

Military Transformation

Effort and Institutional Commitment

Col. Paul E. Vera Delzo, Peruvian Army





Soldiers from the Peruvian Army's 1st Multipurpose Brigade carrying a simulated casualty 10 May 2018 during a multisector earthquake response exercise in Peru. (Photo courtesy of Ministry of Defense of Peru)

At the beginning of 2019, Gen. Jorge Céliz Kuong, commanding general of the Peruvian Army, declared that institutional transformation had begun. This news is of great importance to the members of this military institution since this process will entail changes that will impact not only the future of the organization but also the careers of its personnel. Nevertheless, a lack of knowledge about what an institutional transformation means could generate doubts and resistance. It is thus essential to define its meaning and differentiate it from terms such as reengineering and modernization, which are often mistakenly used instead.

This article examines the meaning of military transformation, differentiating it from other processes that also involve changes; offers a proposal consisting of coherent steps to follow in order to achieve the aim of transformation; and intends to generate ideas and options for strategic leaders involved in institutional transformation.

Understanding the Meaning

Reengineering, modernization, and transformation are processes that involve changes for the institution implementing them. These terms must not be confused since each of them involves a different magnitude, impact, purpose, and scope (see figure 1, page 53).

On the one hand, reengineering is a management tool through which the internal processes of an enterprise are revised and radically designed, thereby obtaining significant improvements in productivity, speed, costs, and quality, among other benefits.¹ However, what reengineering does not necessarily reflect is whether the organization is in a position to face future changes within the strategic environment. In other words, after conducting an appropriate reengineering process, the organization could improve its business,

yet it may not necessarily be in the right business. In fact, many enterprises have ceased to exist by failing to anticipate changes in the strategic environment.

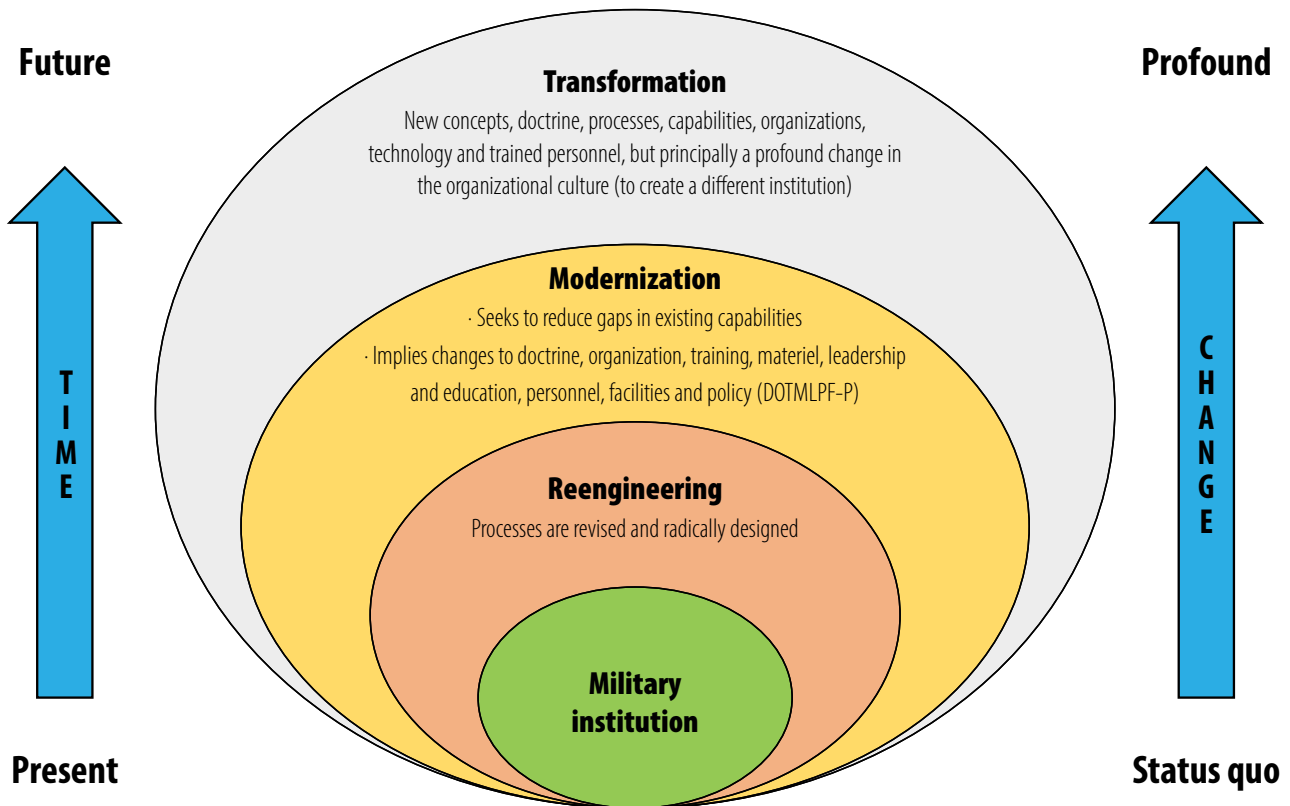
On the other hand, military modernization is a process that seeks to reduce gaps in existing capabilities, providing qualitatively improved capabilities and reducing the institution's costs. Consequently, this process entails the replacement of existing military technology with significantly more capable technology.² Yet modernization is more than the simple acquisition of modern materiel, given that attainment of increased military effectiveness demands that the new materiel must be properly linked to an appropriate organization, concept of operations, set of tactics, command-and-control systems, and supporting infrastructure, among other things.³ In

