‘LEARNING’ KEY LEADER ENGAGEMENT?

BOTTOM-UP ADAPTATION DURING THE DUTCH DEPLOYMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

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After our rotation there were more than enough lessons to be learned, but no knowledge transfer. I really expected the KLE approach would only get better, that people would start thinking it through more, to develop the concept. But that didn’t happen, mainly because of the social dynamics in the team after us. They liked the idea, they said, but as soon as they actually entered the field they returned to what they knew: fighting Taliban.[1]

TFU-mission Uruzgan, Afghanistan (2006-2010)

You could really see how the concept of KLE changed per rotation, it was really just an outcome of the commander’s assignment, his personality, the way staff was utilized and other choices that had already been made. Although it is embedded as a task within the mission plan that is developed in The Hague, they really didn’t give us any more information than: ‘Thou shalt perform KLE’.[2]

PTG-mission Kunduz, Afghanistan (2011-2013)

During my time in the field, I was unable to change the KLE situation. I presented ideas, possibly changed some things in the naivety of our commander, but the method stayed the same […]. It also had to do with the rotation mindset; people want to demonstrate their capabilities during those four to six months, but after the deployment ends nobody particular attention is paid to the knowledge you have gained.[3]

OCEAN SHIELD mission Somalia (2012)

At the moment, we’re engaging with everyone who wants to talk to us […]. However, if we want to move on with KLE, there should be a plan. […] If this plan doesn't come, then we will keep on going […] but it will become more and more complicated: we have to start thinking about that but it all depends on whether people here see the relevance of it. [...] Something has to happen. In the short-term we can manage, but it cannot stay like this.[4]

MINUSMA mission, Mali (2013 - ...)

[1] Anonymous TFU staff officer (4), interviewed by author.
[2] Anonymous PTG staff officer (11), interviewed by author.
[3] Anonymous OCEAN SHIELD staff officer (16), interviewed by author.
[4] Anonymous MINUSMA staff officer (8), interviewed by author.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, armed forces have invariably encountered challenges and unexpected problems during war that have required them to adapt. This ability of military organisations to adapt to change has time and time again been proven decisive in winning the battle and winning the war. Winning the war, however, is not only dependent on large-scale military adaptation (innovation) but equally requires militaries to be able to adapt to the operational environment and the challenges they face during deployment in the field. Traditionally, scholars have concentrated on explaining ‘big change’, large-scale military innovations that dealt with the development of new ways of fighting, or a whole new combat arm (Rosen; Posen; Avant; Kier). In recent years, however, scholars have increasingly argued for the need to counterbalance the study of top-down processes guiding military innovation with a better understanding of how bottom-up approaches can bring about military change. In the words of Theo Farrell: “we need a theory able to explain bottom-up change by organisations at war. In other words, we need a theory of military adaptation” (2010:569).

Several scholars have committed themselves to developing such a theory (Cohen; Farrell; Catignani; Grissom; Foley), and the academic field has grown significantly in recent years. However, much is still to be developed, as for example Adam Grissom argues: “there is an entire class of bottom-up adaptations that have yet to be explored, understood, and explained. The door is open for an individual or groups of scholars to make a major contribution to the field by developing the empirical and conceptual basis for explaining cases of bottom-up adaptation. This is the major challenge, and opportunity, for future military innovation studies” (Grissom, 2007:930). This thesis aims to take on this challenge by providing an in-depth case-study of a particular process of bottom-up adaptation that has occurred within the Dutch armed forces during their deployment in Uruzgan and Kunduz: the development of the Key Leader Engagement approach.

Key Leader Engagement (KLE) refers to a set of non-kinetic military activities that aim to influence directly the behaviour of influential actors in a mission area, and indirectly the behaviour of the constituencies of these influential actors in such a way that it promotes the mission objectives (Hull, 2014). The exact origin of the concept is unclear, but it began to emerge around the time of the Iraq and Afghanistan missions. Since the start of their deployment in Uruzgan in 2006, the Dutch armed forces have been executing these activities, but since little to no institutional knowledge was present on the concept (it had just been ‘invented’), they had to resort to ‘learning on the job’. This means that the KLE approach of the Dutch armed forces largely developed through a process of bottom-up adaptation, through bottom-up “changes to tactics, techniques and technologies to improve operational performance” (Farrell, 2010:569). By conducting an in-depth research into this process, this thesis has aimed to solve the following research puzzle:

> *Given that the Dutch armed forces during deployment in Uruzgan and Kunduz have conducted KLE activities without institutionalized knowledge being present about how to do so, how did bottom-up adaptation processes influence the development of the Key Leader Engagement approach of the Dutch armed forces during deployment in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan (Uruzgan and Kunduz) from August 2006 to July 2013?*

The relevance for such an in-depth case-study of a specific military activity is not limited to the academic realm. Military organisations have been following the recent developments in bottom-up adaptation studies attentively, as there is a growing realisation of the importance for military organisations to start learning effectively from their previous experiences. The formal learning mechanisms of military organisations have a long history of being unable to prevent ‘organisational forgetting’ to occur, which has frequently led to military units having to reinvent the wheel during their deployment (Catignani, 2014; Foley; 2011; Farrell, Osinga & Russell, 2013). The urgency of improving these learning skills seems to become greater now that contemporary conflict settings in which military missions find themselves are becoming ever more localised, decentralised and population-centric in nature, making it harder to guarantee that lessons are been identified and disseminated throughout the organisation. From this perspective,

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obtaining a better understanding of how processes of bottom-up adaptation develop might help them explore new methods of improving their organisational memory.

In this thesis the decision has been made to introduce the theory in parts, each chapter containing a new theoretical section that builds on the concepts and theories presented in the previous chapter. In this way, several perspectives on the case-study explored and illustrated by the empirical data. The outline of the thesis is as follows: in the first chapter, a brief description of the topic of the case-study is provided, as well as a discussion of the research method and its limitations and opportunities. Chapter two first discusses the academic debate surrounding military innovation and adaptation and subsequently applied Farrell’s theory of bottom-up adaptation to the case-study. The third chapter links a theoretical discussion of the structural factors impacting bottom-up adaptation, put forward by Farrell and Catignani, with findings from the research data. Chapter four supplements the structural approach of the previous chapters with an individualist approach to role occupancy and links this to the data from the research. The last chapter presents the conclusion, a theoretical discussion and possibilities for further research.

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CHAPTER ONE – CASE-STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to outline how the research has been designed; how the data is collected; and what the limitations are of the findings presented throughout this study. Additionally, it will provide an overview of the relevant background information on key leader engagement, the topic of the case-study. Chapter two will discuss the actual, empirical case-study: the development of the Key Leader Engagement approach by the Dutch armed forces during deployment in the Uruzgan and Kunduz missions.

METHODOLOGY

This research was designed to study processes of bottom-up adaptation within the Dutch armed forces. In order to do to, the decision was made to focus on one specific *case-study*, being the development of KLE activities since the start of the Dutch contribution in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. Case-studies can be defined as “analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more methods. The case that is the subject of the inquiry will be an instance of a class of phenomena that provides an analytical frame – an object – within which the study is conducted and which the case illuminates and explicates.” In this thesis the case-study then becomes as follows: the subject of the inquiry is “the development of the Key Leader approach by the Dutch armed forces during deployment in Uruzgan and Kunduz”. This is an instance of “bottom-up adaptation”, and through obtaining a thorough understanding of this case study the aim of this thesis is to contribute to the further development of the academic field of bottom-up adaptation (Thomas, 2011:511).

The approach to studying the development of KLE was sensitized by using Farrell’s (2010) theory of bottom-up adaptation in wartime, which provides insight in these processes by discussing the factors that enable such adaptation. Added upon this general theoretical framework was Catignani’s (2014) theory on the relationship between adaptation and organisational learning in military organisations. As the research progressed, it was discovered that the complementary theoretical approaches of Catignani and Farrell could insufficiently account for the ‘person-driven’ characteristics that were found while studying the specific case-study of the development of KLE within the Dutch armed forces. Therefore the decision was made utilize the work of Hollis (1994; 1996) and Jabri (1996) in order to counterbalance the essentially *structuralist* perspective of the abovementioned theories with an *individualist* approach to role occupancy. While this theory (which can perhaps be seen as a re-evaluation of the ontological stance of this thesis) came in later during the data collection process, it did not require a major reconceptualization of this process as the data collected through semi-structured interviews already contained a significant amount of information about these person-driven characteristics. Furthermore, it did not mean that data collected earlier was disregarded, but rather that it was supplemented by a more individualist perspective to obtain a more nuanced and in-depth understanding of the process as it had taken place. By re-evaluating the archival sources for specific references to these person-driven characteristics, it was possible to incorporate such data from a multiplicity of sources, enabling better triangulation of the findings. Throughout the research an *interpretive epistemology* was maintained, aiming to understand the process from within and seeing actions as deriving their meaning from shared ideas and rules of social life.

Early in the data collection phase, it became clear that in studying bottom-up adaptation processes it is particularly interesting to study how adaptation occurred within and across discrete mission. As a result of this realisation, the decision was made to focus data collection efforts on the development of the KLE approach in two specific missions: the TFU-mission in Uruzgan and the PTG-mission in Kunduz. These missions were most interesting for studying the development of KLE as they had spanned several rotations (respectively eight and five rotations) which made it possible to study bottom-up adaptation within and across these rotations. An additional advantage was that the staff of these mission consisted of Dutch military officers instead of large international staffs such as the counter-piracy missions in Somalia. This was advantageous as it made it easier to find and connect to the individuals who had

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performed KLE-related tasks during these missions and to obtain thorough understanding of the bottom-up adaptation processes by retrieving information from a large number of the staff officers who had been involved in these processes.

DATA COLLECTION

The unit of analysis of this research is a process, more specifically the process of bottom-up adaptation of the KLE approach within the Dutch armed forces during deployment. As at the start of the data collection phase it was assumed that visiting the MINUSMA mission area would not be possible, the data collection method was designed according to the following steps:

Step one - Archival research about KLA-related organisational learning within the Dutch armed forces

Literature was explored in which mention was made KLE activities by the Dutch armed forces. The archival research was limited to KLA-related data stored in the archives of the Dutch armed forces since March 2005 (the start of the NLD-army involvement in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan). This included, but was not limited to, evaluation reports, pre-meeting assessment reports, meeting reports, and after-mission reports in which KLE or KLE-related activities were discussed. Additionally, this involves the study of Dutch doctrine and 'standard operational procedures' (both current and previous versions) concerning KLE. By comparing the data from various missions and different moments in time, it became possible to discern ways in which organisational learning has taken place, but also cases of experience and knowledge about KLE being forgotten, 'unlearned' or relearned. This step in practice turned out to continue until the end of the data collection phase as new literature continued to surface as the research progressed and more people learned about the topic of the research.

Step two – In-depth interviews within 'KLE experts' about the development of the KLE approach since the start of the Uruzgan mission.

After having performed an initial study into the written data about the research topic, the second step involved conducting in-depth interviews with informants who had relevant knowledge about the development of the KLE approach since the start of the Uruzgan mission. By including in-depth interviews, this research aimed to obtain access to information that has not been included in the written reports for reasons of classification or because these experiences were not deemed relevant. The interviews were conducted with what will be termed here as 'KLE-experts', referring to those people who either as employees of the Dutch armed forces had been involved in KLE-related practices since the start of the Uruzgan mission, or who were able to reflect on how these practices had developed from their specific academic or military background. This included intelligence officers, staff officers from sections such as psychological operations, information operations and civil-military interaction, operational analysts, cultural advisors, but also military decisionmakers and commanders. In total, 23 interviews were performed, with an average duration of 90 minutes. Interviews were recorded with a voicerecorder, and because of the possible sensitivity of the issues discussed during the interviews it was agreed at the beginning of each interview that everything would be made anonymous. For this reason, informants' names and functions are encrypted in this thesis, as well as the names of individuals discussed during the interviews. Additionally, no mention is made of specific rotations within the Uruzgan and Kunduz mission in order to make sure that the activities discussed cannot be linked to specific individuals. In this thesis, informant will there only be referred to as "anonymous [*mission*] staff officer (*number*), interviewed by author." Numbers were assigned randomly to the informants, and the researcher possesses a document in which these numbers are connected to a name, a function, and the date on which the interview was performed.

The interviews were performed with the purpose of getting a better and more in-depth understanding of how KLE had developed since the start of the Uruzgan mission. Since the primary aim of these interviews was to obtain a deep understanding, a *non-probability sampling* method was used. The sampling method was *purposive*, as the research aimed to interview specifically those individuals who were knowledgeable about KLE. Since only a small pool of individuals within the Dutch armed forces had gained first-hand experience with KLE, and since KLE was not an activity that had been connected to a specific function of section within the Dutch military, such individuals were

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relatively difficult to find. Therefore, a *snowball sampling* method was applied in which initial contacts within the military were asked if they knew other military officers who would be interesting to interview for the purpose of this research. These informants then provided me with more names of possible informants, which eventually led to 23 semi-structured, in-depth interviews.

Apart from the interviews, numerous informal conversations took place with military staff at the Dutch ministry of Defence as the majority of the data collection was conducted at the intelligence section of the Dutch directorate of operations in The Hague. These talks were of great value as they allowed for continuous reflection and discussion of preliminary findings with knowledgeable military officers who themselves often had been deployed various times. This frequently led to new insights and helped significantly in pinpointing what exactly seemed to be at the heart of the matter concerning the KLE development process. Additionally, speaking to these military officers on a regular basis and observing their interactions with other militaries within the structure of the military hierarchy, provided valuable insights which helped me get a better grip on the social and agency-related aspects of working within a military organisation. While this can hardly be seen as participant observation as the context of the Ministry of Defence is hardly comparable to that of a mission area, being present in this setting for a longer period of time did help to obtain a more *emic* perspective and a tacit understanding of the interactions and routines that characterise the military as a social system (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011:10).

Over the course of the data collection phase, and after numerous conversations with different entities and individuals within the Dutch Ministry of Defence, it was decided that a ten-day fieldwork visit to the MINUSMA Headquarters in Bamako, Mali could be performed after all. The data collection method of this fieldwork is discussed in the third step.

Step three – fieldwork at the MINUSMA Headquarters in Bamako, Mali

Originally, the research had focused on textual data and in-depth interviews as it was assumed that the actual process of KLE development during deployment could not be studied first-hand. At the end of the data collection period, however, the opportunity arose to pay a ten-day visit to the Dutch armed forces during their deployment in the MINUSMA mission in Mali. During this visit interviews were performed with Dutch military officers who had been deployed as individual military staff members at the mission headquarters. While these interviews were very informative about the mission in general and the Dutch contribution to this mission, they only to a very limited extent allowed for studying KLE first-hand. As the visit took place while the mission was still very much in the start-up phase, few people had knowledge about the KLE activities being conducted. Moreover, as I did not possess the required security clearance, I was not allowed to observe the preparation and/or execution of KLE activities during this visit. Therefore, the decision was made to leave out the data set about KLE activities in the context of the MINUSMA mission and to focus the main body of this thesis on the empirical data about the Uruzgan and Kunduz missions. However, this does not mean that data collection in Mali was not useful to obtain a better understanding of how military operations work and how social interactions take place during deployment. Additionally, the fieldwork in Mali provided several valuable insights on the current status of the KLE approach in the Dutch armed forces, which will the reflected upon in the final discussion section of this thesis.

Opportunities and limitations

Access opportunities

For the duration of the data collection period, a research internship was performed at the intelligence section of the Directorate of Operations (J2 DOPS) of the Dutch Ministry of Defence. I was appointed a supervisor working at the intelligence section who has provided invaluable assistance in finding relevant documents and reports, contacting informants I would otherwise not have been able to speak to, and more generally supporting the process of developing an argument and answering the research question. Aside from having a knowledgeable supervisor from within the armed forces who would support the research process, performing an internship at the Ministry of Defence proved

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highly advantageous in getting access to informants. The Dutch armed forces tend to form a closed community which is for outsiders rather hard to enter, especially when trying to connect to informants working for the intelligence sections of this organisation. Being connected to the Directorate of Operations made connecting to these informants easier. Additionally, I was allowed to access documents about KLE from the military archives that I most likely would otherwise have not been able to access.

