

Promoting Diversity in the Bolivian Army: Setting the Stage

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Introduction

In Wilfried Krüger's 2004 model, managing change within an organization is compared to an iceberg, with the management of cost, quality and time as the obvious dimensions above the water line. While important, he points out that these are of lesser importance when compared with the more subtle but profound dimensions that lie beneath: the management of perceptions and beliefs, and power and politics management.¹ Managing change in Bolivia, a 20-year old Latin American democracy at "the edge of a profound social and political crisis,"² especially in the Bolivian Army, which is a state institution fully embedded within this current national crisis, the 'hidden' portions of the iceberg take on a vital importance. Managing change in the Bolivian Army requires not only the management of pre-existing attitudes and beliefs within a traditional, rigid and hierarchical organizational culture, but the national crisis makes any process of change extremely vulnerable to external social and political conditions, as well as risky for the leaders of change.

The crisis arises from the fact that the Bolivian government is being pulled, perhaps apart, by pressures from all sides: from business leaders that demand privatization and trade, from the United States that demands the eradication of coca, and from the increasingly well-organized majority of indigenous peoples who demand an end to centuries of political, economic, and social exclusion.

It is a crisis that has already reached the boiling point. In February 2003, more than 30 people were killed in violent protests against a proposed income tax. In September and October 2003, 80 were killed and hundreds were injured in protests fuelled by government plans to export natural gas through Chile. The protests led the President, Gonzales Sanchez de Lozada, to resign his post and flee the country. Sanchez de Lozada was succeeded by Carlos Mesa, who took on the task of running the poor Andean country of 8 million inhabitants. President Mesa has to date managed to stay in power and keep the promises he made in 2003: he has not used armed repression and has shown a commitment to negotiation and peaceful resolution; he has held a referendum on a new oil and gas policy; and he still plans to hold a Constitutional Assembly in mid-2005 which will give unprecedented recognition to indigenous groups.³

In the midst of it all is the Bolivian Army. It is an institution frustrated with being forced to take orders from an extraterritorial power (the United States) and undertaking coca eradication operations that it does not feel are a priority. It is also frustrated with its

¹ Krüger, Wilfried (2004) "Implementation: the core task of change management," in *Strategy – Process, Content, Context*, B. De Wit and R. Meyer (eds.), 3rd edition, London.

² General César López, Commanding General of the Bolivian Army, speech on December 5, 2003 (graduation from Command and Staff School).

³ "Bolivian politics: Goni gone, but not forgotten," *The Economist*, October 16th, 2004.

recent role as the *de facto* police force of the state authority. In the periods of social unrest of February and October 2003, the government sent in the Armed Forces instead of the police to keep the peace, mostly because the police are popularly viewed as incompetent and corrupt, rendering the institution logistically inadequate to provide a respected presence on the streets during protests. The Armed Forces, however, was overwhelmed with the scale and intensity of social unrest, and some troops ended up firing upon the protesters. Up to one hundred people were killed. Though still a respected state institution, the Armed Forces was concerned about the effect that the recent violence and sovereignty issues would have on its legitimacy. For example, when confronted by the accusations of an indigenous leader in March 2004, the Commander of the Army General López responded: “We too lament what happened in February and October...it did not occur because the Army wanted to be out on the streets.”⁴

Additionally, the impending Constitutional Assembly will put the Army, indigenous authorities, and a wide range of other actors all at the same table with the purpose of reviewing the Constitution. The Assembly makes the Army vulnerable as never before, since the decision-making power about the future role and survival of the Army as an institution will be, to an important degree, in the hands of groups who have never before had a say in such matters. Both the indigenous groups and the Army come to the table aware that they need each other: the indigenous authorities recognize that the *libreta militar* (or military identification card) that their sons receive upon completing the obligatory military service serves as an important symbol of citizenship and a tool for economic betterment, and the Army appreciates the importance of indigenous participation in terms of its continued legitimacy. Nevertheless, the Army is nervous. It is aware that indigenous groups are becoming increasingly vocal about their resentment of the toll that military life has on indigenous culture and pride, and the events of February and October 2003 have raised new doubts. Therefore, the Constitutional Assembly serves to add yet another element of urgency to the Army’s situation.

The commander of the Bolivian Army, General César López, sees the situation as a motivation for change within his institution: “Sun Tzu argues that inertia is death. Clearly ... [we must] give a vigorous push to our institution...As Bolivians, as professional soldiers, as sons of the nation to whom we are indebted, we have an unavoidable duty to maintain the highest level of sacrifice and tempered character.”⁵ For him, this means seeing past the overwhelming challenges that the national crisis presents, to the “opportunities for creativity, dialogue, hope and construction”⁶ that lie beyond.

General López is thus embarking on a process of military reform, backed by the support of President Mesa and with assistance from the Canadian Forces. Having recognized the expertise that Canada and Canadian state institutions, including the Armed Forces, have in regards to multiculturalism and the management of diversity, López in December 2003 officially requested the assistance of the Canadian Forces, in particular, the Canadian Forces Leadership Institute (CFLI). CFLI has since assisted the process of military

⁴ *Bolivia Hoy*, March 25, 2004.