other words, military modernization implies changes in the doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and policy of the institution. Nevertheless, these changes are not as radical as those generated during a military transformation, particularly with regard to organizational culture.

The Royal Spanish Academy, the official institution of the Spanish language, defines the word "transformation" as the action and effect of transforming, that is to change someone or something in form, converting it into something else.⁴ For this reason, the term "military transformation" is commonly understood as the "profound change" of a military institution, a term not attributed to the making of modest improvements.⁵ In this regard, the U.S. Department of Defense defines military transformation as "a process that shapes the changing nature of military competition and cooperation through new combinations of concepts, capabilities, people, and organizations."⁶ Military transformation is therefore a long-term progression that involves new concepts, doctrine, processes,



The commander of the Peruvian Army, Gen. Jorge Orlando Céliz Kuong, gives a presentation February 2019 at U.S. Army South about the vision, direction, and transformation process of the Peruvian army. (Photo by Marcos Ommati, *Diálogo Americas*)



(Figure by author)

Figure 1. Processes that Involve Change

capabilities, organizations, technology, and trained personnel to handle these changes but principally involves a profound change in the organizational culture.⁷

Several factors must be evaluated to determine the type of change that an organization needs. While some institutions only require reengineering to improve their processes or modernization to close gaps and develop better capabilities, other institutions require a transformation in order to accomplish profound changes and create a new institution capable of successfully facing the future challenges of the strategic environment. Undoubtedly, reengineering and modernization should be considered during a transformation process but not vice versa.

The Way to Follow

Although scientific advances contribute to the development of new technologies, which in turn have unequivocal and beneficial effects upon humanity, these can also lead to new security threats. Currently, in order to be effective, states must face new challenges and threats through the rational use of all elements of national power.

For that purpose, armed forces must be prepared not only to face the new challenges and threats to national security but also to effectively fulfill the complementary roles assigned by a state. Consequently, the fulfillment of new roles and technological advances force military institutions to be engaged in either modernization or transformation processes that allow them to support the achievement of a state's objectives.

Although military transformation may be the firm intention of a military institution, this process will only begin with the consent of the country's top political decision-makers. All transformation requires the allocation of additional resources that allow for profound changes, especially in the area of modernization. For this reason, the military transformation begins with a political decision and with the allocation of resources that allow its implementation.⁸

Likewise, the transformation of a military institution cannot be planned and executed outside the framework of an integral transformation of the defense sector, which includes the transformation not only of all military

services but also the organization or command that groups them during the planning and execution of joint operations.⁹ However, some questions must be raised: How is this military transformation achieved? What steps must be followed?

