessment of SOF culture through a from a different perspective. In Chapter II, this thesis evaluates SOF culture through the application of Schein's organizational culture model, utilizing information provided by SOF personnel during the interviews. Chapter III presents a quantitative examination of organizational culture variables and their potential effects on SOF professionalism. Chapter IV of this thesis summarizes the findings and provides recommendations to establish a coaching and mentorship program to inculcate an organizational culture conducive to producing and maintaining ethical behavior.

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II. DISSECTING SOF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

To accurately understand SOF organizational culture, it is necessary to recognize which organization within SOCOM is being studied. Even though USSOCOM is a large organization consisting of multiple sub-organizations, the work completed herein only focused on USASOC. Within USASOC, there are six organizations: USAJFKSWCS, 1st Special Forces Command (1st SFC), 75th Ranger Regiment, and U.S. Army Special Operations Aviation Command (SOAR). The focus group for the thesis gathered information from fifteen participants from 1st SFC, which consisted of participants from PSYOPS (4th & 8th PSYOPS Groups), SF (1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th, & 10th Special Forces Groups), and CA (83rd BN & 95th CA Brigade). There were fifteen interviews conducted that focused on the observations from each participant's experience from their last organization. For a complete copy of the interview questions, see *Appendix 1 SOF: Ethics and Professionalism Interview Questions*.

Over the past two decades, the tempo of combat has contributed to the breakdown of organizational culture. Angela Halvorson, a consultant for Abt Associates, and author of *Understanding the Military: The Institution, the Culture, and the People*, stated prolonged and continuous deployments could cause “uncertainty, confusion, fear, and disruption, that for many are beyond their limited coping or resiliency skills.”³⁰ Additionally, she specified that the limitation on coping skills had led some service members to violate both ethical and moral standards expected of military professionals. According to the *Council on Foreign Relations*, the gruesome events of September 11, 2001, conducted by Al Qaeda, thrust the United States into an enduring commitment that led to America's longest war since Vietnam.³¹ By 2003, the U.S. was fully engaged in

³⁰ Angela Halvorson, “Understanding Military: The Institution, the Culture, and the People” (Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse, and Mental Health Services Administration, 2010), https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/military_white_paper_final.pdf.

³¹ “The U.S. War in Afghanistan 1999–2020: The Taliban Insurgency Remains Resilient Nearly Two Decades after U.S.-Led Forces Toppled Its Regime in What Led to the United States’ Longest War,” Council on Foreign Relations, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-war-afghanistan>.

operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan.³² Plus, according to the 2006 Congressional Budget Office report, the Active Army spent millions of dollars on advertising campaigns for retention and recruiting to meet year-end strength numbers to keep pace with the requirements of the Global War of Terror (GWOT), primarily situated in the Middle East.³³ DOD's expectation of SOCOM at the earlier stages of GWOT has forced SOF leadership to shift its organizational focus. Andrew Feickert stated in Congressional Report that SOCOM deterred from conducting "activities designed to deter emerging threats...to current responsibilities of synchronizing the planning, coordination, deployment, and when directed, the employment of SOF globally."³⁴ Additionally, the SOCOM Comprehensive Review on ethics and professionalism added that new obligations upon SOF command structures led to an imbalance in the development of a cultural identity that emphasized the mission as the principle.³⁵ The result of overemphasizing the mission, coupled with high operational tempo, inadvertently produced an environment ripe for ethical and moral misconduct to flourish.

SOF's drive toward tactical mission success has changed how some within SOF began to regard ethics and therefore spent time, energy, and resources toward increasing tactical effectiveness. Yet, according to Florian Emonet of the Swiss Armed Forces, writing in *U.S. Army NCO Journal*, to increase military operational effectiveness, ethics training must be a top priority of the force and executed at the lowest level.³⁶ Emonet continued to state that the U.S. Army should avoid surface anecdotes like online training, and develop "a new approach... such as practical ethics education based on case studies to provide

³² Andrew Feickert, "U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF): Background and Issues for Congress," Congressional Report (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2010), https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20100716_RS21048_cebd65b66a46e7344293952a73570c5f9dbff615.pdf.

³³ James N. Dertouzos, "The Cost-Effectiveness of Military Advertising: Evidence from 2002–2004" (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2009), https://www.rand.org/pubs/documented_briefings/DB565.html.

³⁴ Feickert, "USSOF Background and Issues for Congress," 2.

³⁵ United States Special Operations Command, "USSOCOM Comprehensive Review," 2020.

³⁶ Florian Emonet, "The Importance of Ethics Education in Military Training," *NCO Journal*, Army University Press, (Fort Leavenworth, KS: November 16, 2018): 1, <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/nco-journal/docs/Emone-Ethics-v4.pdf>

additional elements of reflection.”³⁷ In May 2020, USASOC Commanding Officer, Lt. Gen. Beaudette, addressed junior field grade officers attending professional military education (PME), and remarked that a number of ethical and moral issues present within SOF culture were resulting from the “lack of trust in a lot of ways,”³⁸ which, in his opinion, stemmed from “two functional components: vision and energy.”³⁹ Beaudette further stated that “good guidance and intent”⁴⁰ may have alleviated the moral quandaries that ego personalities have cultivated within ARSOF formations. Ramus Hougaard and Jacqueline Carter authored a piece in *Harvard Business Review*, which cautioned leaders regarding the creation of ego personalities within high functioning organizations. Additionally, Ramus and Jacqueline stated that as egos grow, it places individuals and even groups in “insulated bubble(s), causing them to lose touch with their colleagues,”⁴¹ and this affects how people view established standards and norms.

By addressing the change forming within the force, this thesis utilized Dr. Edgar Schein’s work on *Organizational Culture and Leadership* to analyze how SOF organizational culture can influence individual and group behavior. Schein’s work divides organizational culture into three separate sections for analysis: Artifacts, Espoused Beliefs and Values, and Underlying Basic Assumptions⁴² (see Figure 1). Schein’s study focused on analyzing what he referred to as the organization’s core or the behaviors that members use to communicate the culture of the organization amongst the group and to outsiders.⁴³ Comprehension of Schein’s evaluation process can enable SOF senior leaders to accurately

³⁷ Florian Emonet, “The Importance of Ethics Education in Military Training,” 3.

³⁸ Nate Prussian, “Army Special Operations Company Commanders Course” (class notes for lecture U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Monterey, CA, 2020).

³⁹ Prussian.

⁴⁰ Prussian.

⁴¹ Jacqueline Carter and Rasmus Hougaard, “Ego is the Enemy of Good Leadership,” *Harvard Business Review*, (November 06, 2018): <https://hbr.org/2018/11/ego-is-the-enemy-of-good-leadership>

⁴² Edgar H. Schein and Peter Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 5th ed. (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017), 10.

⁴³ Edgar H. Schein and Peter Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 17.

assess the complexity of organizational culture and develop a holistic plan of action to infuse throughout every level of SOCOM.

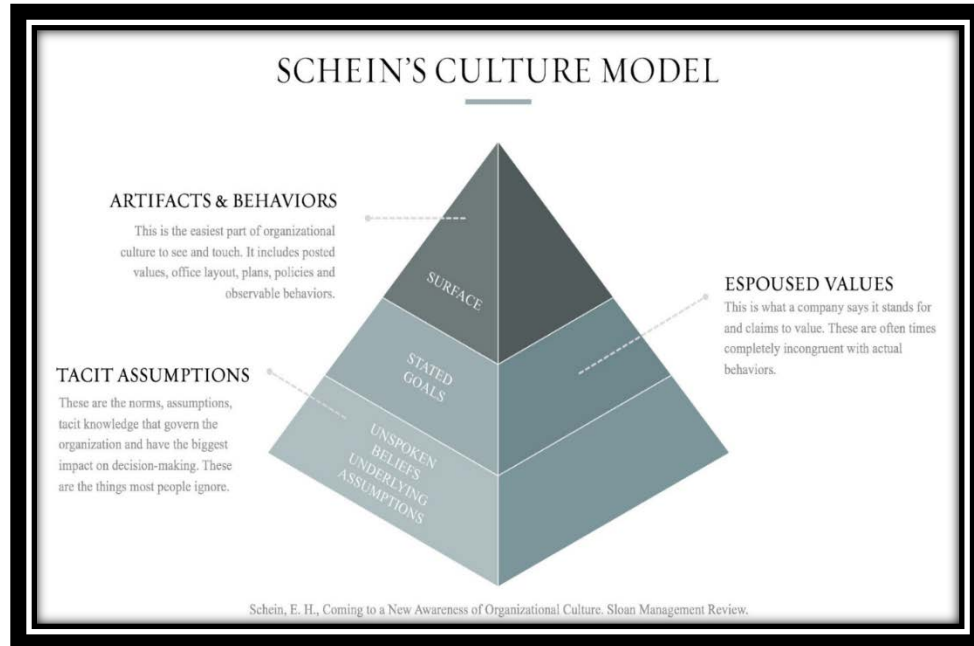


Figure 1. Schein's Culture Model⁴⁴

A. THE STRUCTURE OF CULTURE

Identifying the complexity of culture requires leaders to understand what Dr. Schein defines as culture. Schein pivoted away from a more traditional definition of culture like that of anthropologist Edward Tylor. Tylor defined culture "as a complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits."⁴⁵ Schein approaches the definition from an evolutionary understanding of culture, which captures how perceptions are formed over time and through circumstances:

A Dynamic Definition of Culture

⁴⁴ @semanticwill, "Culture Matters," Twitter, June 8, 2018, <https://twitter.com/semanticwill/status/1005068645788241921>.

⁴⁵ Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1871)

The culture of a group can be defined as the accumulated shared learning of that group as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration; which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, feel, and behave in relation to those problems.

This accumulated learning is a pattern or system of beliefs, values, and behavioral norms that come to be taken for granted as basic assumptions and eventually drop out of awareness.⁴⁶

The uniqueness of Schein's explanation of culture provides a useful roadmap for analyzing the development of SOF organizational culture over the last 19 years. Additionally, Schein's definition of culture is helpful when visualizing the external and internal factors which gave birth to modern SOF cultural norms. Lt. Gen. Beaudette, when speaking on leadership issues and cultural problems within SOF, stated that there is "nothing new to leadership,"⁴⁷ suggesting that the ethical and moral issues highlighted in the media are issues that leaders cannot avoid.

The Commander of the 3rd Special Forces Group (SFG), Col. Prussian, stated that there was a cultural and leadership problem within SOF. He pointed out that leaders were present and involved in the misconduct, and the tempo of combat from the last two decades has changed the environment of SOF and neglected to develop the whole soldier.⁴⁸ The shift that took place in SOF is not something that can be immediately seen on the surface, such as artifacts, but requires an understanding of each element that constitutes the culture.

B. ARTIFACTS

What are the artifacts? Merriam-Webster defined artifacts as "a usually simple object (such as a tool or ornament) showing human workmanship or modification as distinguished

⁴⁶ Edgar H. Schein and Peter Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 5th ed. (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017), 10.

⁴⁷ Nate Prussian, "Army Special Operations Company Commanders Course" (class notes for lecture U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Monterey, CA, 2020).

⁴⁸ Prussian.

from a natural object.”⁴⁹ Schein defined artifacts as the visible and feelable elements such as “the architecture of the organization’s physical environment; cultural language; the technology and products, artistic creations;...its myths and stories told about the organization and its published list of values.”⁵⁰ Schein continued by stating that the first level of an organization is easily seen but rather difficult to interpret or understand.

Furthermore, Schein explained that while consulting for Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC) during the mid-1960s to early-1990s, he was exposed to the company’s artifacts from the omnipresent open-office architecture, to the dysfunctional meetings with top management, and matrix-style organization. Yet, he stated that the surface level of exposure did not explain the climate of the organization. And Laura Queen, blogger for Colloquia Partners, asserted in a blog post *Artifacts: A Powerful Driver of Your Organization’s Culture*, that organizational artifacts are the systems, protocols, standard operating procedures (SOP), and interfaces between colleagues that all produce the atmosphere or climate of an organization.⁵¹ Laura suggested that organizational artifacts are those elements that are realized but require active management to ensure they represent the values and beliefs of the organization.

