



By: LTC Joshua Trimble

Did the Army select you to serve as an S6? If you are lucky, you remember your training. If you are extra lucky, the Army even sent you to a refresher S6 course. Chances are, you are not that lucky, and you probably do not remember everything that isn't written down in your little green notebook. It would be impractical to expect you to remember everything. But, if you can remember these three themes and what they imply, you are on your way to success.

Have a PACE not a Prayer. Many are familiar enough with the communications practice of a PACE. It's the abbreviated signal way of having different courses of action - the acronym standing for, "Primary, Alternate, Contingency, Emergency." Each letter

representing the preferred method of communications between you and adjacent units.

There are different PACEs for communicating to higher units, to lower units and to adjacent units because each unit will have different types and quantities of communications equipment.

There can even be different PACEs for operations or phases of operations. Ask an aviation unit S6 how many PACEs there are in an air assault operation (Hint - at least three: 1. Aircraft to Command Posts (CPs), 2. Aircraft to Aircraft, 3. Aircraft to ground forces) and you understand the complexity of developing a PACE. The best PACEs also account for different Warfighting Functions (WfFs). For example, the intel team wants to talk differently than the fires guys who want to send digital fire missions.

Building the PACE requires extensive knowledge of what you have and what the distant end must communicate back with you. It is more than just understanding what the Army has issued to units. It is an understanding of how the mission and operations are intended to play out, what medium of communications is best for that and which systems are maintained (i.e. functioning) and at what quantity. It is rank ordering these systems based upon the optimal performance to increase shared understanding and enable mission command. It is having a valid staff estimate.

To understand how to do that it implies that you understand the capabilities of the systems at your disposal. You need to also understand your unit's level of training on these systems and the ability of you and your team to provide reliable communications. For this to work, you must track all these things in something like a digital battle roster so that you can build those staff estimates that lead to annexes that produce orders that increase shared understanding.

You must practice and validate the PACE, or it becomes a prayer that it will work when comms start to fail (and they will). Test all parts of the PACE at least daily. Don't let the

first time you validate the systems past the “P” be after the primary has failed. Without validating, you are hoping, you are praying, that the PACE will work.

Deliver a Service not a Cable. Don’t be that guy (or gal) that tests network connectivity of SIPR in the S6 tent and then just takes the wire into the Intel section only to imply, “if you want it [connectivity], come and get it.” Be the S6 that confirms connectivity and then delivers it to the different warfighting functions and stays until their services are confirmed. You want to make sure that the Distributed Common Ground System - Army (DCGS-A) machine can ingest reports, that it can publish through the Data Distribution Service (DDS) to Command Post of the Future (CPoF). You want to troubleshoot the network until the fires team can confirm the ability to send fire missions via the Advance Field Artillery Tactical Data System (AFATDS). You want to stay in the TOC until you can see the full motion video on the screens. Interact with the other staff and understand what they need and develop the plan to give them that service.

Such a capability implies that you understand the concept of how these other Mission Command Information Systems (MCIS) work. You are not the one that is controlling airspace, but you understand what the Tactical Airspace Integration System (TAIS) needs to function.

You need to work with your commander to understand his or her priority of services to create the right Quality of Service (QoS) in your network to prioritize the right data packets over those that can wait. Understanding QoS and priorities means you can design a network that not only has SIPR connectivity but also has redundancy and resiliency. This also requires you understand that certain systems function better over Line of Sight (LOS), and you must be able to recommend to satellite controllers on the distant end that we should test to see if increasing power brings a clear signal and less packet loss for more operational systems.

A great S6 understands how the other WfF's integrate and support Mission Command, and how the signal portion of Mission Command enables them. An S6 that doesn't understand operations will only be concerned with reporting SIPR status as green or red on the COMSTAT (COMMunications STATus). A successful S6 that delivers a service to the other WfF will be concerned if the other MCIS are green or red. Be the S6 that understands operations enough that they could fill in as an assistant S3. That kind of knowledge and understanding means you are building a network that is a service that enables mission command.

Who needs to know? It is a simple question to a less simple answer. In everything that you do or plan, ask yourself, "Who needs to know."

Who needs to know that the BCT Main Command Post is about to jump?

Who needs to know that there is a suspected COMSEC compromise?

Who needs to know when there is a new fire mission?

Who needs to know that there is an enemy SITTEMP that the scouts recently provided that is crucial to where the BEB should think about putting obstacles?

Who needs to know that you are operating on the A of your PACE while you troubleshoot the primary?

Who needs to know drives the foundation for your PACE. Because after you ask who needs to know, the follow up is, "How am I going to tell them?" Who needs to know drives how you build your service and network. Who needs to know is why your position exists. The S6 is the facilitator of all of this; helping organizations achieve shared understanding to attain positions of advantages and win.

Being an S6 can be difficult. There are multiple problem sets and multiple (and different) pieces of equipment available to help solve them. There are several different ways to approach those communications issues. I offer that if you approach them with the three themes of: 1. Have a PACE not a Prayer, 2. Deliver a Service and not a Cable, 3. Who needs to know?, then you will be able to capture your requirements, build your plan and enable others. Good luck.

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