Army Doctrine and the NCO

Mission Command and Small Unit Leadership

NCO Journal

As the Army modernizes its approach to large-scale combat and multi-domain operations, changes in Army doctrine reflect those efforts. The *NCO Journal* discussed these doctrinal changes with Sgt. Maj. Christopher A. Prosser of the U.S. Army Mission Command Center of Excellence, and how they apply to NCOs when building strong units. Transcript follows…

Army Doctrine

Q: What is doctrine hierarchy, and why is it important to NCO leadership?

A: "Doctrine has undergone quite a few revisions in the past year, and most of that is due to the fact that *Field Manual 3-0: Operations* has changed the way that we fight – going back from a counterinsurgency focus into large-scale combat operations.

"Of the 15 ADPs [Army Doctrine Publication] that we have revised this past summer, we've considered two of them to be capstones – *ADP 1*, which is *The Army*, and *ADP 3-0*, which is *Operations*. And they apply to all leaders. The other ADPs from training, leadership, mission command, operations, and others explain the purpose of the Army and how we accomplish our mission.

"What's important for NCOs to understand, is really the applicable doctrine truly does apply to the purpose of the profession of arms. So you have to ask yourself this question, 'How do I embody the NCO Creed?' with confidence being our watchword, without knowing our doctrine

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or how it applies to different situations.

"And another point is we adopt these concepts and lessons learned, if you know multi-domain operations as a concept, all these external threats and challenges; all apply to doctrine. Which is why it changes consistently as we move along and as technology is developed, new threats emerge, or old threats no longer become credible. That's kind of how the Army defines its doctrine, how the Army creates its echelons of doctrine."

Q: How can an NCO understand what specific doctrine is relevant to their current position?

A: "As noncommissioned officers, we know there's a ton of information out there. There's digital websites, there's places you can go if you go to the Army Publishing Directorate website, there's all the ADPs, all the ATPs—everything out there.

"For NCOs, I don't expect a first sergeant to be an expert on *FM 3-0*: *Operations*, which is about 250 pages, because that manual is written for echelons above the brigade level. But I would expect that first sergeant, as the senior trainer of the company, to be intimately familiar with the capstone Army doctrine publication or ADPs, especially *ADP 7-0*, which is training, *ADP 6-22*: *Army Leadership and the Profession*, *ADP 1: The Army*, and others based on what formation they're in.

"Then we get to the specific doctrine. For example, if a first sergeant is in a military intelligence formation, then *ADP 2-0* [*Intelligence*] should be considered required reading. To go further, the applicable down-trace doctrine, tactical, and training publications will describe further the detailed *how to*.

"Of course training publications like MOS-specific [military occupational specialty] training circulars, Soldier training publications, Army regulations, DA PAMs [Department of the Army Pamphlet] – all those external non-doctrinal, yet very important sources of information should also be consulted.

"For us to be truly expert noncommissioned officers, we have to be able to look at all these and truly understand our requirements and the standards."

Q: What are some changes in *ADP 6-22*?

A: "*ADP 6-22* is something we're really proud of. The *Army Leadership and the Profession* was published in August 2019 under a major rewrite. Change one was added in November 2019 to expand on the professional aspects of leadership – so the profession itself.

"You'll see some subtle, but important changes like adding 'Be, Know, and Do' back into leadership doctrinal discussions to align with the attributes and competency requirements in the leadership requirements model.

"The manual is also packed with vignettes of leadership in action, which is extremely important because when you add those practical use cases, it solidifies the ideas of what we need our leaders to do in large-scale combat operations.

"Something else that has changed is addition of humility as character attributes. So those are some of the big changes. The manual itself is full of great principles grounded in history on how to lead others, which is a central role of noncommissioned officers."

Q: Why is it important to understand the logic map of *ADP 6-22: Army Leadership*?

A: "Almost all doctrine has, at the beginning of the manual, a logic chart, which lays out the underpinnings and the framework for the doctrine that you're about to read. So it kind of logically walks you through what's contained in the manual.

"So for example, in *ADP 6-22*, it starts with the profession which is the big idea that we're a trusted vocation of Soldiers and Civilians with expertise and ethics, just to name a few. And then it talks about the profession of arms and then it talks about the Civilian corps.

"As it works its way down, it talks about ethics. And then it talks about leadership, so it has the definition of leadership, and then from there it talks about the leadership requirements model which lays out the attributes and competencies; the 'Be, Know, and Do' of what leaders are required to have in order to lead their organizations. And then at the bottom it talks about outcomes. So again, this is a one page logic map that kind of lays out the framework in *ADP 6-22* for the profession and Army leadership.

"When you walk away from reading it, you ought to be able to look at it and say, 'I understand the basic concept of what this manual is trying to get

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at.' And then you can read in to the manual to find out further details."

Mission Command & Small Unit Leadership

Q: What is required for leaders to empower and decentralize?

A: "Coming from the Mission Command Center of Excellence, we've separated the warfighting function, we call it now, command and control, but the approach to that, as we talk about mission command in and of itself, it's a lot clearer. At one point there was a lot of confusion as to what is mission command. It gets confused between the warfighting function and between the philosophy. But if you look at the principles, it lays it out. So you use two very important words – decentralize and empowerment.

