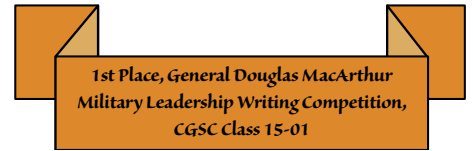


A Trust-Based Culture Shift



Rethinking the Army Leadership Requirements Model in the Era of Mission Command

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In January 2015, the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC) hosted a lecture by bestselling author Ori Brafman. At this lecture, Brafman discussed agile leadership with an audience of eleven hundred military field grade officers. Prior to taking their seats, each audience member received an index card. Midway through the presentation, Brafman instructed the officers to take out their index cards and list one way the Army could more effectively engender trust and enable mission command.¹

When the audience members had written their ideas on their cards, they passed them to others in the crowd who read the ideas and assigned them a numerical value, one through five. The better the idea, the higher the numerical value assigned. The audience repeated the process of passing and grading five times before totaling the scores. Brafman next asked audience members to raise their hands if they held a card that received a perfect score of twenty-five. The individuals identified revealed those “top ideas” to the audience. Surprisingly, most of the ideas discussed shared the same theme: soldiers did not feel empowered; rather, they felt micromanaged and scrutinized by bureaucratic processes.

This result may come as a shock to senior Army leaders who have attempted to empower soldiers through a service-wide implementation of the mission command philosophy. That philosophy enables military

forces to respond quickly to ambiguous situations and supports the tenets of Army operations in *The U.S. Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World* (2014).² Successful mission command requires leaders to provide clear intent, then delegate and empower subordinates to encourage disciplined initiative. However, the Army leadership requirements model, the standard the Army sets for leaders to meet, does not reinforce these premises.³

Additionally, bureaucratic processes and recent service-wide policies have eroded trust across the force, a mission command requisite. The Army leadership requirements model needs modification to reinforce the missing mission command leadership principles. Explicit codification of these principles will serve as an embedding mechanism to reinforce mission command and foster a trust-based cultural change.

The principles espoused in the mission command philosophy are not new. The German concept of mission command, *Führen mit Auftrag* (mission-oriented leadership), more popularly known as *Auftragstaktik*, goes back two centuries.⁴ Following the crushing defeats at Jena and Auerstadt in 1806, the Prussians realized their mechanistic way of conducting war had become insufficient. The Prussians began encouraging more nimble command systems and military organizations, which were championed by Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke the Elder.⁵ In a 2010 *Journal of Strategic Studies*



(Photo by Staff Sgt. Whitney C. Houston, 128th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

Soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division participate in an air assault on Darwazgay Pass 23 June 2014 in Zabul Province, Afghanistan.

article titled “The Long and Winding Road,” Eitan Shamir discusses how Moltke viewed *Auftragstaktik*:

Superiors specify the mission objectives and constraints and allocate resources, leaving the rest to their subordinates. The latter’s skills, creativity, and commitment, or lack thereof, will ultimately determine the battle plan and its execution.⁶

Like the U.S. Army’s mission command philosophy, *Auftragstaktik* relies on leaders to provide direction then delegate and empower subordinates. It encourages individual initiative, skill, and creativity. Embedding those principles into the Prussian military culture served as an effective driving force in German tactical victories in the Second World War.⁷

The assimilation of *Führen mit Auftrag* into Prussian military culture was gradual.⁸ The assimilation of mission command into U.S. Army culture will also be a measured process. Compounding the challenge is the Army’s managerial approach, which according to Shamir is “characterized by centralization, standardization, detailed planning, quantitative analysis, and aspires for maximum efficiency and certainty.”⁹ This managerial approach is effective for centralized

operations but runs contrary to many mission command principles.