To address these questions, based on the experience of military institutions executing similar processes, the following eight logical steps, depicted in figure 2, are presented to achieve a successful military transformation.

Step 1: Reaffirm Values

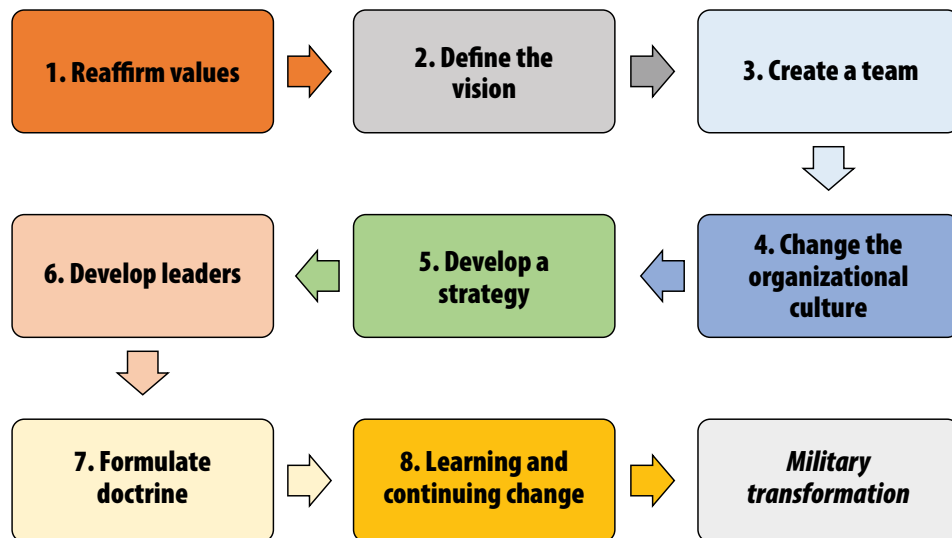
The strategic leaders of a military institution play a key role in the process of military transformation; therefore, knowledge and good practice of strategic leadership are fundamental to the success of this

process. Strategic leadership is defined as “the process used by a leader to affect the achievement of a desirable and clearly understood vision by influencing the organizational culture, allocating resources, directing through policy and directive, and building consensus.”¹⁰

Leading change is one of the main responsibilities of the strategic leader. If the environment is changing at an increasingly faster pace, strategic leaders need to develop organizations that can change quickly to align with the environment. Nevertheless, leading change is not an easy task, especially because it may face resistance from those accustomed to the current system. To overcome this resistance, strategic leaders must reaffirm the values of the military institution. Emphasizing values, people, a sense of commitment, and service to the nation helps personnel understand that the essence of the institution will not change.

To this end, the institution needs to reinvest itself in a profound sense of its own values, reinforcing its commitment to a solid ethical foundation.¹¹ Likewise, it is imperative to identify those values that help the organization to prosper, since values grant the strength, direction, and stability required during periods of confusion

and modification. The essential truth is that leadership is based on values; however, when dissonance exists between declared values and those actually practiced by leaders, rejection and a lack of trust result among members of the organization.



(Figure by author)

Figure 2. Steps to Achieve a Military Transformation

Step 2: Define the Vision

Stephen J. Gerras, editor of *Strategic Leadership Primer*, indicates that strategic leaders “must be agile enough to learn from the past, adapt to current circumstances, and anticipate the future”—one of the greatest challenges that strategic leaders face.¹² Even though the future cannot be predicted, strategic leaders must explore scenarios or plausible hypotheses about how the environment might evolve. In other words, it is critical to craft a context within which an institution can properly perform to create its own future. First, the future must exist in the strategic leader’s mind before it can be proactively communicated to the organization. This intellectual change guides the physical change of the transformation. Without this initial work of intellectual change, the physical change will become unfocused and have a reduced probability of success.¹³

