Strategy Research Project

Objective-T Reporting and Mission Command: Complementary or Conflict?

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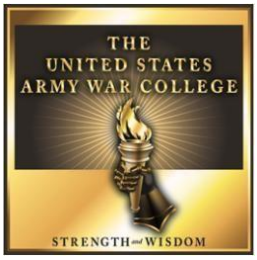

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Accurately assessing and reporting readiness are of great importance to the Army in order to fulfill its responsibilities in defense of the nation. Yet, the Army's current system for this vital requirement is problematic. The Army's latest attempt to address this challenge is the new Objective-Task, or Objective-T reporting method. Meanwhile, the Army continues to have challenges with implementing mission command in the force. This paper examines the Army's new Objective-T training readiness reporting system relative to its promotion of mission command, in order to evaluate how Objective-T reinforces or hinders mission command. Further, it will address the Army's prioritization of objectively assessing and reporting training versus mission command when these two ideas clash. I argue that in the short term the Army's implementation of Objective-T is a valid method to improve readiness reporting, while assuming risk in its potential impacts on mission command. However, in the long-term Objective-T and mission command are compatible, and can be employed in a complementary fashion. Carefully crafting and monitoring Objective-T implementation can mitigate conflicts with mission command for the Army's benefit.

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Abstract

Accurately assessing and reporting readiness are of great importance to the Army in order to fulfill its responsibilities in defense of the nation. Yet, the Army's current system for this vital requirement is problematic. The Army's latest attempt to address this challenge is the new Objective-Task, or Objective-T reporting method. Meanwhile, the Army continues to have challenges with implementing mission command in the force. This paper examines the Army's new Objective-T training readiness reporting system relative to its promotion of mission command, in order to evaluate how Objective-T reinforces or hinders mission command. Further, it will address the Army's prioritization of objectively assessing and reporting training versus mission command when these two ideas clash. I argue that in the short term the Army's implementation of Objective-T is a valid method to improve readiness reporting, while assuming risk in its potential impacts on mission command. However, in the long-term Objective-T and mission command are compatible, and can be employed in a complementary fashion. Carefully crafting and monitoring Objective-T implementation can mitigate conflicts with mission command for the Army's benefit.

Objective-T Reporting and Mission Command: Complementary or Conflict?

Accurately assessing and reporting readiness are of great importance to the Army in order to fulfill its responsibilities in defense of the nation. It is a fundamental input to the development of national strategy and supports the planning, programming, and budgeting process that is integrated into the strategic defense management system.[1] Yet, the Army's current system for this vital requirement is problematic, specifically in accurately assessing training readiness and capturing its cost. This situation handicaps strategic leader communication of readiness to civilian authorities, to include articulating the risks associated with budget decisions to both the Congress and the President.[2]

The Army's latest attempt to address its training readiness reporting challenge is the new Objective-Task, or Objective-T reporting method, which is set for implementation in Fiscal Year 2017-2018.[3] As part of a wider set of initiatives to reinvigorate the Army's training enterprise, Objective-T is a structural adjustment with definitive guidelines. It is intended to add both rigor and accountability to the Army's training management system, thereby feeding improved metrics into the wider strategic readiness reporting system. Objective-T's tighter controls over the training management system will also change the Army's training culture; although the precise direction and magnitude of the change remains uncertain.

Meanwhile, the Army also continues to integrate mission command across the force, as its trust-based foundational leadership approach to operations.[4] During the last 15 years of conflict, the Army has grown leaders with operational experience in Afghanistan and Iraq, who are in many ways natives to mission command's principles. While the value of mission command is seen easily during wartime operations, it is not

always easily realized in a garrison environment, where tensions between mission command and a managerial approach to leadership often occur. This friction generates frustration in the force, particularly among the Army's emerging cohort of Field Grade Officers and Senior Noncommissioned Officers, many who have extensive operational deployment experience, during which they were repeatedly trusted to accomplish a wide range of missions with minimal oversight. Recent Army leadership surveys have captured this friction, indicating that perceived imbalances between mission command and the managerial approach are affecting trust and morale within units.[5]

This paper examines the Army's new Objective-T training readiness reporting system relative to its promotion of mission command, in order to evaluate how Objective-T reinforces or hinders mission command. Further, it will address the Army's prioritization of objectively assessing and reporting training versus mission command when these two ideas clash. I argue that in the short term the Army's implementation of Objective-T is a valid method to improve readiness reporting, while assuming risk in its potential impacts on mission command. However, in the long-term Objective-T and mission command are compatible, and can be employed in a complementary fashion. Carefully crafting and monitoring Objective-T implementation can mitigate conflicts with mission command for the Army's benefit. To make this argument, I will first review the background of the Army's training readiness reporting challenge and the development of Objective-T, followed by a summary of the Army's efforts to inculcate mission command across the force. Next, I will evaluate areas where Objective-T and mission command are complementary of one another, and where there is potential conflict. This evaluation includes addressing potential counterarguments and criticism of my analysis.

