

# Eliminating Micromanagement and Embracing Mission Command

Maj. Justin T. DeLeon, U.S. Army

Dr. Paolo G. Tripodi

Whether conducting limited contingency, crisis response, or large-scale combat operations, the U.S. Army will continue to operate in environments characterized by high levels of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA).<sup>1</sup> In situations in which VUCA plays a central role, making timely and effective decisions is a critical factor that will determine the difference between success or failure.

The U.S. Army operates in situations in which the best positioned and most effective commander to make decisions might not necessarily be the most senior in the chain of command, but the one that can best understand the implications of VUCA. Commanders operating in such an environment at the tactical and operational levels face two critical decision points. First, they might face situations that unexpectedly provide them with a clear chance to deliver a serious blow to the enemy. Yet, to take full advantage of such an opportunity, they might have to depart from, or “disobey,” the orders they had received while remaining inside the intent of their senior commander. Second, they might face a situation in which they have a clear understanding that executing the orders they have received might be detrimental to their overall mission. Again, they

might have to decide to disregard certain orders received. U.S. Army leaders might find themselves in the uncomfortable situation of having to make these decisions without the immediate validation of their chain of command. Moreover, multi-domain operations add complexity to the command and control of forces in a VUCA environment where time and initiative are critical. Therefore, the U.S. Army should wholeheartedly embrace a mission command philosophy that empowers the best-positioned leader to make critical decisions.

The Army officially adopted mission command in the early 2000s. Today, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-0, *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces*, provides commanders the tools necessary to effectively lead at the tactical and operational levels. ADP 6-0 identifies seven mission command principles: competence, mutual trust, shared understanding, commanders’ intent, mission orders, disciplined initiative, and risk acceptance.<sup>2</sup> When integrated and employed correctly, these principles enable initiative and the decentralized decision-making needed in a VUCA environment. Yet, leaders often struggle with micromanagement tendencies, and the Army’s organizational culture has not fully embraced the command philosophy.



Capt. Terrence Shields, commander of Iron Troop, 3rd Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment, prepares for movement while participating in the multinational squadron live-fire validation exercise near Bemowo Piskie Training Area, Poland, on 22 March 2018. Battle Group Poland is a unique, multinational battle group comprised of U.S., UK, Croatian, and Romanian soldiers who serve with the Polish 15th Mechanized Brigade as a deterrence force in northeast Poland in support of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence. (Photo by Sgt. Sara Stalvey, U.S. Army)

## Mission Command and Micromanagement

Adding mission command to U.S. Army doctrine has been an important step, yet its adoption is not ensured. Too often, leaders are evaluated on their ability to follow a checklist of doctrinal tasks rather than fostering an environment that encourages disciplined initiative. This contradicts the Army's mission command philosophy and often results in extreme risk aversion among leaders. Furthermore, it can encourage micromanagement, a practice that deprives subordinates of purpose and narrows a leader's focus away from the greater picture.

According to Niko Canner and Ethan Bernstein, micromanaging "is a breakdown in the fundamentals of delegation."<sup>3</sup> It dulls creativity and slows decision-making, reducing the speed in which a unit can react on the battlefield. Canner and Bernstein rightly note that

micromanagement is particularly powerful in organizations "where goals and accountability are intricately nested. What your people deliver affects what you deliver, and so on up the chain of command—so the pressure is on everywhere to make sure everyone comes through."<sup>4</sup> Leaders who struggle with micromanagement have a desire to personally manage every aspect of an activity with excessive control. They become increasingly involved in the process or method in which a task is performed instead of trusting subordinate leaders to meet their intent.

Micromanagement can also harm the development of junior leaders by limiting opportunities to manage duties autonomously. According to Raymond Noe, employees' development takes place while on the job.<sup>5</sup> They develop most when they are challenged with tasks that are outside their current skill set. Noe refers to these

as “stretch assignments” and recommends employees be challenged regularly beyond their current capabilities to acquire new skill sets and gain confidence.<sup>6</sup> A learning organization committed to growing effective leaders encourages the delegation of tasks, authorities, and decision-making. Delegating power and authority helps subordinates gain a sense of responsibility while allowing them to feel the weight of their decision.