When analyzing SOF at the surface level of culture, the artifacts that may come to mind for individuals familiar with SOF, are the iconic statutes of President John F. Kennedy and Brig. Gen Yarbrough, which are situated across from the United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (USAJFKSWCS).⁵² The statues are a representation of President Kennedy’s affinity with SOF elements during the Vietnam era. The Green Beret is an iconic symbol that communicates to the world the rigorous training

⁴⁹ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “artifact,” accessed July 28, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/artifact>.

⁵⁰ Edgar H. Schein and Peter Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 5th ed. (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017), 17.

⁵¹ Laura Queen, “Artifacts: A Power Driver of Your Organization’s Culture,” *Insights* (blog), February 6, 2017, <http://colloquiapartners.com/2017/02/06/artifacts-a-powerful-driver-of-your-organizations-culture/>

⁵² Janice Burton, “SWCS to dedicate Kennedy-Yarborough statue,” *U.S. Army*, (March 28, 2012), https://www.army.mil/article/76701/swcs_to_dedicate_kennedy_yarborough_statue.

that is required to earn the coveted headgear.⁵³ Yet, according to Schein, attempting to understand an organization by analyzing the artifacts is difficult because observers are unable to recreate the meaning of the artifacts of the group being analyzed. He argues that the main reason why artifacts alone are insufficient to understand culture is that what is seen by an outsider of the organization will inevitably be interpreted differently from an individual who is part of the organization under analysis who understands the meanings of the artifacts.⁵⁴ Thus, it is only by examining the values and beliefs of the organization we can begin to discover what Schein regarded as the cultural DNA.

C. USASOC ARTIFACTS

Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6, Mission Command is the foundational doctrine that drives operations in the U.S. Army. It defines mission command as “the Army’s approach to command and control that empowers subordinate decision making and decentralized execution appropriate to the situation.”⁵⁵ When starting from the premise aforementioned, it follows that decision-making processes in SOF are decentralized and that all leaders are trusted to make decisions, particularly in small units. The interviews of this thesis revealed that, for the most part, this is true. SOF members first observe the concept of empowerment during their respective qualification courses and each validation exercise for SF, CA, and PSYOP. However, respondents revealed that the degree to which they were empowered differed drastically. According to the junior leaders, the differences of empowerment were principally due to leadership styles, and the responses revealed that, in some instances, junior leaders were dissuaded from making decisions during Pre-Mission Training. The implications of these responses show that if detachment/team commanders are not trusted to make decisions during training, they are less likely to be empowered during deployments across the globe. The discrepancy between the observed artifacts and doctrine

⁵³ Tony Schwalm, Green Beret Training: “Ain’t Nothing But a Thing,” *Military.com*, (2012) <https://www.military.com/special-operations/green-beret-training-tony-schwalm.html>

⁵⁴ Edgar H. Schein and Peter A. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2016), 18, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=4766585>.

⁵⁵ Department of the Army, *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces*, ADP 6-0 (Washington, D.C. Department of the Army, 2019) https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/ARN19189_ADP_6-0_FINAL_WEB_v2.pdf.

is problematic because one of the main reasons for SOF operators to transition from conventional forces (CF) to SOF, is to influence the planning and execution of operations in complex environments.

The concepts of flexibility and adaptability are also vital elements of Mission Command, as these are critical to responding rapidly and effectively to dynamic changes in the operational environment.⁵⁶ To gain insight into the application of these tenets in SOF, we asked if the organizations valued junior leaders who utilized initiative to support mission objectives. Similar to the question about empowerment, SOF members had divergent responses. The majority of respondents asserted that their organizations were highly decentralized and supported the detachment/team commander's judgment as long as they kept the chain of command informed and maintained the ethical and moral high ground. Other SOF members stated that their respective organizations discouraged collaboration with other entities outside of the chain of command. This type of response suggests that SOF is not internalizing the essential elements of Mission Command, which in turn decreases an element's ability to coordinate directly with Unified Action Partners (UAPs) to advance strategic objectives.

Two additional artifacts selected for this research included the examination of SOF communication structure and interpersonal dynamics. When asked if the physical layout of the workspace was conducive to open communication, the interviewees suggested by their answers that the physical layouts are adequate for close collaboration within the organization and continuous exchange of ideas. According to Schein, during his assessment of DEC, he observed that the company's high regard for and value to its communication structure were instrumental to their organizational performance.⁵⁷

The SOF team's dynamics were assessed by asking SOF personnel whether the interaction in the organization was formal or informal, a question which is essential to evaluate what Schein categorizes as "unwritten rules," as these are critical for new members

⁵⁶ Department of the Army, *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces*, 3–16.

⁵⁷ Schein and Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 34.

to adapt to the organization.⁵⁸ In SOF, one of these unwritten rules is how personnel address each other on a first-name basis, when on a mission or inside the team room, which is different from the Conventional Force (CF) military customs and courtesy. All respondents stated that interactions at the team level are informal, which at times can lead to confusion for younger team members.

This thesis also looked at two critical processes that influence and shape behavior in an organization: reward systems and punishment. To assess reward systems, we asked two closely related questions: What are the organization's rewards systems, and how often is ethical behavior recognized? Although a limited number of organizations followed their award policies, the majority of respondents stated that SOF members do not receive rewards comparable to their efforts and performance. Overwhelmingly, the respondents agreed that the organizations did not prioritize reward systems, as a result of the high OPTEMPO of operations or inefficiency in established administrative systems.

An interesting perspective presented by a former Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC) commander was that in some organizations, the types of awards are often dictated by rank; thus, junior NCOs within SOF tend to receive lesser accommodations despite significant contributions to the organization. A common response was that organizations only provided awards upon the end of a Soldier's assignment with the unit. In some instances, SOF members received only a Permanent Change of Station (PCS) award for a 3–4-year period in which he/she deployed to potentially hostile environments. However, some organizations demonstrated an appreciation of soldiers by informally recognizing individuals in front of the organization. An additional response was that SOF members were expected to perform at a high level and that the reward for their efforts was the yearly evaluation process. The majority of respondents answered that ethical behavior is not usually rewarded in organizations in any formal way, because it is a part of the evaluation process, a process which evaluates the character and professionalism of the soldier.⁵⁹ One SOF

⁵⁸ Schein and Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 8.

⁵⁹ Department of the Army, "Evaluation Reporting System," AR 623-3, (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2019), <https://ssilrc.army.mil/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AR-623-3-Evaluation-Reporting-System-14-June-2019.pdf>.

member responded that the reward for ethical behavior was inherent in the assignment to additional positions within USASOC.

The responses to the question of the utilization of punishment for unethical behavior are somewhat concerning. Generally, the agreement is that SOF does not consistently hold individuals accountable for their actions. Some observed that investigations occur when an incident is highlighted by external reports, which casts a negative light on SOF. Otherwise, members are reassigned around to other organizations within SOF, with little to no consequences at the individual level. Alternatively, SOF members are reassigned to CF units, or as one respondent stated, “when they are not good enough for the professionals, they send you to minor leagues.”

D. ESPOUSED VALUES AND BELIEFS

When identifying the espoused values and beliefs of an organization can be difficult because these are elements that require observation. However, Schein defined organizational or corporate espoused values and beliefs as those principles, ideals, ideologies, and aspirations that originate from an individual’s system of beliefs and values.⁶⁰ Schein highlighted that “espoused beliefs and morals or ethical rules remain conscious and serve as the normative or moral function for guiding members to deal with certain situations.”⁶¹ Kanika Khandelwal and Nishtha Mohendra, while researching organizational values defined espoused values as “values that are expressed on behalf of the organization or attributed to an organization by its senior managers in public statements, may be distinct from practiced values.”⁶² Therefore, the principles and values of an organization become the driving force that moves organizations toward success or failure.

Building the correct culture requires significant investment, which takes time and commitment. Schein, in his analysis of Ciba-Geigy, a Swiss multinational, multidivisional,

⁶⁰ Edgar H. Schein and Peter Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 5th ed. (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017), 19.

⁶¹ Schein and Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 20.

⁶² Kanika Aggarwal Khandelwal and Nishtha Mohendra, “Espoused Organizational Values, Vision, and Corporate Social Responsibility: Does it Matter to Organizational Members?” *SAGE Journals*, Volume 35, No 3, (July - September 2010): 19, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0256090920100302>.

and geographically decentralized company, stated that the company placed a premium on how the value of “elegance and quality, was reflective in the interactions amongst its members and its development of its products and services to consumers.⁶³ In addition to the value mentioned in Ciba-Geigy, there was a high value placed on respect for technical expertise, academic achievements, individual efforts, and contribution. However, the essential aspect that underpinned the success of the company came as a result of the company’s global identity of helping “third-world countries” tackle complex problems. The value of other people became a vital part of the company’s DNA, a value that was communicated to new members.

For example, the fast-food company Chick-fil-A places a significant value on care, and they communicate this principle in how they care for the needs of each customer.⁶⁴ Additionally, to show that they are serious about the value of caring for its members, the company is closed on Sundays to allow time for the organization and employees to rest. However, Patrick Lencioni, author of *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, wrote in *Harvard Business Review* that a hallowed set of values would hold no meaning, which leaves the organization vulnerable to highly destructive behaviors.⁶⁵ He continued by stating that, even though corporations have great values posted, it does not make them immune to possessing a toxic culture. To drive his point home, Patrick presented how the Enron Corporation failed to uphold its list of corporate values: “communication, respect, integrity, and excellence.” Patrick’s assessment revealed how Enron’s failure in leadership nurtured an environment ripe for corruption that led to the company’s bankruptcy.

Nevertheless, Enron’s story is not anything unique. The internet is full of stories of organizations that are disastrous for many different reasons. Schein stated there are “organizations that espoused values and beliefs that reflect desired behavior but are not

⁶³ Edgar H. Schein and Peter Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 5th ed. (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017), 50.

⁶⁴ “Chick-Fil-A, Culture and Values,” accessed July 31, 2020, <https://www.chick-fil-a.com/careers/culture>

⁶⁵ Patrick M. Lencioni, “Make Your Values Mean Something,” *Harvard Business Review*, July 1, 2002, <https://hbr.org/2002/07/make-your-values-mean-something>.

reflected in observed behavior.”⁶⁶ Understanding that some organizations have dichotomous thinking, it is essential to identify how SOF organizational culture espoused values and beliefs influence their cultural norms.

Within a relatively short period, SOF has seen a transition from being known as quiet professionals into a force that has lost its way. They worked behind the shadows influencing the Nation’s foreign policy objectives, to what the SOCOM Comprehensive Review referred to as a culture focused on force employment. This subtle transformation in culture is what Schein explained as the dynamic change of beliefs and values.⁶⁷ The variation of responses regarding values revealed what Schein referenced as a contradiction in what the organization says and what it does.⁶⁸ David Hawk, in his work, asked the crucial questions, such as “does SOF organizational culture hinder or promote the adherence to SOF ethics and professionalism?”⁶⁹ However, Jonathan Kingsley, a SOF operator researching Special Forces values stated the following:

Aspects of culture that are part of indoctrination include developing a shared identity, assumptions, meanings, values, mindsets, perceptions, ideology, and norms. Individual Green Berets come to understand what their peers and the organization expects of them. Here they begin to experience normative pressures, including competition in marksmanship and physical training. A message in SF education is, ‘It pays to be a winner.’ The “winner is rewarded.”⁷⁰

The SOCOM Comprehensive Review highlighted the fallacy in creating a culture that defines winning in terms of physical and tactical fitness above ethical and moral correctness in conduct.⁷¹ It is not to claim that physical strength and combat skills are not

⁶⁶ Edgar H. Schein and Peter Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 5th ed. (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017), 20.

⁶⁷ Schein and Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 19.

⁶⁸ Schein and Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 20.

⁶⁹ David Hawk, “Sexy Is What You Make It: Organizational Culture and U.S. Army Special Forces” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2014), <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/42641>.

⁷⁰ Jonathan D. Kingsley, *Special Forces Values: How the Regiment’s Ethical Framework Influence Its Organizational Effectiveness*, (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2017. 12) <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/56744>

⁷¹ United States Special Operations Command, “USSOCOM Comprehensive Review,” 2020, 14.

essential, but as Hawk stated, “if the organizational culture is one that places a premium on cultural awareness,”⁷² the culture should reflect that in its actions as well. However, in the context of SOF, thinking that the mission takes precedence over other elements of the organization can lead to assumptive thinking that creates unexpected cultural norms.