⁵ López, December 5, 2003.

⁶ López, December 5, 2003.

reform through staff visits and the organization of two academic seminars, which in March and September 2004 brought, for the first time, military and indigenous actors into dialogue with each other.

López, within his proposed process of military reform, sees an important place for programs that support the Army in becoming a diverse institution that provides equal opportunity and equity to indigenous people. As one of his first actions in 2004, General López declared that there will be greater indigenous representation in the officer corps, and that a program for indigenous officer cadets will become a reality by the year's end.

López' initiative is fully endorsed by President Mesa. Mesa inaugurated the first seminar in March 2004 with the following words: "I encourage the Armed Forces to work to instill the idea of respect for the 'other' in its recruits, respect for what the 'other' represents, the 'other' being another culture, language and vision, so that our citizens find within our Armed Forces a space of their own, not a foreign space, and so that the Armed Forces realize just how extraordinarily important it is that young citizens make the first fundamental link with the Bolivian State through the Armed Forces."

Both López and Mesa have strategic reasons for pushing for the creation of a diverse Army. Both know the state must be reformed to include more indigenous participation, because that is what the indigenous population demands, and, since it makes up between 55 and 70% of the population, these are not demands that can be easily dismissed. Mesa sees the Army as an ideal place to start the process of reform because it is the one national institution where it is easier to impose change rather than negotiate it. López, on the other hand, faced with the specter of the Constitutional Assembly, knows that the initiative will give his institution more bargaining power when confronted by indigenous authorities at the Assembly.

It is at this juncture that I became part of the international assistance provided by Canada to the Bolivian Army transformation initiative. In March 2004, General López requested support from the Canadian Forces Leadership Institute (CFLI) for a pilot project at the Bolivian Military College of the Army (BMC), which would provide scholarships and education to indigenous youth. At present, the level of education in the rural areas, where most indigenous people live, is very poor compared to that of the urban areas. The goal of the project is stand up a program at the BMC that would bring the academic level of indigenous rural high school graduates up to a level that would allow them to transition into the regular BMC program. The project aims to increase the amount of self-identified indigenous candidates who successfully pass the BMC entry exam and join the BMC cadet corps, leading hopefully to an increased indigenous representation in the officer corps and improved military-indigenous relations. By May 2004, CFLI had secured funding from the Human Security Program of Foreign Affairs Canada in order to contract two Canadians (including myself) to support the Bolivian Army transformation initiative as academic advisors. One was selected to work with the Bolivian Army staff on a professionalization initiative, while I was chosen to work with the BMC indigenous initiative, mostly because of my academic background in multicultural education and international affairs.

I arrived in La Paz, Bolivia in June 2004, having been charged with helping the work group at the Military College to build a vision for the pilot project and to begin project planning. My work group became the focus of my work, not only because the success or failure of the project lay in their hands, but because in June 2004 none of the group members were at all enthusiastic about the project and instead were completely bewildered as to why they were being ordered to stand up such a project at the present time.

My three months on the ground in Bolivia have brought me some important insights into how the stage can be set for institutional change; for example, about the importance of having an overarching vision as well as concrete objectives, how to promote acceptance of the vision, and the potential barriers and how to overcome them. Though the following draws upon various organizational change theories, this paper relies mostly on these insights - insights into what I have seen, sensed, and, at times, suffered.

General López and his vision

Institutional change is most often led from above, when key, upper-level individuals are compelled to undertake change – perhaps because they view change as a natural extension of their own ideals, or because it is their response to pressures from internal forces within the organization or external forces from without, or a combination of these. Whatever the motivation, any successful leader of change will have a clear vision of where this change should lead and of the end result they seek.⁷

General López does not make public his motivation for leading a change in the Army towards greater indigenous participation. It can be speculated that he believes that a stubborn refusal to change might well lead to dangerously low recruitment levels, increasingly antagonistic and violent encounters with the indigenous majority, or perhaps to the ultimate extinction of the institution as he knows it, but that would be pure conjecture. Instead, in public he makes eloquent statements that describe the direction the institution should be taking and aim to persuade his audience that, in effect, change will be good for all involved. Take, for example, his speech at his December 2003 graduation from the Command and Staff School:

“We can no longer afford prejudice against those of different skin colour or with aboriginal surnames in our ranks. Our profession should open itself to everyone with the imperatives of justice, equal opportunity and equity as the foundation of full citizenship. In the future we hope to see men and women creating a new, creative space in our proud

⁷ Beckhard and Harris (1987) *Organizational transitions: Managing complex change*, 2nd edition, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley; Kotter, John (1990) *A force for change: how leadership differs from management*, Free Press: New York.

military history. But more than this, we want them to have the same place in our minds and spirits.”⁸

Note the power of the statements that he makes in a few short lines. Most important is that he admits, in no uncertain terms, that there does exist prejudice in the Army and that, at present, the institution is not open to everyone and does not promote full citizenship. While for Canadian audiences this may not seem startling, in Bolivia it is absolutely radical.