Classification limitations

The sampling method used here resembles what is discussed in Dewalt and Dewalt (2011) *as judgement sampling*. As in judgement sampling, informants during this research were chosen based on a consideration of the degree of expertise of an informant (does this person know about what the researcher wants to know about?) and the articulateness of the informant (will he/she tell the researcher, and in detail?) (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2011:130). As the sampling process evolved, it became clear that the second point, articulateness, was particularly relevant in the context of performing interviews within the military. In general, informants were quite open to talk about the topic once an appointment had been made and the interview had commenced. However, as the military is a fairly closed organisation and I did not obtain a sufficiently high security screening, I was unable to interview several individuals that other informants referred to as experienced or knowledgeable in the field of KLE. In several instances an informant was approached for an interview who then refused to participate because he or she could not talk about this topic with someone who had not been screened. It is possible therefore that a body of knowledge concerning KLE exists within the military that this research has been unable to discover or did not have access to. This can be seen as a limitation to the accurateness of the findings in this thesis. A method that I used to ‘loosen up’ informants who felt they were not in a position to share certain information with me, is that I would provide examples of the findings and knowledge I had gathered from the documents that I had been allowed to read or from earlier interviews. By providing the informant with referential material in this way, he or she could obtain a better understanding of what information could and could not be shared with me as a researcher. This method tended to result in a less reserved conversation. Another method would be to emphasise that I was interested in how processes developed, not in the actual events of Key Leader Engagement, as these were often classified.

Classification limitations also became evident during the writing of this thesis. Several ideas, findings, and quotes that were discovered over the course of the data collection phase, were after critical reflection with the internship supervisors at the Directorate of Operations deemed too highly classified to include in this thesis. In certain cases it was possible to downscale the sensitivity of the findings by referring to them in a more general sense so that they could still be included in the thesis. In other instances, however, entire topics had to be left out as the information they contained was decided to be too sensitive. Additionally, while it was possible to collect data from classified documents found in the military archives, it was not permitted to publicly refer to the names of these documents, when they were produced, during which rotation and by which individual or section they were written. After consultation of the master programme’s thesis supervisor, it was decided to refer to these archival sources as ‘archival document’ or ‘evaluation document’, followed by the mission it belonged to (TFU or PTG). Upon request, we decided, it would be possible to share the actual sources of this data after the Directorate of Operations would decide the reader was had a sufficiently high screening.

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KEY LEADER ENGAGEMENT

Success to a large extent will depend less on imposing one’s will on the enemy or putting bombs on target […] Instead, ultimate success or failure will increasingly depend more on shaping the behaviour of others – friends and adversaries, and most importantly, the people in between.

Robert Gates, Former U.S. Secretary of Defence[5]

The last 2-3 years have seen an explosion in interest in the application of influence as a tool for achieving military objectives […]. However, the ‘how to do it’ guidance still lags behind the emphasis on and enthusiasm for, its use […]. It is all very well to state a requirement but when it is not matched by a detailed ‘how’ it becomes not a challenge but a burden.

Rowland & Tatham, 2010:1

Before delving into the processes of bottom-up adaptation in the Dutch armed forces, this section will present a brief overview of what the topic of the case study, Key Leader Engagement, entails.

Throughout history, armed forced have sought to exert influence as a tool for achieving military objectives – albeit at times unwittingly. In recent years, the military application of influence has been brought to further prominence as a result of the changing nature of conflicts; militaries have increasingly found themselves in asymmetric warfare situations in which “the population is the prize” and in which they enter in a competition with insurgents for influence and control at the grassroots level (Kilcullen 2009:73). The importance of winning ‘hearts and minds’ and securing the support of the population has come to be integrated in contemporary discourses on how to win the next war. Resulting from this shift towards what can be termed ‘population-centric warfare’ is a growing belief that future military campaigns will need to focus on altering the behaviour of others through applying influence to the operational environment they find themselves in (Mackay & Tatham, 2009:5).

As a result of military strategists rethinking the balance between the use of force and the use of softer forms of influence such as persuasion, military doctrine is beginning to acknowledge the need to influence the behaviour, perceptions, and attitudes of foreign populations as a cornerstone for successful unconventional warfare (Rowland & Tatham, 2010:2). This has resulted in the development of concepts such as ‘information operations’, ‘psychological operations’, ‘strategic communication’, and ‘influence operations’. The idea behind these types of operations is that they allow military forces in an operational setting to influence attitudes, behaviours, and decisions without resort to (or excessive reliance on) the use of force. These influencing efforts, whether the target audience is specific person, a select group of elites or members of a decisionmaking group, a military organisation, specific population subgroups, or the mass public, are commonly gathered under the term *influence activities*.

Several scholars have reflected critically on this ‘centrality of influence’ in military operations and found that often “the ‘how to do it’ guidance still lags behind the emphasis on and enthusiasm for, its use” (Rowland & Tatham, 2010:1). The military’s urge for action, they argue, has overlooked the intricacies of actually successfully influencing the behaviour of other people, even more so in an unknown and often hostile area of operations. As military operations start to enter the realm of social and behavioural sciences, simply designing and applying influence activities “according to some loose assumptions about human behaviour” will not work, and is likely to be detrimental (Rowland & Tatham, 2010:4; Adams, 2007; Rennie & Deakin, 2011). As the importance of influence operations increases, the questions rises how the military has attempted to further develop and operationalize this notion of influencing human behaviour in the setting of military operations.

[5] Remarks to U.S. Air War College, retrieved on July 16th 2014, via http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1231.

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Influence activities are commonly aimed at a specific 'target audience', both at the strategic and the tactical level. In a mission area, such target audiences can include the local population in general, leadership and opinion makers, local security forces, insurgents and their supporters, other armed factions, local media, and third parties in theatre (Nissen, 2011:19). Initiating behavioural change, it is argued, requires that each audience is approached with persuasion strategies tailored to the specific way in influencing their group could contribute to achieving military objectives (Nissen, 2011:21; Rowland & Tatham, 2010:5-10). *Key Leader Engagement* (KLE) concerns those influence activities that are directed at the actors that wield power in a given area of operations.

The idea of engaging leaders during missions in itself is not new; for decades, military commanders and diplomats have been meeting with important local officials in mission areas (Lindoff & Granåsen, 2011:3). In recent years, however, these engagements have become formalised as a military non-kinetic activity aiming to exert influence over powerful actors in order to achieve behavioural change.[6] The exact origin of the term is unknown, but it began to emerge around the time of the Iraq and Afghanistan missions to describe the meetings that conventional military unit leaders were having with local tribal, religious, political, and governmental leaders in their area of operations (Hull, 2014:20). While the concept of KLE quickly has become well-known within the military realm, its meaning is not yet universally understood nor documented in doctrines (Lindoff & Granåsen, 2011:3). In NATO doctrine, which is generally seen as the basis for most national-level military doctrines, little is written about the concept of KLE. The NATO Information Operations Reference Book refers to KLE by stating that "commanders and leaders at all levels are encouraged to conduct "engagements" with decision makers at their respective level (strategic, operational, tactical) and create an influence that will be beneficial for the NATO goal and objectives" (NATO Bi-SC, 2009:55). These activities are seen to include "bilateral talks of senior leaders with military and civilian counterparts at their level of influence; speeches held at various occasions in the presence of the media and/or key decision makers; featured interviews to selected media with wide influence; and conferences arranged to discuss specific items of interest with influential characters" (NATO Bi-SC, 2009:55). A clear definition, however, is lacking, as is an explanation of how these engagements can serve to influence behaviour.

As a clear definition from the military realm is missing, this thesis will utilise a definition that is proposed by Jeanne Hull, one of the leading scholars who has looked into KLE. In her recent work *Civil Warriors: A Study on Military Intervention and Key Leader Engagement in Iraq*, Hull defines KLE as: "meetings that members of intervention forces conduct with influential people within a host-nation population capable of swaying the support of broader constituencies. The intent behind these engagements is to establish functional relationships with powerful local leaders to further mission objectives" (Hull, 2014:iii). The individuals who qualify as 'Key Leaders' do not necessarily occupy formal leadership position within society, such as governors, majors and other government officials, but can extend to all those individuals who are *influential* in a given society. In Hull's definition key leaders are those powerful local leaders who have influence and are "capable of swaying the support of broader constituencies" (Hull, 2014:iii). In this way KLE can be seen to include everything from government officials to informal leaders such as clan elders, tribal leaders, or village elders to religious leaders, important employers, or landowners (Lindoff & Granåsen; Lindoff & Granåsen; Hull; Allen). Recently, several authors have come to argue that insurgents and spoilers of the peace process can also be identified as key leaders in certain contexts. According to Lindoff and Granåsen key leaders may be supportive, neutral or opposing and are not limited to only the "good guys" or the official leaders in a society (Lindoff & Granåsen, 2011:5, Hull, 2014).

Various scholars who have written about KLE have noted that within the military realm the connection between KLE and its contribution to furthering mission objectives appears to be regarded as fairly self-explanatory and straightforward. The activities are generally understood to be effective and seeing the conduct of KLE as an important

[6] Key Leader Engagement activities to a lesser extent have also been understood to include engagements that have the collection of intelligence as a primary purpose. Due to the specific focus of this thesis on influence activities, KLE being conducted solely for intelligence gathering purposes without aiming to influence behaviour will be excluded from this study. As will become clear, however, the empirical data suggest that in practice it can be hard to make this distinction as KLE is often conducted with multiple purposes in mind, or conversely, without a clear purpose being articulated at all.

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enabler for military operations has become an accepted consensus among many military leaders (Hull, 2014:7). This ‘common-sense’ understanding of KLE has been critiqued as being too simplistic and according to some even potentially harmful as regarding KLE as a ‘can’t go wrong’ activity can lead to developing a blind spot for the possible adverse consequences of engaging with influential actors in an area of operations. Although literature about the risks and possible negative consequences of (badly executed) KLE is relatively scarce, several broad remarks can be made about this topic.

First of all, the concept of Key Leader Engagement contains an assumption that the military is capable of successfully identifying the key leaders in an area of operations. The definition of a Key Leader does not limit itself to those in formal leadership position, but encompasses anyone who has the ability to influence larger groups in a society. How to find these key leaders in a mission’s often unfamiliar and complex area of operations? Lindoff and Granåsen argue that determining who is powerful and influential in a society can be a challenging task and that in military documentation about KLE only very little attention is paid to the question of how an intervention force can discover which individuals have influence in a given society. This means that while armed forces are conducting KLE activities on a regular basis, very little is actually known about how to identify these key leaders and, perhaps even more important, how to know if they are engaging the right ones.

A second critique concerns the analysis of key leaders after they have been identified. Rowland and Tatham throughout their article repeat that “understanding the audience is the beginning and end of all military influence endeavours” (Rowland & Tatham, 2010:2). Lindoff and Granåsen similarly argue that in preparing a KLE activity it is paramount that as much information as possible is gathered about the key leader. This could include information about their religion, culture, family, ambitions, motivations and leadership styles (Lindoff & Granåsen, 2011:5). Key Leader analysis within the military sphere claims to be able to construct a profile of the actor and how he can be influenced, with which means, and how to measure the success of the influence activities. Rowland and Tatham question the extent to which current armed forces are realistically capable of performing such in-depth analysis, especially as this would require thorough knowledge of the human terrain which is generally difficult to obtain in a mission area (Rowland & Tatham, 2010:2). Rennie and Deakin agree that in order to perform such an analysis the military would need influence operators who have an understanding of cognitive, behavioural, social and cultural psychology, as well as negotiation theory, problem-solving, change-management and motivation theory (Rennie & Deakin, 2011:19). Such an analysis is hard to do, they argue; “harder still when your military education and training have prepared you to be an Infantryman, Artilleryman, Naval Officer, Logistician, Airman or Engineer – but not a TAA [*target audience analysis, red.*] specialist” (Rowland & Tatham, 2010:7). Yet it is from these backgrounds and many more alike, that these influence operators are traditionally plucked. Rowland and Tatham worry that false expectations are being built about the achievability of such influence activities and the ability to provide the information necessary to execute them: “Commanders and strategists must accept the reality – that enthusiastic but ultimately amateur dabbling is never a substitute for proper and expert subject matter expertise” (Rowland & Tatham, 2010:5).

A third critique concerns how the military can determine whether an engagement or a series of engagements has been successful. By conducting KLE, the military aims to engage key leaders in such a way that their behaviour changes in a way that corresponds with the mission objectives. Additionally, as the intent of KLE is often to communicate messages to the key leader’s constituencies, it assumes via KLE they can influence the behaviour of these constituencies as well. Attempts to assess the effects of KLE, and of influence activities in a broader sense, have been very limited. As a result, no agreed-upon evidence-based methodology exists to measure the effects and success of influence operations, particularly in hostile environments where it may prove both difficult and unreliable to conduct traditional interviews and opinion polls (Carrier-Sabourin, 2011:2). Nissen indeed argues that one of the biggest challenges for the military is to assess the impact of their influence efforts on the local population. In order to measure the effect, he states, Measurement of Effectiveness (MoE) and Performance (MoP) must be considered already in the early stages of the planning process and the target audience analysis (Nissen, 2011:49). Designing such MoEs and MoPs, however, is not an easy task. Experts indicate that the effects of influence activities such as KLE are notoriously hard to measure in contrast to conventional kinetic action, and that information on this is often be very difficult to obtain

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(Rowland, 2010; Adams, 2007; Carrier-Sabourin, 2011). Since there are so many actors in the information environment, and many of the events that influence target audience behaviour are unanticipated or outside one’s own control, realistic and pragmatic evaluation models are unlikely to be able to establish a direct link between influence activities and target audience behaviour change (Nissen, 2011:49, Adams, 2007:101). The purpose of this chapter is to outline how the research has been designed; how the data is collected; and what the limitations are of the findings presented throughout this study.

To summarize, Key Leader Engagement has received increasing attention during recent years as a military non-kinetic activity aimed at exerting influence over powerful actors in order to achieve behavioural change. A common understanding of what the concept entails, and how it should be conducted, however, is lacking. The way in which these activities are conducted has according to critics not risen above the level of a rather common-sense approach, which can be potentially harmful to the mission objectives. They argue even though KLE activities are being conducted on a regular basis by armed forces, insufficient knowledge exists about how to identify, analyse, execute and evaluate these activities. This makes KLE as a case-study interesting for further exploration. How did the Dutch armed forces, without such knowledge being available, conduct these activities and to what extent did this lead to ‘learning by doing’, or bottom-up adaptation?

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CHAPTER TWO – BOTTOM-UP ADAPTATION

“What I indicated was that military science is the business of practising soldiers at every level: that military learning and military doctrine is drawn together form every aspect of military activity.”

Sir Michael Howard, 1973

This chapter will discuss the academic debate surrounding the concept of how militaries improve in war. It will map out dominant theories on military innovation as well as recent critiques to these traditional approaches. Subsequently, the ideas from these theories will be applied to the way the concept of Key Leader Engagement has developed within the Dutch armed forces during the Uruzgan and Kunduz missions.