E. USASOC ESPOUSED VALUES

The foundation of the Army profession is rooted on the Army Values: *Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Self-less Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage (LDRSHIP)*, which along with the standards of our profession assist Soldiers with maintaining a moral compass to fulfill our commitment with the American citizens.⁷³ The Special Operations Command adds to the Army Values, through the incorporation of a set of norms and values intended to influence SOF capabilities and behavior, the SOF Truths. These include: “*Humans are more important than hardware,*” “*quality is better than quantity,*” “*Special Operations Forces cannot be mass-produced,*” “*Competent Special Operations Forces cannot be created after emergencies occur,*” and “*Most special operations require non-SOF support*”⁷⁴ Thus, to continue our assessment into the behaviors and processes that can be observed, but difficult to interpret, it is necessary to evaluate the values and norms propagated by USASOC. During the interviews, we asked the participants to delineate the values of the organization. Although the majority in one way or another alluded to the Army Values and the SOF Truths, we obtained different responses, which suggest that the USASOC culture as a whole is not synchronized.

One respondent stated that the values for him meant “getting things done.” Other respondents stated integrity, honesty, and SOF truths as the main drivers of their performance and behavior. However, some respondents noted the importance of providing clarity to subordinates to prevent misinterpretation of the values. Special Operation members added competence, innovation, creativity, adaptability, teamwork, perseverance, and

⁷² David Hawk, “Sexy Is What You Make It: Organizational Culture and U.S. Army Special Forces” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2014), <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/42641>, 25

⁷³ Department of the Army, *The Army Profession*, 2–8.

⁷⁴ United States Special Operations Command, “SOF Truths,” modified August 13, 2020, USSOCOM, <https://www.socom.mil/about/sof-truths>.

empowerment to the values of their respective organizations. Perhaps, the most concerning answers regarding loyalty were expressed by two respondents who stated that commitment within the teams was so strong that it led them to look the other way when it came to behavior that may be categorized as unethical or immoral.

After the identification of the values espoused across the subcultures that make up USASOC, the next logical step was to evaluate the diffusion of the values across the organizations. We do have to make a clear distinction at this point, and that is that the respondents were all officers. Therefore, in our current setting, we are unable to evaluate the Non-Commissioned Officers' (NCOs) assessment or the lower enlisted in support functions, both of which form the core of our organizations. Because of leadership differences, we obtained a variety of insightful responses, which included amplification of the values through meetings, memorandum for records, command philosophies, symbols such as beret flashes, t-shirts, and posters across the organizations. Some of the units used museums in their installations, museums which highlighted the values and norms presented in their respective creeds. The respondents asserted that most of the values were adopted directly from the ARSOF vision and the organization's mission statements.

In principle, all the approaches, as mentioned earlier to diffuse organizational values, represent positive steps taken to establish a professional culture. However, as clearly articulated by one of the respondents, "the values on the posters mean nothing until they are given some meaning by leadership." This statement is critical because out of the seven organizations interviewed, only three of them devoted time during the counseling process, briefings, or actions that demonstrated the importance of the organizational values. Perhaps the best example was one organization that legitimately exemplified the "human is more important than hardware" principle by continuously taking care of the SOF member families in times of need.

Once we gained insight into the espoused values within USASOC and how they are diffused across the organizations, the following discussions focused on each SOF member's interpretation of organizational culture. The first question asked whether organizational culture was a key component in the success of the organization. Not surprisingly, each of the SOF members answered positively to this question. However, two important observations

came to light: leadership engagement, and deployment cycles, both of which negatively impacted organizational performance. In the first instance, the emphasis on leadership engagement diverged significantly between organizations. Some respondents stated that their senior leaders took the time to counsel and mentor subordinates, but in general, responses indicate senior leaders did not prioritize engagements with junior officers.

The FORGEN cycle was identified as the second obstacle to an effective organizational culture. The respondents described how the fast OPTEMPO limits their ability to interact with senior members of the organization, and as a result, they receive little to no guidance from leadership, which leaves them left to their own devices to identify the values, the mission, and vision of the organization. Furthermore, the interviews revealed that the lack of leadership engagement, continuous deployment cycles, and rapid turnover of leadership is perhaps one of the main drivers influencing unethical behavior. These assertions seem to validate the findings of the SOCOM review. Essentially, the high demand for SOF elements from the TSOCs represents an obstacle for command teams to assess the character of the individuals deployed.

Another key organizational aspect assessed was whether there was a fit between the individuals in the organization and its culture, with an emphasis on character traits. The responses were mostly in line with previous assessments, in that organizations value innovative personnel and those that can execute missions to standards. Others stated that physical fitness, initiative, competence, and desire were important in assuming higher risks, and these were the key traits sought by their organizations; they also were essential to building trust and confidence. Although the traits already mentioned are critical, character, or ethical behavior, in general, were each not mentioned. One of the respondents with recent experience in a conventional Army organization stated that the “difference between SOF and big Army is that SOF checks the box on character traits, but the conventional Army emphasizes character traits as thoroughly as possible.”

These assessments suggest that organizations are confident that the SOF selection processes at SWCS have screened candidates with character traits that will be a good fit for SOF units. Therefore, the organization is less likely to emphasize ethics and values upon new members’ arrival to the organization. Of particular concern is the observation from multiple

SOF members that there is little to no ethics training upon arrival to the unit, as part of the PMT, or while deployed. The officers interviewed further stated that the NCOs and lower enlisted receive even less ethics training, and this may represent a gap that negatively influences SOF members' behavior, and hence in a violation of the trust emplaced in us by the American people.

F. TAKEN-FOR-GRANTED UNDERLYING BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

To identify what drives individuals and groups within an organizational culture to perform and behave in a particular manner requires a comprehension of basic or tacit underlying assumptions. Edgar defined basic assumptions as elements that the group “learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way you perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.”⁷⁵ By 2004, the *New York Times* reported that with the destruction of the Taliban in Afghanistan and defeat of Iraqi dictator Hussein and his Republican Guard, the problem of terrorism began rapidly expanding across the globe. At that time, the only force capable of shouldering the burden of responsibility for conducting counter-terrorism operations was USSOCOM.⁷⁶ It is in this context that SOF plunged into three underlying assumptions: the concept of mission first, and leadership influence, and adherence to core Army Values.

G. THE MISSION FIRST

During the first part of the GWOT, the mission first mantra of SOF came into being out of demand to target violent extremist organizations from areas in the Middle East to the shores of Southeast Asia. In 2010, according to a U.S. Senate report, SOF received increased funding to prevent state and non-state actors from “destabilizing countries, creating

⁷⁵ Schein and Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 21.

⁷⁶ Eric Schmitt and Thom Shanker, “The Reach of War: Military Special Warriors Have Growing Ranks and Growing Pains in Taking Key Antiterror Role,” *The New York Times*, August 2, 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/08/02/world/reach-war-military-special-warriors-have-growing-ranks-growing-pains-taking-key.html>.

economic crisis and causing violence” amongst key areas of the U.S. interests.⁷⁷ In an effort to secure success in the global strategy against terrorism, SOF became fixated on tactical activities related to Direct Action as the primary measure of achievement. In 2012, David Oakley and Patrick Proctor wrote an article in the *Journal of Strategic Security* highlighting how the fallacy of U.S. counter-terrorism strategy, inadvertently led to DOD’s infatuation with killing or capturing enemy combatants and subsequently developing a culture focused on mission success.⁷⁸ Oakley and Proctor stated that the “zero-sum game strategy created an imbalance”⁷⁹ in American military strategy during this period. In some ways, the zero-sum strategy cultivated a culture where a generation of SOF leaders fostered a climate absorbed with accomplishing the mission. Schein suggested that those leaders were unconsciously “selecting and educating colleagues as well as subordinates”⁸⁰ to think like them. At the height of GWOT, of the twelve Special Operations Core Activities, three of four activities were geared toward achieving those results.⁸¹ During the period of executed missions centered on counter violent extremist organizations (C-VEOs) took place on a global scale, where soldiers, junior NCOs, and junior officers were being developed in a hyper-mission focused environment. Schein exclaimed, what we devote care to, we become.⁸² Without the time to stop and assess the organizational core values, the next generation of leaders will not be able to lead the organization forward.

⁷⁷ U.S. Government Efforts to Counter Violent Extremism: Hearing before the Committee on terrorist organizations, U.S. Senate, 111th Congress, <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/CHRG-111shrg63687>.

⁷⁸ David P. Oakley and Patrick Proctor, “Ten Years of GWOT, the Failure of Democratization and the Fallacy of Ungoverned Spaces,” *Journal of Strategic Security* 5, no. 1 (March 14, 2012): 1–16, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.5.1.1>.

⁷⁹ Oakley and Proctor, “Ten Years of GWOT, the Failure of Democratization and the Fallacy of Ungoverned Spaces.”

⁸⁰ Edgar H. Schein and Peter Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 5th ed. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. (Hoboken, New Jersey: 2017), 131.

⁸¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, JP 3-05 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2014), https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_05.pdf

⁸² Edgar H. Schein and Peter Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 5th ed. (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017)

H. LEADERSHIP INFLUENCE

The current operational environment is complex, and many junior level SOF leaders are tasked with navigating through its ambiguity at times, with little to no guidance. However, when the time comes for junior leaders to seek assistance for a problem, the response from some leaders has been, “there is nothing new to leadership.”⁸³ Schein explained that when leaders respond with a lack of understanding, it forces new and even seasoned leaders to seek “defense mechanisms” to cope with uncertainty.⁸⁴ Kenneth Williams authored an article, *Toxic Culture*, to highlight how DOD enables toxic environments to exist. Williams stated that when subordinate leaders are fearful of being labeled as incompetent, they will begin developing their path toward a solution that leaves some superiors, “assuming the organization is healthy.”⁸⁵ However, when leaders become disillusioned with their actions, it can lead others to begin disregarding the values of the organization, thus creating an alternate culture.

I. ADHERENCE TO CORE ARMY VALUES

When asked, do the values of the organization transfer to all areas of life? More than half of the participants interviewed responded with a resounding, yes! If the answer is yes, the values of the organization do transfer to other areas of life. Why, then, was a senior NCO assigned to 7th SFG caught attempting to smuggle drugs from Columbia to the United States?⁸⁶ These incidents may indicate an issue that some leaders are not willing to admit, and that is that some leaders stop holding individual soldiers accountable to Army standards but instead due established cultural norms. If such norms are reflective of the organization’s

⁸³ Francis Beaudette, “Special Operations Forces Company Commanders Course,” (lecture notes for Army Field Grade officers, (Command and General Staff College, Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA, May 6, 2020)

⁸⁴ Edgar H. Schein and Peter Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 5th ed. (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017)

⁸⁵ Kenneth Williams, “Toxic Culture: Enabling Incivility in the U.S. Military and What to Do About It,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 87, 4th (September 2017), <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Publications/Article/1325971/toxic-culture-enabling-incivility-in-the-us-military-and-what-to-do-about-it/>

⁸⁶ Meghann Myers, “Special Forces Soldier Arrested in Botched Cocaine Smuggling Plot,” *Military Times*, August 20, 2018, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2018/08/20/special-forces-soldier-arrested-in-botched-cocaine-smuggling-plot/>.

values, then the question must be asked, what does the organization value if leaders are caught engaging in destructive behaviors? If an organization values benchmarks, such as physical fitness, the ability to shoot, move, communicate, and medicate, then members as a part of the organization pride themselves in improving those skills based on what the leadership values. Schein suggested that when it is “assumed that everyone is highly motivated and competent, leaders act under those assumptions”⁸⁷; they refuse to investigate to see if their personnel are modeling the Army Values.

The examination of SOF culture is complex, not an easy task to undergo, and not the most desirable thing to do if you are a member of the same culture. Organizations always assess if the product that they are bringing to the consumer is of the best quality and price. Nevertheless, with the same understanding of free-market principles, it is imperative for leaders to conduct an honest self-assessment of SOF formations to ensure that at every turn, SOF is providing the consumer (taxpayers) the best personnel to guard and protect the United States’ most prized asset: its freedom.

