

Strategy Research Project

Opportunity for a Change: Mission Command and the Drawdown

by

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Abstract

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The Army finds itself at a critical point in its implementation of a mission command culture. Recent post-conflict history demonstrates tendencies towards centralization. While there are some differences in context, the anticipated future environment for the Army bears many similarities to its recent post-conflict past. Army senior leaders experienced the difficult days of “zero defect” command climates, reductions in end strength, and reduced promotion rates. Conversely, based on their experiences in combat over the last decade, the Army’s junior leaders have both mission command experience and an expectation of empowerment from their leadership. To increase the chances of successful implementation of a mission command culture, the Army should utilize Schein’s cultural embedding mechanisms. Specific recommendations include: consistent senior leader focus on mission command, senior leader role modeling mission command, rewarding positive examples of mission command, and adjusting the Officer Evaluation Report to ensure the Army promotes the right leaders. The implementation of a mission command culture will only occur when senior leaders overtly embrace and participate in the process.

Opportunity for a Change: Mission Command and the Drawdown

The Army's ultimate effectiveness, contribution, and value to the national defense are determined by how well mission command enables operational units to prepare and execute assigned missions.

—General Raymond Odierno¹

With the publication of Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0 in May 2012, the United States Army released its most current version of mission command as its capstone doctrine for commanding and leading Army formations. Additionally, in April 2012, just prior to the official release of ADRP 6-0, General Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, issued a Mission Command White Paper, identifying mission command as a critical component of Joint Force 2020.²

While the concept and thought behind the philosophy of mission command are sound, there are significant obstacles that will likely hinder the implementation of mission command as intended by the Army senior leadership. This paper examines these potential obstacles through the lenses of organizational culture and change. Though mission command applies universally across the tactical, operational, and strategic domains, the potential failure to implement mission command across the force is a strategic level issue for the Army because the anticipated future operating environment will require empowering leaders, at all levels, to adapt to rapidly changing 21st Century situations and exploit fleeting opportunities.³ Successful implementation of mission command will only occur when a majority of senior leaders both embrace and overtly participate in embedding the culture of mission command across the Army.

The environment over the next few years presents the Army with a tremendous opportunity to implement a culture of mission command. Many of the necessary

conditions are in place: senior leader endorsement of the mission command doctrine and culture; sound mission command doctrine that has proven to be effective in combat; the drawdown, providing the Army an opportunity to rid itself of many of those leaders who either oppose or are not capable of leading by mission command; a lower operations tempo, providing leaders the opportunity to mentor and counsel on how to lead by mission command; finally, the Army possesses a rather large cohort of junior leaders who know, are comfortable with, and expect mission command. This is the only time in the Army's history that all of these conditions have existed concurrently, providing the Army with a window of opportunity to achieve its desired cultural change and implementation of mission command.

The successful implementation of mission command is a strategic level issue for the Army because the missions of the U.S. Armed Forces in the 21st Century will require disciplined initiative at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war. "As the Army changes to meet its evolving requirements, it must continue to embrace its key characteristics of adaptability, flexibility, responsiveness, and depth along with the experience of operating among populations across a variety of missions and activities."⁴ Adaptability within the force is a combat multiplier, enabling Army leaders at all levels to operate effectively within the human dimension on the land domain.⁵ Mission command provides the necessary leadership foundation on which to build strategic landpower, thus, providing the President, Secretary of Defense, and combatant commanders with relevant, flexible strategic landpower options.⁶

Mission Command Description

The Army's version of mission command traces its origin to the Prussian/German concept of *Auftragstaktik*, which encourages initiative at all levels of command. Further,

Auftragstaktik is not simply a technique for issuing command, but it is also a style of leadership. Prussian officers lived a lifestyle of *Auftragstaktik*, emphasizing aggressiveness and subordinate freedom of action to the point of near disobedience.⁷ Significant *Auftragstaktik* conceptual tenets include: the chaotic nature of the Clausewitzian battlefield--chance, friction, and uncertainty--is inherent in war; while technology can improve communications and information processing, it lacks a human capacity for creativity and instant judgment; and subordinates' motivation and commitment are strengthened by active participation and responsibility.⁸

ADRP 6-0 defines mission command as "the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander's intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations."⁹ Mission command was presented as an organizational solution intended to minimize the effects of friction and facilitating the pursuit of organizational objectives.¹⁰ Military operations "are contests of wills characterized by continuous and mutual adaptation by all participants."¹¹ Mission command provides leaders the means to operate at the speed of the problem by increasing agility, effectiveness, and synergy among subordinate elements.¹² This synergy is the result of the cohesive effects of mission command, creating and sustaining unit confidence--a combat multiplier at every level of war.¹³

Fundamentally, mission command is a philosophy of empowerment, as the nature of unified land operations "requires both responsibility and decision-making at the point of action."¹⁴ Empowering subordinates is one of the most forceful expressions of trust, and it is also one of the best ways to develop leaders.¹⁵ Empowering junior

leaders requires senior leaders to relinquish control and accept prudent levels of risk, resulting in increased subordinate freedom of action and initiative. Perhaps most significantly, empowerment provides subordinates the latitude to accomplish missions in a manner that they determine to best fit the situation.¹⁶

U.S. Army Mission Command Strategy

The publication of the Army Mission Command Strategy (AMCS) reaffirms the importance of successful mission command implementation for the Army. While the strategy does provide broad guidance for mission command implementation, it inadequately addresses both the current context and potential reasons why the Army might experience frustration in implementing mission command. In describing the need for a mission command strategy, the AMCS states, “The Army has not fully implemented mission command because there is not a uniform understanding of mission command doctrine across the Army.”¹⁷ While that is almost certainly true, it is also incomplete and fails to acknowledge differences in personal experiences and culture, which may also explain why the Army has not fully implemented mission command.