Surprisingly, many of these principles have appeared in U.S. Army doctrinal publications for over a century. Retired Army Col. Clinton J. Ancker III details this history in a 2013 *Military Review* article titled “The Evolution of Mission Command in U.S. Army Doctrine, 1905 to the Present.” Ancker traces the roots of U.S. mission command back to the very first Army combined arms manual, the 1905 *Army Field Service Regulation* (FSR). The FSR acknowledges that a commander cannot predict or issue guidance for all possible outcomes. Rather than issue rigid orders, it directs commanders to “lay stress upon the object to be *attained* [italics in original], and leave open the means to be employed.”¹⁰ This concept of issuing guidance and then encouraging individual initiative appeared nearly unchanged in subsequent versions of the FSR for the next four decades.¹¹

The Army stressed and improved upon the mission command concepts in the FSR until 1976. In 1976, the doctrine of “active defense” overturned the mission command principles. This philosophy accentuated a “much tighter control of operations than in the past.”¹²

- Be Technically and Tactically Proficient
- Know Yourself and Seek Self-Improvement
- Know Your Men and Look Out for Their Welfare
- Keep Your Men Informed
- Set the Example
- Ensure that the Task is Understood, Supervised, and Accomplished
- Train Your Men as a Team
- Make Sound and Timely Decisions
- Develop a Sense of Responsibility Among Subordinates
- Employ Your Command in Accordance with Its Capabilities
- Seek Responsibility and Take Responsibility for Your Actions

Figure 1. Army Leadership Principles, 1958

Three years later, Army doctrine again reversed direction with the release of “airland battle.” Airland battle doctrine identified the core mission command principles as a “central tenet” and a “prerequisite for its execution.”¹³ Unfortunately, minimization of individual initiative was rampant due to bureaucratic Army processes and frameworks that valued rigid adherence to checklists over creativity.¹⁴

There were, however, those who recognized the importance of these principles and continued to fight to integrate them into U.S. Army culture. Over the last twenty years, advocates of mission command have come closer to having their vision realized. In 2003, the Army made the doctrinal leap and codified the philosophy in Field Manual (FM) 6-0. A small but significant change occurred by renaming this “command and control” manual *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces*. While the name change may seem trivial, it signaled an important doctrinal step for the Army because it transferred the emphasis from the rigid processes and procedures of the past to a focus on the enemy and the outcome.¹⁵

Some have asked why the Army made such a dramatic doctrinal shift if the concepts of mission command were not new. At the 2014 Association of the U.S. Army’s annual meeting, Gen. David Perkins,

commander of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, expressed why the shift back to mission command was necessary. “[Mission command is] in our doctrine now, because we know the world is unknown and constantly changing ... you have got to figure out how you empower subordinates to exploit the initiative.”¹⁶

Additionally, Army leadership believed the term “command and control” strayed from the original intent, and it had become largely associated with the systems rather than people. The Army was able to reframe the

antiquated concept of command and control to stress the centrality of the human domain by consolidating these principles and forming the mission command philosophy.¹⁷ This domain’s criticality, although detailed in doctrine, had largely been diminished and its importance overlooked.

This same rationale applies to the missing elements in the Army leadership requirements model. Various Army publications advocate the mission command concepts of clearly articulating intent, then encouraging disciplined initiative through delegating and empowering subordinates. However, since the Army’s “leadership requirements” do not consolidate and emphasize these mission command cornerstones, they are overlooked just as the human domain was under the “command and control” moniker.

The Army has a vested interest in training leaders and codifying the traits it values in those leaders. The current standard to which the Army holds its leaders is captured in the Army’s leadership requirements model. This model does a satisfactory job of identifying traits; however, these qualities do not exist in a vacuum. For this model to work, the traits espoused in it must be nested with related Army leadership principles, such as those championed by the mission command philosophy. To get an appreciation for the

current model, it is essential to have a basic understanding of how it manifested.

The most famous precursor to the Army leadership requirements model may be the eleven principles of leadership (see figure 1). Developed shortly after World War II, this list of leadership principles appeared in the Army's leadership field manual, *Military Leadership*, in 1951 and again in 1958.¹⁸ The list served as the Army's leadership foundation for over four decades.

