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The establishment of a culture of trust around the commander and his staff remains a key aspect of building an effective approach to mission command. Unspoken "mutual trust" between commanders and subordinates even in the most testing of circumstances is a fundamental necessity if an organization wishes to effectively employ a mission command. The culture of trust has the potential to exponentially increase the efficiency and productivity of military organizations. The mission command, the essential military philosophy of the last two hundred years, even though it has been studied, extensively analyzed, and widely diffused, has rarely had positive, concrete effects on military organizations. Mission command has been around for quite a long time, and much has been written about this concept. However, there are a few militaries and individuals who have effectively employed mission command such as the German Army during WWII, Gen. Mattis, and Gen. McCrystal but most leaders have been unsuccessful in establishing this type of philosophy within their units. The German experience and the innovative approach of the officers mentioned above highlight that this philosophy can be applied only in exchange for a new radical organizational culture that is very much geared towards building a culture of trust. With an effective culture of trust, not only is it possible to conduct military operations efficiently, but the productivity and efficiency of military organizations will also be sharply increased. In an era in which the operational tempo is a game-changer to plan, conduct, and win a military campaign and in which the resources to fight are always limited, the value of human factors and the creation of a culture of trust are the most critical elements to face current and future war-fighting scenarios.

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**MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES**

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**TITLE**

**Trust, the critical element for the adoption of mission command philosophy**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

**AUTHOR:**

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**AY 2020-21**

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## Executive Summary

**Title:** Trust, the critical element for the adoption of mission command philosophy.

**Author:** Major Demetrio Giorgio RIGGIO, Italian Army.

**Thesis:** The establishment of a culture of trust around the commander and his staff remains a key aspect of building an effective approach to mission command. Unspoken "mutual trust"<sup>1</sup> between commanders and subordinates even in the most testing of circumstances is a fundamental necessity if an organization wishes to effectively employ a mission command. The culture of trust has the potential to exponentially increase the efficiency and productivity of military organizations.<sup>2</sup>

**Discussion:** The mission command, the essential military philosophy of the last two hundred years, even though it has been studied, extensively analyzed, and widely diffused, has rarely had positive, concrete effects on military organizations. Mission command has been around for quite a long time, and much has been written about this concept. However, there are a few militaries and individuals who have effectively employed mission command—such as the German Army during WWII, Gen. Mattis, and Gen. McCrystal— but most leaders have been unsuccessful in establishing this type of philosophy within their units. The German experience and the innovative approach of the officers mentioned above highlight that this philosophy can be applied only in exchange for a new radical organizational culture that is very much geared towards building a culture of trust. With an effective culture of trust, not only is it possible to conduct military operations efficiently, but the productivity and efficiency of military organizations will also be sharply increased.

**Conclusion:** In an era in which the operational tempo is a game-changer to plan, conduct, and win a military campaign and in which the resources to fight are always limited, the value of human factors and the creation of a culture of trust are the most critical elements to face current and future war-fighting scenarios.

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## *Preface*

In my military experience, I have covered different types of assignments. First, I was posted in the *Lagunari* Regiment as a lieutenant and captain having the honor to command, for more than nine years at home and abroad, the most efficient and motivated soldiers of the Italian Army. After that, I had the fantastic opportunity to serve as an instructor at the Italian Military Academy, where I observed with privileged eyes the process that guides a young university student to become a man, and after that, an officer. Finally, I was selected as a staff officer in the Italian Army General Staff and assigned to the Planning Division, where officers think about how to shape the future structure of the Italian Army trying to improve its military capacities and fill its eventual gaps. From the beginning of my career, I have always wondered about the elements that could have helped me to improve my command style or, more in general, that would have been useful in fortifying military organizations.

After multiple failures attempting to strengthen conventional aspects of military organizations, such as doctrine or training, looking at some civilian organizations, and reading about some military visionaries that focused their efforts on human factors, I was convinced that the organizational culture could strengthen the military organization.

Toxic leadership, fearful commanders, a sluggish planning phase, a zero-mistake approach, and unenthusiastic and unmotivated junior leaders are concerns that have plagued various armies but that have not been solved with a new textbook or new doctrine. These problems require a new shape of command philosophy totally immersed in the culture of trust, an indispensable prerogative to remain competitive in the current and future scenarios.

For this paper's development, I am grateful to Doctor Paolo Tripodi and USMC Lt. Col. Kenneth Jones. Both of them have encouraged me to keep writing. In particular, Dr. Tripodi helped me to remain focused on the point and to approach critically complex problems related to the

human beings' attitudes; without his guidance, I would not have completed this paper. My last thanks go to my wife Paola and my daughter Alice, from whom I know I have stolen many family moments so difficult to recover.

## Introduction

At the start of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany, and Prussia in particular, began to introduce a leadership framework that would continue to influence the conduct of military operations until the present day. This model, called *Auftragstaktik*<sup>3</sup> (which translates to mission oriented tactics or mission command), was not a doctrinal dogma, nor a tactical principle, but a cultural inspiration that would have led the German Army in chaotic and dubious circumstances, with the sole aim of maintaining its operational tempo.<sup>4</sup> At the time, this model was considered highly unorthodox and enabled the commander of the tactical action to act with relative autonomy. He was not forced to slavishly adhere to orders but was allowed to deviate from orders while acting in accordance with the commanders' intent.<sup>5</sup> The creation of a relationship of trust within the chain of command facilitated this model.<sup>6</sup> Due to the exceptional early success of the German military in Second World War, *Auftragstaktik* has become the most widely copied model by almost all armies in the world, even though their results were very different from those of the German war machine. After more than seventy years of unsatisfied attempts to implement the mission command, an innovative consideration to execute an effective application of it came from two concepts used by Gen. McCrystal in the description of his experience in Afghanistan: "shared consciousness" and "empowered execution."<sup>7</sup> With these terms, the General acknowledged that military organizations (team of teams)<sup>8</sup> need to change to deal with the complexity of current and future scenarios. On the one hand, the need for "transparent information sharing"<sup>9</sup> improves the situational awareness among the different people engaged in military action (shared consciousness). On the other hand, "decentralized decision-making authority"<sup>10</sup> empowers commanders to make decisions in the best modalities (empowered execution). In fact, these concepts are fundamental indicators that the new

phase of mission command does not call for a spectacular and massive revolution of doctrine and training; rather, a practical mission command is linked to human factors and their relations.