J. USASOC BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

As we look at the third layer of organizational culture, with a theoretical understanding of what it signifies, it is time to examine those organizational values that are deeply engraved in SOF culture. To shed some light on this, we began by asking participants, what is the way of doing things in the organization when faced with time constraints and limited guidance? Generally, most respondents answered the question by attributing adaptability and competence as the main values, critical to the success of their operations. Overall, the expectation is for SOF members to “figure it out on their own” because it is taken for granted that all SOF members were precisely selected to make decisions under pressure. These responses suggest that these values are indeed part of the “cultural DNA” of SOF. Other responses included the assessment from the SOCOM review that mission comes first no matter what, and family comes second. A narrative that mission comes first raises some concerns, considering the value that some organizations claimed they place on

⁸⁷ Edgar H. Schein and Peter Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 5th ed. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. (Hoboken, New Jersey: 2017), 23.

supporting families and home life stability, which are critical to success in the battlefield—therein suggesting a misfit between the values advertised with what is observed in the organization.

Another interesting response was that SOF personnel are told to “go forth and do great things,” with limited guidance from senior officers. Another respondent stated in his answer that that little guidance and operating under pressure is part of the “SOF SOP.” These responses suggest an underlying assumption that SOF members are comfortable operating in uncertain environments, that they will apply their training and judgment to complex problems sets, and uphold the values that define their profession, including the Army values and the SOF Truths. Thus, SOF members are trusted by their higher echelons to reflect these values in their daily operations.

Given the responses provided by the respondents, we sought clarification regarding their statements to understand the phrase “get the job done” within their respective organizations. The most common interpretation was that SOF teams must be able to complete the mission by any means necessary as long as the approach was not unethical, immoral, or against the law. The issue with “get the job done,” according to the respondents, is that the unethical is not clear enough—leaving some SOF members room to develop their own interpretation; this can result in personnel engaging in behavior that is contrary to organizational values. One of the interviewees compared the “get the job done” with the concept of “grey zone” operations. He stated that both are ambiguous and that the latter one is continuously engraved in SOF operators beginning at the SOF assessment and selection processes. In his perspective, both concepts represent a slippery-slope scenario in which the misinterpretation of these, along with the lack of leadership oversight and unclear mission and vision statements, puts SOF members in a position in which unethical behaviors are more likely, due to the pressure of completing a mission. Another taken for granted assumption of the phrase “get it done” meant different things such as, don’t bring embarrassment to our organization, and make sure that the unit as a whole gets credit for your efforts through recognition from U.S. agencies and multinational partners.

According to observations provided by participants of this research, loyalty is an espoused value deeply engraved in SOF members. However, loyalty from the team to the

mission was cited as a value that is represented by SOF personnel. However, loyalty to the team appears also to have negative effects on SOF culture and professionalism. There is a notion that SOF teams take care of each other, to the point of covering up unethical or, in some cases, illegal acts for the benefit of the team. Among the examples described are drug offenses, DUIs, and adultery, which often resulted in no punishment for the individual. In some instances, as described previously, lapses in professionalism are amplified across the community, and multiple media outlets are addressed simply by moving the person to other units. In some instances, those who accrued enough time for retirement are kept around until they are able to conclude their service in the Army. As explained by SOF members, the problem with this deep sense of loyalty is that junior leaders and lower enlisted members are often aware of these incidents, and the net effect is that the kind of behavior that contradicts our values is permeated across the organization.

To summarize our discussion of what Schein refers to as the essence of organizational culture or the taken-for-granted assumptions, the SOF members' depiction of their organizational culture suggests that the organizational values are not congruent with observed behavior in SOF culture. An experienced operator articulates the most compelling argument for this. He exclaimed that our force "built itself on the Army Values," which are complemented by the SOF truths, which in turn led to the assumption that these values are so deeply engraved in SOF personnel that it is not necessary to emphasize them anymore. It is expected for SOF members to live by these values and self-adjudicate when they see any deviation from them by SOF personnel. This expectation is also reinforced by the yearly evaluation process in which soldiers are evaluated by their character attributes. However, based on the answers collated for this thesis, the insufficient leadership engagement, lack of emphasis on organizational values, and inadequate training may be hindering the internalization of the values which drive our profession.

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III. A QUANTITATIVE EXAMINATION OF TRUST AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE VARIABLES ON SOF PROFESSIONALISM

The confidence of the American people in the profession of arms occupies a special place in our society, as demonstrated by the latest Gallup poll conducted in 2019, which shows a 79% confidence in the military.⁸⁸ Another reputable source, the World Value Survey (WVS), captured similar results with an 81% confidence in the armed forces.⁸⁹ These are surprising results, considering the increased levels of political and social polarization experienced in our nation. Special Operation Forces (SOF) are a key component of our National Security Strategy (NSS). Special operations are highly relied upon to achieve national security objectives. The overutilization of SOF, characterized by continuous deployments across the globe to conduct missions that range from combating terrorism to stability operations, have led to organizational culture challenges that have brought the professionalism of SOF into question.

Several isolated incidents, highly amplified through numerous communication outlets in a politically charged environment led to a congressional mandate to evaluate factors that may be contributing to the perceived increase in unethical behavior across SOF. This mandate, outlined in the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), led to the Special Operations Command (SOCOM) comprehensive ethics review.⁹⁰ Although the findings are extremely helpful to address the issue at hand, the researchers decided to evaluate specific aspects of organizational culture from a quantitative perspective by assessing the effects of multiple variables on the levels of trust, and how these affect ethical behavior. In order to add to the ongoing discussion of SOF professionalism and ethics, we will begin with a literature review to first define trust, articulate its importance in

⁸⁸ “Confidence in Institutions,” Gallup, 2020, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1597/Confidence-Institutions.aspx>.

⁸⁹ World Values Survey, “Confidence: Armed Forces” World Values Survey Association, 2017, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSOnline.jsp>.

⁹⁰ John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act of 2019, Pub. L. 115–232—AUG. 13, 2018, 132 STAT. 1636, §. 1066 (2018). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-115publ232/pdf/PLAW-115publ232.pdf>.

organizational culture, and then discuss the research design and findings of this thesis. Even though some of the hypotheses are not fully supported by the results, the findings illuminate specific aspects within SOF that must be addressed to retain the high levels of trust conferred by the American citizens.

A. WHAT IS TRUST?

When leaders are faced with circumstances that erode and decrease the value of trust in their organization, they must ask the most leading question: what is trust? Merriam-Webster defines trust as the “assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something.”⁹¹ In a study discussed in *Trust in Leadership*, Dirks and Ferrin stressed the importance of trust between leaders and followers by encouraging superiors to model forth the type of character that promotes trust through “behaviors and attitudes.”⁹² In 2003, two researchers, Dr. Barbra Adams, and Dr. Robert Webb, conducted research to locate related theories regarding the significant role that trust plays in small military teams.⁹³ Their research presented findings extrapolated from interactions with small teams, which sought to enlighten the minds of military leaders and future researchers by focusing on the research gap concerning trust within smaller constructs of the military. They further displayed the diversity of thought on this topic by suggesting that trust was “both a psychological state and behavior.”⁹⁴ Their findings assisted us to plan and conduct a qualitative and quantitative evaluation of trust in organizational culture and how it relates to SOF’s ethical dilemma. The research presented in this work analyzes the role of trust as a critical element to building and maintaining an organizational culture that preserves the ethics and moral integrity in SOF.

⁹¹ Merriam-Webster, s.v. “trust,” accessed June 9, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trust>.

⁹² Dirks, Kurt and Ferrin, Donald L. “Trust in Leadership: Meta-Analytic Findings and Implications for Research and Practice” *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 87, (2002): 613, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.87.4.611>.

⁹³ Barbara D. Adams and Robert D. G. Webb, “Trust Development in Small Teams” (Toronto, Ontario: Humansystems Incorporated, 2003), <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a630676.pdf>.

⁹⁴ Adams and Webb.

B. THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUST

SOF is not unique in confronting issues of professionalism. However, due to the complexity and multiplicity of SOF's organization and mission sets, trust is held in high regard amongst its members. Trust is seen as an essential component for unit effectiveness, and it promotes organizational values and unit cohesiveness for the express purpose of accomplishing the commander's intent.⁹⁵ In 1999, Dirks addressed the effects of interpersonal trust in organizational settings and argued that effective communication is linked to levels of trust. He further posited that trust is a key element for cooperation and hence enhanced work performance.⁹⁶ His study provided a baseline for examining the role that communication has in building trust in SOF's cultural identity.

Leaders looking to create trust within an organization must be willing to actively develop a framework that influences the behavior of each member of the organization. According to U.S. Army senior enlisted personnel writing in *NCO Journal*, the U.S. Army's core values are a sure means to establishing an environment of trust.⁹⁷ They went on to state that the U.S. Army encourages and expects its members to live and uphold the following tenets: "leadership," "duty," "respect," "selfless service," "honor," "integrity," and "personal courage" (LDRSHIP). The U.S. Army, and to some degree, the other branches of the military, consider that adopting creeds such as LDRSHIP defines the military profession and shape any organization's understanding and value of trust.⁹⁸

Stewarding trust is a heavy burden but an important one to bear. Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) 1-1 states that, "trust is the foundation of our relationship with the American people, who rely on the Army to ethically, effectively, and efficiently serve the

⁹⁵ Yafang Tsai, "Relationship between Organizational Culture, Leadership Behavior and Job Satisfaction," *BMC Health Services Research* 11, no. 98 (May 14, 2011): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6963-11-98>.

⁹⁶ Kurt T. Dirks, "The Effects of Interpersonal Trust on Work Group Performance," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 84, no. 3 (1999): 446, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.84.3.445>.

⁹⁷ Michael Holmberg and Andres Salazar, "A Culture of Trust," *Army University Press*, (May 20, 2019): <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/Archives/2019/May/A-Culture-of-Trust/>.

⁹⁸ Department of the Army, *Army Leadership and the Profession*, ADP 6-22, (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2019), https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/ARN20039_ADP%206-22%20C1%20FINAL%20WEB.pdf

Nation.”⁹⁹ The same level of trust is found at the root of every SOF element, from a two-man Marine Special Operations (MARSOC) sniper detachment to an Air Force Special Operations (AFSOC) 9-man AC-130W Stinger crew. Trust is regarded as a structural component of SOF, and for every service component that is a part of SOCOM, trust is expected to permeate from the individual throughout the whole. This is not to assume that this is not a present thought within each element within SOCOM. However, as researchers we must continue to address the importance of trust as being the unique cornerstone within the SOF enterprise.

Nevertheless, Holmberg et. al. claim that there is a shift taking place that is adversely impacting the trust that leaders have placed in SOCOM and its elements. Their findings suggest that to develop an environment of trust, there must be attention given to creating ethics training that is geared toward instilling the core value of trust within every member of the organization. They further claim that trust builds upon communication, respect, and external rewards in the organization. Adams and Webb stated that the focus of trust is “both an individual level and a higher organizational level” value.¹⁰⁰ Understanding this dynamic is essential to identifying and solving the ethical dilemma within SOF.

Trust is vital to any organization, especially with respect to SOF members’ ethical performance. Dirks, in his research, focused on trust and group performance, and stated that, “high levels of trust can increase the degree of performance from members in a group setting.”¹⁰¹ Yet, even today, there remains an information gap surrounding the understanding of trust in the SOF team environment and how it influences every aspect of the organization. It is important to note that examining trust in small military teams provides an understanding for individuals outside or unfamiliar with the construct of SOF the enterprise.

When defining trust within the organizational culture, it needs to be understood that there are two distinct categories of trust in organizations: personal-based trust, and category-based trust. Personal-based trust is established through regular interactions at the work place,

⁹⁹ Department of the Army, *The Army Profession*, 1–1.

¹⁰⁰ Adams and Webb, “Trust Development in Small Teams,” 2003.

¹⁰¹ Kurt T. Dirks, “The Effects of Interpersonal Trust on Work Group Performance,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 84, no. 3 (1999): 446, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.84.3.445>, 8.

and thus is dependent on time spent with team members.¹⁰² According to Adams, category-based trust comes from the assumptions team members internalize based on belonging to specific groups. Personal-based trust is inherently challenging, due to the rapid turnover in leadership and op-tempo of operations. Category-based trust in SOF comes from individuals being selected to become part of the community and the completion of specific qualification courses. The establishment of the aforementioned levels of trust is critical for the commitment of the team members to the organization's mission, vision, and values, and hence influences the behavior of personnel.¹⁰³ Lyons, Stokes, and Schneider highlighted in *Predictors and Outcomes of Trust in Teams*, the importance of trust development and ongoing interactions to build team cohesion, which in turn increases work performance and reveals that trust in teams is a critical enabler to organizational success.¹⁰⁴ It is critical to understand the importance and the impact of trust, because of its role in predicting future behavior, as articulated by Tuan who posited that “trust is conditioned upon how well the trustor can understand and predict the trustee's actions”.¹⁰⁵ Many leaders understand that without trust, an organization will fail at the start, and that trust is as an absolute to effectiveness and key to communication and respect.