Finally, I will provide recommendations for the Army's implementation of Objective-T, as well as propose areas for future research on this topic.

In 1986, the Department of Defense (DoD) implemented the Status of Resources and Training System (SORTS) to measure unit readiness based on its preparedness for the wartime mission it was designed to perform.[6] SORTS compiled reporting data in four categories: personnel, equipment (both on hand and serviceability), supply, and training. SORTS metrics provided a readiness score in each category, which were then aggregated to produce the assessed unit's overall readiness level. In addition to its broadly-cast metrics, SORTS was criticized for its subjective measurements in many categories, as well as allowing commanders to subjectively upgrade unit readiness reports. This criticism led to senior leader concerns among both the civilian and uniformed ranks that the system's subjective nature, combined with institutional pressure on leaders, could lead to inflated reporting and "hollow readiness" in the force.[7]

To address these concerns, DoD implemented the Department of Defense Readiness Reporting System (DRRS) in 1999 to replace SORTS.[8] The most significant change between the two systems was that commanders would base readiness assessments on a unit's ability to perform tasks and missions it may be ordered to execute, vice that for which they were designed. However, while DRRS was seen as an improvement over SORTS, DoD subsequently decided that instead of fully replacing SORTS, DRRS would retain the majority of SORTS metrics, to include subjective mission assessments.[9] The resulting hybrid system manifests itself in the Army today through a methodology whereby battalion to division level commanders report readiness

through monthly Unit Status Reports (USR), employing legacy SORTS metrics as inputs into the automated DRRS database.

Under the current readiness reporting system, USR continues to be an aggregate mixture of hard, quantifiable data and soft, less quantifiable data. For example, personnel readiness reporting metrics are easily quantified, assessing a units assigned personnel relative to its authorized strength, both overall and by Military Occupational Specialty, rank, and position.[10] Similarly, equipment and supply metrics are captured based on on-hand stocks versus unit authorizations, as well as operational readiness maintenance statistics.[11] In both categories, the current system consolidates and reports quantifiable data which enables more precise readiness assessments and more informed resourcing decisions at echelon.

Conversely, a unit's training readiness is not easy to define or quantify under the current USR system.[12] Training readiness assessments center on commanders from battalion to division assessing their unit's Mission Essential Task (MET) proficiency using a Trained (T), Practiced (P) or Untrained (U) scale. While the Army has established standardized METs down to the brigade level by which units report, it has historically been less proscriptive for MET development at the battalion and company level. Commanders at those echelons develop METs which are nested with, and supportive of, brigade level and above Army standardized METs as provided in training and leader development doctrine. All commanders train their units to achieve proficiency in METs which are part of their enduring Decisive Action Mission Essential Task List (DA METL).[13] Those commanders whose units are programmed for a specific

mission within the force generation cycle train to MET proficiency in their DA METL plus their Assigned METL (A-METL) tasks specific to the anticipated mission set.[14]

Commander assessments of the unit's proficiency of individual METs are aggregated by mathematical formula to produce an overall training level (T-level) which is reported via USR. T-levels range from T-1 (no untrained METs) to T-4 (one or more untrained METs), intended to describe unit readiness to execute DA METL and/or A-METL tasks.[15] The current system allows commanders wide latitude in employing their experience and judgement to subjectively upgrade assessments of individual METs to thereby increase the T-level reported.[16] While at first glance subjective adjustments to METs are sound in theory, they have proved problematic in practice.[17]

The broad subjectivity allowed by the current USR system can create conditions for "hollow readiness reporting", because it is built upon three foundational assumptions. First, it assumes that commanders are immune to systemic organizational cultural pressures which may push them toward a disproportionate use of subjective MET and T-level upgrades. Second, it assumes that commanders at every echelon possess the requisite competency to employ subjective upgrades in a deliberate, restrained manner. Third, it assumes that commanders, especially at the battalion level and below, are well versed in the Army's training system and its doctrinal fundamentals. This perfect storm of unvalidated assumptions can produce training assessments which do not accurately reflect ground truth. Based on recent indicators that these assumptions were no longer valid, to include units reporting higher USR T-levels than they were feasibly resourced to attain based on their position within the Force Generation Cycle, the Army undertook an extensive review to reevaluate its training readiness systems.[18]

