

*Of Garbage Cans and Paradox: Reflexively Reviewing Design,
Mission Command, and the Gray Zone*

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I remember the first time I felt paradox within the military. My boss had asked for an After Action Review (AAR) of a training event he had set up for multiple Special Forces (SF) teams within our company. I surveyed the members of my team, wrote out three things that we thought went well and three things that we thought could be done differently. Shortly thereafter, I was called into my company commander's office. He proceeded to berate me for my "immature" memorandum and then threatened to fire me.

"That training has never been done before! It was perfect!" he screamed at me. He then went through every member of my SF team and pointed out their weaknesses, implying, I thought, that they were not good sources for an AAR.

I had recently arrived to Special Operations and sitting in my boss' office I saw my career flash before my eyes almost before it had even started. I decided to attempt to control the damage.

"Sir, I'll re-do the memo and take all those negative things out," I cut-in.

"You're damned right, you will!" he screamed back at me. "These reports are going up to Group headquarters and they will not say anything bad about this training! I have half a mind to send you up to be the battalion personnel officer!"

Later, I reflected upon my experience. Here I was, new to Special Operations and I had assumed that the members of this organization had no patience for careerists and valued honesty above all else. This was an invaluable lesson to me in those first few months as I came to slowly realize that Special Operations suffered from the same problems that all government organizations suffer from: bureaucracy and paradox to name but a few.

However, a deeper lesson remained for me to learn. It was much later that I realized that I had encountered paradox within the military from the start. Way back when I had attended The Citadel, the military college of South Carolina, we had all followed an honor code that had no room for nuance: 'a cadet does not lie, cheat, steal, nor tolerate those who do.' At the same time, some of us read *Five Years to Freedom*, a book that talked about Nick Rowe's capture and imprisonment for 5 years under the Viet Cong and how he had to lie to stay alive. 'Not lying,' it seemed, might have some exceptions in the 'real world.' I am sure if I had looked hard enough, I could have seen the paradoxes within my church growing up, my high school, my Boy Scout Troop, and even my family. Paradox, it seems is everywhere.

To make sense of this we first must look at the concept of paradox and understand that what we observe is not irrational or abnormal: paradox is the rule in how human institutions behave and its language is called 'politics.' Second, there are ways with which to make sense of paradox. One way is to adopt reflexive approaches and attempt to 'see' phenomena, namely oneself and one's organization, in new ways. Next, one example is provided, applying the garbage can model of decision making to some of the military's examples of paradox. Lastly, I use these insights to describe an over-arching concept for how organizations co-opt new ideas and trends and the effects of that co-option on the ideas, trends, and the organization itself. This concept could allow military professionals to understand what happens to new ideas and why so that they can anticipate negative effects and take steps to mitigate the natural extirpation of innovation within organizations.

The Bureaucracy as a Paradox: Three Examples

1. *Mission Command*

The U.S. military introduced the concept of *Mission Command* as a philosophy in 2003, followed in 2010 with a warfighting function.¹ Warfighting functions are how the U.S. military organizes its systems, processes, and tasks to carry out its missions. The Mission Command Center of Excellence (MCCoE) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, manages the required capabilities for the function, directing the conceptual logic that justifies resource acquisition related to the function of its namesake. As a philosophy, the U.S. Army defines Mission Command as “the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander's intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of Unified Land Operations.”² Thus, it is a common view within the US military from my experience that the function naturally focuses on the ideas within the philosophy- in this case: the enabling of disciplined initiative, communicating through commander’s intent, empowering subordinates, and the building of agile and adaptive leaders. The reality is more complicated.

It is no accident that since the founding of the MCCoE there have been numerous articles attempting to explain why the military has failed to enable Mission Command.³ None of these articles, however, concisely captures the connection between the concept of Mission Command and the way in which the military goes about resourcing its

¹ See the graphic found at the “Evolution of Mission Command” tab within the MCCoE website, accessed 5 DEC 2016: <http://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/images/dots/Evolution-of-MC.jpg>

² US Department of the Army, *Mission Command*, Doctrinal Publication 6-0, (Washington, D.C., 2012), iv.

