Lesson learning and adaptation – what can the corporate world learn from the military

Background
The military is one of the oldest continually documented disciplines. Its evolution, way of thinking, success and failure are best documented by its own members and sometimes by its foes. The fact that one can obtain information on the same event from more then one source is both unique and educating (even if it's usually in retrospective).
As a deliberate organization with clear objectives it relies on technology, process and actions that are carried out by people to obtain them. Contrary to other fields, there is no aspect to the military discipline that can be claimed, resolved! The foe will always seek, and find, the weak spot of a plan and strive to use it to his advantage. As such the military is continuously engaged in identifying weak points (both in-house and the enemy's), seeking solutions, learning, changing, adapting and sharing knowledge. As an organization that has a steady flow of people going thru and up the ranks and in time of war a very rapid expansion it developed the capacities to educate, train, identify opportunities, create doctrines, implement changes and retain & share knowledge.
Technology, from early day gunsmith to the F35 designer may stem from interaction between the civilians and the military but the culture and the driver to adapt and push the envelope is always the military.

What can we take away from the vast knowledge and experience and bring in to our world is the purees of this document.

The goal:
This document will explore the opportunities for adopting methods and processes the military discipline utilizes into civilian organizations by examining the military methodologies of identifying weak points, learning, adapting, educating, sharing knowledge and changing in order to improve and streamline the process of continuous improvement in civilian organizations.

The method
This paper will layout relevant military methodologies & techniques and show both the benefits and common mistakes. It will show that beyond leadership that drives the culture, learning & education, critical thinking, and courage are the foundations of survivability and success. It will discuss how to bring them into the organization culture and promote them. The paper will discuss the topics and act as a stimulus / reference in the following fields:
1. Culture – how to develop, disseminate and maintain. What are the makings of good / bad culture.
2. Courage – what is courage? What are its boundaries? What are its benefits to the organization and how to promote it?

3. Education – what education is needed, at what development stage, how to provide it?
4. Fact based critical thinking – How and when to apply? What tool to use?
5. Change and adaptation – identifying when to make a change and what are the avenues for change.
6. Sharing knowledge – when is experience ready for sharing, what is the format and platform.

Accepting (military) methodologies that are based on evolution is a far-reaching decision. In its base is the understanding that in the complex world we live in it's better to turn on the light (and see the whole picture) than to use a flashlight (to light up on specific corner). As technology is evolving continuously our culture changes at the same high pace that doesn't always allow processes to mature. The delicate and very important balance between technology and cultural evolution tips causing us to lose direction.

Basic assumption:
1. War / the task, requires total commitment.
2. War / the task is breaking the equilibrium and driving continuous change.
3. Our (the person, the organization, the technology, the process) abilities are limited.
4. Personal technical skills are not sufficient to win. Interpersonal and multi functional team skills are essential.
5. By the time the resources and procedures are set and functioning they might become obsolete.

First level identified needs:
1. Need for multi level changes at different paces and disciplines.
2. Adaptation is time sensitive and our control of time is limited.
3. Ability to maximize existing resources and make the right decisions.

Tools to satisfy the needs:
1. High level of coordination.
2. Ability to make right decisions – the ability to identify opportunities.
3. The right technology and methodology.
4. Agility (the ability to react swiftly to changing situations)

Methods to achieve:
1. Proficiency at all levels.
2. Efficient information exchange.
3. Common language.
4. Compensation (tradeoffs) methodologies.

The 6-points:
1. *Culture* – how to develop, disseminate and maintain. What are the makings of good / bad culture. A code of behavior built around a set of values and derivers from a common goal.

a. Culture development: The culture is developed from the top based on the high values but draws its strength from basic behavioral role models and events (the Alamo, the battle of Brittan). Traditional values & continuity – the knowledge that the leadership has at one point gone thru the same conditions as the troops go thru:
   i. The military holds a holistic approach - the technical and cultural capacities are intertwined and are totally dedicated to the cause. The culture is built around the idea of ("Army of One"). It doesn't differentiate between technical & performance, individual and team capacity.
   ii. There are no shortcuts and you have to grow in this environment, go thru the steps. The basics are installed and tested at a very early stage and come before the technical skills are given. The initial stage is also the first selection point and those who do not pass are weeded out.
   iii. You have to become a part of the organization and show commitment before you are allowed to act on its behalf.
   iv. Instilling a strong sense of belonging, common-language, pride and a common goal.
b. Dissemination and maintenance of culture:
   i. Dissemination of the culture to new members is done in a clear way that includes education (what, why, how) indoctrination and testing. The goal is that the new member appreciates his acceptance to the organization, has a sense of pride, belonging and becomes a member of the team.
   ii. The steps include:
      1. Selection - initial selection of candidates according to criteria's such as character, aptitude and attitude.
      2. Basic training – instilling the core values by delivery and application, building the pride and identification with the organization as well as team building (the importance of, methods of becoming a member, what makes a team work) – indoctrination.
      3. Obtaining technical skills,
      4. Advance unit training.
c. Maintenance:
   i. Every level and every situation including routine are a challenge to the culture. Training, promotion and continues education are required to counter complacency.
   ii.
2. ***Courage*** – what is courage? What are its boundaries? What are its benefits to the organization and how to promote it? Courage plays a part in the military culture on more then one level. It is celebrated as an individual and a team capacity acting in altruistic manor. Beyond that leys, on a higher level, the individual ability to express (and in some cases to act) one's opinion in contradiction to the (so highly regarded) chain of command. It is a tool to be

used when real life contradicts the core values and a person must choose between the easy way out and the right thing to do. The grand question that always looms is do we intend to promote our subordinates to argue and disobey our instructions. The consequences could be devastating and bring the organization to a halt unless… we have sorted, indoctrinated, educated, trained and mentored them to act according to our values and we trust them to act in good faith. The military has long since asserted that this is the important kind of courage and is promoting it by:

    a. Allowing them to act, to speak and to take initiative with out having to answer for act only for the consequences.

