MISSION COMMAND AND THE STARFISH ORGANIZATIONAL MODELS: A COMPARISON OF PHILOSOPHIES IN A DECENTRALIZED COMBAT ENVIRONMENT

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This study compares the differences and similarities between the U.S. Army's Mission Command philosophy and the decentralized "Starfish" philosophy as applied to a decentralized combat environment. The Attack on the Ranch House battle that took place in Afghanistan provides a prime example of the execution of Mission Command within a U.S. unit, but not necessarily with its Coalition partners. This case study suggests that the U.S. Army's understanding of Mission Command philosophy along with the principles of the "Starfish" can help bridge that gap between the U.S. and its Coalition partners, especially in a decentralized environment. Not bridging the gap may adversely affect the future of military success against future decentralized threats.

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

ABSTRACT

MISSION COMMAND AND THE STARFISH ORGANIZATIONAL MODELS: A COMPARISON OF ORGANIZATIONAL PHILOSOPHIES IN A DECENTRALIZED COMBAT ENVIRONMENT, by MAJ Luciano F. Picco, 104 pages.

This study compares the differences and similarities between the U.S. Army's Mission Command philosophy and the decentralized "Starfish" philosophy as applied to a decentralized combat environment. The Attack on the Ranch House battle that took place in Afghanistan provides a prime example of the execution of Mission Command within a U.S. unit, but not necessarily with its Coalition partners. This case study suggests that the U.S. Army's understanding of Mission Command philosophy along with the principles of the "Starfish" can help bridge that gap between the U.S. and its Coalition partners, especially in a decentralized environment. Not bridging the gap may adversely affect the future of military success against future decentralized threats.

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ACRONYMS

ADP	Army Doctrine Publication
ADRP	Army Doctrine Reference Publication
ANA	Afghanistan National Army
ASG	Afghanistan Security Guards
COIN	Counterinsurgency
COP	Combat Outpost
FM	Field Manual
FOB	Forward Operating Base
JP	Joint Publication
LT	Lieutenant
NCO	Noncommissioned Officer
SSG	Staff Sergeant
TF	Task Force

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

> One advantage we have, especially in times of decreasing budgets, derives from our ability to develop the right leaders - non-commissioned officers, officers, and civilians - who can think in this very complex world.
>
> — General Raymond T. Odierno
> 38th Chief of Staff of the Army

The U.S. Military's ability to effectively contend with the next threat has become increasingly difficult. In the past, the U.S. Army has looked at technological improvements to provide an edge over adversaries. This is especially true when determining how mission decisions are reached and the speed with which adjustments to those plans can be made in a changing combat environment. With the development of cheaper and faster technologies, such as the Internet that allows an adversary the ability to communicate quickly and more effectively, these technologies have shrunk the technological gap between the U.S. military and its adversaries. Many of the technological solutions that the U.S. has enjoyed in the past may no longer be superior to the enemy nor cost effective. This dilemma presents the question, where does the Army turn to maintain its edge, particularly over decentralized combatants and terrorist groups? According to the Combined Arms Center (CAC) White Paper, the Army believes an investment in the leadership and development of the human dimension provides a necessary edge in future warfare. "By investing in human capital, the Army will be

capable of fielding a future force that maintains and exploits a decisive cognitive edge, physical supremacy, and cultural understanding over potential adversaries."[1]

Currently, the Army culture supports a hierarchical leadership structure that aligns predominately with Transactional Leadership Organizational theory.[2] In this schema, transactional organizations utilize leaders who are motivated by reward and punishment, live in a social system that has a clear chain of command, and the prime purpose of subordinates is to do what the manager tells them. Transactional leadership has proven useful in enforcing standards, discipline with in the Army, and gives a structural aspect to leadership at all levels in the military. On the battlefield, this practice paid off for most of the wars fought with peer-like, as well as inferior competitors. Operation Desert Storm provides a useful example.

> Operation Desert Storm was strictly controlled from the top down. There was no room for initiative, . . . below corps level. Commanders at all levels were instructed where and when to move and were not permitted to find their own way to their objectives. In essence the coalition forces simply lined up and swept forward, careful to maintain contact with the friendly forces on their flanks, like the rigidly disciplined Macedonian Phalanx.[3]

When fighting an enemy with a similar leadership structure, Transactional Leadership Style works. Using the Operations Desert Storm example, Iraq was controlled

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[1] Combined Arms Center-Training, "Human dimension White Paper: A Framework for Optimizing Human Performance," 9 October 2014, 7, accessed 21 November 2014, http://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/documents/cact/HumanDimensionWhitePaper.pdf.

[2] Oscar Guzman, "Organizational Leadership Theories," Small Business Index, accessed March 7, 2015, http://smallbusiness.chron.com/organizational-leadership-theories-284.html.

[3] Robert R. Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver: Maneuver-Warfare Theory and Airland Battle* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1991), 269.

by Sadaam Hussein and a handful of powerful generals who typified the transactional approach. They had learned the basics of Transactional Leadership from the West. Yet if we are to face an adversary that does not align with the transactional leadership approach, or leads in a non-hierarchical way, the U.S. Military must reassess the effectiveness of its historical transactional leadership structure and capability to adapt to a new environment.

During the last 25 years, the U.S. Army has witnessed a move toward the less traditional type of nation-on-nation warfare. In the age of the War on Terror, the enemy is traditionally not one with a top-down organizational leadership structure. The Taliban in Afghanistan and insurgents in Iraq provide examples. Both have often utilized unconventional tactics of warfare as they adapted to the U.S. approach to fighting. The counterinsurgency conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq are more reminiscent of special operations missions than they are of big Army on Army conflicts. U.S. units are now called upon to fight in smaller units against an enemy that easily blends within the population and fight only when an opportunity presents itself. Due to the changed threats, the U.S. Army recognized it must adapt the way it conducts missions. It did so by emphasizing the human elements of war. It focused on a more human centric mission of nation-building, humanitarian assistance, security mission and civil support aid.[4]

The Army's top leaders adapted to this new human aspect of war through the adoption of Mission Command Philosophy. In 2011 the U.S. Army officially adopted the Mission Command philosophy in its doctrine manual, ADP 6-0 and made it a war

[4] Uzi Ben-Shalom and Eitan Shamir, "Mission Command Between Theory and Practice: The Case of the IDF," *Defense and Security Analysis* 27, no. 2 (July 2011): 101-117. DOI: 10.1080/14751798.2011.578715. 2011103.

fighting function. This new philosophy emphasizes a shift in Army Culture from a classical top-down hierarchical leadership approach to a delineated, smaller unit leadership organization where small group leaders have greater capability to make independent judgments.

A military's struggle to adapt to new problems and combat environments is not something unique to the 21st century. This same adaptation problem faced the Prussian Army in 1806 after their defeat by the more decentralized French at Jean and Auerstadt. Learning from this loss, the Prussian Army had to develop another way to conduct operations on the battlefield. They found the Transactional Leadership structure utilized against the French was antiquated, and was ineffective in that situation. In essence, the experience created a need to discover a way for a smaller military to organize and build independent leaders that would give the Prussian military an edge in battle. Through study of their war against the French and the desire of the military leaders to adapt to the modernized technology and social changes, the Prussian military developed the doctrine of *Auftragstaktik*.[5]

This same failure to initiate and instill an innovative, decentralized leadership philosophy that adapts to new and changing environments has plagued not only the U.S. Army but private companies as well. Often companies that primarily utilize the transactional leadership approaches where work requirements, goals and strategies flow only from the top down, and rewards are clear-cut have the hardest time adapting to

[5] Eitan Shamir, "The Long and Winding Road: The US Army Managerial Approach to Command and the Adoption of Mission Command (Auftragstaktik)," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 33, no. 5 (2010): 645-72. DOI: 10.1080/01402390.2010.498244.

changing environments. While requirements and rewards to subordinates may be clear-cut, this leadership style does not incentivize original thinking and initiative outside the established protocol. This type of leadership organization may understand that the business environment is changing, but often fails to change its organizational leadership style and falls to competitors who can adapt their leadership methods to the changing market environment. The movie rental business provides an example of a company that failed to adapt, based on their leadership model, to a new environment.

Prior to 2004, Blockbuster enjoyed a position of dominance in the home video entertainment market. However, in 2004, Netflix changed the home video entertainment landscape from brick and mortar rental outlets to the DVD-by-mail business. In reaction, Blockbuster also invested in this new idea of delivering DVD-by-mail. However, they kept the same business model of treating customers as shoppers and not as clients. Conversely, Netflix built user profiles that often recommended other films based on previous rentals and ultimately crafted a focus on a "relationship" with the customer. Newman writes, "Legacy investments create a legacy mindset, Blockbuster got stuck in the box. They never changed their business model."[6] While far from the crucible of combat, Blockbuster's inability to adapt or break out of an old antiquated system led to their demise, just as Prussian inflexibility in 1806 led to defeat by the French. These lessons were not lost on Army leaders seeking answers to changing enemies in Iraq and Afghanistan.

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[6] Rick Newman, "How Netflix (and Blockbuster) Killed Blockbuster-US News," *U.S. News and World Report*, September 23, 2010, accessed March 7, 2015, http://money.usnews.com/money/blogs/flowchart/2010/09/23/how-netflix-and-blockbuster-killed-blockbuster.

Just as Mission Command is a philosophy designed to create adaptable military organizations, another organizational theory, the Starfish model, has received similar traction in the business world. This new adaptation theory is built on the premise of decentralization; its major metaphor reveals that a starfish does not die when it loses a leg. Instead, it grows a new on and continues to develop and organize around that new normal.[7] Many top companies used this organizational thought process to help flatten their organizational structure and maintain their competitive edge in the current technology-driven economy. An example of a Starfish organization is eBay, whose leaders gained success by adapting to new and changing environments. In 1995, eBay came online in the just forming world of online auction e-commerce. It provided customer-to-customer and business-to-customer sales. Around the same time, another giant of online e-commerce started to gain traction, as Amazon became a major player utilizing a business to customer hierarchical structure to sell products from many different vendors.

These two competing companies had very different organizational structures and leadership styles. Amazon stayed true to an online brick and mortar platform offering a wide selection of items, but like Blockbuster, it focused on the one time sale. EBay took a different approach to the new environment of the online e-commerce business. Instead of centralizing their organization, they decentralized it and made the consumer part of the company by providing them the ability to rate sellers and products received. "For a traditionally trained business person, it can be hard to strike the right balance between

[7] Ori Brafman and Rod A. Beckstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations* (New York, NY: Portfolio, 2006).

management leadership and letting the community lead you as well," Pierre Omidyar the president of eBay said. "This is a new way of thinking about business."[8]

In essence, eBay leadership was able to realize that they were in a new environment and utilize decentralized "Starfish" principles. The principles influenced the leadership of eBay to see new opportunities for advancement presented by the community and use those to expand the private company. By utilizing a flattened hierarchical leadership, eBay gained a competitive edge over it competition.

The U.S. Army provided an alternative to the hierarchical transactional leadership style to better adapt in new environments through the use of Mission Command. Likewise, private businesses have utilized the "Starfish" decentralized model to overcome challenges in new environments. Each provides an excellent example of leaders attempting to adapt to changing environments. This paper will explore the potentials of a blending of the two philosophies by addressing the following questions using a selected case study from Afghanistan.

Primary Research Question

Can "Starfish" concepts improve the understanding of Mission Command by the U.S. Army in decentralized operations?

Secondary Questions

1. What are the principles of Mission Command?

[8] Kevin Maney, "10 Years Ago, EBay Changed the World," *USA Today*, March 22, 2005, accessed March 8, 2015, http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/tech/news/2005-03-21-ebay-cover_x.htm.

2. What are the primary concepts of the Starfish theory?

3. How do they apply to the selected case study?

4. What are the philosophical similarities between the two concepts?

5. What are the differences between the two concepts?

Importance

The U.S. Army's ability to understand and successfully employ Mission Command is imperative to how it will fight and win in the future. Recognizing future threats, the Army is emphasizing, the distribution of its decision making capabilities to lower levels, thus better facilitating successful decentralized operations. While the Army has adopted Mission Command as an instrument of change, it has not fully conceptualized or understood the Mission Command Philosophy as described in doctrine, especially in decentralized operations.

Due to a long history of success by embracing the hierarchical structure, indications are that as a whole, the Army has a hard time conceptualizing the decentralized ideas presented by Mission Command and inculcating those notions throughout the Army. Thus, the Army needs to develop a culture and organizational climate that fosters the principles of decentralization. It needs to have a culture that is comfortable with decentralized control in order to foster innovation and adaptation. The Starfish philosophy is a different way to approach the same problem of developing innovative and adaptable organizations, as well as leaders who can thrive in a complex environment. This distinct approach can be utilized to help implement the underlying Mission Command principles and create a cultural change in the Army.

Definitions

This section provides key terms used in the research and throughout this paper. The reader should use these definitions versus his own in order to ensure consistency and understanding throughout the paper.

Army Leadership: Anyone who by virtue of as assumed role of assigned responsibility inspires and influences people to accomplish organizational goals. Army Leaders motivate people both inside and outside the chain of command to pursue actions, focus thinking and shape decisions for the greater good of the organization.[9]

Centralized: to bring (something) under the control of one authority.[10]

Decentralized: the dispersion or distribution of functions and powers; specifically*:* the delegation of power from a central authority to regional, local or other authorities.[11]

Leadership: The process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish and improve the organization.[12]

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[9] Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-22, *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, August 2012), 1.

[10] Merriam-Webster, "Centralize," accessed October 29, 2014, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/centralize.

[11] Merriam-Webster, "Decentralization." accessed October 29, 2014, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/decentralize.

[12] Department of the Army, ADP 6-22, *Army Leadership*, Glossay-1.

Mission Command: The exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative with the commander's intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations.[13]

Organization: a unit of people that is structured to meet a need or to pursue collective goals. All organizations have a structure that determines relationships between the different activities and the members, and subdivides and assigns roles, responsibilities, and authority to carry out different tasks. Organizations are open systems--they affect and are affected by their environment.[14]

Organizational theory: the study of formal social organizations, such as businesses and bureaucracies, and their interrelationship with the environment in which they operate. It complements the studies of leadership, organizational behavior, management, industrial and organizational psychology, organization development and human resource studies among many other fields and professions.[15]

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[13] Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, May 2012), Glossary-2.