Many Army senior leaders have become increasingly concerned that the directive nature of Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) training cycles over the last decade plus of conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan has contributed to producing a generation of leaders lacking Unit Training Management (UTM) competency. This concern led the Secretary of the Army to direct a Department of the Army Inspector General (DAIG) inspection of the UTM system across the force in 2013-2014. The inspection objectives focused on "(1) assessing unit and leader understanding of UTM doctrine, guidance, and associated enabling systems, (2) assessing unit execution of UTM doctrine and guidance and utilization of enabling systems to achieve directed readiness, and (3) assessing the impact of resource management on unit training".[19]

The DIAG inspection's results validated Army senior leader intuition that the Army has many deficiencies in UTM which negatively affect accurate training readiness reporting. Inspectors identified that of the units surveyed, 49% of commanders at the battalion level and below lacked understanding of how to execute a MET crosswalk to drive training plan development.[20] Meanwhile, 51% of company commanders interviewed did not understand how to accurately assess collective training, with 56% of company level and below leaders not using Army standard Task and Evaluation Outlines (T&EOs) to evaluate collective training.[21]

Perhaps the most damning finding was that 92% of the company commanders interviewed who did not use Army T&EOs as a collective task evaluation standard in training admitted to using subjective assessments to evaluate small unit training proficiency.[22] As a result, many junior leaders improperly associate the execution of a training event as automatically resulting in a unit being a trained in a MET to the Army

standard, confusing quantitative with qualitative assessments in a way which is counter to Army doctrine. Inspectors also found that most units did not effectively adhere to Army doctrinal guidelines for commander dialogues in the UTM process to create a shared understanding of training readiness assessments, priorities, resource requirements, and risk.[23]

Senior leaders have good reason to be alarmed by the degradation of UTM core competencies that this report reveals. The Army expects commanders and other leaders to be responsible for training their units.[24] It has built a mature and robust supporting framework of doctrine, policies, regulations, and systems to enable leaders to plan, prepare, execute, and assess training to standard. The Army has invested vast resources into both generating and operating force programs, to develop leaders upon whom it can rely to prepare units for wartime mission sets. However, these findings demonstrate that leader UTM deficiencies, coupled with the shortfalls of the current USR system, jeopardize accurate training readiness reporting across the force.

In response to the DIAG report's findings and recommendations, the Chief of Staff of the Army directed the Army Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations (DA G3/5/7) to develop a more objective system of assessing training readiness in the force in late 2014.[25] This effort was coupled with additional outputs from the 2015 Army Training and Leader Development Conference (ATLDC) to enhance senior leader ability to better communicate the cost of readiness to civilian leadership in Congress, prioritize and protect unit training, and confirm that training resource investments produce required training readiness levels.[26] In February 2016, the Acting Secretary of the Army issued

Army Directive 2016-05 (Building Training Readiness), focused on enhancing combat readiness of the Total Army. It featured four initiatives:

> (1) establishment of the Sustainable Readiness Model as a replacement for the ARFORGEN force generation model, (2) revision of the Army's tasking policy to better prioritize and protect unit training, (3) establishment of a standardized readiness baseline by unit type to include objective factors for evaluating task proficiency and establishing unit T-level readiness assessments, and (4) execution of a pilot program to develop a systemic methodology to tie unit training to an associated cost of training readiness.[27]

DA G3/5/7 subsequently published an Army execution order (HQDA EXORD 002-16, Enable, Resource, Build, Assess, and Sustain Training Readiness) in February 2016, which further described and directed implementation of Army Directive 2016-05's initiatives. Specific to assessing and reporting training readiness, the EXORD directed establishment of an objective task evaluation methodology to produce more accurate reporting and build Senior Leader confidence in unit readiness data. It designated this new method as Objective-Task, or Objective-T.

Objective-T seeks to provide an improved framework to address the noted overreliance on subjective training readiness assessments and resulting shortfalls in accurately communicating Army readiness both internally and externally. Its intent is to establish a common Army training standard across like-units, support and enable Unit Training Management; enhance stewardship, and enable increased training resource efficiency.[28] As opposed to the current system's ill-defined data inputs that generates aggregated data, which when combined with subjective readiness assessment upgrades can create a "hollow readiness" condition, Objective-T is a more defined method to assess training readiness. It is designed to rectify the current system's shortfalls and leader proficiency gaps noted in the DAIG report.

