

Strategy Research Project

Mission Command: Preparing the Fields for the Seed to Grow

by

Colonel William C. Lindner
United States Army



United States Army War College
Class of 2013

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT: A

Approved for Public Release
Distribution is Unlimited

This manuscript is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (215) 662-5606. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) xx-03-2013		2. REPORT TYPE STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Mission Command: Preparing the Fields for the Seed to Grow				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Colonel William C. Lindner United States Army				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Colonel Steven C. Sobotta Department of Command, Leadership, and Management				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College 122 Forbes Avenue Carlisle, PA 17013				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution A: Approved for Public Release. Distribution is Unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES Word Count: 5,080					
14. ABSTRACT As the Army transitions out of a decade of war in both Afghanistan and Iraq, the imperative facing today's Army leadership centers around insuring that the beneficial lessons learned out of the past ten years of war are those carried forward into the next decade and implemented throughout the force. Unquestionably, the distributed nature of the conflict in these wars created reliance upon junior leaders in remote locations to conduct operations based upon training and intent, but with minimal guidance during execution. While certain pitfalls arise out of these types of operations, generally speaking, our Army has advanced greatly through the implementation of mission command in our deployed forces. As the conditions of the current battlefield fade with time, how does an Army both cultivate this concept and integrate it into garrison operations, our training and educational base, and preparations for the next conflict? Just as the field requires preparation for the seed to take root and grow, our Army requires preparation for the concepts of mission command to foster and develop beyond the necessity of the battlefield.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Leadership, Organizational Change, Military Culture					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 30	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UU	b. ABSTRACT UU	c. THIS PAGE UU			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code)

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

Mission Command: Preparing the Fields for the Seed to Grow

by

Colonel William C. Lindner
United States Army

Colonel Steven C. Sobotta
Department of Command, Leadership, and Management
Project Adviser

This manuscript is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (215) 662-5606. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

Abstract

Title: Mission Command: Preparing the Fields for the Seed to Grow
Report Date: March 2013
Page Count: 30
Word Count: 5,080
Key Terms: Leadership, Organizational Change, Military Culture
Classification: Unclassified

As the Army transitions out of a decade of war in both Afghanistan and Iraq, the imperative facing today's Army leadership centers around insuring that the beneficial lessons learned out of the past ten years of war are those carried forward into the next decade and implemented throughout the force. Unquestionably, the distributed nature of the conflict in these wars created reliance upon junior leaders in remote locations to conduct operations based upon training and intent, but with minimal guidance during execution. While certain pitfalls arise out of these types of operations, generally speaking, our Army has advanced greatly through the implementation of mission command in our deployed forces. As the conditions of the current battlefield fade with time, how does an Army both cultivate this concept and integrate it into garrison operations, our training and educational base, and preparations for the next conflict? Just as the field requires preparation for the seed to take root and grow, our Army requires preparation for the concepts of mission command to foster and develop beyond the necessity of the battlefield.

Mission Command: Preparing the Fields for the Seed to Grow

Obedience is a principle, but the man stands above the principle.

—Helmuth von Moltke¹

As the Army transitions out of a decade of war in both Afghanistan and Iraq there will necessarily be a period of change. Whether beset by current economic conditions or the Army's natural tendency to improve through the application of After Action Reviews (AARs), the effect remains the same; the Army will change. With that in mind, the imperative facing today's Army leadership centers around insuring that the beneficial lessons learned out of the past ten years of war are those carried forward into the next decade and implemented throughout the force. Unquestionably, the distributed nature of the conflict in both Iraq and Afghanistan created reliance upon junior leaders in remote locations to conduct operations based upon training and intent, but with minimal guidance during execution. While certain pitfalls arise out of these types of operations, generally speaking, our Army has advanced greatly through the implementation of mission command in our deployed forces. As the conditions of the current battlefield fade with time, how does an Army both cultivate this concept and integrate it into garrison operations, our training and educational base, and preparations for the next conflict? The challenge may be greater than it seems.