The term “vision” suggests the elaboration of a mental image of what the organization will look like in the future. Vision provides not only a sense of identity but also a sense of purpose, direction, and motivation to the members and activities of an organization.¹⁴ Consequently, the defining vision must be one of the

first steps required to execute an institutional transformation. Once the vision is expressed, the methods and resources to achieve it must be identified.¹⁵

Values and vision facilitate change, innovation, and growth while providing members of an organization with a foundation against which they can act, learn, and progress. The creation of vision is a collaborative effort that begins with strategic leaders.¹⁶ For this purpose, the strategic leader is normally supported by a technical group within the organization. Once the leader approves and appropriates the vision, it must be communicated and clearly understood by its organizational members.

Step 3: Create a Team

Another major challenge in the development of military transformation is the need to think of the future while simultaneously attending to current problems in the organization. During the transformation process, the institution does not cease to function, and the principal effort of its leaders is normally focused on tackling daily matters. On this point, it is necessary to observe that assigning the tasks of leading and synchronizing the efforts of a transformation to an existing directorate within an institution will create work overload.

Strategic leaders cannot transform the institution alone. Creating the future is a team effort. For this reason, the strategic leader must create a new organization focused exclusively on the future and the attainment of institutional transformation. This new organization, integrated with civil and military experts in different areas, must provide the unity of command and unity of effort needed to promote agility in the process of transformation and to synchronize the actions of all actors involved. Similarly, as in the case of the Colombian national army's "Transformation Command for the Future" (created in 2015) and the U.S. Army's Futures Command (created in 2018), this new organization will need to depend directly on the strategic leader of the institution, because it will be responsible for articulating the future of the military institution and for providing continuity to the process. The placement of this organization within the structure of the institution will be a clear indicator of its importance and priority.

Step 4: Change the Organizational Culture

Military transformation principally engages significant changes in the organizational culture (e.g., beliefs,

habits, values, attitudes, and traditions existing in the military institution). Without a doubt, the most important and difficult change to achieve is the change in mentality of the members of the institution. Transformation should facilitate a culture that fosters leadership, education, organization, processes, values, and attitudes that promote meaningful innovation.¹⁷ This process creates new areas and competences in a way that allows its constituents to identify or create new ways of doing things.

As manifested by Gordon R. Sullivan and Michael V. Harper, authors of *Hope Is Not a Method: What Business Leaders Can Learn from America's Army*, the change must first happen within the minds of the people; only then can it be applied to the structures, processes, performances, and results of the organization.¹⁸ Consequently, it can be affirmed that institutional transformation begins with changes in the organizational culture. For this purpose, the nature of the new organizational culture must be defined to answer some essential questions: What are the new values, beliefs, and assumptions that must be adopted by members of the organization? What new behaviors will lead to these changes in culture?

Once culture is defined, efforts should focus on identifying and implementing those actions that allow this change to materialize. The shift of culture in mature organizations such as military institutions is very difficult since it requires time, great effort, and perseverance. To allow this process, Edgar Schein, contributor to *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, proposes a method to systematically embed and reinforce a culture.¹⁹ Embedding mechanisms place the assumptions (values, beliefs, etc.) in the organization while reinforcing mechanisms support these assumptions. Both mechanisms are important and useful if employed jointly. For example, a commander who discerns the

