



by Michael Everett

Does the Army practice Mission Command? Or Command and Control?

After the 2019 update to [ADP 6-0 Mission Command](#), many young leaders are confused about the terms command and control and mission command.

The bottom line is this: Mission command is the United States Army's approach to command and control (C2). It became clear that doctrine devoid of C2 is not the optimum way to communicate where mission command lies in the spectrum of warfighting. The 2019 version of ADP 6-0 makes it clear that mission command is meant to enable the command of troops and the control of operations. This vital piece of information clarifies the purpose of mission command and how to frame its implementation.

Command can further be defined by art and science. The art of command is rooted in a commander's ability to exercise sound judgment and adapt to the infinite number of scenarios he or she may face. Art is science applied to a situation using experience and intuition. To exercise the art of command, commanders establish a knowledge base rooted

in experiences and a foundational understanding of the science behind the command of troops and the control of operations.

Mission command provides commanders at all levels a license for creativity, adaptation, and freedom of thought that is anchored in the science of C2. The foundation of this science is the mission command principles. Understand these seven principles and consider yourself a certified mission command scientist, prepared to apply the art of mission command effectively. Through this article, my goal is to help you get one step closer to being a “scientific artist” of mission command.

Competence

The Science: “Tactically and technically competent commanders, subordinates, and teams are the basis of effective mission command. An organization’s ability to operate using mission command relates directly to the competence of its Soldiers.” (ADP 6-0, 1-27)

The Art: The term “competence” is abused. Everyone wants a competent unit, competent teams, and competent Soldiers, but few commanders want to do the work to get competence.

Step one is understanding the standard. Step two is informing the Soldier or team of the standard. And step three is accurately evaluating the Soldier or team to subjectively determine if they have met the standard.

Think about what you believe defines competence. What do you consider a competent Soldier? Leader? You are likely not far off from what the doctrine is trying to tell us. A competent Soldier is one that knows what his or her duties are and how to meet the end state that is expected.

So how do you get there? That is where your responsibility as a commander comes into play. A commander outlines the expectations and requirements of his or her Soldiers. An initial counseling is the ideal way to communicate your expectations. Additionally, the Training and Evaluation Outline (T&EO) for a given task is the perfect way to assess whether or not a subordinate is meeting the Army standard.

Remember, the doctrine tells us what the end state is, but it is the commander’s job to draw the road map and apply the art to the science. Understand the standard, tell your people what the standard is, and evaluate their performance to determine if they have met the standard. The tools are there. It is the commander that brings them all together to make a

true determination of the unit's competence.

Mutual Trust

The Science: "Mutual trust is shared confidence between commanders, subordinates, and partners that they can be relied on and are competent in performing their assigned tasks." (ADP 6-0, 1-30)

The Art: Trust can be a one-way street. Never forget that.

To establish mutual trust a commander must first defeat the narrative that commanders (and officers, in general) are driven by self-interest. Do not allow this myth to derail your intentions in establishing a mutual, genuine relationship with your Soldiers. You must become one of their "good commanders" that "didn't care about the man" and "stuck up for us." To do this you have to be a good commander, not care about the man, and stick up for your people. You have to be genuine, caring for your people and their wellbeing. To caveat, do not try to fake it, because they will see right through it.

Once you defeat the stereotypes, you can work on establishing a deep, enduring trust between you and your people. It is your job, as the commander, to ensure your people are trained and equipped for the mission they are expected to execute. Give a task or mission to your people and trust that they have been prepared and equipped to meet the challenge. If a task does not risk life, limb, or eyesight, allow your junior leaders to fail. The lessons that are gained from experience and failure are far more valuable than those learned through coaching and counseling. If your people fail, pick them up, dust them off and extract every ounce of knowledge from their experience.

Shared Understanding

The Science: "Shared understanding of the situation, along with the flow of information to the lowest possible level, forms the basis for unity of effort and subordinates' initiative. Effective decentralized execution is not possible without shared understanding" (ADP 6-0, 1-36)

The Art: The Profession of Arms requires leaders to collect their thoughts rapidly and succinctly under pressure and communicate them to their subordinates. As a company commander, you will rise and fall based on your ability to effectively communicate the right thing, at the right time, to the right people. You will be convinced that you have shared the appropriate information with the right leaders in your organization, only to find out that

entire sections of your company lack shared understanding of a mission or a situation that is critical to the team.

Trust, but verify. This is how you find out if your guidance is making it to the lowest level. Do not be afraid to ask your junior enlisted Soldiers if they are aware of a change in the schedule or a key task for an upcoming mission. It is crucial to leave your office, walk around, and diagnose your communication apparatus.

Additionally, you will need to make some hard decisions in command. Some decisions will not be popular, but necessary. When you make these decisions, be sure to explain the “why,” and if you choose to do this with your senior leaders (i.e., platoon leaders and platoon sergeants), ensure that the message is delivered to the rest of your command.

Finally, shared understanding will allow your people to make their own decisions, without your direct oversight. If they understand your previous decisions, your philosophy, your guidance, and the unit’s mission, they will possess the shared understanding required to meet any mission.