To meet this challenge, the Army has moved rapidly to codify mission command and the supporting doctrine in a new manual, published digitally in order to hasten its delivery to the force. Under the new doctrine, *mission command* is defined as "the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander's intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations."² The underlying premise of which is

the understanding that there are risks associated with conducting operations; risks mitigated through training and preparation and the trust that forms from superiors observing their subordinates operate successfully. However, this requires that the leader above underwrite those risks as acceptable and reasonable. In a combat environment, there frequently exists little option but to trust one's subordinate. Yet in the garrison environment, especially one characterized by declining budgets, shrinking resources, and few competing requirements, the likelihood that the hard-earned trust of the battlefield will remain seems doubtful. One needs only to look at the recently published message to *All Army Activities* (ALARACT) outlining the requirements for suicide stand-down to appreciate how difficult this challenge will be.

Though this challenge seems great, it is not insurmountable. Just as the field requires preparation for the seed to take root and grow, our Army requires preparation for the concepts of mission command to foster and develop beyond the necessity of the battlefield. This begins with culture. From top to bottom, the Army must cultivate the proper culture if it truly desires to maintain the successful leadership gains of the past decade of conflict. Within this context, this paper will discuss the concept of mission command, its value to our Army, and the potential barriers to implementation in a non-deployed environment. Further, I will discuss the culture associated with successful mission command and why the Army must cultivate same if mission command is to successfully remain as the cornerstone of our leadership doctrine. Finally, I will address those measures undertaken towards implementation, thus far, as a potential indicator of success and offer recommendations for the process.

What is Mission Command?

Before one can have a meaningful discussion about the merits or shortcomings of mission command, a basis for understanding must be established. As referenced above, Army doctrinal Publication (ADP) 6-0 serves as the Army's capstone doctrinal manual on the subject. Three principle components enable the exercise of mission command by leaders in support of unified land operations as depicted in the chart on the following page. The *mission command philosophy*, defined above, outlines six principles "to assist commanders and staff in balancing the art of command and the science of control."³ These include: building cohesive teams through trust; creating shared understanding; providing a clear commander's intent; the exercise of disciplined initiative; the use of mission orders; and acceptance of prudent risk.⁴ In turn, these principles and the philosophy they support are executed through the *mission command warfighting function*, which is the "related tasks and systems that develop and integrate those activities enabling a commander to balance the art of command and the science of control."⁵ Finally, the entire process is enabled by the *mission command system* which includes the personnel, networks, facilities, equipment, processes and procedures that provides the capability to exercise mission command.⁶ Simply put, this manual holistically establishes the philosophical underpinnings of mission command; provides the doctrine which supports its application to Army warfighting procedures; and finally, defines the linkages between the doctrine and those systems which support its execution. The inter-relationship of these components is further outlined in the Figure on the following page.