A short explanation of diversity in the Bolivian Army is perhaps in order at this time. Since 1952, the Armed Forces have been officially open to all citizens, and its regulations made to be fully inclusive of all ethnic groups, language groups, and genders. In the early 1980s, women were banned from the Forces, a ban which was in force until 2001, when the *‘Defensor del Pueblo’* (the national ombudsman, or, literally, the People’s Defender), accused the Army that its refusal to admit women was unconstitutional. Eager to avoid further legal action, the Army yielded and presently there are female cadets in the first and second years of the BMC. Importantly, however, this was an organizational transformation mandated from the outside, not from within, and it rankled the Army to be told what to do by a civil authority. It has made the Army fiercely determined to avoid further civil mandates, such as those that have the potential to spring from the upcoming Constitutional Assembly, and this has provided the impetus to initiatives such as the Indigenous Academic Upgrading Project (IAUP) with which I have been working.

Until approximately the 1980s, the Army was a breeding ground of racism and discrimination, even though the institution was officially non-discriminatory. In other words, if you were short, dark-skinned, with an indigenous surname, you would be taunted throughout your military service, if you stayed in the Army your opportunities for promotion would be extremely limited, your chances for becoming an officer were close to impossible, and the daily third-class treatment would often be enough to make you give up on a military career altogether.

In the 1990s, racism and discrimination became less obvious as the military culture itself underwent a subtle shift. As awareness for human rights increased, and because of the fact that the hostile environment for recruits and lower-rank members was making it harder for the military to recruit and retain members, officers and other military superiors started treating these members in a less harsh manner. There was a reduction in the frequency and intensity of beatings and other violent or degrading punishments, and along with these changes came less outward acceptance of racial slurs and obvious discriminatory behaviour.

Today, ask any official about discrimination in the Army and you will most likely hear the same response: there has not been any discrimination in the Army since 1952. And therein lies one of the greatest challenges to promoting diversity within the Army: most officials simply do not recognize or admit racism or discrimination within their ranks. The reasons for this are manifold: for one, incidents of racism and discrimination are

⁸ López, December 5, 2003.

rarely open and public anymore, and often occur when NCMs, poorly paid and unappreciated, take out their frustrations on ranks that are even further below them, in places and situations where high-ranking officials will never find out about them. For another, it is quite common for recruits or cadets, with the complicity of the recruiters, to change their last name upon entering the Army from an indigenous to a more Spanish name. When Juan Quispe becomes Cadet Quiroga, he joins the ranks of the silent and invisible indigenous population in the Army, which makes overt racist acts trickier to carry out, but provides proof that prejudice and racism persists. Lastly, most high-ranking officials have rarely been subjected to such treatment themselves, since most often they come from the Bolivian elite: lighter-skinned, taller, with a traditional Spanish name. Of course, it is harder to see the discrimination when it has never been part of your reality.

Therefore, when General López stands up and admits publicly that the Army is discriminatory, and that steps must be taken to create an institution that embodies the goals of ‘justice, equal opportunity, equity’ and ‘full citizenship’, his officers stop and listen. No matter the barriers that may exist or the challenges that must be faced, the project has the vision of General López. The fact that this vision comes from the highest-ranking officer in the Bolivian Army provides the project with a crucially important foundation and, of course, legitimacy.

Barriers

In Kotter’s examination of change processes (1990), he concludes that successful change processes occur in the following eight phases: establishing a sense of urgency; creating a coalition; developing a clear vision; sharing the vision; empowering people to clear the obstacles; securing short-term wins; consolidating and continuing to progress; and anchoring the change in organizational culture. At this point in the change process, I believe that the Bolivian Army should be at the ‘securing short-term wins’ phase, with the successful planning and launching of the IAUP as the first short-term win. However, the main barrier to date facing the planning and implementation of the IAUP has been that there is simply not enough time to ensure that the previous phases are implemented well, if at all.

According to the General’s order, the indigenous candidates were supposed to start their preparatory program at the BMC in October 2004. This original plan had the students completing the program in 4 months, after which they would start the first year of the BMC program in February 2005. In my meetings with the Military College work group, I conveyed my concerns that 4 months would not provide enough time in which to upgrade the academic skills of the participants to a level that would permit them to pass the BMC entry exam. Therefore, by August the start time was extended to February 2005, and the program length was extended to ten months. With this second planned timeline, the students would start the Military College program in February 2006. When I arrived in mid-June 2004, the work group had never yet met and no planning had been done. That left 3 months of planning time with the original plan, and 7 months with the second plan.

Arriving on the ground in June, I quickly became aware of two important realities: the first was that the intent and vision of General López went a long way towards fulfilling two of Kotter's phases, namely establishing a sense of urgency and developing a clear vision; the second was that the other phases, such as creating a coalition, sharing the vision, and empowering people to clear the obstacles, had not happened. There was no coalition in place, the vision had not been shared with the rest of the Army, and nobody had been empowered to clear any obstacles. There were few people in the rest of the Army that seemed dedicated or even supportive of the project, and within the Army, General López seemed to be its only resolute champion. This was reflected in the state of my BMC work group in June; they did not understand the need for the project, why the responsibility had been given to them in particular, or at all how to operationalize the order. Therefore, we did not have 3 or 7 months that we could dedicate solely to project planning – in that time we first needed to be able to conceptualize the project.

