

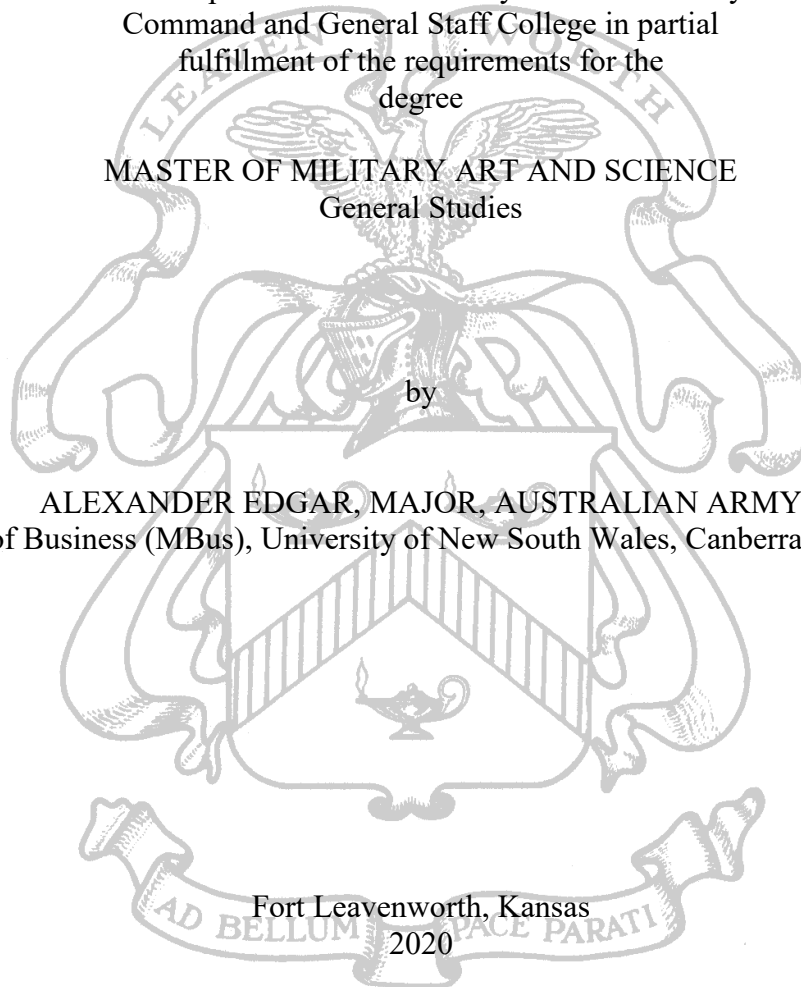
PARTIAL PRAXIS: EXPLORING THE LEADERSHIP FACTORS THAT AFFECT  
THE APPLICATION OF MISSION COMMAND THEORY IN THE US ARMY

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army  
Command and General Staff College in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE  
General Studies

by

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MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

## ABSTRACT

PARTIAL PRAXIS: EXPLORING THE LEADERSHIP FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE APPLICATION OF MISSION COMMAND THEORY IN THE US ARMY, by MAJ Alex Edgar, 100 pages.

The US Army adopted Mission Command as its preferred command and control approach in the 1990s. Mission Commands theoretical concepts are imported from the Prusso-German decentralized command philosophy *Auftragstaktik*, which was gradually implemented over a century allowing the concept to mature in a manner that ensured alignment with their unique command culture. Unfortunately, the swift implementation of Mission Command in the US Army has created a praxis gap between the theory, contained in doctrine, and ability of leaders to practically employ the decentralized command and control approach in the context of the organizations distinctive command culture. Exploratory qualitative research was conducted to define the leadership related factors that inhibit the application of mission command in the US Army. Key themes drawn from the collected data identify a number of contemporary factors that cannot be present (inhibitors) and must be present (oxidizers) to enable the application of Mission Command in the US Army.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE THESIS APPROVAL PAGE .....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
ACRONYMS.....	ix
ILLUSTRATIONS .....	x
TABLES .....	xi
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
Background.....	1
Problem Statement.....	5
Purpose of Study.....	6
Primary and Secondary Qualitative Research Questions .....	7
Definition of Terms .....	8
Mission Command.....	9
Leadership.....	9
Risk Aversion.....	9
Micromanagement .....	10
Blame culture .....	10
Zero-defect mentality.....	10
Culture.....	11
Climate.....	11
Scope.....	11
Limitations .....	12
Delimitations.....	12
Significance of the Study.....	13
Chapter Conclusion.....	14
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW .....	15
Introduction.....	15
Primary Qualitative Research Questions .....	15
Part I – Historical Chronology.....	16
Great and Grande Inception .....	16
Prussian Conception.....	18

Abandoning <i>Auftragstaktik</i> – The German Army in World War I .....	22
German Rediscovery in the <i>Blitzkrieg</i> era .....	24
US Army Adaption .....	27
Part II – Leadership Model Component Review .....	30
Leadership Practice I – Inspire a Shared Vision .....	31
Leadership Practice II – Challenge the Process .....	34
Leadership Practice III – Enable Others to Act .....	36
Conclusion .....	38
CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	41
Introduction.....	41
Primary and Secondary Qualitative Research Questions .....	41
Qualitative Research Methodology .....	41
Human Research Ethical Assurances .....	44
Chronological Research Model .....	44
Conclusion .....	45
CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS .....	46
Introduction.....	46
Data Analysis.....	48
Data Collection .....	48
Importance of Mission Command .....	49
Secondary Research Question I – Increased Commander Interference .....	50
Secondary Research Question II – Leader Risk Aversion.....	53
Secondary Research Question III – Disempowerment of Subordinates .....	55
Greatest Common Factor Analysis .....	58
Findings .....	61
Finding I – The Three Inhibitors of Mission Command.....	62
Finding II – The Two Oxidizers of Mission Command .....	64
Finding III – Leaders Choose to Employ Mission Command .....	66
Finding IV – Mission Command Is Optimized as an Output of Culture .....	67
Summary.....	69
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	70
Introduction.....	70
Research Questions – Answers.....	70
Implications of Research .....	72
Recommendations for Future Research.....	75
Conclusion .....	76
APPENDIX A – Qualitative Survey Instrument .....	78
APPENDIX B – Quantitative Survey Data Results.....	83

Importance of Mission Command .....	83
Leadership Factors that Inhibit Mission Command in the US Army .....	83
Summary .....	85
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>86</b>

## ACRONYMS

ADP	Army Doctrine Publication
ADRP	Army Doctrine Reference Publication
CGSC	Command and General Staff College
DCL	Department of Command and Leadership
DJIMO	Department of Joint, Interagency, and Multinational Operations
DLRO	Department of Logistics and Resource Operations
DTAC	Department of Tactics
FM	Field Manual
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
US	United States

## ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
Figure 1. Problem Overview .....	6
Figure 2. Research Model .....	45
Figure 3. Summary Quantitative Survey Responses .....	59

## TABLES

	Page
Table 1. Recommended CGSC Faculty Subgroup Sampling Design.....	43
Table 2. CGSC Faculty Survey Responses Demographic .....	49
Table 3. Responses – Importance of Mission Command .....	50
Table 4. Theme Identification – Increased Commander Interference Survey Responses	51
Table 5. Theme Identification – Leader Risk Aversion Survey Responses .....	54
Table 6. Theme Identification – Disempowerment of Subordinates Survey Responses ..	57
Table 7. Theme Identification – Greatest Common Factor Survey Responses .....	60
Table 8. Section Two Survey Responses.....	83
Table 9. Section Three Survey Responses – Increased Commander Interference .....	83
Table 10. Section Three Survey Responses – Leader Risk Aversion.....	84
Table 11. Section Three Survey Responses – Disempowerment of Subordinates .....	84
Table 12. Section Four Survey Responses – Summary .....	85

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background

War is a complex, violent human endeavor that occurs in contested environments characterized by the enduring concepts of friction, chance, and fog.<sup>1</sup> These three elements of battlefield uncertainty make the nature of conflict uncontrollable and unpredictable.<sup>2</sup> This chaos is unavoidable. No amount of centralized, detailed planning or commander attention can reduce the uncertainty and unpredictability of warfare. Solutions cannot be engineered using technology and situational awareness provided by disengaged systems can seldom provide the level of clarity that humans require to be comfortable in chaotic environments.<sup>3</sup> To prevail in future conflict forces must be able to adapt in chaotic environments that are rarely in stasis. The key to this adaptation is mission command.

Mission command is an intent-based command and control approach that encourages initiative and empowers subordinates in the pursuit of achieving military

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Westing, “War as a Human Endeavor: The High-Fatality Wars of the Twentieth Century,” *Journal of Peace Research* 19, no. 3 (1982), 261; Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), bk. 1, chap. 1, 119-120.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Sukman, “Human Fog, Human Friction, Human Chance,” *The Strategy Bridge*, April 2, 2015, accessed August 5, 2019, <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2015/11/22/human-fog-human-friction-human-chance>.

<sup>3</sup> MacGregor Knox and Williamson Murray, *The Dynamics of Military Revolution, 1300-2050* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 178.

objectives. Mission command promotes adaption while mitigating the adverse effects of friction, chance, and fog and enables subordinate commanders to exploit time-sensitive battlefield opportunities.<sup>4</sup> The US Army has employed mission command as its preferred command and control methodology since the 1990s. Arguably, the concept provides a relative advantage during the conduct of Unified Land Operations.<sup>5</sup> Mission command has ancestry in the decentralized leadership style of the Prusso-German Army, *Auftragstaktik*.

*Auftragstaktik* is synonymous with the Prussian Army; however, Frederick the Great first recognized the potential of a less rigid command and control approach of military forces during the chaos of battle. *Auftragstaktik* describes a unique decentralized Prusso-German command philosophy and translates to “mission-type orders,” “mission tactics” or “mission-oriented command system.”<sup>6,7</sup> The philosophy of *Auftragstaktik* was institutionalized when “The Father of *Auftragstaktik*,” Chief of General Staff of the Prussian Army Helmuth von Moltke implemented the intent-based decentralized

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<sup>4</sup> Eitan Shamir, *Transforming Command: the pursuit of mission command in the U.S., British, and Israeli Armies* (Stanford, CA: Sandford University Press, 2011), 22.

<sup>5</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Directorate, 2019), 1-1.

<sup>6</sup> Jörg Muth, *Command Culture: Officer Education in the U.S. Army and the German Armed Forces, 1901/1940, and the Consequences for World War II* (Denton: University of North Texas, 2011), 172.

<sup>7</sup> George Hofmann, *Through Mobility We Conquer: The Mechanization of U.S. Cavalry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 2006), 149; Martin Van Creveld, *Fighting Power: German and U.S. Army Performance, 1939-1945* (Westpoint, CT: Greenwood, 1982), 36.

command approach as a part of the Prussian Army reforms of the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> *Auftragstaktik* promoted subordinate freedom of action through emphasizing initiative and contributed to the Prussian Army's military dominance during the Wars of German Unification.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, despite the early success, *Auftragstaktik* has not been without criticism. The German Army shifted to a centralized command methodology before the outbreak of World War I, as it favored synchronization over the decentralized command approach, which maximized the advantages gained in the lethality and precision of firepower.<sup>10</sup> The German Army rediscovered *Auftragstaktik* in the inter-war period during the Hans von Seeckt-led reflection of the organization's performance during World War I. The German Army then paired *Auftragstaktik* with emerging mobile warfare doctrine to develop *Blitzkrieg*.<sup>11</sup> The *Heer*'s defeat during World War II, and the resultant criticism of the German forces, lead to the hibernation of *Auftragstaktik* for more than thirty years.

The *Auftragstaktik* intent-based decentralized command approach was adopted by the US Army following review of its doctrine during the 1970-80s. The US defeat in Vietnam was a catalyst for this review. The US Army asserted the directive command

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<sup>8</sup> Helmuth von Moltke the Elder, *Moltke on the Art of War: Selected Writings*, ed. Daniel Hughes, trans. Daniel Hughes and Harry Bell (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1995),

<sup>9</sup> Donald Vandergriff, "How the Germans Defined Auftragstaktik?" in *Mission Command: The Who, What, Where, When, and Why: An Anthology*, ed. Donald Vandergriff and Stephen Webber (Charleston, SC: Createspace, 2017), 50.

<sup>10</sup> Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 55.

<sup>11</sup> Knox and Murray, *The Dynamics of Military Revolution*, 157-160.

approach employed throughout the Vietnam War was impracticable and would lead to defeat in the event the US was required to fight the quantitatively superior Soviet Union.<sup>12</sup> A vital outcome of the review was the 1976 iteration of FM 100-5 *Operations* and the revised 1982 version. The 100-5 FMs both advocated the new “AirLand Battle”<sup>13</sup> doctrine, which emphasized the principles of maneuver warfare and the application of disciplined initiative within the commander’s intent, drawn from *Auftragstaktik*. This concept gradually evolved until 2003 when mission command became official US Army doctrine with the publication of FM 6-0 *Command and Control*.<sup>14</sup> Subsequently, the concept morphed into ADRP/ADP 6-0, *Mission Command*.

Despite the advantages of employing mission command and its strong foundation in US Army doctrine, some argue the intent-based, decentralized command approach has been poorly implemented or, in some cases, not implemented at all in the US Army. Prominent US Army Generals Mark Milley, Stephen Townsend, and Douglas Crissman have recently stated mission command is well established in doctrine but is not always practiced.<sup>15</sup><sup>16</sup> Others assert mission command is not properly implemented due to the

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<sup>12</sup> Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 114.

<sup>13</sup> Clinton Ancker, “The Evolution of Mission Command in U.S. Army Doctrine, 1905 to the Present,” *Military Review* XCIII, no. 2 (March-April 2013), 48.

<sup>14</sup> Ancker, “The Evolution of Mission Command,” 49.

<sup>15</sup> David Barno and Nora Bensahel, “Three Things the Army Chief of Staff Wants You to Know,” *War on the Rocks*, March 25, 2017, accessed August 5, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2017/05/three-things-the-army-chief-of-staff-wants-you-to-know/>.

<sup>16</sup> Stephen Townsend, Douglas Crissman, and Kelly McCoy, “Reinvigorating the Army’s Approach to Mission Command: It’s Okay to Run with Scissors,” *Military Review*, April 2019, accessed August 6, 2019, <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/>

organization's culture not being suited to the application of mission command, and because the command philosophy is not understood correctly.<sup>17</sup> These examples give rise to the idea that the implementation of mission command in the US Army has been more challenging than publishing the theory in doctrine.

### Problem Statement

Mission command is the US Army's primary command approach.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, this paper asserts, the US Army has failed to fully implement the concept. Specifically, while doctrine supports the application of mission command, the US Army's current command culture appears unsupportive of full implementation of its theoretical concepts. A graphical representation of the problem is outlined in figure 1. The divergence between doctrine and the practical application of mission command in the US Army limits the effectiveness of combat force elements through a reduced ability to adapt in dynamic, contested, and complex environments.