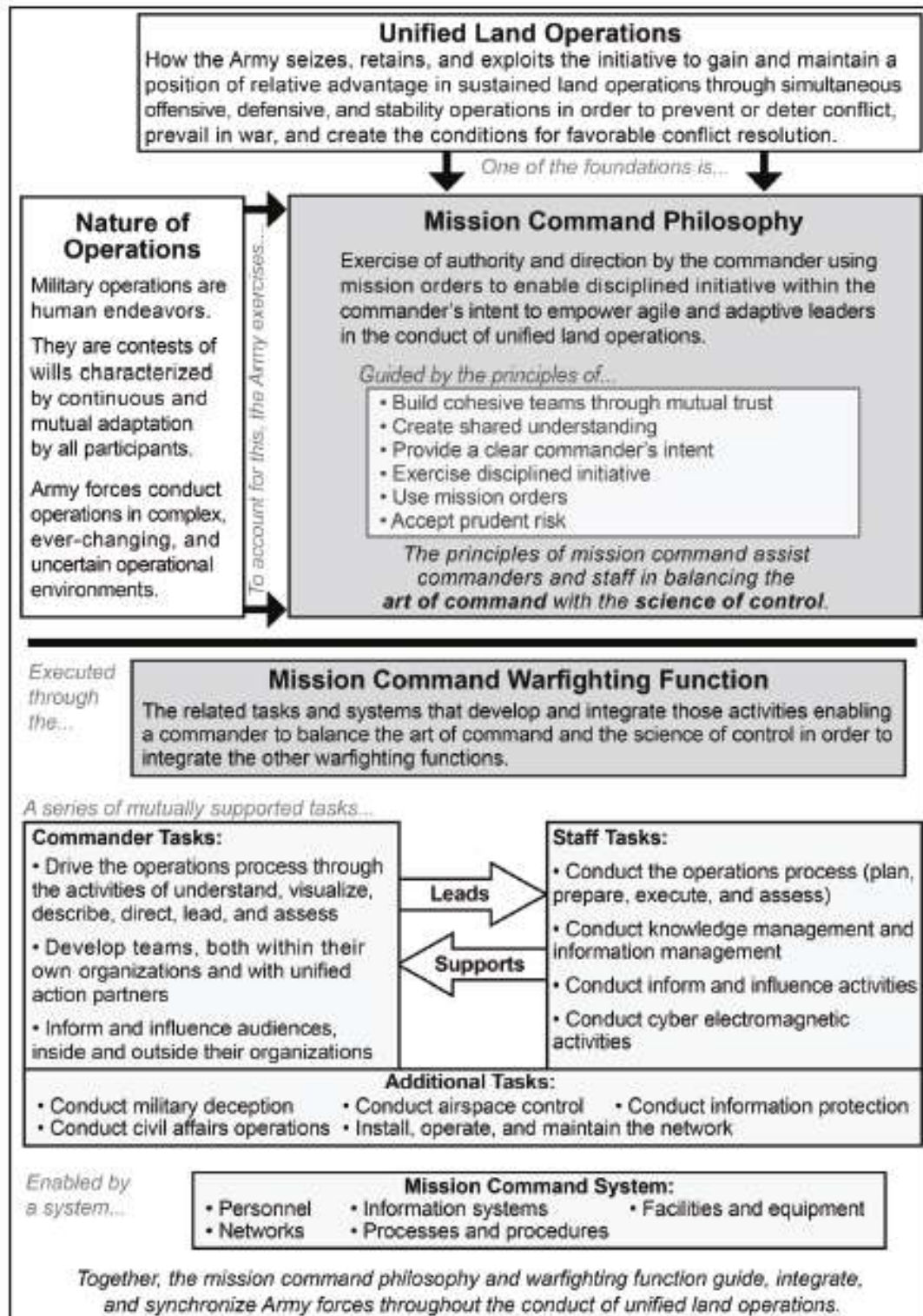


Figure. The Exercise of Mission Command

History and Timing

New manuals aside, many have questioned whether the Army's new doctrine is in fact new at all, or just a re-labeling of past procedures executed for decades. Colonel (retired) Greg Fontenot, a former armored brigade commander and director of the Army's School of Advanced Military Studies, makes a compelling argument that mission command is simply "An old idea for the 21st Century" in his article similarly named. Citing examples from the Indian Wars, World War II, and Operation Iraqi Freedom, Fontenot clearly makes the case that the concepts of mission command have permeated both our doctrine and the execution of our campaigns since Little Big Horn.⁷ Similarly, volumes of AARs from the conflicts in both Iraq and Afghanistan point to the successful execution of operations, spanning the spectrum of warfare from tactical to strategic, and highlight the value of mission command.

As such, one could rightly question "why the increased emphasis on doctrinal concepts which already seem to be in place?" The answer lies not in their practice in battle, but the capture of these gains as our Army moves away from eleven years of war. Most significantly, the culture that allows mission command to succeed in combat often arises out of necessity. Disparate locations across the battlefield frequently mandate that a commander must trust his subordinates to execute based upon training and initiative as distance and communication challenges hamper the exercise of control. Cavalry scouts demonstrated this in the 1870's across the plains against Indian tribes and have done the same in the current campaigns. However, what remains absent from our historical successes with this doctrine are the implementation of these principles in peacetime, where control is easily executed and problems with communications are rare.

The opportunity presented by the current circumstances is more than just anecdotal as it literally determines whether or not the cultural and conditional 'soil' will support the adoption of mission command. First, the principles as executed over the past eleven years are already ingrained across our Army and the joint force, writ large. Whether through mandate or happenstance, our Army has successfully implemented these practices to great effect during the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Moreover, the duration of these conflicts has insured that a whole generation of Soldiers has known nothing but this doctrine. As such, the circumstances surrounding the inculcation of mission command may be less about creation and more about preventing their loss through gains in leadership which were 'hard-earned' on the battlefields of Southwest Asia.

Second, the old maxim 'timing is everything,' applies equally to the implementation of mission command. As the United States faces the greatest economic crisis since the great depression, one cannot help but appreciate that the military will shoulder its fair share of the economic burden. Historically, the military faced periods of both down-sizing and retraction into the continental United States at the conclusion of conflict to both reduce costs and refit the force. With the removal of forces from Iraq, reduction of forces in Europe, and a publicized timeline to bring the majority of elements out of Afghanistan, the current pattern seems to follow historical precedents.