MILITARY INNOVATION AND ADAPTATION STUDIES

The contemporary military environment in recent years has posed significant challenges for armed forces. They have had to adapt, and are still adapting, to the complex and ever-changing conflict settings in which they find themselves. So how do militaries improve their operational performance in such settings? Military and strategic studies literature in recent years has increasingly focused on the imperatives and processes of major military change, namely, *military innovation*. According to Stephen Rosen, one of the earlier military innovation scholars, defined military innovation in his seminal book *Winning the Next War* in terms of big change – that is, a new way of fighting or a whole new combat arm (Rosen, 1991). A more comprehensive definition of military innovation is the following: “a change in operational praxis that produces a significant increase in military effectiveness as measured by battlefield results” (Grissom, 2007:907). Important in this definition are three main components: 1) the innovation changes the manner in which military formations function in the field; 2) the innovation is significant in scope and impact; 3) innovation leads to greater military effectiveness. As will be discussed later in this section, not all scholars agree with this definition and have tried to extend it to incorporate new developments in the field.

For most of the twentieth century, scholarly writings on military innovation took the form of grand historical narratives, operational histories or bureaucratic-political case studies (Grissom, 2007:906). In 1984, Barry Posen brought renewed attention to the topic by assessing interwar innovation through the prism of (positivist) social science which triggered the emergence of the current academic field of military innovation studies. This field has grown to include several contending schools of thought, which put forward either civil-military relations, interservice politics, intraservice politics, or organisational culture as the main source of innovation. Posen’s work presents a civil-military model, focusing on the relationship between empowered external agents, primarily civilian statesmen, and creative insiders, or ‘maverick’ senior officers. The interservice models focus on competition dynamics between the military services within a state in a struggle for scarce resources. Intraservice models see innovation stemming from an ideological struggle within a single service over competing visions of the future. Cultural models essentially argue that cultural imperatives set the agenda for innovation and that military cultures are usually influenced from above or outside (Foley, 2011:254). What connects these different schools of thought is that they have largely focused on the historically rare but transformational breakthroughs or paradigm shifts in peacetime, when military organisations struggle with the conceptual and organisational changes required to leverage major technological developments (Murray & Millet, 1996; Johnson, 1998 in Farrell, 2010:45). It looks at the way in which militaries adopt new doctrine, routines, programmes and organisational structures in order to improve military performance, creating entirely new ways of fighting and winning wars (Catignani, 2012:515).

In a 2006 article on military innovation Adam Grissom pointed out that, while all these theoretical perspectives have intrinsic value, they provide only a partial picture of military innovation. The traditional strands of military innovation studies, he argues, concentrate on top-down change, thereby largely ignoring the importance of learning

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from experiences on the front line. Instead, they are involved in a debate about rival models of top-down innovation, implicitly assuming that such 'big change' steers the way in which military units operate on the ground (Grissom, 1996:907). This critical stance was adopted by various scholars in recent years who argue that this top-down approach is too simplistic. They argue that while the focus on military innovation is understandable as changes on such scale can have significant implications for national military structure and power balances between states, it does not account for military adaptation to the operational environment (Grissom, 1996; Cohen, 2004). Eliot Cohen points out that one characteristic of much of the writing about military innovation has been its implicit assumption that change would come from above. While he acknowledges that some changes indeed come from the top, he argues that it would be an overestimation that "enlightened senior leadership" could, by itself, remake the armed forces. Instead, they call for more attention to bottom-up approaches to explaining and understanding military organisational change (Cohen, 2004). In the words of Theo Farrell: "we need a theory able to explain bottom-up change by organisations at war. In other words, we need a theory of *military adaptation*" (2010:569, emphasis added).

In recent years, Theo Farrell has been able to push forward the research agenda by exploring bottom-up approaches in order to explain military innovation. In his article *Improving in War. Military Adaptation and the British in Helmand Province, Afghanistan 2006-2009*, he differentiates between military innovation and what he has termed *military adaptation*, defined as bottom-up "change to tactics, techniques or existing technologies to improve operational performance" (Farrell, 2010:569). By distinguishing conceptually top-down innovation from bottom-up adaptation, Farrell provides one of the first studies within the military innovation studies literature that effectively operationalizes the concept of bottom-up adaptation. Adaptation occurs when operational pressures force militaries to rethink their strategic or tactical approach to a campaign (Farrell, 2010; Osinga, 2013; Catignani, 2012). This is significantly different from military innovation, adaptation scholars argue, as innovation is a major change that is by definition *institutionalised* in new doctrine, a new organisational structure or a new technology (Farrell, 2010:569). Adaptation is less structured, less top-down, and often takes place on a rather ad hoc basis. A second difference between Farrell's concept of bottom-up adaptation and some of the more traditional approaches to military innovation is that his approach focuses specifically on adaptation *in wartime.* Whereas for example Stephen Rosen included the study of peacetime innovation in his writings, Farrell's theory applies specifically to the question of "how militaries seek to win the 'current war'" (2010:569), aiming to understand explain bottom-up change by organisations in war (Farrell, 2010:569).

While Farrell makes a clear distinction between adaptation and innovation, he at the same time acknowledges that they are linked, stating that adaptation may lead to innovation. It is possible that, over time, new tactics or techniques may be captured in doctrine, or lead to a change to organisational structure or the acquisition of a new enabling technology. In an earlier study of Farrell with Terry Terriff, these scholars suggest that "adaptation can, and often, does, lead to innovation when multiple adjustments over time gradually lead to the evolution of new means and methods" (2002:6). Other scholars have similarly linked adaptation to innovation, such as James Russell in his study of the US army and US Marine Corps in Iraq in 2005-7, who shows that tactical adaptation indeed can "serve as a way station along the route toward more comprehensive innovation" (Russell, 2011:8). In fact, Farrell argues that this is what happened with the British military in Helmand as their population-centric approach was eventually institutionalised in structural and doctrinal changes. At the same time, however, Farrell is uncertain about how long lasting this innovation would be as history suggested that time and time again, the British Army had forgotten innovation from similar campaign and had had to relearn them (Farrell, 2010:590).

This thesis will study the development of the KLE approach during the Uruzgan and Kunduz missions from the theoretical perspective of bottom-up adaptation. By examining how KLE developed, this research aims to contribute to the academic debate about military bottom-up adaptation in wartime. Before delving deeper into the theoretical considerations about how processes of bottom-up adaptation can be understood, this section will first briefly discuss how KLE was conducted in the Uruzgan and Kunduz missions. In doing so, it will provide a more in-depth understanding of the case-study, which is required in order to meaningfully analyse how processes of bottom-up adaptation could develop in the way that they did.

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URUZGAN

In 2006, the Dutch armed forces made a contribution to the security and reconstruction mission ISAF in Afghanistan by deploying a brigade-size Task Force to Afghanistan’s Uruzgan province (TFU). Initially, the Dutch armed forces agreed to be in command of the TFU until 2008, but eventually their involvement was prolonged for two more years until command was transferred to their American successors in August 2010. As the first military operation of this magnitude since the war of decolonization in the former Netherlands East Indies, the mission in Uruzgan provided a wealth of experiences but also required adaptation to new challenges. This mainly had to do with the fact that while the Dutch mission was politically framed as a security and reconstruction undertaking, the reality on the ground could best be described as a counterinsurgency campaign. This required the Dutch soldiers to adapt to the challenges of population-centric counterinsurgency. In this mission, the population was to be seen as the centre of gravity, which required the military mindset to shift towards thinking in terms like popular support, areas of influence, and information operations. Eventually, the Dutch TFU in the Province of Uruzgan developed what was called the ‘Dutch’ 3D Approach (Defence, Diplomacy, and Development), which has been acknowledged both nationally and internationally (Rietjens, Osinga & Kitzen *in* Farrell et al, 2013; Kitzen, 2012).

Key leaders were being engaged already at the very beginning of the TFU mission in 2006. However, its execution and place of these activities within the larger mission framework significantly changed over time. At the beginning of the Uruzgan mission, Key Leader Engagement was still very much a new and unexplored concept within the Dutch military. It did not feature in doctrine or other formal military documents, nor was an extensive body of knowledge present concerning this topic in the first rotations. Moreover, despite the population-centric approach that was being propagated since the start of the mission, the intelligence section started out with still a very much enemy-centric focus. As they had been optimized for gaining and processing enemy-centric intelligence, it took them considerable time to adapt to the new challenges of providing what Kitzen termed ‘ethnographic intelligence’ on the societal landscape and local populations which is deemed necessary for successful KLE. Additionally, or perhaps consequentially, the emphasis of TFU daily business lay on kinetic operations against the Taliban, a situation that would last until 2007 (Kitzen, 2012:721). This was confirmed in early rotation evaluation reports, in which regular mention was made of the intelligence section focusing too much on enemy-centric topics instead of supplementing such information with intelligence products about the population.[7]

As top-down guidance and the provision of institutionalized knowledge on how to prepare and conduct KLE activities was limited, it was largely left to the operational units to explore this approach while they were in the field. During the first TFU rotations, KLE was linked to the work of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), one of the two main units under the TFU command (the other being the Battle Group). The main focus of the PRT was to promote good governance and facilitate reconstruction in order to enhance the popular legitimacy of the provincial government. At the level of the PRT an ‘Information Operations (IO) Planning Tool’ was developed to coordinate the dissemination and communication of ‘key messages’ directed at the local population. KLE was incorporated in this tool as a technique to be used by the Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) officers who were tasked to engage local authorities and powerbrokers in order to gain population support and establish good governance.[8] However, an overarching structure was lacking, and in practice those officers tasked to conduct KLE often found themselves struggling how to deconflict their activities with what other actors in the same area of operations were doing: international coalition partners, Special Forces, political advisors, the cultural advisor, and intelligence officers were all engaging key leaders in different ways and with different objectives.

Things began to change when halfway through the mission the intelligence section of a newly deployed rotation critically reflected on previous KLE activities and argued that it had to become more structured and planned if the military truly wanted to attain effects with these activities. One of the main events that led to this conclusion was a

[7] Evaluation documents TFU archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, July 10th, 2014.
[8] Document TFU archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, July 10th, 2014.

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situation in which the house of a certain key leader was violently broken into by the Battle Group a day after the PRT had engaged with this actor, demonstrating a lack of coordination which was likely to have led to negative effects. One of the staff officers during that rotation explained the event:

> *Shortly after the new PRT rotation came in, the PRT decided to conduct a KLE with an important key leader in […]. A day later, the Battle Group approached the same key leader, who did not feel like having another meeting as he had already spent an hour with the other group the day before, so he refused. This made the Battle Group think he had something to hide, which triggered them to aggressively enter and search the key leader’s house. Of course this had a negative effect on the relationship, which made our head of intelligence and the commander realize that this could not continue, so we decided that there should be one KLE program in which we documented systematically who was talking to whom.*[9]

Aside from this concrete event, several related critiques on how KLE had been conducted until then were identified by the new rotation. One staff officer described the situation in the following manner: “Before, they were just improvising. Everyone was talking to everyone on their own initiative and with their own ideas: […] they would be confronted with promises of building a well. They would then have to explain that it wasn’t them who made that promise but another group. This led to a lot of anger on the part of such a key leader […]. Therefore we tried to structure this.”[10]

A first critique on how KLE had been conducted so far concerning the fact that while KLE was predominantly an activity of the Provincial Reconstruction Team, at the same time various different military and non-military actors were in contact with key leaders in the area of operations. In order to get a better grip on all of the engagements that were being conducted, the head of intelligence decided it was necessary to move up KLE to the TFU-level were the entire Uruzgan mission was being coordinated.[11] At this level, he argued, a program had to be installed in which all these activities were overlooked in order to create unity of effort, to “get everybody on the same page about how to engage these key leaders.”[12] A second critique was that the engagements did not seem to have a clear objective from the onset; there was no strategy of how to attain certain objectives with this key leader and how engagement could contribute to this. As one staff officer explained: “being in contact and drinking tea is nice, but it also has to serve a purpose, you need to want to achieve something with it. If you're just having tea, but with a purpose of maintaining relations, then that is fine, but then it should also be known to the next person who engages him that this was the purpose and these are the next steps”.[13] What was lacking, it was argued, was a cyclical process with multiple engagements and critical reflection on the type of engagement being conducted. Additionally, more attention had to be paid to the effect of KLE so that if the effect was not being achieved the strategy could be adjusted (Van Dalen, 2010:24).[14] A final critique was that until TFU-5, most of the KLE activities had focused on the formal leaders in the region while engagement with informal or ‘hidden’ leaders rarely took place. Broadening the scope of KLE to a level in which also these ‘less obvious’ key leaders were included in the engagement plan was seen as essential for achieving the desired effects.[15]

About a month into the rotation, the head of intelligence organised a presentation for the commander and the TFU staff in which he indicated the main problems they were facing at the moment and how KLE could contribute to solving these problems if conducted correctly. Following this gap analysis he presented a list of priorities, all centred on creating a more structured and effective KLE system with several boards in which selected staff officers would plan, discuss and evaluate KLE activities multiple times per week.[16] Following this rotation, in a short amount of time forms, standard operational procedures, strategies, meetings and boards were set up in order to make this systematic

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[9] Anonymous TFU staff officer (4) interviewed by author.
[10] Anonymous TFU staff officer (3) interviewed by author.
[11] Document TFU archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, July 10th, 2014.
[12] Anonymous TFU staff officer (2) interviewed by author.
[13] Anonymous TFU staff officer (2) interviewed by author.
[14] Document TFU archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, July 10th, 2014.
[15] Document TFU archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, July 10th, 2014.
[16] Document TFU archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, July 10th, 2014.

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approach to KLE possible. One of the TFU-5 intelligence officers involved in the process described it in the following manner:

> *We started over from scratch. We looked into who were the most important key leaders with who we wanted to engage. Then we started making KLE-packages in which we described what the influence of this person was, his network, why he was important, what we wanted to achieve with this person, who was talking to him, when, how much time was in between meetings. This did not exist before […]. For some very important people we really designed a strategy, they would only be talked to by a select few we chose. […]The KLE-board would propose three strategies for every key leader, the commander would then make the decision. Strategies were always long-term, across rotations*[17]

It was also at this time that a KLE Standard Operational Procedure was created with the purpose of providing clear guidelines for TFU personnel in current and upcoming rotations to systematically plan and conduct KLE. This document demonstrated a strong conviction of the necessity to transform KLE from the intuitive, uncoordinated activity it had been until then to a systematic strategy that was linked in a direct manner to attaining certain effects in support of the mission objectives. Additionally, TFU-5 began to document so-called 'engagement assessments', which were designed to measure the effects of KLE over periods of two to four months.[18]

A development that deserves specific mention in this regard is the publication and dissemination of a smaller Standard Operational Procedure (SOP) that linked KLE to the targeting process. This SOP aimed to link the existing knowledge about *targeting* to the relatively new practice of key leader engagement, thereby bridging the gap between traditional, kinetic-oriented military activities with the more population-centric, 'soft' approach of KLE. More than simply introducing and cementing a new concept, one could argue, this move indicated an attempt to change the mindset of those in the military who still regarded kinetic and non-kinetic activities as fundamentally different approaches that served fundamentally different purposes. As the integrated TFU KLE program aimed to bring the targeting approach and KLE closer together, KLE strategies also became more diverse: it could range from friendly and empowering, to hostile or threatening, but also a combination of both. Additionally, it was recognised that some key leaders should not be engaged at all if someone was perceived as too powerful to be influenced, or if the benefits did not seem to weigh up against the costs. In order to further strengthen the connection between what they termed Red KLE (which is a part of the broader targeting approach) and Green KLE, the targeting cycle was integrated into the KLE cycle (identify, assess, profile, decide, measure) so it would become easier to plan these different types of KLE according to the same systematic procedure. [19]

Since several engagements that were conducted during this rotation have been assessed over the period of the rotation itself, generally with a time span of about three months, some initial remarks can be made about to what extent the KLE's were seen as effective. Overall, the results were not unanimously seen as successful. In some cases the engagement strategy was seen to have led to a significant improvement, for example when the empowerment of a specific key leader led this leaders to openly express his support for the Dutch military presence towards his population, or when in a period in which systematic visits and close contact with the tribal elders in an area was established, the number of Taliban sightings in that area was relatively low. At other times, however, the military had a harder time demonstrating the effects of their activities, or seemed unable to explain why a certain KLE-strategy had not led to the desired effect.[20]

In short, it can be said that during this specific rotation the KLE approach went through a process of bottom-up adaptation. After critically having evaluated the conduct of KLE so far, the rotation discovered three opportunities for improvement: 1) lack of coordination; 2) lack of clear objectives; and 3) limited scope. Staff officers in the rotation

[17] Anonymous TFU staff officer (4) interviewed by author.
[18] Document TFU archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, July 10th, 2014.
[19] Document TFU archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, July 10th, 2014.
[20] Document TFU archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, July 10th, 2014.