In 1999, the Army transitioned from the eleven Army leadership principles to the Army "leadership framework" (see figure 2).¹⁹ This new model, commonly referred to as the "be, know, do" model, broke down leadership principles into subgroups consisting of values, attributes, skills, and actions. While some of the ideas were innovative, this model contained many common themes from the eleven principles.

The Army further revised its leadership framework, republishing it as the Army leadership requirements model. This model first appeared in the October 2006 version of the *Army Leadership* manual, renumbered as FM 6-22.²⁰ In 2012, the Army again made changes to the model and republished it in Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-22 (see figure 3).²¹ Similar to the leadership framework model, the Army leadership requirements model breaks leadership themes into subgroups based on what a leader "is" and what a leader "does."

Examining the three models provides some interesting perspectives as it is evident that all three have strengths and weaknesses. The truth is, no model will be truly all-encompassing, nor will it be permanent. The ever-evolving nature

of conflict and corresponding doctrine necessitate an ever-adapting model.

This is one such time where Army doctrine has evolved to confront future conflicts and the current leadership model must evolve as well. The current Army leadership requirements model needs modification to align it with the mission command philosophy. Two competencies that need to be considered are *clearly communicate intent* and *encourage disciplined initiative through delegating and empowering subordinates*.

In order to align the "Leads" section of the leadership requirements model shown in figure 3 with the premises espoused in mission command philosophy, "Communicates intent" should replace "Communicates." Simple, clear communication reduces the chance of misunderstanding. This skill takes time and practice to develop. "Intent" can take the form of



