



Chapter III.

Organizational Culture

#WeAreNATO

The Joint Warfare Centre's One Team programme exposes the staff, in interactive ways, to aspects of organizational culture and ways of working in a multinational environment. The goal is simple: that the Centre be seen as the best possible location to get a comprehensive education in NATO joint operational- and strategic-level training, but also, as a place where staff are given meaningful work, which taps into their unique set of skills and experience.



By Brigadier General Douglas K. Clark

United States Marine Corps
Former Deputy Commander and Chief of Staff
Joint Warfare Centre

Ever wondered what role organizational culture plays for an establishment such as the Joint Warfare Centre (JWC), whose mission is to provide first-class collective training to improve the readiness of NATO’s operational- and strategic-level headquarters?

Let me tell you: It is one of our biggest sources of strength. Our organizational culture, or the One Team ethos, is a vital component of the JWC’s long-recognized success in making NATO better.

Driven by a shared commitment to NATO’s core values of integrity, impartiality, loyalty, accountability, and professionalism, our mission is to prepare the Alliance for the future, while actively embracing diversity as one of our leadership goals, as set out in our vision statement.

I am proud of the fact that the JWC was the first establishment across NATO to initiate a human capital-focused programme built upon our commitment to diversity and inclusion, or, as we say at the JWC, “innovation and leadership at all levels, and all the time”. This is because people truly are our most important asset in meeting the JWC’s goals and objectives.

As NATO’s premier training and warfare development establishment at the operational and strategic levels of warfare, we need to always stay on the cutting edge of NATO’s transformational efforts, on both sides of the Atlantic. This demands a pioneering organizational culture, a curious and innovative mindset, and a diverse and motivated workforce. It also demands an agile organization where there is always growth and progress.

To be NATO’s trusted advisor, bridging Operations and Transformation, we will continue to set standards that both our workforce and our customers equally require. We continue delivering our mission, as the way of warfare continues to change.

As the saying goes, there is no constant except change, and this is at the heart of NATO’s military transformation. Diversity through new and innovative ideas is important and valuable. It gives our organization more opportunities to outwit and dominate, for example, modern battlefield threats, such as information and cyber warfare. Left unattended, such complex threats can place our great Alliance in a precarious position.

“
People are
our **most**
important
asset in
meeting
the JWC’s
goals and
objectives.”

Brigadier General
Douglas K. Clark



By bringing more solutions to the table, we will be in a better position to choose the right one. For the JWC, it equates to better training, better warfare development, and better doctrine.

Home to 17 nations, the JWC is at the heart of NATO's transformation. Together we strengthen NATO's reassurance, demonstrate Alliance cohesion, and provide an immersive world-class learning environment to our training audiences. Together we also anticipate change and focus on creative problem-solving. The Centre has a unique matrix organization that empowers its workforce across multiple programmes and initiatives. We constantly review and adapt our internal processes to be fit for future.

Think of the JWC's wargame design enterprise, which reached its full operational capability early this year. Think of our Joint Operations Planning Group Leaders Workshop, which was launched in 2021 to increase our future operational leaders' proficiencies in operational-level planning. Both are massive success stories that came out in the unsettling COVID-19 world. Together they show how the JWC continually adapts its curriculum to respond to new threats and challenges to best train NATO, even in a time of an unprecedented global health crisis.

It is the commonalities and differences that enable the growth of any organization. In this environment, we do not need diversity. We demand it!

"Together! We make NATO better!", the JWC's maxim, is exactly about our emphasis on diversity. Because this is how we will meet NATO's evolving requirements, holding on to curiosity, innovation, and cooperation.

This is also what the U.S. Marine Corps motto, "Semper Fidelis", which I have held close to my heart since the beginning of my military career, is all about: We keep the faith, and we nurture it for future generations.

Semper Fidelis! ✦

“
We
constantly
review and
adapt our
internal
processes
to be **fit for**
future.
We do
not need
diversity.
We demand
it!”



The One Team Culture at the JWC

To build a culture of excellence, an organization must have a meaningful mission, giving its staff meaningful work.

By Paul Sewell

NATO International Civilian
Organizational Development and Culture
Staff Advisory Group
Joint Warfare Centre

In February 2013, the Joint Warfare Centre (JWC) brought its senior leadership together to conduct a two-day workshop on organizational culture, facilitated by an external leading consulting company. The experiences and discussions which sprung from this small workshop set the scene for the launch of an ambitious organizational culture programme, serving as the foundation for the JWC's unique One Team ethos.