Daniel Pink investigates the negative effects of micromanagement and the potential role motiva-

tion plays to counter it. Pink identifies two competing methods of motivation: Motivation 2.0 and Motivation 3.0.<sup>7</sup> Motivation 2.0 refers to commonly accepted management principles that use control to ensure subordinates meet objectives; it relies on extrinsic motivation techniques. Motivation 3.0 relies on intrinsic motivation and provides a significant amount of autonomy to subordinates.<sup>8</sup>

Leaders who desire more control over their subordinates tend to lead through extrinsic motivators as they reward or punish individuals for their actions. This type of motivation, which Pink refers to as “carrots and sticks,” often narrows an individual’s focus and stunts creativity.<sup>9</sup> Performance and productivity frequently diminish as subordinates struggle to think past the task at hand with any future vision in mind. Additionally, he argues that this type of motivation may lead to poor or unethical behavior. Individuals who are motivated with extrinsic rewards might be tempted to find the quickest route possible to perform a task, even if it requires them to take a questionable shortcut.<sup>10</sup>

Individuals driven by the process and motivated to excel out of pride and responsibility produce more effective results. Subordinates also benefit from autonomy, as it allows them to gain a greater conceptual understanding of overall operations.

Motivation 3.0 argues that people desire control over their decisions and are willing to be accountable for them.<sup>11</sup> Pink argues that those who are intrinsically motivated are rewarded by the activity itself from which they receive heightened learning and experience.<sup>12</sup> Individuals driven by the process and motivated

used to accomplish their duties. This resonates with mission command philosophy, which provides subordinates the autonomy to exercise disciplined initiative. Intrinsic and autonomous motivation allows people to have the power of choice, which has a strong effect on performance. Edward Deci and Richard Ryan emphasize the benefit of autonomous motivation and note, “Consistently, autonomous regulation has been associated with greater persistence; more positive affect; enhanced performance, especially on heuristic activities; and greater psychological well-being.”<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, autonomy allows people to feel relevant as partners of a team, rather than subordinates simply executing tasks with no greater purpose in mind. This approach to partnership was also applied by U.S. Marine Corps Gen. James Mattis. While in command of the First Marine Division, Mattis took considerable care to view all subordinate commanders as his equal.<sup>15</sup> He established a unified group of commanders and referred to himself as a quarterback calling plays as part of the team rather than as a superior directing from above. This command philosophy was instrumental in motivating and empowering leaders while promoting trust within his command. Mattis’s approach resembles Edgar Schein’s “cultural island” concept. According to Schein, cultural islands are a leader-created space “in which some of the societal

rules can be suspended and people are encouraged to be more open about what normally they would withhold.<sup>16</sup> This is a critical experience for team learning, as Schein suggests that “in such team situations, formal status and rank become less important than patterns of who is dependent on whom at a given moment in accomplishing a task.”<sup>17</sup> Although theories of organizational performance stress the role played by trust and open communication, they fail to acknowledge that cultural barriers often disrupt the process. Therefore, leaders must understand when and how to create cultural islands where members of a team can communicate openly without fear of reproach.<sup>18</sup> This practice establishes trust up and down the chain of command and promotes open collaboration and dialogue that is instrumental to achieve a greater sense of shared understanding.<sup>19</sup>

## Overcentralization and the Influence of French Military Culture on the U.S. Army

Despite striving to align itself with the mission command philosophy, the Army often neglects to recognize that its organizational culture remains overcentralized due in part to its heritage in French military culture. Upon deployment of U.S. forces to Europe during the First World War, Army officers were largely instructed at French military schools that taught them to fight in a centralized manner through rigid adherence to doctrinal standards and principles. Although this approach might have improved short-term effectiveness on the battlefield, the Army lacked speed and initiative at the operational and tactical levels. In May 1918, the impact was felt during the American Expeditionary Force’s first offensive as the 28th Infantry Regiment lacked flexibility at the battle of Cantigny. Although German forces were defeated, rigid and overcentralized planning resulted in a high number of casualties while several opportunities to gain initiative were not exploited.<sup>20</sup> Following the First World War, the United States continued to align its doctrinal concepts with those of the French. According to Donald Vandergriff, “When the French developed methodical battle in the interwar years, the United States copied it with all its accompanying process focused education.”<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the Army institutionalized the linear French way of tactics and leader development throughout the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>22</sup>