C. HOW DOES TRUST IMPACT SOF CULTURE

In this section, we concentrated our research on the significance of trust and organizational culture using data and analysis. However, before explaining our study, we reviewed works by other researchers and academics to demonstrate what broken trust can do to the culture of an organization. Dr. Barbara Adams and Dr. Robert Webb explore trust in a military context in their work, *Trust in Small Military Teams*. Their research suggests that,

¹⁰² Adams and Webb, “Trust Development in Small Teams,” 2003, 3.

¹⁰³ Yafang Tsai, “Relationship between Organizational Culture, Leadership Behavior and Job Satisfaction,” *BMC Health Services Research* 11, no. 98 (May 14, 2011): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6963-11-98>.

¹⁰⁴ Joseph Lyons, Charlene Stokes, and Tamera Schneider, “Predictors and Outcomes of Trust in Teams,” *Trust in Military Teams*: 1st ed, Neville A. Stanton (London: CRC Press, 2018) <https://doi.org/10.1201/9781315549637-3>, 31.

¹⁰⁵ Trong Tuan Luu, “The Linkages among Leadership, Trust, and Business Ethics,” *Social Responsibility Journal*; *Bingley* 8, no. 1 (2012): 136, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/17471111211196629>.

“the nature of trust, and the factors affecting trust” influence the way in which individuals in organizations function in absence or violation of trust within a team environment.¹⁰⁶ They further emphasize that trust assumes how individuals will communicate and show respect in a future setting where trust is cultivated through practices and interactions with others.¹⁰⁷ Trust is essential in understanding the other influencers as it relates to culture, for with it we can explain the dynamics of organizational culture from its subcultures to micro-organizations and the influence it wields on members of a group.

Other academics such as Dirks and Ferrin examined the role of trust from an organizational perspective by providing a framework to enhance researchers’ ability to analyze the consequences of trust by explaining the positive results of trust.¹⁰⁸

When trust is broken, it is assumed that it is some intrinsic thing that does not affect the whole of an organization. Mark Hall describes trust in his work as having “both intrinsic and instrumental value.”¹⁰⁹ Hall continues by advocating that trust is an essential characteristic that “affects aspects of ethics, law, and public policy,” ultimately causing undulation throughout an organization.¹¹⁰ Hall suggested that when trust is eroded, it could eventually lead to tearing down of pre-established norms, values, and ideas which were created to maintain good order and discipline. Hall’s theory is especially pertinent within SOCOM; the recent ethics review stated there are discrepancies throughout several areas of SOF, which pose an internal threat to the SOF enterprise.¹¹¹ As an organization, SOCOM is a multi-disciplinary command that relies on interdependency to achieve strategic effects for senior leaders. As a result of the interconnectedness of the organization, new behaviors and norms are quickly adopted before leaders can identify the cultural changes occurring in their organizations.

¹⁰⁶ Adams and Webb, “Trust Development in Small Teams,” 2003, 15.

¹⁰⁷ Adams and Webb, 17.

¹⁰⁸ Kurt T. Dirks and Donald L. Ferrin, “The Role of Trust in Organizational Settings,” *Organization Science* 12, no. 4 (2001): 453.

¹⁰⁹ Mark A. Hall, “The Importance of Trust for Ethics, Law, and Public Policy,” *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 14, no. 2 (2005): 157, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S096318010505019X>.

¹¹⁰ Hall, “The Importance of Trust for Ethics, Law, and Public Policy,” 58

¹¹¹ United States Special Operations Command, “USSOCOM Comprehensive Review,” 2020, 15.

After analyzing SOCOM's ethics review and several other studies regarding SOF's ethical issues, our team posited that the low levels of trust influenced the perceived erosion of individual and group ethics and professionalism. However, the SOCOM ethics review team identified force employment as the principal element causing the unethical domino effect across the force.¹¹² Gen. Richard Clarke, Commander of USSOCOM, was quoted in an article by columnist Luiz Martinez of ABC News, stating that, "recent incidents... threatens the trust"¹¹³ built between SOCOM and the American population. Martinez further highlights Gen Clarke's idea that strengthening morals represents an essential step towards improving SOF organizational culture, and thus maintaining high levels of professionalism within the ranks.

Nevertheless, the SOCOM review would have leaders believe that the frequency of deployments created the "cascading effects" across the force.¹¹⁴ However, our research has not led to the identification of quantitative data that supports the SOCOM Review Team's findings and recommendations. Yet, Ferrin advocated that the absence of trust creates an environment that leads to more leaders and subordinates neglecting service values, in favor of a system of norms that focuses on internal benefits instead of the team or organizational goals.¹¹⁵ According to the *Human Resources for Health* Journal, the presence of character inconsistencies can give way to behaviors that destabilize individual and group motivation, deteriorate overall work performance, and decrease trust relationships that influence adherence to organizational norms and values.¹¹⁶

¹¹² United States Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Command Comprehensive Review*. 6.

¹¹³ Luiz Martinez, "Special Operations Command Orders Comprehensive Ethics Review Following Recent Scandals," *ABC News*, August 12, 2019, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/special-operations-command-orders-comprehensive-ethics-review-recent/story?id=64928932>.

¹¹⁴ USSOCOM Review, 7

¹¹⁵ Joseph Lyons, Charlene Stokes, and Tamera Schneider, "Predictors and Outcomes of Trust in Teams," 2018, 35, <https://doi.org/10.1201/9781315549637-3>.

¹¹⁶ Dickson R. O. Okello and Lucy Gilson, "Exploring the Influence of Trust Relationships on Motivation in the Health Sector: A Systematic Review," *Human Resources for Health* 13, no. 1 (2015): 17, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12960-015-0007-5>.

D. DATA AND HYPOTHESES

Based on SOCOM's findings, the team decided to analyze the effects of trust in organizational culture to understand the problem in depth and add to the ongoing discussion of ethics and professionalism in SOF. The team utilized Kristen Aubele's research regarding junior officer recruitment and retention within the active army, titled *A Look at the Human Capital in Army Special Operations Civil Affairs*.¹¹⁷ Her work focused on taking a holistic view of the retention dilemma happening within Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF), Civil Affairs. Aubele's research focused on assessing the attitudes and concerns which influenced the decisions of mid- to senior-level O-3/Captains on active duty to either remain in the organization or transition from active duty service. Kristen, with approval by the 95th (SO) (CA), Civil Affairs Branch Proponent, and the United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), surveyed the CA Captain population assigned to the two CA active duty Brigades: the 95th CA (A), 85th CA, as well as officers assigned to staff positions in support of Conventional Forces (CF) organizations. It is also important to point out that the respondents had different levels of experience, years of service, and deployments, and this is critical to consider when performing quantitative analysis. The survey questions were administered through the SurveyMonkey cloud-based software.

This data represents the best available source to address one of the primary questions of the team's research examining how individuals are influenced by organizational culture. It is suitable to the research, because CA is a subculture within SOCOM, and the data provides an unadulterated preview into understanding some of the dynamics affecting trust and ethical behavior in SOF entities. Due to the inherent similarities between SOF elements, which include PSYOP, SF, NAVY SEALs, MARSOC and ARSOC, and CA, this data assists the team with the illumination of organizational culture issues permeating throughout SOCOM after almost two decades of persistent engagements. The total number of respondents utilized for the analysis consisted of 152 CA officers. The questions asked during the survey included assessments on levels of communication, trust, intrinsic and extrinsic reward systems, organizational values, and professionalism among other factors.

¹¹⁷ Aubele Kristen, "A Look at the Human Capital in Army Special Operations' Civil Affairs" (master's thesis, West Virginia, University of Charleston, 2017).

The team thoroughly examined the raw data from the CA survey to select and evaluate factors pertinent to our hypotheses, as the survey measured several elements which are critical in assessing organizational culture, particularly when it comes to trust and behavior. The selection of variables was guided by the literature review with emphasis on seminal publications on organizational trust and its effects on work performance and behavior.¹¹⁸ Utilizing the most relevant empirical analyses and research, along with the findings of the SOCOM comprehensive review and the SF Survey, the research team derived the following hypotheses:

- (1) H1: Effective communication, and implementation of extrinsic and intrinsic rewards systems enhance trust in SOF entities.
- (2) H2: Organizations that undervalue the factors of professionalism, diffusion of values, duty, and trust are less likely to exhibit ethical behavior.

The unit of analysis utilized for the research are the survey respondents (N=152).

E. METHODS

The research team selected trust, defined in the CA survey as “faith in personnel,” as the dependent variable for the analysis of H1. The independent variables chosen to evaluate the outcome on trust were communication, extrinsic rewards, intrinsic rewards, and respect. The factors of leader and deployment were selected as control variables for this study, because each has the potential to influence the independent variables. The time in the position as a team leader, as well as the distinction between a deployed environment or garrison affects the way in which officers assess the variables analyzed in this study. For H2, the team utilized professionalism, values, intrinsic rewards, extrinsic rewards, accountability and trust as independent variables to measure the effects on ethical behavior, the dependent variable for H2. The survey question that best described the dependent variable asked whether the CA force as a whole demonstrated honest and ethical behavior. As far as the control variables, the same factors were utilized for H2: leader and deployment. The rationale behind the selection

¹¹⁸ Dirks and Ferrin, “The Role of Trust in Organizational Settings,” 18–23; Dirks, “The Effects of Interpersonal Trust on Work Group Performance,” 2–20; and Adams and Webb, “Trust Development in Small Teams,” 3–31.

of these variables is the robust empirical support for these in the research conducted by influential scholars in the field of trust. The recent SF survey, a qualitative analysis which evaluated the sentiment of SF Captains, also influenced the team's hypotheses and selection of variables. The examination of these two hypotheses provided insight into how individuals are influenced by organizational culture, and thus contribute to the ongoing strategic level conversation of SOF ethics and professionalism.

The data utilized for this study was not initially conducive to conduct quantitative research, since the questions were asked using a five-category scale. In order to make the data suitable for analysis the team created dichotomous values/dummy variables (0,1), using R software. This procedure was conducted for all the factors considered in this research. After the values were converted to binary values, the team conducted exploratory analysis to observe potential relationships between the DV and IVs.

After reading the data set in R, and ensuring that it was suitable for analysis, the research team conducted logistic regressions for both hypotheses. For each hypothesis, the team started the analysis with base variables, and proceeded with a stepwise approach to measure the effects of additional factors on the dependent variable. In H1, the team tested for multiplicative interaction between two variables: job satisfaction and communication; this was in order to test whether the effect of one independent variable is affected by another.

Following the logit regressions on multiple models, the team utilized the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) scores to determine the model with the lowest predictive error, and, thus, those that more accurately predict the effects of the variables examined on the dependent variable. Lastly, the models with the lowest AIC scores were utilized to conduct additional visualizations to evaluate substantive effects and, thus, the robustness of the findings.

F. MAIN RESULTS: HYPOTHESIS #1

Table 1 presents the results of the main logit models tested for H1. The first four models, (m2, m3, m6 and m8), represent the baseline models in which the relationship between the independent and dependent variable were first tested. Additional models were tested; however, these were excluded from the table due to lower AIC scores. As we can see,

each of the four IVs appears to have a significant effect on the DV, when no other factors are controlled for in the model. The next four models, (m10, m15, m16, and m17), delineate specifications in which the main IVs were added sequentially to account for the effects that each of these may have on the DV. An interesting finding in these models is that communication, job satisfaction, respect, and extrinsic rewards appear to influence the outcome of trust, suggesting support for hypothesis one. In each of these models, an increase in the IV results in a corresponding increase of the dependent variable, with standard errors estimated between 95% to 99% confidence in the direction of the coefficient.