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responded to this discovery by adapting the approach, advancing it in terms of the level of structure and the deepening of knowledge. After this rotation in which rapid developments had taken place concerning KLE, the subsequent rotations inherited an extensive body of knowledge and data about how to engage with those actors that are influential in Uruzgan society. Looking at the way in which these insights and experiences were translated into the practices of the subsequent rotations provides an interesting opportunity to study how military organisations learn or adapt across rotations.

In the rotation that followed, the KLE approach of their predecessors was largely adopted. They implemented some additional adaptations by redesigning the existing intelligence structure in order to spur closer interaction between the different elements that provided analytic capacity at the TFU level.[21] A Joint Intelligence Centre was created in which the different intelligence branches were merged, bringing together those people in each branch who were working on the same type of intelligence. Additionally, it aimed to draw in other functionalities who could contribute to the work of these intelligence elements, such as political advisors, cultural advisors, the civil representative, NGO’s and IO’s. Intelligence officers were divided into several clusters based on their analytic focus: brown (weather, terrain, geospatial, red (insurgency, IED), white (local authorities, tribal affairs, population, formal and informal powerbrokers), and black (organised crime and corruption).[22] The different clusters were closely linked to each other and structure was created that strongly promoted the collaboration and knowledge exchange between them. This development was important for the way in which KLE was executed because it reflected a growing realization that people (including key leaders) could have different roles at the same time: “the clusters were closely linked because, well, someone can be a criminal for two days a week, an insurgent for six hours a week, a tribal leader the rest of the time, and participate in a shura once a month.”[23]

What is striking about the development of KLE during this mission, and what led to frustration among staff officers who had been deployed in earlier rotations, is that after these two rotations in which KLE had made significant advancements, the following rotation demonstrated a sudden deviation from the path that had been set out. More specifically, during this rotation it was decided to largely abandon the changes that had been designed and implemented during previous missions. The KLE working groups which had become a common phenomenon were suddenly no longer regarded as essential for setting up a consistent and effect-based KLE strategy. Although meetings did take place, no meeting reports were written, nor were the decisions processed in the system that had guided the process in earlier missions.[24] Informants referred to the KLE approach during this mission ‘messy’, ‘unorganised chaos’, ‘non-binding’, and ‘ad hoc’.[25] While archival data of the previous rotations demonstrated a large amount of documentation on KLE’s conducted, key leader (psychological) profiles, and reports from KLE board meetings, this rotation archived very little of such documents. KLE was still conducted, but one could no longer speak of a systematic approach in which intelligence, IO-officers and those executing the engagements (predominantly the political and cultural advisors) worked together to plan, prepare and assess the KLE’s. Additionally, several informants argued, no structural attempts were made to connect KLE to the operational objectives of the mission. Importantly, the engagement was seen an end in itself, not as an instrument to bring about an effect: “you would often see that they would conduct a KLE with the governor, but only because that was the arrangement, not because they wanted to achieve something with that engagement.”[26]

[21] The three elements being: ASIC (All Source Intelligence Cell (JISTARC)), NIST (National Intelligence Support Team), G2 (Staff Intelligence).
[22] Anonymous TFU staff officer (5) interviewed by author.
[23] Anonymous TFU staff officer (5) interviewed by author.
[24] Evaluation document TFU archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, July 10th 2014.
[25] Anonymous TFU staff officers (5), (1), (15) interviewed by author.
[26] Anonymous TFU staff officer (15) interviewed by author.

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KUNDUZ

After the Dutch participation in Uruzgan mission ended in 2010, the next large mission to which the Dutch armed forces made a contribution was the mission in Kunduz, Afghanistan. In January 2011, the Dutch government decided to conduct an integrated police training mission in Kunduz in the period from 2011 to 2014. In Kunduz Province rule of law and the Afghan Uniformed Police (AUP) were under pressure due to an ongoing insurgency and a weak Afghan administration at that time. The insurgency was regarded as local in nature and interlinked with local social dynamics resulting from agendas and intents of local key persons. As in Uruzgan, the insurgents where understood to follow a concept of operations in which the perception of the local population was the centre of gravity. Additionally, in Kunduz province various militia groups were active, some fighting the Taliban, thereby operating as unofficial, non-aligned, security providers, others operating as official Afghan Local Police. Local key figures often appeared inclined to cooperate with militia in order to safeguard personal stakes versus adversaries based on local conflicts. Friction within and between militia was common and in some cases this friction led to armed confrontations.

Within this context, the Dutch armed forces deployed a Police Training Group (PTG). The PTG’s mission was to support the Afghan government in improving the quality of the Afghan civilian police and judicial system and institutions, focusing on Kunduz province. The German armed forces had been assigned *lead nation*, under which the Dutch deployment would focus on police training. Specifically, the mission was to contribute to the improvement of the reinforcement of the Afghan civilian police through education, training and mentoring. KLE was conducted regularly throughout the mission. From the beginning, KLE activities were conducted with key leaders who were deemed important for reaching the mission objectives. The PTG realised that the availability of training participants and the security situation in the area of operations to a large extent was dependent of the support of local leaders. When local key leaders would see the PTG activities as not beneficial or even harmful to their interests, it was seen as a possibility that they would keep participants from following the training program, or try to negatively influence the local population. This, the PTG staff argued, would be a threat to the mission, which is why “well-prepared Key Leader Engagement and Information Operations are essential to steer the population in support of the PTG”.[27] In the context of the PTG mission, KLE focused on authorities in the areas in which the PTG was planning to conduct police training activities. Such key leaders encompassed government officials of the Kunduz province, governors, police commanders at different levels, brigade commanders of the Afghan National Army, and mayors. Additionally, talks would be held with a myriad of “local influential people, who we would explain the mission and exchange information with about relevant topics”.[28]

While KLE activities were conducted in each of the five PTG rotations, their approach to planning and executing KLE varied significantly, as did the intent and the objectives they wanted to attain with it. In Uruzgan, one of the main developments concerning KLE was that in the course of the mission more and more elaborate KLE-strategies were designed and executed in which long-term vision were thought out. The demise of these strategies, however, already became apparent in the final rotations of the Uruzgan mission, and in the PTG mission such long-term strategies were rarely even developed. Planning long-term KLE strategies during the PTG mission was all the more difficult since from the beginning a concrete relationship between the lines of operations and the effects that could be achieved through KLE was never designed. This point was indicated several times during the mission by staff officers as well as in presentations in which the commander was advised to develop a KLE-plan, but such suggestions did not lead to changes in practice.

Even though it was difficult to design long-term strategies for KLE, several instances of bottom-up adaptation did occur throughout this mission. Right from the start of the mission, KLE was given significant attention by the commander and engagements were conducted regularly with the formal leaders in the area of operations, such as the police commander and the mayor. Engagements were prepared as well as analysed by the staff, mainly the intelligence

[27] Evaluation document PTG archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, July 10th 2014.
[28] Evaluation document PTG archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, July 10th, 2014.

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section. The following rotation was deployed with an intelligence section that proactively developed a format for ‘pre-meeting assessments’ in order to better prepare KLE activities. In this pre-meeting assessment information would be gathered about the key leader, it would provide an assessment was of this person and describe the purpose and intent of the engagement. Additionally, it would contain a meeting agenda, several pointers about how to conduct the KLE, and a list of intelligence gaps that person who was to conduct the KLE could pay attention to.[29] Also, a KLE-board was set up which organised regular meetings in which key leaders would be discussed and KLE activities would be set out.[30]

The process of further developing the KLE approach during this mission, however, did not continue to build on previous efforts during the later rotations. The practice of writing pre-meeting assessments was abandoned over time, and the hosting of KLE-boards quickly diminished after the initiating rotation has finished its deployment. This process seems to be illustrative of a more general development that occurred during this mission; while in the beginning of the mission staff officers had been relatively involved in the decisionmaking processes concerning who to engage with and why, this involvement declined significantly as the mission progressed. At the start of the mission staff officers who had KLE-related tasks would be in a position to present an advice to the commander and the operations section about which leaders should be engaged and why. In later rotations, however, it was more likely to occur the other way around, with the commander taking the lead in selecting key leaders and involving his staff only when he needed more information about these persons.[31] Staff officers from later rotations indicated that during their deployment it was difficult to identify leaders the in such a way that a long-term vision could be attached to the engagements, to exert influence, and subsequently to monitor and analyse whether the strategy was developing in the right direction. As one of the staff officer explained: “my commander would decide that he wanted to expand his territory, so the key leaders in this district would be wiped off the table and the first key leaders in the new area would be engaged the next day. Where does that leave us […] in how we would go about analysing such these key leaders?”[32] Another staff officer expressed a similar argument when discussing why in his rotation it was decided to drop the KLE-boards: “We organised those KLE-boards twice, but it did not take us long to realise that we were just sitting there with the eight of us without having anything to say, because in the end it would still just be the commander who decides, and us who had to respond to his needs as soon as possible. Therefore we decided to cancel these boards and to only meet if the commander wanted to know something specific”[33]

From the beginning of the mission, attempts were made to measure the effects of the engagements, but it was acknowledged that such measurements were difficult to perform. As a KLE team member from one of the earlier PTG rotations explained: “we tried to see if key leaders in the long term for example would start working harder, if they would communicate certain messages in speeches, if they were behaving in line with how we wanted them to behave. It was always difficult though, […] if you would be talking to the chief of police you would just assume that it would also count for his police corps, you would hope that the message reaches the police corps via the chief of police […]. You could never measure if an effect was caused by your strategy or by an external factor.”[34] Although already in the first rotation it was indicated that measuring effects was difficult, this did not seem to affect the amounts of KLE activities taking place throughout the mission.[35] At the end of the mission, the contacts that had been established with key leaders in the area were gradually discontinued. Final evaluation reports did not contain information about the effectiveness of the KLE activities in contributing to either force protection or to the mission objectives.

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[29] Anonymous PTG staff officer (11) interviewed by author; evaluation document PTG archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, July 10th, 2014.
[30] Evaluation document PTG archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, July 10th, 2014.
[31] Anonymous PTG staff officer (13), (10), (11) interviewed by author.
[32] Anonymous PTG staff officer (11) interviewed by author.
[33] Anonymous PTF staff officer (10) interviewed by author; evaluation document PTG archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, July 10th, 2014.
[34] Anonymous PTG staff officer (13) interviewed by author.
[35] Anonymous PTG staff officer (11), (13) interviewed by author; evaluation document PTG archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, July 10th, 2014.

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CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Looking at the KLE activities from both the Kunduz mission and the Uruzgan mission, it becomes clear that in both missions the KLE approach was adapted on several occasions. Neither mission, however, this resulted in a linear bottom-up adaptation process in which one rotation built upon the next in order to further develop and refine the approach. Instead, research data demonstrate that KLE-related adaptations and refinements were frequently not transferred to and implemented by successors their successors, resulting in a discontinuous development trajectory. As a result, the ways in which KLE activities were prepared and conducted in different rotations varied significantly. It is likely that this has had a negative effect on the continuity in how key leaders in the area of operations were engaged, and made it more difficult to execute KLE strategies that spanned periods longer than one rotation. Additionally, these discontinuities in KLE approaches made measuring effects particularly difficult as it often occurred that strategies were adapted or abandoned, or the measuring of effects was neglected by a specific rotation which then resulted in data gaps.[36]

These findings suggest that a distinction can be made between bottom-up adaptation *during* rotations and bottom-up adaptation *across* rotations. Only by making this distinction it becomes possible to obtain an in-depth understanding of how in this case-study adaptation processes occurred during the various discrete rotations out of which these missions existed. Irrespective of what happened after their deployment ended, during various rotations significant advancements were made concerning KLE: systematic approaches were developed; new insights were gained on what constitutes a key leader; KLE and the targeting procedure were integrated; SOP’s were designed; strategies and pre-meeting assessments were thought out; and possibly the mindset of some of the staff officers and commanders were changed in favour of a more population-centric approach. The focus of the following chapters will be on the bottom-up adaptation processes concerning KLE both during and across rotations and how these two are linked. Specifically, they will look into institutional and individual factors that enabled or impeded these processes in the Uruzgan and Kunduz missions.

[36] Anonymous TFU staff officer (1), (3) interviewed by author; Anonymous PTG staff officer (11) interviewed by author.

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CHAPTER THREE - ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS AND BOTTOM-UP ADAPTATION

The previous chapter has demonstrated that the approach to conducting key leader engagements both in Kunduz and in Uruzgan has varied significantly across these missions' rotations: possibilities for improvement were identified, forgotten, relearned; adaptations were designed, developed, abandoned, and sometimes reinvented. From the perspective of bottom-up adaptation this poses a question of continuity: how can these differences across rotations be understood? Why did the process of adaptation not follow a 'logical' trajectory of creation, further refinement, and possibly institutionalisation? As was argued in the previous chapter, such questions require a study of bottom-up adaptation at the level of discrete rotations instead of the mission as a whole. Several scholars have look into this by trying to identify the specific characteristics of rotations in which bottom-up adaptation has occurred. While having identified several indicators that point toward situation in which adaptation seems more likely to occur, few have studied these enabling factors systematically (Grissom, 2007; Russell, 2010; Cohen, 2004; Foley, 2011).

An important exception is Farrell's work on military adaptation by the British in Helmand province, in which he identifies three enabling factors for bottom-up adaptation to occur: personnel turnover; decentralised organisation; and poor organisational memory. The first enabling factor, Farrell argues, is *personnel turnover* as ideas travel with people and organisations can lose old knowledge when people leave. At the same time, people can bring fresh ideas and perspectives with them when they join organisations (Farrell, 2010:573). The second enabling factor for bottom-up adaptation has to do with the level of centralisation within the organisation. According to Farrell, bottom-up adaptation during missions is more likely to occur when the military organisation is relatively *decentralised*. Farrell argues that centrally controlled organisations are efficient at exploiting their existing techniques, tactics and procedures and can make sure that these are adequately applied in operations. Decentralised organisations, conversely, where authority and a degree of autonomy are delegated to component units, are less efficient at the management of core competencies, Farrell argues. Additionally, decentralised organisations are more sensitive to changes in their local environments. The combination of these two characteristics makes such organisations more inclined to develop new techniques or to make rapid adaptations when this is deemed necessary (Farrell, 2010:572). The third factor that according to Farrell should be seen as enabling bottom-up adaptation during deployment is *poor organisational memory*. Organisational routines are encoded and transmitted through organisational memory. For military organisations, such a memory consists of doctrine, lessons-learned processes, and training. Poor organisational memory, Farrell argues, facilitates bottom-up adaptation during a rotation as it reduces "the efficiency with which organisations recover and transmit core competencies" (Farrell, 2010:573).