French influence is still seen today in the strict use of the Army’s military decision-making process and the Marine Corps planning process. Both are based on the French Cartesian approach which was implemented after the First World War to promote process-oriented analysis and planning. Although these processes can be effective planning frameworks, Vandergriff argues they can turn planners inward and focus their efforts on outcomes that please superiors instead of properly confronting the environment.<sup>23</sup> The use of these linear planning methods in complex environments may mistakenly convince leaders that they can control the chaos of war. The desire for control and the development of scientific methods and principles to maintain control may encourage leaders to micromanage. In fact, if doctrine is too rigidly applied and leaders are not allowed to employ appropriate levels of creativity on the battlefield, the system itself can become a micromanaging instrument.

Vandergriff noted that large-scale Army training remains overly rigid today.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, as the Army prepares for large-scale combat operations in a multi-domain environment, education and training must facilitate collective proficiency on emerging doctrinal

**Maj. Justin T. DeLeon, U.S. Army**, is a G-35 planner at the 25th Infantry Division, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. He holds a Master of Science in management, strategy, and leadership from Michigan State University, a Master of Military Studies from the Marine Corps University, and a Master of Arts and Military Operations from the School of Advanced Military Studies. He has served as an intelligence officer in the 1st Cavalry Division, as a military instructor in U.S. Army Cadet Command, and as a rifle platoon leader in the 172nd Separate Infantry Brigade. His service includes overseas tours in Germany, the Republic of Korea, and Afghanistan.

**Dr. Paolo G. Tripodi** is a professor of ethics and leadership and Ethics Branch head at the Lejeune Leadership Institute, Marine Corps University. The author of several articles and book chapters, he is the coeditor of *Marines at War: Stories from Afghanistan and Iraq* and *Aspects of Leadership: Ethics, Law and Spirituality*. Tripodi trained as an infantry officer and served with the Italian Carabinieri.

concepts. Proficiency in doctrine certainly allows commanders to trust subordinates when confronted with ambiguous environments on the battlefield. However, Army training must strike a balance and allow leaders, informed by doctrinal concepts, to solve problems through innovation and creativity. Army Doctrine Publication 3-0, *Operations*, suggests that “doctrine acts as a guide to action rather than a set of fixed rules.”<sup>25</sup> Doctrine is largely based on lessons learned from past conflicts and on forecasts of what a future conflict may look like. Therefore, officers must be encouraged to be critical of doctrine, and challenge assumptions in training. Such an approach enables Army leaders to iteratively refine doctrinal concepts and better prepare the force for the future fight.

## Risk Aversion

The Army’s struggle to implement mission command and expel micromanagement tendencies can also be attributed to extreme risk aversion among leaders. Through systemic risk aversion, military organizations often establish a culture that promotes micromanagement and the overcentralization of decision-making authorities. Whether an overly risk adverse culture is established intentionally or inadvertently, this type of environment makes it difficult to cultivate trust among subordinates on and off the battlefield.

Maj. Thomas Rebeck argues that the Army suffers from a “bureaucratic, managerial mindset with a pathological fear of uncertainty and a squeamish aversion to risk.”<sup>26</sup> This results in an extreme compulsion to micromanage, as leaders have an unrealistic desire to impose order on the battlefield.<sup>27</sup> Risk aversion also stems from a lack of trust that might inhibit leaders from developing subordinates and providing them appropriate levels of autonomy. Additionally, careerism among leaders can develop a culture where trust is lacking.<sup>28</sup> Leaders may exercise rigid control to protect themselves from subordinates’ failures. The policy then becomes a game of exercising constant mitigation to avoid mistakes as opposed to working toward success as a team.<sup>29</sup> As a result, officers may resort to the use of micromanagement practices and shy away from providing subordinate leaders autonomy and the benefit to learn from errors. As Mattis warns, “If the risk takers are punished, then you will retain in your ranks only the risk averse.”<sup>30</sup> This may not be done maliciously or

with ill intent but may be the result of a zero-defect organizational culture.