Objective-T consists of four foundational components by which to assess training readiness: (1) weapons qualification at the individual, crew, and platform level (2) MET proficiency, (3) collective live-fire proficiency, and (4) training days required for a unit to attain T-1 readiness".[29] Objective-T also standardizes METLs down to the company level to establish a common baseline for like-unit assessments, as well as to ultimately produce better resourcing predictability.[30] Objective-T provides a common language for leaders through employing detailed descriptions of each foundational component, to include introducing or revising terminology which enables standardized, objective assessments. This standardization effort includes revising and defining MET evaluation from the legacy system's T/P/U model to a T/T-/P/P-/U model and setting well-defined metrics for the weapons qualification, collective live-fire, and required training day components.[31] Figures 1 through 3 below provide an overview of Objective-T definitions, standards, and evaluation criteria.

Objective T-Level Definitions

T1	The unit is assessed as a minimum of **"T-" in all** of its METs. Greater than 90% of the unit's individuals, and teams are qualified, unit achieves a T- (Trained) proficiency at the appropriate qualification gate for its unit type / echelon. Resource constraints do not limit the unit's ability to train. The unit is prepared to provide the capabilities for which it was designed and **can be employed immediately** for Unified Land Operations (ULO).
T2	The unit is assessed at a minimum of **"T-" in most** of its METs **with no "U"**. At least 80% of the unit's individuals and crews are qualified, and subordinate units have achieved T- (Trained) proficiency for the appropriate qualification gate at least one level below that required of its echelon. Resource constraints have minimal impact on the unit's ability to train, and the unit needs no more than **35 continuous** days of additional training to provide the capabilities for which it was designed. The unit can be employed for ULO.
T3	The unit is assessed at a **"P" or better in most** of its METs with **no more than one "U"**. Less than 80% of the unit's individuals, crews, and sections are qualified, and subordinate units have completed the appropriate qualification gate at least two levels below that required of its echelon. Resource constraints may limit the unit's ability to train, and the unit needs no more than **90 continuous** days of additional training to provide the capabilities for which it was designed before it can be employed for ULO.
T4	The unit is assessed at **"P-" or less in most** of its METs; the unit is not prepared to execute the mission for which it was designed. The unit has resource constraints, has not completed any of its required qualifications, and needs at least **90 days of additional training** before it can be employed for ULO.

T Level	Mission Essential Task Proficiency	Individual / Team Qualification	Qualification LFX Gate	Continuous Training Days to Achieve T1
T1	≥ T- in **all** METs	≥ 90%	Unit LFX at directed echelon	10 Days to RLD
T2	≥ T- in **most** METs **(No U)**	80-89%	Unit LFX at one level below directed echelon	≤ 35
T3	≥ P in **most** METs **(< 1xU)**	70-79%	Unit LFX at two levels below directed echelon	≤ 90
T4	≤ P- in **most** METs	<70%	Unit LFX not complete	>90

Figure 1. Objective-T, T-level Definitions and Standards[32]

Task Proficiency Standards

T (Fully Trained): Complete task proficiency to Army Standard by achieving a "GO" in 90% or more of both performance measures and leader performance measures, and 100% of all critical performance measures. The task is externally evaluated and meets the remaining requirements as outlined in the T&EO IAW the Task Proficiency Criteria Matrix.

T- (Trained): Advanced task proficiency free of significant shortcomings by achieving a "GO" in 80% or more of both performance measures and leader performance measures, and 100% of all critical performance measures. The shortcomings require minimal training to meet the Army Standard. The task is externally evaluated and meets the remaining requirements as outlined in the T&EO IAW the Task Proficiency Criteria Matrix.

P (Practiced): Basic task proficiency with shortcomings by achieving a "GO" in 65% or more of all performance measures, 80% or more of all leader performance measures, and 100% of all critical performance measures. Shortcomings require significant training to meet the Army standards. The task is not externally evaluated and meets the remaining requirements as outlined in the T&EO IAW the Task Proficiency Criteria Matrix.

P- (Marginally Practiced): Limited task proficiency with major shortcomings by achieving a "GO" in 51% or more of all performance measures, but less than 80% of all leader performance measures, and less than 100% of all critical performance measures. Shortcomings require complete retraining of the task to achieve the Army standard. The task is not externally evaluated and meets the remaining requirements as outlined in the T&EO IAW the Task Proficiency Criteria Matrix.

U (Untrained): Cannot perform the task. Unit achieves a "GO" in less than 50% of all performance measures, less than 80% in all leader performance measures, and less than 100% in all critical performance measures. The unit requires complete training on the task to achieve the Army standard.