[14] BusinessDictionary.com, "What Is an Organization? Definition and Meaning," accessed October 29, 2014, http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/organization.html.

[15] Wikipedia, "Organizational Theory," October 24, 2014, accessed November 6, 2014, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organizational_theory.

Personal power: power derived from the followers, not from one's office or rank. Personal power is usually gained by using one's expertise or personality to gain trust, admiration and respect of the followers.[16]

Referent power: the strength of the professional relationship and personal bond leaders develop with their followers.[17]

Starfish Concept: the concept of an organization of people, built on trust and operating in a decentralized manner to achieve a common goal. The members collaborate in a decentralized environment without a direct hierarchy of command and control. These decentralized organizations rely on groups of people taking the initiative and making decisions. Everybody in the organization has access to information and they do not rely on leaders to direct them. Observers consider these decentralized organizations ―flat, that is, no dominant leader exists and the organization's power and initiative resides at the edge with the doers.[18]

Transactional Leadership: the leader believes in motivating through a system of rewards and punishment. If a subordinate does what is desired, a reward will follow, and if he does not go as per the wishes of the leader, a punishment will follow. Here, the

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[16] J. R. P. French and B. Raven, "The Bases of Social Power," in *Group Dynamics,* ed. D. Cartwright and A. Zander (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1959), 150-167.

[17] Robert C. Ginnett, Richard L. Hughes, and Gordon J. Curphy, *Leadership, Enhancing the Lessons of Experience* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Irwin, 2006), 114.

[18] Jeremy M. Holmes, "Defining Adaptive Leadership in the Contest of Mission Command" (Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, 2011), 7.

exchange between leader and follower takes place to achieve routine performance goals.[19]

Limitation

The limitations of this study include access to primary source information from the Soldiers who were in the battle of the Ranch House. This research is limited to the interviews conducted by other organizations and the documents that were produced by those organizations. The findings on the effectiveness of decentralized organizational methods cannot be generalized for all company and below level tactical battles as the circumstances of each engagement are inherently different.

The types of organization models examined will be limited to Occidental (Western and Middle Eastern) organizational theories. This specific exclusion of Eastern decentralized organizational principles enables the research to compare and contrast Western principles of centralization and decentralization in organizations. As the U.S. Army is based in European warfare, it benefits the study to narrow the focus to the Western strategies.

Delimitations

There are no delimitations.

[19] Management Study Guide. "Transactional Leadership Theory," accessed March 7, 2015, http://managementstudyguide.com/transactional-leadership.htm.

Conclusion

This research is composed of five chapters: (1) Introduction, (2) Literature Review, (3) Research Methodology, (4) Analysis, (5) Conclusions and Recommendations. Chapter 1 sets the conditions, significance, and relevance of the study, and formalizes the hypothesis and research questions that aim to validate or invalidate the study. Chapter 2's Literature Review discusses the historical relevance of Mission Command by discussing *Auftragstaktik*, the Mission Command Philosophy, the "Starfish" philosophy as described by Ori Brafman, and a historical background on the case study. In addition, this section provides some new terms key principles to the "Starfish" philosophy. The Research Methodology in chapter 3 argues the importance of the Case Study chosen to illustrate the hypothesis and thesis of this paper. In addition, this section defines the Case Study Methodology and provides an overview and a detailed explanation of the six questions asked about Mission Command and the five questions asked on the "Starfish" theory. Chapter 4 provides analysis of the case study and includes an in depth application of the principles of the two separate philosophies seeking illumination for the secondary questions using the case study. Finally, the conclusion in chapter 5 provides conclusions to the analysis, and recommendations. Further, it recommends future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature reviewed in this paper is grouped into three separate categories. Each contains a thread of decentralized organizational theory. The first category discusses the history and origin of *Auftragstaktik.* This Prussian military philosophy was one of the first decentralized organizational theories put into practice in a military setting. The second segment of literature reviews the current U.S. Army military philosophy of Mission Command. The documents described in this section present an overview of the principles of Mission Command and the interpretation of what each one of the six principles entails. The third portion of the literature review discusses the "Starfish" theory. The primary source literature for this will be the Ori Brafman and Rod A. Beckstrom's book, *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations*, which provides the philosophy and elements of the theory. The chapter concludes with a brief history of the Waygal Valley in Afghanistan necessary for the understanding of the Ranch House case study.

Auftragstaktik: Origin of Decentralized Philosophy

The doctrine of decentralized command origins can be traced back to the reforms that took place in Prussian following the defeat at Jena and Auerstadt in October 1806. These battles were fought by a very professional Prussian Army that utilized an orthodox, highly centralized organization. The battles that the Prussians fought were meticulously planned and highly scripted as far as movement and maneuvers. Once the battle had

begun, the leadership adhered to the strict plan not deviating from it due to the Prussian culture that was based on obedience to superiors. The Prussian Army that lost to the French closely resembled their army from fifty years earlier where foreigners, prisoners of war and mercenaries were utilized as the main fighting force. This army relied almost exclusively on men from the nobility for it officer corps. Much like knights in the feudal age, the king used these nobles in the officer corps to keep control over the regiments of the Prussian Army. Although the king expected and utilized the loyalty of the officer corps that was in charge to keep these untrustworthy mercenaries in check, his reliance on the noble-class officer also left a highly centralized command that allowed just a few to exercise initiative on the battlefield.[20]

In a sense, the French Army was far less professional and definitely less rigid than their Prussian adversaries were. They had less experienced troops who were not as disciplined as the Prussian forces, but this did allow for a greater degree of decentralized decision-making. Of course soldiers in the French Army, just like the citizens who supported and fought for the French Revolution, believed in individualism, citizenship and the ability for equality across all classes. This led to an Army made up of smaller organizations whose citizen leaders were able to exploit advantages and success on the battlefield without the formal orders of a higher headquarters.

The result was that the French inflicted damage to their enemies in a wide array of different environments utilizing this decentralized leadership approach. "[the] Prussian Army [was] classed as a traditional hierarchy, with high degrees of coordination,

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[20] Michael Gunther, "*Auftragstaktik*: The Basis for Modern Military Command?" (Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, 2012), 5.

monitoring, control with rules applied to maintain efficiency and functionality and the newer French Army [was] categorized as an adhocracy, where innovation, entrepreneurial behavior and visionary leaders, who had a thirst for creativity and growth were recognized and promoted."[21] The French Army in the 19th century promoted citizen leaders who were able to think for themselves by adapting to the changing battlefield environment while acting in accordance with the intent of the commanders. The philosophy of citizenship, fueled by the French Revolution promoted leadership, not as a noble individual in charge of followers but as a member/citizen of the army organization. This was important, as leaders were less likely to seek individual glory on the battlefield like the Prussian nobles who were appointed to key leadership positions by the King. French officers, who often rose through the ranks, were able to act within the context of the communal plan.

This defeat by the French prompted the King of Prussia to order a commission to study the reason for his Army's rout at the hands of a less professional Army and make recommendations for change. The committee found that, "poor leadership, inadequate training, recruitment, an aging officer corps, and the army's organization all contributed to Prussia's defeat."[22] Based on this information, sweeping reforms took place both in the Prussian Army and society from 1807-1810. Frederick Wilhelm III decreased the rift between the population and the government as he allowed for the formation of local city

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[21] Ivan Yardley and Andrew Kakabadse, "Understanding Mission Command: A Model for Developing Competitive Advantage in a Business Context," *Strategic Change* 16 (January-April 2007): 71.

[22] Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1955), 32.

governments where the local citizen could have representation.[23] This created an ideology of citizenship and equal representation much like the French Revolution had achieved in France.

Next came changes to the officer corps; these resembled the transformation which had occurred in the Prussian society. The Army officers' corps was then opened up to the citizen class and not just the nobility who had held those positions before. The Prussian Army now based commissions on education and promotions on examinations, all merits of one's self-worth, and not just class status. The ability of the non-noble class to become officers along with the emphasis put on education in military strategy, led to a revolution in Prussian Military Culture. It was in this new culture where knowledge and the ability to think for one's self was valued above all else. In this new cultural framework built on the individual's self-worth and initiative, the intellectual idea of *Auftragstaktik* emerged as a practical reality.

The first time the concept *Auftragstaktik* appeared was in an 1806 military doctrine manual. It stated that the commander should give "his divisional commanders the general concept in a few words, and show them the general layout of the ground on which the army is to form up. The manner of deployment is left up to them [the subordinates]; fastest is best. The commander cannot be everywhere."[24] This idea and philosophy utilized a decentralized military operational process that laid the groundwork for future Prussian decentralized military theories. A revision in 1837 to the Prussian

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[23] Gunther, "*Auftragstaktik*," 6.

[24] Richard Simpkin, *Race to the Swift* (London: Brassey's Defence, 1986), 227.

Field Service Regulation declared, "If an execution of an order was rendered impossible, an officer should seek to act in line with the intent behind it."[25] This became a significant concept as it allowed for legitimate dissent from the directed orders and encouraged individuals to analyze the task and act in the commander's best intent. Lower level commanders gained the ability to be creative and act to seize the initiative in a chaotic environment.

It was not until General Helmuth von Moltke of the Prussian Army helped embed this concept through his writing, as the Prussian/German Chief of staff between the Austro-Prussian War (1866) and the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871), that the concept was widely accepted.[26] In his writings, he illustrated this philosophy, thus delineating the art of commanding military forces in a decentralized manner. He specified that commanders should provide subordinates the "what" needs to be accomplished and allow them the autonomy to decide "how" to do it. This system of command helped build a leader who could think and make judgments on his own.

The culture of the German military already had the idea of *Auftragstaktik,* but it was Moltke the Elder who articulated it and made it doctrine in his book, *Instructions for Large Unit Commanders*.[27] In this book he explained command and control of units on the battlefield, the reason for conflicts and politics in war, but this document really

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[25] Yardley and Kakabadse, "Understanding Mission Command," 72.

[26] John T. Nelsen II, "*Auftragstaktik:* A Case for Decentralized Battle," *Parameters* 17, no. 3 (September 1987): 21-22.

[27] Helmuth Karl Bernhard von Moltke, "Moltkes Taktisch-Strategische Aufsätze aus den Jahren 1857 bis 1871," in *Moltkes Militärische Werke*, 2, no. 2, ed. German General Staff (Berlin: E. S. Mittler, 1892-1912), 183.

explored the philosophy of *Auftragstaktik*. "Moltke's views on war were rooted in a central belief that too much exigency existed in combat to rely totally on heavily centralized control structure predicated on the use of detailed orders."[28] It solidified the idea that each commander must act on his own judgment rather than wait for orders on the battlefield.

A commander needed to put greater thought into risk taking, but act decisively and quickly in order not to miss a chance at victory.[29] Moltke also knew that higher-level commanders could never have a complete understanding of the battlefield, and thus subordinates must have the authority to disobey a direct order if the situation on the battlefield changed. This concept was articulated in his writing, but more significantly, his writing solidified this philosophy in the Prussian-German military culture. As stated by Daniel Hughes, "*Auftragstaktik* was more than a system of command; it was part of a particular life style of Prussian officers for more than a century."[30] It was Moltke the Elder who most eloquently laid out the philosophy of *Auftragstaktik*, yet in many instances he was writing down the decentralized philosophy that the Prussian-German military culture already practiced.

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[28] Garrett T. Gatzemeyer, "What is Mission Command?," *Military Intelligence Professional Bulletin* 38, no. 4 (October 2012): 10.

[29] Gunther, "*Auftragstaktik*," 10.

[30] Daniel Hughes, "Auftragstaktik," in *International Military Defence Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 A–B, ed. Trevor N. Dupuy (London: Macmillan, 1993), 332.

Mission Command Philosophy

Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-0, *Mission Command*, is the foundation on which the United States Army operations concept of "Unified Land Operations" is built.[31] The most recent version of the manual approved in May 2011, is an evolution of field manuals that preceded it. The manual is less than fifteen pages in length, but is the culmination point of command philosophy found in the August 2003 FM 6-0 and May 1997 FM 101-5. These previous manuals incorporated the term Mission Command as a concept within Command and Control; however, it was not until ADP 6-0 that the philosophy of Mission Command came to fruition. It is in the ADP 6-0 where Mission Command's philosophy of six guiding principles are introduced and the idea behind each principle is explained (figure 1).

[31] Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, May 2012), 1.

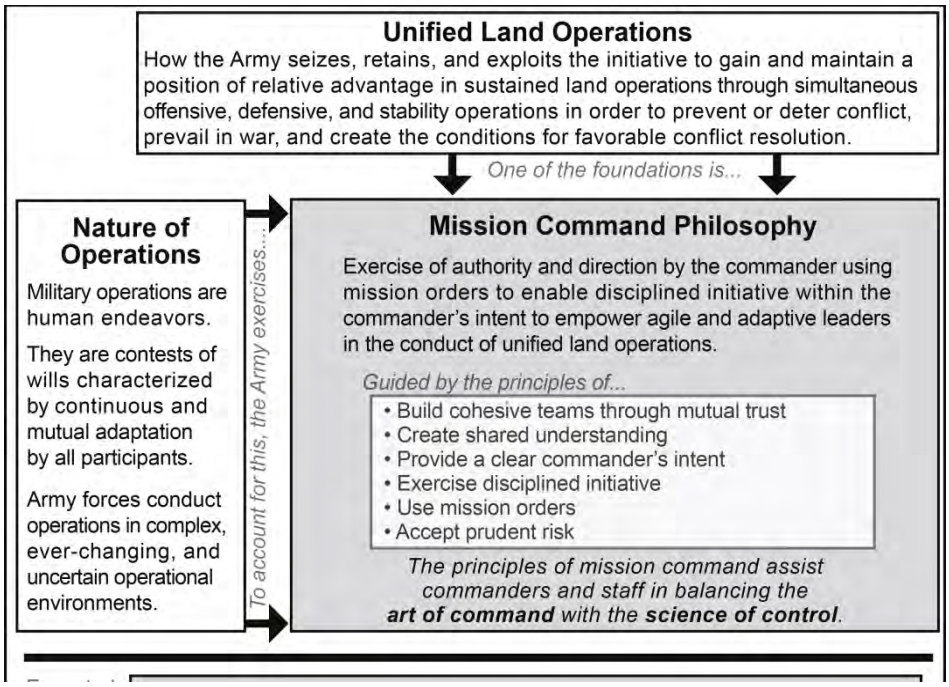

Figure 1. Mission Command Philosophy

Source: Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, May 2012), iv.