³ For just some of the articles on Mission Command, see: Thomas Williams, “Mission Command, Leadership and the U.S. Army,” *Thestrategybridge* (2016), <http://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2016/4/26/mission-command-leadership-and-the-us-army>, Ben Summers, “Mission Command Is A Balancing Act Between Leadership and Management,” *TaskandPurpose* (2015), <http://taskandpurpose.com/mission-command-balancing-act-leadership-management/>, Don Vandergriff, “The Myth of Mission Command: How “Synchronization Warfare” has Removed the Human from Modern Warfare,” *Medium* (2014), <https://medium.com/the-bridge/the-myth-of-mission-command-78b81d7f7987#.wq8jxs4i0>, Burton L. Brender, “The Problem of Mission Command,” *Realcleardefense* (2016), http://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2016/09/02/the_problem_of_mission_command_110008.html, and COL Tom Guthrie, “Mission Command: Do We Have the Stomach for What is Really Required?” *Army* (2012), https://www.ousa.org/sites/default/files/FC_Guthrie_0612.pdf

requirements. Mission Command as a concept became a popular subject as two things occurred: massive introspection at the ways in which the military commanded forces in Iraq and Afghanistan using cutting-edge technology along with the perception that the drawdown in Iraq would lead to a garrison mentality back at home, and, two: frustration among junior leaders who were used to wide latitude in combat. The latter issue was perhaps best described by the vignette of an infantry lieutenant who had been entrusted with hundreds of thousands of dollars, large swaths of land, and task execution latitude with his platoon while deployed, only to come home to the US and not allowed to dictate whether his troops wore a winter physical training shirt or a summer one. The former subject was best described by the commanding general, sitting in an air-conditioned joint operations center thousands of miles away from a battle, feeling as if he had situational understanding through a video feed from a drone flying over the battle.

The way in which the military would potentially look to change reference these two issues is assumed by the institution to be rational: it assumes that an objective investigation into the root causes of the problems would lead directly to resource decisions. Instead, once the analysis was complete, the solutions mainly revolved around more technology. I will never forget first hearing how Information Technology and Command and Control (C2) systems would solve our mission command problems in a Capabilities Based Assessment (CBA) meeting. After several of us voiced objection, the lead of the meeting, a relatively high-ranking individual, told us to not “confuse the CBA with solving mission command: the objective is to get money; and IT and C2 systems are how we get money.” More drones and more joint operations centers (JOCs) would negate the need for the lieutenant to worry about what PT uniform his unit needed to wear, as sensors within his troops’ uniforms could be relayed to the hyper-connected JOCs and the general could relay the ‘mission orders’ to the lieutenant from the JOC through an automated chat function to his mobile interface, connected to his smart phone. The need for the lieutenant to take initiative was obviated by the increased ability of the general to monitor his troops.

Junior leaders, however, have not been mollified and those aware of the disconnect between the problems identified and the solutions being pursued have published articles, commented on email listserves, and complained on Facebook pages.

The problem, they have asserted, is associated with culture, education- both professional and foundational, and the personnel system. Mostly, however, the resource process itself and organizational theory have largely been ignored by critics. What if the problem was systemic, i.e. it dealt with the resource system itself? In addition, is there anything in the organizational theory literature that describes how resource systems could paradoxically make problems worse, as many junior leaders were convinced the Mission Command's solutions of more technology would?

2. *Design*

This disconnectedness between resource decisions and the problems themselves is not isolated to just Mission Command, however. Take the design effort of the US Army. At the same time that the military was coming to grips with the frustration of counterinsurgency in Afghanistan and Iraq, many militaries around the world were attempting to adopt complexity and systems theories into their doctrine. The US military was no different, and, borrowing from Shimon Naveh's Systemic Operational Design and other concepts, there was a serious effort from 2004 until 2008 to introduce a new way of planning and thinking about military operations, especially those addressing so-called 'wicked problems.' In short, the idea was that the same tools that were used for dramatic success against explicit and militarily-accomplishable objectives (think *Operation Desert Storm* or the original missions of 'overthrow the Taliban' or 'overthrow Saddam Hussein' in Afghanistan and Iraq, respectively) might not be the same tools required for more tacit (hard to communicate about) and non-militarily accomplishable objectives (like 'establish stability' or 'deny Al-Qaeda sanctuary'). Many militaries around the world turned to relatively new concepts like 'Systems Thinking' and 'Complexity Theory.'