Figure 2. Objective-T, MET Proficiency Standards[33]

Objective Task Evaluation Criteria

Plan and Prepare						Execute						Assess
Operational Environment												
SQD & PLT	CO & BN	BDE & ABOVE			Training Environment (LIVIC/G)	% Leaders Present at Training / Authorized	% Present at Training / Authorized	External Eval	Performance Measures	Critical Performance Measures	Leader Performance Measures	Task Assessment
Dynamic (Single Threat)	Dynamic & Complex (4+ OE Variables & Hybrid Threat)	Dynamic & Complex (All OE Variables & Hybrid Threat)	Night	Yes	*Proponent Establishes Training Environment Standards (FTX, STX, CPX, STAFFEX, TEWT, etc)*	≥85%	≥80%	Yes	≥90% GO	All	≥90%	T
						75-84%			80-90% GO		80-89%	T-
Static (Single Threat)	Dynamic (Single Threat)	Dynamic & Complex (All OE Variables & Single Threat)		No		65-74%	75-79%	No	65-79% GO			P
			Day			60-64%	60-74%		51-64% GO	<All	<80%	P-
	Static (Single Threat)	Dynamic. & Complex (< than all OE Var. & Single Threat)				<60%	<60%		<50% GO			U

Task Dependent ***Task Independent***

Figure 3. Objective-T, Task Evaluation Criteria[34]

In light of the Army's training readiness reporting problem, as evidenced by the DAIG report, and its solution via Objective-T, we now consider its efforts in promulgating mission command across the force. In doing so, we will survey its background, foundational components, and strategic importance. Moreover, we will see that in spite of numerous alignment actions in the training and education enterprise intended to inculcate mission command across the Army, it remains a work in progress.

In 2012, General Martin E. Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and Staff, published a Mission Command White Paper to stress the importance of instilling and operationalizing the mission command concept across the U.S. Joint Force as the preferred approach to military operations.[35] Some saw this move signaling a unique change to how the U.S. military in general, and the U.S. Army in particular, intended to operate.[36] Others saw it as merely institutional codification of de facto knowledge and practice already resident among units in the field.[37] The Army's replacement of "command and control" with "mission command" as a doctrinal warfighting function in 2009, an earlier effort General Dempsey shepherded while commanding the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, supports the latter view.[38] Years later, it seems that the truth is still somewhere in the middle. The Center for Army Leadership's 2013 *Annual Survey of Army Leadership* (CASAL) indicates that while the idea of mission command is spreading, the Army's adoption of mission command in practice is uneven at best.[39]

Mission command itself is a multi-faceted term, which often poses challenges in both understanding and application.[40] Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 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".[41] Mission command is built upon mutual trust, shared understanding, and purpose.[42] Per ADP 6-0, mission command "is guided by the principles of building cohesive teams through mutual trust, creating a shared understanding, exercise disciplined initiative, use of mission orders, and accepting prudent risk".[43] Trust is the most important foundational requirement for effective mission command. Mutual trust enables subordinates to exercise disciplined initiative, knowing that superiors will underwrite mistakes. The Army's mission command doctrine integrates three aspects of mission command: mission command as a philosophy or approach to operations, the exercise of mission command, and mission command as a warfighting function.[44]

Mission command remains an important strategic issue because it establishes the U.S. military's guiding foundational approach to operations. Mission command, vice detailed command or a managerial approach, is the preferred method of military operations in the current and future dynamic and complex security environment.[45] Mission command doctrine codifies the importance of decentralized operations that synchronize and integrate effects within the commander's intent to gain and maintain the initiative on the battlefield.[46]

The practice of mission command gives commanders and staffs the ability to employ mental agility and speed in decision making cycles, anchored in trust, intent, and mission-type orders, to create and seize opportunities in a complex operating environment. This results in leaders making better and quicker decisions on the battlefield.[47] Mission command also supports enhanced capacity for adaptation at

echelon, as vertically and laterally shared information and understanding enables units to adjust strategies, tactics, techniques, and procedures based on rapidly changing conditions.[48] Enhanced adaptation combines with optimized decision cycles to produce a synergistic agility that increases the Army's competitive advantage against its adversaries. The Army's success in fostering mission command is central to its effectiveness as a warfighting force.[49]

The U.S. Army has undertaken both formal and informal steps in transitioning from a managerial to mission command operational approach since the mid-20th Century.[50] Post-Vietnam reforms, Air-Land Battle Doctrine planning assumptions, and the last 15 years of the Global War on Terror accelerated and shaped this transition. The 2013 CASAL survey results found that while the Army has made progress with the mission command approach, much work remains. Much of the implementation effort's real or perceived success is tied to where one sits in the organization. Field Grade Officers and Senior Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) reported favorable perceptions of success in integrating mission command principles across the force.[51] Leaders in maneuver, fires, and effects (MFE) career fields tend to be more familiar with mission command philosophy and execution.[52] Conversely, Junior Officers and NCOs reported less favorable perceptions of success in integrating mission command principles across the force.[53] Meanwhile, leaders outside of MFE career fields are less familiar with mission command philosophy and execution.[54]