Studying the elements that have characterized the German officers in the application of *Auftragstaktik*<sup>11</sup> such as loyalty, trust, and fidelity and matching these with the reflections of military visionaries such as Gen. McCrystal or Gen. Mattis show that for the adoption of an effective mission command it is necessary to reset the actual organizational culture of armies under a new set of values. Many values could be adaptable to redefine an organizational culture, but critical element is trust.<sup>12</sup>

Trust encourages subordinates to think creatively and act decisively without fear of negative judgment. The cultivation of trust and the associated empowerment of subordinates in a work environment can greatly reduce the incidence of toxic leadership.<sup>13</sup> This trust can foster a culture in which mistakes are not only tolerated but also viewed as essential steps towards mission success.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, as business models have clearly shown, work environments that apply a culture of trust are capable of responding and performing well to any request that ensures responsiveness and a high level of performance compared to the environments in which top-down and closed systems drive organizational culture. This paper supports the idea that the establishment of a culture of trust around the commander and his staff remains a key aspect of building an effective application of mission command. Mutual trust between commanders and subordinates even in the most testing of circumstances is a fundamental necessity if an organization wishes to effectively employ a mission command. Moreover, it has the potential to exponentially increase the efficiency and productivity of military organizations.

The paper is divided into four parts. The first chapter focuses on the history of mission command, highlighting its origin, describing how the main armies have completely shattered its

nature and essence. The second chapter describes the potentiality of the trust and how a culture of trust can be decisive in enhancing the correct application of this philosophy and increasing the effectiveness of the military organization. The third chapter discusses the possibility to create a trust environment. Finally, the conclusion highlights that the role of commanders and educators are essential to instill and develop this culture of trust as a normal precondition in the application of mission command philosophy.

## The Origin and the evolution of mission command

### *1.1. Definition of mission command and its actual implementation*

Mission command, born under the German name *Auftragstaktik* (literally tasks tactics<sup>15</sup> but subsequently translated into English as mission command/mission tactics), has multiple definitions, but probably one of the most important definitions came from MCDP-1 *Warfighting* of the US Marine Corps:

Mission tactics is just as the name implies: the tactics of assigning a subordinate mission without specifying how the mission must be accomplished. We leave the manner of accomplishing the mission to the subordinate, thereby allowing the freedom-and establishing the duty- for the subordinate to take whatever steps deemed necessary based on the situation. Mission tactics relies on a subordinate's exercise of initiative framed by proper guidance and understanding.<sup>16</sup>

Nowadays, this philosophy, which would have been spread throughout the world, is struggling intensely to replicate the original *Auftragstaktik*.<sup>17</sup> Military organizations (including US Army) have tried, in fact, to acquire and implement this philosophy, but the results have not been in line with their expectations.<sup>18</sup> The main reasons for these failures are due to military organizations' lack of vision; they have failed to focus on the development of the core values that underpin the philosophy (trust, loyalty, fidelity). Instead, they have focused on the effects they hope to generate through the adoption of a mission command approach, incorrectly believing that a change of doctrine and training will be sufficient to enable them to reap the same rewards as the historical proponents of *Auftragstaktik*.<sup>19</sup> Using an innovative doctrine or changing the training approach to reinforce and fortify this philosophy has generated negative effects on the implementation process of mission command. At the moment in fact, this philosophy is stagnating in these three contingencies. First, it is theoretically applied through an incredible production of

doctrine or through an innovative training, but it remains unenforceable because there is no concrete idea of value or organizational culture that should govern that specific military organization. Second, it is partly implemented with poor results under a cultural paradigm focused on personal ambition, a zero-defect approach, "no equity to all".<sup>20</sup> Third, it is used with massive results when military visionaries shape the military organization around human factors, with a specific reference to the value of trust, as the experiences of Gen. Mattis<sup>21</sup> and Gen. McCrystal<sup>22</sup> have shown.

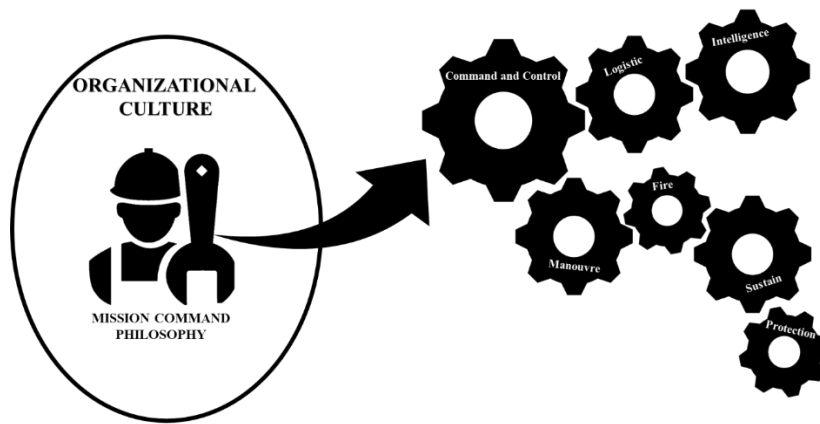
### *1.2. Difference between command and control function and mission command*

Inconsistent definitions of mission command, many times different from the original concept of *Auftragstaktik* and more than once combined with the definition of command and control core function (C2), have caused considerable confusion in military organizations. This misunderstanding was so significant that the US Army in the Army Doctrine Publication 6-0 defines the mission command as a synonym of command and control. As the publication reports:

The use of the term mission command to describe multiple things—the warfighting function, the system, and a philosophy—created unforeseen ambiguity. Mission command replaced command and control, but in practical application it often meant the same thing.<sup>23</sup>

The first cause of the poor implementation of mission command is the confusion between mission command and C2. The aim of this paragraph is therefore to explain and clarify how this confusion arises, why there is a danger of an incorrect implementation of the mission command, and the relationship between these two distinct elements. First, the distorted interpretation from many military organizations is the primary cause of confusion in the adoption of mission command. In fact, these military organizations focus on the tools and processes that derive from the application