In the forward to the AMCS, General Odierno states, “Mission command is an intellectual and cultural shift for the Army that must be driven through education and training to yield the desired mission command outcomes.”¹⁸ However, the AMCS does not further describe the existing culture from which the Army must shift. By failing to overtly account for any specific organizational cultural dynamics, the AMCS essentially implies that the most significant impediment to implementing mission command is a lack of understanding. Again, while this may be true in part, this paper will argue that

dynamics within the Army's organizational culture also impede the implementation of mission command.

Fundamentally, the Army's goal for mission command implementation results in a paradox: the desire for organizations to be adaptable and flexible, yet also stable and controlled. This paradox is evident in many types of organizations, but it is particularly pronounced in a large, hierarchical organization such as the Army. In the context-free management literature, Quinn describes this paradox within the context of his competing values framework because the criteria seem to carry a conflictive message. Leaders must be willing to accept risk and trust subordinates' intuition. Conversely, at the appropriate time, leaders must be able to leave behind intuition, initiative, and decentralization and move toward control, constancy, and centralization. These oppositions simultaneously exist in the realm of organizational leadership. Ultimately, according to Quinn, the mastery of leadership and organizational management hinges on the ability to continuously adjust along the continuum between control and flexibility.¹⁹

Historical Context: The Foundation of Army Culture

Organizational culture refers to "the taken-for granted values, underlying assumptions, expectations, collective memories, and definitions present in an organization."²⁰ Former IBM chief executive officer, Louis Gerstner, posits that "culture isn't just one aspect of the game--it *is* the game."²¹ He added, "Successful institutions almost always develop strong cultures that reinforce those elements that make the institution great."²² An organization's culture reflects the environment or context from which it emerged. When the environment changes, the culture can be an enormous impediment to the organization's ability to adapt to the appropriate context.²³

The recent history of the United States Army does not demonstrate a culture of mission command and trust in the aggregate. Due to the size of the mobilized Army during World War II, Army leadership emphasized many popular business management practices of efficiency and organization, favoring centralized control over individual judgment. The Army's success in World War II cemented these behaviors in the organizational culture, just as Gerstner describes.²⁴ These characteristics of what some call the American Way of War heavily influenced the Army's culture, through the Vietnam War and the Cold War.

Post-Vietnam

The practice of corporate managerial processes driving military operations reached epidemic proportions during the Vietnam War. Initiatives, by then Secretary of Defense McNamara, emphasized corporate quantitative and statistical analysis over the human dimension. As a result, senior leaders developed an insatiable appetite for data, requiring subordinates to invest lengthy periods of time to prepare and execute missions. The Army's ability to keep pace with the less sophisticated but highly effective enemy guerrilla forces was severely impaired.²⁵ Centralization and a managerial style of command were fostered by an increased dependency on firepower, an asset easily quantified. This command approach sought to efficiently manage vastly superior American resources in order to exhaust the resource-challenged enemy.²⁶ Instead, the enemy chose a strategy of irregular warfare that marginalized the American way of war.²⁷

The Study on Military Professionalism, commissioned by then-Chief of Staff General William Westmoreland, yielded some disturbing findings present in the Army officer corps as it was concluding operations in Vietnam. Junior officers described a

command environment that demanded progress quantification, efficiency, effective allocation of scarce resources, and the withholding of decisions at the highest possible level.²⁸ They were particularly frustrated with a perceived “zero defects” mentality, which they described as pervasive throughout the Army.²⁹ The environment, in turn, stifled initiative and innovation, because it demanded perfection or the façade of perfection at every turn.³⁰

Throughout its rebuilding period of the post-Vietnam 1970s, the Army focused almost exclusively on defeating the Soviet Union on the plains of Central Europe. This significantly influenced the culture and environment for over two decades. The Army neglected many of the lessons learned of fighting a counterinsurgency and its accompanying ambiguity, and chose to focus on the very structured problem of combating waves of Soviet tanks and infantry. This environment produced a generation of officers who tended to be tactically adept, but particularly uncomfortable with vague situations, foreign cultures, inadequate information, and ill-defined goals.³¹

Post-Cold War

The period following Operation Desert Storm and the end of the Cold War was a particularly difficult era for mission command. The drawdown, beginning in the early 1990s, coupled with an Army trying desperately to find a focus, created an unhealthy environment that was, in many ways, incompatible with a mission command culture. Though the social, economic, and political context was different than the post-Vietnam drawdown, many characteristics of the prevailing Army culture were strikingly similar to the post-Vietnam Army.