While trust is a foundational requirement for successful mission command, the CASAL survey found that it is also an issue in the force.[55] The survey found that trust is high in units where leaders empower subordinates to make decisions in the course of

their duties and where learning from honest mistakes is encouraged.[56] It found that trust is low in units where discipline and standards are not enforced, and perceptions of favoritism, self-interest, and character issues exist.[57] It further identified that while the majority of survey participants expressed high or very high trust in their immediate superior, peers, and subordinates, only 55% or participants reported similar perceptions of their superiors two-levels up.[58]

These findings indicate that implementation of the mission command philosophy is still uneven and requires additional effort to instill it at the lowest level to meet intent.[59] Given the survey's date, it is reasonable to expect a portion of the junior leader population who expressed low trust in superiors are now migrating into the Field Grade Officer ranks, or to the Sergeant First Class to Master Sergeant level in the NCO Corps; carrying their trust issues forward as their careers advance. It is likely that as these leaders assume expanded roles within the Army that the trust gap developed during their formative years will further promulgate at the junior leader level through a cascading effect if it is not addressed.

Mission command is designed to optimize decentralized operations down to the small unit level, ultimately relying on junior leaders who are empowered through mission command principles to be successful.[60] Two overarching methods emerge as ways to achieve this end state. First, superiors must model mission command behaviors and principles to develop the same behaviors among their subordinates, especially those of trust and disciplined initiative. Second, the Army must address the reality that its own bureaucracy is an impediment to mission command. Its extensive body of rules, regulations, and reporting requirements is indicative of how much the risk-averse,

managerial approach to command remains engrained in Army culture.[61] To be fair, some level of bureaucratic structure is inherent and required in a large organization like the Army. However, left unrestrained, bureaucracy's natural tendency toward regulation and redundancy inevitably creates an environment that suppresses trust and disciplined initiative at lower levels. Mission command relies upon trust and disciplined initiative in order to be successful as an operational approach.

With the current state of both training readiness reporting and mission command in the Army established, we now turn to analysis of whether or not Objective-T and mission command are complementary or in conflict with one another. The preceding review of Objective-T's origins identified that the Army has a training readiness reporting problem and a UTM problem, which are interrelated. As the summary of the Army's mission command implementation efforts, which included the 2013 CASAL findings, the Army also has a trust problem. This trust gap resides among junior leaders in particular, many of whom are now entering the midgrade leadership ranks. Within this context, we first consider areas where Objective-T and mission command are congruent, followed by areas of potential conflict.

Looking at Objective-T through the lens of mission command principles reveals they are complementary in four ways. First, while Objective-T increases control out of necessity to improve reporting standards, with a short-term risk to mutual trust, it will ultimately strengthen trust in the long run. As outlined in ADP 6-0, commanders are expected to make decisions on priorities, resources, and where to assume prudent risk in operations, balancing the art of command with the science of control.[62] Objective-T is a forcing function to address UTM shortfalls by applying more rigorous assessment

metrics to increase control, in accordance with mission command doctrine. As the 2013 CASAL identified, trust is low in units where standards are not enforced.[63] In the case of training readiness reporting and UTM proficiency, the DIAG report identified that many leaders either do not know the standards, or are not enforcing standards.[64] Increasing control is a natural response to falling standards. Although increasing control risks a further decrease in organizational trust initially, trust will increase over time as the assurance that standards are being enforced increases. Thus, Objective-T is a valid method to add additional controls to the training enterprise which promote adherence to readiness reporting and UTM standards in order to regain mutual trust.

Second, Objective-T still affords leaders flexibility to employ their experience and judgement in evaluating and assessing training in a standards-based training environment, which builds mutual trust and enables disciplined initiative.[65] It does this through maintaining and reinforcing the use of T&EOs, which are unaltered by Objective-T. While the Army uses T&EOs to evaluate training and feed readiness reporting as a doctrinal standard, many of their performance measures are broadly written. This broadness is by design. It enables leader initiative and innovation in employing a variety of tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) to achieve task standards, while accounting for a commander's experience and judgement to assess the results. Increased confidence and mutual trust leads to more effective disciplined initiative, and supports mission command principles.