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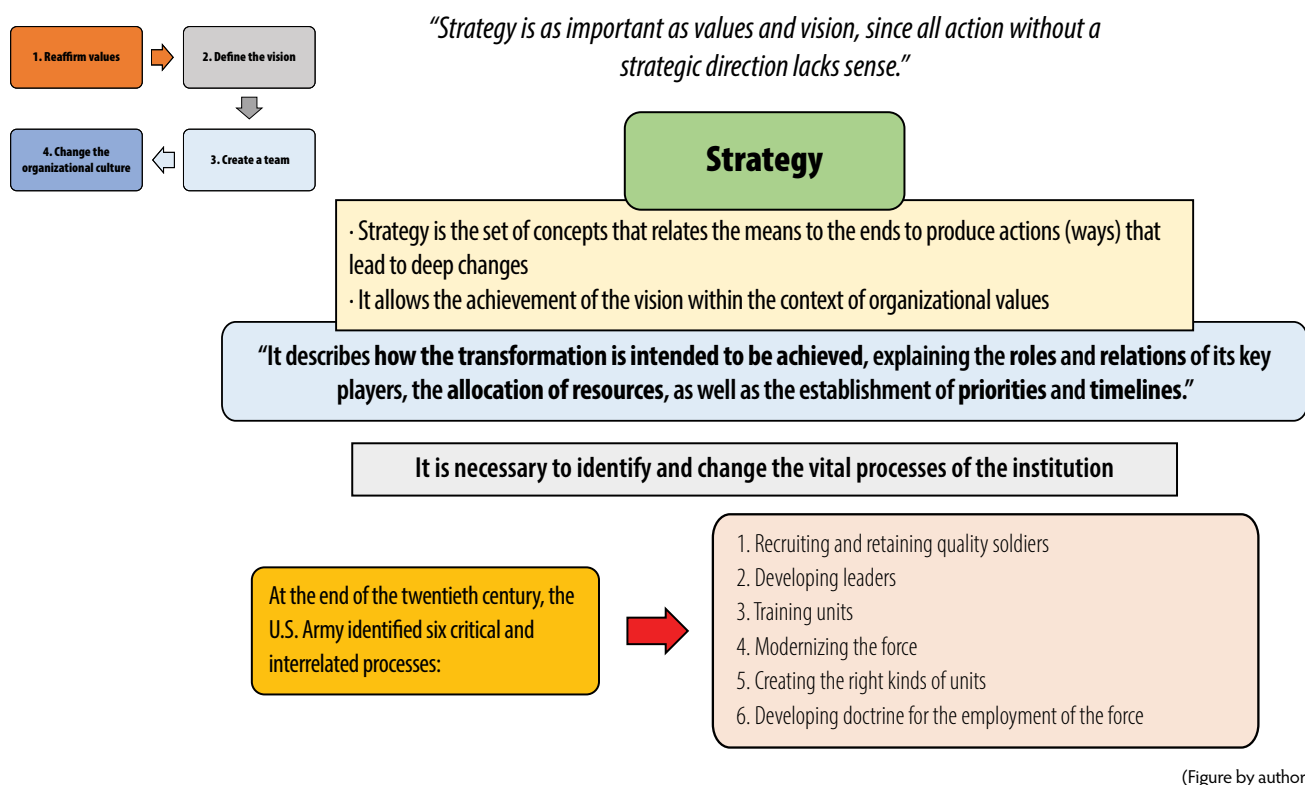


Figure 3. Step Five: Develop a Strategy

importance of honesty (reinforcing mechanism) among his or her staff will only obtain the desired impact if he or she acts honestly (embedding mechanism).

Step 5: Develop a Strategy

During the transformation process, strategy is as important as values and vision, since action without strategic direction lacks sense. In the context of military transformation, strategy is the set of concepts that relates the means to the ends to produce actions (ways) that lead to deep changes. The institution must therefore define a strategy that allows the achievement of the vision within the context of organizational values.²⁰ The development of the strategic concept is critical since it describes how the transformation is intended to be achieved, explaining the roles and relations of its key players, the allocation of resources, and the establishment of priorities and timelines (see figure 3).