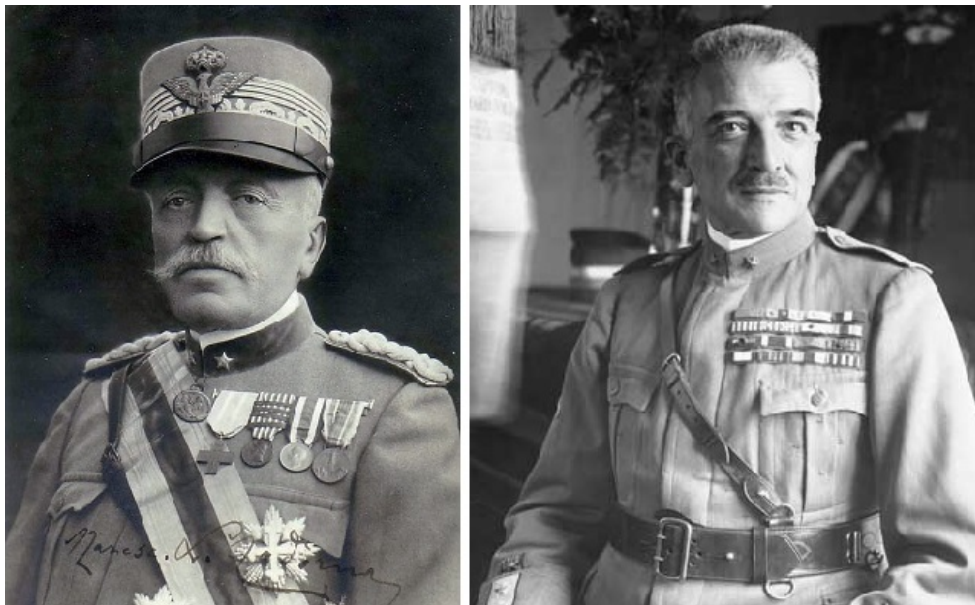
of this type of philosophy rather than on the study of their organizational culture.<sup>24</sup> Second, using the same terminology to highlight two elements that can be comparable generates confusion and uncertainty inside of the military organization rather than focusing the attention on the real problem of mission command, i.e., organizational culture and its values.<sup>25</sup> Third, the presumption that between the C2 and mission command exists a type of functional and favored correlation has contributed to generate confusion.<sup>26</sup> However, as for the other warfighting functions, between C2 and mission command, there is a subordinate relationship in which the first element depends on the latter. Even if the C2 function enables other core functions<sup>27</sup>, this is not the critical element for changing and transforming the efficiency and productivity of the organization, which remains the exclusive privilege of a leadership style that is heavily dependent on values and human relations (see figure 1).



**Figure 1- Relations between Mission Command and C2**

### 1.3. Centralized Command against Decentralized Command

There are different examples along the course of history that are useful to contrast and compare decentralized command with centralized command, but there is an example that can highlight the potentiality of the first over the latter better than others. This historical event came from the Italian Army front during WWI where the relief in place between Gen. Luigi Cadorna and Gen. Armando Diaz (see figure 2), with two different approaches to command, had a crucial role in the Italian victory of First World War. The Italian Army was under the command of General Luigi Cadorna until 1917, before the infamous Caporetto disaster. Of Piedmontese origin Gen. Cadorna was famous for his "ferocious discipline and inflexibility".<sup>28</sup> Tactically incapable of innovating the Italian Army, it is reminiscent of a style of command that has refused any human relationship, essentially based on rigid respect for orders without decision-making autonomy (*Frontal Attack and Tactical Training*).<sup>29</sup> Therefore, he can represent a very clear example of centralized command.



**Figure 2- Centralized Command vs Decentralized Command**

Source: Adopted from l'Adigetto "Che fine hanno fatto i Generali al termine della Grande Guerra?"

<https://www.ladigetto.it/rubriche/centenario-della-grande-guerra/85264-che-fine-hanno-fatto-i-general-i-al-termini-della-grande-guerra.html>

After two years of limited success following the disaster of Caporetto, he was replaced by Gen. Diaz, who led a kind of revolution in the Italian Army, thanks to his style of command. After Caporetto, morale in the Italian Army was low and victory was uncertain. However, General Diaz began this period with great positivity. He adopted a style of command very different from General Cadorna. First, he divided Cadorna's centralized power, appointing General Badoglio and General Giardino as deputy chiefs.<sup>30</sup> Second, he gave more autonomy to the battalion level to decide what actions to take in the context of a terrain or tactical situation.<sup>31</sup> Third, he had an open-minded attitude about the problems of his soldiers (Gen. Badoglio, one of his Deputy Staff received the task to study any possible solution to improve the morale of Italian Army).<sup>32</sup> This style of command can be useful to understand the minimal characteristic of the decentralized style of command. The appointment of Gen. Diaz to replace Gen. Cadorna after the defeat of Caporetto strongly contributed to the Italian victory in WWI.<sup>33</sup>

#### *1.4. History and adaptation of mission command*

Every past, current, and future war, independently of the grade of technology the future armies will have, identifies in the management of command and control (C2) the critical element for planning, conducting, and winning the war for three main reasons. First, it allows the rest of the functions to operate effectively and synchronized.<sup>34</sup> Secondly, the command and control is massively dependent on the style of leadership in contrast with the other warfighting functions (e.g. fire or sustainment).<sup>35</sup> Thirdly, exercising a critical C2 can dramatically affect operational tempo, one of the important elements that decides military battles.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, every commander adopts, based on his background and in relation to the organizational culture that his military structure sustains, a different style of command as a key element to exercise the C2 function. This opportunity is not new in the warfighting arena because it was already basically implemented by the Roman and Greek Empires. The approach in which Alexander the Great led battles (using the cohesion of his cavalry), or the warfighting methodology of Spartans (using the discipline like a cohesive element), and more the system of Roman phalanx (using a capillary organization) could be reconducted as a sort of initial style of command.<sup>37</sup>