Additionally, there was much resistance in place towards the proposal of introducing indigenous members into the officer corps. As Beckhard and Harris (1987) point out, resistance to the change is a very important factor, and can ruin a change process unless there exists a very clear vision and well-planned achievable steps in place towards the achievement of this vision.⁹ With a clear vision in place but with no planning yet underway, resistance to change needed to be addressed and dealt with.

Resistance to change is a factor of not only psychological dimensions but of the organizational culture as well. People, as well as the organizations they create, prefer stability, and change obviously represents a loss of this stability. As Edgar Schein (1987, 1988) describes, in order for people to change, they need to lose the stability of their existing views and beliefs. In his words, people need to 'unfreeze' or destabilize their existing paradigm.¹⁰ In my view, there are three main paradigms that need to be 'unfrozen':

The first is the fear among many members of the Bolivian Army that certain indigenous groups in the country wish to separate and are perhaps even arming themselves to enforce this separation that would constitute their 'liberation'. Many officers consider the idea of training indigenous officers as dangerous, worried that upon graduation the new officers will take their newfound military skills back to their communities and use them to engage the same officers that trained them to destroy the very concept of a nation that the Army holds so dear. The idea, in their view, is akin to training the enemy to take up arms against you.

The second is the popular perception that the IAUP is unnecessary because 'there are already indigenous members in the ranks of the Bolivian Army'. In this view, indigenous

⁹ Beckhard and Harris.

¹⁰ Schein, Edgar (1987) *Process Consultation. Lessons for Managers and Consultants*, Vol 2. Addison-Wesley: Reading, MA; Schein, Edgar (1988) *Process Consultation. Its Role in Organization Development*, Vol 1. 2nd ed. Addison-Wesley: Reading, MA.

people have been permitted entry into the Army since 1952 and thus there is ‘no discrimination’.

The third paradigm is the deeply ingrained idea that military culture and values are homogenous, and are the legacy of centuries of (non-indigenous) military tradition. Indigenous culture is not a part of military culture, and bringing in a contingent of indigenous individuals as they are, without forcing them to becoming part of the Bolivian military homogeneity, threatens the essence of military culture and tradition.

Kotter and Schlesinger (1979) find that people resist change for four main reasons: parochial self-interest, misinformation or miscommunication, different assessments of the situation, and low tolerance to change. Therefore, in order for these paradigms to be ‘unfrozen’, these reasons need to be analyzed and dealt with.

Parochial self-interest is definitely a factor within the Bolivian Army that contributes to resistance towards the IAUP project. The Bolivian Army, like most military institutions, is a product of long-standing traditions and practices. It is not surprising that certain successful individuals within the institution, those who have profited from these traditions and practices, are loath to see them change. For many Bolivian Army officers, including those in my work group, the *status quo*, even if it is exclusive, discriminatory and unjust, has worked well for them, and changing the *status quo* represents a threat to their continued success. The challenge of this factor is to convince individuals that the personal gains associated with the change outweigh the losses.

Misinformation, miscommunication, and different assessments of the situation account for the first paradigm, which regards indigenous groups as dangerous elements that plan to use the IAUP as a means towards attacking the Armed Forces, the state, and *la Patria*. This represents an unfounded and pessimistic assessment of the situation, and reflects the extremely poor communication between the Armed Forces and indigenous groups. It is also very unproductive; even if this paradigm could be backed by evidence, it provides no solution to the problem. This factor can only be overcome by convincing individuals that the IAUP does not represent a considerable risk to the institution, and instead represents a positive step towards healing the deteriorating relationship between the Army and the indigenous population.

Misinformation accounts for the second paradigm as well. In reality, even though the Bolivian Army is formally open to all ethnic groups, it is next to impossible to advance through the ranks as an openly indigenous person. The conscript ranks are overwhelmingly indigenous, while the officer ranks are populated by individuals who identify themselves as either white or *mestizo*. Indigenous culture and language is not accepted within the military culture, and discrimination is pervasive in all military practices and at all levels.

Tolerance to change is low in most military organizations, but it is especially low in the Bolivian Armed Forces. This was often reflected in my meetings with the Military College work group: on one occasion, for example, a member of the group, who has been

at the Military College for decades, claimed, “You can’t do that. That’s the way the Army has always been. You can’t change it.”

There are historical reasons for why the organizational culture of the Bolivian Armed Forces has low tolerance to change. For one, the duty of the Bolivian Armed Forces is to maintain *la Patria*, or the ‘fatherland’, and to promote loyalty and patriotism towards it. The concept of *la Patria* remains constant and unwavering, as does the duty of the Armed Forces to defend it, and this is unrelated to politics, (the petty ‘business’ of civilians), and government administrations, which tend to come and go with startling frequency in Latin America. Loyalty to *la Patria* is much more enduring and important than loyalty to a particular President or civil administration. Thus, when a proposed change is seen as imposed mandate of a civilian authority, the Armed Forces view it with much suspicion and as a potential threat to its duty as defender of *la Patria*. In order to combat this factor, the members of the Armed Forces need to be convinced that the change fits with and promotes the institution’s duty to defend *la Patria*.