The first principle is to build teams through mutual trust. This principle specifies that for an organization to function properly, mutual trust must be achieved between leaders and subordinates. Trust cannot be freely given but is earned and developed over time. It is the everyday actions of commanders and subordinates which builds a relationship of trust. It is the qualities of people in these relationships that engender confidence in each other. Integrity, personal example and competence of the people in these relationships lead to loyalty between individuals over time.[32] This mutual trust is

[32] Department of the Army, ADRP 6-0, *Mission Command*, 2-1.

accomplished through mission completion, shared adversity and/or difficulty, and brings with it the knowledge that the leadership will take care of their subordinates.

It is not a one-way trust, but rather one that is built from two way communication and interaction between subordinates and leaders. Leaders cannot expect that their subordinates will blindly trust them when they first meet them. Similarly, subordinates do not have the full trust of their leaders to be able to responsibly exercise initiative from the start. It is through growing mutual faith and the ability of the leader to release some of their control and allow their subordinates to flourish or learn from mistakes that mutual allegiance occurs. Subordinates must allow themselves to trust their leader to guide them in their development. Once these relationships are established between individuals then leaders can then start to build teams of individuals and create trust between subordinates. The commander becomes extremely important when it comes to establishing trust in the unit. The commander can bridge relationships between individuals to create a shared unity of reliance between all members within their organizations, effectively accomplishing a mission and generating new and innovative ideas.

According to U.S. Army Doctrine, "The exercise of Mission Command is based on trust."[33] Trust building is the key essential task when executing the Mission Command philosophy. It has already been established that trust is built over time through relationships between individuals and units. Yet the organizational structure of the Army is not set up to provide the time that is needed to build those relationships. In today's Army, it is a much too common a practice for a unit to deploy and be task organized

[33] Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, *Mission Command*, 1.

under a higher-level headquarters with which they have never worked with before. On the other hand, because the rotation of personnel in a unit changes rapidly due to the Army Force Generations cycle, frequently relationships and trust never develop between individual and units. Too often that higher headquarters element, due to a level of risk-adversity, directs detailed orders and requires detailed reporting, thus limiting the subordinates ability to make mistakes and implement more control measure at lower levels.[34] This behavior is counter intuitive to the first principle of Mission Command - building trust.

"In order to apply the Mission Command philosophy effectively in these situations, commanders and their staff must begin by trusting rather than requiring trust to be earned."[35] In these circumstances, it is even more imperative that leaders create opportunities to allow subordinates to develop trust in the relationship by showing their integrity and competence to execute the mission accordance with the commander's intent. By showing little trust for subordinate units to exercise initiative, higher command limits the innovative way a unit can adapt to complex situations. Commanders must have trust to open two-way communication and allow subordinates to engage higher headquarters in a discussion about the shared vision of the mission. If left without clear guidelines and without trust established between subordinates and higher headquarters, "staffs may be

[34] Lt. Col. Thomas M. Feltey and John F. Capt. Madden, "The Challenge of Mission Command," *Military Review* (August 2014): 2.

[35] Ibid., 3.

inclined to over rely on the 'science of control' relative to the art of command."[36] Consequently, this limits the units' ability to be adaptive and its members to think for themselves in complex environments.

The second principle is to create a shared understanding throughout the entire organization. The leaders of an organization must generate a communal vision of the environment in which the problem resides, the problem itself and why the unit is solving the problem. When this is done, as a collective unit with guidance from the leaders of the organization they can then build a collective approach to solve the problem.[37] This process creates a shared understanding of the mission for units in the Army. Battlefields are not static and the collaboration that creates a shared understanding must be a continuous process. This continuous process is cyclical at all level of the organization. The process of planning, preparation, execution and assessment helps build this shared understanding.[38] Additionally, these steps can be done by different elements of the unit simultaneously. The lower level unit might be executing the collective approach to solving the problem while the leaders of the organization are assessing and creating ideas or plans. Then they come together to build a new understanding of the problem and the situation in order to execute another combined approach.

The shared understanding is not one directional and pushed only from the higher levels of the organization to the lower; rather it is a dual flow process. Building the

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[36] GEN (Ret.) Gary Luck, "Mission Command and Cross-Domain Synergy" (Deployable Training Division, Joint Staff JS7, March 2013), 1.

[37] Department of the Army, ADRP 6-0, *Mission Command*, 2-2.

[38] Ibid.

picture of the situation or problem through input from lower elements is critical for higher elements to understand the problem from a different perspective, and because of the communal vision, this process encourages sharing of strategic goals with lower elements. If the situation is not a shared experience then different perspectives are formed and thus doing the "right thing" looks contradictory at different levels of the organization.[39] This leads to a divergence of effort within the organization. These conflicts can be overcome through the use of constructive dialogue by all elements of the organization to create a culture of collaboration. A collaborative culture, based on qualities like trust is built through the interaction between elements of the organization over time. It is only when this new culture of collaborative input from all levels is established, that a shared vision can be clearly understood for all goals of the operation. This shared vision results in synergy, thus creating a greater understanding, a sense of a common purpose and an integrated collaborative community within the organization.

The third principle emphasizes the need to provide a clear commander's intent. The commander's intent is "a clear and concise expression of the purpose of the operation and the desired military end state that supports Mission Command, provides focus to the staff, and helps subordinate and supporting commanders act to achieve the commander's desired results without further orders, even when the operation does not unfold as planned."[40] This illustrates that the commander's intent is not identical to directed orders but acts as the basis for synergistic efforts by all elements of the force.

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[39] Luck, "Mission Command and Cross-Domain Synergy," 5.

[40] Department of Defense, Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, August 2011), GL-7.

The leader of the organization uses his intent to display the broader purpose of the task. This broader purpose allows subordinates to know not only what is expected of them but most importantly the context in which they can conduct future actions.

A clear commander's intent coincides with creating a culture of shared understanding. In sharing an understanding of the environment, the organization is able to reflect on which approach the unit will take toward the problem. Input by the leaders, subordinates and partners of the organization is critical to crafting an approach to the mission at hand.[41] This cultural practice of sharing the understanding leads to the commander building his intent based on the shared approach of the organization. Once a collective vision for the end goals of the organization is established, the commander shares his intent, which provides the framework for conducting operations for the organization. The benchmark of providing the framework requires the flexibility of subordinate leaders to use their ingenuity to analyze and solve future problems. Not all problems can be foreseen especially in a rapidly changing environment, but if the commanders intent is clear and matches with what the collective unit has established as the framework, then subordinates can utilize ingenuity to determine a solution to complex problem set.[42]

Critics have argued about the way this doctrine depicts the establishment of a commander's intent through a collective effort. Some argue this process takes power away from the commander and distributes it to the lower levels. It leaves the commander

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[41] James Parrington and Mike Findlay, "Mission Command: Addressing Challenges and Sharing Insights," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 71 (October 2013): 106.

[42] Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, *Mission Command*, 4.

responsible for subordinate actions with the power to influence but without the power to directly supervise them. If a commander's intent is clear, well developed and executed with trust by the organization, the commander retains the power to influence his subordinates without explicit intents. "It is not about the elimination of a formal leadership structure or the democratization of the leadership process. On the contrary distributive leadership (though commander's intent) requires a strong central leader who . . . encourages the sharing of leadership responsibilities."[43] It is through this encouragement of sharing leadership responsibilities that the commander's intent becomes clear, as this intent becomes the organization's intent. In this framework, the commander's intent provides left and right limits on actions by leaders at all levels and is developed by the entire organization; it is thus rooted in the mind of all personnel in the organization. The commander's intent, accomplished through collective drafting, becomes a communal standard, ingrained at the margins of the organization where actions are rooted, and helps direct the unit or organization toward a desired outcome.

The next principle requires the unit to exercise disciplined initiative. Disciplined initiative is being able to act on the intent of the overall broad purpose without specific top-down driven direction. This ability to use disciplined initiative is critical in the success of the Mission Command philosophy. It is essential for commanders to have subordinates who are trusted enough and have the right leadership qualities and education to work within the intent of the commander when new situations or problems present

[43] James D. Sharpe Jr. and Thomas E. Creviston, "Understanding Mission Command," *Army Sustainment* 45, no. 4 (July 2013): 11.

themselves. This ability to act in the absence of direct orders is a key benefit of Mission Command over the past Army managerial style of leadership. Case writes,

> The Army became professionalized after the 1898 Spanish-American War and Elihu Root's reforms of 1903, military schools were encouraged to adopt contemporary industrial management ideas . . . this focus on centralization and managerial command took the Army to an increasing dependency on superior firepower, which ultimately was used as a substitute for directing troops and using initiative.[44]

The industrial managerial style the Army utilized in the past diminished the ability of organizations to seize initiative due to the controlling nature of this style and culture of top-down leadership.

As the Army changed from the command and control management style to a Mission Command philosophy, the ability and need for subordinates to exercise individual judgment became paramount. This individual judgment can happen when leadership breeds a culture that allows subordinates the flexibility to act within the commander's guidance. This culture of trust and shared understanding, "give subordinates the confidence to apply their judgment in ambiguous situations because they know the mission's purpose, key tasks, and desired end state."[45] Being able to use one's judgment is key when the situation has changed and the orders last given no longer fit the new environment. This ability to act in ambiguous situations creates an organization that is proactive rather than reactive, and uses initiative and resourcefulness in new circumstances. This proactive ingenuity can act as a starting point for a stagnant

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[44] John Case, "The Exigency for Mission Command: A Comparison of World War II Command Cultures," *Small Wars Journal* (November 2014): 9.

[45] Department of the Army, ADRP 6-0, *Mission Command*, 2-4.

organization. Further, proactive initiative sets the standard of the mental agility and superior speed needed to address the competitive cycles of decision making in a fluid environment.[46] It is in this creative culture of trust that commanders are assured their organizational leaders will act in a disciplined manner and make decisions that adhere to applicable laws and regulations.[47] This adherence to the rules exercises discipline and brings credibility and legitimacy to the organization to regulate itself. Disciplined initiative requires a culture of trust, understanding and knowledge of a clear commander's intent. When it comes to the Mission Command philosophy, disciplined initiative propagates a culture that facilitates unit leaders' resourcefulness to reach the pinnacle of effectiveness and strive for more by asking, "what's next."[48]

The fifth principle is the use of mission orders to provide direction and guidance to help focus a unit's available resources toward the common goal. Mission Command contains various facets that discuss the ideas behind the philosophy, but the use of mission orders is viewed primarily as the procedure to distribute this philosophy. Mission orders are "a technique for completing orders that allow subordinates maximum freedom of planning an action in accomplishing mission and leave the "how" of mission

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[46] GEN. Martin E. Dempsey, *Mission Command White Paper* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, April 2012), 3-8.

[47] Ibid., 204.

[48] Thomas E. Meyer, "The Leadership Imperative: A Case Study in Mission Command," *Infantry* 103, no. 1 (January 2014): 29.

accomplishment to subordinates."[49] Mission orders are the methods used to distribute the information and synchronize actions of subordinates by assigning tasks, allocating resources and issuing guidance based on the commander's intent. They are the methods utilized to form communication networks and interconnections between subordinate elements in the organization. The orders' main goals are to communicate information effectively and coordinate that information between all elements of the organization.

Once this information is distributed though mission orders, the connection needed to accomplish the guidance can be established to orchestrate a synergy toward mission accomplishment.[50] The simplicity of the mission orders only directs the "emphasis" to subordinates and the "results" to be attained, rather than "how" to achieve them. This is where disciplined initiative is implied, building on the guidance put out through mission orders to set up networks and work toward common mission accomplishments across the organization. Specific mission orders in the Army follow the five paragraph operation order format. In that five paragraph format the task described to subordinate elements tell them the 'who, what, where, when, and why' of a mission. It is this "why" combined with the synchronization of limited resources which is the focus of mission orders. These subordinate elements, in turn, use the established initiative and trust to accomplish the mission goals that best meet the commander's intent.

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[49] Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 6-0, *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, August 2003), 1-17.

[50] Department of the Army. ADRP 6-0, *Mission Command*, 3-10.

Recent critics have voiced concern that the intent behind mission orders of providing just what is necessary, undercuts commanders with directing orders for units.[51] However, this is the opposite of what a mission orders actually do. Issuing mission orders, with minimal oversight, allows the unit to determine the action needed and puts a greater burden of professionalism on the Soldiers of the subordinate elements.[52] This is the purpose of providing just what is needed; it allows the professionals in the subordinate units to exercise disciplined initiative to take on the tasks and allocated resources and synchronize with other elements and partners to accomplish and solve the problems at hand.

The last principle of Mission Command is accepting prudent risk. All operations have inherent risks, but leaders who are able to analyze those risks and determine that these hazards are for the betterment of the unit accepts prudent risk. Prudent risk is "the deliberate exposure to potential injury or loss when the commander judges the outcome in terms of mission accomplishment as worth the cost."[53] Success in mission accomplishment does not come without taking some type of risk. Risks allow organizations to create opportunities for advancement and gain initiative in a stagnant

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[51] Demetrios A. Ghikas, "Taking Ownership of Mission Command," *Military Review* 93, no. 6 (November 2013): 23.

[52] Case, "The Exigency for Mission Command: A Comparison of World War II Command Cultures," 8.

[53] Department of the Army, ADRP 6-0, *Mission Command*, 2-5.

situation.[54] Part of the leader's job is to review a situation and determine if the risk involved with creating an opportunity outweighs the risk of simply averting setbacks.

Accepting prudent risk is not done in the isolation of higher-level commanders, but as part of the organization through the use of adequate planning and preparation based on current information. Through planning, commanders and their organizations can determine the level of risk involved and ways to mitigate those risks.[55] Assessing prudent risk is made possible by a culture built on mutual trust, a shared understanding through clear commander's intent, and disciplined initiative framed by mission orders.[56] It is through this collaborative culture that commanders rely on subordinate units to see opportunities, the risk involved in those opportunities, and to justify whether those risk are worth the rewards. These subordinate units take the framework of the commander's intent, which inherently lays out unacceptable risks, and analyze the options in comparison to the risks. They can then confidently take prudent risk to exploit opportunities.