To achieve a transformation, it is necessary to identify and change the vital processes of the institution. In the case of the U.S. Army in the 1980s, during the transformation process after the Vietnam War, Chief of Staff Gen. Carl

E. Vuono identified six critical and interrelated processes that then became essential to ensure a long-lasting transformation: (1) recruiting and retaining quality soldiers, (2) developing leaders, (3) training units, (4) modernizing the force, (5) creating the right kinds of units, and (6) developing doctrine for the employment of the force.²¹

Step 6: Develop Leaders

A military institution’s soldiers are important, yet the leaders who guide them are vital. Consequently, the quality and growth of a military institution’s leaders must be a part of any strategy formulation for the execution of a transformation process. The development of leaders (both military and civil) is fundamental for the military institution, given that it must build subordinates who assume responsibility for their own actions and are capable of acting independently. This is the true sense of empowerment.²² To empower is to give someone authority, influence, or knowledge to do something, but above all, it is to bestow responsibility.²³

If the leaders of a military institution are important, the strategic leaders are fundamental. These leaders play a



key role in the transformation process because they are responsible for defining the vision, reaffirming the values, and leading the change of the organization. For this reason, the formation and development of strategic leaders must be prioritized through training and empowerment. Strategic leaders must train and mentor future leaders of the institution because they will be responsible for giving continuity to the transformation process. Therefore, one of the principal jobs of strategic leaders is to develop subordinates who will lead the organization when the leaders leave.²⁴

Step 7: Formulate Doctrine

Once the transformation process is initiated, several drivers will demand that profound changes commence

Peruvian soldiers rappel from a helicopter 24 November 2018 during *Exercise Olas Solidarias* (Solidarity Waves Exercise) in Peru. The U.S. Navy partnered with Peruvian armed forces and civilian agencies in the rapid-response exercise. The goal of the exercise was to demonstrate an integrated response by many government resources to a natural disaster and to strengthen interoperability and improve relations between the two nations. (Photo courtesy of Ministry of Defense of Peru)

promptly, especially changes related to organization, training, and modernization of the institution. However, it is not logical to implement these types of changes without a clear sense of direction. At this juncture, doctrine acquires particular importance since it will give coherence,