"In order to do that, the principles that are laid out, and again these are available on the logic chart and throughout the manual. We talk about the principles of competence. Competence leads to mutual trust. Mutual trust is enabled by shared understanding.

"When an organization is flat, and people have good communication across the formation it enhances your ability to create mutual trust.

"You have the commander's intent, when it's clear and concise, and you lay out and you know exactly what your commander wants. That leads to mission orders. The use of mission orders to clarify items that you may not necessarily completely understand. That leads to things like mission initiative.

"If you tell me exactly how to do something, I will do it exactly how you tell me. If you give me the commander's intent, which is the purpose, key tasks, and the end-state, then I can use my discipline initiative with my expertise; again, leading back to doctrine as the underpinning and understanding of what is expected. You will get a better result.

"And I think the last part is risk acceptance, and understanding that risk acceptance does not start at the bottom—it starts at the top. Leaders have to accept risk for subordinates. And so when you have risk acceptance, and you have all these other principles of mission command, you can lead a highly functional organization and you create this culture–that just doesn't happen overnight.

"It takes time, but the whole point of having that culture means that you don't have to be micromanaging people. And noncommissioned officers, we don't like to be micromanaged. We like to be given things like the commander's intent, we like to be trusted, we want to be competent, ensure that everybody understands, to take that discipline initiative, understand where we can and can't accept risk appropriate to the situation, and accomplish the mission."

Q: How does Army culture affect how NCOs lead?

A: "The first thing we have to talk about is our Army culture; our beliefs, values, practices. It forms our unit trust, cohesion, it instills discipline, it gives the Army and its units their identity as a whole.

"So as we talk about a culture within the organization, we want to talk about, do we create cultures of competence? Are we competent? Do we know our doctrine? Are we able to have professional conversations with our officer counterparts, our warrant officer counterparts, and our Civilian counterparts that are grounded in doctrine? Do we have that mutual trust? Is there trust that's created back and forth? Again, that kind of goes to that risk acceptance. Are you willing to accept risk for me to go out and do my job and to accomplish my mission, and to lead my Soldiers?

"When we start talking about multi-domain operations and we start talking about being flexible and agile, this is exactly what we're talking about. And large-scale combat operations, we're not going to be able to have all the resources available at the platoon that's in contact at one time. We're going to have to be able to look across and say, 'Okay, the commander has to make decisions on where he's going to put those resources.'

"We have to be able to trust that platoon sergeant, that platoon leader, that squad leader, those team leaders, and those Soldiers to execute their mission and to understand the intent, understand those key tasks, the purpose, and the end-state to be able to accomplish their mission.

"It takes a lot to build that trust. It takes time, and leaders have to be cognizant of that because you can lose it in a second – all the hard work you've done to gain it. Again, it's a culture, it's not something you do. You don't just walk out and say, 'Alright, today we will exercise mission command.' It's something you do day in and day out, whether

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it's working in the motor pool, or it's out in the field, or it's in large-scale combat operations. It's something that your organization has to embrace, and your organization has to understand."

Q: How does cultivating that culture, translate to an NCOs' representation and reflection of themselves?

A: "I think one of the most important things that leaders have to do is to self-evaluate. And they have to be able to take objective looks at their organizations. A lot of times when you're down in the business, doing the work, it gets really hard to see yourself, see your organization, and sometimes you have to pull back.

"Oftentimes, to understand the culture of your organization, it takes that person to stand back and give an honest assessment to themselves. And really to look within themselves and say, 'how can I do this better?'

"As noncommissioned officers, if you're knee-deep in the mud with the Soldiers it's hard to see. Sometimes you have to pull yourself away a little bit unemotionally and take a look at your organization and say, 'Are we doing the best that we can do? Do I trust my Soldiers? Do they trust me? Am I as competent as I can be? Do I understand my doctrine? Do I understand the standards? Do I understand how to train?' All those things go into understanding how you are influencing your organization.

"If you don't do that, and you end up repeating the same mistakes over and over again, you could have a breakdown in trust, you could have a breakdown of competence within your organization. It's looking at yourself, understanding that you have an extremely important role as a noncommissioned officer. You're influencing America's sons and daughters every single day to do things that they wouldn't normally do."

Q: What does a unit with mission command look like?

A: "I think in units with a culture of mission command, you see excellence. You see excellence in everything they do. You see pride. You see buy-in. And I think what's important is that you understand that your Soldiers are human beings and there's a human dimension that comes with everything that we do. It's understanding what motivates each individual Soldier because no two Soldiers are exactly the same.

"It's understanding the Soldiers within your organization, and over time, if you took me a corporal, many years ago and said, 'Okay, you have this organization. Go get after it.' As an inexperienced leader, there were many things I didn't understand about myself. There were many things I didn't understand about what motivated others. With maturity and understanding through our doctrine, with understanding through role modeling and watching others, it created a huge impact on me.

"So for example, I'll ask you a question: Who has had an incompetent leader? I'll ask the second question, of those who said yes, how many of those leaders were trusted? If you look back on your career, I'm sure every one of us can say, 'Hey, I have had a noncommissioned officer that I didn't trust.' And why was that? It could have been an ethical issue. It could have been an issue of whether someone was competent. But at the end of the day, trust trumps all.

"You can do anything with a highly disciplined organization where people in that organization trust each other." ■

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