To get to new ways of thinking, however, students were told that we must first 'unlearn' the old ways. The new ways of thinking initially took root in the US Army in their School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS). This school, a master's degree program at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, introduced students to books like *A Treatise on Efficacy*, *A Thousand Plateaus*, and *A Primer in Theory Construction*, to name but a few. These kinds of books did not just introduce complexity theory and systems thinking to the students, they taught them to attempt to see the world in new ways. Most of us at

SAMS⁴ were products of both the American educational system and the military's professional education system. Both of these systems produced mostly linear thinkers who viewed the world largely in one way: reductive, deterministic, and objective. The SAMS curriculum asserted that in some respects the world was not linear, reductive, or objective, that many phenomena were subjective, and the best ways with which to go about doing things were not always deterministic. This required a re-mapping of students' thinking processes: we had to question some of our most basic cultural and social assumptions about the world.

This effort, called 'Design,' quickly ran into problems.⁵ First, US Army Training and Doctrine Command insisted that things be made "simple, short, and familiar." This, of course, clashed with the ideas behind 'unlearning:' there was not a simple, short, and familiar way to introduce new concepts, many of which were in direct contradiction to 'the familiar.' Next came the doctrinal system itself. As manuals were updated during this time, each new publication captured a different snapshot in time of the debate within the Army about Design. This resulted in much confusion as to what Design was.⁶ To some it was simply a more detailed and intellectually deeper take on 'Mission

⁴ The author was a student at SAMS in 2009.

⁵ Alex Ryan, "A Personal Reflection on Introducing Design to the U.S. Army," *Medium* (2016), <https://medium.com/the-overlap/a-personal-reflection-on-introducing-design-to-the-u-s-army-3f8bd76adcb2#.lnpicbisw>.

⁶ See: COL Thomas Graves and Bruce E. Stanley, "Design and Operational Art: A Practical Approach to Teaching the Army Design Methodology," *Military Review* 93, no. 4 (2013); COL Stefan J. Banach, "Educating by Design: Preparing Leaders for a Complex World," *Military Review* 89, no. 2 (2009); Matthew Lauder, "Systemic Operational Design: Freeing Operational Planning From the Shackles of Linearity," *Canadian Military Journal* 9, no. 4 (2009); John F. Schmitt, "A Systemic Concept for Operational Design." US Air Force Air War College (n.d.), http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/usmc/mcwl_schmitt_op_design.pdf; Adam Elkus and Crispin Burke, "Operational Design: Promise and Problems," *Small Wars Journal* (February 2010), Roger Martin, "Design Thinking Comes to the U.S. Army," *Designobserver* (2010), <http://designobserver.com/feature/design-thinking-comes-to-the-us-army/13478/>; Alex Ryan, "A Theory of Systemic Design," *Systemic-design.net* (2013), <http://systemic-design.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Ryan.pdf>; Ben Zweibelson, "Design Theory and the Military's Understanding of Our Complex World," *Small Wars Journal* (2011), <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/design-theory-and-the-military%E2%80%99s-understanding-of-our-complex-world>; and Christopher Paporone, "Design and the Prospects of a Design Ethic," *Small Wars Journal* (2011), <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/design-and-the-prospects-of-a-design-ethic> for just a few of the examples of the debate about what Design was or was not.

Analysis,' the second step of the *Military Decision Making Process* (MDMP). To others it was the conceptual thinking prior to launching into MDMP. To still others it was about 're-imagining' the situation. Many conflated the term with 'operational design,' 'operational art,' and 'systemic operational design.' The latter label was associated by some within the American military with the Israeli's problems during the *Second Intifada*. Regardless, this confusion and the different labels and emotions attached to the American military 'Design' concept quickly resulted, from my perspective, in three different groups: those willing to question assumptions about traditional planning methods, those only willing to tweak traditional methods somewhat, and those unwilling to entertain that anything was possibly wrong with traditional methods.