However, it is only at the beginning of the XIX century that the effects produced by styles of command started to be studied under an academic lens to analyze the connections between the performance of soldiers and the style of command adopted. With the advent of Napoleonic Wars in the early 1800s, two styles of command emerged: the decentralized and the centralized command models.<sup>38</sup> The first was a more flexible approach that encourages all leaders, especially junior leaders, to take responsibility for their decisions without specific orders in respect of the superior commander's general intent to maintain the initiative of their actions "to make the wrong decision is worse than making no decision at all".<sup>39</sup> The latter model rebuts the autonomy of leaders in the field by affirming that the only way to obtain a meaningful victory over the enemy is to execute precise and comprehensive instructions in perfect synchronism at the highest level, avoiding risk and confusion (according to this model "the centralized plan is sacred"<sup>40</sup>). Tactical actions during Second World War attest to the effectiveness of the decentralized command model, and from this point on it has become the default command model not only in Germany but also among the Allies.<sup>41</sup> However, the origin of the *Auftragstaktik* is a German cultural innovation promoted by two eminent German personalities, Scharnhorst and Von Moltke. These two Prussian generals, in fact, introduced this style of command operating a massive cultural revolution as the

critical priority to reconstruct the spirit of the Prussian Army.<sup>42</sup> This new style of leadership, of which some criteria are discussed in the paragraph command of *Truppenführung* doctrine<sup>43</sup>, was based on some principles that were extraordinarily innovative for that era of which the other states were not able to replicate. The key elements of the new leadership style were mutual trust, the ability of a junior officer to act with relative freedom in line with his commander's intent, the acceptance of responsibility of actions from leaders and commander.<sup>44</sup> In contrast to this sense of organizational culture, other military organizations, such as the US, have tried to replicate the success of mission command, but the results achieved have not been in line with their aspirations. Even though the US has tried many times to replicate the German model, the lack of investment in the importance of human factors and the absence of any serious education reform to reorganize the American organizational culture have not produced tangible results.<sup>45</sup>

Therefore, even if mission command has been extremely important for military organizations, an inadequate organizational culture continues to be an obstacle to the full implementation of this philosophy. Currently, the only possible useful application of this philosophy can rely on the unique attitude of some military leaders, capable of understanding in depth the potential of the organizational culture in exploiting this incredible style of command. Gen. Mattis and Gen. McCrystal in fact, according to their experiences in Iraq and in Afghanistan, have updated and successfully used the mission command, restoring the importance of the human relations based on the culture of trust as the main element of a new organizational culture.

## The critical elements of mission command

### *2.1 The challenges of the future operational environment to the mission command*

The future operational environment represents an important challenge for the mission command. The next scenario of 2035, defined by NATO as a "congested, contested, cluttered, connected, and constrained environment"<sup>46</sup>, strongly challenges military organizations to introduce, adopt, and practice the mission command more than in the past. Indeed, if until now the mission command has been seen as an opportunity to enhance the performance of the military organization, in the future this philosophy could be considered fundamental for the survival of military organizations. In fact, the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrate that the increment of the threat's complexity requires an agile approach, such as mission command, to manage a system that Gen McChrystal defines as chaotic.<sup>47</sup> In fact, the speed of information generated by new disruptive technologies, the different enemy threats (asymmetric, symmetric, or hybrid) or domains (cyber, space, and social network), and the porosity within the traditional operational levels (strategic, operational, and tactical) called for commanders and staff able to make\support decisions in a few seconds, many times without the possibility to confront and share them with their own subordinates or superiors.

The widespread adoption of mission command and a consequent change to organizational culture is an option that could be considered in order to adapt an organization to face the challenges of the future. However, innovating the organizational culture of military organizations is not as common and easy as changing its doctrine or developing a new warfighting capability for troops; it calls for methodology, application, and time before producing effects. Gen. McChrystal summarizes the difficulty in encouraging the military to adapt a new model with this sentence:

"How do you train a leviathan to improvise?"<sup>48</sup> Therefore, two important factors can represent a potential answer to the question of General McCrystal.

First, an (military) organization must have an awareness of its need to transform and adapt its organizational culture. This is an essential precondition for successful adoption of a mission command, which is becoming an increasingly central part of the future operating concepts of many modern armies. From the American doctrine<sup>49</sup> to the Swedish<sup>50</sup> and the British<sup>51</sup> doctrine, military organizations deem the organizational culture an important element for the adoption of mission command.

Second, the structure and characteristics of this organizational culture are often linked to human factors with a particular focus on the value of trust. Taking for example one of the most critical future concepts of NATO, *Framework for Future Alliance Operations*, it is clear that the word trust inspires a crucial part of the document. In particular, about the architecture of NATO, the document reports "NATO cohesion relies on two pillars trust and reciprocity."<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the same NATO Concepts affirm that the C2 authority "depends on human factors, such as strong leadership, timely decision-making, and relationships built on trust."<sup>53</sup> Additionally, in the context of the future warfighting scenario, a new organizational culture based on trust relationships could help to figure out a sort of unnatural competition between the concept of network-centric warfare, deeply based on disruptive technology, and the mission command. It is commonplace, in fact, that strategic leaders improperly use the network-centric warfare concept<sup>54</sup> to assist with some crucial tactical situations (important examples of that are the killing of Bin Laden and Al Baghdadi<sup>55</sup>). This sort of big brother that observes a team or a platoon's actions limits the tactical leaders' autonomy and represents a substantial risk to the success of the operation. A new organizational culture based on trust in subordinates' professional abilities and an understanding that they are

empowered to conduct tactical actions with relative autonomy will discourage senior leaders from the improper use of technology to interfere in these situations.

## *2.2 Revolutionary military experiences based on trust of two visionaries*

The experience of two military visionaries, Gen. McCrystal and Gen. Mattis, has begun to open a new era for the implementation of the mission command, following various unhelpful attempts to adopt this philosophy in military organizations. In two different moments, but with the same operational problems, these two important military figures noted that the key to adopting an appropriate model of mission command was to utilize and strengthen the human relations changing the organizational culture of the units in which they were operating. In the face of the complexity of the threat posed by insurgent groups in Iraq and Afghanistan with a new mentality and different ethics, they responded with natural flexibility compared to the traditional American method of transforming their units into victorious and efficient military organizations. Thus, three innovative ideas, tested overseas by these two Generals, were considered revolutionary to facilitate the spread of mission command philosophy.