The Army Training and Leader Development Panel (ATLDP) Officer Study, commissioned by the Chief of the Staff in 2001, identified significant dissonance

between Army beliefs and practices, as well as a corresponding loss of faith in senior leaders. Junior leaders stated that many senior leaders were focused on their own careers and failed to promote cohesion and trust in their organizations.³² Many junior officers reported an increasing, unhealthy environment of competition and careerism. This increased competition undermined cooperation among officers, as officers focused inward, afraid of giving any advantage to their peers.³³

The ATLDP report flatly stated that micromanagement had become part of the Army culture.³⁴ Commanders and leaders became consumed with not failing, and, predictably, micro-managed their organizations which stifled initiative in the process. Subordinates were not allowed opportunities to make mistakes in this "zero defects" command atmosphere.³⁵ Junior leaders were essentially afforded the uninspiring choices of either playing along by being overly cautious or leaving the Army.³⁶ Many junior officers opted for the latter, citing poor leadership by senior commanders who cared more about their careers than their soldiers or the Army.³⁷ They simply lost confidence in the institution.³⁸

The aforementioned history of the U.S. Army is not rife with examples of trust and risk tolerance on a grand scale. In fact, current senior Army leaders, defined here as lieutenant colonels (LTC) and above, were commissioned and developed as leaders in an Army that did not consistently demonstrate that it valued what is now known as mission command.³⁹ "The unique nature of a military society means that junior officers have no real, a priori sense of that culture until they are exposed to the beliefs and behavior patterns of the generations of officers senior to them."⁴⁰ Current senior leaders grew up in a culture that valued more centralized control, risk aversion, and strict

processes. This was the culture that emerged from World War II, Vietnam, and the Cold War. Arguably, it remains the culture of some of our senior leaders today.

Decentralized Operations in Afghanistan and Iraq

A notable exception to the, arguably, troubled history of mission command implementation by the U.S. Army is found in the last 12 years of combat operations in both Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and in post-invasion Operation Iraqi Freedom. As traditional offensive operations gave way to counter insurgency and stability operations, the Army was forced to either adapt or lose the wars. As a result, a mission command atmosphere generally flourished in both theaters. Senior leaders gave junior leaders their intent, necessary resources, and the freedom to exercise initiative to solve some incredibly complex problems.

Current mission command doctrine is essentially a codification of the last decade or so of conflict, largely consisting of counterinsurgency, wide area security, and stability operations.⁴¹ An entire generation or so of Army leaders has grown up in the environment of mission command. Army officers, up to and including the rank of major, have generally only known an environment in which leaders are encouraged to exercise disciplined initiative to achieve the commander's intent. By virtue of experience, junior leaders have a culture - and an expectation - of mission command.

Why the Future Operating Environment Demands Mission Command

War and nature will likely remain entrenched in the realm of uncertainty, due to the interface between the adversary, incomplete or poor information, information overload, and other environmental considerations.⁴² This environment is characterized by economic and political instability and a convergence of people and technologies that increase the rate of environmental change. The future operating environment will

require the Army to provide leaders who possess a wide array of competencies and who are proficient in conducting operations within a broad range of military, political, and social contexts.⁴³

At the strategic and operational levels in particular, the interconnected nature of future operations will require continuous interaction with a significant number of unified action partners. Creating and maintaining trust with these disparate partners is difficult and will likely demand significant time from both commanders and their staffs. As a result, senior level commanders will not have as much time available, as compared to previous eras, to control and guide subordinates. Accordingly, embedding the concept of mission command and the importance of shared understanding, intent, and guidance will likely be of increased importance.⁴⁴

U.S. national security and fiscal policy decisions will dramatically impact the future operating environment of the Army. General Robert Cone, former commander of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, identified the potential impact of the post-conflict political reality on the Army's junior leaders. "Fiscal austerity and a smaller force could define the next decade for a generation of younger leaders if we let them." Junior leaders will require senior leader mentorship to reconcile the dissonance between their experiences in fully resourced periods and the expected future characterized by significant resource constraints.⁴⁵

Organizational Cultural and Change

Since the Army has identified the implementation of mission command as necessitating a cultural change, it is useful to examine the theory behind cultural understanding and why successful change might be difficult to achieve. Organizational culture scholar Edgar Schein argues, "Culture matters because it is a powerful, latent,

and often unconscious set of forces that determine both our individual and collective behavior, ways of perceiving, thought patterns, and values.”⁴⁶ Organizational culture is significant, because culture informs strategy, goals, and modes of operating. Further, organizational culture is significant because the values and thought patterns of leaders are partially determined by their own cultural backgrounds and shared experiences.⁴⁷ In short, culture’s impact is experienced across the breadth and depth of an organization.

Application to the Army

The Army finds itself at a critical intersection and interaction of two disparate generational experiences and expectations of mission command. As previously mentioned, there is a generational difference between the senior leadership and junior officer corps in their respective cultural views of mission command. Interestingly though, some of the most senior leaders of the Army (and Joint Force) are some of the most vocal supporters of mission command. Despite efforts to the contrary, however, Gerras, Wong, and Allen found that there is a disconnect between the stated goal to have an adaptive, learning force to deal with the current operating environment and the creation of the requisite culture to enable this adaption.⁴⁸ The adoption of new mission doctrine, with passionate endorsements from senior leaders, will not alone suffice to transform the entire Army culture.