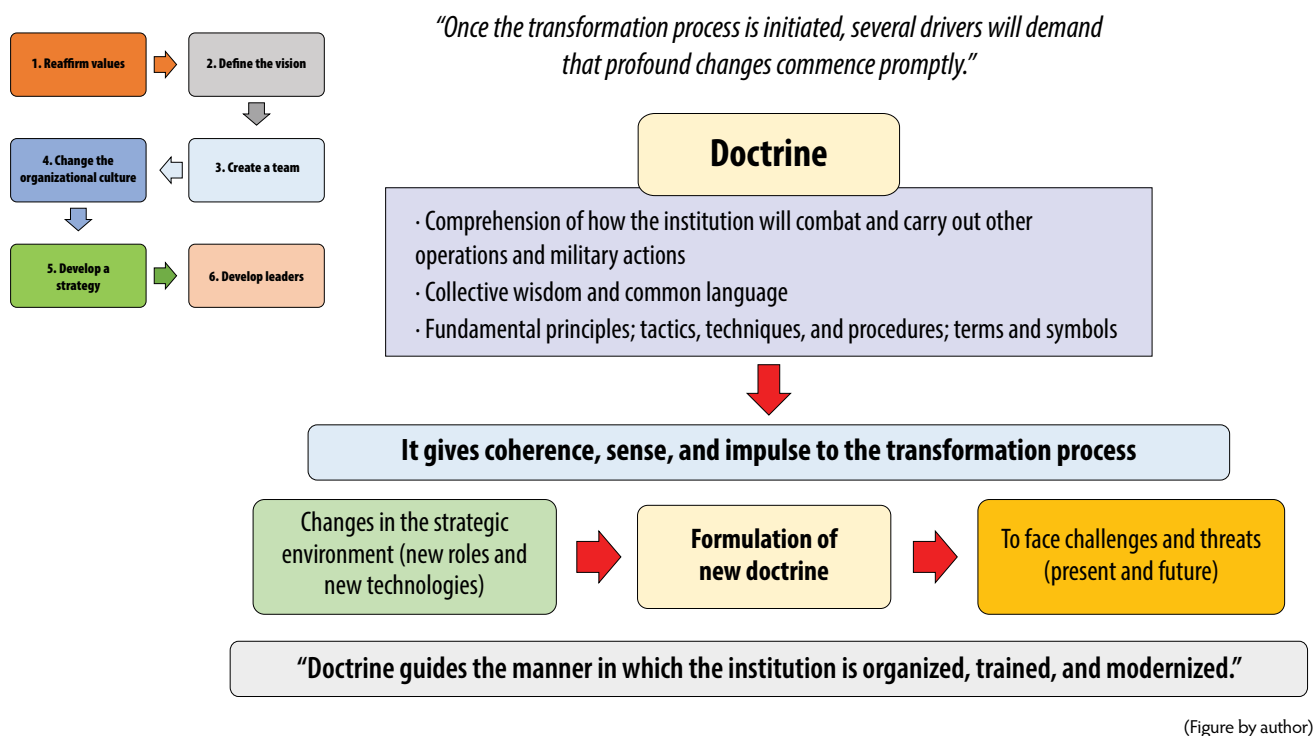


Figure 4. Step Seven: Formulate Doctrine

sense, and impetus to the transformation process. Military doctrine is defined as “fundamental principles by which military forces or elements thereof guide their actions in support of national objectives.”²⁵ For this purpose, doctrine consists not only of fundamental principles but also of tactics, techniques, and procedures including terms and symbols. In fact, doctrine represents the collective wisdom of the institution and provides a common language so that its members may communicate among themselves.

The changes in the strategic environment, including new roles and technologies, force the military institution to write a new doctrine that includes a wider range of operations and military actions. During the transformation process, it is therefore essential that doctrine is formulated to efficiently fulfill all roles assigned by a state. This new doctrine must not only successfully enable current challenges and threats but also, and above all, those of the future (see figure 4). For example, no one would want to repeat the experience of the French army, who during World War II formulated a doctrine and organized, equipped, and trained units for the wrong type of war.²⁶ In other words, the army prepared itself to fight another World War I (a past, relatively

static war) but not the warfare it actually confronted (blitzkrieg, or lightning war).

Doctrine is the collective comprehension of how the institution will combat and carry out other operations and military actions. For this reason, doctrine guides the manner in which the institution is organized, trained, and modernized.²⁷ Modernization and reorganization of the institution should not be initiated if a new doctrine has not first been formulated.

Normally, the transformation process begins with sequential actions. For example, as learning about the impact of new technologies increases, transformation tends toward modernization. Subsequently, when new doctrine is combined with new technology, transformation expands to encompass the redesign of tactical units.²⁸ Thereafter, these sequential actions convert themselves into simultaneous and synchronized actions, above all when transformation includes each critical process of the organization.

Step 8: Learning and Continuing Change

Transformation is a process that emphasizes maintaining continuity, making appropriate changes, and

growing to become a different institution.²⁹ Nevertheless, appropriate changes require time since they must first be experimented, learned, and improved. This is of particular importance in determining the new organization, equipment, and training of the tactical units.

Another challenge that faces military transformation is the need to secure continuity in the change process. To achieve this, strategic leaders of the institution must create consensus among its members. Otherwise, changes will endure only as long as the person who promoted or implemented them lasts. The creation of consensus is achieved through ongoing communication and participation of the institutional members, primarily those persons who in the future will replace the current strategic leaders.

Transformation must base itself on positive and aggressive actions, guided by vision and consistent with the values of the institution, but, above all, these must be actions that institutional members can see and understand.³⁰ For this reason, members of the institution

must be kept informed to avoid the spread of rumors and negative attitudes. Equally important is the speed at which changes are accomplished (not so slow that its impact is imperceptible, nor too quick so it does not saturate the organization).

Conclusion

Military transformation is an arduous process that requires time and involves the use of profound changes to convert the institution into something qualitatively better while preserving its essence. As this article has shown, transformation calls for the reaffirmation of values, the definition of a vision, the creation of a team, the change of the organizational culture, the identification of strategy, the development of leaders, the formulation of doctrine, and the constant willingness to learn. To this end, the permanent effort and commitment of both an organization's members and its political decision-makers are required to successfully face the diverse challenges of military transformation. ■

Notes

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