First, both introduced the importance of establishing a harmonious work environment. In contrast to many different military units or staff where people don't have the possibility to contradict the leader, these two military geniuses collocated harmony as a fundamental factor to achieve efficiency and speed in the conduction of operations. Thus, while Gen. Mattis focus on harmony as result of the cohesion of military units<sup>56</sup>, General McCrystal points out that the responsibility for creating and fostering this harmony-based environment is entirely in the hands of leaders.<sup>57</sup> In fact, he attributes the responsibility for setting up this work environment to leaders according to two principles. First, leaders must lead by "own behavior"<sup>58</sup>, the only vehicle that can

traditionally reinforce one commander's orders, especially when a commander demands something extraordinary from his or her own troops. Second, they have to use the criteria of "eyes on and hand off."<sup>59</sup> This criteria could in fact be a new modern translation of the mission command. In these few words, Gen. McCrystal expresses the idea that the main assignment for a leader is to enable the system's functionality and not its direction. Leaders facilitate, enable, supervise, and set the harmony and the transparency of the team without micromanagement.<sup>60</sup> At the same time, they can intervene in that specific contingency in which their presence could be useful to improve the resolution of the particular situation. As General McCrystal reports:

The leader's first responsibility is to the whole. A leader's word matter, but actions ultimately do more to reinforce or undermine the implementation of a team of teams. Instead of exploiting technology to monitor employee performance at levels that would have warmed Frederick Taylor's heart, the leader must allow team members to monitor him. More than directing, leaders must exhibit personal transparency. This is the new deal.<sup>61</sup>

The second important feature of both is the relationship between the commanders and the staff and the commanders and subordinates. Using this terminology, such as "fraternity of shared risk and common vision"<sup>62</sup> and "teams of teams,"<sup>63</sup> both generals announce a Copernican revolution on the fundamental importance of human factors in the exercise of leadership within the military structures. In contrast to the rigid hierarchical approach, Gen. Mattis and Gen. McCrystal point out that the success of their units depended to a large extent on the authentic and loyal human relations that they had instilled from the beginning of their commander experiences. The creation of such relationships during the conduct of operations in Iraq or Afghanistan could

help to break down the formal barriers that often serve to impede the flow of information and so increase the awareness of leaders.<sup>64</sup>

Finally, establishing these types of relationships has an educational value especially for young officers. As Major Valenti reports about Mattis's style of command, the most important task of one commander is to "coach rather than command"<sup>65</sup> his subordinates like important element of the commander's leadership. This type of relation fortifies the cohesion of units, and the normal obedience imposed by the hierarchy becomes natural and productive. This approach generates the fertile terrain in which the mission command grows naturally.

### *2.3 Replicating the success of Gen. Mattis and Gen. McCrystal*

Gen. Mattis and Gen. McCrystal are two visionaries that represent a unique exception for the military arena. However, their success in Iraq and Afghanistan are significant not only for the results of the operations but also for the leadership model that they were able to introduce, support, and adopt in their units. For the first time, in fact, thanks to their incredible charisma and capacity to understand and anticipate the complexity of the events, they were able to change the cultural organization of their units, introducing a new leadership model that allows the spread of mission command. From their fruitful experiences based mainly on human factors, it is fundamental to understand how it is possible to replicate their models without charismatic leaders like Gen Mattis or Gen. McCrystal. In a few words, how is it possible to have a universal application of this philosophy? How is it possible to reach a new, universally adopted model of mission command? In order to apply a new model of mission command, it is necessary to create a new organizational culture based on trust.

### 2.3.1 Organizational Culture based on trust

During the transformation process for military and non-military organizations, it is normal to observe a significant discord between what they would like to become and what they actually are. If, on the one hand, they would like to change their cultural approach adopting mission command to face the new complex environment, on the other hand, they are incapable of avoiding the main limitations of this philosophy, i.e. micromanagement, risk-aversion, and the zero-defects mentality.<sup>66</sup> As Vandergriff indicates in the Path to Victory: America's Army and the Revolution in Human Affairs, as long as the American military organizations will continue to have a promotion system inspired by the zero mistake policy<sup>67</sup>, it will be impossible to apply the six principles of mission command: "build cohesive teams through mutual trust, create shared understanding, provide a clear commander's intent, exercise disciplined initiative, use mission orders, and accept prudent risk."<sup>68</sup> Therefore, as common international theories have supported and as some military visionaries have tested in the operational theater, a new cultural organization is mandatory in the application of a concrete mission command. The organizational culture is something that is not easy to change. According to Schein:

the culture of a group can be defined as the accumulated shared learning of that group as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration; which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, feel, and behave in relation on those problems. This accumulated learning is a pattern or system of beliefs, values, and behavioral norms that come to be taken for granted as basic assumptions and eventually drop out of awareness.<sup>69</sup>

Such a culture is made of three levels: “the artifacts, the espoused beliefs, and the basic values underlying assumptions.”<sup>70</sup> While the first element represents the visible process (artifact) and the second the ideas/goals of the organization (the espoused beliefs), the third element is the “unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs and value that determine behavior, perception, thought and feeling”<sup>71</sup> and for this reason the crucial element to influence the entire organization. Establishing a culture based on the authentic value of trust will modify military organizations, enabling the mission command to function.

Trust is the main value of building a new cultural organization for three main reasons. First, trust is a prerequisite for the attainment of important values such as honesty, transparency, and respect inside an organization.<sup>72</sup> Second, military organizations need massive amounts of human interactions, and there are no human relationships that can function without trust. From family to economy, from individual to team, all human interactions need trust as an essential part of working.<sup>73</sup> Third, forging an organizational culture on trust means duplicating the speed of decision-making and the autonomy of the subordinates.<sup>74</sup> Faster decisions for every level and the autonomy of leaders to operate without rigid schemes dramatically reduce the operational tempo allowing commanders to maintain initiative, which reduces the OODA loop (Observe, Orient, Decide, Act).<sup>75</sup> Assuring this result on the enemy is the key of success for every military operation and the real outcome of mission command. Controlling the operational tempo could allow more time to plan creative solutions against enemy plans, apply critical thinking, reduce risk, and prepare for further action against the enemy. In addition, trust is an incredible factor, which alone increases the efficiency of organizations.

Trust eliminates bureaucracy and redundancy.<sup>76</sup> When there is trust in one environment, multiple management levels or complex regulations that strictly regulate human behavior are vain and useless, allowing for fast and smooth processes and procedures.