Looking critically at the three enabling factors that Farrell proposes, there seems to be an interesting contradiction between how these enabling factors relate adaptation on the one hand and military innovation on the other. In the previous chapter it was discussed that over time, bottom-up adaptations could be captured in doctrine, or lead to a change to organisational structure or the acquisition of a new enabling technology. Adaptation could lead to innovation when multiple adjustments over time gradually lead to the evolution of new means and methods. For such innovation to occur it seems that adaptation across rotations would be a beneficial first step. However, as Sergio Catignani argues in a review article of Farrell's publication (2010), the same factors according to Farrell that enable bottom-up adaptation can act as barriers to innovation and the learning of the organisation as a whole (Catignani, 2014:38; Catignani, 2012:69). This contradiction is what Catignani refers as the *adaptation trap*, a situation in which favourable conditions for bottom-up adaptation simultaneously create a situation in which military innovation is impeded. Farrell seems to acknowledge this apparent contradiction in the conclusion of his article, where he states that the three organisational attributes that assist adaptation "may well hinder the process of innovation, specifically the institutionalisation and recovery of innovations" (Farrell, 2010:591).

In the first section of this chapter the three enabling factors as put forward by Farrell will be elaborated upon as well as linked to the empirical data about the development of KLE in the Uruzgan and Kunduz missions.

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Subsequently, this chapter will look into the *adaptation trap* as discussed by Catignani, specifically focusing on how the results of bottom-up adaptation during rotations have been adopted and ‘learned’ by subsequent rotations.

FACTORS ENABLING BOTTOM-UP ADAPTATION DURING ROTATIONS

The first enabling factor for bottom-up adaptation, Farrell argues, is *personnel turnover*. In a military context, personnel turnover during a mission is generally high. As discussed earlier, in both the Uruzgan and Kunduz mission personnel was rotated every four to six months, with new teams coming in and replacing the old ones on a regular basis. The reason behind bringing in new teams in their entirety instead of a more gradual approach of individual replacement or phased transition between rotations is that it allows for the rotation staff to go through a collective pre-deployment period in which the staff develops a common understanding of the mission and learns to work together as a group. This is likely to have enabled adaptation processes to occur as on a regular basis new rotations were brought in who had developed their own ideas during the pre-deployment period and looked at the mission differently than those who had already been there for half a year. Indeed, the research data indicate that adaptations generally occurred at the start of a new rotation, when new staff officers entered the field and identified problems as well as possible solutions that might not have been recognised by those who had already been in the field for a longer period of time. As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, the introduction of the systematic approach to KLE halfway through the Uruzgan mission was introduced shortly after a new rotation had entered the field, and a similar process occurred in Kunduz at the beginning of two successive rotations.[37]

The second enabling factor for bottom-up adaptation concerns the level of centralisation within the organisation. According to Farrell, bottom-up adaptation during missions is more likely to occur when the military organisation is relatively *decentralised*. Looking at the Uruzgan mission, it seems that the staff of the different TFU rotations indeed enjoyed a relatively high degree of autonomy, both from the national and the international overarching organisations. By making the Dutch armed forces ‘battle space owner’ of the Uruzgan province, the overarching ISAF mission delegated a significant level of responsibility to the level of the TFU. Evaluation reports generally conveyed an opinion that the TFU was able to make autonomous decisions, which in itself can be seen as an indicator for a higher propensity for bottom-up adaptation efforts. However, the TFU was also under control of the Dutch government which could have forcefully steered decisionmaking processes at the TFU-level. Research data indicate that indeed several instances can be identified in which top-down decisions impeded the further development of the KLE approach. An example from the Uruzgan mission can be found in the case of Jan Mohammed Khan. Jan Mohammed was provincial governor in Uruzgan in 2006, the year in which the Dutch PTG mission would commence. In the context of transparency and integrity, the Netherlands advocated as policy of appointing suitable candidates for government position. As Jan Mohammed was known to favour his own Popolzai tribe and frequently used force in his dealing with other tribal groups, the Dutch successfully lobbied for the resignation of Jan Mohammed before the Dutch mission began. In fact, his departure was a condition for deployment of the Dutch mission in Uruzgan (Final Evaluation TFU, 2011:55-56).

Over time, however, the TFU discovered that in the background Jan Mohammed was still able to exert significant influence on the region as an informal leader. Together with his cousin, Matiullah Khan, these men soon were identified as the most important power brokers in Uruzgan. Because of this, the TFU suggested that these men should be recognized as key leaders and as such be considered for KLE activities.[38] The stringent Dutch policy, however, did not allow the Dutch mission leadership to enter into dialogue with Jan Mohammed Khan and Matiullah Khan, even though they still held a great deal of informal power and resources with which they could obstruct formal government officials in their activities. Moreover, the Dutch policy was in direct contrast to the ISAF policy and that of other coalition partners in the area, who did cooperate with them, especially in the area of security. There was therefore no international unity of effort regarding the issue (Final Evaluation TFU, 2011:55-56). This difference in opinions between

[37] Documents TFU archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, July 10th 2014; Documents PTG archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, July 10th 2014
[38] Anonymous TFU staff officer (8), (6), (4), interviewed by author.

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the Dutch government and the TFU mission staff lasted throughout the mission and a definitive solution for the complex problem of dealing with this type of informal leader was not found.[39] In this particular case, bottom-up adaptation was restricted by top-down decisions at the national level. However, such political involvement in operational level decision-making processes was not standard procedure in these missions. In fact, the TFU in general enjoyed a relatively high level of autonomy. In Uruzgan the Dutch were lead nation and battle space owner, and as they generally did not conduct KLE at the national level the political level did not have to be updated about the majority of the engagements. Kitzen, Rietjens and Osinga confirm that commanders were allowed reasonable freedom of action (Kitzen *et al.,* in Farrell *et al,* 2013:178). Amongst others, this resulted in the fact that throughout the mission, most decisions about KLE and how to go about it could be made at the TFU-level instead of having to be approved by the overarching national and international entities.[40]

In Kunduz, similar cases occurred in which the mission teams would come to the realisation that engaging a certain group of key leaders would be beneficial to the mission, but that KLE with these leaders was blocked at the political level. Additionally, as the German contingency was lead nation, the Dutch PTG had to follow their decisions. During the PTG mission the discussion centred on whether or not certain informal (militia) leaders could be engaged. Also in this case, top-down decisions by the political level were leading even though the PTG mission team did not necessarily agree.[41][42] Generally, however, the Dutch PTG in Kunduz enjoyed relative freedom in their operations as they provided a niche service (Policy capability and Rule of Law) whereas other coalition partners’ efforts were directed more at development and the Afghan National Army. Additionally, whereas the PTG had agreed to follow the decisions made by the German contingent, in several instances the Germans had not formulated their position on a stance in general, which provided significant for the PTG room for manoeuvre for the specific rotations to develop their own trajectories. According to Farrell, decentralised military organisations, where authority and a degree of autonomy are delegated to component units, generally are more open to bottom-up adaptation as they are less efficient in top-down management of operations and the teams on the ground are more sensitive to changes in the local environment. In both missions, while the national and international overarching organisations did limit the developments in KLE activities in some specific cases, it can be said that in general a significant amount of authority and autonomy were delegated to the TFU and PTG-level in the mission areas. This in turn enabled possible bottom-up adaptation during deployment.

A third factor that according to Farrell should be seen as enabling bottom-up adaptation during deployment is *poor organisational memory*. Poor organisational memory, Farrell argues, facilitates bottom-up adaptation during a rotation as it reduces “the efficiency with which organisations recover and transmit core competencies” (Farrell, 2010:573). In this way, the staff of a specific rotation is less able to build on pre-existing knowledge which increases the possibility that they will develop their own ideas and approaches in dealing with challenges they encounter during their deployment. This is an interesting point as it demonstrates a clear distinction between bottom-up adaptation during a rotation’s deployment and more long-term adaptation across rotations. In fact, whereas poor organisational memory enables adaptation during a specific rotation it simultaneously makes it more difficult for these adaptations to be adopted by the rotations that follow. This is what was referred to earlier in this chapter as the *adaptation trap.*

In theory, the concept of the adaptation trap can be seen to apply to all three enabling factors discussed by Farrell: whereas personnel turnover, decentralisation and poor organisational memory all enable military units to adapt quickly to operational challenges, it simultaneously can be seen to increase the likelihood that the adaptations they implemented will be lost as their deployment ends. The difference between the first two factors and the third, however, is that the first two enabling factors are relatively stable: both the level of decentralisation and the rate of personnel turnover are decided upon during the designing phase of the mission and therefore are unlikely to change as

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[39] Evaluation documents TFU archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, July 10th 2014.
[40] Evaluation documents TFU archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, July 10th 2014.
[41] Anonymous PTG staff officer (10), interviewed by author.
[42] Anonymous PTG staff officer (10), (11), interviewed by author.

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the mission progresses. As we have seen in the findings from the research data, these factors also remained stable over the course of both the Uruzgan and Kunduz mission. Organisational memory, however, is a more complex matter as it depends not only on the decisions that were made at the start of a mission, but also on the social processes that take place during such missions. As organisational memory is not stable but can fluctuate throughout a mission, it seems like a fruitful topic to explore in more detail as it can help obtain a better understanding of why the differences in KLE approaches between rotations were so significant. The following section will first provide a brief overview of the main theories related to organisational learning and adaption from the field of military innovation studies and organisational learning more broadly. Subsequently, one of these theories, Catignani's *social theory of learning,* will be further elaborated upon and connected to the empirical data from the Uruzgan and Kunduz missions.

ORGANISATIONAL MEMORY, ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

In recent years the topic of organisational memory and how it impacts the way in which military organisations adapt during war has received increasing attention in the field of military innovation studies. Theories about organisational memory in the military have generally borrowed ideas and concepts from the broader field of organisational learning studies. Organisational learning scholars tend to regard organisational knowledge not as static but as constantly evolving and developing in different directions. New experiences can deepen existing knowledge, but can also result in new insights gaining prominence, possibly even leading to discarding old assumptions and developing new standards for organisational practices. The *organisational memory* contains the stored information from an organisation's history that can be brought to bear on present decisions. It is a set of "knowledge retention devices … that collect, store and provide access to the organisation's experience" (Olivera, 2000 *in* Easterby-Smith, 2003:396). Not all organisational knowledge, however, ends up in the organisational memory, and not all knowledge retained there remains available to the organisational members (Argote & Miron-Spektor 2011:1124; Veran & Crossan *in* Easterby-Smith, 2003:132; De Holan & Philips, 2003:1604 in Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2003).

A frequently adopted approach to studying organisational memory in a military setting is to look at the military's formal learning mechanisms, the most significant being their 'lessons-learned' system. The Lessons Learned system is a formal structure for producing and dissemination knowledge that is acquired during missions. The purpose of this system is to identify lessons and best practices both during and after each rotation and after a mission is completed so that the armed forces as an organisation can learn from their mission experiences. After each rotation an evaluation report is written in which the most important findings are documented so that they can be used to inform future rotations and the military organisation in general. The idea behind it is that relevant experiences are identified as lessons which are then translated into *lessons learned* by institutionalising them within the military organisation (e.g. in procedures, doctrine, education, training). Several scholars have looked into the lessons-learned systems and how it contributes to operational practices and decisionmaking processes during deployment (Downie, 1998; Foley et al., 2011). Robert Foley *et al.* provide a comprehensive discussion on the main issues surrounding these formal learning mechanisms in the article *Transformation in Contact*, which examines the fundamental changes that have occurred to the lessons-learned systems in the US and British armies between 2003 and 2011. The authors discuss the structural reforms in these formal organisational learning mechanisms and how this impacted the organisational memory of both institutions. They argue that the successive rotations of the British army in Afghanistan were unable to successfully learn from the experiences of their predecessors as a result of the "deep-rooted internal weaknesses in doctrine and education". Moreover they argue that the British army lacked an organisational structure that combined force development, training and education with a formalized process of learning lessons, which limited them in adapting their operations for the betterment of the campaign (Foley *et al.*, 2011:260).

A second approach to studying organisational memory in a military setting has argued that it is important to look beyond these formal learning systems to see how knowledge within the military is being shared *informally*. Several scholars have argued in recent years that in order to overcome shortcomings in the formal learning systems, military personnel has often resorted to informal learning mechanisms in order to gain knowledge (Kitzen, *et al.*, in Farrell *et al.*, 2013; Russell, 2011; Rotmann *et al.*, 2009). Within this field of study, Sergio Catignani as one of the leading scholars in

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organisational learning within the military has made several variable contributions in developing knowledge about informal learning within the armed forces. In his recent work *Coping with Knowledge: Organisational Learning in the British Army?*, Sergio Catignani explores this concept of organisational memory and its relation to formal and informal learning systems by looking at how the British army has learned during their campaign in the Helmand Province, Afghanistan. In his article, Catignani brings forward a *social theory of learning*. He argues that organisational learning within the military is not only determined by the organisation’s formal learning systems, but is also influenced by the pervasiveness of informal learning systems in which individuals are able to interpret and make sense of their experiences and share new operational knowledge through social interaction (Catignani, 2014).

Focusing on the experiences of the British army during their campaign in Afghanistan, Catignani discusses how the British armed force experienced difficulties with their formal lessons learned process in identifying and ‘learning’ lessons that resulted from experiences in the field. Seeking out organisational knowledge proved difficult given the “explosion of information availability” that occurred in the British military as a result of a rise in number of data collection and storage systems (Catignani 2014:46). Knowledge management proved to be a significant challenge, and as a result many of the lessons identified could not be incorporated into the military’s organisational routines during the mission. The lessons that did eventually reached the process of implementation, moreover, related predominantly to techno-centric, health, safety and procedural issues, and “failed to distinguish and prioritize big operational lessons from small technical lessons” (Catignani, 2014:48). As a result, the practices of the British army, especially concerning their relatively new COIN approach, remained “common sense” and left much to chance instead of trying to learn actively whether they were indeed doing things right (Catignani, 2014:42).

As a result of this poorly functioning formal learning system, Catignani continues, military personnel started to resort to obtaining and sharing knowledge informally through social networks in order to make up for the deficiencies experienced with the organisation’s formal learning system. Commanders would contact counterparts who had served in the mission at an earlier stage, but also other staff officers would resort to their informal social network to gain current knowledge of the Helmand campaign. Relationships developed in previous shared contexts of experience, whether on missions, training, courses or staff postings, facilitated the creation of informal social networks enabling knowledge sharing among personnel. In this way, these networks allowed personnel to somewhat make up for knowledge deficiencies encountered in the formal learning system, enabling them to seek out short-term alternatives to problems requiring immediate operational solutions.

Importantly, Catignani stresses that such informal learning did not necessarily lead to learning throughout the organisation. In fact, he argues that the informal learning methods themselves also suffered several limitations. First of all, these informal learning systems were mainly limited to short-term, circumscribed and ad hoc problem-solving. Second, the spread of this knowledge was unequal, which can be said to have led to asymmetries in knowledge and competencies within the deployed rotations. One reason for these *knowledge asymmetries* can be attributed to the fact that some information was classified, which made that this knowledge could also not be shared informally with military personnel that did not have the right clearance level. Asymmetries, however, could also result simply from the fact that some individuals were better at utilising their social network, or had a larger informal network to tap into in order to obtain knowledge. In either way, these knowledge asymmetries point out the problem with informal learning methods: it often leads to individual learning, and although “individual learning is necessary for institutional learning, it is not sufficient to cause institutional learning” (Downie, 1998:24, *in* Catignani, 2014:35). The knowledge that was exchanged through informal learning methods rarely became incorporated and institutionalised in the organisation, meaning that the knowledge was often lost once personnel or rotations had moved on or ceased to exist within the organisation. Catignani states that as a result of this, many rotations had to ‘relearn lessons learned’ and ‘reinvent the wheel’ during their deployment. Therefore, he argues, the informal learning systems can be said to have led to adaptation - the correction of errors leading to a change in prescribed practices -, but not to organisational learning – the outcome of which results in the institutionalisation of new structures, processes, routines and new conceptual and normative constructs within the organisation as a whole.