Third, Objective-T's framework and metrics underscore the importance of the commander's dialogue in both the UTM and readiness reporting system, creating shared understanding among decision makers in accordance with mission command

principles.[66] Given Objective-T's more defined metrics, combined with historical stress on synchronizing manning, equipping, and training timelines within the Force Generation cycle, a unit has an exceptionally finite window where it can realistically achieve and maintain a T1 or T2 readiness level. Objective-T's subjective upgrade constraints, which limit a commander's ability to subjectively upgrade unit T-levels by no more than one grade, adds additional discipline to the system. As a result, Objective-T requires commanders to candidly discuss ground truth readiness in a detailed fashion at every level. This detailed communication to articulate priorities, resources, and risk will create improved shared understanding of Army readiness. Improved shared understanding also fosters trust and disciplined initiative, as leaders are better apprised of challenges and opportunities, and therefore are able to make better decisions.

Fourth, Objective-T enables the Army to more accurately communicate risk and risk mitigation at the strategic level with increased trust and confidence.[67] Objective-T's more controlled, disciplined framework for assessing and reporting training readiness and its resulting improved shared understanding, assists senior leaders in identifying and understanding risk internal to the Army.[68] Objective-T will generate more accurate data about which senior leaders can be confident, supporting the shared understanding required to make better risk decisions. Moreover, it ensures risks decisions within the training enterprise are made at the appropriate level, mitigating "hollow readiness" reporting in the force. Objective-T also enables senior leaders to better articulate risk to external audiences, to include the Congress and the President. This clarity is especially valuable to Army senior leaders as they provide professional military advice to inform civilian authorities during the strategy development process, and related planning,

programming, and budgetary actions. The resultant improved confidence in risk articulation promotes additional trust at echelon, maintaining alignment between Objective-T and mission command.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned coherence between Objective-T and mission command, there are also some aspects of Objective-T that are counter to mission command principles. While these effects may be unintended, their impacts on the organization can be significant, and merit discussion. First, Objective-T's top-down approach to address training readiness reporting accuracy and associated UTM issues conveys a lack of trust in subordinate leaders. While this trust issue is not unwarranted given deficiencies in readiness reporting and UTM identified by the DAIG inspection, the CASAL findings demonstrate that this signaling occurs within a force where vertical trust is already an issue.[69] As such, many junior and midgrade leaders will see Objective-T as just one more top-down driven Army control mechanism that impacts trust and morale, and suppresses initiative. In an organization already struggling with maintaining a balance between a managerial, detailed command approach and a mission command approach to leadership, the Army must keep Objective-T's real and perceived impact in in mind throughout its implementation.

Second, some leaders will perceive Objective-T's defined framework as inhibiting their flexibility in tailoring unit training plans based on intimate knowledge of their units. The Army's organizational culture influences leaders and units to "train for the test", where measurable tasks, conditions, and standards are potent drivers of activities and behavior.[70] While Objective-T's positive aspects focus leaders on training units to Army specified MET proficiency, many leaders will interpret this focus to mean anything

outside of a “Objective-T report card” is not important. Analogous to training for the Army Physical Fitness Test vice a more holistic approach to physical readiness based on the demands of combat, Objective-T can generate units which are too narrowly focused with leaders who ignore tailoring training plans to fit their unit’s needs. As a result they will be more likely to expend organizational energy on activities which feed Objective-T, and less likely to exercise disciplined initiative to comprehensively address specific unit training needs. Given the wide range and complexity of missions which units have been called upon to execute over the last 15 years, it begs the question of whether or not the cost of training to this narrow focus will be losing hard-earned capabilities based on lessons learned in combat.

Third, Objective-T’s concurrent effort to establish Army standardized METLs down to the company level exacerbates leader trust issues. Objective-T’s METL standardization in this regard is counter to what the Army has said it wants company commanders to know how to do in the UTM arena. Specifically, it signifies the Army shifting from coaching, teaching, and mentoring company commanders to develop METLs and training supporting collective tasks in the UTM system to now handing them an approved METL solution which can stymie the leader development process. Army-directed company level METL standardization will likely produce leader cohorts who are even more ignorant of the METL development process than currently exists. It also tells company commanders, and other junior leaders, that they are no longer trusted. It conveys a lack of trust in battalion and brigade commanders’ abilities to develop junior leaders as well. This effect on trust can negatively impact the Army’s wider training and leader development objectives.

Some may argue that the Army is now in a situation where strong action via Objective-T is warranted to inject discipline and accountability into the training enterprise, even at the expense of mission command. At the end of the day, the Army has a critical, and practical, requirement to generate MET proficient units which can fight and win in combat. Just as trust and control are inversely proportional, so too are trust and accountability. Leaders cannot expect to be trusted without also being held accountable for their actions, as provided in mission command doctrine. Hence it is not constructive for subordinate leaders to quibble with Objective-T's approach to address problems within the training enterprise which their own action, or inaction, has brought about to a large degree.