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journals/hmilitary-review/online-exclusive/2019-ole/march/reinvigorating-mc/; Kyle Rempfer, "The past decade of war has eroded the decision-making confidence of young leaders, Army general says," *Army Times*, January 9, 2019, accessed August 9, 2019, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2019/01/09/the-past-decade-of-war-has-eroded-the-decision-making-confidence-of-young-leaders-army-general-says/>.

<sup>17</sup> Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 178; Thomas Rebuck, "Mission Command and Mental Block: Why the Army Won't Adopt a True Mission Command Philosophy?" in *Mission Command: The Who, What, Where, When, and Why: An Anthology*, ed. Donald Vandergriff and Stephen Webber (Charleston, SC: Createspace, 2017), 87-88; Douglas MacGregor, *Transformation Under Fire: Revolutionizing How America Fights* (Westpoint, CT: Praeger, 2003), 192.

<sup>18</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, ADRP 6-0.

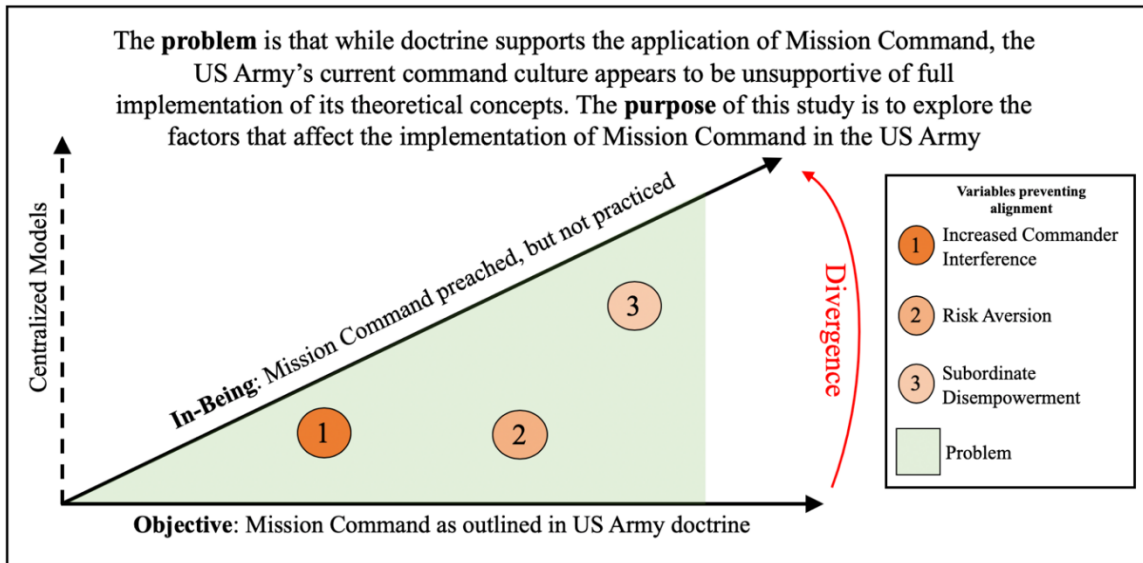


Figure 1. Problem Overview

Source: Created by author.

### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the leadership factors that affect the implementation of mission command in the US Army. The successful implementation of mission command relies on the commander's inclination and effective leadership.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, a framework which analyses effective leadership will be used as a basis for this thesis. The Kouzes and Posner's model for effective leadership was selected as the framework as it is a developed and prominent leadership model, supported by over thirty years of research, which identifies certain traits and behaviors that outline an

<sup>19</sup> John Nelson, "Auftragstaktik: A Case for Decentralized Battle," *Parameters* 17, no. 3 (September 1987): 29.

“operating system”<sup>20</sup> for effective leaders. The system comprises of five effective leadership practices (model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart) that each comprise of a number of subordinate traits and behaviors.<sup>21</sup> Three of Kouzes and Posner’s five effective leadership practices directly relate to the implementation of mission command in the US Army: inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, and enable others to act. Specifically, inspiring a shared vision relates to communicating intent to and developing a climate of trust in subordinates; challenging the process relates to encouraging initiative in subordinates and risk acceptance; and enabling others to act relates to the empowerment and development of subordinates. Consequently, to refine the scope of the thesis, only three of Kouzes and Posner’s five effective leadership practices will be employed as a theoretical model to define the key themes that contribute to the implementation of mission command in the US Army. Once identified, the key themes were inverted to identify obstacles for the successful implementation of mission command in the US Army.

#### Primary and Secondary Qualitative Research Questions

The primary qualitative research question for this study was: *What are the primary leadership factors that influence US field grade officers’ use of mission*

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<sup>20</sup> James Kouzes and Barry Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations*, 6th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2017), 13.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

*command within units and formations?* The following secondary research questions were identified as obstacles to the implementation of mission command and were developed by analyzing three of Kouzes and Posner's effective leadership practices:<sup>22</sup>

1. *Does increased commander interference inhibit the application of mission command in the US Army?* This question is related to Kouzes and Posner's effective leadership practice two – inspire a shared vision and focuses on the contradiction between trust vs. micromanagement.
2. *Does leader risk aversion inhibit the application of mission command in the US Army?* This question is related to Kouzes and Posner's effective leadership practice three – challenge the process and focuses on the contradiction between risk acceptance vs. risk aversion.
3. *Does the disempowerment of subordinates inhibit the application of mission command in the US Army?* This question is related to Kouzes and Posner's effective leadership practice four – enable others to act and focuses on the contradiction between empowerment vs. disempowerment of subordinates.

#### Definition of Terms

The following definitions are presented to provide an understanding of the key terms' resident throughout the study. US Army Doctrine definitions have been used in the first instance.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

## Mission Command

ADP 6-0 states “Mission command is the Army’s approach to command and control that empowers subordinate decision making and decentralized execution appropriate to the situation.”<sup>23</sup>

## Leadership

ADP 6-22 states that leadership is “The process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization.”<sup>24</sup>

## Risk Aversion

US Army doctrine does not formally define risk aversion; however, the Merriam-Webster dictionary provides the following definitions for risk: “possibility of loss or injury”<sup>25</sup> and “someone or something that creates or suggests a hazard.”<sup>26</sup> Further, Merriam-Webster also states that aversion is defined as “a feeling of repugnance towards something with a desire to avoid or turn from it.”<sup>27</sup> However, the most complete

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<sup>23</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Directorate, 2012), 1-3.

<sup>24</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-22, *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Directorate, 2012), Glossary-1.

<sup>25</sup> *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “Risk,” accessed September 3, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/risk>.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “Aversion,” accessed September 4, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/aversion>.

definition is “[r]isk aversion entails an excessive desire to avoid risk at virtually any cost, which can paralyze a unit into inaction or squander key opportunities.”<sup>28</sup>

### Micromanagement

US Army doctrine does not formally define micromanagement; however, the Merriam-Webster dictionary provides an appropriate definition for the study: the process of micromanagement is “to manage especially with excessive control or attention to details.”<sup>29</sup>

### Blame culture

US Army doctrine does not formally define blame culture. The Business Dictionary states blame culture is “a set of attitudes such as those within a particular business or organization, that are characterized by an unwillingness to take risks or to accept responsibility for mistakes due to a fear of criticism or prosecution.”<sup>30</sup>

### Zero-defect mentality

US Army doctrine does not formally define zero-defect mentality. Retired Army Lieutenant Colonel Dr. Leonard Wong identified that zero-defect mentality was a result of downsizing the US Army post the Gulf War that included “a stifling atmosphere of

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<sup>28</sup> Brendan Gallagher, “Managing Risk in Today’s Army,” *Military Review* 94, no. 1 (January-February 2014), 94.

<sup>29</sup> *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “Micromanage,” accessed September 4, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/micromanagement>.

<sup>30</sup> *BusinessDictionary*, s.v. “Blame Culture,” accessed September 4, 2019, <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/blame-culture.html>.

perfection.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore, Wong asserts a zero-defect mentality is an attitude, based on careerism, where leaders do not tolerate mistakes in subordinates.<sup>32</sup>

### Culture

US Army Doctrine defines culture as a “set of long-held values, beliefs, expectations, and practices shared by a group that signifies what is important and influences how an organization operates.”<sup>33</sup>

### Climate

US Army Doctrine defines organizational climate as:

[T]he perception and attitudes of Soldiers and Army Civilians as they interact within the culture with their peers, subordinates, and leaders. Observed policies and practices often drive climate, reflecting the leader’s character. The greatest influence on an organization’s climate is the quality of its leadership.<sup>34</sup>

### Scope

This study explored the leadership related factors that affect the implementation of mission command, as defined by doctrine, in the US Army. Data was collected employing a qualitative survey instrument on serving and ex-serving field ranking US Army officers (i.e. Major and above) from the US Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC) faculty. The social studies research method sought to explore how

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<sup>31</sup> Leonard Wong, *Generations Apart: Xers and Boomers in the Officer Corps* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, October 2000), 2.

<sup>32</sup> Wong, *Generations Apart*, 2.

<sup>33</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, Army Regulation (AR) 600-100. *Army Profession and Leadership Policy* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Directorate, April 2017), 31.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

certain leadership traits and practices can impair the use of mission command. Key themes were identified during chapter 2 of this study and were used to focus the data collection instrument.

### Limitations

The time available and access to a suitable research population were limitations associated with this study. The two limitations were both imposed by the structure and settings of CGSC and reduced the scale of human research that could be conducted in the time available. It was assessed that valuable research was still possible in the context to these limitations.

This study discusses the US Army's employment of Mission Command theory, command climate, and organizational culture. Another limitation associated with this research undertaking is the author's lack of experience and limited immersion in the US Army required to conduct meaningful research, present valid findings and detail relevant implications for the organization. The 'outsider looking in' limitation was appropriately mitigated through the chosen research methodology, which relied heavily on the experience and understanding of the CGSC faculty, to compensate for the lack of experience and understanding of US Army culture, systems and structures by the author. An additional benefit of this limitation was the unbiased and evidence-based perspective the study provides on an important issue effecting the US Army.

### Delimitations

A number of constraints were imposed on the study, reducing its scope. First, the study only focused on the leadership related factors that affect effective employment of

mission command. It is acknowledged that there are a number of other social, technological and emergent issues/factors which also affect the implementation of mission command in the US Army. These factors were not analyzed or discussed in this study. Further, three of Kouzes and Posner's five effective leadership practices were employed as a theoretical model to define the key themes to identify obstacles to the implementation of mission command.<sup>35</sup> Employment of this model focused and constrained the study by ensuring that only leadership related obstacles associated with the effective leadership practices (inspire a shared vision, challenge the process and enable others to act) were identified and analyzed.

The demographics of the human research methodology also constrained the study. For example, only serving and ex-serving US Army field grade officers in the CGSC faculty were used to complete the survey. This constraint reduced the survey population to approximately 150 possible candidates as participants must have a) served in the US Army, b) held the rank of Major or above and c) been a member of the CGSC faculty. The amount of data available for collection was capped at the number of possible and willing candidates. Further, there was a small risk involving the diversity of the data collected as the research participants are drawn from a similar population.

#### Significance of the Study

The study identified whether certain leadership factors affect the implementation of mission command in the US Army. The findings provided context as to why US Army doctrine supports the application of mission command; however, practical application

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<sup>35</sup> Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 13.

was only partially supported. Most importantly, this study recommends further research opportunities related the application of mission command.

### Chapter Conclusion

This chapter presented a general overview of the practical benefits and value of mission command and identified the problem and purpose of this study. Chapter 2 will provide an overview on the relevant literature and research of the problem and will identify key themes, which will be used to formulate the qualitative research instrument.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Chapter 2 will review the historical background and theoretical perspectives of mission command as a command philosophy and the leadership related factors that enable its employment. The purpose of this chapter is to identify key themes, embedded in academic literature, relevant to the identified theoretical framework to analyze leadership related barriers to entry to the implementation of mission command in the US Army.

The first section of this chapter will conduct a chronological review of mission command from the concept's origins in eighteenth century Prussia under the rule of Frederick the Great to the gradual implementation of *Auftragstaktik* in Prusso-German command culture and the subsequent transformation of the concept to mission command in the late 1970s. The second section of this chapter will use the selected three effective leadership practices to examine the leadership related factors and barriers to entry that prevent the implementation of mission command in the US Army. The key themes identified within this chapter will be used to refine the research methodology of this study.

#### Primary Qualitative Research Questions

The primary qualitative research question for this study was: What are the primary leadership factors that influence US field grade officers' use of mission command within units and formations?

## Part I – Historical Chronology

### Great and Grande Inception

The inception of *Auftragstaktik* occurred in an unlikely setting during the eighteenth century: Frederick the Great’s Prussian Army. This notion may seem dubious due to the highly centralized and rigid command structure Frederick employed, and the brutal discipline used as an extrinsic motivator that encouraged his subject-soldiers not to desert.<sup>36</sup> However, Frederick’s Army contained two important characteristics that set a foundation for the adoption of *Auftragstaktik* seventy years later. The first was a command climate whereby Prussian officers were charged with the close supervision of their units, including the responsibility for their day-to-day management and leading the units from the front during conflict.<sup>37</sup> Second, Frederick identified the inherent benefits associated with the universal and standardized collective training of his Army. The comprehensive drilling of the Prussian Army, combined with hyper discipline, enabled Frederick’s subject-soldiers to achieve a level of speed on the battlefield – related to musket reloading and marching – that enabled defeat of superior forces.<sup>38</sup>

Frederick also first recognized the potential benefits of less rigid and decentralized command approach for future military endeavors after observing the

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<sup>36</sup> John Lynn, “States in Conflict,” in *The Cambridge History of Warfare*, ed. Geoffrey Parker (New York: University Printing House, 2005), 180-181.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 181.

<sup>38</sup> Robert R. Palmer, “Frederick the Great, Guibert, Bulow: From Dynastic to national War,” in *Makers of Modern Strategy: from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 99-100.

effectiveness of light infantry and cavalry operating independently during the invasion of the duchy of Silesia in the War of Austrian Succession (1740 – 1748).<sup>39</sup> However, even though Frederick identified the benefits of a less centralized command and control system he did not further develop the concept as his own military genius, mixed with highly trained subject-soldiers who would desert if given ample opportunity, did not have a use for a decentralized command system.