Among those 'early adaptors' who were willing to imagine for a moment that there might be fundamental issues with traditional planning there were many different ideas about how to proceed and what was feasible. Some thought fundamental change was warranted, but that most Army officers were incapable of the intellectual thought needed for that kind of change. Others thought that simply adopting a new method would suffice (usually systems theory). A third group argued that fundamental change was required and feasible, but acknowledged that it would be long-term and difficult. This third group, admittedly the one I identify most strongly with, argued that sociology, organizational theory, and other disciplines had to be incorporated into the Army's approaches and that the most important thing to concentrate on was understanding the military's current way of thinking first and foremost. This clashed with the idea that the military's main task was understanding 'the other' (usually 'the enemy,' or 'the natives' when conducting counterinsurgency).

In 2010, a new SAMS director, then-Colonel Wayne Grigsby, spearheaded an effort to redirect the Design concept to be more of a standardized process. SAMS thus returned to being focused more on deterministic planning and the steps of MDMP. From 2010 and on the Design concept was directly tied to Operational Design and became mainly three steps prior to MDMP. This co-opting of the original concept, which was fundamentally about questioning assumptions and specifically those associated with using traditional planning and decision making methods, was paradoxically incorporated right back into traditional planning and decision making methods. If one's final act with 'Design' was to use the insight gained from the process to inform MDMP and then deterministic planning, then there was little hope of Design

leading to questioning the utility of MDMP and deterministic planning. Somehow 'unlearning' old ways became 're-learning' the old ways. How could this have happened?

3. *The Gray Zone*

The final example of bureaucracy causing the military to paradoxically do something different than what it sets out to do is the example of the 'Gray Zone.' The Gray Zone has recently come into the popular mindset as a description of the confusion the US faces in places like Syria, Iraq, Russia, and China. It attempts to make sense of phenomena such as Russia's annexation of Crimea, its encroachment into Georgia, Iran's proxy efforts in Iraq and Syria, and China's building of islands in the South China Sea. The concept asserts that Western nations are structured to handle two situations: peace and war, and when 'something else' is going on, they are ill-equipped to manage things to a successful outcome. The Gray Zone concept argues that different thinking, structuring, and tools are required.⁷

On its face the concept sounds reasonable. To counter Russian aggression within the Ukraine, simply training Ukrainian troops, pushing for sanctions, and launching official complaints does not seem to work. Many argue the military must restructure ourselves around the specific situation and think in different terms than 'peace' and 'war.' A closer look, however, at the recommendations from the military seems to show the solutions matching very closely to the same solutions the military was already advocating for prior to the Gray Zone concept: solutions that did not necessarily have anything to do with the phenomena the Gray Zone describes.

One example is Special Operations' need to conduct Unconventional Warfare (UW) and a requirement for more UW capability and authorities.⁸ Another is arguing for a Grand Strategy.⁹ Still others recommend 'Whole of Government' approaches,

⁷ Capt. Philip Kapusta, "The Challenge of Operating in the Gray Zone," *Special Warfare Magazine* 28, no. 4 (2015).

⁸ Joseph L. Votel, Charles T. Cleveland, Charles T. Connett, and Will Irwin, "Unconventional Warfare in the Gray Zone," *Joint Forces Quarterly* (January 2016).

⁹ David Maxwell, "Defining the Gray Zone Challenge," *Small Wars Journal* (2015), <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/defining-the-gray-zone-challenge>.

‘dispelling ambiguity,’ and ‘fixing the Federal Government’ as panaceas that are presented as something new.¹⁰ Others argue that conventional forces must build security force assistance capabilities.¹¹ Still others argue the military should take the lead within the Interagency and develop strategic approaches.¹² And some argue for a little of all of the above.¹³

The point here isn’t that any of these examples are wrong, one or more may be right for all I know. The point is that to a certain extent they all reflect solutions that different groups were already pushing for long before the ‘Gray Zone’ was a concept, the ‘Little Green Men’ invaded Crimea, or the Chinese built any islands. One might think that if these actions were truly different and confounding phenomena that the US was unable to counter that maybe some of the solutions offered would be different from ones we were already pursuing. A truly less hubristic sign would be articles and concepts that admitted ignorance as to the proper solution or even ones that questioned the role of the government in countering these phenomena.