The current, and anticipated near term environment, exacerbates the generational clash of mission command cultures. As discussed earlier, history suggests there is potential for a return to a more centralized command atmosphere, as the Army transitions from large-scale conflicts to a less-focused environment. The Army is entering a period of reduced end strength and reduced resources. Garrison operations,

tight fiscal constraints, and decreasing opportunities for promotion could bias leaders towards centralization in an effort to gain efficiencies.⁴⁹

Moreover, the Army's power distance--"the degree to which members of an organization expect power to be distributed equally"--is quite high, as it is in most military organizations.⁵⁰ The culture handed down from previous generations, coupled with the personal early career experiences of some of our senior leaders, has reinforced high power distance. Despite ample evidence that the environment will only continue to be more complex, diverse, and changing, many Cold War legacy processes and attitudes remain extant in the Army today.⁵¹

The Army is returning to a garrison footing for the first time in over a decade. Officers in the rank of major and below, by and large, have not experienced the garrison and train-for-the-sake-of-training and preparedness--Army for any length of time. Increasingly competitive promotion and selection boards will be the norm. The Army's young officers, since the late 1990s, have had an operational focus, be it Iraq or Afghanistan. Overall, young officers, freed from the many bureaucratic constraints commonly found at home station, have adapted and performed admirably in combat. Historically, this same bureaucracy has driven many bright young officers from the military.⁵² It remains to be seen how the Army's young leaders will react to this largely unfamiliar environment.

Conversely, the prospective future environment looks at least somewhat familiar to the Army's senior leaders. Most of them were serving during times of reduction in force boards and other measures designed to reduce Army end strength after the Cold

War. They, therefore, have some experience in dealing with very limited resources. They were part of the early 1990s Army that struggled to find a focus and relevancy.

Cultural Change Challenges

Changing the culture of an organization is an extremely difficult endeavor. According to Schein, "Culture is deep, extensive, and stable."⁵³ If a leader does not manage culture, Schein found, then it (culture) will manage the leader, and he or she may not even be aware of the extent to which this is happening. Schein argues that culture is difficult to change, because it represents the accumulated learning of a group. More specifically, it is the manner of thinking, feeling, and perceiving the world that made that group successful.⁵⁴ Effective cultural change requires a deliberate, consistent effort over an extended period of time.

In his research on organizational change, Kotter posits that it takes three to ten years to change the culture of an entire organization.⁵⁵ He also found eight common errors that companies make in the pursuit of organizational change. Three of these errors are evident in the Army's attempt to fully implement mission command doctrine: allowing too much complacency, failure to create a sufficiently powerful guiding coalition, and neglecting to anchor changes firmly in the corporate culture.⁵⁶ In order for this cultural change to transpire, and to negate the effects of these errors, Army senior leaders must be open, direct, and consistent in their actions.⁵⁷

The Army must overtly demonstrate a commitment to the guiding principles of mission command, and senior leaders must ensure that their observable actions are consistent with the Army's espoused mission command principles. Accordingly, Army leadership should utilize Schein's six primary embedding mechanisms - four of which are paramount and will be analyzed here: what leaders pay attention to, measure, and

control on a regular basis; deliberate role modeling, teaching, and coaching; observed criteria by which leaders allocate rewards and status; and observed criteria by which leaders recruit, select, promote, retire, and ex-communicate (dismiss) organizational members.⁵⁸

Embedding Mechanism Analysis and Recommendations

Schein's embedding mechanisms are the major levers available to leaders in order to alter how their organizations perceive, think, and behave. While they are presented sequentially here, they actually operate simultaneously across the organization. These mechanisms all interact with and reinforce each other, but only if the leaders' observed values are consistent.⁵⁹

What Leaders Pay Attention to, Measure, and Control on a Regular Basis

First, Schein offers that what leaders pay attention to clearly demonstrates their priorities, goals, and assumptions. It is the consistency of the leader's attention that is most important, not the intensity.⁶⁰ If mission command is important for the Army, then every leader should be paying close attention to ensure their respective part of the Army is operating in accordance with a mission command philosophy under the six guiding principles. If senior leaders' patterns of attention towards mission command are weak or inconsistent, subordinates will decide for themselves what is really important.⁶¹ Paying attention to, and focusing on, mission command should enable a guiding coalition of like-minded supporters and practitioners of mission command to gain necessary momentum to overcome institutional inertia.

In addition, leaders must ensure that mission command is practiced in as many settings as is appropriate, as there are situations, such as an emergency, where mission command may not be appropriate. If leaders only partially employ mission

command in certain contexts, then it will never permeate the leadership culture of the Army. Unless deliberate steps are taken to apply the mission command philosophy in everyday activities, there will be significant risk to achieving full mission command implementation.⁶² For example, junior leaders, many of whom have experienced mission command in combat, need to experience mission command in the execution of the more mundane garrison duties.

Deliberate Role Modeling, Teaching, and Coaching

Second, some of the Army's senior leaders (those previously mentioned LTCs and above) may not have experienced mission command. Moreover, based on the leadership example of their senior leader predecessors, they may not view mission command as the proverbial path to success. These leaders will require some deliberate role modeling, teaching, and coaching by superiors. This effort does not have to be exclusively in a formal setting. In fact, Schein argues, "The informal messages are more powerful teaching and coaching mechanisms."⁶³ This deliberate effort to role model and demonstrate mission command will help address Kotter's observation that organizations fail because of their inability to anchor changes firmly in the culture.⁶⁴ Senior leaders' visible behavior has remarkable value for communicating assumptions and values to other members, especially new organizational members.⁶⁵ Consistent role modeling and providing consistent, positive mission command examples will significantly assist in anchoring mission command across all levels of the Army.