The next (small) step towards an institutional decentralized command system occurred within Napoleon's *La Grande Armée*. The French Revolution changed the nature of warfare. The increased nationalistic motivation of French citizen-soldiers, resultant from the revolution, alleviated the problems that Frederick the Great experienced with desertion. Further, the collapse of the French dynastic social structure made possible a meritocracy-based promotion system in the Revolutionary Army, which enabled the evolution of the traditional centralized command model employed during the time of Frederick the Great.<sup>40</sup> The revolution enabled Napoleon to implement the corps system, which allowed him to delegate authority and empower his Field Marshals.<sup>41</sup> Despite the Corps Commanders operating within Napoleon's intent *La Grande Armée* still employed a highly centralized command system. Napoleon's genius enabled him to

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<sup>39</sup> Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 41.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Paret, "Napoleon and the Revolution in War," in *Makers of Modern Strategy: from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 125.

<sup>41</sup> John Lynn, "Nations in Arms," in *The Cambridge History of Warfare*, ed. Geoffrey Parker (Cambridge, UK: University Printing House, 2005), 202.

retain the decision-making authority while still adapting quicker than his enemies on the battlefield, despite the centralized system.<sup>42</sup> Napoleon's largest contribution to *Auftragstaktik* was his comprehensive defeat of the Prussian Army at Jena and Auerstedt in 1806, which was the catalyst for the extensive reforms of the Prussian Army that occurred from 1807 that "intended not to reinvigorate but rather to provide a substitute for the Frederician system."<sup>43,44</sup>

### Prussian Conception

*Auftragstaktik* entered an embryonic state as a part of Gerhard Johann David von Scharnhorst's reforms of the Prussian Army in response to its decisive defeat at the hands of Napoleon at Jena and Auerstedt in 1806.<sup>45</sup> The Prussian Military Reorganization "realized their mechanistic way of conducting war had become insufficient."<sup>46</sup> Clausewitz's theories of friction, fog and chance mandated a less rigid command and control structure and had a large impact on the command culture of the Prussian Army

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<sup>42</sup> Owen Connelly, *Blundering to Glory: Napoleon's Military Campaigns* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 292.

<sup>43</sup> Paret, "Napoleon and the Revolution in War," 131-134.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Invasion of France, 1870-1871* (Oxford, UK: Routledge, 1981) 11.

<sup>45</sup> Vandergriff, "How the Germans Defined Auftragstaktik," 49.

<sup>46</sup> Gerry Long, "Auftragstaktik: A Case Study, France 1940: Understanding Mission Command in the Training of Soldiers," in *Mission Command: The Who, What, Where, When, and Why: An Anthology*, ed. Donald Vandergriff and Stephen Webber (Charleston, SC: Createspace, 2017), 71.

during the reform period.<sup>47</sup> The Prussian's viewed the fog of war as an unavoidable battlefield phenomenon that provided exploitable opportunities by well-trained leaders on the battlefield.<sup>48</sup> However, the birth and institutionalization of *Auftragstaktik* did not occur in earnest until 1857 under the newly appointed Chief of General Staff of the Prussian Army Helmuth Karl Bernhard Graf von Moltke.

Moltke was quick to harness new technology and recognize the change that it would have on military operations. The emergence of the telegraph and the railway enabled greater dispersal of larger armies on continental Europe, which was necessary due to the increased range and lethality of the rifled, breach-loading *Zündadelgewehr* – needle rifle.<sup>49</sup> The American Civil War revealed the prolonged stalemate resultant from a combination of employing the new technology in the context of Napoleonic warfare tactics and practices.<sup>50</sup> Moltke identified that Prussia did not have the manpower or physical geographical depth to fight protracted wars. His solution was the implementation of strategic envelopment as the preferred form of maneuver in the Prussian Army as it would enable Prussia to achieve favorable force ratios and maximize the emergent technology to rapidly destroy opposing armies.<sup>51</sup> Moltke sought to institutionalize

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<sup>47</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, 119-120.

<sup>48</sup> Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 45.

<sup>49</sup> Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 23.

<sup>50</sup> Gunther Rothenberg, "Moltke, Schlieffen, and the Doctrine of Strategic Envelopment," in *Makers of Modern Strategy: from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 299.

<sup>51</sup> Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 24.

measures that would promote subordinate initiative that were founded by Scharnhorst and based on the work of Clausewitz. The primary reason for the evolution to a decentralized approach was controlling armies of up to 250,000 personnel while employing the new strategic envelopment doctrine was inherently difficult. Moltke also identified that a decentralized command approach would enable the Prussian's to exploit time sensitive battlefield opportunities; specifically, Moltke stated:

A favorable situation will never be exploited if commanders wait for orders. The highest commander and the youngest soldier must be conscious of the fact that omission and inactivity are worse than resorting to the wrong expedient.<sup>52</sup>

The decentralized execution command concept would later be called *Auftragstaktik* post World War II. However, the concept was more of a *modus operandi* for the Prussian Army officer corps that valued “knowledge, independence, and the joy of taking responsibility”<sup>53</sup> as key leader traits. Moltke’s end state was to increase initiative through empowerment of subordinate leaders based on succinct commanders’ intent. Moltke provided formal guidance to senior Prussian commanders outlining how the new command system would functionally be employed by the chain of command:

In general, one does well to order no more than is absolutely necessary and to avoid planning beyond the situation one can foresee. These change rapidly in war. Seldom will orders that anticipate far in advance and in detail succeed completely to execution. The higher the authority, the shorter and more general will the order be. The next lower command adds what further precision appears necessary. The

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<sup>52</sup> Trevor Dupuy, *A Genius for War: The German Army and General Staff, 1807-1945* (London: United Kingdom: Hero Books, 1984), 116.

<sup>53</sup> Vandergriff, “How the Germans Defined *Auftragstaktik*,” 55.

detail of execution is left to the verbal order, to each command. Each thereby retains freedom of action and decision within his authority.<sup>54</sup>

The decentralized command approach cemented *Auftragstaktik* in the Army and its implementation was greatly aided by the Prussian Army's professional military education system, unified doctrine and culture.<sup>55</sup> Jörg Muth asserts *Auftragstaktik*'s concepts were seamlessly implemented into the Prussian Army due to the organizations unique command culture, strenuous officer selection process, and extensive officer education system.<sup>56</sup> The Clausewitz-headed Prussian *Kriegsschule* (war college), later changed to the *Kriegakademie* (war academy), was a military education institution that focused on tactical proficiency and leadership. The *Kriegakademie* was unique as "officers were taught how to think, not what to think"<sup>57</sup> and this setting enabled the easy inculcation of *Auftragstaktik* into the curriculum and was a key inject and driver of the Prussian Army command culture. *Auftragstaktik* contributed to the Prussian Army's military dominance during the Wars of German Unification, including practical application in the following conflicts: Danish-Prussian War (1864), Austro-Prussian War (1866), and Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Moltke the Elder, *Moltke on the Art of War*, 178.

<sup>55</sup> Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 48.

<sup>56</sup> Muth, *Command Culture*, 18-22.

<sup>57</sup> Vandergriff, "How the Germans Defined Auftragstaktik," 54.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

## Abandoning *Auftragstaktik* – The German Army in World War I

Post the Wars of German Unification and pre-World War I *Auftragstaktik* was well established within the *Heer* (German Army). During the interwar period the *Heer*'s command culture evolved to value three leadership traits: '*Willenskraft*' – willpower and calm under pressure, '*Verantwortungsbewußstein*' – sense of responsibility, and '*Kämpferisches Wesen*' – fighting spirit and tactical competence.<sup>59</sup> Prior to the outbreak of World War I the *Heer* relied on the effective communication of orders and extensive training, which promoted initiative. However, the failure of the Schlieffen Plan and subsequent transition to trench warfare changed the way the German's operated at the tactical level of war. Specifically, The *Heer* responded to the advances in firepower and the adoption of trench warfare by favoring synchronization over *Auftragstaktik*, and the concept was largely ignored for the initial portion of the war.<sup>60</sup> John R. Nelson II succinctly describes the *Heer*'s gradual transition away from *Auftragstaktik*:

In the initial campaigns, it [*Auftragstaktik*] was fully applied with good results. However, the high attrition rates and the great influx of reserve officers who had not received adequate training caused the application to wane. In the west, the more centralized nature of trench warfare also had an influence. Commanders issued increasingly detailed orders that gave subordinates few opportunities to exercise much initiative.<sup>61</sup>

In an attempt to break the trench-stalemate the allies developed technological solutions, e.g., the tank, whereas the Germans focused on the evolution of tactical force

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<sup>59</sup> Muth, *Command Culture*, 60.

<sup>60</sup> Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 55.

<sup>61</sup> Nelson, "Auftragstaktik: A Case for Decentralized Battle," 22.

employment that relied on quality rather than quantity, striving for victory through superior skills, tactics, and leadership at the junior officer and Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) level.<sup>62</sup> Specifically, German General Erich Friedrich Wilhelm Ludendorff developed modern defense-in-depth tactics and attack-in-depth tactics that became doctrine during 1917-1918 and required units to act independently for periods of time to gain the initiative and exploit battlefield opportunities.<sup>63</sup> The revised tactics placed a premium on combined arms with synchronized fires supporting dismounted infantry units attacking on mass to identify and quickly exploit surfaces and gaps in enemy defenses.<sup>64</sup> The new tactics resulted in a resurgence of *Auftragstaktik* and resulted in the creation of elite light infantry units – *Strösstruppen* (shock troops) – that employed a diverse range of weaponry at the squad level to penetrate forward defended positions and exploit into depth positions quickly. The pinnacle of the *Auftragstaktik* resurgence in World War I was during Operation Michael that commenced on 21 March 1918 where sixty-three German divisions, led by *Strösstruppen*, attacked allied positions on a 53-mile front.<sup>65</sup> The *Heer* overrun the British defenders on the entire front and achieved a level of penetration not seen for over four years; however, the tactical breakthrough was not of

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<sup>62</sup> Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 59.

<sup>63</sup> Williamson Murray, “The West at War,” in *The Cambridge History of Warfare*, ed. Geoffrey Parker (Cambridge, UK: University Printing House, 2005), 303.

<sup>64</sup> Murray, “The West at War,” 303-304.

<sup>65</sup> Stephen Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2004), 89-91.

consequence at the strategic level of war.<sup>66</sup> Ultimately the German Spring Offensive of 1918 did not affect the outcome of World War I, but its legacy was the discovery of a tactical method of operation that relied on combined arms, tempo and *Auftragstaktik*.

#### German Rediscovery in the *Blitzkrieg* era

Germany's defeat during World War I commenced a similar reflection of the organization's performance during hostilities reminiscent of the Prussian Military Reorganization that occurred one hundred years earlier. The Versailles Treaty required the *Heer* to reduce its numbers to four thousand officers and 100,000 soldiers during the interwar period.<sup>67</sup> General Hans von Seeckt was appointed as the as the Chief of Staff of the *Heer* and immediately directed for a number of committees be established to critically examine the collective performance of the German Army during World War I.<sup>68</sup> The recommendations of these committees shaped new doctrine that was largely conceived by von Seeckt. The revised doctrine placed an importance on *Auftragstaktik* and paid homage to the longstanding Clausewitzian principles of fog, friction and chance.<sup>69</sup> Von Seeckt identified that Army leaders must be "self-reliant, self-confident, dedicated, and

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>67</sup> Williamson Murray, "The World in Conflict," in *The Cambridge History of Warfare*, ed. Geoffrey Parker (Cambridge, UK: University Printing House, 2005), 314.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 315-316.

<sup>69</sup> Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 63.

joyful in taking responsibility,”<sup>70</sup> which was nested in the new doctrine that “emphasized flexibility, initiative at all levels, exploitation, and leadership from the front.”<sup>71</sup> A

prominent German officer noted the historical origins of *Auftragstaktik*:

It has always been the particular forte of German leadership to grant a wide scope of the self-dependence of subordinate commanders-to allot them tasks which leave the method of execution to the discretion of the individual. From time immortal, certainly since Moltke the elder’s day – this principle has distinguished Germany’s military leadership from that of other armies.<sup>72</sup>

William Murray identified the importance that the *Heer* placed on *Auftragstaktik* as a method in improving military performance:

To German analysts, the decentralized command and control system that they had received from Prussian tradition – from Scharnhorst through Moltke the Elder – and had further expanded and extended in the lost war was the only conceivable solution.<sup>73</sup>

Eitan Shamir reinforces the historical importance of *Auftragstaktik* in enabling Doctrine changes during the interwar period:

The Wehrmacht was able to implement these regulations due to the modified and improved Prussian organizational system. This system reinforced values such as trust, professionalism, and initiative through processes of selection, training, promotion, reward and education designed to enhance familiarity and cohesiveness.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Williamson Murray, “May 1940: Contingency and fragility of the German RMA,” in *The Dynamics of Military Revolution, 1300-2050*, ed. MacGregor Knox and Williamson Murray (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 160-161.

<sup>71</sup> Murray, “The World in Conflict,” 316.

<sup>72</sup> Eric von Manstein, *Lost Victories* (Chicago, IL: H. Regnery, 1958), 382-383.

<sup>73</sup> Murray, “May 1940,” 160.

<sup>74</sup> Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 63.

Concurrent to the doctrine review was another revolutionary advancement in the German Army: the creation of mechanized forces. General Heinz Guderian was one of the German officers that pioneered new units combining tactical radios with mechanized forces and tanks that ushered in a new form of combined arms armored warfare.<sup>75</sup> Guderian then combined the new technology and units with the *Strösstruppen* tactics that emerged at the end of World War I to create a new form of operating that placed a premium on speed, surprise, and shock-action: *Blitzkrieg*. This new operating practice nested nicely in von Seeckt's new doctrine and required *Auftragstaktik* due to the speed and dispersion that characterized *Blitzkrieg*, and the requirement to decentralize command in order to exploit fleeting battlefield opportunities.<sup>76</sup> The pairing of *Auftragstaktik* and *Blitzkrieg* cemented the Prussian decentralized command approach in history through the spectacular German successes during the initial stages of World War II including the invasions of Poland, France, and Russia. However, the large influx of reserves and poorly trained soldiers in the *Heer* during World War II and the centralizing of command and control by Chief of Staff of the Army High Command General Franz Halder and Hitler during the Operation Barbarossa resulted in the institutional abandonment of *Auftragstaktik* during the remainder of World War II.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Murray, "May 1940," 154-159.

<sup>76</sup> Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 61.

<sup>77</sup> Muth, *Command Culture*, 203.

## US Army Adaption

The US Army's adoption of the theoretical concepts of *Auftragstaktik* occurred in a similar fashion to the Prussian Army of 1806 and German Army of 1919, after a military defeat. The US experience during the Vietnam War resulted in a thorough review of the Army's doctrine, equipment, and training in the context of large-scale combat operations against a quantitatively superior Soviet Union. During the 1970-80s there were a number of factors that necessitated the transition to a decentralized command and control model in the US Army. First, the US Army doctrine reforms identified a shift to an all-volunteer force and the implementation of the various "Big Five" major system upgrades.<sup>78</sup> Brigadier General Huba Wass de Czege stated that "[t]he directive command culture of the Vietnam years was an invitation to disaster under the all-volunteer professional forces of the post-Vietnam reforms."<sup>79</sup> Further, the implementation of the material and culture changes required a more robust leadership training model that enabled the implementation of an intent based command approach. However, the implementation of AirLand Battle doctrine, based on techniques employed the Israeli Defense Force during the Six-Day War in 1967, was the largest contributing factor to the implementation of what would later enter lexicon as mission command.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> David Trybula, "*Big Five*" *Lessons for Today and Tomorrow*, Civilian Research Paper (Carlisle: PA, US Army War College, 2012), iv.