A high level of risk aversion encourages micromanagement, but the overstatement of risk multiplies these negative effects. Overstating risk adds excessive parameters to subordinates, denying them the ability to be agile and use initiative to solve complex problem sets or to pursue unexpected opportunities.<sup>31</sup> ADP 6-0 stresses that “an order should not trespass upon the province of a subordinate. It should contain everything that the subordinate must know to carry out his mission, but nothing more.”<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the overstatement of risk trespasses upon subordinates’ ability to operate and excessively limits the parameters in which they can exercise initiative. If risk is overstated, then intent will not leave space for subordinate action and decisions will be held at higher levels than they belong. This undermines a mission command philosophy while slowing the decision-making process, making the Army less agile.<sup>33</sup>

## Organizational Culture and Mission Command

In a 2019 study on military organizational culture, Peter Mansoor and Williamson Murray stressed, “Culture is clearly a crucial determinant to the effectiveness of military organizations.”<sup>34</sup> Edgar Schein defines the culture of a group “as the accumulated shared learning of that group as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration; which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, feel, and behave in relation to those problems.”<sup>35</sup> Organizational culture plays a pivotal role in how leaders manage and lead subordinate teams.

Policies, regulations, and codified systems encourage leaders’ behavior at all levels. Organizational culture is the key to developing effective leaders and minimizing negative management styles such as micromanagement. Schein noted that the way an organization selects its leaders for promotion plays a significant role in the formation of the organization’s culture.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, if the empowerment of subordinates becomes a consideration for promotion, leaders are motivated to continue this practice and micromanagement tendencies begin to diminish. Without this understanding, empowerment of subordinates varies depending on the beliefs and values of each individual leader.<sup>37</sup>



History provides examples of enlightened leaders and organizations who understood the perils of micromanagement and embraced a decentralized decision-making approach with excellent results. Not only did they appreciate the beneficial impact of adopting mission command, but they also made sure the organization embraced such a philosophy. Mission command remains strongly associated with the German approach, *Auftragstaktik*. Yet decades before *Auftragstaktik* was introduced in the 1870–1871 Franco-Prussian War, Adm. Horatio Nelson had adopted a philosophy of command that empowered leaders in his chain of command. During Nelson’s most important battle at Trafalgar, “the Royal Navy won Nelson’s greatest victory while the admiral himself bled to death below decks.”<sup>38</sup> He had delivered his commander’s intent and empowered a decentralized decision-making process in such an effective way that his own presence became irrelevant for the Royal Navy’s success.

The interwar period provides strong evidence that a decentralized command philosophy promotes effective innovation at the operational and tactical levels,

Col. Robert Born, commander of 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), briefs Maj. Gen. Brian E. Winski, commanding general of the 101st Airborne Division and Fort Campbell, Kentucky, on his defensive plan via a map on the hood of a humvee after a press conference 19 September 2020 during operations at the Joint Readiness Training Center, Fort Polk, Louisiana. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Justin Moeller, U.S. Army)

while a centralized approach has the opposite effect. During this period, the German army established a culture that encouraged critical thinking and debate among officers regarding war, tactics, and operations.<sup>39</sup> This allowed the organization to iteratively evaluate doctrinal concepts and improve them over time. Moreover, the German command culture developed an officer corps that was empowered to learn and adapt on the battlefield.<sup>40</sup> Conversely, the French army favored a centralized command philosophy, and allowed the French War College to develop doctrine with limited input from the broader officer corps.<sup>41</sup> Senior military leaders, also inhibited debate on doctrinal concepts. Under the leadership of Gen. Maurice Gamelin, dissenting opinions were not tolerated in the French army, and open discourse diminished. This

resulted in rigid adherence to the “methodical battle” doctrine that emphasized tightly controlled operations.<sup>42</sup> On one hand, the German army’s approach enabled it to develop the blitzkrieg operational concept, shifting the paradigm in combined arms warfare. On the other hand, the French approach produced an army that lacked operational flexibility. Among other factors, this contributed to its inability to adapt during the German offensive in May 1940.