In addition, this element contrasts the phenomenon of office politics, which represents "interdepartmental rivalries, backbiting, and sabotage initiative between colleagues."<sup>77</sup> Moreover, the absence of tactics and strategies to gain power improves the organization's transparency, directly affecting talent management<sup>78</sup> based on the evident merit.

Furthermore, trust can be an appropriate solution to avoid the disengagement of employees who have lost the ambition and motivation to operate within a system that does not professionally fulfill their legitimate aspirations.<sup>79</sup> In an environment where trust is at the center of human relations, employees can discuss their lack of motivation and find the right solution to increase their productivity with a significant impact on the company's efficiency.

Finally, trust affects fraud, eliminating any attempts at "dishonesty, sabotage, obstruction, and deception and disruption" within the organization.<sup>80</sup> This effect dramatically reduces all the bureaucratic structures that can prevent and monitor these dysfunctional behaviors, creating a new workforce to strengthen other sectors of the organization. Removing this redundancy can strengthen the productive assets of the organization with a significant impact on performance.

Adopting these results introduced by Covey in the military environment could have tremendous effects on military organizations with a direct effect on the mission command. Generally, the adoption of trust in military organizations could create huge benefits in term of speed, transparency, and eliminating the zero mistakes approach. Particularly, the DOTLMPP<sup>i</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> The acronym is commonly used to give to the lecturer an all-inclusive vision about a general problem. In fact, any type of problem is analyzed under doctrine, organization, training, leadership, material, personnel, and facilities.

matrix, a common instrument frequently used in the military organization, could be an effective tool to summarize the potential impact of trust culture in military organizations (see figure 3).

<b>DOTLMPF MATRIX</b>	
<b>Doctrine</b>	Trust could reduce the number of directives to monitor and control the achievement of the results. Doctrine could become simple, easy, and adherent to the true needs of military organizations.
<b>Organization</b>	Trust could remove all redundant military structures that represent an unnecessary level of management. Light and adaptable military structures could be more versatile and flexible and respond with more efficacy to the future operational challenges that are characterized by uncertainty and mutability.
<b>Training</b>	Trust could enable leaders of all levels to make their decisions without fear of possible failures or negative judgments that could compromise their promotions. Trust could allow leaders to take responsibility in the exclusive interest of the military organization without thinking about their decision's indirect impact on their careers. Moreover, training could be more realistic because no one will be afraid to reduce the level of risk of the training to maintain his <i>status quo</i> .
<b>Leadership</b>	Trust could guarantee merit, transparency, and appropriate talent management. Trust prevents toxic leadership and ensures the achievement of organizational goals.
<b>Material</b>	Trust could encourage the adoption of agile processes to lead the acquisition of new capabilities or modern equipment. Thanks to the process stimulated by trust, it could be possible to equip military organizations with better products in less time.
<b>Personnel</b>	The spirit of trust could transform an impersonal organization into a real family giving to soldiers the opportunity to build close relationships. Having the opportunity to discuss critically different points of view with superiors and colleagues and adopting coaching methodology along the chain of command could strengthen the efficiency of military organizations and prevents phenomena such as fraud and disengagement.
<b>Facilities</b>	Cutbacks of redundancy and bureaucracy as well as the decrement of management levels could allow military organizations to save their financial resources and re-invest them in sectors that traditionally are considered weak and less financed (training, infrastructures, and logistics).

Figure 3- DOTLMPF Matrix

## **Building a trust environment**

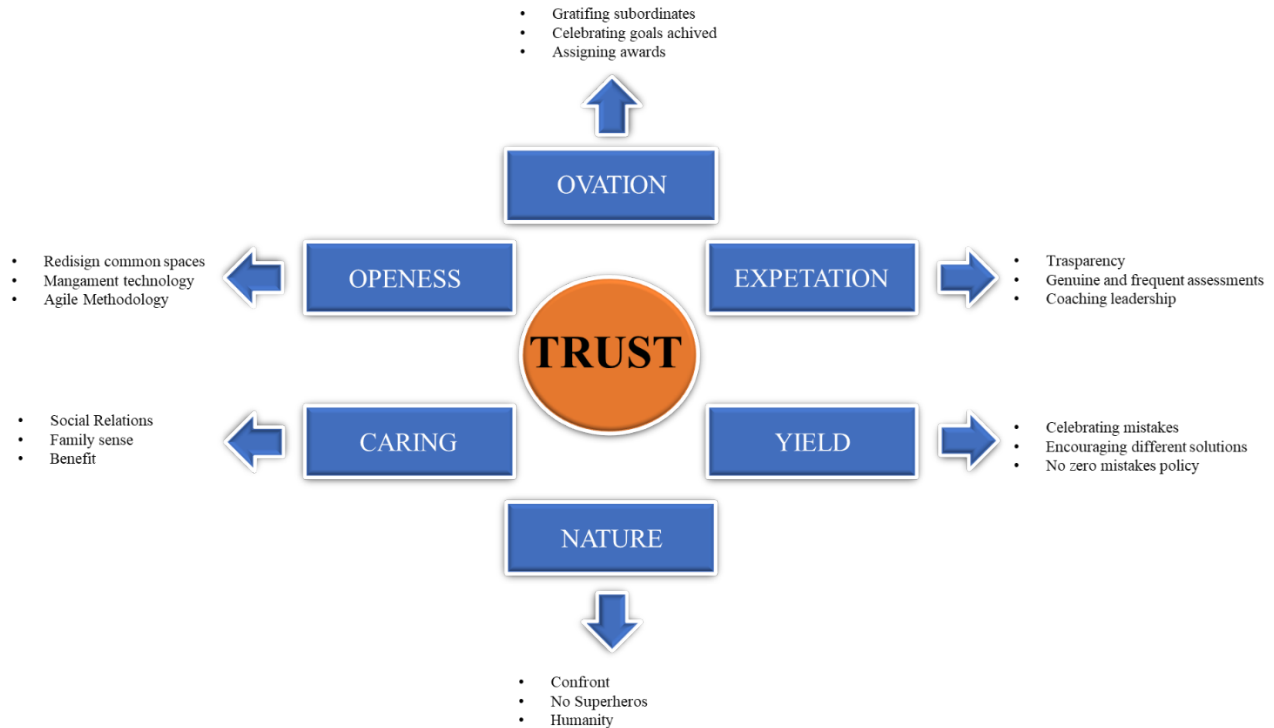
### ***3.1. Practical solutions to spread trust***