<sup>79</sup> Huba Wass de Czege, "Mission Command in the Contemporary Battlespace," in *2006 Chief of Army's Exercise Proceedings*, ed. Scoot Hopkins (Land Warfare Studies Centre: Canberra, January 2007), 12.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

The AirLand Battle doctrine, first presented in the 1976 version of FM 100-5 *Operations*, was created to counter the quantitatively superior Soviet Union. FM 100-5 *Operations* described the AirLand Battle as a form of operation whereby deep air strikes would occur in enemy rear echelons, supported by combined arms forces employing maneuver warfare against enemy first echelon forces, with the intent to separate the respective echelons and reduce enemy cohesiveness and tempo.<sup>81</sup> FM 100-5 was the US Army publication to state the requirement of a decentralized command approach, with origins from the Prusso-German concept of *Auftragstaktik*:

The strength of our Army lies in the *decentralization* of responsibility and authority to the commander on the ground. We cannot afford to lose that additional combat effectiveness which derives from the intelligent actions of trained leaders operating under a flexible system of *mission-type orders*. Thus, each officer must be imbued with the idea that success will depend upon the skill, *initiative*, and imagination with which he seeks to accomplish the assigned mission within the intent and concept of his commander.<sup>82</sup>

The next version of FM 100-5 was released in 1982. The 1982 version of FM 100-5 placed more emphasis on the emerging decentralized command approach doctrine by linking the use of initiative and mental agility as key operational concepts for the employment of the AirLand Battle concept. The passage that emphasizes initiative as a key concept provides an insight into thinking that current mission command doctrine is based on today:

Initiative implies an offensive spirit in the conduct of all operations. The underlying purpose of every encounter with the enemy is to seize or to retain independence of action. To do this we must make decisions and act more quickly than the enemy to disorganize his forces and to keep him off balance. To preserve

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<sup>81</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-5, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Directorate, 1976), 8-1 - 8-3.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-2.

the initiative, subordinates must act independently within the context of an overall plan. They must exploit successes boldly and take advantage of unforeseen opportunities. They must deviate from the expected course of battle without hesitation when opportunities arise to expedite the overall mission of the higher force. They will take risks, and the command must support them. Improvisation, initiative, and aggressiveness—the traits that have historically distinguished the American soldier—must be particularly strong in our leaders.<sup>83</sup>

The concepts outlined were further refined with the release of the 1993 version of FM 100-5 *Operations*. In addition to the content contained in the 1976 and 1982 version, the 1993 version identified initiative, mission orders, and decentralization as key command concepts.<sup>84</sup> Mission command became a US Army official term with the release of FM 6-0, *Mission Command*, in 2003. FM 6-0 *mission command* was the first US Army publication that outlines mission command as the Army's Command and Control concept.<sup>85</sup> The first US Army definition of mission command is also provided:

*Mission command* is the conduct of military operations through decentralized execution based on mission orders for effective mission accomplishment. Successful mission command results from subordinate leaders at all echelons exercising disciplined initiative within the commander's intent to accomplish missions. It requires an environment of trust and mutual understanding. Successful mission command rests on the following four elements: Commander's intent, Subordinates' initiative, Mission orders and Resource allocation.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-5, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Directorate, 1982), 2-2.

<sup>84</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-5, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Directorate, 1993), 2-6, 6-4, 6-6.

<sup>85</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 6-0, *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Directorate, 1976), viii.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-17.

Over time FM 6-0, *Mission Command*, morphed into ADP 6-0, *Mission Command*, and in 2010, the US Army combined the command and control warfighting function with doctrine to evolve Mission Command into a warfighting function. The current US Army definition for Mission Command is: “the Army’s approach to command and control that empowers subordinate decision making and decentralized execution appropriate to the situation.”<sup>87</sup> ADP 6-0 outlines seven principles that guide the employment of Mission Command in the US Army:<sup>88</sup>

1. Competence
2. Mutual Trust
3. Shared understanding
4. Commander’s intent
5. Mission orders
6. Disciplined initiative
7. Risk acceptance

### Part II – Leadership Model Component Review

According to Kouzes and Posner, ordinary people who guide others along pioneering journeys follow similar paths, marked by common patterns of action. When getting extraordinary things done in organizations, leaders engage in Five Practices that are available to anyone who accepts the leadership challenge:

1. Model the Way

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<sup>87</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, 1-3.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 1-7.

2. Inspire a Shared Vision
3. Challenge the Process
4. Enable Others to Act, and
5. Encourage the Heart

This model has stood the test of time – research confirms that it is just as relevant now as when Kouzes and Posner first began their investigation. This study focused on three of the practices: inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, and enable other to act.

Following is a description of these practices in a military context.

#### Leadership Practice I – Inspire a Shared Vision

The first of Kouzes and Posner’s effective leadership factors that will be reviewed is inspire a shared vision. Inspire a shared vision directly relates to the employment of Mission Command through communicating intent and developing a climate of trust in subordinates.

Trust is essential for Mission Command and effective leadership. Kouzes and Posner’s research found that organizations with trusted subordinates outperform other organizations where trust is not part of the collective climate or culture.<sup>89</sup> Kouzes and Posner also state that “trust must be reciprocal and reciprocated”<sup>90</sup> and there is a level of vulnerability associated with trusting subordinates as leaders’ are taking a chance with

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<sup>89</sup> Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 198.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

future subordinate behavior.<sup>91</sup> Ultimately the benefits of trusting subordinates are clear: “When trust is the norm, decisions are made efficiently and swiftly, . . . innovation is higher.”<sup>92</sup> James Warn reinforces the notion that trust is not only important, but essential for teams to function in dynamic and competitive environments.<sup>93</sup> US Army doctrine also recognizes the importance of trust in the context of Mission Command as “build cohesive teams through mutual trust” is one of the six principles of Mission Command.<sup>94</sup> ADP 6-0. *Mission Command*, reinforced the importance of two-way confidence and communication in the establishment of trust between subordinates and leaders. However, Eitan Shamir asserts that trust is essential for Mission Command by stating: “Delegation of authority, the core of mission command, is difficult to achieve, as commanders are required to relinquish control over events but retain reasonability for them.”<sup>95</sup>

The second component of inspire a shared vision relates to leaders communicating purpose or vision to teams. Kouzes and Posner assert “meaning and purpose matter” to teams and the leader is ultimately responsible for establishing a common purpose for a group.<sup>96</sup> There are two elements of communicating purpose to

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 198-200.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>93</sup> James Warn, *Leadership* (Frenchs Forrest NSW, Australia: Pearson, 2014), 133.

<sup>94</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, 2.

<sup>95</sup> Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 28.

<sup>96</sup> Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 106.

teams: having a clearly defined end state and effectively communicating the desired end state to a team.<sup>97</sup> Two of the Mission Command principles, outlined in US doctrine, support this notion and are “create a shared understanding” and “provide clear commander’s intent.”<sup>98</sup> The purpose of these two principles is to achieve unity of effort and help “subordinate and supporting commanders act to achieve the commander’s desired results without further orders, even when the operation does not unfold as planned.”<sup>99</sup> *Auftragstaktik* also stressed the importance of common purpose as it provided a framework for subordinates to take action.<sup>100</sup> Specifically, the Germans employed intent heavily in World War II; however, common purpose revolved around the concept *Schwerpunkt* (focal point), which enabled the apportionment of tactical resources to promote unity of effort.<sup>101</sup> The *Schwerpunkt* was a tactical common purpose nested in commander’s intent and enabled the delineation of main and supporting efforts.

Communicating intent and developing a climate of trust enable the employment of Mission Command. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that a lack of trust and/or clear intent could result in increased commander interference and micromanagement; two factors which may inhibit the employment of Mission Command and promote centralized

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>98</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, 3.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>100</sup> Donald Vandergriff, *Adopting Mission Command: Developing Leaders for a Superior Command Culture* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2019), 19.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 13.

decision-making. Increased commander interference is also counter-productive in building trust as people do not trust overcontrolling leaders.<sup>102</sup>

### Leadership Practice II – Challenge the Process

The next of Kouzes and Posner’s effective leadership factors that will be reviewed is challenge the process. Challenge the process directly relates to the employment of Mission Command through leaders encouraging initiative in subordinates and risk acceptance.

ADP 6-0, *Mission Command*, states “initiative is action in the absence of orders, when existing orders no longer fit the situation, or when unforeseen opportunities or threats arise. Leaders and subordinates exercise disciplined initiative to create opportunities.”<sup>103</sup> Jay Conger also recognized the importance of initiative as essential to empower subordinates, whereas Kouzes and Posner identify that exemplary leaders “seize the initiative themselves and encourage initiative in others.”<sup>104</sup><sup>105</sup> High levels of initiative enable subordinates to operate within an overarching intent, and the employment of Mission Command is supported by organizations that possess subordinates who regularly exercise initiative.

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<sup>102</sup> Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 199.

<sup>103</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, 4.

<sup>104</sup> Jay Conger, “Leadership: The Art of Empowering Others,” in *A Diagnostic Approach to Organizational Behavior*, ed. Judith Gordon (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1991), 434-344.

<sup>105</sup> Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 154.

The second aspect of challenge the process is risk acceptance. Accepting risk is fundamental to the employment of Mission Command as military operations are categorized by a high level of uncertainty, and battlefield opportunities can seldom be exploited without accepting risk.<sup>106</sup> Kouzes and Posner identify that “success demands a willingness to take risk and experiment” and stated mistakes, and at times failure, will accompany risk taking.<sup>107</sup> Further, James Warn also identifies that risk taking is important; however, he identified that risk taking is often accompanied by undesirable results and leaders “must tolerate mistakes” if they want to promote initiative and empower their subordinates to capitalize on emerging opportunities.<sup>108</sup> Leaders need to create a climate of subordinate risk taking to enable the employment of Mission Command.

To tie both concepts together, subordinates will only exercise initiative and take risk if they have confidence that their mistakes will not have adverse effects on their standing within an organization or their career.<sup>109</sup> Donald Vandergriff identified that risk acceptance across the entire spectrum of the chain of command was instrumental for the use of *Auftragstaktik* by the German Army post World War I. Specifically, German Army culture meant that “a higher commander rarely if ever reproached a subordinate if he showed initiative,” even if the actions of the subordinate resulted in undesirable

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<sup>106</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, 5.

<sup>107</sup> Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 185.

<sup>108</sup> Warn, *Leadership*, 134.

<sup>109</sup> Vandergriff, *Adopting Mission Command*, 20.

results.<sup>110</sup> Top down approaches do not promote initiative, and initiative enables decentralization. Mission Command can only be appropriately employed within organizations that encourage initiative in subordinates and accept risk. Therefore, it is reasonable to deduce that organizations that are risk adverse and possess a zero-defect mentality would inhibit the employment of Mission Command.

### Leadership Practice III – Enable Others to Act

The final Kouzes and Posner effective leadership factor that will be reviewed is enable others to act. Enabling others to act directly relates to the employment of Mission Command by leaders empowering and developing subordinates. Empowering subordinates to make decisions and take action based upon a higher intent and their own initiative is important for the implementation of Mission Command. James Warn provides a comprehensive definition of empowerment:

Empowerment involves sharing power with subordinates and pushing decision making and implementation power to the lowest possible level. Its goal is to increase the power and autonomy of all employees in organizations.<sup>111</sup>

Empowerment is embedded in an organization's culture and is based upon other, and previous, effective leadership factors including fostering trust and initiative in subordinates, while accepting risk.<sup>112</sup> Further Mission Command, like *Auftragstaktik*,

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Warn, *Leadership*, 133.

<sup>112</sup> Albert Bandura, "Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change." *Psychological Review* 84, 2 (1977), 192-193.

requires subordinates to feel empowered to employ initiative.<sup>113</sup> The “keys to empowerment are giving employees control of how they perform their work . . . by providing them opportunities to succeed.”<sup>114</sup> Empowerment is achieved through a level of mastery that can only be achieved through learning. James Warn asserts that empowerment is largely, if not solely, reliant on the selection and the training leaders.<sup>115</sup>

A mutually supporting concept that enables empowerment through an increase of subordinate competence is the ongoing development of subordinates by leaders. Developing subordinates was the foremost role of commanders in the Prussian/German Army.<sup>116</sup> This unique part of Prusso-German culture, that when combined with an intensive officer selection process and professional education system, set the cultural conditions to the employment of *Auftragstaktik* in Prusso-German military formations.<sup>117</sup> Trevor Dupuy identified that Moltke’s revolutionary concepts were well nested in a Prussian military system that developed ultra-professional military leaders.<sup>118</sup>

Empowering and developing subordinates is essential for the implementation of Mission Command. However, some leadership practices can lead to the disempowerment

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<sup>113</sup> Antulio Echevarria, “Auftragstaktik: In Its Proper Perspective,” *Military Review* 66, 10 (October 1986), 51.

<sup>114</sup> Warn, *Leadership*, 133.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>116</sup> Vandergriff, *Adopting Mission Command*, 23.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24.

<sup>118</sup> Dupuy, *A Genius for War*, 62.

of subordinates. For example, “the bureaucratic top-down structure common to most militaries” can lead to disempowerment of subordinates as can a lack of discretion from higher commanders and leaders to achieve tasks, and a blame culture.<sup>119</sup>

### Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the historical background and theoretical perspectives of Mission Command as a command philosophy and has explored key leadership factors that enables its employment using three of Kouzes and Posner’s five effective leadership practices as a theoretical model. From the historical review, it is evident that *Auftragstaktik* did not suddenly materialize in the Prussian Army. Its emergence resulted from decades of cultural change that occurred as a result of the Prussian Army’s comprehensive defeat by Napoleon at Jena and Auerstedt in 1806. Moltke is credited for successfully institutionalizing *Auftragstaktik* in the Prussian Army. However, its adoption and employment were largely based upon the command culture of the Prussian Army with foundations of merit-based promotions, a through education system, and a well-regarded professional standing military. It is important to note that countless individual commanders have employed less rigid decentralized command approaches throughout history; however, these were based on individual preference – the Prusso-German phenomenon *Auftragstaktik* was unique as it was institutionalized holistically.

Interestingly history shows that *Auftragstaktik* is championed in well-trained, small and professional armies; however, it is often abandoned during large-scale conflicts – e.g., World War I/II – when either attrition of the standing forces or moderately skilled

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<sup>119</sup> Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 28.

replacements/volunteers are injected into standing organizations. This reinforces how important competent and capable leaders are in the context of employing decentralized command approaches.