Table 1. Logit regression results of the effects of IVs and CVs on trust

	Dependent variable:										
	Trust										
	(m2)	(m3)	(m6)	(m8)	(m10)	(m15)	(m16)	(m17)	(m18)	(m39)	(m40)
Communication		2.795*** (1.062)			2.230** (1.072)	2.217** (1.072)	2.300** (1.075)	2.283** (1.075)		1.971* (1.090)	16.332 (1,035.881)
Job Satisfaction									0.940** (0.429)	0.860* (0.440)	0.955** (0.450)
Respect	2.163*** (0.386)	1.909*** (0.398)			1.848*** (0.411)	1.848*** (0.411)	1.830*** (0.413)	1.830*** (0.413)	1.828*** (0.420)	1.675*** (0.427)	1.650*** (0.427)
Ext Rewards			2.284*** (0.643)		1.652** (0.732)	1.639** (0.731)	1.592** (0.733)	1.583** (0.732)	1.597** (0.717)	1.224 (0.756)	1.252* (0.758)
Accountability				1.585*** (0.416)							
Leader						0.066 (0.384)		0.029 (0.388)	-0.076 (0.404)	-0.067 (0.413)	-0.070 (0.414)
Jobsat * Comm											-15.187 (1,035.882)
Deployment							0.493 (0.569)	0.488 (0.572)	0.242 (0.606)	0.376 (0.603)	0.391 (0.603)
Constant	-1.485*** (0.320)	-1.548*** (0.326)	-0.387** (0.175)	-0.521*** (0.197)	-1.658*** (0.342)	-1.690*** (0.393)	-1.710*** (0.350)	-1.723*** (0.397)	-1.784*** (0.406)	-1.778*** (0.406)	-1.797*** (0.408)
Observations	160	160	159	149	158	157	158	157	145	145	145
Log Likelihood	-91.788	-84.954	-100.673	-94.845	-81.219	-81.188	-80.842	-80.821	-77.126	-74.675	-73.907
Akaike Inf. Crit.	187.576	175.907	205.346	193.689	170.439	172.375	171.684	173.642	166.252	163.350	163.814
Note: m= model									*p<0.10**<0.05 p***p<0.01		

Note: m = model

*p<0.10 **<0.05 p***p<0.01

However, as we evaluate the last three models in Table 1, (m18-40), we observe that the significance of communication is diminished when job satisfaction is inserted in the model, indicated as weakly statistically significant in m39 and non-significant in m40.

In m18, the effects of job satisfaction, respect, and extrinsic rewards were evaluated, and all indicate support to H1, in the absence of a control for communication.

The initial results indicated that the variable of job satisfaction, which accounts for intrinsic rewards systems, reduced the statistical significance of communication in the organization. To evaluate potential interaction between these two variables, the researchers controlled for collinearity as shown in m4; however, the interaction was not statistically significant.

The AIC scores reported in Table 1 indicate that model 39 is the most accurate to predict the outcome of the DV, with a score of 163.350 and across 145 respondents. In this model, the positive coefficients for both communication and job satisfaction suggest an effect on trust. However, both variables are weakly statistically significant with a $p < .10$. The second most preferred model is m40, with a score of 163.814. The difference between these two models is that m40 accounts for the interaction between job satisfaction and communication. The third model with lowest AIC score is m18, with a score of 166.52, with the same amount of observations as the previous two models. These findings suggest that the CVs of leader and deployment have limited to no effect on the outcome of trust.

Taken together, the logit regression analyses conducted to test H1 suggest partial support for our hypothesis. An interesting finding during the analysis presented in Figure 2 is the substantive effect of the variable of respect on trust among all the models tested. In all models evaluated, the positive coefficient of respect was statistically significant, with a $p < 0.01$. An additional visualization that illustrates the robustness of the findings is included in Figure 3, which is a coefficient plot that denotes the prediction of the effects on DV with a 95% confidence interval.

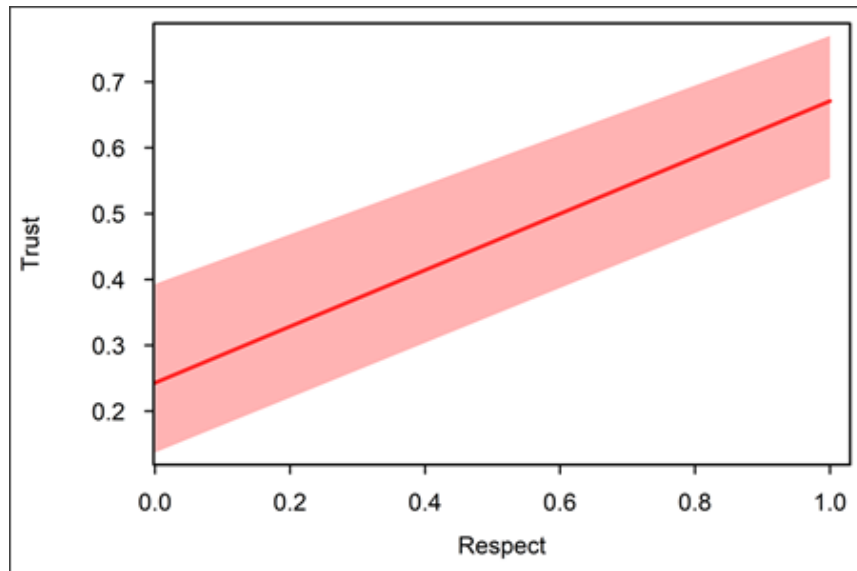


Figure 2. Substantive effects of respect on trust

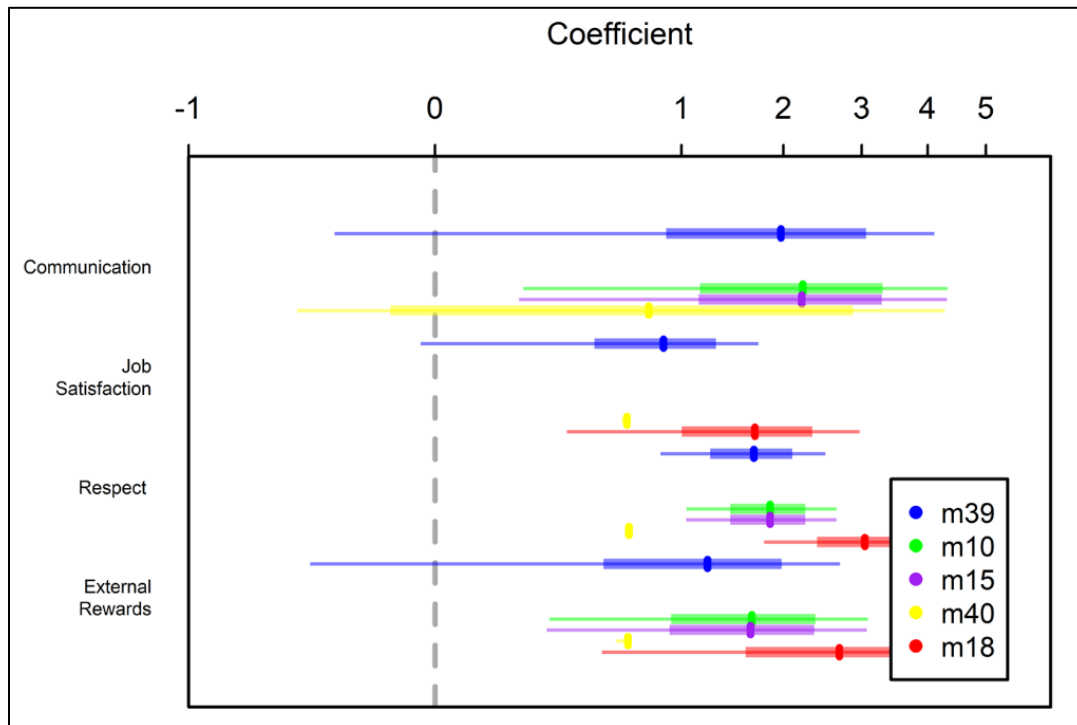


Figure 3. Robustness checks of variables analyzed across 5 logit regression models

G. MAIN RESULTS: HYPOTHESIS #2

Table 2 reports the findings from the main models. As discussed, a stepwise regression was utilized for H2 as well, but the base models are not presented in the table. Instead, the table shows the results of combined model specifications. In model 27, the team controlled for the effects of organizational values, trust and job satisfaction, all with a positive coefficient suggesting an effect on the DV with at least a 95% confidence interval. In model 29, the researchers controlled for values, trust, and professionalism. The results showed a weakly statistically significant effects of organizational values on the DV. It also demonstrated a positive effect of trust and professionalism on the DV with $p < .05$. However, the effects of both trust and professionalism were not significant when the subsequent models controlled for job satisfaction. Model 31 suggests a positive effect of values and respect, but the variable of professionalism does not appear to influence the outcome of the DV.

The next five models, (m34-38), evaluated the effects of job satisfaction, accountability, respect, values, and control variables on ethical behavior and represent the primary focus of the analysis on hypothesis #2. The AIC scores suggest that the most accurate model that predicts the effects of the IVs on ethical behavior is model 34, with a score of 142.8. As we can see, organizational values, job satisfaction, respect, and accountability all have positive coefficients that influence the outcome of ethical behavior, with $p < .05$ for values and $p < .01$ for job satisfaction, respect and accountability, respectively. Model 34 is similar to models 37 and 38, with the distinction that it does not control for leader and deployment, and the control variables, which do not appear to have a statistically significant effect on the outcome.

Based on the models with the lowest AIC scores, Figure 4 suggests partial support for hypothesis 2. The diffusion of organizational values, respect, job satisfaction, and accountability appear to influence the perception of ethical behavior in the organization. The suggested influence of these four factors on the dependent variables are also displayed in Figure 5, in which we assessed the robustness of the findings.

Table 2. Logit regression results on the effects of IVs on ethical behavior

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>							
	Behavior							
	(m27)	(m29)	(m31)	(m34)	(m35)	(m36)	(m37)	(m38)
Values	0.972** (0.447)	0.788* (0.454)	0.918** (0.462)	0.980** (0.480)	1.184** (0.479)	1.196** (0.481)	1.010** (0.487)	1.023** (0.488)
Trust	1.334*** (0.406)	0.992** (0.430)						
Job Sat	1.173*** (0.393)			0.980** (0.435)			0.945** (0.442)	0.977** (0.445)
Professionalism		1.483*** (0.461)	0.850 (0.544)					
Respect			1.616*** (0.489)	1.553*** (0.433)	1.636*** (0.423)	1.597*** (0.425)	1.566*** (0.435)	1.524*** (0.437)
Accountability				2.916*** (1.057)	3.190*** (1.066)	3.239*** (1.068)	2.939*** (1.061)	2.981*** (1.065)
Leader					0.354 (0.430)	0.334 (0.431)	0.183 (0.445)	0.161 (0.446)
Deployment						0.493 (0.621)		0.602 (0.643)
Constant	-0.882*** (0.298)	-0.690*** (0.267)	-0.990*** (0.295)	-1.512*** (0.368)	-1.349*** (0.395)	-1.394*** (0.400)	-1.598*** (0.427)	-1.668*** (0.437)
Observations	149	149	151	151	150	150	150	150
Log Likelihood	-80.210	-79.259	-77.090	-66.410	-68.632	-68.312	-66.317	-65.871
Akaike Inf. Crit.	168.420	166.518	162.180	142.820	147.264	148.624	144.635	145.742