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Adopting Catignani’s *social theory of learning* in which adaptation and learning processes are determined both by an organisation’s formal and informal learning systems, the following section will look into the bottom-up adaptation processes concerning KLE that took place during the Uruzgan and Kunduz mission. How did formal and informal learning systems influence the development of KLE, both within and across rotations?

KLE AND THE SOCIAL THEORY OF LEARNING

Looking at the formal learning system of the Dutch armed forces, critiques on this system can be traced back as far as 1996, when internal reports were already acknowledging that the Dutch armed forces did not offer sufficient opportunities for institutionalising lessons learned and was neglecting possibilities to learn from previous experiences. A recent study on the Lessons Learned system within the Dutch armed forces suggests that little has changed since then; “the military organisation profiles itself as a learning organisation, but is confronted daily with the fact that they are not adequately processing their lessons learned […] Lessons insufficiently end up in the organisation, which results in repeating the same mistakes over and over again” (Lustgraaf, 2010:13). Such findings were once again confirmed in post-mission evaluation reports about the Uruzgan mission, which contained several critical remarks about the effectiveness of the Lessons Learned system during the Uruzgan mission. It was argued that the system had been inadequate in processing the identified lessons that resulted from the different rotations trying to come to terms with the specific challenges of that mission (Final Evaluation ISAF, 2011). Similarly, scholars who have critically reflected on the way the Dutch armed forces capture and institutionalise argue that the operational adaptation in recent missions failed to become institutionalised in the wider organisation as a result of an ill-structured lessons learned process (Kitzen, *et al.*, in Farrell *et al.,* 2013:159).

In a highly informative article on KLE within the Dutch armed forces, Hans van Dalen argues that KLE-related lessons and experiences since the start of the Uruzgan mission have been insufficiently identified and processed. A systematic approach to evaluating KLE-activities and processes was and still is missing, he argues, and insufficient attention has been given to evaluating these processes at the higher organisational levels as for example commanders are not encouraged to write about KLE in their rotation- or mission evaluations. Van Dalen’s findings correspond with the responses from informants, who generally argue that the lessons learned system during and after their rotation was insufficiently able to identify and process lessons about key leader engagement. As a Kunduz staff officer remembers: “Yes, my chief had to fill in an evaluation, but those questions had nothing to do with content, purely procedural information. It did not concern how KLE should be conducted, also because my chief did not know anything about such matters. […] I just went home, started preparing for a new mission, and nobody paid any attention to the knowledge I had gathered during that deployment.”[43] Similar remarks came from other staff members who had been involved with KLE: “we all had to write an individual evaluation report, but nobody knows what happens to that information, who is responsible for identifying the lessons?”[44] During the Uruzgan and Kunduz mission, the lessons learned system did not systematically process lessons about KLE, and those involved preparing and executing these activities generally did not know were such knowledge should go in order for it to be institutionalised within the military organisation.

Although the formal lessons learned system did not structurally process the various lessons and experiences that had been gathered during the two Afghanistan missions, this does not mean that knowledge was not transferred between rotations and between the two missions. In fact, a large majority of the informants agreed that *informally* a lot of valuable information had been exchanged and shared with their successors. Kitzen *et al.* find that while institutional knowledge production during the Uruzgan mission was limited, adaptations were able to take place as a result of informal bottom-up initiatives from staff officers who exchanged lessons learned in an informal manner by virtue of their personal acquaintance with each other” (Kitzen, *et al.*, in Farrell *et al.,* 2013:177). Such informal knowledge transfer primarily took place between rotations when a staff officer who had been involved in KLE would transfer current practices to his or her successor. In such instances, the important key leaders in the area would be discussed as

[43] Anonymous PTG staff officer, interviewed by author, May 2nd 2014.
[44] Anonymous TFU staff officer, interviewed by author, March 21st 2014.

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well as possible strategies that had been designed to engage this key leader, but information would also be exchanged about how the process of preparing and conducting KLE within the staff had taken place. Other informants would contact colleagues who they knew had conducted KLE in previous missions or rotations to meet up and ask about these experiences before going into the field. Several individuals who had been involved in KLE in the Uruzgan mission in this way were able to share their knowledge with staff officers who were preparing for their deployment in Kunduz.[45]

The data demonstrate that informal learning methods indeed were being used to transfer knowledge between rotations. Simultaneously, however, these findings confirm several of the limitations that according to Catignani often accompany such informal learning. A first limitation was that the knowledge that was exchanged through these mechanisms was often limited to explaining technical procedures (e.g. how to set up a KLE meeting; how to write a pre-meeting assessment) and time-specific, contextual information (who were the important key leaders; what KLE activities had recently been executed; which meetings are scheduled for the next rotation). As knowledge was mainly shared between those who would be involved in KLE-activities in the near future and their predecessor(s), knowledge sharing was often highly practical, focused on the concrete activities that needed to be executed and the most important events that had occurred in the recent past. These ‘ad hoc’ knowledge exchanges left little room for more abstract discussions about whether they were engaging the right key leaders, or fundamental reflections on whether or not KLE was actually contributing to mission objectives. In short, staff officers generally indicated that these instances of informal learning did not cover fundamental questions about the assumptions and premises underlying the practice of KLE as it was being executed in Uruzgan and Kunduz.

A second limitation that can be identified from the research data is what Catignani has termed *knowledge asymmetries*. Knowledge was mainly being exchanged between individuals who occupied the same position; intelligence officers would exchange knowledge and experiences with intelligence officers, commanders with commanders, planners with planners, and so forth. This could lead to certain insights being disseminated within one section of the military while in another this knowledge was not commonly present or accepted. Additionally, certain sections would have a stronger system of informal learning or a more tight-knit social network that facilitated knowledge sharing more than in other sections. The next chapter will discuss these knowledge asymmetries and the effects they have had on bottom-up adaptation processes more elaborately.

Lastly, as identified by Catignani, several informants indicated that while these informal learning practices were helpful for individual learning, it was unsure whether it also contributed to organisational learning in a broader sense. As one informant summarised it: “Although the Lessons Learned system might not be common practice, that does not mean that knowledge is not being shared. Indirectly the lessons are still being transferred because some people just want to know, or because they are applying their own lessons from previous mission in a new mission. But is it institutionalized, is it common practice? No, not yet.”[46] This was also recognised in the Uruzgan mission evaluation report which indicated that organisational learning should go beyond the tactical adaptations that had developed during the mission. While during the mission it was possible to make adjustments based on time-specific needs, periodic reassessment and evaluation of especially influence activities such as KLE was lacking.[47] An interesting idea worthy of further consideration was brought forward by another TFU staff officer, who noted that it was not only uncertain whether informal learning contributed to organisational learning in a broader sense, its noncommittal nature made that the knowledge exchange in no way could guarantee that the knowledge and advice would be followed. As the staff officer explained: “informal learning occurs because the Dutch armed forces are very small, everybody talks to

[45] Anonymous TFU staff officer, interviewed by author, March 21st 2014; Anonymous TFU staff officer, interviewed by author, May 13th 2014; Anonymous TFU staff officer, interviewed by author, May 27th 2014; Anonymous PTG staff officer, interviewed by author, June 11th 2014.
[46] Anonymous TFU staff officer, interviewed by author, May 13th 2014.
[47] Evaluation documents TFU archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, July 10th 2014.

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each other and knows what their predecessor has done. The next step, however, is to decide if they are going to follow that example, and that cannot be formalized, that really all depends on personalities."[48]

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed three enabling factors that seem to contribute to bottom-up adaptation to take place within missions: personnel rotation; decentralisation; and poor organisational memory. These factors at the same time can be interpreted as what Catignani calls *adaptation traps*: while they enable adaptation during a specific rotation, they seem to impede such adaptations to be transferred across rotations, which would allow adaptation to possibly turn into innovation. The research data demonstrate that indeed the first two enabling factors were present during the Uruzgan and Kunduz missions. Both missions had regular personnel turnovers, and both missions were fairly decentralised in their command structure, meaning that decisions about KLE during deployment could be taken relatively autonomous. These factors thus seem to indicate that conditions for bottom-up adaptation during rotations were favourable, but at the same time could be seen as impeding the transfer of adaptations in the KLE process across rotations.

The third factor, organisational memory, turned out to be more ambiguous: if focus is placed solely on the formal learning process, then it can be argued that organisational memory during these missions was poor. This would indicate that the conditions for bottom-up adaptation were favourable, but bottom-up adaptation across rotations was limited. However, if informal learning processes are included, which Catignani argues they should be, then it seems that a significant amount of knowledge created during deployment was transferred across rotations. This tells us that through the informal learning system it was possible to transfer knowledge across rotations and create a more continuous pattern of bottom-up adaptation of the KLE approach. In other words, through informal learning systems successive rotations were enabled to tap into the knowledge of their predecessors and adopt the adaptations they developed.

The empirical findings as discussed in the previous chapter, however, demonstrate that in practice the bottom-up adaptations to KLE that were developed often were not built upon or were even discontinued as new rotations entered the field. So the question remains: if knowledge was available through the informal learning systems, why was the KLE approach not adopted and developed further throughout the subsequent rotations, and instead were significantly different approaches developed every time a new rotation began their deployment? Looking closely at the limitations to the informal learning system as discerned by Catignani, it is possible to identify several situations in which it was not the structural features of the organisation, but rather the actions of specific individuals within it that had a decisive impact on the extent to which the knowledge about KLE was transferred to subsequent rotations. This can for example be found in the fact that informal learning was based on the social networks of individual actors, which in several occasions led to the development of knowledge asymmetries between staff officers. Another indicator that refers to this more individualist factor is the suggestion of the staff officer in the previous section who referred to the importance of 'personalities' in the development of the KLE approach. This suggestion was not one of a kind. In fact, in a large majority of both in textual data as well as in the interviews conducted, the role of personalities was a recurrent theme. In order to get a better understanding of what underlies this 'personality'-factor and how it has impacted the bottom-up adaptation processes, it is necessary to add a more individualist perspective to the rather structuralist approaches of Farrell and Catignani. The next chapter will look into this notion more in-depth by exploring the development of KLE from a more individualist, agency-based perspective.

[48] Anonymous TFU staff officer, interviewed by author, June 7th 2014.

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CHAPTER FOUR – ROLES AND AGENCY IN BOTTOM-UP ADAPTATION

We found that it was very much dependent on personalities; the commander has to agrees, the intelligence section has to support it; the people who conduct the KLE have to get it. It really depends on the person[49]

You are dependent on personalities, which makes things at times, well, go rather slow[50]

The whole thing is bound together by personalities […]. Some get that the game has changed, others do not[51]

In every rotation it depends on personalities, if it clicks, if there is trust[52]

Counterproductive personalities, that is what made it hard to turn things around[53]

Until now, the approach to understanding why discontinuities in KLE approaches were able to come into existence between rotations has mainly focused on the structural challenges that have impacted this process. However, the previous chapter demonstrated that only focusing on the structural attributes of the organisation could not explain why the knowledge about adaptations in the KLE approach which was transmitted through informal learning systems was often still not adopted in subsequent rotations. The key to a better understanding, this chapter will argue, lies in adopting a more individualist, agency-based perspective on bottom-up adaptation in order to supplement the findings from previous chapters.

In the process of exploring what made it possible that KLE activities had been conducted in such different ways, informants not only referred to structural factors, but also kept coming back to a conclusion that could be summarized as: “it’s all personalities”. The collection of quotes at the beginning of this chapter is only a small selection. Mission and rotation evaluation reports from both missions made note of similar findings, making regular mention of group dynamics, individual initiatives, or unqualified personnel.[54] While such findings are not unusual, and most likely can even be said to be found in every organisation or company, they indicate that more than simply a succession of identical collectives of functionalities, it is worthwhile to look deeper into the role of individuals and the social dynamics in which these staff officers found themselves. To obtain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, this thesis will now turn to the social dimension of the dynamics that developed over time in the Kunduz and Uruzgan missions.

In order to understand how social dynamics have impacted the development of the KLE approach, it is relevant to look at the military as a social system. As such, this system is often characterised by a composition of disciplined actors organised in a hierarchical structure of functionalities with carved out roles and responsibilities upon which the military tends to build its missions. An illustration of this is the way in which the armed forces are structured around a numbering system (ranging from 1 to 9) that has been adopted to create a similar staff structure at all levels of command. From the lowest level of ground troops in the field to the directorate of operations in the Ministry of Defence, the ‘2’ is always the intelligence section, the ‘3’ is in charge of current operations, the ‘5’ deals with plans and strategy, and so on.[55] Roles are divided along these lines, and the content of these roles are taught from the very beginning of the military education process. In a mission context, this means that at every level of the system it is clear to all which person is responsible for which tasks at which levels. Therefore, while missions generally consist of various

[49] Anonymous TFU staff officer (2) interviewed by author.
[50] Anonymous TFU staff officer (11) interviewed by author.
[51] Anonymous TFU staff officer (8) interviewed by author.
[52] Anonymous PTG staff officer (3) interviewed by author.
[53] Anonymous PTG staff officer (1) interviewed by author.
[54] Evaluation documents TFU archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, July 10th 2014.
[55] The complete staff structure is as follows: (1) manpower or personnel; (2) intelligence & security; (3) operations; (4) logistics; (5) plans & strategy; (6) signal (communications & IT); (7) education & training; (8) Finance; (9) CIMIC.

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successive rotations, the idea is that the structure will at all times be maintained, notwithstanding the individuals who at different times are tasked to fill these positions.

In traditional military innovation literature, but also in a large number of the bottom-up adaptation writings, this hierarchical system is taken as a given. Focus is placed on the structural components of the military system, while actors are referred only insofar as they represent a position within that system (commander, intelligence officer, planner, etcetera). By doing so it can be said that these authors follow what one of the informants coined a “functionality mindset”, a mindset which he argued is dominant in military thinking. He explained that within the military it is common to think in a strict hierarchy in which everyone has a specific function that is understood by all the members and that is identical in all situations. The individual that fills this position at a given time and place is assumed to act according to his function, thereby allowing continuity to exist across rotations and missions.[56] If we look at such a mindset from a social sciences perspective, it seems that such theories implicitly hold a rather *structuralist* perspective of how the military works as a social system. From a structure-based approach, systems are largely seen to shape the actions of their units. They contain the constitutive and regulative rules that are articulated in social interaction and tell the individuals in it “how to do” social life in the social system in which they find themselves (Wallace & Wolf, 1999:181). Ontologically, this structure-based approaches support a holistic stance, contend that power resides in institutions and as such is beyond the control of the individual. Epistemologically, these theories do not seem to see these structures as external or prior to actions, determining them fully. Instead, they acknowledge that the military as a system is a social construction, containing sets of meaning rules with specific constitutive and regulative rules and practices, indicating an interpretive epistemological stance (Hollis, 1994; Giddens, 1984; Demmers, 2012).

More specifically, the ‘functionality mindset’ reflects what social scientists such as Marin Hollis and Vivienne Jabri have referred to as a structural view on *role occupancy*. Role theorists argue that any theory of action must incorporate the notion of role if it is to provide an understanding of human behaviour. Hollis, one of the foremost theorists on role theory, defines role as “a set of normative expectations attached to a social position” (Hollis, 1994:180). Roles are performed by incumbents, who according to this structuralist perspective do just what their positions require from them, being driven ‘top down’ by the demands of the role. Importantly, these individual incumbents are perceived as highly replaceable and the source of action is presented as the institutions and organisations in which these role-players find themselves. Power thus resides in institutions and individuals exercise power only in so far as they represent powerful institutions (Jabri, 1996; Hollis, 1994; Demmers, 2012:108/109).