So, why would all of these examples appear on their face paradoxical? Mission Command is not enabled by more technology, it is more likely hurt by it. Design, if it is about unlearning old processes, cannot then feed blindly into old processes. And the Gray Zone, if it is indeed something we are ill-suited for, has to require different thinking, if not an admittance that we are ignorant about its required response. Instead, what all of these examples show is a system co-opting attempts to change it. This is what bureaucracies do best. Bureaucracies, defined as rule-following organizations, are set up to offer standardization, control, and prediction. They are bent on efficiency, although not efficiency always defined simply as ‘lower cost,’ and focused on effectiveness in the face of known tasks. They allow these things, which can be seen by

¹⁰ Hal Brands, “Paradoxes of the Gray Zone,” *Foreign Policy Research Institute* (February 2016) and COL Robert S. Hume, “Confronting Conflict in the Gray Zone,” *BreakingDefense* (June 2016), <http://breakingdefense.com/2016/06/confronting-conflict-in-the-gray-zone/>.

¹¹ David Barno and Nora Bensahel, “Fighting and Winning in the Gray Zone,” *Warontherocks.com* (May 2015), <http://warontherocks.com/2015/05/fighting-and-winning-in-the-gray-zone/>.

¹² Nathan Freier, “Gray Zone: Why We’re Losing the New Era of National Security,” *defenseone.com* (June 2016), <http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2016/06/gray-zone-losing-new-era-national-security-strategy/128957/>.

¹³ Dr. Michael J. Mazarr, “Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict,” Monograph, Strategic Studies Institute (2015).

some as preferable, at a cost to innovation and effectiveness in terms of adapting to new phenomena. In short, if one is expecting a conventional war to break out in Southern Iraq over who should control Kuwait, then a bureaucracy is the best way to go about preparing for such an eventuality. If, however, one does not know what to expect, but is reasonably sure it will not be a conventional war, then a bureaucracy is perhaps the least likely organization to prepare one for whatever does come. The question then becomes, *what does one do about the paradox of a bureaucracy?*

How to Make Sense of the Paradox: Reflective Learning, Reflexive Thinking and Mixed Methods Approaches

The first task is to reorient ourselves away from traditional categorical and linear thinking. It is intuitive to see ourselves in the military as only executing policy and our military culture likes to think of itself as 'separate from politics.' But paradox points to things being counterintuitive. According to Deborah Stone, who writes about paradoxes in public policy, we humans naturally struggle constantly to deconflict competing values.¹⁴ As such, politics is the way in which we inform others of our values and are in turn informed of others' values. Thus, the key insight for military professionals is to see the world as it is, not as we would like it to be. Politics are not 'messy,' 'irrational,' or 'separated from the military,' but, instead are the way in which humans create communities. It is important for us in the military to understand that we use politics within the military and in the greater Federal government to create community. We do this so that we can live and work together. War is not an extension of politics, it is a socially-created abstraction that we argue about with others (and engage in) as a way to do two things: create an internal and national community and an activity we engage in with the rest of the world to create a larger community. Thus, we military professionals, in order to deal with paradox, have to first understand that we are part of the political picture and that war is both a tool we use to communicate about our values to decision makers and an activity we engage in on behalf of the country to do the same with the rest of the world. If one is limited to 'ends-ways-means,' thinking, then understanding

¹⁴ Deborah Stone, *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making*, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2012).

paradox through politics and reorienting away from seeing politics as separate from the military would be our preferred 'end.'

Moving to our 'ways,' Norma Riccucci, in her book on public administration, offers a practical way to deal with paradox.¹⁵ This way is to use multiple methods in order to make sense of the paradoxical. Her thesis is that since politics produce paradox, and paradox is counterintuitive, humans can only come to grips with paradox through building multiple ways with which to make sense of things. So, for example, an empirical study resulting in a data set and a regression curve would be one way of making sense of a phenomena, but it would be insufficient. Mixing that study with an ethnographic interpretation of the phenomena would offer more nuance. Obviously, the more methods used, the more understanding of the phenomena. Since humans make sense of their world largely through social methods, understanding how different humans could make sense of a situation adds a more holistic understanding.