Herein lies both the opportunity and the potential pitfalls facing implementation. The opportunity presents through the fact that the concepts of this doctrine are largely embedded in our force, greatly mitigating traditional start-up costs associated with implementing a "new" doctrine. As General Dempsey stated in his *white paper* on

mission command, “trust informs the execution of [the commander’s] intent.”⁸ The basis for this trust derives from a regimen of training and experience resident in subordinates. Unlike periods where the Army finds itself expanding and thus, has the benefit of manpower but not necessarily experience, drawdowns-especially those following a protracted conflict-present circumstances where both training levels and experience are in surplus. This may well be the decisive element which allows mission command to take root in our Army where it has failed to do so in the past.

The downside and potential pitfall derives from the same circumstances. Raised in an era where trust was given under the most dire of circumstances, the current generation of Army leaders through the rank of lieutenant colonel, have largely known nothing but mission command and its application in a deployed environment. However, the withholding of that same trust in a garrison environment where impacts are less but controls are greater, seems to be leading many to doubt whether leaders are willing to allow subordinates the freedom to execute under the principles of mission command.⁹

The Speed of Trust

With these conditions facing the Army, the imperative question which must be answered is, *how do we create a culture of trust that allows mission command to flourish in garrison in the same manner it has in combat?* In his best-selling book, *The Speed of Trust*, Stephen Covey sets the foundation for mission command as he describes the criticality of trust, one of the three key attributes of mission command as outlined by General Dempsey in his white paper on mission command.¹⁰ Covey states that, “simply put, trust means *confidence*. When you trust people, you have confidence in them-in their integrity and in their abilities. When you distrust people, you are suspicious of them-of their integrity, agenda, capabilities, or their track record.”¹¹ This

fundamental concept serves to form the most basic and critical bond between leaders and the led. It is the empowering principle that, when combined with initiative and discipline, enables the incredible outcomes observed in our junior leaders in those places and at times where higher control is absent. These form the foundational building blocks at the lowest levels of mission command.

Covey goes on to discuss this relationship to productivity in the business world. In his discussion of the 'economics of trust,' he states that, "trust always affects two outcomes-speed and cost. When trust goes down, speed will also go down and costs will go up."¹² Conversely, "when trust goes up, speed will also go up and costs will go down." Applied to operations within the military, those costs represent the efficiency of our operations which must be addressed in times of austerity. Even more importantly, in wartime these costs are measured [potentially] in the lives of Soldiers.

Colonel Tom Guthrie provides several simple scenarios in his writings on the subject which are useful in demonstrating this concept.¹³ The most basic of these scenarios centers around one of the Army's most time-honored traditions-the conduct of physical training. At most installations, physical training or "PT" occurs from 0630-0730 daily. It typically begins with large formations and then breaks down into smaller ability groups where subordinate leaders, using their initiative and better knowledge of those in their group, lead subordinates through exercises to build endurance, flexibility, and conditioning. On the one hand, coordinated timing of these events allows for the blocking off of roads for safety, synchronization of schedules, and provides a measure of predictability in a Soldier's day. But what happens, as Guthrie poses, if a subordinate leader (*Lieutenant X*) decides that his platoon needs more than just an hour or that the

weather later in the day is more conducive to workouts. In this simplest of examples, the tension of extending the trust to subordinates who wish to exercise initiative can be seen, and easily squashed for reasons of synchronization and homogeneity. So why give the trust when clearly, there exist valid reasons for conducting PT at the same time and in the same format? The “trust dividend” takes this concept a step farther.