Figure 2. The Army Leadership Framework, 1999

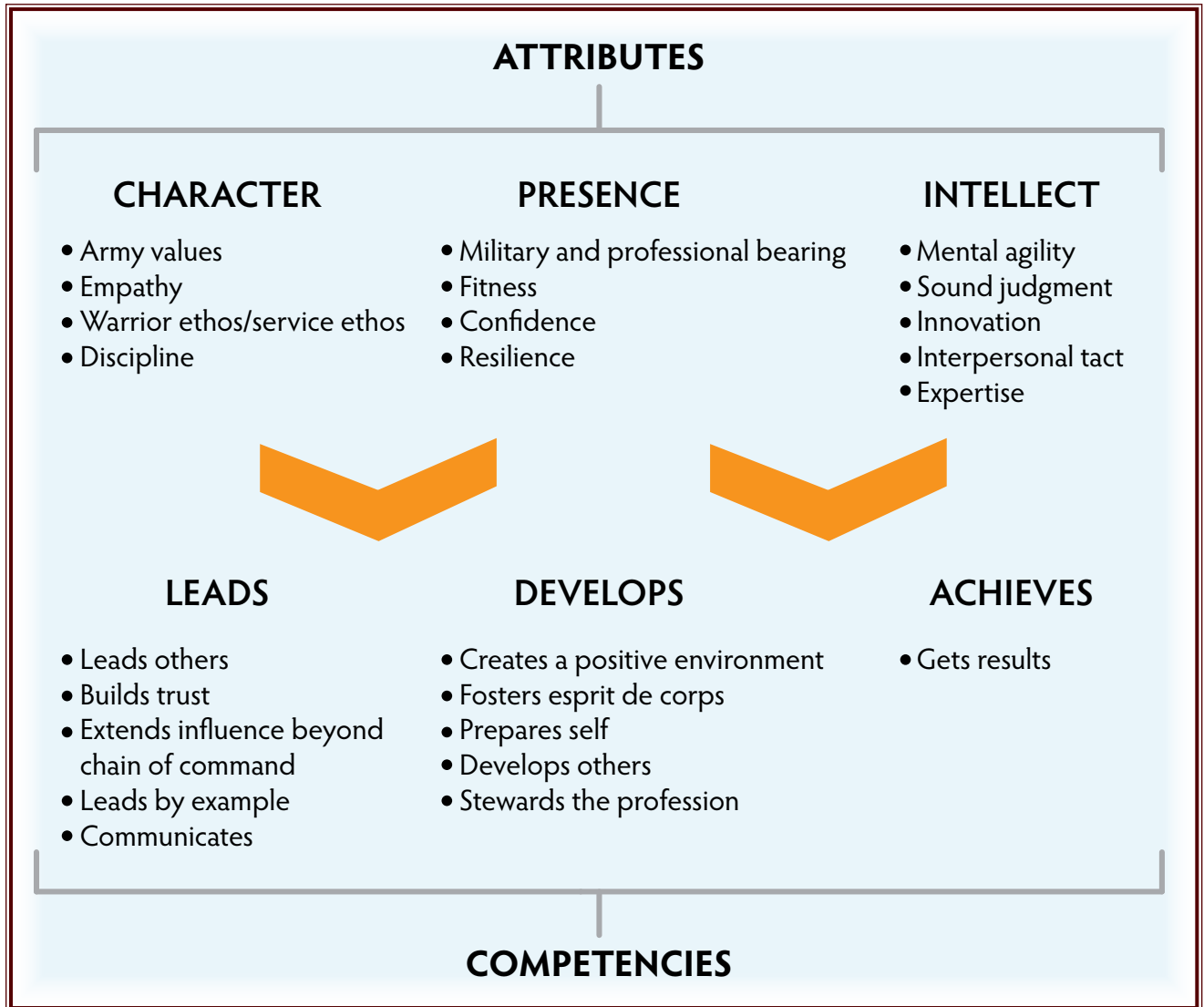


Figure 3. The Army Leadership Requirements Model, 2012

a vision or mission statement for large organizations, a mission-type order in combat situations, or general guidance for in-garrison operations.

Once subordinates receive this clear intent they can, in theory, execute the “disciplined initiative” called for in the mission command philosophy. However, as the field grade officers in the audience of Brafman’s lecture attested, something is missing between theory and practice.²² The missing links are *delegating* and *empowering*. Those concepts are vital to mission command because they accentuate the shift from the leader being the doer of the action to being a true leader and managing the execution of the action.

Inspiring disciplined initiative through the correct balance of delegation and empowerment is an obligatory skill for effective Army leaders. Application of those principles necessitates the leader incurring a certain degree of risk. Getting comfortable with taking the appropriate amount of risk is a skill leaders have to develop. Effective execution of mission command requires leaders to accurately assess subordinates and trust in their ability to accomplish the mission in accordance with the leader’s intent.

Furthermore, the Army leadership requirements model lists “Gets results” as the single goal under the “Achieves” section (figure 3). This single-minded focus punctuates the effect achieved, which has the