    b. Not having a single right solution allowing subordinates to develop their own solutions.

    c. Providing tools for developing solutions (the military way of thinking). This allows showing the formation of any solution and it's advantage over other solutions therefor the "off the wallness" of the idea is reduced.

 The value of courage in the organization is that it allows to identify and take advantage of opportunities quickly.

3. ***Fact based critical thinking*** – How and when to apply? What tool to use? Courage is the cultural vehicle that allows an individual to take an action that involves risk and ***fact based critical thinking*** is the massage it carries. Now that a person has the courage to stand up and speak what will he say? The military has created the tools to convey a meaningful massage that both the speaker and the audience know what to expect in the way of format. The avenues for expressing new ideas and critiquing past events, continues improvement, relies heavily on the debriefing process. This process is methodical way of collecting 360 data on events and pushing it up the information hierarchy to become ***Decision supporting information***.

4. ***Education*** – what education is needed, at what development stage, how to provide it:
Organizations such as the military receive the entry-level employees (recruits) with given set of skills but never does it get them with the complete set for reasons we have already mentioned. For each group of tasks a set of skills are required and the military is set provide them. Flexibility in cases where basic skills require enhancement is common (reading and writing in extreme cases). Providing and maintaining is done in all levels and includes:

    1. Learning, a school like environment:

        a. Basic training, technical skills and low-level unit training can be done in a classroom environment.

        b. It is understood that developing leadership in the organization is an evolution and every step from privet to a 4 star general includes learning.

2. Training: applying the education in simulated "real conditions" with the ability to make mistakes and correct them - training:
   a. After learning.
   b. Periodically.

   Since the military education facilities are strong and able establishments that are governed by the doctrine command (that arm's functions and capacities to be discussed in point 6) they serve as an efficient change agents and can be regarded as force multipliers.

5. ***Change and adaptation*** – identifying when to make a change and what are the avenues for change. Changes are driven by different drivers on different levels:
   a. Long-term concept changes that include heavy investment in hardware and substantial changes in process (the introduction of the tank and the plane).
   b. Short term adaptation to changing condition such as the use of the AA88mm gun as an anti tank weapon or the "on the fly" development of trench warfare by Lt. Winters (Band of Brothers) and the use of tunnels by the hummus in the Gaza strip conflict.

   All the changes go thru the same process. They become a part of the doctrine and are disseminated by the ***Doctrine & Training Command***. The question of when to make the change and how far to go with it is reduced by a magnitude to the issue of resources and impact as the strength of the command structure and the fact that adaptation is a pillar in the organization's culture. The military's education, knowledge shearing, training and information and dissemination tools already exist helping to overcome the inherent resistance to change.

   As an organization that strives on continues change and is restricted by resources (to pay for the very expensive tools of war) the questions that drive the decision process are:
   1. Is this a game changer?
   2. What quantity is required to make an impact?
   3. What are the statues of the other side?
   4. What is the cost of no change?

   As many of the circumstances are external the timing of the changes are not always controlled and sometime are implemented "on the fly" but in the same manor of learning as a long implementation. The key is the education and knowledge that ***derives from and feed the*** doctrine.

6. ***Sharing knowledge*** – when is experience ready for sharing, what is the format and platform? Every military in on form or another, has a ***Doctrine & Training Command.*** A multi function arm that is responsible for:
   a. Collection, development, evaluation and documentation of doctrine from strategic to tactical levels.
   b. Indoctrination of new members (education and training).
   c. Continues education for the upward mobility – developing leadership and skills.

    d. Training of tactical to strategic inter-service formations.

Identifying required / proposed changes, and turning them to doctrine and implementing the change is one of this department's key functions. The process includes:

    a. Identification.
    b. Examination.
    c. Optional solutions and impact study.
    d. Timing impact and priority.
    e. Intermediate solutions.
    f. Creating tasks and resources for implementation.
    g. Evaluation and reaction.

A large bank items is continuously in process and is monitored for its progress. The platforms for dissemination are the existing platforms and are enhanced thru the chain of command according to the urgency.

To conclude,
1. The military has a constant need to learn educate train in order to execute its tasks. It does so by taking a holistic approach: common goal, common-language, high proficiency of the individual and the team.
2. The military strives on change thus it installed robust mechanisms to manage it at all levels.

The key for success is as always finding and mentoring the right people to lead as a strong and robust mechanism such as this could drive itself to destruction by people who for lack of ability and understanding cling to the form rather then push the envelope of the contant.