When commanders keep risk taking authority at the higher levels, the organization's ability to seize opportunities and synchronize its efforts is diminished. The fear that a risk appears "too important to leave in the hands of subordinate commanders" leads to micromanagement of the organization, and regresses to higher regulation and

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[54] Robert L. Caslen Jr., "The Way the Army Fights Today," *Military Review* 91, no. 2 (March-April 2011): 86.

[55] Department of the Army, ADRP 6-0, *Mission Command*, 2-5.

[56] Holmes, "Defining Adaptive Leadership in the Contest of Mission Command," 34.

more prescriptive mission orders and commander's intent.[57] This can be averted with a clear understating of the environment as well as trust between elements in the organization. The communication that is gained through trust between junior leaders and higher leaders creates an open communication structure where relationships are built and in which prudent risks are acceptable and can be discussed. It is through an open relationship culture in an organization that leads to the empowerment of subordinates to assess risk, find mitigation factors, and seize opportunities. This culture can only be embodied if it is practiced. If the subordinate unit is allowed to analyze risks on their own, and then take those risks to seize opportunities, then initiative will carry over outside of training and into mission accomplishment. This acceptance of risk aids commanders in the exercise of Mission Command to accomplish missions in an uncertain and ever changing operating environment.

In summary, the execution of Mission Command is based on the six principles of building cohesive teams through mutual trust, creating a shared understanding, providing a clear commander's intent, exercise of disciplined initiative, using mission orders and accepting prudent risk. On the surface, all of these seem like commander-centric principles with the commander as the principle individual who executes these tasks for the organization. As seen through an in-depth study of Mission Command, this is anything but the truth. The six principles work in conjunction to form a symbiotic relationship between the commander, subordinate leaders and the organization as a whole. The six principles are not meant to work alone as individual principles, but rather

[57] Feltey and Madden, "The Challenge of Mission Command," 3.

in combination and harmony with each other. When one principle is applied, it builds and amplifies the other principles of Mission Command. This is also how the principles of Mission Command work for an organization. When a commander tries to utilize these principles on his own without integrating them in the organization, they often lead to micromanagement and a centralized hierarchy in a unit. When the commander helps build a culture that embraces the Mission Command principles, it can lead to a decentralized organization that is able to adapt and exploit changing situations. The collective relationship between members of the organization comprises the basic fundamentals of Mission Command. The principles are the way in which the Army presents this philosophy to the Soldiers and leaders in its organization.

Starfish Theory

The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations, a book published in 2006 by Ori Brafman, and Rod A. Beckstrom, analyzes the power of decentralized organizations. The idea behind their organizational philosophy is that starfish are similar to decentralized organizations and spiders stand as a metaphor for a centralized organization. Spiders symbolize hierarchical management; if the head or top of the organization is destroyed the entire organization dies. However, when a starfish loses a leg, like a decentralized organization, it will survive and the severed part will spawn a completely new organism. Another difference between the two is that with a spider, the brain controls the movement of the animal. The spider's head is the central point from which all directions come, much like a centralized organization. The starfish on the other hand has no central control. If the starfish wants to move, it does so in mutual support with its other legs to move in a direction. This is similar to a group

focused on decentralized principles in that, in order to function, it needs the mutual support from all members of the organization.[58] It is these decentralized concepts of adaptability and influence in an organization that the Army is trying to instill in its culture and apply in an ever-changing complex environment.[59]

In the book, Brafman and Beckstrom present the differences between a centralized organization and decentralized organization by using several historical examples. One such example is the conquest of the New World by the Spanish in the 16th century. In 1519, Hernando Cortes landed in Mexico and discovered the great capital of the Aztecs, Tenochtitlan. This civilization was centralized in nature as displayed by a single language, roads leading to and from the center of the metropolis, and a centralized government led by one person.

In his conquest, Cortes killed the ruler of the Aztecs, closed off the city and within two years, the entire Aztec civilization had collapsed. Without a centralized leader to make decisions and keep order, the Aztec civilization crumbled from the inside. In a matter of months, the Spanish had annihilated an entire centralized civilization that had thrived for centuries due to its centralized nature. As the Spanish moved north for more conquest, they encountered another native people, the Apaches. Unlike the Aztecs they had no paved roads, no mega city, and no centralized government. The Apaches were a loose band of nomadic people with primitive weapons connected by similar beliefs. The Spanish believed this conquest would be easier than the defeat of the Aztecs. Yet, "by the

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[58] Brafman and Beckstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations*, 35.

[59] Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, *Mission Command*, 1, 7.

end of the seventeenth century, the Spanish had lost control of northern Mexico to the Apaches."[60] The Apaches were able to evade subjugation because they were not centrally organized. Instead they had a culture that was decentralized in nature and allowed the changing environment to inform their next moves. With no centralized leader, there was no one person who the Spanish needed to eliminate or remove from power. Without a centralized leader, the beliefs and ideas held by the group could not be destroyed by taking out one person. Instead the Apaches were able to adapt and influence one another in order to overcome a force that was superior to them militarily.[61]

The authors also discuss the principles of a successful decentralized organization. These fundamental principles of decentralization are essential to the "Starfish" theory and provide insight to the exercise of decentralized organizations. This model has five legs or principles that convey the basis for its organizational philosophy. Much like a starfish, it can lose one or two legs and still survive. However, if these five principles mutually work together a decentralized organization can succeed.[62]

The first principle in the "Starfish" theory features an organizational need for "Circles". Circle is a term that represents a group of people who all belong to a community and once included in that community, all members of the community are equal. These circles are usually independent and autonomous in nature.[63] Once a person

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[60] Brafman and Beckstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations*, 18.

[61] Ibid., 21.

[62] Ibid., 87.

[63] Ibid., 88.

is a member of the circle, he or she is independently responsible to contribute to the circle in their own way.[64] There is no pressure from any type of hierarchical leader or organizational head who gives out tasks for members to complete; instead the individual members determine their own contribution to the group. These contributions might be to help group members by following the lead of a circle member or doing something on their own that helps the organization.

Once a person is a member of a circle, they are equal in the eyes of all other members of the group. This implies that each member's contribution is valued no matter how much or little it adds to the circle's goals. These circles can be as open or closed to membership as the organization desires, as it is up to the people in the circle. Applying the Apache example, their circles were organized through nomadic groups spread across the Southwest, and entry to these groups was exclusive. But once a member of the circle was accepted, they were all considered Apache whether by birth, adoption or even kidnapping. They saw all Apache tribe members as full blood, nationalized Apaches, and not as some outsider who they adopted but remained a foreigner. Yet the Apache philosophy did not allow anyone to join their bands on their own terms. They realized that there is a trade off with large open circle; once they become too big, the bonds of nationalism, or in this case tribalism, break down. Big circles start to become highly fluid, lose the human dimension, and close personal relationships that came with joining the circle in the first place and allowed the group's ideology to be instilled.

[64] Ibid.

Some might think that with this type of group there are no rules because it is a decentralized organization. However, the "norms" of the organization are a group element stronger than rules. These norms are self-imposed regulations that help govern the circle's behavior and actions between its members. "The norms, in fact become the backbone of the circle."[65] Rules are imposed by top-down organizations whereas norms are created by the group with acceptance from members of the circle. With norms, the circle members become the enforcers because these norms are the governing ideals that all equal members agree upon. As the circle develops, members spend more time joining in a common purpose, which builds a bond of trust within the circle. Partners in the circle build relationships and a sense of community with members of their circle. They are no longer an unknown person, but rather a person who shares a common belief of self-governing for the betterment of the group. This relationship builds faith and trust in the members of the organization and leads to a community where members "assume the best of each other and . . . that is what they get in return."[66]

The second element needed in a decentralized organization is a "Catalyst". The catalyst is the person who facilitates an organization or idea. Catalysts are interconnected to the first principle of circles. Circles do not just sporadically form on their own. Rather, they need an element, often a person, to help facilitate the ideas within the circles and lead by example.[67] These catalysts assist with the connecting of people and sharing of

[65] Ibid., 90.

[66] Ibid., 91.

[67] Ibid., 93.

ideas to form circles. They do this by setting up connections between people and ideas, but never forcing their views on people in the organization. The catalyst's role in the Apache's decentralized tribal model was played by the spiritual leader of the band. For individual circles, it was the spiritual leader who generated the ideas that allowed the tribe to pursue that initiative. The spiritual leader never forced his views on others within the tribe, but allowed the views of the organization to form with spiritual guidance.[68] This key collaborator helps develop an idea or ideals that come from group think by synthesizing that idea into a congruent entity that can be explained and modeled to others. Once this idea is formed into something presentable, the catalyst then shares the idea with others. As they collaborate, groups begin to form around these ideas and interact with other circles that have similar ideas or goals. One of the main goals of the catalyst is to helps create the connection between these groups so that the idea can grow stronger by being questioned, examined and if need be changed. Once the connections are made, then catalysts lead by example and act on the ideas formed from these collective links between groups. These catalysis might sound like dynamic leaders, but they have a quality that is different from the traditional notion of leadership (Table 1). "The catalyst gets a decentralized organization going and then cedes control to the members."[69]

[68] Ibid., 92.

[69]Ibid., 56.

Table 1. CEO traits V.S. Catalyst traits

The Boss	A Peer
Command-and-Control	Trust
Rational	Emotionally Intelligent
Powerful	Inspirational
Directive	Collaborative
In the Spotlight	Behind the Scenes
Order	Ambiguity
Organizing	Connecting

Source: Brafman Ori and Rod A. Beckstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations* (New York, NY: Portfolio, 2006), 130.

Their ability to integrate themselves back into the organization is the most important part for a catalyst. If the idea created by the group is associated solely with the catalyst, then this actually diminishes the decentralized nature of the organization. People within the organization then see this person as the leader of the cause and view them as the centralized figurehead of the idea. Within an organization, the result is dampened ingenuity. When a catalyst morphs from an innovative, collaborative peer who works behind the scenes to a directive leader who take charge and is publicly powerful, a centralized organization is created. Instead of the organization displaying initiative and developing new innovative ideas to solve complex problem, they have to verify with higher leadership elements whether an idea is suitable for the organization. It is critical that the catalyst know when the organization has a firm footing in the ideas and philosophy he has inspired, and then transfer the responsibility for maintaining the ideology to the organization itself.

The third leg in the model is organizational "ideology". Individuals must internalize the ideology that sparked the circle and is utilized in that community or organization. This sense of common beliefs is the glue that holds decentralized organizations together. The people in these organizations have a sense of community that shares a set of values or ideas. People's willingness, of their own accord, to contribute to the ideology is the key to success and sustainability of these decentralized groups. Many centralized organization have a shared sense of community, but it does not mean they understand the ideology and support it.

Centralized organizations, like Microsoft and IBM, have a sense of community with common bonds and friendships and use ingenuity to solve complex problems.[70] These corporations are monetarily motivated to create a better product but lack the intrinsic ideology or motivation that decentralized organization have built in into them. According to Pink, "Human beings have an innate inner drive to be autonomous, self-determined, and connected to one another. And when that drive is liberated, people achieve more."[71] People in a decentralized organization believe so much in the ideology of their group that they contribute to its success, not because they have to but because they want to. Supporting and sustaining this ideology gives them a purpose and allows people in an organization to commit themselves to the ideology. Their goal is to seek to

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[70] Brafman and Beckstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations*, 95.

[71] Daniel H. Pink, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us* (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2009), 73.

improve the organization; in a sense, their work supporting the group's ideology is its own reward.

The Apaches shared a common belief that the land and the water was part of the tribe and any notion to own it and distribute it interfered with this ideology. When the Spanish came to conquer the Apache, they did so by taking their land and assigning ownership to something the Apache believed could not have an owner. The philosophical roots of the Apaches' beliefs ran so deep that the divergence of ideologies between them and Spanish led to the Apache fighting for their cause. "Without the ideology, the Apaches wouldn't have had the motivation to remain decentralized."[72] This type of intrinsic motivation born through an ideology leads groups that have the willpower and initiative to make their organizations better, and decentralization allows them the freedom to protect that ideology through innovative actions.

Having a "preexisting network" is the fourth principle, which is crucial to building an enduring decentralized institution. These can be communities or organizations that already exist and have mutual relationships between the members. This principle cannot exist in a vacuum; it is only a platform for the four other Starfish principles from which to launch a decentralized network. This principle lays out the framework for Starfish organizations to start. Very rarely do decentralized organizations emerge already established onto the public stage; most start within a communal framework. Preexisting organizations provide launch pads to start a decentralized network. Most people in the preexisting organizations already have relationships and

[72] Brafman and Beckstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations*, 95.

some type of common identity. The catalyst uses these already established networks to create circles based around an ideology in order to build a decentralized network. Then a champion promotes the new idea. There is a difference between preexisting networks and centralized organizations. Centralized organizations usually have a top down driven leadership model not based on relationships, but rather on power and control. Preexisting networks are the mutual relationships that have already been built by individuals as a collective group.

Knowing this difference is important because a logical question would be, could a decentralized network be built out of centralized organizations? The reason that the catalyst does not go directly to the leaders of a centralized organization to promote his ideas is that top down organization are bad platforms for starting decentralized organizations.[73] First, centralized organizations usually have ideas that come from the top with very little input from the members, but one of the key elements of a decentralized organization is that ideas come from the organization itself. If the leadership promotes an idea in a centralized organization, members are expected follow it, but they are rarely inspired by it, or take it on as their own. Second, top-down organizations are based on power and control, and the loss of that ability to control makes those types of organizations and the leaders who hold authority uncomfortable. When a centralized organization keeps power and control, ingenuity and creativity are stifled. “Decentralized

[73] Ibid., 97.

networks, however, provide circles and an empowered membership and typically have a higher tolerance for innovation."[74]

It was this type of preexisting network between the different tribes in the region that was so useful to the Apache. Marriage into different tribes within the Apache communities along with, the trust and mutual relationships built between the tribes acted as their preexisting network. It was through these family and tribal relationships that the idea of combating the Spanish was able to spread and be acted upon.[75] It is important that enduring Starfish organizations are those built on preexisting networks that rely on mutual trust and equal recognition between members.