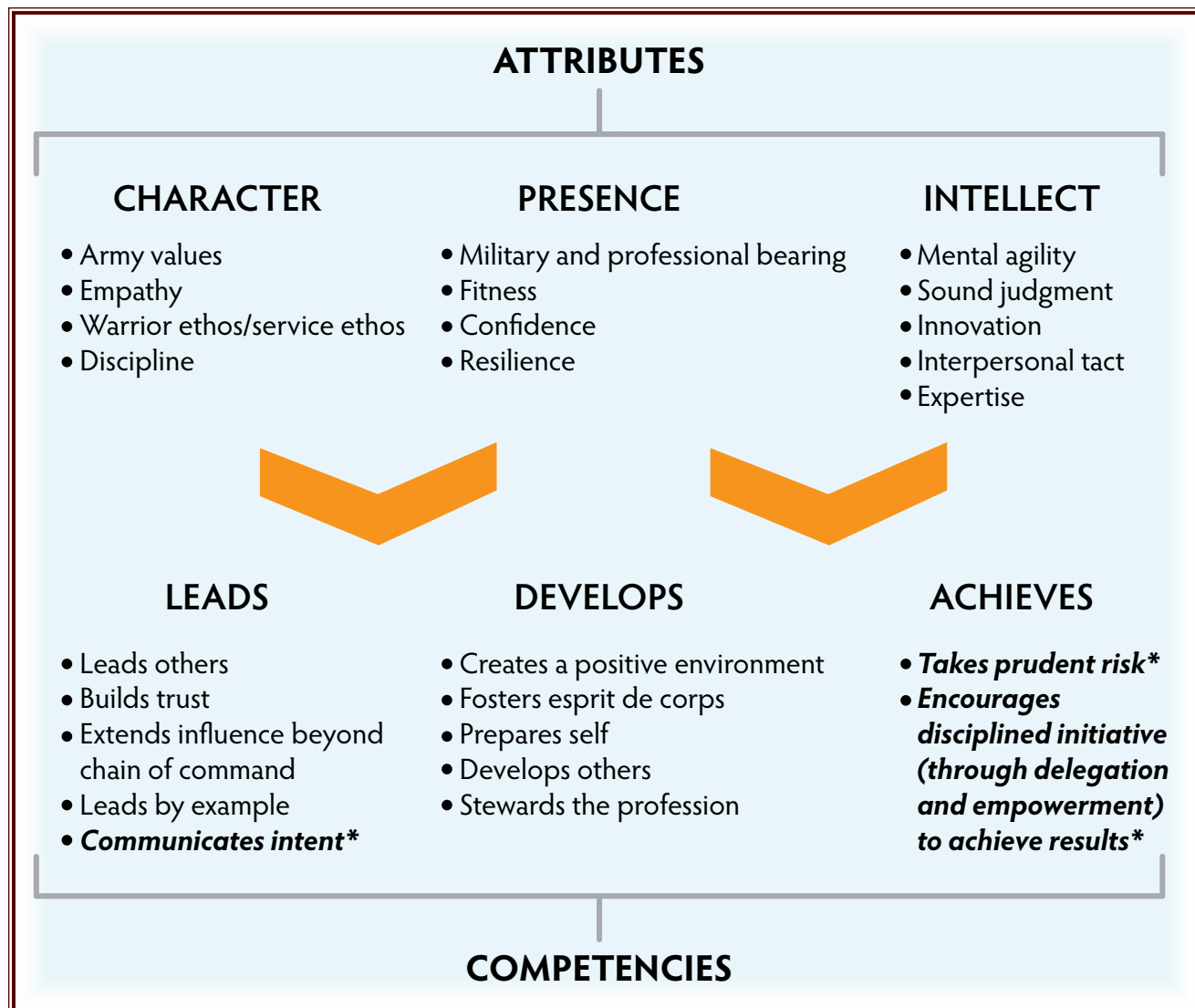


Figure 4. Proposed Army Leadership Requirements Model (* denotes change)

propensity to inspire leaders to become the doer of the action or micromanage the action's execution. Getting results is an admirable goal for leaders when those leaders remain mindful that they are in their position to coordinate subordinates and inspire them into action.

Guiding subordinates requires delegation and empowerment balanced against the risk and primacy of the mission. They are both necessary to inspire disciplined initiative, yet they are absent from the leadership requirements model. The first term, delegation, is specific to tasks and requires detailed instructions from the leader. Delegation involves risk, but since leaders typically monitor delegated tasks more closely, the risk level is smaller. The latitude given by leaders

should vary to a degree commensurate with the trust developed in subordinates and their experience level and competence.

Empowerment, the second missing term needed to encourage disciplined initiative, is the essence of mission command. It provides subordinates the authority to make decisions in the absence of specific orders in accordance with the leader's intent. Empowerment demands decentralization and decentralization takes trust.