When trust is high, the dividend you receive is like a performance multiplier, elevating and improving every dimension of your organization and your life...In a company, high trust materially improves communication, collaboration, execution, innovation, strategy, engagement, partnering, and relationships with all stake holders.¹⁴

Though the lexicon he cites reflects the qualities sought in business, the applicability toward the military and its culture clearly resound. Now expound upon the previous example. By extending the trust to subordinates which appreciates their greater knowledge of those they lead, the organization improves through the exercise of initiative over what would be expected from simply following the norm. Further, this extension of trust creates a multiplicative effect in the organization that permeates from one situation into all facets of subordinate actions. Covey refers to this as the “hidden variable” in the formula for organizational success. “The traditional business formula says that strategy times execution equals results.” What it should say is: “Strategy times execution multiplied by trust equals results.”¹⁵ Applied to the scenario above, as *Lieutenant X* realizes he has the latitude to change training conditions for the benefit of his men (results), he will likely utilize the same methodology when approaching other training opportunities such as marksmanship, gunnery, ethics, etc. As a result, the unit benefits through a more tailored and focused plan to develop its members which, in turn, delivers greater capability to the commander for employment when called.

Problem Solving or Problem Bounding?

Expounding upon the trust variables highlighted above, Keith Stewart, a Defense Scientist with Defense Research and Development Canada (DRDC) has conducted considerable research on the topic of mission command as it pertains to leading multi-national coalitions. A direct outgrowth of Canada's participation in operations in southern Afghanistan, Mr. Stewart draws further distinction in the cultural differences between mission command styles derived from the education and experiences resident in the officer corps from different nations. Building upon the research of 'Information Age' scholars Donald S. Alberts and Richard E. Hayes, He presents a spectrum of "command and control approaches" to define where mission command fits within the differing types of leadership doctrines.¹⁶ The spectrum ranges on one end from "Order specific" which is exemplified by the Chinese Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA), and characterized by centralized control and the use of detailed orders with little room for variation or initiative, to "Mission specific," exuding low levels of control as exemplified by the Israeli Army and the German Wehrmacht during World War II. The area between these two ends of the spectrum they title "Objective specific," which defines the band of leadership doctrine predominantly occupied by the western armies of today, inclusive of the British, Canadian Forces, and the United States Army.¹⁷

Within the rubric of the "Objective specific" category, they further delineate between "problem bounding" and "problem solving" approaches. Indicative of the Commonwealth armies where objectives are presented in more general terms, they propose that "problem bounding directives are less detailed than those issued by commanders in problem solving environments-often by a factor of three to one, reflecting this lack of detail."¹⁸ In contrast, Alberts and Hayes suggest that the US Army

adopted 'problem solving' methods characterized by more substantial guidance, focusing not only on the objectives to be met, but how they are to be accomplished.

A rational person might question why this matters. First, it provides insights into how other armies view our methods of operation as a military. More importantly, it gives a reasonably objective characterization of where we are culturally within the spectrum of mission command doctrine, and where we need to go as seen through the eyes of our closest allies. Finally, it lends credence to the value of this doctrine by those who've adopted its use through successful incorporation in their own armies and their appreciation of the potential that comes with successful implementation in the U.S. Army.

Changing Culture and "The Gaps"

Though the discussion thus far is critical to the future of the Army, one could largely relegate it to the realm of small unit leadership and experiences at the brigade-level and below. However, implementation of this doctrine across the Army in specific terms, and the joint force writ-large becomes a problem orders-of-magnitude larger. That said, addressing this type of problem is not without precedent, as many large corporations and multi-national organizations have had to emplace cultural changes over the years in order to remain viable in the workplace.

Renowned author, Stephen Bungay presents a roadmap for this type of change in his book, *The Art of Action; How Leaders Close the Gaps Between Plans, Actions and Results*. He states, "Executing strategy is about planning what to do in order to achieve certain outcomes and making sure that the actions we have planned are actually carried out until the desired outcomes are achieved."¹⁹ Implied in this, of course, is the idea that there is in fact a plan for implementation of mission command

which guides the process before us. Often times, there still exist “gaps” in the strategy which hamper execution on the large scale. Bungay addresses three of these.

The first gap occurs between ‘plans and outcomes’ and concerns *knowledge*: “it is the difference between what we would like to know and what we actually know. It means that we cannot create perfect plans.”²⁰ With regard to mission command, this gap clearly highlights the lack of information supporting implementation across the force. It includes critical components such as the desired culture that Army and Department of Defense leadership wish to cultivate, the methods selected, and timelines associated with its implementation. Put another way, “Norms make meaningful action possible by telling military actors who they are and what they can do in given situations. In this way cultural norms define the purpose and possibilities of military change. For this reason, we start looking at culture.”²¹

The second gap in strategy occurs between ‘plans and actions’ and addresses alignment. “It is the difference between what we would like people to do and what they actually do. It means that even if we encourage them to switch off their brains, we cannot know enough about them to program them perfectly.”²² Potentially, this has the most pertinence to mission command because its impact coincides directly with the concepts of the doctrine. Guidance is provided to achieve an effect, but how that guidance is perceived and acted upon determines the methods used to accomplish the desired result.