The practice of senior leaders providing positive examples of mission command is essential, as organizational climates and cultures are greatly influenced--for better or worse – by the values, intuitions, and behaviors of the senior leadership of the organization. Despite the long enunciated idea, from many Army senior leaders, that

disagreement does not equal disloyalty, many subordinates are hesitant to challenge their superiors.⁶⁶ Healthy dialogue must be role modeled and facilitated by the senior leadership in every organization. Leaders, who encourage and participate in discourse with subordinates, create an environment built on mutual trust--an essential component of a mission command culture.

While the Army has been at the forefront of the Department of Defense's adoption of the mission command philosophy, it is useful to consider the other services' ideas for implementing mission command. Specifically, the Marine Corps asserts the new senior leadership traits of trust, moral courage, and restraint. These traits, which complement existing, classic leadership traits and principles, are "designed to promote those qualities of character in senior leaders that enable initiative, innovation, and a bias for action to thrive among subordinates."⁶⁷ Leaders must both demonstrate the moral courage and exercise the restraint that encourages their subordinates to take acceptable risk, make mistakes, and develop their decision making skills. These qualities must be demonstrated in both garrison and combat, in peace and war.⁶⁸

How Leaders Allocate Rewards and Status

Third, it is important that the Army overtly reward those leaders that embrace and propagate mission command. Organizations get the behavior they reward; therefore, organizations that wish to both perform well and effectively realize change must utilize reward systems that emphasize both performance and change implementation. Unfortunately, many organizations fail to properly reward their members, thereby emphasizing behavior inconsistent with organizational goals. Organizations tend to reward stability over change, seniority over performance, and job scope over development.⁶⁹

While there are certainly a number of factors that go into determining whether to reward a member of the Army (e.g., physical fitness level, overall performance of duty, attitude, etc.), making successful application of mission command one of those criteria would show that the Army is serious about this culture change. Schein posits that leaders can quickly reinforce their priorities, values, and assumptions by consistently linking rewards to the desired behavior.⁷⁰ Schein further argues that while leader behavior sends a strong message to subordinates, it is judged over time by whether the important rewards are allocated consistently with the desired behavior.⁷¹ Again, it is critical that Army senior leaders remain consistent in rewarding those positive mission command examples across the force.

Impact awards, such as the Army Achievement Medal or the Army Commendation Medal, are suitable for recognizing outstanding performances of duty, but they become less significant as the recipients increase in seniority. Accordingly, the Army should consider awarding an additional skill identifier (ASI) for those officers that demonstrate excellence in the training and application of mission command. This would aid the Army in building a body of expertise and the capability to recall it when needed. Identified mission command experts would be useful at all levels. At the strategic level, mission command experts would advise Army senior leaders on policy decisions that involved mission command. At the operational and tactical level, those identified experts could, at a minimum, advise and assist senior commanders in the implementation of mission command across their formations. Without question, all commanders and leaders are responsible for mission command. However, the introduction of an ASI for mission command excellence, both rewards those leaders who exemplify the tenets of

mission command, as well as provide a readily identifiable body of experts to assist the senior leadership of the Army.

How Leaders Recruit, Select, Promote, and Excommunicate

A final recommendation is for the Army to deliberately apply the philosophy of mission command as observed criteria for recruitment, selection, promotion, retirement, and excommunication. While, these criteria should be applied across all levels of command, a noticeable focus should be applied to those mid and senior level leaders who may not embrace mission command as the accepted method of command and leadership. Schein posits that an organization's processes for promoting, retiring, and firing (relieving) serve as some of the strongest cultural embedding mechanisms.⁷²

Selection and promotion boards are important power levers for changing or maintaining culture. Army officer personnel management systems have been reviewed and even altered, to some degree, in recent years. However, these efforts to date have not forced the degree of cultural change needed to appreciably reform the established promotion and selection models.⁷³ The Army senior leadership needs to ensure that the officers chosen to sit on selection boards, as well as the precepts given to boards, contribute to promoting and selecting Army leaders who are most capable of implementing mission command.⁷⁴

As the Army prepares to release the newest versions of the officer evaluation report (OER) in April 2014, consideration should be given to including the application of mission command as a specific criterion for promotion, command, and even retention on active duty. Specifically, the OER should have a portion of the document dedicated exclusively to mission command. The proposed mission command portion would evaluate the rated officer against the six guiding principles of mission command: build

cohesive teams through mutual trust, create shared understanding, provide clear intent/guidance, exercise disciplined initiative, use mission orders, accept prudent risk. The guiding principle addressing commander's intent is modified to allow for a more universal application to all officers and not just commanders.

Instead of a binary "yes or no" evaluation, the rater will evaluate the rated officer on a 1 to 5 scale for each of the six guiding principles, with 1 being poor and 5 being superior. The intent is to force the rater to actually consider the officer's performance against those very important guiding principles and assign the appropriate numerical value. A system using a 1 to 5 scale should encourage raters to use the full range of scoring options, as appropriate for the particular rated officer. In addition, a rating of either a 1 or 5 would require a mandatory entry in the rater comments on the reverse side of the OER, amplifying either the really exemplary or poor mission command performances. If implemented, Army promotion, selection, and retention boards would have additional useable data to inform their selection processes.⁷⁵

The current performance evaluation system is very much dependent upon an officer's relationship with his or her rating chain. The incentive is to optimize that relationship, potentially at the expense of other competing leadership demands. While a good senior leader to subordinate relationship is important, seniors and subordinates must both balance the competing requirements of leadership. Conflicts sometimes emerge between what an officer must do to protect his or her career, and what he or she must do to provide for his or her unit.⁷⁶ Accordingly, the Army should consider including both peer and subordinate input as supplementary data provided to both the rater and senior rater. This is not a new concept, as various groups have recommended

its inclusion several times in recent history, including the 1970 Study on Military Professionalism.⁷⁷ The purpose of providing this data is for the rating chain to obtain a more accurate and complete evaluation of the rated officer, as “only the led know for certain the leader’s moral courage, consideration for others, and commitment to unit above self.”⁷⁸ If implemented, the Army could include: both specific information about the officer, as well as broader command/leader climate data.