Commander’s Intent

The Science: “The commander’s intent is a clear and concise expression of the purpose of the operation and the desired military end state that supports mission command, provides focus to the staff, and helps subordinate and supporting commanders act to achieve the commander’s desired results without further orders, even when the operation does not unfold as planned” (ADP 6-0, 1-45)

The Art: Company grade officers understand commander’s intent as the opening information provided in the execution paragraph of an Operations Order (OPORD). It provides a commander’s purpose, key tasks, and end state. The information provided in the commander’s intent should be brief enough that it fits on five to six lines but defined to the point where your team is able to execute within your intent.

Ideally, you would always have time to think, write, and disseminate your intent for every operation or task. This is unlikely. [An Army leader](#) “provides purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization” (ADP 6-22, Ch. 1). Commander’s intent is your vehicle to provide purpose and direction in order to motivate your subordinates to operate decentralized. Commanding troops and controlling operations can be an overwhelming task at the company level, when you lack the staff that other levels of command possess. Therefore, as a company commander, you need to trust more and

control less. How? Leverage your commander's intent.

Mission Orders

The Science: "Mission orders are directives that emphasize to subordinates the results to be attained, not how they are to achieve them." (ADP 6-0, 1-53)

The Art: The United States Army is predicated on creativity, autonomy, and trust. The mission order is foundational to the culture of our Army. It is intended to lay out the situation and the expectation or end state for execution. Whether it is an OPORD, Fragmentary Order (FRAGORD), or Warning Order (WARNORD), the intent of a mission order is to tell your people what needs to be done, what right looks like, and what you need to know to make it happen. It is not intended to be a road map or a recipe for mission success.

Autonomy, creativity, and adaptation are the secret ingredients that have made our Army the most successful professional Army in the world. Although we celebrate our autonomy at the lowest levels, we do not exercise this philosophy without a foundational framework. As a company commander, your mission orders are your most powerful tool. They enable you to exercise all the other mission command principles, and effectively lead your team.

Many company commanders lose sight of the importance of the written order, delivered verbally. There seems to be a gap at the company command level, where leaders determine that they can "get away with" not conducting a formal OPORD brief. Do not fall into this trap. You owe it to your team to provide the framework and situational understanding to operate without direct oversight. If you find that no one is holding you accountable for a formal brief prior to a company-level training event, have the self-discipline to do one anyway. Not because you must, or you should, but because it is your inherent responsibility to your Soldiers.

Disciplined Initiative

The Science: "Simply put, disciplined initiative is when subordinates have the discipline to follow their orders and adhere to the plan until they realize their orders and the plan are no longer suitable for the situation in which they find themselves." (ADP 6-0, 1-59)

The Art: The plan never survives first contact. How do commanders ensure that they are positioned to handle the unknown, or unforeseen circumstances that arise? As the commander, you instill disciplined initiative in your team. Initiative is the byproduct of

exercising sound leadership through all other mission command principles. Your ability to instill a proactive mindset in your people depends on your ability to loosen your need for control, while being comfortable with your team making decisions.

Disciplined initiative is predicated on trust. Trust is built through training and repetition. As you guide your team through the training calendar, you should start to feel more and more comfortable allowing them to operate with less direction. If you reach this level of performance, you will not wake up at night stressed about the things that could negatively impact the plan. Your goal is to get to the point where you know that your people understand your guidance and intent, operate within it, and can freely diverge from the plan once it is no longer valid.

Risk Acceptance

The Science: “Commanders analyze risk in collaboration with subordinates to help determine what level of risk exists and how to mitigate it.” (ADP 6-0, 1-66)

The Art: Risk is a science. Risk mitigation is an art. As a company commander you will assume risks on a regular basis. The key to staying one step ahead of a safety incident is to be deliberate in your risk assessments. Enter the Army’s Deliberate Risk Assessment (DRA) form. It just so happens that it is required for all training events from individual to collective level. Avoid cookie cutter DRAs or recycling last year’s DRA. These forms are a great place to start, but I have found that sitting down with the leaders in the company to deliberately think through the risk factors at the start, middle, and end of a training event, produces the most useful document. Yes, it takes significant energy. No, there is not a shortcut.

If you still find it difficult to commit to true, deliberate, risk assessment, think of it like this: if X happens because of Y, then what can I say I did to prevent it? Sometimes accidents happen, regardless of the mitigation implemented. When you are in the life and death business, you need to be much more in tune with the level of risk, and how to mitigate it to a level that is acceptable, in concert with the potential outcome.

All this said, do not avoid risk. This principle is called risk acceptance, not risk avoidance (or “accept prudent risk,” as it used to be called in doctrine). Coming to terms with the inherent responsibility of a company commander for risk acceptance and risk management is the most important step. You cannot take the guidon and convince yourself that you will avoid all risks. This approach will create far more risk within your organization, because you will not be able to adequately train your team.

You will accept a certain level of risk every day. Understand your end state, know where your risks are, and do your best to eliminate as much risk as possible, while still meeting your end state.

In conclusion, successful company command strongly depends on your ability to master the mission command principles. They are interdependent and require regular reflection to monitor appropriate application. These seven principles are your playbook to Army leadership. Apply them consciously and consistently and you will be the leader that our Soldiers deserve. As a byproduct, you will be an outstanding commander.

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