The previous chapter highlighted the beneficial effects of trust on civil and military organizations, underlining how this value can represent a real game-changer for implementing mission command and an incredible multiplayer in terms of efficiency and performance. This chapter explains the modalities of building an organizational culture based on trust as a precondition for properly applying the mission command philosophy. Following these modalities will provide two effects for military organizations. First, a successful adoption of mission command philosophy, which exploits trust, will delate the misconceptions or the wrong tentative of the past. Second, it will be possible to promote mission command independently of the attitude or capacity of leaders who are in charge of a military organization at a given time. This new modality to enable mission command intends to overcome the King definition of mission command 2.0<sup>81</sup> (characterized by the brilliant initiatives of Gen. McCrystal or Mattis) fostering the creation of a universal application of this philosophy to all military organizations because of the fundamental importance of trust. Therefore, the next section provides answers to this question: how is it possible to create a military environment devoted to the value of trust?

### ***3.2 Creating an environment devoted to the trust value***

Even if trust is a sociological value, thanks to neuroscience, it is scientifically proven that a human hormone, called oxytocin, can stimulate trust between human beings. As Paul Zak says in his book *Trust Factor*, this hormone, defined by the author as a “moral molecule,”<sup>82</sup> plays a fundamental role in social relations. It is responsible for creating empathy, a familiar and harmonious environment, and human interactions within organizations.<sup>83</sup> Understanding how to

generate and manage the advantage that this hormone guarantees means building an organizational culture model strongly based on trust. Paul Zak lists eight factors that may stimulate the production of oxytocin in social organizations.<sup>84</sup> Studying all of them, six appear particularly related to the adoption of mission command. As a consequence, the next paragraph will explain their value and their impact in military organizations (see figure 4).



**Figure 4- Impact of trust factors on the mission command**

The first factor is the "ovation"<sup>85</sup>, which is the enthusiastic recognition of work. Having a tangible and personal ovation in correspondence with the completion of an important project, especially in front of family members or in public, is an element that stimulates the production of oxytocin and therefore creates a trusting environment.<sup>86</sup> For the adoption of mission command, this element is probably the most important motivation factor that commanders have to manage to gratify their subordinates' efforts. Late awards or poor and foregone ovation after the achievement

of an assigned goal, potentially without the presence of family or other colleagues, could not contribute to the increase of trust culture. There are different solutions that could foster this type of behavior: assigning awards during formal ceremonies where families are also invited (anniversary of the unit, for example), investing the unit's financial resources to customize the award for worthy soldiers, and creating sport or military competitions to elect the best team of the month, as an example for others to follow.

The second factor is "expectation."<sup>87</sup> Having clear expectations and constantly assessing performance is useful in contrasting anxiety and stress (these elements produce testosterone, a hormone that contrasts oxytocin production). Sustainable challenges and not impossible goals are the right methodology for creating a harmonious working environment.<sup>88</sup> In the military environment, expectations always generate stress and tensions with a negative impact on the production of oxytocin. Waiting for an annual report that can change the career of soldiers, not having a transparent assessment, or not encouraging subordinates or colleagues to achieve results are examples that impact the building of trust within military organizations. From a military perspective, managing the expectation means fortifying relations along the chain of command. Three lines of effort are fundamental to achieve this result. Primarily, the maximum level of transparency in the assessment criteria, which must remain stable for a long time, is crucial. On the one hand, having transparency avoids false expectations or potential misapprehensions in advance; on the other hand, it shows soldiers the vision, the goal, and the policy to follow for achieving concrete and positive results. The second line of effort could be related to the frequency of the assessment. To replace the anxiety produced by an annual report, it would be easier to have a monthly counseling with a direct leader in which a soldier could frequently assess his performance with the possibility of correcting the potential error faster than before. More frequent

oral reports decrease the bureaucracy and increase empathy between leaders and subordinates. Finally, providing coaching leadership to achieve goals in line with personal expectations could establish a mentoring relationship between old and young leaders/soldiers (very similar to the relations that officers have inside of the military academy).

The third factor is the "yield".<sup>89</sup> This element can be stimulated through different solutions, but the most relevant actions that affect this factor are to avoid a policy of zero mistakes and to allow freedom of action to achieve the outcomes. Having the opportunity to fail without being punished (as it is common practice in many organizations) or following non-traditional approaches to achieve the assigned objectives reinforces the strength of the group and encourages the process of innovation.<sup>90</sup> The yield in the military environment is strongly influenced by the zero-mistake policy adopted by military organization (for example the US Army).<sup>91</sup> Rigid schemes and misconceptions that a mistake is never acceptable afflict the creativity of leaders and soldiers who are unable to experiment with their ideas or methodologies for fear of wrong doing. These phenomena, which foster behaviors that are not entirely in line with the culture of trust, are potentially fixable at the educational level of military organizations.<sup>92</sup> Instilling the idea that the "celebration of mistakes"<sup>93</sup> is a value for improving skills and performance, accepting the mistakes of junior officers encouraging and feigning different solutions (during, for example, activities such as wargaming or after-action review) are solid starting points to improve the overall yield of military organizations.

The fourth factor is the "caring."<sup>94</sup> As Pepsi and Disney have shown, having an organization that takes care of its employees, providing assistance or support (medical assistance, benefits, etc.) contributes to creating a culture of inclusion and subsequent high performance.<sup>95</sup> Feeling part of a unique team and having a relationship with colleagues that is more than a simple working

relationship transforms the working environment into a familiar environment where it is possible to better express one's own potential. Exploiting this element, important multinational companies can explain 84% of their organizational trust.<sup>96</sup> This type of feeling inside a military unit like a battalion or regiment is fundamental to increase the value of trust with a direct effect on the adoption of mission command and military organizations' performance and resilience. In addition to social events, which should be common in all military units to increase social relations, there are other alternative solutions to transform the formal military environment into something more like a family—for example, the constitution of a family committee that could operate in support of the members of the family when military units are abroad; the building of social infrastructures inside of bases like swimming pools, schools, or preschools; and again the introduction, according to the typology of the unit, of flexible time (more suitable for headquarters or non-operative units).