Additionally, the Bolivian Armed Forces has been, throughout history, overwhelmingly shaped by the Franco-Prussian military model. Under this model, military schools “became closed spaces where European military knowledge was replicated...[Their] principal objective was to create an officer corps that was, like the model of the time, professional and homogenous, and loyal to *la Patria*...”¹¹ As Selmeski (2003) describes, the result was an officer corps that was “very homogenous, with an unquestioning attitude toward the material and values taught,” and which “consisted of only one sector of the population in ethnic, economic, and racial terms...”¹² The military culture that was ultimately created reflects the prejudices, attitudes and culture of only one group. This accounts for the second paradigm described above, that of military culture being seen as homogenous and non-indigenous, and of the IAUP as a threat to the essence of this culture.

With such high levels of resistance, it begs the question: why had so little been done to combat this resistance? In other words, why had López’ vision not been shared with the rest of the organization, why had no coalition of support been created, and why had people not been empowered to clear the obstacles? The answer, I believe, lies in three reasons: time, military culture, and the significance of the project.

The first reason is simple; the leaders of Bolivia are busy people. In between strikes, blockades, and referendums, there is little time for creating coalitions, sharing visions, and empowering people. General López gave a verbal order, but never put it into writing, making it difficult for his staff to know how to move from the verbal order to action. While it is clear that more time should have been made to support the progress of the project from order to planning to implementation, it must be said that time in Bolivia moves in strange dimensions: bureaucracy can be painfully slow but Presidents can

¹¹ Brian Selmeski (2003) “Formando líderes militares para el nuevo milenio: una vista comparativa de la educación y capacitación,” FLACSO.

¹² Selmeski.

change quickly. Those leaders of Bolivia that have visions and plans of change run around in a frenzy of meetings and speeches, knowing that their time to make any difference on the Bolivian political landscape may be limited.

The second reason is that Bolivian military culture, like the military cultures of other countries, is top-down and authoritarian. Military leaders do not often see the need for building coalitions and support, since an order is an order. Though this does little to build 'buy-in' among the members of the military organization and reduce resistance, it has its benefits. For example, it is very likely that the President is supporting this initiative because he recognizes the benefits of promoting change in an institution where change can be mandated and enforced, unlike in other state departments where change would need to be negotiated. Negotiation, of course, takes time, and time in Bolivia is a scarce resource.

The third reason is that the project is potentially important, and thus risky. It not only heralds the arrival of a significant shift in the Army itself, but it also symbolizes that the Army is willing to contribute, at risk to itself, to the process of real social change. In a country where the national crisis runs deeply along the lines of indigenous/non-indigenous, the project, for its small size, is significant. That being well and good, being an instigator of social change can be dangerous. Being associated with the IAUP project puts political and military careers on the line, which makes it harder to build coalitions, since nobody wants to be associated with the project until it has proven to be a success.

Because I was unaffected by all the above reasons, my role in the project became crucial. I had the time to share López' vision with the work group and other stake-holders, to build coalitions with government and non-government actors, and to empower people to become champions of the project. As a civilian, it was accepted that I would work outside of the traditional military hierarchy structure, which gave me the freedom to say what other people could not say and generally ignore the chain of command, (which usually worked in my favour). Finally, as a foreigner, and not responsible to any political interests (other than a general mandate to reflect the interests of the Canadian Forces and the Canadian government), I was neutral and better able to build coalitions. I could be loyal to the underlying values of the project – the promotion of fairness, tolerance and dialogue – unburdened by political interests. This neutrality and objectivity also made it easier for people to trust me.

How the BMC work group conceptualized the General's order

In order for the BMC work group to become empowered to overcome obstacles themselves (Kotter's fifth phase), the members needed to conceptualize the project so that, when the time came to actually begin the planning phase, the group would be able to make informed and qualified decisions. I prepared 5 background documents about multiculturalism, racism, the armed forces, and education, with accompanying discussion questions. In our weekly meetings, we discussed these documents and their answers to the discussion questions. We reflected and sometimes fought over concepts, definitions, justifications and plans, and by the end of the three months, the members of the work

group had gone from being doubtful officers with an order, to dedicated champions of the project. Together, I believe we managed to overcome some of the barriers that arose from a lack of institutional support and pre-existing attitudes.

The Military College work group was headed by Colonel Cueto, the second in command at the Military College. From the Military College also came LCol. Villavicencio and Major Mendieta, as well as two civilian staff from the psychologist/social work office within the College. There was also a group from the Army Staff headquarters: LCol. Cortez, who attended regularly, and 3 majors, who occasionally came to the meetings. Unfortunately, none of the work group had been relieved of other duties to be part of the group, and therefore being a part of the group was an additional duty added to their full-time tasks. For me, this meant the added burden of having a work group with little time or energy for meetings, background reading, and extra responsibilities.

The first order of business was to be able to ground the project within the current national situation. The group pondered why the term 'interculturalism' was coming out in their Commander's speeches. What, in recent current events, had led General López to suddenly announce this order? The General is a well-respected military leader, so the whole order was not dismissed lightly by the members of the work group.