Note: m=model

*p<0.10 **<0.05 ***p<0.01

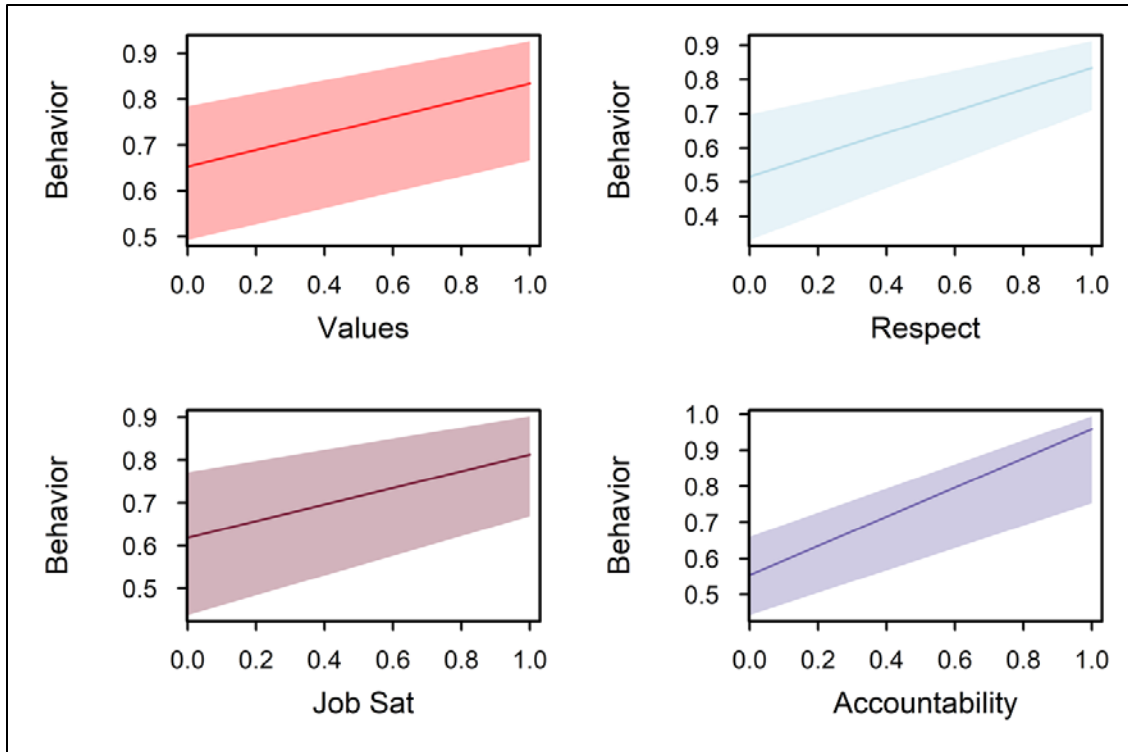


Figure 4. Substantive effects of IVs from model 34 on ethical behavior

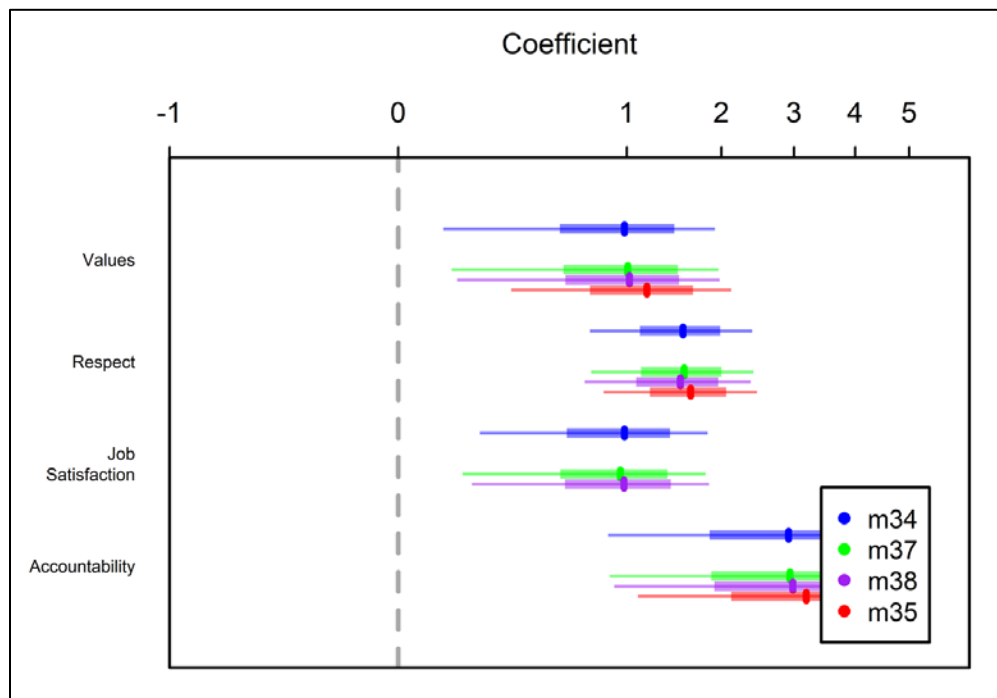


Figure 5. Robustness checks of variables analyzed across four logit regression models

H. DISCUSSION

The effects of trust in organizational settings have been extensively researched, and it is widely understood that trust within organizational culture is essential, as Roderick Kramer wrote in *Annual Review of Psychology*, “trust has a number of important benefits for organizations and their members.”¹¹⁹ This account is largely undisputed, but the effects of trust on performance and behavior are exerted in two distinctive ways. First, there is a large body of literature which claims that trust exerts a direct effect on the outcome of desirable factors for organizational performance. However, the seminal empirical analysis conducted by Dirks and Ferrin (2001) suggests that, although the first account has some merits, trust also plays an indirect role as a moderator of desirable outcomes related to organizational performance. More specifically, their findings suggest that trust is essential in influencing team members’ attitude and behavior.¹²⁰ More importantly, the authors suggest that trust can be utilized to predict future behaviors. This rationale is precisely what led the authors of this thesis to evaluate the effects of trust in organizational culture as a key element influencing performance and, more importantly, ethical behavior as posited in hypothesis #2.

Although the effects of communication on trust appear to be weakly statistically significant in the preferred model of our research, it is critical that SOF emphasizes the importance of this factor in the team dynamics. Empirical analyses on the effects of communication in organizational settings strongly suggests that communication influences the level of trust in an organization, which is critical for cooperation across the organization.¹²¹ Communication is also categorized as a key element of organizational trust in the military, along with competency and caring for team members.¹²² In the SOF

¹¹⁹ Roderick M. Kramer, “Trust and Distrust In Organizations: Emerging Perspectives, Enduring Questions,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 50, no. 1 (1999): 565, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.50.1.569>.

¹²⁰ Kurt T. Dirks and Donald L. Ferrin, “The Role of Trust in Organizational Settings,” *Organization Science*, Vol 12, no. 4, (Jul-Aug 2001): 465, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3085982?seq=1>.

¹²¹ Kurt T. Dirks, “The Effects of Interpersonal Trust on Work Group Performance,” *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol 84, no. 3 (1999): 447.

¹²² Philip Gift, “The Three C’s of Trust,” *The Military Leader* (blog), June 19, 2016, 2, <https://www.themilitaryleader.com/three-components-trust/>.

context, one-on-one interactions can be extremely challenging when compared to the private sector, because SOF teams are often geographically dispersed. The leadership of these teams are also inserted into the organizations shortly prior to deployment, and this further hinders the establishment of the levels of trust necessary to achieve optimal performance and behavior. As alluded to in the SOCOM review, as one of the main findings there needs to be a more concerted effort of leadership engagement to communicate more effectively with subordinates. The renewed effort of leadership engagement and open communication across the organization is essential to enhance the levels of trust in SOF entities.

The concept of intrinsic rewards, measured as job satisfaction in this research, was selected for its suggested influence on trust.¹²³ It makes intuitive sense that job satisfaction was weakly statistically significant, when measured together with communication, respect and extrinsic rewards, because SOF members are selected for their adaptability to their respective environments and support operations from the tactical to the strategic levels. This is generally true, because even without communication, SOF members are motivated to determine a way forward through coordination and planning with Partner Nation (PN), Interagency, and other SOF elements. According to Thomas, what might be suggested with these findings is due to the presence of four intrinsic rewards: sense of choice, competence, meaningfulness, and progress. Taken together these four elements might increase the commitment to the assigned tasks, and when empowered by leadership may increase trust in the organization.¹²⁴

Although the coefficient of extrinsic rewards was not statistically significant in the preferred model, in accordance with AIC scores, it was statistically significant in every other model tested, and thus warrants attentions in future studies of the influence of trust in SOF. Ferrin and Dirks suggest that rewards have a statistically significant effect on interpersonal trust, and can be utilized to increase the levels of perceived trust and hence performance and behavior in the organization. In SOF, extrinsic rewards can take several

¹²³ Adams and Webb, "Trust Development in Small Teams," 2003.

¹²⁴ Wayne Thomas, *Intrinsic Motivation at Work : Building Energy & Commitment*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2000), 43.

forms, ranging from nomination to civilian schooling, specialized training, awards, other recognitions, or promotion. It is important to recognize, however, that the sentiments outlined in at least two surveys indicate that SOF organizations are not necessarily prioritizing reward systems, perhaps due to the high rate of deployment or operations. According to Gift, reward systems are critical to demonstrate to SOF members that the organization cares about them, their contributions to the mission, and their self-development.¹²⁵

The effect of respect was significant across all models tested in both hypotheses. According to Okello and Gilson, respect is one of the key motivational factors that influences the level of trust in organizations.¹²⁶ In the SOF community, it is imperative that organizations respect individuals, based on their capabilities assessed during the selection process. Individuals undergo a rigorous process in which aptitudes related to behavior, competency, and moral values are thoroughly screened for. As mentioned before, organizations quickly deploy individuals to lead small teams, teams that do not have proper time to make their own assessments. Thus, it is not surprising that respect between leadership and subordinates is highly regarded when it comes to the perception of trust in SOF.

As previously noted, the organizational values appear to influence ethical behavior. The diffusion of values defined as basic assumptions on how team members ought to behave are essential for a positive organizational culture, because along with beliefs, they are the foundation for “shared understandings” across the organization.¹²⁷ The recent SF survey, which captured sentiments related talent management and retention of SF Officers, suggests a disconnect between the organizational values and observed values.¹²⁸ Preliminary findings in our own research indicate that the values are not diffused equally

¹²⁵ Gift, “The Three C’s of Trust,” 3.

¹²⁶ Okello and Gilson, 17.

¹²⁷ Vijay Sathe, “Implications of Corporate Culture: A Manager’s Guide to Action,” *Organizational Dynamics* 12, no. 2 (1983): 7, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616\(83\)90030-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616(83)90030-X).

¹²⁸ Daniel Warner et al., “The Future of U.S. Army Special Forces Talent Management” (Boulder, Colorado: University of Colorado, 2019), 10.

across the SOF formations. The negative effects of the lack of discussion or diffusion of values according to Sathe are that when team members are not reminded of values consistently, these values are ignored and not internalized by team members. If this occurs in an organization, it is conceivable that subgroups abide by a different set of values, which may then affect the behavior of individuals. In essence, the scenario may represent a deviation from organizational culture or misfit between the expected behavior with the actual behavior of teams.¹²⁹

Along with the diffusion of values in an organization, it is imperative to establish and implement measures of accountability of personnel who deviate from established values and norms. In this study, the concept of punishment measured with the variable of accountability suggests that it may have a regulatory effect on behavior. Thus, it is imperative to evaluate the organizational systems in place to monitor and address undesired behavior. Daft argues that accountability must be part of the organizational system, which needs to specifically outline the adverse effects of unethical behavior in their rules and policies to prevent the diffusion of undesirable behavior.¹³⁰

I. CONCLUSION

The recommendations from the SOCOM ethics review are crucial in addressing factors within SOF culture that may be influencing the behavior of individuals. Even though the review did not find systemic issues in SOF culture, it is imperative to evaluate the organizational variables influencing the culture, especially trust, as it is the “bedrock of our profession.” according to GEN (RET) Dempsey.¹³¹ The quantitative study, which was conducted on a subculture of SOF, suggests that the systems and processes that account for communication, external rewards, and accountability affect the levels of trust needed to enhance cohesion in the organization. Furthermore, the data suggest a critical role of the diffusion of values and norms and their effects on ethical behavior. Taken together, these observations indicate that SOF entities must place additional emphasis in discussing and

¹²⁹ Sathe, “Implications of Corporate Culture: A Manager’s Guide to Action,” 15.

¹³⁰ Daft, “Organizational Culture and Ethical Values,” 121.

¹³¹ Department of the Army, *The Army Profession*, 3–1.

diffusing the values, that perhaps due to the rapid op-tempo of operations, are not internalized by the organizations. The risks of ignoring the importance of the aforementioned factors is that this neglect may lead to amplification of norms adopted by sub groups that are counterproductive to SOF culture, and thus perpetuate unethical behavior. More importantly, the lack of internalization of the right values erodes the external trust with the American people.