The fifth factor is "natural".<sup>97</sup> Refusal of the concept that every leader must embody the idea of a superhero without weaknesses is probably the best definition for this factor.<sup>98</sup> Being easy on one's self with regard to limits and strengths remains a crucial element in maintaining trust and credibility. Reducing social distances, interacting with dependencies, sharing leadership, removing titles within factories, remaining available to hear others, and being easily approachable are concrete solutions to exploit this element to build a trust-based organizational culture.<sup>99</sup> Exercising the leadership with humanity is fundamental to create a trust environment that can encourage the adoption of mission command. As Paul Zak points out in his book with the example of Pope Francesco, eradicating the idea that a military leader is a superhero without the possibility of failure or weakness is the starting point for building a natural military leader.<sup>100</sup> It is not easy to encourage this type of leadership in military organizations because they are based on hierarchy. Consequently, leaders who are too sensitive or too human could have adverse effects on the units.

Operating with crystalline transparency, especially when commanders have to reward or punish someone, remaining open to direct confrontation with subordinates, and being easily approachable remain the key to produce this attitude that is fundamental to shape a trust-driven work environment.

The last important factor is "openness."<sup>101</sup> Having an inclusive attitude, making all employees aware of the organization's strategy for achieving common goals, and practicing genuine transparency between different levels of management are crucial elements for this factor.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, there are many concrete approaches to encourage the adoption of this value within organizations and corporations. For example, a company that would like to operate according to this concept must forge its architecture on the openness. Open spaces, glass doors, shared drives where it is possible to work collaboratively, and weekly appointments that can analyze the status of a project increase the value of openness and have a massive impact on the culture of trust.<sup>103</sup> In the military environment this value can be achieved by acting on three components. The first component is a new concept of infrastructure. Redesigning military common and private spaces with more green areas and creating open rooms increases social interactions and reduces the amount of stress that contributes to the production of oxytocin (e.g. the project called Caserme Verdi in Italy, see figure 5).<sup>104</sup>



**Figure 5- Caserme Verdi Italian Project**

Source: Adopted from Italian Army General Staff, *Caserme Verdi*

[http://www.esercito.difesa.it/comunicazione/Le-5-Sfide/Documents/Brochure\\_caserme-verdi-190110.pdf](http://www.esercito.difesa.it/comunicazione/Le-5-Sfide/Documents/Brochure_caserme-verdi-190110.pdf)

The second component is a different use of unit management technology. The openness (according to information security) requires the creation of a new network where it is possible to share documents without restrictions, collaborate at the same time on the same document, and constantly monitor the *status* of a project. This network infrastructure automatically generates collaboration and improves information sharing, increasing the quality of the product (the best example of that is the generation of an order or a briefing). Finally, the last element (particularly functional in headquarters) is the adoption of an agile methodology to replace the waterfall methodology.<sup>105</sup> This new methodology guarantees flexibility, ensures maximum sharing of information, and involves all staff, not in terms of rank, but in terms of expertise.<sup>106</sup>

## Conclusion

Military organizations require an organizational culture based on trust as the best modalities for adopting the mission command. This important aspect in fact, assures the implementation of this philosophy and generates significant indirect benefits in terms of efficacy and speed in the military world.

Moreover, this decision to invest in the mission command philosophy is becoming more than a cultural desire or stylistic ambition of some commanders and is an important operational requirement to compete in the chaotic future scenario. In this environment in fact, this philosophy represents the right answer to dominate the "turbulent and unpredictable"<sup>107</sup> nature of warfighting, particularly for junior leaders, who are increasingly called to make decisions that impact the strategic level.

Abandoning misleading approaches that military organizations have used over the last seventy years, focusing on the importance of human relations, and instilling the value of trust is collectively the most important challenge for the concrete implementation of this philosophy. Changing an organization's culture requires perseverance, time, and significant investments over an extended period of time.

Rapid changes to the structure of a military organization based on singular initiatives rather than a true desire to begin a new course are doomed to fail. After Napoleon's victory over the Prussian Empire during the Battle of Jena in 1806, Scharnhorst and Von Moltke inspired the Prussian Army to implement the idea of *Auftragstaktik*, but the first benefits of this philosophy were marked only in 1870 during Germany's reunification wars.<sup>108</sup> Therefore, as a result of the willingness and the time to make this change to the organizational culture two figures emerged as vital. First, the commander remains the critical figure to promote a cultural organization based on

trust. Under commanders' responsibility, there is the challenging possibility to shape an organizational culture based on trust instead of micromanagement and a zero-defect approach. Hence, he has to create proper harmony within military units, inspire trust around him and his staff, and coach junior officers about this value. Furthermore, key leaders must play a role (and potentially change) in considering new methodologies to counter the insane bureaucracy<sup>109</sup> and innovative criteria for soldier promotions and career advancements.<sup>110</sup> These contingencies remain a sort of brake on the implementation of this new culture based on trust. Changing the zero-defect mentality and encouraging the spread of "shared consciousness" and "empowered execution,"<sup>111</sup> are simple decisions that can be taken immediately without financial resources or political authorizations. Even if this organizational culture can include a level of risk according to the traditional military culture, commanders' willingness to embrace this type of cultural organization remains fundamental.

Second, the educator, who is the vital actor able to shape the future generations of soldiers in the trust culture. This figure, which is crucial and fundamental in all fields, represents the reference model for the next generation and will always be a crucial asset to which the military organization entrusts its future. Academic instructors in the military institutes, military leaders posted in educational institutes such as military academies, or warrant officers in operation units will be the true multipliers who will instill a new culture of trust in military organizations. Therefore, having a team of educators able to change a military organization's organizational culture requires an important talent management process. It will be important to identify the right attitude that enables a soldier to effectively fulfill his specific task, his training and educational background should be appropriately evaluated, and his awareness of his role are all fundamental considerations that must contribute to this figure's selection.

Furthermore, the educational system requires significant financial resources to support the expansion of a trust culture and the maintenance of high educational standards. Sending educators abroad to learn alternative approaches, as well as adapting military institutes' information infrastructures to new educational needs such as critical thinking and agile methodology, are expensive and not always feasible for small armies such as the Italian Army. As a result, seizing any opportunity in this field and launching a significant investment campaign to improve the quality of the education system could be another critical aspect in spreading a new culture of trust in organizations.

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