The last principle sponsors a "champion" to promote the new idea; this person is the energy behind a Starfish organization. The champion is the individual in the organization who is the driver behind spreading the idea that was formulated by the catalyst. They are the people in an organization who have an outgoing, extroverted personality and are generally great salesmen. The champion is the one who cannot stop talking about the ideology behind a cause or group. Champions have the innate ability and charisma to grab on to an idea and be able to sell it to everyone they meet. "A champion is relentless in promoting a new idea."[76] Their charm and instinctual aptitude for excitement when campaigning for an ideology makes everyone they talk to feel comfortable and interested in what they have to say.

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[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid., 21.

[76] Ibid., 99.

There is an important distinction between a champion and a catalyst in the Starfish theory. The main difference is how they apply the use of soft referent power within an organization. Coined by Joseph Nye, soft power is "getting others to want the outcomes you want – co-opts people rather than coerces them"[77] Both the catalyst and champion utilize their referent power to help further the cause of the organization, but the methods with which they use this referent power is the major difference between the two roles.

Catalysts have personal appeal like the champion, but promote the idea in a more subtle and subdued way. Catalysts are able to inspire and naturally connect people to form circles of like-minded individuals, but they do not have the charisma to move larger groups to action as the champion does. Champions tend to be more like salesmen than connectors or organizers. They are the ones who provide the decentralized network with passion for the ideology and the strength to continue to build.[78] All the champion wants to do is get the idea out to the wider community and inspire others about the ideology of the organization.

In the Apache example, one of their best historical champions was the warrior, Geronimo. As a member of an Apache tribe, he traveled to the different tribal groups championing the cause to fight against the authority of the oppressive Mexican government. "I took the war path as a warrior, not as a chief . . . I fought with my

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[77] Joseph Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1990), 27.

[78] Brafman and Beckstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations*, 99.

tribe."[79] He utilized his referent power to influence members of the Apache tribes to fight with him not as their leader but as a champion for a cause.

The champion uses referent personal power through inspirational appeal and influencing techniques to provide the energy behind an idea or ideology.[80] Champions personally identify with the values of the ideology, and then inspire others through their ability to build relationships by passionate dialogue and actions. They have a personality that can build relationships easily and show that the ideology they are championing is similar to the ideals of the people they are influencing. Similar to the catalyst, the champion does not want to be the organizational leader. If the catalyst becomes the organizational leader, the group is in danger of centralizing and loses its ability to be agile and adaptive. All the champion wants to do is inspire people to join the organization and then let the individuals contribute to the goals of the organization.

History of the Waygal Valley

The Ranch House battle that occurred in August 2007 took place in the Nuristan province located in the northeastern part of Afghanistan. This region of Afghanistan has a history of being led by many different rulers dating back to Alexander the Great around 330 B.C.E.[81] Historically, this region of Afghanistan served as a critical junction between

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[79] Geronimo, "Geronimo's, Story of His Life," 1909. accessed April 8, 2015, http://www.world-enlightenment.com/Mythology/Apache-Indian-Stories/Apache-Geronimo-Book/Apache-Geronimo-Book-12.html.

[80] Ginnett, Hughes, and Curphy, *Leadership, Enhancing the Lessons of Experience*, 128.

[81] Shaista Wahab and Barry Youngerman, *A Brief History of Afghanistan* (New York, NY: Facts on File, 2007), 43.

Western and Eastern cultures. Located just south of the highest peaks of the Hindu Kush mountain range, the Waygal Valley in the Nuristan province provides a passage gap between the towering mountains. At a cross roads of cultures, the people of the Nuristan province have historically been influenced by both Eastern and Western cultures; however due to the mountainous terrain they have also been isolated and allowed to form their own internal beliefs and values. This isolation allowed for two main separate cultures to develop in the region; the Nuristani culture in the north and the Safi Pashtuns in the south. The Nuristani claim their heritage dates back to the soldiers of Alexander the Great, and until the nineteenth century practiced their own polytheistic faith until they converted to Islam. This culture predominantly lives on the mountainsides of the southern Hindu Kush tending to livestock as the terrain permits with only limited agriculture.

The Safi Pashtuns are a subculture of the greater Pashtun people who live in the southern and eastern part of Afghanistan. The Safi Pashtuns reside on the lowland south of the Hindu Kush Mountains and rely on agriculture for their subsistence It is the Waygal Valley that separates these two distinct cultures, and where these cultures collide and intermix. Both of these cultures have a reputation of being warriors.

> Feuds are an important part of [the] culture and many cultural values are reflected in the feud. For example, masculinity and honor are strong values and provide themes for many stories and songs. Men strive to be fierce warriors who are loyal to their kin, dangerous to their enemies, and ready to fight whenever necessary.[82]

Although these two cultures have a stern belief in a warrior culture, they are able to live side-by-side due to the easing of tensions through the traditional process of *shuras*.

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[82] World Culture Encyclopedia, "Pashai," accessed April 24, 2015, http://www.everyculture.com/Africa-Middle-East/Pashai.html.

Shuras are tribal meetings and a way for separate cultures within Afghanistan, especially where two cultures meet, to have a dialogue and provide conflict resolution to situations without the use of violence. These *shuras* are extremely important as they allow villagers in isolated areas, such as mountainous terrain, to solve problems without a centralized government. Due to its isolated location in the southern Hindu Kush Mountains, the Waygal Valley has received minimal support from the centralized government of Afghanistan. This lack of support from a centralized government has led to a culture highly independent from outside entities, and its people are willing to support ideologies that keep their independent culture alive. It is this culture that promotes the ideology of fierce warriors and independence from a central government. According to the CSI report,

> Within northeastern Afghanistan, there are three general types of anti-Afghanistan forces (AAF): local fighters; dedicated core fighters of the HiG, other fundamentalist groups, and organized criminal factions that are generally Afghan-centric; and the hardcore radical Islamic fundamentalists such as the Taliban and al-Qaeda who can be considered transnational.[83]

The antagonist against U.S. forces at the Ranch House incident was comprised of these three distinct fighting groups.

The U.S. involvement in the Nuristan province started in the 1980s through the proxy war with the Soviet Union. The Nuristan province was a smuggling route for U.S. purchased Soviet arms provided to the Mujahedeen fighters battling against the communist Soviet forces. The Mujahedeen fighters were based out of this independent tribal region of northeast Afghanistan, and used neighboring Pakistan as a base to launch

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[83] US Army Combat Studies Institute, *Wanat: Combat Action in Afghanistan* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2010), 8.

attacks. The anti-communist forces secured arms bought by the U.S., and recruit forces from the Pakistan region, then smuggled those arms and fighters across the border through the Nuristan province and Waygal valley to combat Soviet forces near Kabul and Bagram Air base. This key smuggling route over the eastern part of Afghanistan was instrumental in defeating the Soviet Union and driving out their military from Afghanistan[84] According to Shaista and Youngerman, "Those clans and tribes who were now freed of Soviet influence or government overlords returned to their traditional localist orientation; . . . and who were more than happy to accept local autonomy."[85] It was this smuggling route over the southern Hind Kush Mountains from Pakistan that led to the rise of Taliban ideology and it became the base from which the Taliban toppled the old government and formed the new government of Afghanistan in 1996. The Taliban victory allowed for a base of operations for the terrorist organization al-Qaeda to form. From their base in this rugged mountainous region, al-Qaeda launched the September 11, 2001 attacks against the United States.[86] These 9/11 attacks reinvigorated U.S. military interest and influence back into the Nuristan province and Waygal valley.

Beginning in October 2001, the U.S. conducted military operations in Afghanistan that overthrew the Taliban government with a mission to destroy al-Qaeda and those groups that provided a safe haven for terrorists. This mission was completed rather quickly, and in 2003 Afghanistan had a new government with U.S. military

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[84] Shaista and Youngerman, *A Brief History of Afghanistan*, 181.

[85] Ibid., 189.

[86] Ibid., 212.

presence largely residing in bases near cities where they mounted sporadic patrols. By 2004, opposition to the new government and coalition forces was mounting. Anti-Afghanistan forces started to launch attacks on Coalition forces. The U.S. Military, due to its involvement with Iraq at the time, kept a limited number of troops in Afghanistan compared to those deployed to Iraq. In 2006, the U.S. Military began to conduct counter insurgency operations with units of 30-40 Marines or Soldiers who would occupy outposts in remote locations such as the Waygal Valley.[87] The Waygal valley was important as, "an al-Qaeda stronghold because of its remoteness, access to Pakistan, and proximity to refugee camps."[88] Much like this region had during the Soviet conflict in the 1980's, it again was being used to transport weapons, fighters and ammunition from Pakistan to Afghanistan. The establishment of the outpost in the Waygal valley was instrumental in the U.S. forces counterinsurgency fight in the region. This is when the combat outpost of the Ranch House near the village of Aranas was established. In May 2007 Task Force Rock, the 2nd Battalion 503rd Infantry, 173d Airborne Brigade Combat Team deployed to Afghanistan and took over the Nuristan province and Ranch House outpost as their area of operations.[89]

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[87] US Army Combat Studies Institute, *Wanat: Combat Action in Afghanistan*, 10-23.

[88] Sergeant Major D. Utley, "Konar Valley," *Long Hard Road, NCO Experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq* (Fort Bliss, TX: US Army Sergeants Major Academy, October 2007), 53-56.

[89] John J. McGrath, "The Attack on the Ranch House, August 2007," in *16 Cases of Mission Command*, ed. Donald P. Wright. 2nd ed. (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2013), 179.

Chapter Summary

The previous literature examined two schools of thought regarding how organizations solve the similar problem of staying current with competition. For the U.S. Army, the principles in Mission Command provide the foundation for the system in which the organization operates. For the private sector, the Starfish theory suggests principles that companies could incorporate into their business practices. Both emphasize decentralization as an approach to improve the organizational performance as conditions on the battlefield, or in the market place change. Through the review of the literature, trends between both philosophies start to emerge. It is these similarities and difference, which will be analyzed in chapter 4.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study attempts to answer the primary research question: Can "Starfish" concepts improve the understanding of Mission Command by the U.S. Army in decentralized operations? This section presents the methodology utilized to answer both the primary and secondary research questions provided in chapter 1. This research will be accomplished by making a qualitative in-depth assessment of applying the principles of Mission Command and Starfish principles to a single military engagement. Chapter 3 begins by justifying the selection of the case study, which illustrates the application of Mission Command, and the Starfish principles by a combat unit in a decentralized changing environment. The "Attack on the Ranch House", presents to the reader a case study that is a key study in Mission Command at the company level and below. Finally, the Research Methodology section describes how the analysis of the case study is conducted utilizing the structured, focused comparison method.[90]

Selection of the Case Study

The case study examines Mission Command and the Starfish principles in the Attack on the Ranch House encounter that took place in Afghanistan in August of 2007. The Combat Studies Institute presents an in-depth approach to the battle at the Ranch

[90] Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 67.

House in its publication *16 Cases of Mission Command*.[91] This publication depicts the conflict between U.S. Forces, Coalition forces, and enemy insurgents and logically lays out the events that took place prior to the incident as well as the battle itself. The publication then reviews the six principles of Mission Command and applies them to U.S. and multinational military operations that occurred over the course of the case study. Choosing this particular case to study was purposeful, as it allows a focus on a true application of the Mission Command principles. Moreover, the case study documented by the U.S. Army Combat Studies Institute, provides a textbook example of the execution of U.S. Mission Command in a decentralized operational environment.

Case Study Method and Analytical Criteria

This thesis uses the structured and focused comparison method to analyze the case study. According to George and Bennett, the structured portion of the method is where the researcher, "writes general questions that reflect the research objective and that these questions are asked of the case under study to guide and standardize data collection, thereby making systematic comparison and accumulation of the findings in the case possible."[92] These questions will be derived from both the principles of Mission Command and the Starfish principles, and then applied to the case study. The focused part of the study requires, "that is, they [the case studies] should be undertaken with a specific research objective in mind and a theoretical focus appropriate for that

[91] McGrath, "The Attack on the Ranch House, August 2007," 175.

[92] George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, 67.

objective."[93] This specific research objective compares and contrasts the Mission Command philosophy and the Starfish theory in relationship to the case study; this will result in answering the secondary research questions. This study starts by defining the structured questions utilized to analyze the case study that will answer the third secondary question. The sub-questions to address the secondary question are as follows.

Mission Command Principle Questions

1. Did the unit build cohesive teams through mutal trust? In other words, was there shared confidence among the commander, subordinates and all members of the team? Was the trust between members gained through eveyday actions and through two-way communication? Through these actions was a unit of effort achieved within the team?[94] This quesiton specifically looks at the relationship that was formed between the members of the unit, the unit and its leadership the unit to its higher headquaters and with it mulitnational parners.

2. Did the unit have a shared understanding of the situation/misison? This question asks whether or not the security force at the outpost "understood the operational envionment, their operation's purpose, its problems, and approaches to solving them." In understanding the environment, was that understanding shared by every member of the team or just forced upon them?[95]

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[93] Ibid., 70.

[94] Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, *Mission Command*, 3.

[95] Ibid.

3. Did the commander provide a clear intent to the unit? This question leads to the understanding that the commander provided a clear and concise purpose with a desired endstate. The commander, in providing his clear intent, articulates a vison of the mission that expresses a broader purpose so that all security forces can operate within that vison.[96]

4. Did the unit exercise disciplined initative? Disciplined initative is taking decisive actions without being explicitly told to do so. This is expresed when an opportunity presents itself to achieve an objective laid out by the commander's intent; the unit as a whole or members of the unit use their own lawful judgment to take actions that would best accomplish the mission.[97]

5. Did the unit utilize mission orders? "Mission orders are directives that emphasize to subordinates the results to be attained, not how they are to achieve them."[98] These mission orders are envisioned to maximize freedom of action and provide a framework for lateral units to conduct cross coordination to achieve the over all higher mission. When leaders use missison orders it is not to micromange but to guide and adjust the unit on the intended path.

[96] Ibid., 3-4.

[97] Ibid., 4.

[98] Ibid., 5.