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IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. MAIN FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

The genesis of our research stemmed from our desire as members of the SOF community to contribute to the ongoing discussion on SOF ethics and professionalism. We began with two key questions: Why is organizational culture important? And how are individuals influenced by SOF organizational culture? To address these essential questions, we examined them within the SOF community context from both a qualitative and quantitative methodological approach. The intent of this approach is to uncover and illuminate additional factors that may be influencing SOF ethics and professionalism that were not identified during the SOCOM's Comprehensive Review on ethics. In this way, the conclusions reached through these dual lenses can be understood as a needed expansion of the conclusions reached in the Comprehensive Review. To the best of our knowledge, our research is unique in the utilization and combination of two distinct approaches to evaluate SOF organizational culture. Chapter IV, first summarizes the main findings of our research, identify trends found in both the qualitative and quantitative analyses, and conclude with a proposed way forward.

We first selected the Schein model as the framework for the qualitative examination of this thesis because, compared to other models, it provides the strongest and most holistic view of organizational culture. The framework dissects organizational culture into three distinct levels, with the ultimate goal of identifying what is truly internalized by members of an organization. As discussed in Chapter 2, the first level of Schein's framework are artifacts, or what members can observe upon arrival to the organization. The interviews of our study revealed that, in general, the concept of empowerment is widely emphasized in theory, but it is applied at different levels across the organization. The divergence in the application of this concept is of concern, since most of the members of the organization switched from CF to SOF primarily to influence operations at the operational and strategic levels in complex environments.

While examining the organization variables that shape and influence behavior and performance revealed areas of improvement for SOF. In the first instance, respondents assessed that rewards system were not utilized as advertised in policy letters posted across the workspace. The main reasons for this provided during the interviews was the high OPTEMPO and multiple missions, both of which resulted in the low prioritization of rewards. The common perception is that senior leaders obtain rewards that aided in their career progression, whereas for junior members, the same type of rewards are won for outstanding performance. The second aspect uncovered during interviews was the adjudication of punishment for ethical or immoral infractions, and that some members in the community received protection from punishment due to their prior accomplishments and time in SOF.

The second element of analysis, the espoused values, suggested that the Army and SOF Values are exhibited around the physical spaces of the organization. However, there is little to no emphasis placed to ensure that team members understand the espoused values. One of the most consistent observations was that senior leaders did not prioritize engagement with subordinates to discuss organizational values or ethics in general. Furthermore, rather than supporting individuals with strong character traits in accordance with Army values, organizations placed more emphasis on innovation and capabilities to “get the mission done.” Based on conversations with SOF members and our own experiences, it appears that the organizational values promoted across the force are not resonating with the individuals, and thus are not internalized.

While analyzing interviews to examine USASOC basic assumptions, we discovered that, among 80% of the participants previously serving within the 1st SFC, there was an inconsistency in responses. However, when asked about the values of their last organization, all interviewees stated that “the mission” was the most critical value. The mission-first culture cultivated by the organization detracted from maintaining the health of the organization and its members. SOF at the organizational level became performance-oriented, and over time overlooked leaders and individuals who lacked the personal character required for SOF. Furthermore, there is a widely held belief that because each individual undergoes a thorough selection process, which considers character traits as one

of the main determinants of professionalism, all members, when confronted with complex challenges, will exhibit ethical behavior. This assumption is deleterious on SOF culture, and potentially even dangerous, as it diminishes the importance of organizational values during the planning and execution of worldwide missions. The risk to SOF organizations over time is the potential misinterpretation of the values, as discussed with regard to loyalty, for example. At the current juncture, it is apparent that creating the culture for the future requires a paradigm shift in how SOF develops current and future members.

B. TRENDS OBSERVED BETWEEN QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

The first hypothesis tested during the quantitative analysis was that effective communication, respect, and implementation of extrinsic and intrinsic rewards systems enhance trust in SOF entities. The results suggest that, indeed, all these variables except extrinsic rewards significantly influence the levels of trust in the surveyed population. As we have seen, due to the OPTEMPO and emphasis on “mission first,” combined with the idea that SOF can operate with limited guidance, the communication between higher echelons and teams is less than ideal. Concerning reward systems, we obtained different results. On the one hand, respondents highlighted issues with the reward systems during interviews. Still, the survey answers suggest that extrinsic rewards are not that critical, comparatively and overall, when it comes to influencing levels of trust in the organization.

During the examination of the second hypothesis, the evidence posited that organizations that undervalue the factors of professionalism, diffusion of values, duty, and trust are less likely to exhibit ethical behavior required of its members. In this case, the diffusion of values, levels of job satisfaction, and punishment were all significant elements that influenced ethical behavior. The findings with regard to the diffusion of organizational values support the responses captured during the interviews, thus enhancing the validity of the assessment that additional emphasis in the way that we communicate SOF values to current and future members. Another trend found in common between both research approaches was the significance of punishment as a method to ensure that SOF personnel adhere to the organization’s values and regulations. Taken together, when it comes to accountability for ethical shortcomings or moral failings, it appears that the lack of

enforcement by leadership is a significant contributor to unethical behavior. Over time, the absence of consequences reinforces and normalizes unethical behavior, a situation which may lead to some of the incidents highlighted in social media.

C. WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

With the understanding of how the dynamics of SOF organizational culture wields influence on individuals and groups, it's essential to develop a path for fostering the type of culture that is both ethical and professional. In 1989, Stephen Covey, a renowned author and leadership guru, identified a problem with the understanding of personal ethics during his research on the habits of successful people. He stated that, while analyzing "success literature published in the U.S. since 1776,"¹³² there were two competing ideas regarding success. Covey suggested that the literature written within the last 50 years was nothing more than what he calls "personality ethic." Personality ethic is described as artificial remedies that focus on the outward image, such as attitudes and behaviors. Personality ethics lack the depth required to cultivate an organizational culture that can withstand the attacks against moral and ethical judgment. At the beginning of the thesis, we highlighted several different ethical and professional infractions that are a direct result of personality ethics.

On the other hand, Covey describes literature composed during the Nation's formative years as works that are more attentive to the formation of what he terms as "Character ethic." Character ethic, as Covey stated, is "the foundation of success," the foundation which by nature requires the development of an individual's core beliefs. In essence, Covey said that the character ethic deals with "things like integrity, humility, fidelity, temperance, courage, justice, patience, industry, simplicity, modesty, and the Golden Rule." Character ethic represents a core value system that is not swayed by outward pressures and temptations. Character ethic is developed over time and is revealed when one's core beliefs are reflective in behavior and performance. This is in contrast to personality ethic, much like the current concept of SOF Attributes, which only demonstrate

¹³² Stephen Covey, *7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 18.

temporal displays of professionalism and moral courage. The problem repeatedly communicated in the news media is a result of SOF organizational culture's acceptance of the duplicitous nature of personality ethic over concrete aspects character ethic.

D. MOVING PAST A SOF ATTRIBUTES BASED ORGANIZATION TO A SOF PRINCIPLES-BASED ORGANIZATION

The current SOF values paradigm has eight leadership traits known as the SOF Attributes: integrity, courage, perseverance, personal responsibility, professionalism, adaptability, the ability to be a team player, and capability. However, there is nothing inherently wrong with expecting individuals and leaders within SOF to display these attributes. The problem is, as the evidence presented in this thesis attests, that the display of these attributes cannot produce the type of members that SOF needs to succeed. The current attributes-based approach has neglected to develop the whole SOF soldier. According to Army Doctrine Publication 6-22, Army Leadership and The Profession, "Army Values consist of the principles, standards, and qualities essential for service." SOF Attributes are only worthwhile if they become embodied as principles within the organization and its members.

However, the only way to achieve that goal is through a novel concept: mentorship. Mentorship is not, of course, a new concept within the Army. According to Army doctrine FM 6-22, mentorship is defined as "the voluntary developmental relationship that exists between a person of greater experience and a person of lesser experience that is characterized by mutual trust and respect." Mentorship, as a voluntary program, continues to provide space and opportunity for the same behavior to exist. The concept of mentorship must take on a new approach if SOF, as an organization, expects to see members abandoned surface displays of behavioral modifications to adopting a principled-focused culture.

E. TRANSGENERATIONAL COACHING AND MENTORSHIP

Transgenerational coaching and mentorship (TCM) is a concept of coaching and mentoring, coupled with the idea of building an organization geared toward leaving a legacy. TCM is a program that focuses on engaging all members within SOF organizational culture by making existing members responsible for the process of defusing SOF Attributes

as principles. As members at every level embody the principles, the climate of the organization begins to shift toward reproducing the cultural environment that refuses to accept any individual that violates the new norms of the organization. To create the organizational culture that is ready to tackle any challenge requires a concept that transcends military generational boundaries. The transgenerational process is a deliberate effort of effectively passing the organization's legacy to each generation.

As SOF transitions its focus on leaving a legacy for the next generations, it creates a sense of ownership within the culture. When current and future members see themselves as owners of a legacy, they work to restore and maintain trust with senior leaders and the American people. TCM aims to build an organization that consciously thinks about becoming successful stewards of the SOF profession. The stewardship of the profession is a vital responsibility that must be protected. Through transgenerational mentorship, communicating SOF values become an essential priority of the organization. A principle-oriented organization builds principled leaders who are empowered to engage and to lead from their character, while propagating the core identity of SOF. Transgenerational mentorship is bringing into being an environment that develops individuals to operate both ethically and professionally as Quiet Professionals.

F. FURTHER RESEARCH

Even though this thesis provided some important insights into SOF organizational culture, we encourage researchers and leaders to take what is provided herein to examine the whole of USSOCOM, not merely SOF. One approach in this examination could be the expansion of both the qualitative and quantitative research to include larger populations, including NCOs and lower ranked enlisted personnel. Although the interviews were conducted with representatives from three SOF branches, they were limited to discussions with officers and warrant officers. Similarly, the quantitative portion of our research considered only the sentiments from commissioned officers. An additional recommendation would be to formulate a survey in conjunction with the interview questions used in our research to ensure that the data from the same population is analyzed from both perspectives. It would be interesting and fruitful to compare and contrast our

findings with future research to assess the effects of the implementation of measures suggested by the comprehensive review.

Furthermore, it could also be worthwhile to compare different sub-group populations sets against one another within the broader USSOCOM organization, such as compare our finding here for SOF with those of similar research on NSW, for example. That is, additional research utilizing the frameworks used in this research could shed light as to whether these findings are unique to USASOC, or if they apply across USSOCOM. U.S. Army SOF is the largest contingent within USSOCOM, meaning that SOF culture may have received much of its influence from USASOC. Several questions need to be evaluated to come to an appropriate conclusion, such as, is USASOC culture the dominant personality found within USSOCOM? Is USSOCOM at large experiencing the same shift concerning personal ethics? And, are there other services recruiting messages aimed at individuals with the character?

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APPENDIX. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What approaches have been effective to transform the organizational culture, and which ones have not yielded the desired effects? (Artifacts)
2. What are the values of the organization? (Espoused Values)
3. How does the company communicate its values? (Espoused Values)
4. Do the values of the company transfer to all areas of life? (Basic Assumptions)
5. Does your company/organization believe it has the “right kind of culture?” (Basic Assumptions)
6. Is the culture of the company a key component to having an effective organization? (Espoused Values)
7. Does the culture of your organization speak to the character of the individuals you seek to recruit? (Espoused Values)
8. Given the new generation of soldiers/employees, can your organization adapt to survive and thrive in a new environment? (Basic Assumptions)
9. Does your company value individuals who go outside of the normal change of command to accomplish the mission/goals? (Artifacts)
10. What is the frequency of meetings and the time spent in meetings? (Artifacts)
11. Is the physical arrangement of the workspace conducive to open communication and exchange of ideas? (Artifacts)
12. What are the interpersonal dynamics between members of the organization, do members address each other formally or informally? (Artifacts)
13. What is your organization’s “way of doing things” when faced with time constraints and little to no guidance? (Basic Assumptions)

14. What are the organization's reward systems? (Artifact)
15. How often is ethical behavior rewarded in your organization? (Artifact)
16. Are there any rituals or stories that emphasizes the role of ethical behavior on performance?
17. Are team members empowered to make decisions? (Artifacts)
18. What role do organizational values play in the evaluation process? (Basic Assumptions)
19. What is the organization's interpretation of "get the job done"? (Basic Assumptions)

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