The US Army's adoption of the principles of *Auftragstaktik*, which was later defined as Mission Command, occurred in a similar manner that the Prussians – post Jena and Auerstedt – and the Germans – post World War I – after defeat on the battlefield. The Doctrine, material and cultural reforms post the Vietnam War established a requirement for a more flexible command approach that suited a professional and all-volunteer military. However, Jörg Muth made the observation that the US Army may have copied and implemented elements of the Prusso-German concept of *Auftragstaktik*, but may not have replicated the command culture that enabled those forces to effortlessly implement the command approach.<sup>120</sup>

The importance of the leader in adopting and employing Mission Command cannot be understated. This study is focusing on the leadership related factors that may prevent alignment of practices in the US Army and the espoused theory contained in its doctrine. A prominent leadership model, based on over twenty years of research, was used to focus the analysis of what leadership related factors may affect the implementation of Mission Command in the US Army. From combining the review of literature and leadership model, a number of key themes/factors have been identified in this chapter that enabled the development of the survey instrument:

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<sup>120</sup> Muth, *Command Culture*, 209-211.

1. Secondary research question one: Does increased commander interference inhibit the application of Mission Command in the US Army? Inspire a shared vision component of the theoretical model:
  - 1a. Key theme one: Micromanagement.
  - 1b. Key theme two: Poor communication of commander's intent.
2. Secondary research question two: Does leader risk aversion inhibit the application of Mission Command in the US Army? Challenge the process component of the theoretical model:
  - 2a. Key theme three: Risk aversion.
  - 2b. Key theme four: Zero-defect mentality.
3. Secondary research question three: Does the disempowerment of subordinates inhibit the application of Mission Command in the US Army? Enable others to act component of the theoretical model:
  - 3a. Key theme five: lack of leader driven subordinate development.
  - 3b. Key theme six: blame culture.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

The purpose of the chapter is to outline the selected research model and provide an overview on how the research was conducted. The selected qualitative research methodology will be stated, prior to an explanation on the overall research model, followed by a step-by-step detailed breakdown of how the research was conducted. This chapter will conclude by providing an overview of the human research ethical considerations mandated by federal law and departmental policy.

#### Primary and Secondary Qualitative Research Questions

The primary qualitative research question for this study was: What are the primary leadership factors that influence US field grade officers' use of Mission Command within units and formations? The secondary research questions were:

1. Does increased commander interference inhibit the application of Mission Command in the US Army?
2. Does leader risk aversion inhibit the application of Mission Command in the US Army?
3. Does the disempowerment of subordinates inhibit the application of Mission Command in the US Army?

#### Qualitative Research Methodology

This study employed an exploratory qualitative case study to collect data from serving and retired US Army field ranking officers of the CGSC faculty. A mixed

methods qualitative survey instrument was used to solicit advice from the faculty on experience-based perceptions on the leadership related factors that impede the full adoption of Mission Command in the US Army in accordance with the key themes identified during chapter 2 of this study. Deductions and conclusions were determined through the identification of common themes through the analysis, comparing and contrasting of the data contained in the responses. MacNealy defined this form of qualitative research as ‘purposeful’ as the selected research methodology will likely collect data that will answer the research questions.<sup>121</sup>

The mixed methods qualitative survey gathered data from a diverse sample of participants from the CGSC faculty. A parallel sampling design was employed for the survey. Onwuegbuzie and Leech describe parallel sampling as “sampling strategies that facilitate credible comparisons of two or more different subgroups.”<sup>122</sup> Functionally, the research population was broken into three subgroups to enable data comparison and contrast: serving/ex-serving, combat arms/non-combat arms and CGSC faculty department (i.e. Department of Command and Leadership [DCL], Department of Joint and Interagency Military Operations [DJIMO], Department of Logistical and Resource Operations [DLRO] and Department of Tactics [DTAC]). Data saturation was achieved by “gather[ing] sufficient depth of information as a way of fully describing the

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<sup>121</sup> Mary MacNealy, *Strategies for empirical research in writing* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman: 2009), 157.

<sup>122</sup> Anthony Onwuegbuzie and Nancy Leech, “Sampling Designs in Qualitative Research: Making the Sampling Process More Public,” *The Qualitative Report* 12, no. 2 (June 2007), 239

phenomenon being studied.”<sup>123</sup> Predicting the amount of responses required to achieve data saturation can be difficult, but the initial assessment on the volume of responses required to achieve saturation are outlined in a study sample design in table 1.

Table 1. Recommended CGSC Faculty Subgroup Sampling Design

Experience	DCL	DJIMO	DLRO	DTAC	Total
Combat Arms	<i>n.</i> 2	<i>n.</i> 3	<i>n.</i> 0	<i>n.</i> 6	<i>n.</i> 11
Non-Combat Arms	<i>n.</i> 2	<i>n.</i> 3	<i>n.</i> 3	<i>n.</i> 3	<i>n.</i> 11
Total	<i>n.</i> 4	<i>n.</i> 6	<i>n.</i> 3	<i>n.</i> 9	<i>n.</i> 22

*Source:* Created by author.

The mixed methods qualitative survey instrument was exploratory – observations were made from the data collected. The survey contained multiple single choice and open-ended questions that align to the key themes identified during the literature review in the context of the leadership model applied to this study. Questions were general, which enabled participants to provide unconstrained insights into the topic, and neutral language was employed when constructing the questions. Themes were identified across multiple responses. Despite being a qualitative case study, some quantitative questions proceeded each open-ended question. This practice was employed to frame the common

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<sup>123</sup> Michelle O’Reilly and Nicola Parker, “Unsatisfactory Saturation: a critical exploration of the notion of saturated sample sizes in qualitative research,” *Qualitative Research* 13, no. 2 (2012), 195

themes identified and is not primary objective of the survey. The blank survey instrument completed by participants is contained in Appendix A.

#### Human Research Ethical Assurances

This study involved human subjects and complied with mandated federal laws and regulations, and departmental policy governing human research. Specifically, the research was conducted in an ethical fashion that minimized any potential risks to the human subjects. No personal information was collected or stored throughout the conduct of this study and human subjects participating remained anonymous, which also meant responses were more honest. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary and the participants received sufficient information about the specifics of the study. Further, an informed consent statement accompanied the survey. Finally, an anonymous paper survey was employed due to the anticipated low number of research subjects and the research methodology was approved by both the CGSC Human Research Protections Office and Quality Assurance Office. It is assessed that the risk posed by this study to human subject participants was very low.

#### Chronological Research Model

A visual representation of this study's research model is outlined in Figure 2.

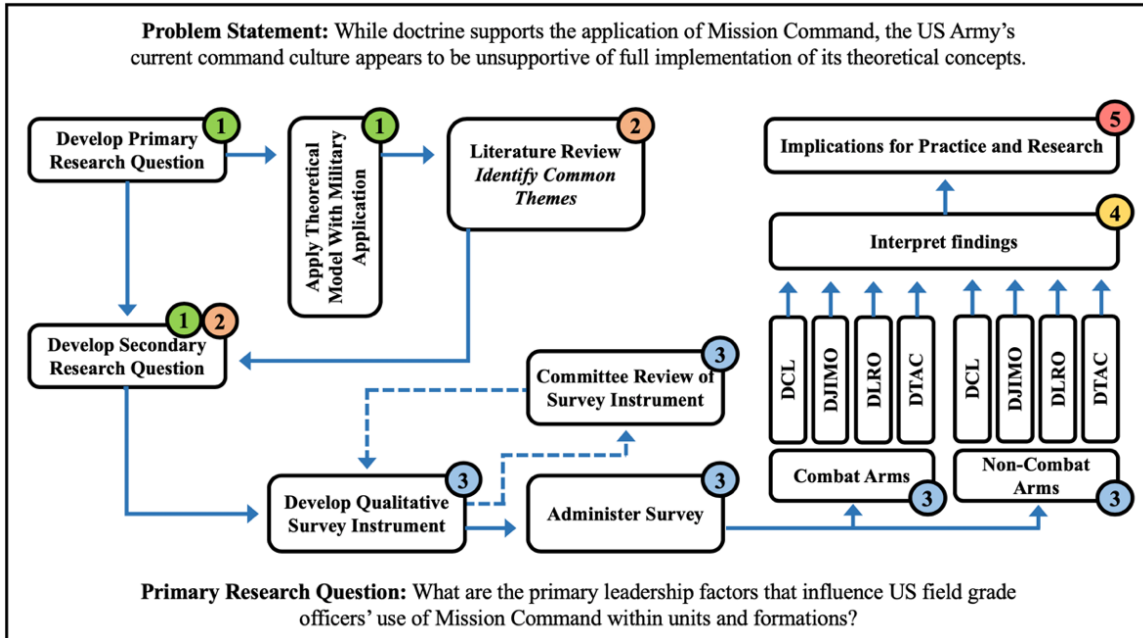


Figure 2. Research Model

Source: Created by author.

### Conclusion

In conclusion this study explored the observations of the CGSC faculty in the context of the key themes identified in the literature review. A mixed methods paper administered qualitative survey instrument was employed to source sufficient data to analyze and formulate deductions in chapter 4.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS

#### Introduction

Chapter 4 will present and interpret the actionable data collected from the research population. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the data collected via the survey instrument and identify themes to answer the primary and secondary research questions. This chapter will initially discuss the administration of the qualitative survey prior to discussing the findings employing the same structure as the qualitative survey instrument: importance of Mission Command; the effects of increased commander interference (secondary research question one), leader risk aversion (secondary research question two), and the disempowerment of subordinates (secondary research question three); and the greatest common factor analysis.

Key themes were drawn primarily from qualitative response data and were identified through employing a two-step process. First, *word repetition* – an informal qualitative data analysis technique – was employed to identify key themes related to the primary and secondary research questions. As a cognitive tool, word repetition enables researchers to triage the importance of qualitative data through identifying terms repeated across multiple responses. D’Andrade asserts the significance of a key term during qualitative research is directly linked to the number of times the word is repeated in separate responses.<sup>124</sup> Once key terms were identified, the *keywords-in-context* data

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<sup>124</sup> Roy D’Andrade, *The Development of Cognitive Anthropology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 287.

analysis method was employed to confirm identified themes. The keywords-in-context technique enables researchers to interpret responses to identify themes between key terms through analyzing the immediate context which key words used.<sup>125</sup> The identified themes were then analyzed in the context of the leadership factors inherent to the primary and secondary research questions. The quantitative data collected, from Likert-type scales, also supported the analysis of key qualitative data themes, outlined in Appendix B. The quantitative data will attempt to ascertain at what frequency specific leadership factors that influence the application of Mission Command, occur in the US Army and how difficult it is to remove the barriers preventing the full implementation of Mission Command.

Bias is inherent and unavoidable in qualitative research. The key biases intrinsic to this study were predictive bias, generated through the employment of the leadership model to derive the secondary research questions and subsequently the survey, and the confirmation bias relating to the author's inclination to interpret data in conformation with their perspectives, beliefs, and values. All efforts were made to compartmentalize bias throughout the conduct of the study. Bias was practically reduced through employing the above mentioned qualitative analytical techniques to aid in the objective interpretation of data to develop findings, and the author remained vigilant of and cognizant to mitigate bias during the design, administration, and analysis of the data collected from the survey instrument.

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<sup>125</sup> Nigel Fielding and Raymond Lee, *Computer Analysis and Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998): 53.

This chapter concludes by summarizing the findings in a manner that answers the primary research question, *What are the primary leadership factors that influence US field grade officers' use of Mission Command within units and formations?*

### Data Analysis

#### Data Collection

The qualitative survey was administered to the CGSC faculty in the period 09 – 23 December 2019, post receiving approval by the CGSC Human Research Protections Office (29 November 2019) and endorsement from the Quality Assurance Office (06 December 2019). Table 1 identified 22 survey responses (11 combat arms and 11 non-combat arms) were required to achieve data saturation. In total 35 surveys were completed by the CGSC faculty across all target departments and an overview of the research population demographic is outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. CGSC Faculty Survey Responses Demographic

Experience	DCL	DJIMO	DLRO	DTAC	Other	Total
Combat Arms	<i>n.</i> 1	<i>n.</i> 8	<i>n.</i> 1	<i>n.</i> 9	<i>n.</i> 1	<i>n.</i> 20
Non-Combat Arms	<i>n.</i> 2	<i>n.</i> 3	–	<i>n.</i> 3	<i>n.</i> 1	<i>n.</i> 9
Both	<i>n.</i> 1	<i>n.</i> 2	<i>n.</i> 3	–	–	<i>n.</i> 6
Total	<i>n.</i> 4	<i>n.</i> 13	<i>n.</i> 4	<i>n.</i> 12	<i>n.</i> 2 <sup>126</sup>	<i>n.</i> 35

*Source:* Created by author.

Twenty of the of the thirty-five respondents were combat arms, nine identified as non-combat arms and six respondents identified as having experience in both combat and non-combat occupations. Respondents were a mix of both retired and serving US Army officers with a period of service that ranged from 16.5 years to 30.5 years, and averaged twenty-one years, two months. It is assessed the number of responses received achieve data saturation and sufficient actionable data has been obtained to enable the answering of the primary and secondary research questions.

#### Importance of Mission Command

The first question outlined in the survey instrument – how important do you feel it is for units or formations in the US Army to employ Mission Command – employs a Likert-type scale to ascertain the relative value of employing Mission Command as a

<sup>126</sup> One respondent was from the Department of Distance Education and one respondent was from a satellite campus.

command approach from the perspective of the research population. The responses pertaining to the importance of Mission Command is outlined in Table 3.

Table 3. Responses – Importance of Mission Command

Likert-type Scale	Very Important	Important	Neither Important or Unimportant	Unimportant	Very Unimportant
Responses	<i>n.</i> 19	<i>n.</i> 12	–	–	<i>n.</i> 2

*Source:* Created by author.

Two respondents did not answer the question. However, 58 percent of those surveyed deemed the employment of Mission Command to be ‘very important’, whereas 36 percent stated the employment of the command approach as ‘important’. A small number of respondents, 6 percent, stated the employment of Mission Command was ‘very unimportant’. On the basis of the results it is fair to conclude that the majority of the research population – 94 percent – see value in US Army units and formations employing Mission Command as a command approach.

#### Secondary Research Question I – Increased Commander Interference

The first secondary research question outlined in the survey instrument, *does increased commander interference inhibit the application of Mission Command in the US Army*, is based on Kouzes and Posner’s “inspire a shared vision” effective leadership practice.<sup>127</sup> The review of literature in chapter 2 of this study identified

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<sup>127</sup> Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 12.

micromanagement and poor communication of commander’s intent as factors that may lead to increased commander’s interference. Subsequently, both factors were integrated into the survey instrument as focus areas. Data relating to this secondary research question was gathered through asking research participants an open-ended question: “Provide your thoughts on how leader interference inhibits the application of Mission Command in the US Army.” Five of the thirty-five respondents (14 percent) did not respond to the question; however, the key themes drawn from the tendered responses are outlined in table 4.