The aforementioned rewards (medals or ASI) and OER system adjustments are not likely to have as much impact on colonels and general officers--strategic leaders. Building on the concept of providing subordinate and peer data to the rating chain, the Army should provide similar subordinate input to promotion and selection boards, specifically for these strategic level officers. At the strategic level, the OER itself is of lesser importance. An officer’s reputation among other strategic leaders is, arguably, the most important determining factor for advancement. General Dempsey argues that, over the last ten years, the military has valued and rewarded competence over character.⁷⁹ Character, which is related to trust, is an important component of one’s reputation, and it is also an essential component of mission command. Therefore, providing subordinate and peer input to promotion and selection boards at the strategic leader level will assist the board members in selecting those officers who demonstrate both the appropriate competence and character. Those with strong character are also likely to be the better practitioners of mission command.

Reinforcement and Selected Implication

Embedding mechanisms require reinforcement to be effective over time. For example, Schein posits that organizational systems and procedures serve as reinforcing mechanisms. The aforementioned changes to the OER system require a change in

Army policy. The associated policy changes, along with the systems that are developed to implement and monitor the changes, formalize the process of “how leaders select and promote”--the embedding mechanism. General Odierno’s statement in the AMCS, emphasizing the need for a cultural change, may also serve as a reinforcing mechanism. Embedding mechanisms that are not reinforced over time may result in inconsistencies in the desired culture.⁸⁰ However, because this paper focuses primarily on a senior leader’s direct behavior, the emphasis has been on embedding mechanisms.

In addition to implementing the Army’s desired cultural inculcation of mission command, these recommended changes would also assist in strategically shaping the force over the coming years. Evaluation reports are as important for the behavior they promote or discourage, as they are for performance they evaluate and potential they identify in our officers.⁸¹ As a case in point, the Army could apply these measures to rid the institution of toxic leaders. By definition, toxic leaders are those who demonstrate values that are inconsistent with mission command. Removing toxic leaders from service would demonstrate a strong Army commitment to change. Additionally, promoting positive leaders, who embrace mission command, would send an equally strong message. The attrition of negative and toxic leaders, combined with the advancement of those leaders who are committed to mission command, further increases the chances of a successful cultural change.

This is not to suggest that the Army is not acting on some of the aforementioned recommendations. In fact, there are senior leaders who are actively working to establish a mission command culture across the Army. To establish mission command as the

culture of the Army will require a more overt and deliberate effort, as indicated by Schein and other organizational scholars. The Army's mission command doctrine is sound, but it must be embedded and reinforced with action. As Kotter suggests, telling an organization one thing and then behaving differently is a great way to undermine change efforts.⁸²

Conclusion

The Army is at a critical juncture with its implementation of mission command. The environment in which Army leaders at all levels will operate is going to be volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. The Army has a young cohort of leaders that are relatively comfortable operating in this type of environment. They are comfortable exercising initiative, accepting great responsibility, and they expect that their superiors will provide them the freedom to implement their ideas. The Army's more senior leaders joined the Army and served a significant portion of their respective careers in an institution where, in the aggregate, control and order were valued over initiative and risk tolerance. A return to the risk averse environment of the early 1990s could be devastating to the younger generation of leaders and, by extension, to the future of the Army. This dynamic demands that senior leaders be committed to a culture of mission command. While there are no quick fixes or assurances of success, an overt, immediate, and aggressive adoption of Schein's embedding mechanisms would significantly increase the chances of creating a culture of mission command across the United States Army.

Endnotes

¹U.S. Department of the Army, *U.S. Army Mission Command Strategy FY 13-19* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, June 12, 2013), i.

²Martin E. Dempsey, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2012), 3-8, http://www.jcs.mil/content/files/2012-04/042312114128_CJCS_Mission_Command_White_Paper_2012_a.pdf (accessed February 10, 2014).

³U.S. Department of the Army, *Mission Command*, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-0 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, May 2012), 1-4.

⁴John M. McHugh and Raymond T. Odierno, *2012 Army Strategic Planning Guidance* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, April 19, 2012), 3.

⁵*Ibid.*, 7.

⁶John M. McHugh and Raymond T. Odierno, *2013 Army Strategic Planning Guidance* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, 2013), 4.

⁷Eitan Shamir, "The Long and Winding Road: The US Army Managerial Approach to Command and the Adoption of Mission Command (Auftragstaktik)," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 33, no. 5 (October 2010): 645-648.

⁸Subordinates were not relegated to the status of automatons, blindly following orders, but, rather, were regarded as intelligent individuals capable of making sound, independent judgments. Eitan Shamir, *Transforming Command: The Pursuit of Mission Command in the U.S., British, and Israeli Armies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 15.