Most thought that indigenous rights in Bolivia had a potentially damaging effect on national unity and risked destroying *la Patria*, the idea of the nation they were sworn to protect. So, I put the question to them, if that is the case and the indigenous people plan to break apart your nation, why do you think they want to do that and what are you going to do about it? After discussing the historical roots of the indigenous situation in the country and the present conflictive situation, the group came to appreciate the project as a strategy to fortify national unity through diversity and mend some of the historical breaks and wounds.

We also discussed culture and identity, and the work group was able to grasp and empathize with the experience of many of the indigenous recruits and cadets when they first join the Army, who, in order to get by, hide their indigenous culture. Yes, they admitted, there is discrimination here at the College because indigenous culture is not valued, and it is hurting our cadets psychologically.

Definitions were a challenge for the group, because the definitions that can be teased out of current cultural studies literature are confusing and inconsistent. The term 'multiculturalism', for example, has different meanings depending on the country, government institution, or academic using the term, and a distinction must be made between multiculturalism *as a fact* and multiculturalism *as a theory*. Furthermore, in López' speeches and in Latin American cultural studies literature, the term 'interculturalism' is used more widely than multiculturalism. Though both terms refer to more or less the same concept, there are small but important nuances and political implications that had to be analyzed by the work group. The term 'diversity' lends to confusion as well; in the mind of the officers at the Military College, the Army was diverse and had been since 1952.

After much discussion, the group came to a conclusion about many of these terms, which in the end led them to have a better grasp of the material than if they had been given the definitions straight from the Army Staff, for example. The group decided that ‘multiculturalism’, as a public policy that promoted, accommodated and valued different cultures but which stopped short of a transformation of the majority culture, was the policy of choice for rich countries with minority ethnic populations. In developed countries, the group viewed multiculturalism as a policy that came out of the actions of kindhearted politicians with deep pockets, not as a policy necessary for the survival of the nation. For Bolivia, however, with its deep ethnic cleavages, inequality, and a majority indigenous people demanding their rights in an increasingly more vocal and violent manner, multiculturalism was not an option. They favoured the term ‘interculturalism’ instead, with its focus on getting the various cultures within the culture to learn about and dialogue with each other, in order to create a new and better society together. The concept of ‘diversity’ that the group finally adopted was one in which people are valued because of their differences and these differences lead to increased innovation and efficiency, since the diverse organization has a greater ability to respond to unpredictable environments.

Next, the group approached topics closer to the collective nerve: interculturalism and the armed forces. They examined the role (or lack of) indigenous culture within the Bolivian military, and the mechanisms of discrimination within their own institution. They analyzed how the Armed Forces of other countries had managed diversity and what lessons had been learned. For example, they came to appreciate how a culturally diverse army that has good-quality cultural diversity training programs can increase international prestige, as well as how failing to promote a diverse army can threaten the legitimacy of the institution. The most important result of this analysis was that the group used the background material to begin conceptualizing their own rationale for the project and started making mental lists about what components they wanted to include in the project.

At this point in the process we were finally able to construct a justification for the project, a strategic explanation of why such a project should be implemented. The group decided that the goal of the project, (i.e., having officers in the Bolivian Army that are proud and open about their indigenous heritage), had many strategic advantages. For one, it would increase military effectiveness, since an atmosphere free of discrimination promotes productiveness, loyalty, and unit morale. Another point was that it would improve international prestige and potentially lead to more invitations to peacekeeping operations, given the increasing need for intercultural skills on the part of UN peacekeepers. Intercultural skills promote the tolerance of ambiguity and difference, realism, tolerance, and cultural sensitivity,¹³ all of which help peacekeeping troops cope and succeed in a foreign, confusing, and unpredictable environment. Additionally, the project would provide the Army added legitimacy by improving the representation of the indigenous sector in its ranks, especially in the officer corps, and improve its standing among

¹³ Manigart, Philippe (1999) “Managing Diversity: Women and Ethnic Minorities in the Belgium Armed Forces,” in *Managing Diversity in the Armed Forces*, Joseph Soeters and Jan van der Meulen (eds.), Tilburg University Press..

indigenous ethnic communities. A long-term potential impact would also be to build national unity and citizenship by teaching respect and duty for the 'Patria' to diverse sectors of the population.

The final topic was interculturalism and education, which to the work group seemed of minor importance to the project. The group had never considered that the delivery of the educational program to the indigenous students would need to be any different from the delivery of the regular Military College program. In my view, however, the two programs are much too different, given their dissimilar objectives and purpose, to share the same education delivery framework. The objective of the regular BMC program is to find and create the best officers, weeding out the weaker candidates as the program goes on. There is also the underlying assumption that the best officers will be culturally *mestizo* and come from well-off families, which accounts for the tendency of cadets from rural areas, if they can financially afford to attend the program, to hide any outward signs of indigenous culture.