The final gap he addresses occurs between actions and outcomes and concerns effects: “It is the difference between what we hope our actions will achieve and what they actually achieve. We can never fully predict how the environment will react to what

we do. It means that we cannot know in advance exactly what outcomes the actions of our organization are going to create.”²³

Here we refer to acclaimed organizational scholar, Peter Senge. In his book, *The Fifth Discipline; The Art and Practice of a Learning Organization*, Senge discusses *systems thinking* and its value toward understanding problems of increasing complexity. In particular, *systems thinking* provides a method “for seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static “snapshots.”²⁴ Unequivocally, the strategic “re-culturing” of the Army, across the multitude of organizations, agencies, and posts requires a holistic appreciation of the second, third, and “nth order” effects which will occur during this process. He also joins other organizational scholars in cautioning that, undertakings of this magnitude must be iterative in order to succeed. To address this anticipated frustration surrounding changes in a learning organization, Senge provides what he terms “The Laws of the Fifth Discipline,” all of which provide insight toward the Army’s way ahead.²⁵

Making the Case

As with any new doctrine published, there must be a focused effort to educate the current members of the force on the changes while simultaneously indoctrinating new members of the military when they join. The Army’s emphasis on suicide prevention and its associated chain teachings and stand-down days come to mind as only the most recent example. Because this is important to our Army, its emphasis echoed from the mouth of every senior leader with accompanying graphic aids and a mandated timeline for execution by the force.

The adoption of mission command, though less immediate in its necessity than addressing suicides, should receive similar emphasis across the force in terms of both

breadth and scope. However, the current efforts appear to fall short, either of educating the force or providing rationale as to why its adoption is important. The publication of ADP 6-0, Mission Command, demonstrates this clearly. Though provided to the Army via digital media, the emphasis on *why* adoption of this doctrine was important was left largely to self-discovery and a documents search of Army briefings provides only cursory references from senior leaders, most of which are dated seven months ago.

As a trainer at the Army's Joint Maneuver Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany, the task to train this doctrine in Cavalry Squadrons and Tank Battalions fell to me and a handful of selected former battalion commanders. Each of us commanded an understanding of the tactical concepts of the doctrine, having led formations in combat where mission command reigned as a necessity out of distributed operations as much as canon to be followed. In that regard and the tactical scenarios presented at the training center, its adoption clearly displayed tactical merit. However, there exists a considerable gap between the 'tactical benefit' observed at the training center and the vision of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, who states that "mission command must be institutionalized and operationalized into all aspects of the joint force."²⁶

Pertaining to mission command, leaders have addressed time and again the need to establish the proper culture to allow it to cultivate. That said, the literature produced thus far, only provides a cursory, "one over the Army" view. In order to properly establish a culture for mission command to take root, the Army must first decide upon what aspects of our culture will carry forward. To better appreciate the

criticality of this step, organizational theorist Edgar Schein provides a simplified definition of culture for understanding:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.”²⁷

These are further broken down into three distinctive levels which establish the fundamental building blocks that underpin the way in which an organization sees itself. *Artifacts* are those “visible products of an organization such as structure, procedures, and technology; rites and rituals; design of physical space; tales of important events and celebrated heroes; and formal statements such as mission and vision.”²⁸ Applied to mission command, examples range from celebrating Soldiers recognized for their heroic actions while exercising initiative in battle, to the allowing of variance in training schedules and PT in a manner that rewards initiative, and the emphasis on junior leaders empowered and underwritten by the chain of command.

Moving in the direction of the collective whole, *espoused beliefs and values* represent “the unwritten rules and norms that govern and guide day-to-day behavior [which] serve as an integrating mechanism and often reduce uncertainty in key areas of a group’s functioning.”²⁹ Guidance from commanders in order to maintain limits for the purpose of resource allocation and efficiency across the organization highlight this second category. For example: recalling our previous *Lieutenant X* and his desire to conduct PT outside of hours designated by the post, guidance to remain out of high-traffic areas for safety purposes while conducting same would exemplify this type of unwritten norm.