6. Did the commander accept prudent risk? This seeks to determine if the commander was able to judge the risks and hazards that are inherent in a misison and determine that in order to exploit an opportunity, the risks are worth taking.[99]

Starfish Theory Questions

1. Did the unit utilize circles? Circles can be described as a group or organizaiton with independent team memebers who believe in common norms that come together to contribute to a common goal. Were the units in the case study formed into circles based on mutal trust and did those circles interact with other circles that also valued mutual trust?[100]

2. Did the unit have a Catalyst? This depicts the leader and actions used to influence the units in the case study. Was the leader of the orgnization able to initiate the unit or circle, then cede control and eventually transfer ownership or responsibilty to the members of the organization? This abilty to spur an idea or misison, share it, lead the unit then allow the organization to take the lead while the leader becomes just another member, is the action of a catalyst.[101]

3. Did the unit have a organizational ideology? In other words, did the unit have a guiding principle or idea that all memebers were motivated to work towards? Did units in

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[99] Ibid.

[100] Google Docs, "Summary: The Starfish and the Spider," accessed March 11, 2015, https://docs.google.com/document/d/1nJ3JCDI4yQIN2O09DW6qApRhPrQXDj9wsxY-3jduOAw/edit?hl=en&pli=1.

[101] Brafman and Beckstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations*, 91-94.

the case studies possess an overall broad purpose relating to the misison at hand in which they all believed?[102]

4. Did the unit have a preexisting network? This refers to the culture that existed prior to the catalyst engaging with the problem. Would it act as a launch platform for a decentralized organization? In the case study, did the unit have a culture that was nurturing enough to allow for a decentralized organization to blossom?[103]

5. Did the unit have a champion? A champion is described as a person who takes the ideology of the organization and tirelessly advocates for the cause.The champion is not the individual responsible for making leadership decisions, but the one who is a campaigner for the ideology. This relates to the case study as a person in the unit who promoted the inquiry about "why" the mission was being conducted and was able to mobilize unit members around the question of purpose.[104]

Once these questions are addressed in the context of the case study, an analysis will be conducted to determine the similarities and diffrences between the principles of Misison Command and the principles of the Starfish theory. The investigation of the fourth and fifth secondary questions will provide the analysis to determine if the two philosophies are congruent or incompatable in a military organization based on the case study.

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[102] Ibid., 94-96.

[103] Ibid., 96-98.

[104] Ibid., 98-105.

Data Collection

This study focuses mainly on one key publication related to the case study. This key document is the U.S. Army Combine Arms Center Combat Studies Institute publication, *16 Cases of Mission Command*. This text provided the most intensive unclassified study of the Attack on the Ranch House that is available on the open source network. Other documents were used to gather data, but the most comprehensive retelling of this case was in the documents provided by the US Army Combine Arms Center Combat Studies Institute. Army Doctrine Publication 6-0 and Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-0 provided the Army's understanding of the Mission Command philosophy, but analysis of what Mission Command is came from several different written journal publications. The data gathered from the journals on Mission Command as a philosophy offered an in-depth examination of the concepts behind Mission Command. The last document that led to the analysis of the five principles of the Starfish theory was the book, *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations*. This book along with a speaking engagement at the Command and General Staff College by the author Ori Brafman provided the data used to analyze the Starfish theory.

Summary

The Battle at the Ranch House case study provides a relevant example of combat at company level and below. The potential impact of this case study resides primarily in the non-linear decentralized battlefield environment in which the unit found itself. The atmosphere in which this case study is set provides a look at a complex environment where the enemy is decentralized and fighting unconventionally. This case study provides

an inside look at the leadership of the organization and how those leaders formed the organizational principles of the unit. It is exactly "how" the leader utilized or did not utilize the principles of Mission Command philosophy, and whether implementation of the Starfish decentralized organizational theory model could help to achieve a true understanding and practice of Mission Command that this thesis seeks to answer.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

Introduction

Initially, this chapter provides a case overview of the Attack on the Ranch House, and provides a summary of the events that took place during the battle. The chapter discusses the primary concepts of Mission Command and Starfish principles as understood and then applied by U.S. forces in the case study, as well as the U.S. application of Mission Command toward their coalition Afghan partners. The last part of the chapter concludes with an analysis of the case study to discuss the similarities and differences between the two concepts.

Case Overview: Attack on the Ranch House, Afghanistan, August 2007

On the morning of 22 August 2007 the Ranch House Combat Outpost (COP) was manned by 20 members of 1st Platoon, C Company 2-503rd Infantry. As dawn approached, the outpost was attacked by a decentralized enemy organization with a centralized shared understanding to inflict damage to the Ranch House COP and drive the American and Afghanistan troops out of the area. The enemy had allowed time to observe U.S. forces in this small remote base, as this particular unit had occupied the base for three months. During the initial parts of the fight, the enemy fighters concentrated their fire towards the eastern part of the outpost.

Once the fighting started, the 45 Afghanistan Security guards (ASG) and 22 Afghanistan National Army (ANA) personnel abandoned their posts on the southern part of the COP. This allowed the insurgent force to seize the initiative and exploit a gap in

the perimeter of the base. The enemy was able to do this through the decentralized fighting structures of their organization. The individual enemy fighters exploited an opportunity because they were not bound by direct orders from a commander, but rather able to embrace initiative within the intent of the mission. The enemy was able to exploit this opportunity and break the perimeter of the Ranch House COP and sever the communication between the main centralized command post and some of the U.S. elements. According to the case study, "To the southwest, Post 4 was now isolated from the rest of the defenders and was receiving fire from three sides."[105] The enemy fighters remained to put intense pressure on the gap while U.S. and reconsolidated ANA troops tried to reestablish the broken perimeter.

It was during this part of the conflict that the local insurgent cell leader, Omar, championing the attack was killed. This sudden loss halted the enemy's advance. This halt by the enemy provided an opportunity for the Soldiers at COP Ranch House to exercise disciplined initiative to drive the enemy advance backwards using aircraft support and small arms fire. The case study states, "With the enemy advance already halted by Omar's death, the intensity of the insurgent's fire immediately decreased by half."[106] This allowed the U.S. and Afghan forces to evacuate the wounded, reestablish, and secure the perimeter of the outpost. Once the perimeter was reestablished, the enemy insurgents retreated from the area, and the battle at the Ranch House was over. The U.S. forces at the Ranch House were operating in a volatile environment that required adaptive

[105] McGrath, "The Attack on the Ranch House, August 2007," 185.

[106] Ibid., 188.

and agile leaders who would have to conduct violent combat operation in the morning and interact with the population in the afternoon. It is with this backdrop that the examination of the Mission Command and Starfish principles are to be evaluated.

Analysis

Mission Command

The primary concepts of Mission Command are based on the six principles discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis. The first concept is that of building cohesive teams through mutual trust. Mutual trust is accomplished through mission completion, shared adversity and/or difficulty, and bring with it the knowledge that the leadership will take care of their subordinates. Once this trust is established through shared experiences and two-way communication, then cohesive teams can be built. The second concept of Mission Command is to create a shared understanding throughout the entire organization. The leaders of an organization must generate a communal vision of the environment in which the problem resides, the problem itself and why the unit is solving the problem. Once a unit has a shared understanding, it is able to execute actions towards the shared set of goals of the organization.

The next concept of Mission Command is the need for the unit to have a clear commander's intent. The commander's intent is the basis for synergistic efforts by all elements of the force and provides the broader purpose of the mission at hand. This broader purpose allows subordinates to know not only what is expected of them but most importantly the context in which they can conduct future actions. The fourth concept of Mission Command is execution of disciplined initiative. Disciplined initiative is being able to act on the intent of the overall broad purpose without specific top-down driven

direction. This individual initiative happens when leadership breeds a culture that allows subordinates the flexibility to act within the commander's guidance.

The next concept of Mission Command is the use of mission orders. Mission orders are the methods used to distribute the information and synchronize actions of subordinates by assigning tasks, allocating resources and issuing guidance based on the commander's intent. The main goal of mission orders is to communicate and coordinate information effectively between all members in the organization. The last concept of Mission Command is that of accepting prudent risk. Prudent risk is the deliberate exposure to chance of injury or loss when the commander can visualize the outcome in terms of mission accomplishment or damage to the force, and judges the outcome as worth the cost.[107] All of these primary concepts are fundamental in the effective exercise of Mission Command and reflect the decentralized nature of the Mission Command philosophy. These concepts aid leaders in the exercise of Mission Command to accomplish missions in an uncertain, changing and complex decentralized operating environment. Now that the primary concepts of Mission Command initially defined in chapter 2 have been reviewed, these principles provide the starting point to answer the secondary research question #3: How do they apply to the selected case study?

Question One: Cohesive Teams

Did the unit build Cohesive Teams through mutual trust? Although the unit had only been in Afghanistan for three months, the platoon that participated in the battle at the Ranch House had trained and prepared for the deployment several months before

[107] Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, *Mission Command*, Glossary-2.

arriving in Afghanistan. This preparation allowed mutual trust to be formed over time between the company leadership, platoon leadership and subordinate members. This trust was exemplified in the case study as the platoon leader, 1LT Ferrara, allowed his subordinate NCO's to control the actions on the ground while he relayed to his higher unit the importance of receiving attack aviation aircraft to help turn the tide of the battle. Without this dual relationship of trust with his subordinates to execute his defensive intent for the COP, 1LT Ferrara would not have been allowed the opportunity to call the next higher unit and request assets to integrate into the fight. The trust relationship that the platoon had with its higher headquarters element was paramount in receiving the extra support needed in the battle. It was the trust that allowed the unit to adapt and seize the initiative without direct orders to repel the enemy and take back the security of the outpost.[108]

Though the U.S. had highly effective cohesive teams within their own organization, the U.S. platoon did not formulate teams with the ASG or ANA partners on the outpost. These Afghan security elements were critical to the defensive plan for the Ranch House but were neither part of the cohesive team nor aligned with the American battle strategy. The, "[U.S] paratroopers distrusted the ANA, holding them in the same low regard as the Afghan Security Guards."[109] This distrust did not lead to a total cohesive team at the Ranch House because one element was not viewed as an equal with the same rights or influence as the platoon at the COP.

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[108] McGrath, "The Attack on the Ranch House, August 2007," 193.

[109] US Army Combat Studies Institute, *Wanat: Combat Action in Afghanistan*, 219.

Question Two: Shared Understanding

Did the unit have a shared understanding of the situation/mission? All the U.S. Soldiers had an understanding of the defensive plan at the Ranch House COP as well as the counterinsurgency mission of their higher element. The unit at the Ranch House COP, a platoon from Task Force Rock, "conducted a mix of missions including securing the local population, providing humanitarian assistance and establishing a presence of the central Afghan government."[110] These mission sets address complex problems as they involve interacting with the human element of the battlefield and pose the complex problem of shared understanding for the Soldiers at the Ranch House outpost. The unit, along with leader involvement had to create a shared understanding that was essential not only to navigate through this complex human terrain, but also to deal with the threat of combat action against the unit. This collective discernment was complete with a dialogue between members of the unit regarding how to defend the outpost if it was attacked. "The unit had previously rehearsed quick reaction drill and fighting from secondary and supplemental positions."[111] It was this understanding through rehearsals and discussion that helped the U.S. Soldiers quickly counteract the enemy momentum when the invading insurgent leader was killed. This shared understanding to know each individual's responsibility in the unified defense allowed TF Rock unit members to adjust to the loss of the Afghan-manned section of the perimeter. Without this shared understanding, the

[110] McGrath, "The Attack on the Ranch House, August 2007," 179.

[111] Ibid., 193.

U.S. forces would not have worked in unison to close the breach and repel the enemy out of COP Ranch House.

Due to the lack of trust of the ANA and ASG by U.S. Soldiers, there was a fracture in the shared understanding of the importance of the defensive plan at the combat outpost. COIN operations were paramount to the U.S. operation in the Aranas valley around the Ranch House but this shared understanding of COIN operations was never fully communicated with the Afghan Security elements. This was shown as the ANA and ASG fled from the post, not understanding that the underlying mission was to show a presence of governance in the area, and that their ability to stay and fight was part of that goal. This lack of creating a shared understanding by the U.S. forces with Coalition partners on the major consequence of leaving their post and its effect on the overall broad mission left the U.S. forces at a disadvantage during the battle and afterward within the region.

Question Three: Clear Intent

Did the commander provide a clear intent to the unit? With a shared understanding of the mission, the intent of the commander for the battalion, company, and the platoon at the outpost was clear. The mission of the unit was to conduct counterinsurgency operations. In conducting counter insurgency operations, it is imperative to create a secure environment for the local populace, establish governance presence in the area and gain the populace support.[112] The platoon from TF Rock

[112] Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC; US Government Printing Office, December 2006), 5-18.

accomplished this by maintaining a presence in the Aranas community at forward operations base (FOB) Ranch House and defending the outpost. In providing that secure environment through presence at the outpost, the unit simultaneously gained some support through interaction with the local leaders and established a link between the people in the region and the government of Afghanistan. This was the commander's intent and was the broad understanding why it was so important to defend the outpost near the Afghanistan town of Aranas. Commitment to the intent was displayed during the battle as the U.S. force stayed and fought the enemy, even after the Afghanistan security personnel abandoned the post. The end state of executing the counterinsurgency doctrine was so clear and communally understood by TF Rock that it bred a culture of understanding in the unit resulting in the realization that they were willing to risk their lives to help the organization achieve those counter insurgency objectives.

This is not true for the ANA and ASG that were part of the defensive posture at the Ranch House. The commander, 1LT Ferrara did not display his intent to the Afghan National Army and their importance to keep a presence at the Ranch House COP. He did coordinate with the local security on which sector of the defense to staff, but never clearly explained why it was so important for the ASG and ANA to stay there in a fight with the enemy. He knew that their presence at the outpost offered legitimacy and presence of the national government to the region, and if they left the post, the credibility they had built with the local population would be degraded or broken. It was this intent of the U.S. Forces at the outpost that if presented to the ANA and ASG, would have given them a substantive reason to stay and fight.

Question Four: Disciplined Initiative

Did the unit exercise disciplined initiative? The NCOs directing the unit's action on the ground did not have to be given instructions to counter the attack during a lull in enemy momentum.[113] Those NCOs, in particular a squad leader named SSG Phillips, were able to make decisions on their own based on interactions with the environment. SSG Phillips had a shared understanding of defensive plan, knew what resources he had available to the organization, and utilized those to take action against the enemy. This ability to act on real-time conditions was based on the trust this NCO had developed with the leadership of the unit that allowed SSG Phillips the flexibility to proactively take action with Command's guidance; he seized the opportunity to turn the tide of the battle.