Lastly, we come to 'means.' One of the means, among many, is to be *reflexive*. Reflexivity is understanding that one's actions affect one's learning and thinking and, in turn, one's actions in a circular manner.¹⁶ A related term that is just as important is the idea of *reflective learning*, which is learning that takes a critical look at the way in which one's learning and one's organization's learning processes are structured and how they potentially influence that learning in unintended ways. It allows one to uncover blind spots and unquestioned assumptions.¹⁷ Being reflexive and reflective in the military is just as important as understanding the military's preferred way of making sense of the world. The military largely accepts as a given an objective world in which knowledge is built upon previous knowledge in a 'positive' direction.¹⁸ Understanding the military's preferred method can be both a useful tool in some situations as well as be a part of being a reflexive and reflective practitioner. As some in the military say quite

¹⁵ Norma Riccucci, *Public Administration: Traditions of Inquiry and Philosophies of Knowledge* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010).

¹⁶ Robert K. Merton, "The self-fulfilling prophecy," *Antioch Review*, 8 (1948): pp. 193–210, E. Nagel, *The Structure of Science: Problems in the Logic of Scientific Explanation* (New York: Harcourt, 1961); and Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957).

¹⁷ Donald A. Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

¹⁸ Christopher Papparone, *The Sociology of Military Science: Prospects for Postinstitutional Military Design* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

frequently, “you can’t deviate from doctrine if you don’t know the doctrine.” A reflexive quality would allow the military professional to both execute doctrinal methods competently and understand where they come from and their associated assumptions and weaknesses. A reflective quality would allow the military professional to constantly improve upon organizational learning.

However, how would this be applied in a practical manner? In the next section I give such an example using the Garbage Can Model of decision making.

One Example: the Garbage Can Model of Decision Making

One example I would like to share to show how a mixed methods approach might work to understand paradox is the example of the Garbage Can Model of decision making. This model was developed by Cohen, March, and Olsen.¹⁹ They developed the model after observing a university administrative body making decisions. Instead of the assumed method of a rational process, what they observed seemed to suggest that decisions were rarely, if ever, linked to the problems the decision making bodies identified. Instead, what they observed seemed to be a situation wherein influential people with preferred solutions constantly looked for opportunities to initiate their solutions. These opportunities did not have to have anything to do with any of the solutions or even the original problems. Once an opportunity appeared, solutions were applied to problems based on how savvy the influencers were and how the opportunities shaped the situation. Their description of this process was to imagine a ‘garbage can’ full of solutions and, when an opportunity came along, an influential person grabbing one of the solutions and applying it, regardless of the situation or if there was even a problem to address.

If we apply this model to the three examples I described above, a different sort of understanding can be achieved. First, however, we must offer the institutional conventional wisdom for how these examples unfolded. With Mission Command, we are led to believe by the institution that a complete and thorough analysis of the

¹⁹ Michael D. Cohen, James G. March, Johan P. Olsen, “A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (1972): pp. 1-25.

requirement was conducted, an analysis of solutions to solve any gaps in requirements followed, and experimentation efforts helped prioritize the most valid solutions to put resources towards. Likewise, in the case of Design, after much trial and error and including a rigorous testing in both combat and in experimental exercises, the institution supposedly determined that the best way in which to ensure successful mission accomplishment in ambiguous situations was to follow a three-step methodology prior to launching into MDMP and deterministic planning. Finally, with respect to the Gray Zone, the institution's story is that after careful deliberation and study, alternative viewpoints, and much debate and analysis, it was found that the best way to think about the current environment was to imagine a 'zone' between the extremes of peace and war that the US was ill-suited to operate within.