Table 4. Theme Identification – Increased Commander Interference Survey Responses

Key Terms (word repetition)	Key Themes (keywords-in-context)
Trust ( <i>n.</i> 12)	Lack of mutual trust results in micromanagement Micromanagement/leader interference reduces mutual trust Organizational climate/culture can affect trust
Risk Aversion ( <i>n.</i> 6)	Risk aversion is linked to organizational climate/culture Risk aversion reduces a commander’s inclination to trust subordinates A causative factor for risk aversion can be a lack of trust in subordinates
Micromanagement ( <i>n.</i> 5)	Commander interference is micromanagement Micromanagement reduces subordinate initiative
Commander’s Intent ( <i>n.</i> 2)	Poor intent reduces ability for subordinates to display initiative

Source: Created by author.

On the basis of the key themes identified through analyzing qualitative survey results it can be concluded that increased commander interference can inhibit the application of Mission Command in the US Army. Sufficient respondents identified increased commander's interference reduces mutual trust between leader and subordinate, and a subordinate commander's inclination to demonstrate initiative. Trust was the most common key theme among responses with 40 percent of the research population discussing the importance of trust, the impact commander interference has on trust or the relationship between trust and other key themes. ADP 6-0 identifies both mutual trust and disciplined initiative as key Mission Command principles, and a reduction in either subordinate initiative or trust would logically inhibit the effective application of the decentralized command approach in an organization.<sup>128</sup>

The data also identifies leader risk aversion as a causative factor that influences leaders' inclination to interfere with the actions and process of subordinates. The emergence of this factor as a key theme was unexpected in this data set as risk aversion is a focus area of the next secondary research question. A small portion of the research population (17 percent) identified micromanagement as a common form of commander interference, which was an expected outcome as micromanagement was identified as a focus area during the literature review. Specifically, quantitative data states 55 percent of respondents believe US Army leaders micromanage 'frequently' or 'very frequently'. Surprisingly, poor or insufficient commander's intent received low attention (6 percent) in qualitative responses despite being identified as a focus area in the literature review.

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<sup>128</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, 1-7.

The low word repetition frequency of poor or insufficient commander's intent suggests respondents did not consider the focus area as important as other factors in the context of the secondary research question two.

#### Secondary Research Question II – Leader Risk Aversion

The second secondary research question outlined in the survey instrument, *does leader risk aversion inhibit the application of Mission Command in the US Army*, is based on Kouzes and Posner's "challenge the process" effective leadership practice.<sup>129</sup> The review of literature in chapter 2 of this study identified risk aversion and zero-defect mentality as factors, integrated into the survey instrument as focus areas, that may lead to a lack of leader risk acceptance. The data relating to this secondary research question was generated by asking the research participants the open-ended question: "Provide your thoughts on how a leader's approach to risk acceptance effects the application of Mission Command in the US Army." Note: eight of the thirty-five respondents (29 percent) failed to respond to the qualitative question. The key themes drawn from the other twenty-seven responses are contained in table 5.

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<sup>129</sup> Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 13.

Table 5. Theme Identification – Leader Risk Aversion Survey Responses

Key Terms (word repetition)	Key Themes (keywords-in-context)
Risk ( <i>n.</i> 14)	Mutual trust is required for risk acceptance Leader risk aversion effects subordinates’ ability to accept risk and display initiative Leader risk acceptance represents a healthy command climate
Trust ( <i>n.</i> 4)	A zero-defect culture causes leader risk aversion Risk aversion reduces leader inclination to trust subordinates
Zero-defect ( <i>n.</i> 4)	A zero-defect climate reduces subordinate initiative Fear of repercussions reduces risk taking by subordinate commanders

*Source:* Created by author.

The key themes identified from the qualitative survey data indicate that leader risk aversion can inhibit the application of Mission Command in the US Army. Specifically, the general view of the research population is risk aversion inhibits the application of Mission Command through reducing subordinate commanders’ inclination to demonstrate initiative and accept risk. This finding is similar to the previous secondary research question to the extent that certain leader behaviors (in this case risk aversion) affect subordinates’ freedom of action and thus the subordinate organizations ability to effectively practice Mission Command.

The chapter 2 literature review identified risk aversion and zero-defect mentality as focus areas for this secondary research question. Both focus areas were raised by those surveyed; however, a higher percentage (52 percent) of respondents focused on risk aversion as opposed to zero-defect mentality (15 percent) during the qualitative component of the survey. The focus on risk aversion may be attributable to the view that

zero-defect mentality is generally considered a causative factor to risk aversion, whereas risk aversion is a leadership behavior that directly affects the application of Mission Command in military organizations. Note that a zero-defect culture/climate may be a reason for leader risk aversion; however, multiple other reasons were identified by respondents, e.g., leaders not being comfortable with operational complexity, that reduce risk acceptance. The quantitative data suggested that leaders are affected by zero-defect mentality (80 percent) in the US Army at a higher frequency than risk aversion (54 percent). The same data states that the respondents consider risk aversion more difficult to overcome (97 percent) than zero-defect mentality (88 percent).

Mutual trust was once again identified as a key theme in the qualitative survey responses and was mentioned by 15 percent of the respondents. The data suggests that trust is an important factor that links the leader to the subordinate in the context of Mission Command. Specifically, a number of responses identified risk-averse leaders or leaders that employ a zero-defect mentality decrease the trust with their respective subordinates, who become less willing to employ initiative due to fear of punishment or making mistakes.

### Secondary Research Question III – Disempowerment of Subordinates

The final secondary research question outlined in the survey instrument, *does the disempowerment of subordinates inhibit the application of Mission Command in the US Army*, is based on Kouzes and Posner’s “enable others to act” effective leadership practice.<sup>130</sup> The review of literature identified disempowerment of subordinates may

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<sup>130</sup> Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 13.

occur as a result of lack of leader driven subordinate development and blame culture. The data relating to this secondary research question was gathered through asking research participants an open-ended question: “Provide your opinion on how subordinate disempowerment affects the application of Mission Command in the US Army.” Eight of the thirty-five respondents (29 percent) did not respond to the question. However, the key themes drawn from the tendered responses are outlined in table 6.

The key themes outlined in the qualitative data indicate a relationship exists between the disempowerment of subordinates and sub-optimal application of Mission Command in the US Army. However, the responses suggest “disempowerment” is a poor descriptor and generalized term that encompasses a number of specific factors and leader behaviors that adversely affect subordinates’ ability to employ Mission Command. For example, the research identified a diverse range of behaviors and factors that result in the disempowerment of subordinates including – lack of trust, blame culture, risk aversion and a poor learning culture within an organization. The likely reason for these diverse range of results, despite the two focus areas, is that disempowerment is the end result of other factors, e.g., increased commander interference and risk aversion, that adversely affect the employment and application of Mission Command within an organization.

Table 6. Theme Identification – Disempowerment of Subordinates Survey Responses

Key Terms (word repetition)	Key Themes (keywords-in-context)
Disempowerment ( <i>n.</i> 10)	Subordinates will not seize the initiative or act decisively if they are not empowered A lack of trust results in disempowerment Empowerment and alignment to common purpose must be embedded in organization culture or blame culture can permeate Disempowered subordinates achieve mediocre results and do the minimum
Trust ( <i>n.</i> 7)	Lack of mutual trust disempowers subordinates Less trust = less initiative = less empowerment
Learning Culture ( <i>n.</i> 3)	Disempowerment deprives subordinates of learning from experience People learn and grow from mistakes, but cannot if a blame culture exists
Risk Aversion ( <i>n.</i> 2)	Risk aversion is a leader behaviour that disempowers subordinates

*Source:* Created by author.

Surprisingly, one of the focus areas identified during the literature review – lack of leader driven subordinate development – did not feature once during the qualitative responses. The quantitative data supports this notion as lack of leader driven subordinate development scored the lowest frequency metrics out of the six focus areas across the three secondary research questions. Instead 12 percent of respondents identified a lack of learning culture as the more appropriate source if disempowerment relating to professional development and education. Trust was once again identified as a key theme in the qualitative survey responses and was mentioned by 26 percent of the respondents. The data suggests trust is an important factor in the context of employment of Mission Command as it has been a common theme throughout all the secondary research question

qualitative responses. Further, risk/risk aversion was identified in a small number (7 percent) of responses also establishing a common theme throughout all secondary research questions.

#### Greatest Common Factor Analysis

Section four of the survey instrument provided an opportunity for respondents to summarize and prioritize their opinions about the factors that most inhibit the application of Mission Command in the US Army. The premise of this section was that it would yield quantitative and qualitative data supporting the satisfying of the primary and secondary research questions. The summary comprises of two sections: one quantitative and one qualitative in nature. First, the research population was asked what specific factor/s most inhibit the application of Mission Command in the US Army. The six focus areas from the secondary research questions were listed, as was an option for respondents to select their own factor. All thirty-five research participants provided an answer for the quantitative element of section four. The second aspect of the survey summary was an open-ended question that asked respondents: ‘Why do you think that your selected factor inhibits the successful application of Mission Command the most.’ A total of thirty-one respondents (89 percent) provided a response to the qualitative component of section four. The quantitative results are outlined in figure 3.

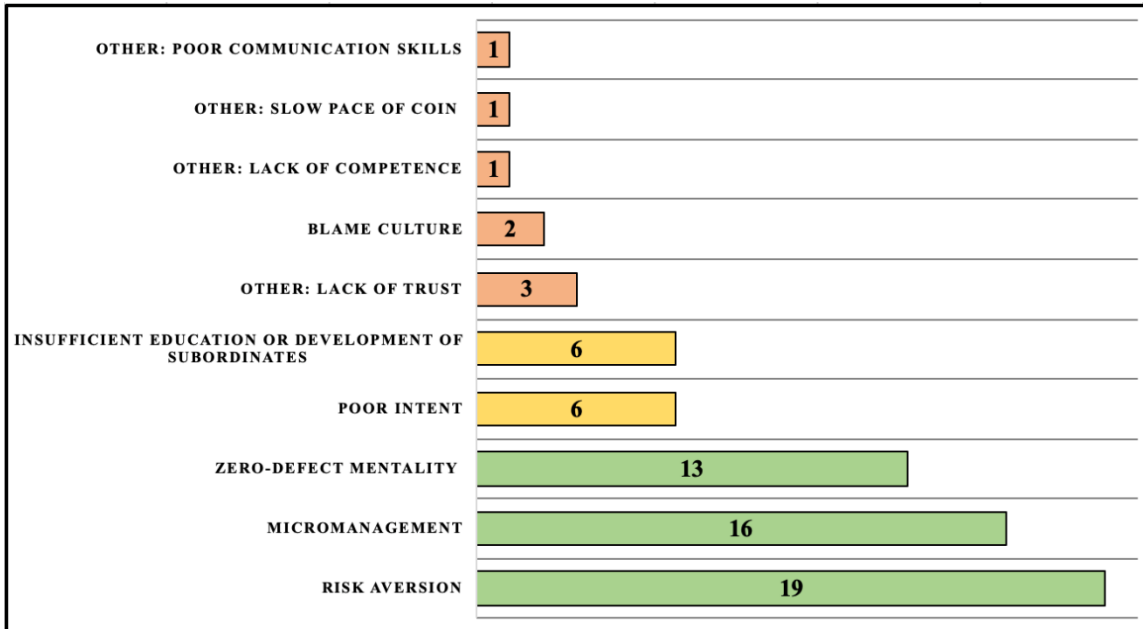


Figure 3. Summary Quantitative Survey Responses

Source: Created by author.

Respondents could select multiple factors in the quantitative question. The data collected suggests respondents consider risk aversion (55 percent), micromanagement (46 percent) and zero-defect mentality (37 percent) as the top three factors that inhibit the application of Mission Command in the US Army. A total of six respondents (17 percent) selected the combination of risk aversion, micromanagement, and zero-defect mentality.

Lack of trust was chosen by three separate respondents or 8 percent of the research population. The low selection of what has been a dominant theme through the qualitative components of the secondary research questions is likely due to ‘lack of trust’ not being an option for respondents to select on the survey instrument. Further, the data collected throughout the study indicates trust is not viewed as an inhibitor but an enabler of Mission Command by the research population.

Table 7. Theme Identification – Greatest Common Factor Survey Responses

Key Terms (word repetition)	Key Themes (keywords-in-context)
Risk Aversion ( <i>n.</i> 14)	<p>Risk aversion, zero-defect mentality and micromanagement all stifle subordinate freedom of action</p> <p>Risk averse leaders often develop a zero-defect mentality</p> <p>Risk aversion leads to zero-defect mentality, which encourages micromanagement</p> <p>Micromanagement is applied by risk averse leaders</p> <p>Micromanagement is caused by leader risk aversion, lack of faith in subordinates' abilities and wider organizational zero-defect culture</p>
Micromanagement ( <i>n.</i> 13)	<p>Lower echelons cannot employ Mission Command if higher echelons micromanage</p> <p>Micromanagement can be caused by leader hubris</p> <p>Lower operational tempo of COIN / stability operations has enabled a climate of leaders</p> <p>Zero-defect culture produces risk averse leaders and causes lower echelon commanders to micromanage</p>
Zero-defect ( <i>n.</i> 9)	<p>Careerism leads to oppressive command methods – zero-defect mentality and micromanagement</p> <p>Toxic leaders stem from zero-defect thinking</p> <p>Absence of trust contributes to micromanagement, risk aversion, zero-defect mentality and blame culture</p> <p>Better trained subordinates are easier to trust – think SOF</p>
Trust ( <i>n.</i> 4)	<p>Lack of trust influences commanders to micromanage to avoid risk, which can lead to a zero-defect culture</p> <p>Leaders are the single point of failure in employing Mission Command</p>

*Source:* Created by author.

The qualitative key themes drawn from section four of the survey instrument are outlined in table 7. The qualitative data collected during section four of the survey instrument aligned with the top three factors drawn from the quantitative data and outlined in figure 3 – risk aversion, micromanagement and zero-defect mentality. The key

themes outlined in figure 3 were generally discussed by respondents in three ways. First, the majority of respondents attempted to identify and explain the causative factors – the why – for their selective factors that inhibit Mission Command. Second, respondents who selected more than one factor that inhibits the application of Mission Command attempted to explain the relationship between the difference factors. Lastly, some respondents attempted to explain certain factors through a lens employing leadership behaviors and organizational culture.