Within the field of social sciences, the structuralist approach to role occupancy is not uncontested. Critics of this structuralist view argue that it must be acknowledged actors have room for manoeuvre, even when the pressure to conform is great, as is for instance the case in the military. As Jabri formulates it: “the fact that role occupancy brings with it a set of predefined expectations where compliance acquires high salience does not negate the possibility of variation in conformity depending on the role and the specific individual which occupies that role” (Jabri, 1996:70). Instead, a more *individualist* approach is proposed in which actors in social systems are seen not as marionettes but as stewards, with norms both enabling and constraining the incumbents of a social position (Hollis, 1996:97). As stewards, or purposive agents, people can both refuse to enforce, as well as obey, certain role-related regulations. Institutions then move from being the source of all action to a set of rules and practices of which the power depends on whether individuals are willing to accept them. From this individualist stance, the role occupant is seen as an active decision-maker potentially capable of nonconformity (Jabri, 1996:70; Hollis, 1996:106).

Within each actor fulfilling a role there is an interplay between personal and bureaucratic. This interplay indicates that an actor is able to consciously decide to what extent he or she will conform to a given role. The choice to do so might depend on whether a role provides “legitimating reasons” to justify personal decisions. In this way, an actor can instrumentally ‘use’ his or her role or position to achieve personal goals. However, choices can also be motivated simply by the need to act ‘appropriately’ according to the social norms and cultural values inherent to the

[56] Anonymous TFU staff officer (1) interviewed by author.

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system in which one finds oneself preferences (Jabri, 1996:68). It is important to note here that not every actor has the same level of agency in making these decisions. Agency is a relational trait: one can have more or less of it. Some people are more “agential” than others by virtue of their place in the social order, their skill, or their dispositions (Fay, 1996:67). In this way, agency is inherently linked to the concept of power. On the one hand, power can be found in the constraining effect a role can have as its normative expectations might limit one’s options to ‘act freely’. On the other hand, a role at the same time can be seen as enabling in that it allows some actors to “adjust the rules of the game in their favour”, to influence the system in which they find themselves. In both the enabling and constraining aspects of roles power is inherently present. As power and the ability to make choices, however, is not equally spread across roles, this is what Jabri refers to as the *relative distribution of influence* within a social system (Jabri, 1996:68).

To summarise, according to the individualist approach to role occupancy the actor should be seen as a purposive agent acting within a social system that both enables and constrains, and making legitimate decisions depending upon the contingent dynamics of the situation (Jabri, 1996:70). This thesis will follow this approach in order to explore what lies behind this frequently mentioned notion of “it’s all personalities” and to see how the ‘personalities behind functionalities’ have impacted the development of the KLE approach in the Uruzgan and Kunduz missions.

ROLES WITHIN THE KLE APPROACH

Already in the beginning of the Uruzgan mission, evaluation reports indicated that the staff was not dependent on functions, but on people: ‘sometimes qualified people would be placed in a position that limited their ability to perform, while other positions, such as Information Operations, were filled by less qualified people, or event remained vacant throughout the rotation.’[57] This section will first discuss role division with relation to KLE in the Uruzgan and Kunduz missions, and will then turn to several broad findings from the research data that give insight into the dynamics between these roles and the individuals that occupied them during the different mission. Specifically, it will look into two central questions that can be asked when studying these dynamics: 1) were the role occupants *able* to act according to their role? and 2) were they *willing* to act according to their role? Subsequently, this chapter will provide an analysis on how these dynamics have played a part in shaping the bottom-up adaptation processes in the development of the KLE approach. By doing so, it aims to identify some indicators that help understanding how individualist, agency-based factors can influence bottom-up adaptation processes within and across rotations.

As indicated in previous chapters, both in the preparation of the Uruzgan and the Kunduz mission no top-down instructions or plan existed within the Dutch armed forces about how to approach KLE. One result of this was that it was unclear which position or which section should be responsible for these activities. This gap was generally filled during the pre-deployment period of each rotation when positions would be tasked with KLE-related activities if deemed necessary by the decisionmakers of that rotation. Not every rotation, however, attached the same value to KLE and how it could contribute to attain mission objectives. During the several months before a rotation was deployed, the commander would design a plan for that specific rotation and assigns tasks to the different members of his staff. In both the Uruzgan and Kunduz mission, each rotation contained several individuals that occupied a role that was linked to either the preparation or the conduct of KLE activities. This included military officers from the different 1-to-9 sections, primarily intelligence officers (2) and officers from the operations section (3), but it could also include Information Operations officers, political advisors, operational analysts, the military assistant of the commander, and sometimes also the commander himself. The extent to which the division of tasks was formalized varied per rotation. On the one extreme the officers involved in KLE would take part in a KLE board that held multiple meetings per week and that brought everyone together in order to synchronise and coordinate activities. At the other extreme, no such group existed and the individuals involved in KLE only met occasionally and informally, or did not coordinate at all.

[57] Evaluation document TFU archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, on July 10th, 2014.

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WERE THE ACTORS ABLE TO ACT ACCORDING TO THEIR ASSIGNED ROLES?

A first aspect of role occupancy that can be studied in relation to the development of the KLE process, it the extent to which the individuals occupying KLE-related roles in different rotations were capable of performing these roles. As discussed, each rotation had its own configurations and role division, and had different individuals occupying these roles. Both archival data and interviews indicate that as KLE had not been institutionalised as a specific method that fell under the responsibility of one of the nine sections, it was often unclear who would be most suitable to take on specific KLE-related tasks such as coordinating the KLE board, identifying and analysing key leaders, preparing meetings, or assessing effectiveness.[58] The data suggest that in most rotations, one of the intelligence analysts would be tasked with providing information on the key leaders (most often the Human Terrain Analyst), and the commander would be the one conducting most of the KLE activities at his level of command (together with political advisers and cultural advisers).[59] However, other KLE-related tasks such as setting up meetings, coordinating the KLE-board, deconflicting KLE activities by different units, were less anchored in a specific section. In the Kunduz mission for example, guidance in assigning these roles was rather limited, as one informant recalls: ‘from the ministry in The Hague, they would say: ‘thou shalt do Key Leader Engagement’, but well, that was about it.’[60] As a result, one rotation would have a KLE-officer who was at the same time responsible for Lessons Learned, in another rotation KLE would be a task of the Information Operations officer, and in yet another rotation the KLE-officer would divide his time between the coordination of engagements and his core responsibilities that had nothing to do with these influence activities.[61]

In general, the lack of an institutionalized notion of how to embed KLE in a mission setting resulted in different role divisions per rotation, if attention had been paid at all to dividing these roles beforehand. As one informant formulated it: ‘at the beginning of our rotation, nobody had properly thought about KLE. Everyone seemed to realise it had to be done, but nobody had been assigned to actually take the lead.’[62] Because of this, it regularly happened that military officers were assigned a KLE-related role while they had no knowledge about how to fulfil this role. It would occur that for example a marine who had been tasked with traditional ‘clear and hold’ functions for over thirty years would suddenly be made responsible for the KLE-board without the required knowledge of doctrine, without experience in the field, without an academic background. In other rotations, similar processes occurred with untrained military officers, often in low-ranked positions, being tasked to ‘do KLE’. In other words, those assigned KLE-related roles were not always ‘the right man for the right job.’[63] In other cases, it would occur that the rotation was already deployed when they discovered they needed a KLE-officer, which often led to one of the lower-ranked staff officers doing KLE on the side, next to their other responsibilities and with little to no time to properly prepare for occupying this role.[64]

While in these rotations the military officers assigned to KLE did not to have the required knowledge and experience to live up to their role expectations, informants argued that it frequently happened such a military officer was able to ‘grow into’ his role. As one informant argues: ‘within the Dutch armed forces, incapable people can still obtain a position in which they are suddenly in charge of a KLE-board, that is a big responsibility. The guy I was working with, however, was great; he didn’t have the background, but he was eager and enthusiastic, which made him a quick learner.’[65] Other informants provided similar examples: ‘during our rotation the commander put the one of the bomb experts in charge of KLE since he wasn’t too busy at the time. He didn’t have experience, but he was smart enough and

[58] Anonymous PTG staff officer (11) interviewed by author.
[59] Internal communication document TFU archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, on July 10th, 2014; Evaluation document PTG archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, on July 10th, 2014.
[60] Anonymous PTG staff officer (11) interviewed by author.
[61] Anonymous PTG staff officer (10), (11) interviewed by author; Anonymous TFU staff officer (1), (2) interviewed by author.
[62] Anonymous PTG staff officer (11) interviewed by author.
[63] Anonymous TFU staff officer (9) interviewed by author.
[64] Anonymous TFU staff officer (1), (2) interviewed by author, Anonymous PTG staff officer (10) interviewed by author; Evaluation document TFU archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, on July 10th, 2014.
[65] Anonymous PTG staff officer (10) interviewed by author.

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got the hang of it pretty soon.’[66] In short, some staff officers did not have the required knowledge and experience and because of this were limited in the extent to which they could act according to their role. This could explain why they were not able to internalise and implement the knowledge about previous adaptations to the KLE approach. In several cases, however, these individuals were able to ‘grow into’ their role during their deployment and learned how to act in accordance with the expectations connected to their position. This in itself therefore does not seem to provide a conclusive explanation of why bottom-up adaptation across missions often did not occur.

WERE THE ACTORS WILLING TO ACT ACCORDING TO THEIR ASSIGNED ROLES?

A second question that is relevant to look into when trying to understand how bottom-up adaptation can occur from an individualist perspective to role occupancy, is to explore whether actors at all times decided to act according to their assigned roles. According to the individualist approach to role occupancy, the extent to which actors conform to their role is not only depends on their *ability* to act ‘appropriately’, but also on their *willingness* to do so. This refers to directly to the agency of the individuals behind these roles which allows them to manoeuver between their roles and their personal preferences, if these can even truly be separated. As Fay already indicated in the previous section, agency is relational and some people are more “agential” than others. From the data collected on the development of the KLE approach within the Uruzgan and Kunduz missions, it seems that in each rotation it is possible to identify what we shall term here *KLE entrepreneurs.* This concept derives from Farrell’s discussion of *military entrepreneurs* as actors who from a position of authority within their organisation, or outside the organisation and with the support of civilian leaders, are able to bring about military innovation (including bottom-up adaptation) (Farrell, 2010:571). For the purpose of this research, the definition will be slightly altered to include also those actors within the military who do not occupy a position of authority but have found other ways to use their position in order to influence decisionmaking processes concerning KLE. A KLE entrepreneur in this way can be defined as ‘an actor who from his position within the military organisation is able to influence the way in which KLE is approached, both during and across rotations.’ Data research suggests that in the Kunduz and Uruzgan missions two categories of role occupants demonstrated particularly high agency in how they were able to influence decisionmaking processes concerning KLE during their deployment; within each rotation it seems to have been those individuals who were either 1) (regarded as) highly knowledgeable, or 2) relatively high-ranked (or both). These individuals seemed to have had the most influence on how KLE was developed during and across rotations. Both categories will be discussed more in-depth in the following section.

KLE ENTREPRENEURS AND HIERARCHY

> *In the end, it’s a commander’s thing, if a commander does not think it is important, then the whole KLE process just comes to a halt.*[67]

A first factor that influences the level of agency actors have in performing their role is their position in the military hierarchy. As Jabri argues, the ability to “adjust the rules of the game in one’s favour” is often derived from the role or social position by a certain individual (Jabri, 1996:68). Roles that position an individual high up the ladder of the military hierarchy tend to allow this individual to exercise significant influence over the rules of the game. Changing these rules can be in favour of the organisational objectives, such as improving the KLE approach, but can also be aimed at serving personal interests. Catignani in his most recent article (2014) seems to (unwittingly) refer to such a process in which an actor who occupies a high-ranked role appropriates this role to serve interests other than that of the organisation, by referring to a commanders ‘need to act’. In his discussion of the UK’s campaign in Helmand, Catignani argues that commanders often seem to be driven by a need to act and ‘to be seen to seize the initiative (in a conventional military way)’ through the implementation of indecisive offensive, kinetic operations. This, however, was deleterious to the achievement of the UK’s campaign objectives in the area (Catignani, 2014:41). As such, Catignani’s description

[66] Anonymous PTG staff officer (5) interviewed by author.
[67] Anonymous TFU staff officer (1) interviewed by author.

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demonstrates an actor occupying a high-ranked role making a decision that does not serve the best interests of his social system (the UK armed forces) but those of his own.

Similar processes can be identified from the research data, in which several instances are discussed in which a commander (knowingly) makes decisions that do not promote the achievement of mission objectives. Military missions providing an opportunity for a commander to demonstrate his leadership skills and strategic insight within the four to six months that he is in charge of a rotation. Aside from performing his role in support of the mission as a whole, data also suggest that commanders’ decisions were sometimes motivated by what one informant described as “a need to score, to plant flags during his time in the field”.[68] Another informant would say: “during my rotation there was this urge for action, for results, that was contradictory to the long-term, to the time we needed to reach our objectives. They’d say ‘I want action now, I want to see result’”.[69] Is tendency was strengthened by the fact that during the Uruzgan and Kunduz missions success was often still regarded in rather ‘kinetic’, enemy-centric terms. A commander wanting to score would therefore tend to resort to kinetic activities and quick impact programs that showcased his competencies to attain significant results during the rotation under his command.[70]

So what does this mean for the way in which KLE could develop in different rotations? It indicates that decisions about whether or not to conduct KLE activities, and the importance such activities were given in a specific rotation, depended to a large extent on whether the commander saw KLE as positively contributing to both mission success and his personal interests. In other words, KLE had to fit in with both his personal preferences and the bureaucratic preferences inherent to the high-ranked role he occupied. Every commander deployed in a mission area is trained to make decisions, based on the knowledge and resources he has at a given time. The combination of KLE being a long-term process and difficult to measure its effects, and a commander’s urge to make a difference during his rotation, make opting for KLE often not the first choice of a military commander. ‘If you’ve received a military education’, one informant said ‘and you are there to make a difference, you’ll be inclined to decide to undertake action outside the gates, demonstrate your presence, show them who you are. Especially in the case of KLE, in which it is unclear who should do it, and more importantly, how.’[71] Other commanders, on the other hand, would see KLE as a prime opportunity to demonstrate their rotation’s effectiveness. As an informant recalls from his deployment: ‘my commander saw KLE as a ‘quick win’, a way to demonstrate his success by counting all the key leaders he had engaged during the rotation. Just talking to those people, not even the effects those engagements had had, was in itself seen as a sure sign of success.’[72] As KLE was (and to a certain extent still is) a rather unexplored concept with measures of effectiveness and causal relations between KLE activities and “success” not yet conclusively established, much depended on the ideas of the commander and whether or not he thought it would be a valuable contribution.

KLE ENTREPRENEURS AND KNOWLEDGE

While actors occupying the high-ranked role of rotation commander were able to exert significant influence on the way in which KLE was conducted during their rotation, the research data suggest that it would be an oversimplification to limit analysis of the impact of individuals on bottom-up adaptation processes to this category of role occupants. Instead, it appears that during the Kunduz and Uruzgan missions a second category of KLE entrepreneurs can be identified, consisting of actors who were able to steer decisionmaking processes concerning KLE without occupying a role that automatically placed them high in the military hierarchy. Instead, these actors were able to manoeuvre the space between their personal preferences, their role and the social system in which they found themselves in such a way that enabled them to influence KLE-related decisions such as who should be engaged, how KLE-strategies should

[68] Anonymous PTG staff officer (10) interviewed by author.
[69] Anonymous TFU staff officer (2) interviewed by author.
[70] Anonymous PTG staff officer (10) interviewed by author; anonymous TFU staff officer (4), (1) interviewed by author.
[71] Anonymous TFU staff officer (4) interviewed by author.
[72] Anonymous TFU staff officer (8) interviewed by author.

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be designed, and what should be defined as ‘successful KLE’. The key to this agency was, as shall be argued here, their (superior) knowledge of KLE.