Where the BMC program represents a process of weeding out the less than ideal candidates, the IAUP represents a process of creating the model of the new ideal candidate. In other words, the goal is to create the BMC candidate of the future: a cadet with intercultural skills, cultural pride, as well as a fierce loyalty to the protection and maintenance of *la Patria*. The IAUP is a pilot project of vital symbolic importance to the Army and to the future state of military-indigenous relations, and thus each successful candidate that ultimately enters the BMC program and the officer corps is a symbol of the success of the project. This means that every effort should be made to assure that as many students graduate successfully from the project. Academically, therefore, the retention goal, unlike in the regular Military College program, should be 100%, the class size should be small, and many supports should be put in place, such as academic mentors, supplementary exams, etc., to ensure academic success. It was at this point that I convinced the work group to change the originally planned duration of the project, 4 months, to 10 months, or an entire school year. The group was in agreement that there would be a much higher chance of achieving academic success with the longer program time.

Culturally, it must be understood that the students, upon entering the program, must go through three types of culture shock at the same time: moving from a rural to urban culture, from an indigenous to non-indigenous culture, and from a civilian to military culture. As program planners, we should do all in our power to reduce these culture shocks, since academic success and retention will be low if the student cannot cope with the psychological stress of the multiple cultural transitions. Additionally, one goal of the project is to show civil society (especially the indigenous community) that the military is dynamic and responsive to society's needs – it too, like the Ministry of Education with its bilingual intercultural reforms in 1994, can make education intercultural. If this is so, then the pilot project cannot be intercultural only in name but must also adopt intercultural principles within its project delivery. In my interpretation, an intercultural education program in the Bolivian Military College should include greater indigenous content in the curriculum, cultural diversity training for the students as well as for all

those involved with the program, indigenous mentors from the indigenous and military communities, and a framework for promoting indigenous culture (including values and language) and intercultural dialogue. The work group agreed in principle with the suggestions, but there were hesitations that stemmed not from attitudinal barriers but with the sheer novelty of the ideas. The military simply had no experience with intercultural education, and furthermore I had no experience with Bolivian indigenous issues.

Moving from conceptualization to planning

I was aware that we needed support from the Ministries of Education and Indigenous Affairs, as well as from indigenous authorities, but having attempted before to navigate the bureaucracies of those departments, I knew it would be a while before that support could be accessed. In the meantime, I was running out of time on my three months in the country and I had no idea whether I would be going back to continue with the planning of the project. I decided to write up a tentative project outline and plan, with various components: administrative (deciding upon the length of the program, the number of candidates, the retention philosophy); public relations (making contacts with secondary educational institutions and indigenous authorities, publicizing the project within the Army and to the public); educational (contracting and training teachers, creating an educational diagnostic); and cultural (introducing anti-discrimination policies, cultural diversity training programs, and mentoring programs). The plan also included my own suggestions for how to proceed with these plans. During the following group meeting, I presented the group with the plan, and we proceeded to discuss the plan point by point. The strategy was useful; not only did the group reach an agreement on many of the points, but the plan also allowed the group members to put the ideas they had discussed in previous meetings into a workable framework.

Other than the academic and cultural components mentioned above, the public relations component came about out of a sobering realization that barely anyone else in the Army was enthusiastic about the project, especially at the Military College. I had heard bizarre rumours such as the idea that the Military College was planning to train indigenous sociologists, and another that the College was going to be invaded by illiterate naked people from the Amazon. These were rumours borne out of two sources: misinformation and resentment. The feelings of resentment stemmed from the fact that, even though they were members of the same military organization, most military members had never been asked their opinion about the project and had not been told why they should support it.

Unfortunately, since the project was officially in the planning phase and the final plan would still need to be approved by top Army levels, Colonel Cueto did not want to undertake any publicity or information initiative that involved broadcasting the still unapproved plans. Any presentations, workshops, or other initiatives would be limited to vague cultural diversity training and discussions about the benefits of diversity for the military. For the time being, it was all that could be done, and I intended to take full advantage of the space permitted to me.

One week before leaving the country, I gave a presentation to all 750 cadets and officers at the Military College. In the presentation I explained the psychological effects of hiding one's culture and made the statement that discrimination on the basis of culture does exist at the Military College, illustrated by the fact that a majority of cadets from rural areas do not feel proud of their indigenous origins. It was difficult to ascertain whether the presentation was well-received or not, because there was no opportunity for questions or feedback.

The next day, I undertook a pseudo-cultural diversity training workshop with the 4th year cadets at the College, with the original aim of training the cadets how to identify and address acts of discrimination around them. I brought in a theatre group of 2nd year students to act out potential examples of discrimination at the College, and the 4th year cadets had to identify which were acts of discrimination and which were simply unfair or cruel acts. I barely got to this part of the workshop, however, because as soon as I introduced myself, the cadets quickly took advantage of the opportunity to make it clear to me that they did not believe that there was any discrimination at the College and that therefore there was no need for the project. For the next hour, we were able to have precisely what this project sorely needs: open discussion and debate. With the much-appreciated help of Major Mendieta, we passably fielded the questions and by the end one cadet admitted, "Of course there is discrimination here. And we're lying to ourselves if we deny it." Though the workshop did not go as far as securing full buy-in from all of the cadets regarding the IAUP, it did manage to force the cadets to question some of their attitudes and beliefs. In other words, it had led to the destabilization, or 'unfreezing' of their existing paradigms.