Mattis’s experience in command of First Marine Division is an enlightening example of a proper application of mission command philosophy. Mattis strongly encouraged leaders to exercise judgment and initiative. He understood the detrimental consequences of asserting excessive control. Opportunities on the battlefield were fleeting, and only through decentralized decision-making and disciplined initiative could the Marines achieve the speed necessary to capitalize.<sup>43</sup> The Marine general also articulated to his subordinates that they had the freedom to deviate from original plans when facing unexpected variables on the battlefield as long as they remained within his commander’s intent.<sup>44</sup> Such an approach emphasized the need for clear and open communication to ensure his subordinates understood his intent at all times.

Commander’s intent must have a great level of clarity, be easily comprehended, and provide valuable information. According to Mattis, subordinate commanders “cannot seize fleeting opportunities if they do not understand the purpose behind an order. The correct exercise of independent action requires a *common understanding* [emphasis by authors] between the commander and the subordinate, of both the mission and the commander’s intent of what the mission is expected to accomplish.”<sup>45</sup> In Mattis’s view, common understanding has to be truly shared at all levels.<sup>46</sup> He wrote, “If a corporal on the front lines could not tell me what my intent was, then I had failed. Either I had not taken the time to be clear or my subordinates were not effectively conveying it down the chain of command.”<sup>47</sup> Mattis’s belief is echoed by Gen. Stanley McChrystal as he stressed that “team members tackling complex environments must all grasp the team’s situation and overarching purpose. Only if each of them understands the goal of a mission and the strategic context in which it fits can the team members evaluate risks on the fly and know how to behave in relation to their

teammates.”<sup>48</sup> Mattis and McChrystal’s views are in line with ADP 6-0, which explains commander’s intent must be clear and provide an overarching purpose that describes what success looks like.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, effective commanders clearly and concisely communicate intent while fostering a collaborate environment that allows all members to achieve shared understanding.

## Mission Command on the Contemporary Battlefield

Advancement in technology and communication allows leaders to command and control subordinate elements more effectively than ever before. However, instant situational awareness and communication increase the temptation to micromanage and undermine a mission command philosophy. With new technologies and increased operational tempo, leaders may overcentralize and unduly influence decisions that belong at lower levels of war.<sup>50</sup>

McChrystal, a strong advocate of decentralized decision-making, provides an exhaustive discussion about this problem in his book *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World*. While in command of the Joint Special Operations Command, McChrystal recognized the organization suffered from an efficiency problem. Developments in technology and communications were allowing high-level leaders, himself included, to maintain control of operations that lower-level commanders were supposed to manage. McChrystal admits, “For a closet micromanager, it was a new opportunity to pull the puppet strings from great distances.”<sup>51</sup> Subordinate commanders were forced to move through a bureaucratic approval process to conduct certain missions. This slowed the decision-making process, resulting in missed opportunities. To solve the issue, he instituted a policy of “empowered execution,” which delegated decision-making authority down to the proper and most effective levels. McChrystal stressed that embracing “empowered execution would transform the way we thought about power and leadership.”<sup>52</sup> As part of this initiative, he did not remove himself from the process completely but worked to maintain visibility and make himself available to provide clarity on his intent whenever necessary. To support this policy, McChrystal adopted an approach that advocated a high level of shared understanding, which he called “shared consciousness.”<sup>53</sup> The

shared consciousness concept ensured that subordinate commanders were privy to all information and intelligence and were consistently updated on commander's intent. McChrystal accomplished this mainly during his morning video conference meetings with subordinate elements, during which they received updates in intelligence and operational guidance. As a result, the general was able to influence his subordinates daily and ensure that they understood his intent as the environment changed. Additionally, morning meetings pro-

mission of the organization to attain an enduring state of common understanding.