### Findings

The next section will employ a combination of collected qualitative data, the information outlined in the literature and other supporting evidence to present the key findings drawn from this study. The exploratory nature of this study limits the ability to deliver finite answers to the research questions; further, answers or likely findings were not predictable at the commencement of this research project. The findings outlined below are best viewed as repeating themes across multiple responses, fused with existing literature, to form a preliminary basis of understanding of a complex issue. There are four key findings relating to this study:

1. There are three inhibitors of Mission Command: micromanagement, risk aversion, and zero-defect mentality.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> An inhibitor is “a substance that reduces or suppresses the activity of another substance.” *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “Inhibitor,” accessed March 28, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/inhibitor>. For the purposes of this study an inhibitor is a factor or behavior that negatively interferes with or degrades the employment of Mission Command within a certain organization.

2. There are two oxidizers of Mission Command: trust and commander's intent.<sup>132</sup>
3. Leaders choose to employ Mission Command.
4. Mission Command is optimized as an output of culture.

#### Finding I – The Three Inhibitors of Mission Command

This finding is based on the quantitative and qualitative data collected in the survey instrument and answers the primary research question. The actionable data collected strongly supports the notion three main factors inhibit the application of Mission Command in the US Army: micromanagement, risk aversion, and zero-defect mentality. If a leader micromanages, is risk averse or possesses a zero-defect mentality within a US Army organization then Mission Command, as defined by doctrine, will not be employed to an optimal standard. The premise of this finding is simple: one or any combination of the three factors cannot be present for Mission Command to be effectively applied in The US Army. The data collected indicated there are a number of other factors that inhibit or degrade the application of Mission Command in the US Army; however, the evidence indicated the above specified factors affect the employment of Mission Command the most.

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<sup>132</sup> An oxidizer is “an agent used to support the combustion of a . . . propellant.” *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “Oxidizer,” accessed March 28, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/inhibitor>. For the purposes of this study an oxidizer is a factor essential for the continued application and sustainment of Mission Command within a certain organization.

The survey responses suggested these factors inhibit Mission Command as they ultimately result in the disempowerment of subordinates and conflict with the seven principles of the decentralized command approach as outlined in ADP 6-0.<sup>133</sup> How these three factors lead to disempowerment and the relationship between the three factors cannot be defined to a finite level of detail employing the data collected. For example, a number of survey responses established relationships between micromanagement, risk aversion, and zero-defect mentality and suggested zero-defect culture creates leader risk aversion, which results in increased leader interference through micromanagement. However, there is a wide range of other factors that cause the identified inhibiting factors. It is true that zero-defect mentality can be a causative factor for leader risk aversion, but so can a range of other factors. The same can be said for the suggestion that risk aversion can act as a causative factor for micromanagement. However, micromanagement can be caused by a number of unrelated factors like increased situational awareness gained from digital command and control systems, the slow tempo of the contemporary operating environment and leader hubris. This study has not gained sufficient data to ascertain causative factors for the identified inhibitors. The ultimate cause of micromanagement, risk aversion, and zero-defect mentality may be unknown, but what is evident from the collected data is these three factors – singularly or operating in concert – inhibit Mission Command in the US Army.

The identification of the three prominent inhibitors to Mission Command conforms to the themes identified through analyzing the Kouzes and Posner theoretical

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<sup>133</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, 1-5.

leadership model outlined in chapter 1 and chapter 2 of this paper.<sup>134</sup> The model predicted that micromanagement would adversely affect effective leadership practice two – inspire a shared vision – and the presence of both risk aversion and zero-defect mentality would inhibit effective leadership practice three – challenge the process. However, the model also identified other inhibitors, such as poor communication of commander’s intent, lack of leader driven subordinate development, and blame culture that were identified in some responses, but not at sufficient frequency to establish a trend or theme.

#### Finding II – The Two Oxidizers of Mission Command

This finding is based on the quantitative and qualitative data collected in the survey instrument and was unexpected. The actionable data supported the view that two factors are required to enable the successful application of Mission Command in the US Army: trust and commander’s intent. This finding is similar to the previous finding; however, this finding asserts that both of above specified characteristics must be present for Mission Command to be established and maintained in an organization. Trust was a dominative key theme amongst all primary and secondary research questions in the survey instrument and is viewed as an essential element for leaders to push power down to empower subordinates.

Commander’s intent was not as prominent as trust throughout the survey responses; however, was present enough to establish a theme warranting its inclusion as an oxidizer to Mission Command. Six respondents, or 19 percent of the research

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<sup>134</sup> Kouzes and Barry Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 13.

population, mentioned commander's intent in section four, but it was only mentioned a total of four times throughout the qualitative responses in section three of the survey instrument. The low occurrence rate of an anticipated key theme is likely due to the difference in how commander's intent is functionally employed at the operational and tactical level in the US Army to drive the operations process. Specifically, at the Divisional level, and below, sufficient information is provided from higher to enable the employment of the Military Decision Making Process for decision making and planning. However, the Operational Design and Army Design methodologies are generally employed at Corps level and above due to lack of information and the abstract nature of problems at the high tactical/low operation level. Commander's intent is essential for the conduct decision making and planning in abstract, dynamic and uncertain environments. The low importance placed on commander's intent during this research may suggest that the research population may not have adequate exposure at the operational level of war to realize it's functional importance; however, sufficient data was not collected to verify this assertion. Therefore, commander's intent is important as a pre-requirement for the decentralized nature of Mission Command in dynamic and uncertain environments as it enables subordinates to seize the initiative, exploit time sensitive battlefield opportunities, and ensure that operations are planned and executed in concurrence with higher guidance.

Both factors being essential for Mission Command to function is supported by ADP 6-0 that identified both as principles to the decentralized command approach.<sup>135</sup> Further, these findings conform to Chris Fussell's four drivers of effective teams – trust,

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<sup>135</sup> Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 13.

common purpose, shared consciousness, and empowered execution.<sup>136</sup> The data collected is in-line with and supports the US Army Doctrine and the theoretical leadership model;<sup>137</sup> however, was not an objective of the research and was an unexpected, however insightful and important, finding.

### Finding III – Leaders Choose to Employ Mission Command

This finding is based on a combination of information identified in the literature review and data collected in the survey instrument. An underlying assumption of this research endeavor is Mission Command, as defined in doctrine, is not properly implemented in the US Army. Nelson identified the commander’s inclination and behavior as the most important variables for the successful implementation of Mission Command.<sup>138</sup> This line of thinking asserts that a key barrier to entry to effectively employing Mission Command is a leader’s decision to employ it. The key themes identified in the survey instrument responses support this notion as a large number of the factors identified that inhibit or enable Mission Command are based on the decisions, behaviors, and policy made/exhibited/implemented by leaders.

The previous two findings identified certain factors inhibit and sustain Mission Command in an organization. It is the responsibility of leaders to ensure that the

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<sup>136</sup> Chris Fussell, *One Mission: How to Build a Team of Teams* (New York: Pegin Random House, 2017), 1-2.

<sup>137</sup> Specifically, trust relates to Kouzes and Posner ‘s effective leadership practice two, inspire a shared vision and commander’s intent (represented as ‘vision’) relates to effective leadership practice four, enable others to act.

<sup>138</sup> Nelson, “*Auftragstaktik: A Case for Decentralized Battle,*” 29.

command climate feeds a healthy organizational culture appropriate to empower subordinates to seize the initiative, take calculated risks, and operate with relative freedom of action.<sup>139</sup> Through *primary embedding mechanisms* (e.g., leader behavior) and *secondary articulation and reinforcement mechanisms* (e.g., systems and procedures) a leader ultimately establishes a command climate that is conducive or does not support the application of Mission Command.<sup>140</sup> The survey responses identified multiple leadership related behaviors and factors that can stifle the employment of mission command. Doctrine outlines the requirement to employ Mission Command within the US Army; however, this study found it is ultimately up to the leader of an organization to employ the decentralized command approach.

#### Finding IV – Mission Command Is Optimized as an Output of Culture

This finding is based on information identified in the literature review but reinforced by the collected qualitative data. Mission Command is a rebranded and contemporary version of *Auftragstaktik*, the Prusso-German command philosophy that was developed gradually over a century to meet the unique leadership needs of Prussia/Germany in Europe. *Auftragstaktik* was never defined in detail or prescribed to Prussian and German leaders, and was only given a name in the memoirs of prominent

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<sup>139</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, 1-5.

<sup>140</sup> Edgar Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 246.

German Field Marshalls after the war.<sup>141</sup> Von Moltke and von Seeckt both identified the requirement for increased leader empowerment and initiative, and successfully embedded the command philosophy into the Prusso-German military institution. This was achieved through valuing specific leadership traits that over time gradually embedded a command climate into the overall culture of the military institution.<sup>142</sup> Jörg Muth reinforced this notion through identifying that *Auftragstaktik* conformed to the military culture of the Prusso-German military institution, making it an output of culture.<sup>143</sup>

The US military has taken a different approach to implementing Mission Command. As opposed to the Prusso-German experience of gradual implementation and development of the concept, the US Army identified the need to increase subordinate initiative to enable the execution of the maneuver warfare centric Active Defense doctrine and AirLand Battle operating concept. As a result the US Army imported the concept of Mission Command from *Auftragstaktik*. These concepts gradually morphed into FM 6-0, *Mission Command*, in 2003.<sup>144</sup> The release of the prescriptive concept attempted to reverse engineer the process of instilling the requisite leadership traits and values into leaders, but largely ignored the command climate or culture of the US Army. Jörg Muth also supported this concept by asserting the US Army may have copied and

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<sup>141</sup> Manstein, *Lost Victories*; Erwin Rommel, *The Rommel Papers*, ed. Basil Liddell-Hart, trans. Paul Findlay (New York: Da Capo Press, 1953); Heinz Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, trans. Constantine Fitzgibbon (New York: Da Capo Press, 1952).

<sup>142</sup> Vandergriff, “How the Germans Defined Auftragstaktik” 55.

<sup>143</sup> Muth, *Command Culture*, 209-211.

<sup>144</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, FM 6-0, viii.

implemented the key elements of *Auftragstaktik*, but ultimately failed to fully understand the concept's complex inception and did not replicate the command climate or culture required to apply the command approach.<sup>145</sup> This finding provides a potential explanation as to why Mission Command is not being implemented in the US Army in accordance to doctrine and in some cases to a sub-optimal level: Mission Command doctrine and the concepts implementation in the US Army does not take into consideration the unique culture and sub-cultures of the US Army, which is affected by a number of key factors that inhibit the decentralized command and control approach.

### Summary

In summary this chapter analyzed and presented the key findings and observations from the data collected during this exploratory research study. The findings and interpretation of the research evidence will be explained and presented in the context of the research questions in chapter 5.

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<sup>145</sup> Muth, *Command Culture*, 209-211.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

This chapter will employ the collected data to answer the primary and secondary research questions, outline the significance of the research undertaking and will make recommendations on further lines of inquiry for the field of study. The purpose of chapter 5 is to present the research findings obtained from the mixed methods survey administered to the faculty members of CGSC.

#### Research Questions – Answers

The primary qualitative research question for this study was: *What are the primary leadership factors that influence US field grade officers' use of Mission Command within units and formations?* The secondary research questions were:

1. *Does increased commander interference inhibit the application of Mission Command in the US Army?*
2. *Does leader risk aversion inhibit the application of Mission Command in the US Army?*
3. *Does the disempowerment of subordinates inhibit the application of Mission Command in the US Army?*

To answer the primary qualitative research question, the collected data from the CGSC faculty strongly supported that a number of primary leadership factors influence the use of Mission Command in the US Army. Specifically, micromanagement, risk aversion, and zero-defect mentality were identified as key inhibitors of Mission

Command in the US Army as these factors affect a leader's inclination to employ the decentralized command approach and can contribute to the disempowerment of subordinate leaders. Mission Command cannot flourish in an organization that possesses a command climate that supports micromanagement, risk aversion, or a zero-defect mentality. On the other hand, the research identified two oxidizers that must be present within an organization to implement and sustain a Mission Command culture. Trust is essential for a leader to delegate authority and empower subordinates to employ initiative, take risks, and exploit fleeting battlefield opportunities. Commander's intent is also a valuable tool whilst employing Mission Command, but was assessed to be more important when operating in dynamic and uncertain environments. The identification of specific inhibitors and oxidizers are related to observations and opinions by members of the CGSC faculty serving over the past thirty years. These contemporary factors may presently inhibit and sustain Mission Command but may disappear or solidify in the future. This study identified that the command climate and organizational culture/sub-culture will have a long-term effect on the ongoing implementation and enduring employment of Mission Command in the US Army.

The data collected was also sufficient to answer the secondary research questions. The detailed answers to the secondary research questions are outlined in chapter 4; however, a central tendency in the responses from the research population were increased commander interference, leader risk aversion, and the disempowerment of subordinates inhibit the application of Mission Command in the US Army. Specifically, the identified behaviors all reduce the mutual trust between leader and subordinate, and a subordinate commander's inclination to demonstrate initiative and accept risk.

The majority of the data supported the answering of the research questions; however, isolated instances of the collected data and analysis ran counter to the theoretical model and what the literature review in chapter 2 suggested. For example, some responses identified the competence and certain character traits of leaders as inhibitor to Mission Command. Other responses identified the Army, as an institution, inhibits Mission Command on a greater and more profound scale than individual leaders through its career management procedures and the organizations overall *enterprise approach*. Further, some responses identified more contemporary factors, e.g., the slow pace of recent counterinsurgency and stability operations in the middle-east, new digital communication suits, and globalization, as other impediments to the application of Mission Command. The rationale for the variance from the theoretical model is simple: the employment of Mission Command is affected by a plethora of internal and external factors. This study solely focused on the factors that relate to the leader – the key agent in employing the decentralized approach.

### Implications of Research

The findings of this study indicate US Army doctrine supports the application of Mission Command; however, the organizations' current command culture appears to be unsupportive of full implementation of its theoretical concepts. A combination of the literature review and the collected data identified Mission Command, like its Prusso-German processor *Auftragstaktik*, requires a certain organization culture to function appropriately. The approach and gradual implementation of *Auftragstaktik* by the Prussians and Germans occurred over a century and meant the concept matured in a manner that ensured alignment with the Prusso-German command culture. Unfortunately,

the swift implementation of Mission Command doctrine in the US Army has created a gap between the theory (contained in doctrine) and ability of leaders to practically employ the decentralized command and control approach within existing systems, processes, and management frameworks within the US Army.

This study identified a number of cultural barriers – micromanagement, risk aversion, and zero-defect mentality – preventing the optimal implementation and application of Mission Command in the US Army. Further, leader inclination is essential for the adoption of Mission Command through delegation of authority and empowerment of subordinates. The perception of a mismatch of US Army culture and Mission Command theory seems to form a sufficient motivator for leaders to not fully implement the approach.