Figure 4 shows the Army leadership requirements model with the recommended changes. As previously mentioned, the recommendations include changing "Communicates" to "Communicates intent." They also

include adding “Takes prudent risk,” and modifying “Gets results” to “Encourages disciplined initiative (through delegation and empowerment) to achieve results.” Those changes align the leadership principles of mission command with the leadership requirements model. Once aligned, these mutually supportive concepts can serve as guiding principles upon which Army leaders can rely. They can also serve as embedding mechanisms to foster cultural change.

As discussed earlier, force-wide cultural adoption of a philosophy like mission command will take time. To accomplish the transition, it is important to assess the current situation to effectively evaluate what must happen next. ADRP 6-22, *Army Leadership*, asserts that culture consists of “shared beliefs, values, and assumptions about what is important.”²³

Those beliefs, values, and assumptions permeate the Army and operate at different cultural levels, such as those proposed by Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner.²⁴ Using their model, Angela R. Febbraro, Brian McKee, and Sharon L. Riedel describe how achieving lasting organization change requires altering organizations on at least two, and possibly all three cultural levels.²⁵ The most superficial level incorporates “artifacts and practices” that represent an organization’s explicit culture, including processes, procedures, and other observable behavior.²⁶ The middle layer incorporates “attitudes and expectations,” and according to Febbraro, McKee, and Riedel, it is “more conceptual than tangible, and consists of doctrine, customs, and traditional practices.”²⁷ The innermost layer, “deep structure,” or “deep culture,” represents implicit culture, and it is “the source and structure from where attitudes and expectations are generated.”²⁸

Applying ADRP 6-22’s definition of culture to Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner’s model shows that cultural change likely requires integration into all three layers of Army culture. Various Army organizational practices and policies support the surface cultural layer by promoting mission command principles; however, practical application varies by unit. Some recent changes to doctrine support the middle cultural layer by mandating mission command, but discrepancies exist between doctrinal publications. The inconsistencies noted above suggest the philosophy has not permeated the innermost layer, the layer

of “implicit culture” which will be necessary for lasting cultural change.

Further complicating the adoption challenge are some recent policy announcements that have eroded the trust necessary for this culture change.²⁹ Examples include the Army’s reduction-in-force announcements and the unmasking of officer evaluation reports at separation boards.³⁰ Those policies have frustrated many soldiers who view the measures as broken promises and centralized deterrents to mission command that encourage a risk-averse, zero-defect force.³¹ The possibility that one mistake made at the beginning of one’s career could have career-ending consequences years down the road may engender soldiers that are less willing to take risks or think outside the box.

Additionally, bureaucratic processes such as the in-garrison, daily operations order process have the tendency to perpetuate the status quo, epitomize centralization, and inhibit individual initiative, skill, and creativity.³² This runs contrary to Perkins’s guidance in *The U.S. Army Operating Concept* that states,

We must not be consumed with focusing solely on avoiding risk, but build leaders and institutions that recognize and leverage opportunities. Leaders at all levels must encourage prudent risk taking and not allow bureaucratic processes to stifle them.³³

If the Army is serious about encouraging leaders to take prudent risk and about reducing the stifling bureaucratic processes, a cultural shift is necessary. For this to occur, two actions are obligatory. First, Army leaders at all levels must examine and fix deficiencies within their organizations. Units should follow the example set by CGSC leadership through Brafman’s survey and examine their practices and policies to determine if they inspire trust-based mission command. Second, mission command and Army leadership doctrine need alignment. Editing the leadership requirements model will support and punctuate the centrality of the mission command principles. Once these steps are complete and mission command permeates the first two cultural layers, the U.S. Army may be able to make the shift the Prussians made and comprehensively adopt the philosophy.

Forecasts of future battlefields are ambiguous in threat and dynamic in nature. Success in these

conflicts will require the right amount of decentralized, trust-based disciplined initiative. This will only

happen if the U.S. Army fully integrates mission command into its culture. ■

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