On one of my last days in La Paz, Colonel Cueto surprised me by running up to me during officer physical examinations and telling me about his new project plan. It involved more or less what we had discussed before with the added dimension that the indigenous candidates would complete their military service (at the Security Battalion at the Military College) at the same time as the preparatory program. With this plan, the candidates, even if they do not go on to the Military College regular program, exit the pilot project in possession of the *libreta militar*, the military identification card that in the rural areas of Bolivia constitutes an important form of male citizenship. Financially, the plan represented a reallocation of resources to the BMC for the program: since the participants would be recruits as well, the BMC would be channeled the funding necessary to feed, house, and clothe them, just as funding is provided for all recruits within its battalions.

The Colonel presented his plan at the seminar, "Multiculturalism, Education, and the Armed Forces" in September 2004. After his presentation, various indigenous authorities approached him and expressed interest and positive views about the project. They saw the project as contributing to the reform of the military service, as well as providing a positive tangible outcome (the *libretas*) to the participants. I welcomed his presentation for many reasons: firstly, it led to positive interaction and dialogue between the Colonel and indigenous authorities; secondly, I was satisfied to see that my background documents and our group discussions formed the basis of his presentation and its

conclusions, which validated the process I had undergone with the group; and lastly, it showed that the Colonel had become a dedicated champion to the project, and I knew that every champion I could help create would contribute to the success and ultimate sustainability of the project.

Conclusions

Kotter and Schlesinger (1979) identify six approaches to change: education and communication (to reduce misinformation and miscommunication); participation and involvement (to make members into active change agents); facilitation and support (to help deal with the fear and anxiety that leads to resistance); negotiation and agreement (to provide incentives); manipulation and co-option; and explicit and implicit coercion. All except the last approaches are part of what I call the 'slow boat' approach to institutional change. In the slow boat approach, the process of institutional change is slow and methodical. There is much focus placed on education and communication campaigns to win the hearts and minds of the members, and members are given tasks to support the change process, since a person working towards change is less likely to resist it). And even before Kotter and Schlesinger's first five approaches comes an in-depth analysis of the proposed change, including risk and cost-benefit assessments, and bringing in focus groups to investigate the opinions and views of the institution's members regarding the change.

In the 'slow boat' approach, the leadership is responsive to the views, positive and negative, of its members. If the majority wholeheartedly rejects the proposed change, then the leadership must decide how it will further prepare its members for the change, or how it will adapt it to make it more acceptable to the disapproving majority. Most likely, the final change will be slow and methodical as well, with the hope that the application of gradualism will reduce shock and rejection to the change.

The 'rocked boat' approach, on the other hand, is aggressive and swift. In this approach, the decision to implement the change is announced, and is presented as final and inalterable. This approach, which comes under Kotter and Schlesinger's sixth 'explicit and implicit coercion' approach, is often only effective or acceptable in hierarchical organizations that are familiar with the concept of an undisputable order. Even in hierarchical organizations, however, there is the risk that change will constitute a superficial response to the order and not lead to sustainable attitudinal and behavioural change.

General López took the 'rocked boat' approach. Without any systematic analysis and without seeking feedback or approval from the members of his organization, he made the decision to go ahead with his plan and introduce specific programs in the Army to increase and improve indigenous participation. He left the organization with little time to conceptualize the idea or prepare for its actual undertaking (operationalization). The General is aware that resistance to his idea might be strong, in which case he runs the risk

of not being chosen for the Chief of Defense Staff position. However, that was the risk he decided to take.

The 'slow boat' is an approach that we can afford to take in Canada. It is less heavy-handed and more democratic, and the spirit of education, preparedness, and gradualism that pervades the approach fits well with Canadian values. In Bolivia, however, the bureaucracy moves so slowly, and communication between parties is so poor, that the 'slow boat' approach may as well turn into the 'stalled boat'. At the same time, given the political and social instability of the country, administrations and military destinations can change unexpectedly. In Bolivia, General López acted when the timing was right and acted swiftly, with the hope that in the end the 'rocked boat' would not capsize.

Ideally, institutional change should be led by the highest levels but should seek the participation of all levels of the institution, as well as other external bodies, (academic bodies, interest groups, etc.). Before the change is implemented, actions should be taken to ensure that all members understand the role of their institution in society, as well as the role of the proposed change in the future of their institution. In Bolivia, however, where conditions are less than ideal, the leaders of change do what they can. They take risks with the content and delivery of the proposed change, because the windows of opportunity are often small. Bolivia sorely needs leaders that will push for change, despite the risk. During this time of national crisis, the Bolivian Army can best serve its duty to the *Patria* by being an institution of action, not caution.

My contribution to the IAUP will continue into 2005, and I will hopefully see the successful launch of the project in February of that year. Time is short, and there are still many obstacles to overcome, especially in terms of securing funds for some of the technical demands of the project, such as contracting teachers and ensuring proper infrastructure. Nevertheless, the fact that the members of the BMC work group are now champions of the project provides an essential foundation for its future success and sustainability.