Lastly, *basic underlying assumptions* “reflect a marked preference for certain solutions to problems, adopted on the basis of past preference.”³⁰ Simply stated, historical successes produce a range of outcomes, some of which are more desirable than others and the organization will tend to gravitate toward those which most optimally address an issue. As an Army, we learn through teaching subordinates principles that work and then incorporate these into to a training regimen so that they become ingrained in the force. Succinctly put, leaders are afforded “multiple avenues through which to affect change,”³¹ these include:

- What they pay attention to, measure and control;
- Their reaction to critical incidents and organizational crisis;
- Resource allocation;
- Deliberate role modeling, teaching, and coaching;
- Awarding rewards and status; and
- Recruitment, selection, promotion, and communication procedures.³²

Selecting the best of these equates to perpetuating success, an objective that has value when resources are short and ultimately, lives are at risk. This last point highlights the gravity of this endeavor and the imperative of cultural change. As Eitan Shamir notes in his book, *Transforming Command; The Pursuit of Mission Command in the U.S., British, and Israeli Armies*, the difference between leadership and management lies in “its capacity to generate culture change.”³³ Conversely, failing to change a culture relegates this effort simply to a management endeavor which falls short of the required deliverables where the stakes are potentially terminal.

Vision Begins with a White Paper

Once the Army decides what its mission command culture will look like as discussed above, the next step in the process requires communicating that *vision* to the force. According to John Kotter, author of six best-selling books on the topic and one of the foremost experts in management and leadership of large organizations, “*vision* is a picture of the future with some implicit or explicit commentary on why people should strive to create that future.”³⁴ The criticality of this step surrounds the understanding of what vision accomplishes for the organization. There are three principle benefits:

First, by clarifying the general direction for change...it simplifies hundreds or thousands of more detailed decisions. Second, it motivates people to take action in the right direction, even if the initial steps are personally painful. Third, it helps coordinate the actions of different people, even thousands and thousands of individuals, in a remarkably fast and efficient way.”³⁵

Without question, General Dempsey’s *White Paper* on mission command serves as an exceptional vision for where the Army should proceed in order to implement this concept across the force. By describing the future environment, he provides context to how the underlying assumptions of mission command will apply and support future operations. His discussion of key attributes depicts the values and beliefs we wish to carry forward from eleven years of conflict into the future force. Finally, his roadmap for instilling mission command and the way ahead interweave those traditional artifacts that tie the history of the Army to its future success.

Though the aforementioned articulates the vision clearly in its own right, it falls prey to both of the major pitfalls surrounding the communication of a vision to the organization, namely poor and under-communication. As Kotter writes, “The real power of a vision is unleashed only when most of those involved in an enterprise or activity

have a common understanding of its goals and direction.”³⁶ In order to transform this effort from “brilliance which fails to reach its intended audience” into a vision that “resonates in the hearts of the force,” the Army must seize the opportunity before it. Like a fumbled handoff, the Army simply needs to pick up the ball and run with it.

This begins with a simple, understandable product, capable of communicating the vision to every level. The *White Paper* accomplishes this more than satisfactorily. Next, repetitive communication via multiple forums insures that the vision gets communicated to the target audience and reinforced over time. Here again, refer to the ALARACT message for implementing a “suicide awareness” stand-down. That effort was accompanied with clear implementation guidance, accompanying explanatory graphics, and a feedback mechanism to the Army’s senior leadership. The difference between the two efforts offers stark contrast. Finally, through leadership by example and dialogue with their audience, seeming inconsistencies can be addressed to insure that the message remains as intended.³⁷

The Way Ahead

Just because valued concepts are penned in a well-articulated tome does not guarantee their implementation. As this paper and numerous other articles have expressed already, the further inculcation of mission command will require a cultural change which has failed to take root previously, despite its espoused benefits. The complexity of this task merits a systems approach to fully appreciate and anticipate the responses that will ensue as implementation continues. As one scholar put it:

Leaders play a crucial role in the process of culture change as they both shape and are shaped by culture. Leaders represent the culture in which they themselves matured; conversely, leadership is distinguished from management primarily by its capacity to generate cultural change. In situations where the gap between “theory in use” and “espoused theory”

generate dysfunction, leaders must identify and steer a course for change.³⁸

However, the verity that realizing this change in culture is difficult does not minimize the worthiness of the venture. Rather, the fact that much of the “heavy lifting” has already occurred through leadership gains in combat and a well-crafted vision should motivate the Army and its senior leadership to see it through to completion. The foundations for this leadership transformation find themselves throughout the history of the U.S. Army and continue today. Moreover, the gains achieved through eleven years of war should both motivate senior leaders to maintain visibility of the potential rewards and convict us from the costs already incurred in combat, driving our Army to fully develop and implement mission command doctrine.