As discussed in the previous chapter, institutionalised knowledge about how to conduct KLE was limited throughout both missions. Most knowledge was transferred informally through networks that consisted of individuals who occupied the same or similar roles throughout these missions. Data research reveals that the most significant flows of KLE-related knowledge passed through networks of intelligence analysts and IO-officers. It can be argued that this led to an unequal distribution of knowledge in which insights concerning KLE were mainly present within a role category that did not come with an authority allowing actors occupying this role to influence decisionmaking processes.[73] Several informants indicated that it was difficult from such a position to get this knowledge to those role occupants who did have a position to decide how KLE was going to be conducted during a rotation. As one informant described it, in each rotation (and missions as a whole) there seemed to be a struggle over whether the mission should be ‘intention-led’ or ‘intelligence-led’, which also reflected in the way in which KLE was approached. When a mission is intelligence-led, he argued, it would be the analysts and other KLE experts who take the lead in identifying key leaders and providing advice on how best to go about such a KLE and how it fits in with mission objectives. These actors would subsequently communicate to the decisionmakers ‘these are the key leaders, so you would have to talk to these people in order to attain these effects’. Conversely, in ‘intention-led’ missions the commander has a clear vision of what he wants to do during the specific rotation in which he is in charge and out of that intention operations are planned. In such a case, the initiative would be with the decisionmakers and those did not occupy such a position, such as the intelligence officers, the IO-officer, the CMI-officer, would provide support by presenting additional information after decisions were made. This often meant that “what you think is a good idea as an analyst would just have to fit in with what the commander wants, […]. If the commander wants to expand his area of control, and indicates that he wants to talk to the mayor and the chief of police in order to do that, then those individuals automatically become your key leaders”.[74] Or as another staff officer described the situation: “the commander would make a decision that he’s going to a certain area, and wants to speak to the key leaders there the next morning. What is really left then of how we would like to approach KLE and design a strategy?”[75]

In general, the KLE processes during the PTG mission gravitated towards the intention-led approach. One of the staff officers from one of the earlier rotations indicated that identification of key leaders was rather ‘common sense, it was a police training mission, so we would talk to the police, the chief of police, the mayor, but it hadn’t been thought out why they would be involved, or why we maybe shouldn’t.’[76] This affected not only the way in which key leaders were identified, but also the analysis and advice that followed it. In several rotations of the PTG mission, however, the intelligence officers who were involved in KLE were able to obtain a position in which they could more directly influence the commander’s decisionmaking process. By proactively giving presentations about what they knew about KLE and what they were capable of in terms of analysing key leaders, some of these officers were able to become more involved in the decisionmaking process. They were able to create a position for themselves, or attempted to do so, that allowed them to exert more influence on the KLE approach than their role traditionally allowed them to. In short, they developed strategies to manoeuvre the constraining characteristics of their roles in order to influence the KLE-related decisionmaking process.

In the Uruzgan mission, the most significant example is that of the rotation in which the staff intelligence section, primarily the head of intelligence, was able to make significant changes to how KLE had been conducted so far. During this rotation, these KLE entrepreneurs were able to install a KLE-board with several meetings a week, they produced Standard Operational Procedures on how to conduct KLE, and they connected KLE to the already existing practice of targeting. What seems to be one of the factors that allowed them to do so was that they were able to sway

[73] Anonymous TFU staff officer (2), (4), (5) interviewed by author; anonymous PTG staff officer (11) interviewed by author.
[74] Anonymous PTG staff officer (11) interviewed by author.
[75] Anonymous PTG staff officer (10) interviewed by author.
[76] Anonymous PTG staff officer (10) interviewed by author.

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the commander to support their ideas. At the beginning of the rotation, they gave a clear presentation to the decisionmakers about what was currently lacking in the way the successive TFU staff members had approached KLE so far. In this presentation they argued that the TFU was being ‘outwitted and manipulated, outmanoeuvred. Sometimes we don’t reward [the key leaders] enough; sometimes we don’t scare them enough. In any case, we are unable to effectively influence their behaviour.’[77] Subsequently, they explained what would be the benefits of a more systematic approach, stressing that constructive and synchronised KLE would be a way for the TFU commander to influence the process and set his priorities, and for all actors within the operational environment to be engaged in unity of effort, under control of the TFU commander.[78] One of the actors involved in the process of systematising KLE in that rotation, reflected on it in the following manner: ‘They did not ask us to do it, but [the chief of intelligence] had this idea to give a presentation to the commander which would convince him that KLE was important to him. That’s how it often works: a commander doesn’t exactly know what he wants to know, so we should proactively tell him which questions we think he might have.’[79] This proactive behaviour, together with a convincing story that explained to the commander why a systematic approach to KLE was in fact beneficial to his personal and bureaucratic preferences, allowed these KLE entrepreneurs to move beyond their initial roles and promote a process of bottom-up change.

Interestingly, it can even be argued that by doing so these KLE entrepreneurs were not only able to move beyond the constraints of their roles, but perhaps even changed the content of the roles they occupied. Every role is connected to what Jabri describes as ‘role expectancy’, referring to the way in which an actor that is occupying that role is expected to act. By adopting this proactive behaviour while simultaneously demonstrating to the commander that allowing them to do so is not detrimental to his personal and role-specific interests, these KLE entrepreneurs seem to have open the door for more ‘proactive intelligence’ in the future. However, while these KLE entrepreneurs were able to implement their ideas in the specific context of their rotation, it proved difficult to transfer such ideas outside of this context. After their deployment, attempts were made by these actors to spread their approach to a wider audience. They gave trainings to actors military officers would be performing KLE-related roles in subsequent rotations and missions, but this did not always result in their systematic approach being adopted, as was demonstrated in the previous chapters. One of the KLE entrepreneurs describes the difficult process in the following manner:

> *We realised that it would take time for our system to develop, and within six months [the duration of their rotation, red.] it is difficult to make everything work properly. That is why we tried to transfer our system to our successors, we briefed it, we made our documents available to them... It worked partially, but not completely. We found it was very much dependent on personalities; the commander has to agree, the intelligence section has to support it, the ones conducting the KLE’s have to be able to understand it… This can vary per rotation, which made us realise that if we want to do this properly, it should become embedded in the armed forces as a whole.*[80]

This idea of ‘embedding’ or institutionalising within the armed forces the approaches to KLE that have been developed in the field, leads us what Farrell has termed *bottom-up innovation*. Although it goes beyond the scope of this thesis to study to what extent KLE entrepreneurs have indeed been able to institutionalise the knowledge and experience that has been gained during the Kunduz and Uruzgan missions, there are several initiatives that seem to indicate processes that could indeed lead to such bottom-up innovation. One example this the publication of a Tactical Targeting Doctrine in which KLE is included as closely interlinked to the other processes in the field of targeting (Doctrine Tactisch Targeting Proces, 2014). Another example is the fact that several KLE entrepreneurs who had been involved is improving KLE during their deployment, are still involved in developing concepts and methods for a more systematic KLE approach, and are presenting their experience and knowledge to new staff officers who will be deployed in future missions.[81]

[77] KLE presentation TFU archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, on July 10th, 2014.
[78] KLE presentation TFU archive, consulted at Semi-Statisch Informatiebeheer Ministerie van Defensie, on July 10th, 2014.
[79] Anonymous TFU staff officer (4) interviewed by author.
[80] Anonymous TFU staff officer (2) interviewed by author.
[81] Anonymous TFU staff officer (2), (1), (5), (15) interviewed by author.

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CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed the process of bottom-up adaptation from an individualist approach to role occupancy, thereby supplementing the theories discussed in the previous chapter with a more agency-based perspective on how such processes can come about. This perspective was added as a result of a recurring pattern in the research data in which both the informants and the textual data referred to the central role ‘personalities’ played in the development of the KLE approach during and across rotations. This chapter has aimed to unpack this notion of ‘personalities’ by looking at the military as a social system in which actors occupied roles that both enabled ánd constrained them in their actions. This contrasted with the ‘functionality mindset’ that in general bottom-up adaptation theories seems to follow: roles determine the actions of individuals, and each role can be assumed to be ‘played’ correctly, the actors occupying these roles being interchangeable.

By moving beyond this essentially structuralist view on role occupancy, several findings could be discerned concerning how role occupancy impacted bottom-up adaptation processes. First, this section looked into the extent to which role occupants were *able* to successfully act according to the role they were assigned. It was demonstrated that during the Uruzgan and Kunduz missions indeed not every actor had been capable at the start of their deployment to fulfil his or her role according to the expectations that came with it because of a lack of experience or knowledge. While this could indicate that in such instances the role occupants impeded the process of bottom-up adaptation across rotations, no such instances were identified. It is possible that this can be the result of the fact that often such actors were able to ‘grow into’ their role as they occupied it for a longer period of time. Second, this chapter looked into the extent to which actors had been willing to act according to their assigned role. Using the concept of KLE entrepreneur, data suggested that not only those actors with a high position within the military hierarchy, but also those who possessed in-depth knowledge about KLE were able to influence decisionmaking processes, sometimes even in spite of the role they occupied.

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CONCLUSION

In the field, it was not the mission design that guided the way we engaged with key leaders […] we didn’t even have a mission design at that stage! It was the individuals who out of personal conviction pushed the idea, […] but then again, it was also individuals who pushed it back[82]

This thesis has taken on Grissom’s challenge to explore specific cases of bottom-up adaptation by providing an in-depth case-study of a particular process of bottom-up adaptation that has occurred within the Dutch armed forces during their deployment in Uruzgan and Kunduz: the development of the Key Leader Engagement approach. By conducting an in-depth research into this process, this thesis has aimed to solve the following research puzzle:

Given that the Dutch armed forces during deployment in Uruzgan and Kunduz have conducted KLE activities without institutionalized knowledge being present about how to do so, how did bottom-up adaptation processes influence the development of the Key Leader Engagement approach of the Dutch armed forces during deployment in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan (Uruzgan and Kunduz) from August 2006 to July 2013?

In short, the findings demonstrate that the structural characteristics of the mission created an adaptation trap that enabled bottom-up adaptation during rotations, but simultaneously created unfavourable conditions for these adaptations to be transferred across rotations. As a result, adaptation across rotations came to rely on a small number of KLE entrepreneurs who through an interplay or personal and bureaucratic preferences were be able to steer decisionmaking processes concerning KLE during their rotation in such a way that it either enabled or impeded adaptation across rotations. Combined, these structuralist and individualist factors of bottom-up adaptation provide an in-depth understanding of how the development of the KLE approach took shape during the Dutch deployment in the Uruzgan and Kunduz missions.

In the first two chapters, analysis of the research data demonstrated that the development of KLE during the Uruzgan and Kunduz missions cannot be seen as a linear process in which adaptations from one rotation were automatically adopted and built on by the next. Instead, it often occurred that adaptations were abandoned in subsequent rotations and that approaches in how to prepare and conduct KLE activities varied widely across rotations. This lack of continuity across rotations was further explored by combining the three enabling structural factors for bottom-up adaptation that were identified by Farrell (personnel turnover, decentralised organisation, poor organisational memory) with the concept of the ‘adaptation trap’ as put forward by Catignani. Analysis of the research data demonstrated that indeed the structural factors of these missions enabled bottom-up adaptation during a rotation, but at the same time seemed to have impeded the transfer of these adaptations to the rotations that followed. In the case of the Uruzgan and Kunduz missions, it was found however that informal learning systems had provided an alternative way of sharing knowledge about how to approach KLE across rotations. While these informal learning systems had their limitations, they did seem to enable knowledge transfer.

In chapter four, the research turned to a more individualist, agency-based approach in order to understand why this knowledge had in many instances not led to adaptation across rotations. Specifically, by studying role occupancy during these missions from an individualist perspective, it became clear that what happened to knowledge that was transferred depended to a large extent on the individuals who occupied KLE-related roles during successive rotations. At times, individuals occupying KLE-related roles were unable to fulfil their role expectancies because of their lack of knowledge and experience. Research data suggest, however, that it was often possible for such actors to ‘grow into’ their role as the rotation proceeded. Additionally, some rotations consisted of role occupants who were both capable of and willing to implement the knowledge that they had received. Such *KLE entrepreneurs*, who either

[82] Anonymous TFU staff member (1) interviewed by author.

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obtained their legitimacy from their position in the military hierarchy or through their knowledgeability on the topic, were able to significantly push the process forward, often making creative use of their agency to manoeuvre between their role and their individual preferences. This, however, was not always the case as personal interests, knowledge asymmetries and social dynamics in several instances seemed to have impacted decisionmaking processes concerning KLE in significant ways. Importantly, data research demonstrated that the interaction between role occupants and their roles could both work as an enabling and a constraining factor for the development of the KLE approach, and thus for the process of bottom-up adaptation within and across rotations.

DISCUSSION

This research has been an exploration of how to apply theories of bottom-up adaptation to the development of a specific military activity. It found that not only structural aspects, but also individualist, agency-based factors had had a significant impact on how the practice of KLE developed over the course of the Uruzgan and Kunduz missions. By providing an in-depth case-study of a specific bottom-up adaptation process and linking it to the work of bottom-up adaptation theorists Farrell and Catignani, but also to insights from the individualist approach to role occupancy, this thesis has aimed to contribute to the existing academic field of military innovation studies. Several concepts such as the distinction between adaptations during and across rotations; the adaptation trap; knowledge asymmetries; role occupancy; and KLE entrepreneurs were linked to the case-study’s bottom-up adaptation processes. In this way, “the case-study illuminates and explicates the analytical frame” of bottom-up adaptation (Thomas, 2011:511).

Its relevance, however, does not need to end there; a more in-depth understanding of how military organisations adapt (or do not adapt) ‘in the field’, could also have a practical application for organisations working in an area in which military units are deployed. Additionally, a better understanding of how bottom-up adaptation occurs during deployment is relevant for the military organisations themselves. As the findings show, informal learning systems have developed as a result of a perceived ineffectiveness of the formal lessons learned system. This informal learning system however, has its limitations as it is highly dependent on the individuals who provide and disseminate the knowledge. One informant suggested that a way ahead would be to develop a thematic learning system that consciously bridged the different sections, in the case of KLE leading to the creation of a knowledge production group that consisted of a pool of military officers from Intelligence, Information Operations, CIMIC, but also Planning, Current Operations, and commanders who had gained experience with KLE during their deployment(s). Such a system does not exist up to the current day, but appears to be a possible solution to breaking the cycle of knowledge asymmetries and organisational forgetting that seems to have resulted from the lack of a functioning formal lesson learned system.

Lastly, the findings of this thesis are relevant for military organisations as they provide a critical perspective on the ‘functionality mindset’ that underlies much of contemporary military thinking. Mackay and Tatham (2011:5) argue that for the military to better understand how to position themselves in contemporary conflict settings, it would be wise for them to take a more introspective approach and look into their own social system. This could include supplementing their structuralist perspective on role occupancy with an understanding how the agency of the specific actors in specific rotations has brought about change, at times irrespective of, or perhaps even despite of the role they occupy. This, ironically, could even be linked back to the concept of Key Leader Engagement, a practice in which over time the military seems to have discovered that it is not enough simply to look at the role a person inhabits, but also to look beyond that and try to gain insight into the person “behind the mask” (Hollis, 1996:91).

Due to the limited scope of this research, it was decided not to discuss the differences in how bottom-up adaptation takes place in specific military branches (air force, navy, army). Additionally, the decision was made not to include the possible international aspects of KLE-related adaptation processes in these missions. Thirdly, and more fundamentally, this research acknowledges that from the findings from this research, it would have been a small step to include Giddens’ structuration theory and to further explore to what extent the agency of the KLE entrepreneurs had impacted the larger structures. In order to do so, it would have been best to study the current approach to KLE in a new mission area such as Mali. While indeed data was collected in Mali, it was decided that is was too early in the

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process to identify valid information about this topic. All three of the points mentioned here, however, are deserving of further study and would greatly contribute to obtaining a more thorough understanding the development of the Dutch KLE approach as well as bottom-up adaptation processes more generally.

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