The U.S. forces on the outpost had a shared understanding of COIN operations and the defensive plan, which allowed SSG Philips to exercise disciplined initiative during the battle. The lack of broad mission understanding and relations with the American Soldiers hindered the ASG and ANA's ability to exercise initiative within in the intent of the mission. When the enemy started to fire on the outpost, the Afghan security elements were unable to act on their own within the parameters of the mission intent because all they knew of the defensive plan was the section they had been assigned. Even though the U.S. troops had devised a collective plan to defend the Ranch House, they did not include the ASG and ANA in developing a full understanding of the plan. This led to a misunderstanding of the parameters the Afghan security forces could

[113] McGrath, "The Attack on the Ranch House, August 2007," 194.

or could not act upon. Without this understanding, individual initiative to act in the absence of specific directives is inconceivable.

Question Five: Mission Orders

Did the unit utilize Mission Orders? The broad orders given by the platoon leader emphasized the "what" which was to defend the compound rather than the "how" and "when". This allowed the NCO's controlling the fight flexibility to react to and counter the enemy they engaged at the Ranch House outpost. Creating a shared understanding of the mission and utilizing mission orders go hand in hand. The platoon from TF Rock had a culture of understanding the mission and importance of counterinsurgency and used this broad appreciation of the philosophy of counterinsurgency operations to frame all other orders given. That is why when the battle started, the only order that 1LT Ferrara had to give was to defend the perimeter of the outpost. According to the case study, "During the action the platoon leader did not issue detailed instructions to his subordinate leaders, instead giving them general instructions while he focused on providing necessary external support."[114] This also resonated in the culture of the higher element of TF Rock as the company commander did not give specific orders to 1LT Ferrara, but rather provided support assets and allowed the platoon leader to utilize those as he saw fit and not as higher organizational elements dictated.

The Afghan security elements dispersed at the very beginning of the fight because the U.S. leadership did not instill/portray the intent behind mission orders. The Coalition partners did not have the ability to act in the absence of direct orders due to their lack of

[114] Ibid., 194.

training in receiving mission type orders. “This force (ASG) was locally recruited and given only rudimentary military training.”[115] All the ASG had received up to that point was direct orders by the U.S. forces at the outpost to operate their guard post and not trained in the use of mission orders. When the battle started and they had not received direct orders from the Americans to put up a more vigorous defense of the outpost, they fled. It was due to this lack of having been trained on mission orders, and to act on intent instead of on direct orders that was a cause of the ASG at the Ranch House to disbanding.

Question Six: Prudent Risk

Did the commander accept prudent risk? In every mission, there is risk. The greatest taken by the TF Rock commander was the over extension of troops because of the location of the Ranch House combat outpost. The company commander knew that if a large enemy force attacked the Ranch House, the limited amount of personnel at the outpost would have a difficult time defending the post. This was to be mitigated by the use of the ASG and ANA as part of the defense as well as indirect fire assets and air assets. Yet, all members of the platoon knew that if the COP was attacked, U.S. reinforcements would not arrive from another outpost for at least an hour and that the defense at the Ranch House needed to last until that point. Although this risk was mitigated, the ability to effectively conduct counterinsurgency by “placing troops among the local population,”[116] created opportunities for an element of TF Rock to conduct counterinsurgency operations. Stationing the platoon at the Ranch House outpost was a

[115] Ibid., 180.

[116] Ibid., 194.

prudent risk determined by the leadership, but all the members of the platoon understood these risks. It was through this open relationship to talk and understand the risk that subordinates in the unit felt empowered to assess risk during the fight, find mitigation factors on their own and seize opportunities.

Starfish

The primary concepts of the Starfish philosophy are based on the five principles discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis. The first concept of the Starfish theory is the use of circles. Circles are groups of people who belong to a community, and once included in that community, all members of the community are equal. This communal acceptance implies that each member's contribution is valued within the organization resulting in the building of trust within the circle. The second principle of the Starfish theory is the use of a catalyst. The catalyst is the person who facilitates the forming of circles around a shared idea. They do this by connecting people with similar interests but often diverse talents, and help build relationships between individuals within the organization to work toward shared ideas.

The next Starfish principle requires that the organization must have a shared ideology. The sense of a common belief is what holds the organization together. When those individuals believe in that common ideology they are willing to contribute toward the goals of the organization no matter what the cost to the individual. The fourth concept acknowledges that a Starfish decentralized organization forms best from inside a preexisting network. This preexisting network provides the framework for Starfish organizations to start. It relies on the mutual relationships already in place between individual and groups to allow for a new idea to form and grow.

The last principle of the Starfish philosophy is the use of a champion to promote the shared idea or ideology. The champion is the individual in the organization who is the driver behind spreading the idea that is embraced by the circle. The primary function of the champion is to passionately disseminate the idea out to the wider community and inspire others to act, in order to promote the ideology of the organization and contribute to its goals. It is through the use of these principles that an organization can be successful when facing ill-structured problems in uncertain or ambiguous environments. These Starfish based, decentralized organizations arrive at solutions by being effectively aware of the goals or mission of the organization, knowing the teams and teammate's strengths and weakness, and trusting in individuals and circles to arrive at their part of the solution by way of critical and creative thinking. Now that the principles of the Starfish theory originally defined in chapter 2 have been recapped, these concepts provide the starting point to answer secondary research question #3: How do they apply to the selected case study?

Question One: Circles

Did the unit utilize Circles? The American unit at the Ranch House outpost utilized the circle concept to build a community of trust and equality. The platoon employed circles to help build the norms of the organization especially when it came to the defense of the outpost. Each member understood the defensive plan and individually agreed upon their own sector to protect if the enemy were to attack. This was shown as no specific order was given to defend the outpost, yet once the enemy started to attack the Ranch House, each individual Soldier went to their section of the perimeter for the defense of the group. This group defensive plan was agreed upon by the circle of Soldiers

at the outpost and became the norms for the group. It was these norms that reinforced the trust that they had between each other to work collectively to defend COP Ranch House.

These circles concepts were established by U.S. forces within the outpost but did not carry over to all elements at the Ranch House. The ASG and ANA were part of the defensive plan as they staffed part of the perimeter for the Ranch House. In order for the collective defense to operate to its full capacity, the ASG and ANA needed to be incorporated into the U.S. platoon's defensive circle. "The ASG were not organized or expected to participate in sustained combat."[117] The ASG and ANA were not given access to the same circle that the coalition forces were a part of because they were not viewed by American forces as equals. They did not have the same norms of trust to defend their portion of the defensive sector that were codified in the U.S. Soldiers defense of the outpost. While, the U.S. unit at the Ranch House established a circle of trust and communal effort for itself, these circles were not all-inclusive and excluded the ASG and ANA even though they were integral to the defensive plan.

Question Two: Catalyst

Did the unit have a Catalyst? The platoon at the Ranch House did have a Catalyst in the platoon leader, 1LT Ferrara. 1LT Ferrara was the leader within the organization and acted as the facilitator making connections between the upper level organization and Soldiers in combat at the Ranch House. He was charged with implementing the counterinsurgency ideas/intent within the platoon as well as facilitating the relationships between the NCO's to accomplish a comprehensive defense plan for the base. "With the

[117] US Army Combat Studies Institute, *Wanat: Combat Action in Afghanistan*, 41.

NCO leadership directing the action of the squads and sections, 1LT Ferrara was free to maintain contact with his superiors and direct fire support activities."[118] 1LT Ferrara demonstrated classic traits of a catalyst who instills an idea or intent into his subordinates, and then cedes control to the members of the circle or group. When the platoon leader was able to make those connections and relationships between the NCO's in his unit this allowed him the freedom to work behind the scenes and request support from his higher organization.

In essence, 1LT Ferrara was a catalyst for his organization as he fostered relationships between his NCOs and provided the development of the counterinsurgency ideas/intent fostered within the U.S. forces. The unit at the Ranch House, however, did not have a viable catalyst between the two separate circles of Afghanistan troops and coalition forces. The Afghanistan National Army troops did have a small marine embedded training team whose role was to advise the ANA on operations, but this Marine detachment did not act as a catalyst between the U.S. forces and the Afghan forces. There was little to no cross-coordination between the American forces on the outpost and the ASG and ANA units on the base.[119] It was this lack of a facilitator to build these connections between Afghan forces and U.S. forces that led to a disconnect in the intent of the entire defensive plan at the Ranch house.

[118] McGrath, "The Attack on the Ranch House, August 2007," 190.

[119] Ibid., 182.

Question Three: Ideology

Did the unit have an organizational ideology? The Army as a whole has common beliefs or ideology that binds members of the organization together, and the American members at the Ranch House had a shared ideology that held the unit together during the battle at the Ranch House. This counterinsurgency ideology and the unit's commitment to mission completion propelled them to hold the COP at all costs. This shared COIN ideology/understanding was engrained in each individual. They shared a communal understanding and allegiance that led to the platoon fighting back the enemy when they had breached the compound because the unit knew how important it was to keep a Coalition presence in the Aranas region. Even after the attack which had an impact on the morale of the unit the platoon did not abandon their COIN approach. "After the Ranch House attack in late 2007 . . . TF Rock continued to meet with local leaders in the valley and attempted to use reconstruction projects as an inducement for their participation in creating security."[120] The shared ideology and understanding of COIN operations was so entrenched in the unit and individuals that they continued to meet and provide security for the population even after they were attacked at their outpost.

While the COIN ideology was collectively and individually endorsed within the U.S. forces at the Ranch House, this same ideology was not fully shared by U.S forces or communally understood by all members of the security force at the outpost. The ASG and ANA did not receive the opportunity to grasp or give support to the same COIN ideology in which the members of 1st Platoon, C Company, 2-503 infantry so strongly

[120] US Army Combat Studies Institute, *Wanat: Combat Action in Afghanistan*, 203.

believed. “After the brief opening volley the ASG and ANA elements located near Post 5 broke contact and withdrew . . . many of the ASG men withdrew completely, retreating into Aranas and the countryside away from the enemy positions.”[121] With this action one can infer that the ASG and ANA did not have a shared understanding of the rigors of the counter insurgency fight due to a lack of shared understanding by U.S. forces. The Coalition Soldiers did not internalize COIN principles of keeping a strong security presence in the area and because their ideology differed from the American ideology or shared organizational understanding at the Ranch House, they abandoned their post during the conflict with the enemy.

Question Four: Preexisting Network

Did the unit have a preexisting network? TF Rock and the units underneath TF Rock began with a preexisting network developed by both the Army organizational structure and several months train-up before deploying into Afghanistan. It was through this training experience that the relationship of the preexisting network within the platoon and the task force developed and continued to increase while in the Waygal valley region of Afghanistan. Further this preexisting network of relationships within the organization that facilitated the spread and distribution of the COIN ideology. The network built at the platoon level allowed the catalysts to facilitate the understanding of the communal actions needed to complete the end result of security for the local population. This relationship network within the organization allowed individuals to understand the “why”

[121] McGrath, “The Attack on the Ranch House, August 2007,” 183.

behind an ideology or mission and enabled individuals to act within the norms of the circle as guidelines for future action.

The ASG and ANA at the outpost were not afforded the opportunity to have this same type of preexisting network or training on which to build an ideology. "Unlike the regular ANA combat formations, the ASG were locally recruited, low quality security personnel responsible for serving as gate guards and providing static defense from guard towers."[122] The Afghan security elements did not go through unit training like U.S. forces to build the relational networks needed to spread and facilitate the shared understanding of COIN operations. U.S. forces recruited these forces then put them directly to work with little to no collective unit training. Due to the lack of a preexisting relationship network, the understanding of the mission intent acknowledged by U.S. forces was unable to be internalized by the Afghan security elements. The ASG and ANA simply saw the U.S. COIN mission as a "what" to do instead of answering "why" they were providing security for the population. A direct consequence of this lack training by U.S. forces on collective training, a supportive network could not be developed that would have provided the guidance and direction to understand the "why" behind an action. This lack of collective training provided by U.S. forces to establish a preexisting network was illustrated by how easily and quickly the ASG and ANA gave up on the mission of defending the Ranch House outpost.

[122] US Army Combat Studies Institute, *Wanat: Combat Action in Afghanistan*, 41.

Question Five: Champion

Did the unit have a Champion? The American platoon at the Ranch House had a champion during the battle who was able to inspire others to rally toward the goals of the organization. SSG Phillips was the champion for the platoon during the battle at the Ranch House. He was not the centralized leader of the platoon, but rather one of its members who inspired others to keep fighting because of their relationship with members of the group and their actions. "Phillips and the other NCOs at the outpost displayed initiative and verve in their reactions to the attack, fully understanding this mission, how the defense was expected to work, and what was necessary to prevent disaster."[123]SSG Phillips used referent power to champion the defense during the battle, which allowed the organization to act upon the broad principles of security and seize the opportunity to repel the enemy once their leader had been killed. He exercised individual judgment due to the trust he had built with his organization to influence members to fight with him not as their leader but as a champion for the cause.

SSG Erich Phillips was able to champion the U.S. troops at the Ranch House but failed to understand his role in influencing the ASG and ANA troops stationed at the outpost. In order for a champion to be successful, they must build relationship with all the people in their organization in order to inspire group members about an ideology or the mission. Through developing these relationships, the champion then builds referent power to champion the cause. This referent influence was never cultivated by the U.S. Soldiers with the ASG and ANA, and thus the communal defense ideology of the Ranch

[123] McGrath, "The Attack on the Ranch House, August 2007," 190.

House COP never sunk in with the ASG and ANA. When it came time to act, they did not have the ability to apply judgment to the situation within the ideology of the community. The U.S. troops never established relationships to champion understand of the mission purpose, key tasks and desired end state to the Coalition forces. "If the ASG and the ANA held their ground, . . . I would have grabbed me two or three dudes . . .and reestablish and helped them out."[124] Through SSG Phillips own words, he wanted to champion the defense of the outpost by showing the ASG and ANA that they would have received help during a fight but because of the lack of a relationship built prior to the battle he did not understand he had to do so.