In its most basic form, our institution has three tasks before it to close the gaps between the strategy for mission command and executing its implementation: Decide what really matters; Get the message across; And give people space and support.³⁹ The trusted initiative of our able subordinates will take care of the rest, and that after all, is the essence of mission command.

Endnotes

¹ Stephen Bungay, “Thinking smart, Acting Smart: Some Reflections on Project Delivery,” RUSI Defence Systems, Spring 2006, p. 56-59. [http://www.ashridge.org.uk/Website/IC.nsf/wFARATT/Thinking%20Smart%2C%20Acting%20Smart%3A%20Some%20Reflections%20on%20Project%20Delivery/\\$File/ThinkingSmartActingSmart.pdf](http://www.ashridge.org.uk/Website/IC.nsf/wFARATT/Thinking%20Smart%2C%20Acting%20Smart%3A%20Some%20Reflections%20on%20Project%20Delivery/$File/ThinkingSmartActingSmart.pdf) (accessed April 25, 2013).

² U.S. Department of the Army, *Mission Command*, ADP 6-0 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, May 17, 2012), 1.

³ Ibid., iv.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Gregory Fontenot, "Mission Command: An Old Idea For the 21st Century," *Army* Vol. 61, no. 3 (March, 2011), 66, in ProQuest (accessed October 15, 2012).

⁸ Dempsey, "Mission Command," 6.

⁹ SES Robert Naething, U.S. Army, former Director, Mission Command Center of Excellence, interview by author, Washington DC, December 3, 2012.

¹⁰ GEN Dempsey, "Mission Command," 6.

¹¹ Stephen M.R. Covey, *The Speed of Trust; The One Thing That Changes Everything*, (New York: The Free Press, 2006), 5.

¹² Ibid., 13.

¹³ Tom Guthrie, "Mission Command: Do We Have the Stomach For What is Really Required," *Army* (June, 2012), http://www.ausa.org/publications/armymagazine/archive/2012/06/Documents/FC_Guthrie_0612.pdf (accessed November 9, 2012).

¹⁴ Covey, *The Speed of Trust; The One Thing That Changes Everything*, 19.

¹⁵ Covey, *The Speed of Trust; The One Thing That Changes Everything*, 20.

¹⁶ David S. Albert and Richard E. Hayes, *Command Arrangements for Peace Operations*, (Washington, DC: CCRP Publications Series, 1995).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Keith Stewart, "Mission Command: Problem Bounding or Problem Solving?," *Canadian Military Journal* Vol. 9, no. 4 (Winter 2009), 51.

¹⁹ Stephen Bungay, *The Art of Action; How Leaders Close the Gaps Between Plans, Actions, and Results*, (Boston: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2011), 19.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Theo Farrell and Terry Terriff, eds., *The Sources of Military Change: Culture, Politics, Technology*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002), 7.

²² Bungay, *The Art of Action; How Leaders Close the Gaps Between Plans, Actions, and Results*, 20.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline; The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 68.

²⁵ Ibid., 57-67. The (11) Laws of the Fifth Discipline further describe the action-reaction process when making changes to a system. These eleven laws account for the majority of scenarios encountered when organizational changes are levied upon a complex system and highlight the fact that, most often, the relationships are non-linear in their relationship.

²⁶ Dempsey, "Mission Command," 6.

²⁷ Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 17.

²⁸ Eitan Shamir, *Transforming Command; The Pursuit of Mission Command in the U.S., British, and Israeli Armies*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 21, adapted from Schein 25-37.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 23.

³² Ibid., 22.

³³ Ibid., 23.

³⁴ John P. Kotter, *Leading Change*, (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1996), 68.

³⁵ Ibid., 69.

³⁶ Ibid., 85.

³⁷ Ibid., 90.

³⁸ Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 245-271.

³⁹ Bungay, *The Art of Action; How Leaders Close the Gaps Between Plans, Actions, and Results*, 21.