⁹Commanders and leaders are guided by six principles: build cohesive teams through mutual trust, create shared understanding, provide a clear commander's intent, exercise disciplined initiative, use mission orders, and accept prudent risk. It is this philosophy that decentralizes decision-making and allows for subordinate freedom of action. Mission command is grounded in trust, arguably the single most important component of mission command. "Developing trust takes time, and it must be earned." U.S. Department of the Army, *Mission Command*, 1-1.

¹⁰Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 27.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²"Mission command is the most appropriate command philosophy for the increasingly uncertain future environment because it empowers individuals to exercise judgment in how they carry out their assigned tasks. First and foremost, it exploits the human element in joint operations, emphasizing trust, force of will, intuitive judgment, and creativity, among other traits. This ethic of decentralization empowers subordinate leaders to advance their commander's intent through the most effective means at their disposal." U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations: Joint Force 2020* (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, September, 10, 2012), 4-5.

¹³James Parrington and Mike Findlay, "Mission Command: Addressing Challenges and Sharing Insights," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, no. 71 (4th Quarter, 2013): 104.

¹⁴U.S. Department of the Army, *Mission Command*, 1-2.

¹⁵U.S. Department of the Army, *Army Leadership*, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-22 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, August 1, 2012), 6-4.

¹⁶U.S. Department of the Army, *Mission Command*, 1-4.

¹⁷U.S. Department of the Army, *U.S. Army Mission Command Strategy*, 2

¹⁸The AMCS list of facts bearing on the problem states, "The Army has made mission command an instrument of cultural change and emphasized the mission command philosophy and warfighting function in doctrine, and the Army has not fully implemented mission command." *Ibid.*, i.

¹⁹Robert E. Quinn, *Beyond Rational Management: Mastering the Paradoxes and Competing Demands of High Performance* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1988), 24, 49.

²⁰Stephen J. Gerras, Leonard Wong, and Charles D. Allen, *Organizational Culture: Applying a Hybrid Model to the U.S. Army*, Research Paper (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, November 2008), 2.

²¹Louis V. Gerstner, Jr., *Who Says Elephants Can't Dance? Leading a Great Enterprise through Dramatic Change* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 182.

²²*Ibid.*

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴Shamir, "The Long and Winding Road," 649-650.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 651-652.

²⁶Senior commanders came to prefer rearward positions on the battlefield, which facilitated better communications with their superiors at the expense of both a first-hand knowledge of the tactical situation and face-to-face contact with their subordinates. Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 64-66.

²⁷Frustrated with a lack of a coherent, effective national strategy for winning the Vietnam War, many senior commanders shirked their strategic responsibilities to focus on what they knew best: killing the enemy in tactical engagements. "When strategy becomes inexplicable, the natural tendency is to retreat into tactics." Not only did these senior officers neglect their strategic duties, they micromanaged their subordinates and created a climate filled with fear and a lack of trust. Thomas E. Ricks, *The Generals: American Military Command from World War II to Today* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 284.

²⁸In its efforts to maximize the use of technology and managerial efficiencies, the Army created a culture that valued the content of reports over actual results. Junior officers reported that senior leaders were "engulfed in producing statistical results, fearful of personal failure, too busy to talk with or listen to their subordinates, and determined to submit acceptably optimistic reports which reflect faultless" completion of the mission. U.S. Department of the Army, *Study on Military Professionalism* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, June 30, 1970), 14.

²⁹In this context, zero defects is defined as “a leadership environment in which it is unacceptable to make mistakes and, by extension, officers are less willing, and less able, to demonstrate creativity and initiative.” David McCormick, *The Downsized Warrior: America’s Army in Transition* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 143.

³⁰U.S. Department of the Army, *Study on Military Professionalism*, 29.

³¹Senior leaders of this era tended to be described as “hardworking, determined, somewhat conformist, steady, prudent to a fault, and wary of innovation.” Ricks offered a description of general officers selected during this period: “He is a highly capable, competent, very intelligent individual who enacts a standardized leadership role quite effectively. His weakness lies in his lack of innovativeness (in areas where innovativeness is appropriate but not organizationally required).” Ricks, *The Generals*, 348, 351.

³²U.S. Department of the Army, *The Army Training and Leader Development Panel Officer Study Report to the Army* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, 2001), OS-2, 8.

³³Officers reported experiencing a cutthroat environment, particularly when it came to competing for placement in key development positions, such as company commander or battalion operations officer. McCormick, *The Downsized Warrior*, 141.

³⁴U.S. Department of the Army, *The Army Training and Leader Development Panel Officer Study*, OS-9.

³⁵Zero-defects oriented commanders took measures to limit risk during training, thereby, reducing the quality of the training. The resulting environment had a decidedly negative impact on the growth of a mission command culture. Careerism and unhealthy competition increased, while initiative and independent decision-making declined. “Closely supervised junior officers in a risk-averse setting are not free to innovate and experiment, yet innovation and experimentation are critical factors in professional skills development.” Mark R. Lewis, “Army Transformation and the Junior Officer Exodus,” *Armed Forces & Society* 31, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 79.

³⁶Lawrence H. Saul, “Junior Officers: The Thinning Ranks,” *Field Artillery*, no. 6 (November/December 2001): 25-27.

³⁷Harry Levins, “Departure of Many Young Officers Concerns Army,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 6, 2000.

³⁸Ike Skelton, former Congressman and Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, reminded the Army leadership, “Individuals will not stay in an institution they do not trust. Leaders must dedicate themselves to maintaining the integrity of trust within the organization. It takes only one faithless act to destroy trust and monumental effort to reestablish it.” Ike Skelton, “Military Retention Intangibles: Espirit, Morale, and Cohesion,” *Military Review* 79, no. 4 (July/August 1999): 5.