## The Future of Mission Command

McChrystal and Mattis's visionary approaches to command in their respective organizations, and their enlightening intellectual reflections, have prompted much thinking about the future of mission command. In a 2017 *Parameters* article, "Mission Command 2.0," Anthony King argues that mission command



McChrystal created a lethal and efficient organization while demonstrating the positive effect decentralized operations have on the modern battlefield.



vided a forum for subordinates to communicate with one another, increasing collaborative efforts among the force. The meetings developed a state of shared consciousness between McChrystal and his subordinates that gave him the confidence to delegate most decisions previously held at his level. The outcome was staggering. As a result of his empowered execution and shared consciousness policies, the organization was able to increase its raids per month from ten to an astounding three hundred.<sup>54</sup> Using these policies, McChrystal created a lethal and efficient organization while demonstrating the positive effect decentralized operations have on the modern battlefield.

Nonetheless, as technology and communications continue to advance, commanders might be tempted to micromanage and hold decision-making authority at levels higher than necessary. The Army cannot simply hope all commanders have the resolve and confidence to delegate decision-making as McChrystal did. The Army's culture must support mission command and encourage commanders to develop a shared-consciousness process within their respective organizations. Leaders should use advancement in technology and communications to retain situational awareness, yet without interfering with subordinate commanders. They should adopt McChrystal's approach of "eyes on, hands off." In addition, they should make sure they use any opportunity to communicate, clarify, discuss, or reiterate their commander's intent and the overall

has changed due to advancement in technology and mission type. He states, "Mission command today does not involve mere local, individual initiative but rather a deep and enduring interdependence between commanders across levels."<sup>55</sup> King's view echoes Pink's discussion on motivation 3.0 and autonomy. Pink notes autonomy does not imply subordinates should conduct themselves independently, but instead they should have the freedom of choice that empowers them to choose how to work interdependently with others.<sup>56</sup>

To support his argument, King references McChrystal's shared consciousness concept, which promotes cooperative efforts between commanders while keeping them in line with McChrystal's overall intent. King also uses Mattis as an example in the evolution of mission command. He notes Mattis and his staff gained expertise in identifying decision points the First Marine Division was likely to see on the battlefield. According to King, Mattis's subordinates "did not act on their individual initiative or instinct," as decisions and second and third order effects were already fleshed out.<sup>57</sup>

King's analysis brings clarity to the modern practice of mission command, but his conclusions may be flawed to some extent. His overconfidence on a staff's ability to predict future decision points ignores that war is inherently unpredictable. Moreover, he fails to acknowledge the effect VUCA has on the operating environment. VUCA regularly triggers chance





alterations to the environment, forcing leaders to make decisions that could not have been preplanned or foreseen. Consequently, King takes great effort to speak of McChrystal's shared-consciousness initiative but lacks depth in his discussion of empowered execution. His analysis views mission command solely through the lens of higher-level commands such as the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, Joint Special Operations Command, and the First Marine Division. FM 6-0 rightly states that mission command's focus is on tactical commanders.<sup>58</sup> Solely analyzing mission command through the lens of these higher-level commands may not accurately represent its implementation at the tactical level, where communication becomes increasingly difficult.

King's argument also only references the Iraq and Afghan wars. It fails to recognize the harsh realities the Army faces conducting large-scale combat operations in a multi-domain environment. On the future battlefield, the Army will have to operate in a dispersed manner, and leaders must also recognize that adversarial action will force the Army to operate in degraded environments where communication may be

Paratroopers assigned to the 173rd Airborne Brigade plan during exercise Swift Response 17 in Hohenfels, Germany, 10 October 2017. Swift Response is an annual U.S. Army Europe-led exercise focused on allied airborne forces' ability to quickly and effectively respond to crisis situations as an interoperable multinational team. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Alexander C Henninger, U.S. Army)

denied or compromised.<sup>59</sup> This emphasizes the need to implement a true mission command philosophy that promotes decentralized decision-making. If decision-making authorities are kept at too high of levels, it will significantly disrupt operations and slow the decision-making process. The Army cannot afford to be complacent during this postwar period. It cannot rely on the ease advanced technology and communications brought to the Iraq and Afghan wars as the environment will be largely different at the onset of a potential peer-on-peer conflict.