Ranch House Case Study Analysis

The Ranch House case study allowed application of both Mission Command and Starfish principles. In doing so, it allowed a comparative analysis of both similarities and differences of the two concepts. This analysis allowed insight to the fourth and fifth secondary research questions of, "what are the philosophical similarities between the two concepts and what are the differences between the two concepts?"

In Mission Command, the first principle of building cohesive teams through mutual trust correlates directly with the Starfish principle of Circles. Both cohesive teams and circles need trust among the members to be efficient. The platoon was the circle or cohesive team built on relationships of trust developed over time. The unit at the Ranch House had to belong to two separate circles, one was the platoon at the Ranch House and the other circle was with higher headquarters. The norm of mutual trust was valued

[124] Ibid., 190.

within the two different teams or circles. This was shown as the NCO controlled the fight on the ground trusting that 1LT Ferrara would call for higher support, and trust was also evident when higher HQ's element allowed 1LT Ferrara to control the air assets during the battle. The platoon at the COP trusted that their higher command would provide them with resources based on loyalty to a common purpose and the higher organization trusted the platoon to utilize these higher-level assets to execute their common goals. This created two interconnected circles or cohesive teams built on trust with aligned goals and beliefs or norms.

The second correlating principle is that of shared understanding or organizational ideology. In the case study 1st Platoon, C Company 2-503 Infantry shared understanding and its ideology were identical. The ideology of the Starfish principle is the common beliefs shared by the group, and the shared understanding in the Mission Command philosophy is to create and maintain as shared purpose. The shared purpose that was fostered by the guiding principles or ideology of counterinsurgency was shared and understood by all members of the organization. It was this shared understanding of the COIN principles of securing the population, ingrained in individual U.S. Soldiers, that was a driving factor in keeping the outpost at the Ranch House.

The third parallel principal between the two different philosophies is the commander's intent and that of the catalyst. The catalyst is the person who facilitates an idea or ideas that allowed an organization to pursue an initiative. The commander's intent is the synergistic ideas provided by the commander to guide the unit toward mission accomplishment. Both of these principles help facilitate an idea or effort through a person who allows an organization to achieve a goal or mission. This was demonstrated in the

case study by 1LT Ferrara as he fostered relationship within the platoon to enable the defense of the Ranch House with the intent or idea of conducting counterinsurgency operations.

The fourth conclusion is that the principle of exercising disciplined initiative and the champion principle are similar, but not mutually exclusive. To exercise disciplined initiative an individual understands the ideas of the organization and then acts upon those ideas as an individual for the betterment of the group. This is the same for the champion of a group; they understand the ideology of the organization and works through words and actions to spread that ideology for the betterment of the group. The champion who exercised disciplined initiative in the case study was SSG Phillips. Because he understood the ideology behind the defensive plan, he was able to act without direct orders and seize an opportunity in the battle for the betterment of the organization.

The fifth and final congruent principles are those of the use of mission orders and the preexisting network. The preexisting network provides the launching platform for an idea or a decentralized organization. Mission Orders also follow the same function, as they are the way an organization distributes it ideas in the organization. The main purpose of each is to spread the ideas of the organization to create some kind action. Mission orders and the preexisting network were exemplified in the case study by the relationship that existed in the platoon. It was this relationship network among the NCOs and members of the unit that allowed the broad mission orders of defending the outpost to be distributed within the platoon. Both the mission orders and preexisting network act as methods to display ideas across an organization.

Even with the many parallels drawn between the Mission Command and Starfish principles, the relationships are not mutually exclusive. Just as in the holistic approach of Mission Command and the Starfish theory, the parallels drawn between each principle have the ability to intertwine with and influence the others. The Mission Command principle of building cohesive teams through mutual trust aligns most with the Starfish principle of building circles, but it also draws some correlations to preexisting networks. The concept of preexisting networks refers to a community that already has some type of interpersonal relationships. This is similar to the concept of building cohesive teams as ADP 6-0 states, "Effective commanders have teams within their own organizations . . . built through interpersonal relationships."[125] The elements of building communities or teams that are established on interpersonal bonds are key in both of these concepts. This study had drawn comparison between separate principles of Mission Command and Starfish for the simplicity of comparison, but it is importation to note that these principles are not mutually exclusive and blend throughout both the Mission Command and Starfish philosophies.

However, in comparing the different principles of Starfish and Mission Command there is one principle that does not cross over. The Mission Command principle of accepting prudent risk does not have a counterpart in the Starfish philosophy model. This could be for two main reasons. First, the Starfish philosophy model has grown in the private sector where taking risks is discussed, but is viewed differently from a military organization in combat. When a private company takes risks, what they risk is a bottom

[125] Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, *Mission Command*, 3.

line or fiscal risk. If they fail in this fiscal risk, it could lead to lower profits or in extreme cases bankruptcy of the company. In the military, risk is it often measured in life and death for Soldiers. This is drastically different from a majority of private companies' views on risk. In the military, an organization has to assess whether the advancement of the organizations ideology is worth possible physical injury to one of its members. That is the first reason why prudent risk is a key principle of Mission Command and not in the Starfish theory.

The second reason why prudent risk is not specifically stated in the Starfish principle is that it is an inherent part of a Starfish organization. Starfish organizations thrive on taking risks, or allowing individuals within the organization to try different methods of solving problems. When those new or inventive ways do not work out, that ideology or idea is not incorporated into the organization as a whole. "Decentralized networks, however, provide circles and an empowered membership and typically have a higher tolerance for innovation."[126] These risks or innovations are taken as the lowest levels of an organization and because each member has equal status in the group, the risks are often seen as contributions to the organization and not as hazards. Taking risks in a Starfish organization are fundamental to the way that it operates and innovates.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of a decentralized battle at company level and below in the case study, Attack on the Ranch House. It then applied and analyzed the

[126] Brafman and Beckstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations*, 97.

fourth and fifth secondary research questions to address the philosophical similarities between the Starfish and Mission Command concepts and the differences between the two concepts in reference to the case study. The analysis of the similarities and differences between Mission Command and the Starfish principles in the case study provides the research needed to answer the primary question: Can "Starfish" concepts improve the understanding of Mission Command by the U.S. Army in decentralized operations? Chapter 5 will draw conclusions from the case analysis, and in doing so will address the primary research question.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The previous chapter provided findings through a detailed analysis of the secondary research questions. This chapter provides conclusions drawn from chapter 4, and how that analysis applies to the primary research question. Lastly, this chapter will provide recommendations for further study in the area of decentralized application in the context of the Army's Mission Command philosophy.

Conclusions

The Starfish and Mission Command principles are similar in their philosophical competencies, and an overall relationship is seen between the principles of Mission Command and the principles of the Starfish philosophy. In the case study, where the principles of Mission Command were executed, so were the corresponding principles of the Starfish theory. The opposite also applies; where the Mission Command principles failed to be executed, the principles of the Starfish theory also failed to be achieved. By examining the comparison between the two philosophies through the application of the case study method, it can be determined that both Mission Command and the Starfish organizational models are trying to achieve the same results through similar processes. When implemented, both of these philosophies flatten the hierarchical command structure of an organization. When this command structure is flattened, the ability of that organization to adapt to a changing decentralized environment is improved over a conventional command and control structure. The U.S. forces at the Ranch House utilized

the Mission Command and Starfish principles to adapt and overcome an unconventional enemy threat in a continuously changing decentralized environment. This contrasts with the ASG and ANA organizations that were accustomed to a structured Transactional Leadership environment, but were not given constant and direct orders about holding their position at the Ranch House. From their actions, it was obvious these local military organizations did not embrace the same Mission Command principles, and were unable to adapt and quickly abandoned their post.

In the case study it was established that the U.S. can be successful in the application of Mission Command within its own force structure, but has difficulty applying the principles of Mission Command outside their organization. As discussed in the case study analysis, the principles of Mission Command, as well as their Starfish relations, were utilized effectively by American troops. However those troops apparently were unable to relate those same principles with their Coalition partners. This potentially presents a crucial gap in how small units understand the principles of Mission Command, and how they internalize the ideology and use Mission Command with coalition partners. The leaders in the case study were able to "guide the development of the team, help build trust and shared understanding" for U.S. forces, but did not understand how to bridge the gap and apply those same principles to the entire security organization at the Ranch House.[127] In essence, the inward-focused culture of the U.S. forces in the case study did not allow for them to apply the principles of Mission Command to elements that were different from themselves. They viewed the principles of Mission Command only as a

[127] Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, *Mission Command*, 2.

U.S. Army doctrine, and did not feel the need to share or expand those ideas among their allied partners.

In his the book, *People Skills*, Dr. Robert Bolton describes how a leader should communicate and influence people across the broad spectrum of cultural and social differences. This idea directly supports working collaboratively with coalition partners, which is often the case in an uncertain complex environment. He reaches the conclusion that successful groups of people rely on the ability to trust one another and communicate ideas effectively.[128] This inability to understand the Mission Command principles application outside U.S. Army units is consistent with Army culture. "The Ranch House fight was similar to another major attack on an outpost in October 2009 . . . similarly the Afghan-manned section of the perimeter collapsed."[129] It is this lack of understanding how to collaborate with Coalition partners due to the Army's inward-focused cultural understanding of Mission Command principles being U.S. doctrine only, which leads to a serious gap in the understanding of Mission Command by the U.S. Army.

In every instance that a Mission Command principle was applicable, so was a principle of the Starfish theory. Conversely, when a principle of Mission Command was not applied, the Starfish theory principle also was not applicable. Because this research indicates a close alignment of these two concepts, it can be inferred that the Army's Mission Command philosophy is a decentralized concept for conducting U.S. Army operations. The Starfish theory is also a concept describing decentralized organizations.

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[128] Robert Bolton, *People Skills* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 14-29.

[129] McGrath, "The Attack on the Ranch House, August 2007," 192.

However it not only provides an alternate way of viewing the concepts of decentralized operations and the metaphors necessary to teach the organizational style, it also stresses the successful application of this model throughout history and in today's business world.

In the analysis of the case study, it was identified that there was a gap in the application of Mission Command in the context of a joint/multinational structure working with coalition partners. ADP 1-01 states, "Understanding the joint structure and doctrine is required to fully understand the role of land forces in the overall campaign."[130] Although the unit that fought at the Ranch House was able to apply the concepts of Mission Command to their own forces, they apparently did not understand the concepts behind Mission Command doctrine and its role in the joint/multinational structure of land operations. It is this potential misunderstanding of the use of Mission Command in the joint/multinational arena where the application of the Starfish theory may be able to improve the Army's cultural understanding and use of Mission Command, and moreover better understand how the principles can relate to non-U.S. Army partners.

With the similarity of Mission Command and Starfish principles, the Starfish principles can provide a different way to frame how not only U.S. organizations understand Mission Command, but also how they can better form partnerships and conduct operations in a joint/multinational environment. This alternate way of understanding the principles of Mission Command through the Starfish philosophy can improve the way U.S. Army leaders understand the doctrine of Mission Command in complex multinational environments.

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[130] Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 1-01, *Doctrine Primer* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, September 2014), 5-1.

Recommendations

The U.S. Army's Mission Command philosophy is the "most effective means to account for the fog and friction of war."[131] Mission Command, due to its decentralized nature, allows the U.S. Army to be flexible within the human dimension and able to adapt to complex operational challenges.[132] The U.S. Army has the capability to execute Mission Command within its own formation, but may not fully understand the role of Mission Command, or how to interpret it, in a joint or multinational environment. In the case study, the U.S. Army was unable to understand the Mission Command principles in its holistic relationship with its multinational partners. An understanding of the Starfish principles may help bridge the gap in understanding and the interpretation of Mission Command.

The following recommendations may serve to help the understanding and cultural context of decentralized concepts of the Mission Command philosophy in joint and multinational operation. First, the principles of the Starfish theory could be included in the Mission Command narrative, especially in Army Doctrine ADRP 6-0. In section 3-8 through 3-13 of ADRP 6-0, the doctrine deals particularly with joint, interagency and multinational, but fails at critically connecting the principles of Mission Command to these types of operations. The Starfish principles of circles, catalysts, ideology, preexisting networks and champions could be utilized to promote understanding and develop effective multinational operations. Comprehension of the Starfish principles and

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[131] Ibid., 4-6.

[132] Department of the Army, ADP 6-0, *Mission Command*, 1.

their correlation to the appropriate counterparts of Mission Command would bridge the gap between how the U.S. conceptualizes Mission Command philosophy in multinational operations, and how it applies Mission Command.

Next, considerations for further research and study of the implications of utilizing the Starfish principles could pursue in two separate directions. The first could be conducted by applying this same type of case study approach to a case where Mission Command was not implemented correctly by a U.S. Army unit. This could help determine if the misunderstanding of Mission Command goes beyond the application in a multinational role, and if the Starfish principles could be applied to the understanding of Mission Command within the Army's own culture.

Second, an analysis of Mission Command and Starfish philosophy in the U.S. military joint doctrine could determine if the misunderstanding of Mission Command in multinational operations stems from the nesting of U.S. Army Doctrine with Joint Military Doctrine. The study would revolve specifically around Joint Publication 3-16, *Multinational Operations,* Joint Publication 3-31, *Command and Control for Joint Land Operations* and Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations*. Within this collection of joint doctrine, a study could be conducted to determine if the gap of understanding described in this thesis is only apparent in U.S. Army doctrine, or if it is due to lack of shared understanding documented in joint/multinational doctrine.

For all the right reasons, the U.S. Army has chosen to implement a decentralized command and control system through Mission Command. Yet, this thesis suggests that historically this decentralized operational structure has to be embraced and understood by the culture of the organization to be applied correctly. The German decentralized

Auftragstaktik philosophy evolved over seventy years until it was finally adopted in doctrine and culture. "Over the past 100+ years the basic ideas of mission command have evolved continuously."[133] Yet, it is only since 2003 that Field Manual 6-0 coined the term, Mission Command. Since 2003, the U.S. Army has attempted to change its command and control culture by focusing on the humanistic type of decentralized control through the Mission Command philosophy. The application of Starfish principles could help in unlocking the secret to an understanding of the U.S. Army's Mission Command philosophy in decentralized complex environments.

[133] COL Clinton J. Ancker, "The Evolution of Mission Command in U.S. Army Doctrine 1905 to the Present," *Military Review* (March-April 2013): 51.

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