The key research findings raise valid questions regarding the suitability of Mission Command in the context of unique command climate and culture of the US Army and US social norms. Specifically, is the current use of the decentralized command and control approach enhancing Army's effectiveness of combat force elements in dynamic, contested, and complex environments, or is it increasing friction among leaders and subordinates? The data collected during this exploratory study suggests overwhelming support for the use of Mission Command in the US Army; however, the current version of Mission Command has more in common with Prusso-German historical theories as opposed to the espoused culture of the US Army.

The evolution of the US Army culture to being more supportive of Mission Command is achievable. First, leaders need to establish a command climate through employing primary embedding mechanisms that support the employment of Mission

Command. Secondary, the US Army institution needs to align its various secondary embedding mechanisms (e.g., policy, procedures, and systems) to support and reinforce an overview organizational culture supportive of Mission Command. Mission Command theory needs to become the central theme to US Army leadership doctrine. Currently, the US Army's capstone leadership doctrine ADP 6-22 *Leadership* and Army Regulation 600-100 *Profession and Leadership Policy* only contain the phrase "Mission Command" three times and twice, respectively.<sup>146</sup> This lack of synergy with doctrine and the Army's primary command and control approach may undermine a Mission Command supportive culture. Also, the officer career management system needs to be evolved to discriminate between officers that have demonstrated the attributes and behaviors in-line with the decentralized approach and those would have not. The Army's current criteria for promotion and selection for important positions,<sup>147</sup> and the evaluation criteria on the current Officer Evaluation Report largely exclude reference or inference to Mission Command.<sup>148</sup> These various career management tools and doctrine are currently a barrier

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<sup>146</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, ADP 6-22.

<sup>147</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3, *Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Directorate, 2014), 51. DA PAM 600-3 states that the following criteria are employed for selections and promotions: performance, embodiment of Army Values, professional attributes and ethics, integrity and character, assignment history and professional development, military bearing and physical fitness, attitude/dedication/service, military and civilian education and training, and concern for soldiers and families.

<sup>148</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, Department of the Army Pamphlet 623-3, *Evaluation Report System* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Directorate, 2014), 3-12. Officer Evaluation Reports employ character, presence, intellect, leads, develops and achieves (in accordance with the Army leadership requirements model outlined in ADP 6-22).

to the selection of officers capable of establishing a Mission Command culture in teams, units, and formations. Revising the US Army's various cultural secondary embedding mechanisms would create more supportive Mission Command culture.

### Recommendations for Future Research

The exploratory nature of this research undertaking has provided a strong basis for the conduct of future research into the inhibitors to the employment of Mission Command in the US Army. Suggested areas for future research undertakings are outlined below:

1. What factors cause leaders to micromanage subordinates and what actions can be taken to reduce micromanagement tendencies in the US Army?
2. What factors cause leader risk aversion and what actions can be taken to reduce a command climate of risk aversion in the US Army?
3. What are the factors that cause a zero-defect climate/culture and what actions can be taken to remove zero-defect mentality from the US Army?
4. Does the historical command culture of the US Army better support a centralized control decentralized execution approach to command and control within the organization?
5. Is Mission Command a viable command and control approach at the operational level of war?
6. Are different organizations within the US Army better suited to employ Mission Command due to their respective role and function, i.e. airborne, airmobile and Special Operation Forces?

7. Does unprecedented situational awareness for commanders, obtained through emergent surveillance and intelligence capabilities, increase a leader's inclination to centralize command?
8. Do better and more networked digital communication systems increase commander inference?
9. Does the emergence of the Strategic Corporal phenomenon where subordinate decisions can have significant impacts on operations at all levels of war decrease leaders' willingness to delegate authority and empower subordinates?
10. How has recent experience conducting Stability and Counter Violent Extremist operations in the Middle-East shaped the command culture of the US Army?
11. Does the US Army need the predictive and time-consuming Military Decision Making Process and an intent based approach to military operations?
12. Is Mission Command only suited to small, well-trained professional militaries?
13. What are the factors that support or inhibit Mission Command in other armies that incorporate elements of *Auftragstaktik* into their doctrine?

### Conclusion

This paper asserted the US Army has failed to fully implement mission command; its primary command approach to conducting Unified Land Operations. This study inverted a prominent leadership theoretical model to identify likely obstacles for the

successful implementation of mission command and employed an exploratory mixed methods survey to draw on the experience and knowledge of the CGSC faculty to generate data. Key themes were drawn from the collected data and identified a number of contemporary factors that cannot be present (micromanagement, risk aversion, and zero-defect mentality) and must be present (trust and commander's intent) to enable the application of mission command in the US Army. The research undertaking also emphasized the central importance of the commander or leader as an agent of mission command who must display trust and delegate authority downwards to empower subordinates to exercise initiative. Finally, the study reinforced the importance of ensuring mission command is integrated within the unique command climate and organizational culture of the US Army. This study asserted that there is currently a misalignment between mission command doctrine and the command culture of the US Army; alignment can only be achieved by evolving either the theoretical concepts that underpin mission command or the wider culture of the organization.

## APPENDIX A – QUALITATIVE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

An inquiry into the leadership factors that influence field grade officers' use of Mission Command within The US Army

Major Alex Edgar – Australian Army  
Command and General Staff Officer Course  
Human subjects research assigned protocol approval number 20-001

**Research Objective:** The research objective is to identify obstacles for the successful application of Mission Command in the US Army.

**Research Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to explore the leadership factors that affect the application of Mission Command in the US Army.

**Research Design:** Research data will be collected from current and former US Army field ranking officers relating to the application of Mission Command in the organization. Participation in the research project is entirely voluntary and participants can quit their involvement at any time without penalty. Research data will be collected anonymously through a mixed methods paper qualitative survey. The researcher will not know your identity or attempt to deduce your identity. Research information will be consolidated and presented in a manner that is non-attributable to research participants. No personally identifiable information will be collected or stored.

### **Section 1: Definitions:**

**Mission Command** – Mission command is the Army's approach to command and control that empowers subordinate decision making and decentralized execution appropriate to the situation.

**Risk Aversion** – An excessive desire to avoid risk at virtually any cost.

**Micromanagement** – Is to manage with excessive control or attention to detail.

**Blame Culture** – A set of attitudes such as those within a particular business or organization, that are characterized by an unwillingness to take risks or to accept responsibility for mistakes due to a fear of criticism or prosecution.

**Zero-Defect Mentality** – Is an attitude, based on careerism, where leaders do not tolerate mistakes in subordinates.

**Section 2: Importance of Mission Command**

1. How important do you feel it is for units or formations in the US Army to employ Mission Command?

<i>Very Important</i>	<i>Important</i>	<i>Neither important or unimportant</i>	<i>Unimportant</i>	<i>Very Unimportant</i>
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**Section 3: Leadership factors that inhibit the application of Mission Command in the US Army**

Directions: Based on your experiences, please indicate how frequently each of the following leadership behaviours and practices occur in US Army organizations, how difficult to overcome they are when they are present and your personal perceptions how they affect the successful application of Mission Command.

1. How frequently do leaders micromanage subordinates?

<i>Very Rarely</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Frequent</i>	<i>Very Frequent</i>
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2. How difficult is the establishment of mutual trust between subordinates and overcontrolling leaders?

<i>Very Easy</i>	<i>Easy</i>	<i>Neither Easy nor Difficult</i>	<i>Difficult</i>	<i>Very Difficult</i>
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3. How frequently do leaders provide poor or insufficient intent to support the application of Mission Command?

<i>Very Rarely</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Frequent</i>	<i>Very Frequent</i>
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4. How difficult is it for subordinates to gain shared understanding without adequate commander’s intent?

<i>Very Easy</i>	<i>Easy</i>	<i>Neither Easy nor Difficult</i>	<i>Difficult</i>	<i>Very Difficult</i>
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5. In the space below, please provide your thoughts on how leader interference inhibits the application of Mission Command in the US Army:

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6. How frequently are leaders too-risk adverse to effectively employ Mission Command?

<i>Very Rarely</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Frequent</i>	<i>Very Frequent</i>
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7. How difficult is it for subordinates to exercise disciplined initiative in a risk adverse organization?

<i>Very Easy</i>	<i>Easy</i>	<i>Neither Easy nor Difficult</i>	<i>Difficult</i>	<i>Very Difficult</i>
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8. How frequently does zero-defect mentality reduce a leader's inclination to employ Mission Command?

<i>Very Rarely</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Frequent</i>	<i>Very Frequent</i>
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9. How difficult is it for subordinates to take risks in an organization with a zero-defect climate?

<i>Very Easy</i>	<i>Easy</i>	<i>Neither Easy nor Difficult</i>	<i>Difficult</i>	<i>Very Difficult</i>
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10. In the space below, please provide your thoughts on how a leader's approach to risk acceptance effects the application of Mission Command in the US Army:

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11. How frequently do leaders conduct insufficient education and development of subordinates?

<i>Very Rarely</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Frequent</i>	<i>Very Frequent</i>
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12. How difficult is it for subordinates to gain/maintain competence in an organization deficient leader driven development?

<i>Very Easy</i>	<i>Easy</i>	<i>Neither Easy nor Difficult</i>	<i>Difficult</i>	<i>Very Difficult</i>
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13. How frequently does blame culture reduce a leader's inclination to employ Mission Command?

<i>Very Rarely</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Frequent</i>	<i>Very Frequent</i>
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14. How difficult is it for subordinate empowerment to occur in organizations which possess blame culture?

<i>Very Easy</i>	<i>Easy</i>	<i>Neither Easy nor Difficult</i>	<i>Difficult</i>	<i>Very Difficult</i>
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15. In the space below, please provide your opinion on how subordinate disempowerment effects the application of Mission Command in the US Army:

#### **Section 4: Summary**

1. In your opinion, which of the following leadership factors most inhibits the successful application of Mission Command in the US Army?
  - Micromanagement
  - Poor or insufficient intent
  - Risk aversion
  - Zero-defect mentality
  - Insufficient education or development of subordinates
  - Blame Culture
  - Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Why do you think that your selected factor inhibits the successful application of Mission Command the most?

**Section 5: Demographic Information**

What is your status? Active Duty / Army Reserve / National Guard / Army Civilian

1. If Army Civilian:
  - a. Do you have prior military service? Yes / No
  - b. If yes, how many years? \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. If active Duty, Reserve or National Guard:
  - a. How many years have you served? \_\_\_\_\_

What CGSS faculty department are you from? DCL / DJIMO / DLRO / DTAC / other: \_\_\_\_\_

What is the background of your experience? Combat Arms / Non-Combat Arms

APPENDIX B – QUANTITATIVE SURVEY DATA RESULTS

Importance of Mission Command

Table 8. Section Two Survey Responses.<sup>149</sup>

Likert-type Scale	Very Important	Important	Neither Important or Unimportant	Unimportant	Very Unimportant
Responses	<i>n.</i> 19	<i>n.</i> 12	–	–	<i>n.</i> 2

Source: Created by author.

Leadership Factors that Inhibit Mission Command in the US Army

Table 9. Section Three Survey Responses – Increased Commander Interference

How Frequently do Leaders Micromanage?					
Likert-type Scale	Very Rarely	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequent	Very Frequent
Responses	–	–	<i>n.</i> 16	<i>n.</i> 16	<i>n.</i> 3
How Difficult is it to Overcome?					
Likert-type Scale	Very Easy	Easy	Neither Easy nor Difficult	Difficult	Very Difficult
Responses	–	–	<i>n.</i> 1	<i>n.</i> 15	<i>n.</i> 19
How Frequently do Leaders Provide Poor or Insufficient Intent?					
Likert-type Scale	Very Rarely	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequent	Very Frequent
Responses	–	<i>n.</i> 3	<i>n.</i> 12	<i>n.</i> 17	<i>n.</i> 3
How Difficult is it to Overcome?					
Likert-type Scale	Very Easy	Easy	Neither Easy nor Difficult	Difficult	Very Difficult
Responses	–	<i>n.</i> 2	<i>n.</i> 2	<i>n.</i> 14	<i>n.</i> 17

Source: Created by author.

<sup>149</sup> Note, two respondents failed to answer this question.

Table 10. Section Three Survey Responses – Leader Risk Aversion

How Frequently are Leaders too-risk Averse?					
Likert-type Scale	Very Rarely	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequent	Very Frequent
Responses	–	<i>n.</i> 1	<i>n.</i> 12	<i>n.</i> 14	<i>n.</i> 8
How Difficult is it to Overcome?					
Likert-type Scale	Very Easy	Easy	Neither Easy nor Difficult	Difficult	Very Difficult
Responses	–	–	–	<i>n.</i> 15	<i>n.</i> 20
How Frequently does zero-defect mentality effect leaders?					
Likert-type Scale	Very Rarely	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequent	Very Frequent
Responses	<i>n.</i> 1	<i>n.</i> 3	<i>n.</i> 3	<i>n.</i> 12	<i>n.</i> 16
How Difficult is it to Overcome?					
Likert-type Scale	Very Easy	Easy	Neither Easy nor Difficult	Difficult	Very Difficult
Responses	–	–	<i>n.</i> 1	<i>n.</i> 9	<i>n.</i> 25

Source: Created by author.

Table 11. Section Three Survey Responses – Disempowerment of Subordinates

How Frequently do leaders Conduct Insufficient Education and Development of Subordinates?					
Likert-type Scale	Very Rarely	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequent	Very Frequent
Responses	–	<i>n.</i> 2	<i>n.</i> 15	<i>n.</i> 14	<i>n.</i> 4
How Difficult is it to Overcome?					
Likert-type Scale	Very Easy	Easy	Neither Easy nor Difficult	Difficult	Very Difficult
Responses	–	<i>n.</i> 4	<i>n.</i> 6	<i>n.</i> 18	<i>n.</i> 7
How Frequently does Blame Culture Reduce a Leaders Inclination to Employ Mission Command?					
Likert-type Scale	Very Rarely	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequent	Very Frequent
Responses	<i>n.</i> 1	<i>n.</i> 2	<i>n.</i> 11	<i>n.</i> 17	<i>n.</i> 4
How Difficult is it to Overcome?					
Likert-type Scale	Very Easy	Easy	Neither Easy nor Difficult	Difficult	Very Difficult
Responses	–	<i>n.</i> 1	<i>n.</i> 2	<i>n.</i> 19	<i>n.</i> 13

Source: Created by author

Summary

Table 12. Section Four Survey Responses – Summary

Factor	Micromanagement	Poor Intent	Risk Aversion	Zero-defect Mentality	Insufficient education or development of subordinates
Responses	<i>n.</i> 16	<i>n.</i> 6	<i>n.</i> 19	<i>n.</i> 13	<i>n.</i> 6
Factor	Blame Culture	Other: Lack of Trust	Other: Lack of Competence	Other: slow pace of COIN	Other: Poor Communication Skills
Responses	<i>n.</i> 2	<i>n.</i> 3	<i>n.</i> 1	<i>n.</i> 1	<i>n.</i> 1

*Source:* Created by author.

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