## Conclusion

The greatest obstacle standing between the Army and the full adoption of mission command is its own culture. Vandergriff explains, "Until the U.S. Army is

realistic about the shortcomings of our institutional culture, it will never be able to embrace and practice mission command.<sup>60</sup> If the Army hopes to attain success on the contemporary battlefield, micromanagement at all levels must cease, and the Army must remove ineffective leadership practices at all levels of war. As part of the solution, the organization must communicate the hazards of overcentralized command and create an urgency among its leaders for change. Moreover, it must promote officers who nurture a mission command philosophy.

Leaders at all levels have acknowledged that such a philosophy has the potential to make the organization more effective, not only at the execution of its mission but also for the development of creative, visionary leaders able to understand and plan for future conflicts. The Army, however, maybe unintentionally or unconsciously, remains resistant to a practical application of mission command. Micromanagement, risk aversion, and a culture that does not fully promote trust up and down the chain and laterally remain obstacles to deal with. For an effective adoption of mission command, the U.S. Army should embrace critical concepts developed by visionary leaders like Mattis and McChrystal such as common understanding, shared consciousness, and empowered execution. This will develop the adaptive leaders the Army needs in combat while producing the freedom of thought necessary to cultivate peacetime innovation.

Common understanding and shared consciousness are key when creating a strong organizational culture in which all members of the organization see themselves as part of a team playing different roles rather than only as subordinate executors. Common understanding is critical to establish and maintain a strong culture of trust that promotes a sense of shared ownership, through which all the members of the unit not only feel they own the mission but that they are important for the accomplishment of such a mission. Mattis and McChrystal articulated how essential common understanding and shared consciousness are. They stressed the value of the team, the critical role played by commander's intent and its dissemination, and the importance of sharing information at all levels.

Schein's cultural islands concept provides leaders a practical approach to achieve candid dialogue and collaboration in line with Mattis and McChrystal's

philosophies. Cultural islands are opportunities for leaders at all levels to establish a culture of trust and become intimately acquainted with their subordinate leaders. They become places where an informal understanding of commander's intent can be solidified. Common understanding and shared consciousness develop throughout the team in a variety of venues, yet cultural islands play an important role for the creation of an organizational culture that in Schein's view "is a shared product of a shared learning."<sup>61</sup> Schein stressed that when the organization embraces shared learning, group identity and cohesion play a strong role to define "for the group who we are and what is our purpose or reason to be."<sup>62</sup> Common understanding and shared consciousness are critical for an organization that values shared learning and effective collaboration. Yet, understanding can only be achieved when commanders use approaches such as cultural islands to facilitate collaboration and dialogue where subordinates have no fear of reproach.

Armed with a culture of trust and an organization whose identity is the outcome of common understanding and shared consciousness, leaders should see the value of adopting a truly decentralized decision-making process through which they delegate authority to the level where decisions are going to be the most effective. Empowered execution is the next step for a strong adoption of mission command that minimizes or eliminates micromanagement while containing risk aversion. Furthermore, this approach helps leaders resist the overuse of extrinsic motivators and provide more autonomy to subordinates. Mattis stressed, "My young folks always got me out of every jam I got them into because they had the authority to do it ... so delegate, delegate to the point you're almost uncomfortable ... Keep pushing the authority to make decisions to lower and lower levels and it will reward you. Eventually it will even make you a four-star general."<sup>63</sup> Leaders should see the great benefit empowered execution has for them and the organization so they will not give in to the temptation to micromanage, and they will increase tolerance for risk. It is in that "uncomfortable" moment when leaders might give in to micromanagement, yet if they have an organization with a strong culture of trust based on common understanding and shared consciousness, they will be in a better position to resist the urge. ■

## Notes

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