Yet there are two reasons to believe Objective-T could seriously undermine mission command. First, although the Army needs to apply additional accountability and control measures in the training enterprise based on the evidence already discussed; the Army also requires shared understanding of Objective-T's anticipated effects on the exercise of mission command in the force, to include the associated risk, and risk mitigation options. Second, while unit MET proficiency is undoubtedly a fundamental component of combat readiness, this readiness also hinges on leaders who are mission command experts that can employ this combat readiness when it counts. So, in the Army's legitimate push to fix training readiness reporting, and UTM as a whole, it must be careful to not accidentally diminish its capability to produce mission command capable leaders in the process.

Others may argue that this concern overstates the degree to which Objective-T implementation will affect the exercise of mission command in the force. At worst, critics

could label this analysis as alarmist in nature. A critic can assert that Objective-T maintains the existing doctrinal principle that commanders and other leaders are responsible for training their units. Therefore, commanders and leaders will retain accountability, control, and oversight for unit training readiness, employing mission command principles to mitigate any potential risks with Objective-T implementation in this regard.

However, while it is true that the degree to which Objective-T will affect mission command is uncertain, the potential impacts should not be dismissed or ignored. As earlier noted, it is premature for the Army to declare victory with integrating mission command into its organizational culture. If the Army means what it says about mission command's importance, while acknowledging that its integration remains a work in progress, the institution needs to consider this analysis while reviewing Objective-T's underlying facts and assumptions during the implementation process.

Accordingly, the following recommendations are offered to reinforce congruence between Objective-T and mission command as currently constructed. The Army should retain the commander's ability for subjective T-level adjustments as currently developed. It should monitor the subjective upgrade process once Objective-T is fully implemented to determine if additional guidelines are needed. For example, one area to consider in this regard is whether or not the approving authority for subjective T-level upgrades discussed during a training brief and/or USR commander's dialogue should be retained at a specific level of command, e.g., at the brigade or division level. The Army should continue its ongoing training and leader development efforts which focus on UTM in both the institutional and operational force, but with extra emphasis on

operating force programs and initiatives. This emphasis will serve to reinforce operating force integration of UTM fundamentals taught through the Officer and NCO Education System.

In addressing potential friction points identified between Objective-T and Mission command, the Army should first ensure that its communication plan to support Objective-T implementation clearly explains Objective-T's purpose so as to mitigate negative trust perceptions among leaders. Second, as alluded to earlier, the Army should continuously monitor Objective-T implementation and integrate feedback from field units to feed required adjustments in an iterative fashion as applicable. This monitoring should focus on both whether or not Objective-T is having the desired effect as a forcing function, as well as its impacts on promoting mission command. Third, the Army should execute a prioritized review of T&EOs to determine if their current design is properly aligned to provide required inputs into unit training assessments which support the intent of Objective-T, and if not make adjustments accordingly. Finally, the Army should unambiguously assign brigade and battalion commanders the responsibility to resolve tensions between Objective-T and mission command implementation, as its point men for leading change at the unit level.

However, it should be noted that while Objective-T is intended to help solve the Army's training readiness reporting problem, and also serves as a structural adjustment to drive improvements in the training enterprise, it only partially solves the Army's UTM issue. Improving UTM proficiency in the force is, and will remain, an enduring effort. Leader competency is paramount to effective training throughout the operations process. Regardless of the reporting system, the Army ultimately relies upon developing

leaders with the competency, experience, and judgement to accurately assess and report training readiness.

Proposed areas for future research on this topic are twofold. First, future research should focus on subsequent analysis of Objective-T over time to determine if it is achieving its intended outcomes, as well as its impacts on mission command promulgation. Second, researchers should examine Objective-T and UTM as a discrete subset to identify if there are other aspects of the system in need of adjustment as part of the Army's larger training enterprise.

The final analysis of both the pros and cons of Objective-T vis-a-vis mission command shows that Objective-T is a valid method to improve Army training readiness reporting based on its current state. While initially forced to assume risk on Objective-T's potential impacts on mission command in the force, the Army's training readiness reporting challenges are significant and require significant action to remedy. In the long-term Objective-T and mission command can coexist, leading to improvements across the Army's training enterprise. Key to this effort will be implementing Objective-T in a deliberate, iterative fashion with continuous assessment of its impacts, risks, and appropriate risk mitigation options.

Endnotes

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., B-2.

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