Why Organizational Culture?

Traditionally, organizations focus on a clear strategy before creating the structure to support it. In recent years, however, organizations have begun to focus on what is known as the "third pillar" of organizational effectiveness: culture. Every organization has its own culture, and in the past decade more and more organizations are realizing the impact of a positive work culture, and the detriment of a negative one.

In the military context, personnel rotation is a fact of life. Most military staff, therefore, have plenty of experience working in various military units. As abstract as "culture" may sound, it actually has a direct and tangible effect on not only the strategy and structure, but also on the people who work within it. For this reason, the JWC's senior leadership back in 2013 decided to proactively focus on shaping the Centre's own organizational culture.

How It All Started

In the early days of shaping the programme, many questioned why the JWC should make the effort. The Centre was already a well-established NATO body with a strong reputation for its conduct of joint operational-level exercises. There was no shortage of praise from the various commanders the Centre trained, and more and more headquarters wanted to train with the JWC.

“
Culture has a direct and tangible effect on not only the **strategy and structure**, but also on the **people** who work within it.”



It began with a survey focusing on the “organizational climate”. The entire organization was invited to participate and there was an encouraging high interest with over 70 percent of the staff responding in the survey, netting more than 75 pages of comments. It was apparent that the staff had clear ideas on how the JWC could be even better. Reviewing the results of the survey, and with the strong endorsement of the Command Group, the rest of the JWC was then given the same two-day introductory cultural workshop. The JWC’s One Team workshop differs from most NATO courses in that it exposes the staff, in interactive ways, to aspects of organizational culture and ways of working in a multinational environment. The programme includes over 20 concepts that are still referred to today, such as “Be Here Now”, “Levels of Listening”, “The Mood Elevator”, “Gravity”, “Energy” and the “Accountability Ladder”.

ABOVE
Left: The author, Paul Sewell.
Right: Staff members at the One Team workshop

RIGHT
The JWC’s cultural and organizational development workshops

Achieving Success Through Hard Work

As the matrix organization developed and evolved, the leadership deemed it necessary to assign the task of organizational development to one staff member. This was a clear sign that this was no longer just a “nice to have” capability. On the contrary, the leaders had started seeing the One Team ethos as a vital resource in continually shaping the organization and its staff in line with the mission. This work would not only encompass the existing One Team programme work, but also focus more broadly on programmes and initiatives to improve the JWC and its output. A great deal of work has already been done. Some examples from the past include:

- The development of a streamlined online handover/takeover (HOTO) process to capture the knowledge of staff before they leave (which has also been adopted by several other headquarters in NATO);

Why Culture Matters

The impact of culture has a tangible effect on the output and productivity of an organization. Since 2013, the JWC has embarked on a journey of intentionally shaping a healthier, high-performing culture to become even more effective in serving the NATO Alliance.

- An annual climate survey, which taps into the “atmospherics” of the staff, providing invaluable feedback to leaders at all levels and identifying new ideas and areas in need of focus;
- Proactive and bespoke team development programmes for teams at all levels of the organization to find better ways of working;
- A highly comprehensive and integrated two-week newcomers’ training programme aimed at preparing the new staff so that they are able to contribute to the mission more quickly.

One significant change since 2013 is that more of NATO is taking an interest in the JWC’s approach to improving organizational culture. In other words, the JWC continues to be regarded as a well-respected resource for managing and understanding organizational culture and human capital.

Almost a decade later, our own organizational culture efforts have become a solid part of the JWC’s identity. The One Team ethos has indeed become an enabler for strong collaborative and innovative work across the many nations, services, and working styles of our diverse and engaged staff.

In conclusion, the main goal of our organizational development and culture work is simple: that the JWC be seen as the best possible location to get a comprehensive education in NATO joint operational- and strategic-level training. But our goal is also to be a place where staff are given meaningful work, which taps into their unique set of skills and experience, and which ultimately contributes to the safety and security of the Alliance. ✦

“
More of **NATO**
is taking an
interest in
the **JWC’s**
approach to
improving
organizational
culture.”



Paul Sewell is the JWC’s lead facilitator of the One Team Programme. He also served as a lessons learned analyst and worked on numerous projects focused on the JWC’s ongoing development.