Now, those frames described above are valuable if only to understand how the military makes sense of what has happened. This provides an understanding of how the military makes sense, as an institution, of itself. It is also possible, of course, that we could find evidence that at least part of what ended up happening did reflect, more or less, some of that description. To make sense of some of the paradox, however, we could include another description of what happened. The Garbage Can Model of decision making, as one such alternative, would hold that the solutions for Mission Command: IT and C2 systems, the current situation for Design within the Army: a lengthier and deeper addition to rational decision making (MDMP) and a reinforcing of deterministic planning, and the recommendations to counter the Gray Zone: a Grand Strategy, more Whole of Government, and more Unconventional Warfare capability and authorities- all were floating around 'in a garbage can,' waiting for an opportunity to be applied to a situation.

In the case of Mission Command, the opportunity came in the form of a reflection upon the unprecedented use of IT systems and a draw-down in Iraq that many feared would result in a garrison mentality that would drive good leaders out of the Army. In the case of Design, the opportunity came in the form of many leaders, in the wake of instability in Iraq, post-Operation Iraqi Freedom, wishing to incorporate complexity theory and systems thinking into planning processes. And in the example of the Gray Zone, the opportunity was the feeling within the Pentagon and in D.C. that we were unprepared to handle the actions of Russia, China, and Iran when those actions stayed below a threshold that precipitated a military response.

Once these opportunities appeared, it was quite natural for those in influence to turn to solutions that they either wanted to institute anyway, or were convinced they could be on some level a part of the solution. It makes sense that if one is an 'unconventional warrior,' for instance, every problem looks unconventional in some manner or form. Likewise, if one is a 'strategic planner,' then surely there are few problems that cannot be traced back to a lack of strategic foresight and planning. Regardless, seeing what happened through the lens of Cohen, March, and Olsen's "Garbage Can," might assist in making sense of what happened and might offer a different take on things that could be of use to an organization that is looking to mitigate the adopting of ill-fitted solutions the next time an opportunity arises. This, of course, would not obviate the need to understand the institution's version of what happened, since following the formal resource decision making process at least on some level is necessary to secure resources.

Conclusion: Theory of Organizational "Co-opting" of Ideas and Trends

From this analysis, I have attempted to make sense of observing the military co-opting new concepts into existing methods or by using them as opportunities to provide solutions that do not necessarily comport with the opportunity. This causes us, as humans, to see paradox, which often should signal to us that what we assume to be happening behind the curtain is not happening quite in the way in which we think it is. To explain this paradox, I have first recommended that the military look at politics in a different manner, and, in so doing, look at itself in a different way. This way would be more in line with viewing politics as a necessary activity that all human groups engage in to establish community. The communication of different values is a necessary activity of social groups in communities and allows us to establish a norm, albeit temporary, with which to govern ourselves. That the military uses politics internally, influences politics externally, and understands and uses war as a political activity are very important insights. In addition, engaging in warfare itself is a political activity in which militaries and others communicate values to each other as one part of how we form a global community.

Following this insight, the paradox that this political activity gives us is best understood through a process of using multiple methods to understand said activity. This has to be coupled with both critically reflecting on one's learning and reflexively thinking so as to understand circular logic within one's organization or institution. The practical example I described contained two parts: one part was to use the institutional explanation of what happened, the other was to use, in this case, an alternative to the rational model, that being the Garbage Can Model. These different ways of thinking might allow a military organization to better understand why certain things happened in the past, and potentially anticipate them happening again when the next opportunity arises. This insight might be used to assist in mitigating unintended consequences and wasting opportunities for fundamental change in the future.

The theory that I would like to close with is this: that bureaucratic organizations, those that are hierarchical in nature and rule-bound, will normally work in a very unconscious and systemic manner to co-opt opportunities for change by one of two methods: 1) either by assimilating solutions within existing processes and systems or, 2) by co-opting the opportunity from the beginning by injecting preferred institutional or organizational solutions that have little, if anything, to do with the opportunity itself. This is a part of a natural activity that social groups engage in called 'community building,' in that groups communicate with each other about values through something called 'politics.' Military advice, military thinking about 'war,' and military participation in warfare are all different examples of how the military engages with different entities to build communities. This is not something we should aim at changing, as that would be impossible, but it is something that we can understand so that we can potentially learn and work to address commonly understood problems in a more productive manner.