³⁹Battle command, a predecessor to mission command, was defined as “the art and science of understanding, visualizing, describing, directing, leading, and assessing forces to impose the commander’s will on a hostile, thinking, and adaptive enemy.” Though it did encompass some of the same concepts of mission command, battle command was rescinded by the Army, in part,

because it was applied most frequently in combat/training operations; whereas, the Army desired to have a command/leadership philosophy that applied across all contexts, all the time. United States Army Combined Army Center, *Center for Army Lessons Learned Thesaurus*, <http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/call/thesaurus/toc.asp?id=4945> (accessed March 11, 2014).

⁴⁰Lewis, "Army Transformation," 67.

⁴¹Decentralization enabled more numerous points of engagement over a wider operating environment to control terrain and to influence and protect the population. Enhanced situation awareness, facilitated by mission command, empowered small unit leaders and enabled both greater fidelity in planning and dexterity in execution. U.S. Department of the Navy, *Marine Corps Operating Concepts*, (Washington, DC: Deputy Commandant for Combat Development and Integration, June 2010), 19.

⁴²U.S. Department of the Army, "Mission Command Strategy," 2.

⁴³Demetrios A. Ghikas, "Taking Ownership of Mission Command," *Military Review*, (November-December 2013): 25.

⁴⁴Parrington and Findlay, "Mission Command," 104.

⁴⁵"They need the encouragement of today's strategic leaders. We need to tolerate intense debate, support experimentation to find out what works and underwrite some well-intentioned failures if we want our most talented subordinates constructively engaged in solving our challenges. If we don't, we will not keep the people who are able to do the kind of hard intellectual work that leads to innovation." Robert W. Cone and Richard D. Creed, Jr., "How the Next Generation of Strategic Leaders Builds the Army of the Future," *Army* 64, no. 3 (March 2014): 33.

⁴⁶Edgar Schein, *The Corporate Culture Survival Guide* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 14.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸Gerras, Wong, Allen, *Organizational Culture*, 15.

⁴⁹Parrington and Findlay, "Mission Command," 105.

⁵⁰Gerras, Wong, Allen, *Organizational Culture*, 14-15.

⁵¹*Ibid.*

⁵²William R. Burns and Drew Miller, "Improving DOD Adaptability and Capability to Survive Black Swan Events," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 72 (1st Quarter, 2014): 33.

⁵³Schein, *The Corporate Culture*, 185.

⁵⁴Schein further argues that humans do not like chaotic, unpredictable situations, and they work hard to stabilize them. A change in culture, therefore, requires one to grapple with some of the most stable elements of his or her organization. If a leader treats culture as a superficial

phenomenon, assuming that he can manipulate organizational culture and change it at will, he will likely be unsuccessful. Ibid., 21, 25-26, 185.

⁵⁵John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1996), 13.

⁵⁶Ibid., 4-14.

⁵⁷Speeches, posters, and web sites offering the benefits of mission command will not be sufficient, as actions, truly, speak louder than words. Gerstner, *Who Says Elephants Can't Dance?*, 187-188.

⁵⁸Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2010), 236.

⁵⁹Ibid., 236, 250.

⁶⁰When leaders are aware of this practice, then being methodical in paying attention to certain behavior becomes an extremely powerful way of communicating a message, especially if leaders are totally consistent in their own behavior. Ibid., 237.

⁶¹Ibid., 237, 243.

⁶²Ghikas, "Taking Ownership," 25, 29.

⁶³Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 241.

⁶⁴Kotter, *Leading Change*, 14.

⁶⁵Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 246.

⁶⁶Walter F. Ulmer, Jr., "Military Leadership into the 21st Century: Another 'Bridge Too Far?'" *Parameters* 40, no. 4 (Winter 2010-2011): 140, 149.

⁶⁷U.S. Department of the Navy, *Marine Corps Operating Concepts*, 24.

⁶⁸Ibid., 25.

⁶⁹Edward E. Lawler III and Christopher G. Worley, *Built to Change: How to Achieve Sustained Organizational Effectiveness* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 256.

⁷⁰Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 247.

⁷¹Ibid., 248.

⁷²Ibid., 249-250.

⁷³Walter F. Ulmer, Jr., *American Military Culture in the Twenty-First Century* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies Press, 2000), 70.

⁷⁴Burns and Miller, "Improving DOD Adaptability," 34.

⁷⁵The previous yes/no system for evaluating the Army Values and leader attributes, skills, and actions portions was, arguably, of little use for promotion and selection boards. Officers were almost universally assigned a “yes” for every value or attribute, unless they had been relieved or committed an ethical violation.

⁷⁶Lewis, “Army Transformation,” 84.

⁷⁷U.S. Department of the Army, *Study on Military Professionalism*, 43, 50.

⁷⁸Ulmer, “Military Leadership,” 146.

⁷⁹NBC News, “Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman on Petraeus Scandal,” January 23, 2013. *NBC News Rockcenter*, video file. <http://rockcenter.nbcnews.com/news/2013/01/23/16662407-joint-chiefs-of-staff-chairman-on-petraeus-scandal> (accessed March 2, 2014).

⁸⁰Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 250-253.

⁸¹McCormick, *The Downsized Warrior*, 145.

⁸²Kotter, *Leading Change*, 96.