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ADAPTING C2 TO THE 21st CENTURY

Mission Command needs the Adaptive Stance

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Abstract

Mission command is a command approach which expects and makes use of the initiative, intelligence and adaptivity of those commanded. A lot of attention has been paid to how commanders should exercise mission command, and to a lesser degree, to when it should be exercised. This paper argues that it is equally important to consider *how* it should be received and implemented, and presents the concept of taking an Adaptive Stance as the essential complement that makes mission command work as intended.

We will describe what we believe are the essential elements of an Adaptive Stance, and discuss their implications for organisational policy, doctrine, training and the cultures of defence forces. There are also implications for information collection and dissemination policies and the systems that enable and support them.

Extension of the notion of an Adaptive Stance beyond the individual to teams and enterprises has further consequences for policy, doctrine and structure, and significant potential benefits for enterprise and C2 agility.

Partial Paper Outline

Describe Mission Command, and how and when practiced.

Discuss problems of implementation of Mission Command.

Introduce Adaptive Stance as the 'missing complement' of Mission Command, and discuss how it addresses the problems of implementation,

Demonstrate that:

1. the Adaptive Stance embodies the military ideals of initiative, flexibility, resilience, integrity, mental toughness, cool-headedness, objectivity etc
2. the Adaptive Stance is empowered by Mission Command and squashed by directive control
3. Mission Command is enabled by Adaptive Stance and disabled by its absence (a stance of waiting to be told what to do, following orders without question, assuming others know what they're doing, not taking responsibility etc)

The Adaptive Stance refers to an intellectual stance to be adopted by individuals throughout a defence force, and includes the following components:

- resistance to the urge for closure and certainty,

- not being seduced by one's own ideas
- appreciating that it is much more important to be prepared to be wrong in order to learn, than to always be right (and therefore either or both risk-averse or in denial)
- 'decriminalising' others being wrong, making it ok for others to acknowledge when they make mistakes or are proved wrong

Illustrate this with discussing the learning opportunities in each box of the following matrix, especially the missed learning opportunities when people are afraid to admit mistakes:

Decision or Action Outcome	Unacceptably "Wrong"	Acceptably "Wrong"	Right
Catastrophic	Sanctions or Punitive measures	Learn about the boundaries of what is/isnt acceptable	Learn about what 'right' should be for decisions and actions. Seek to improve decision process and decision support.
Wrong	Sanctions or Punitive measures	Corrective training.	Review boundaries between "wrong" and "right" actions and decisions. Seek to improve decision process and decision support. Learn about the complex dynamics leading to outcome.
Right	Review how 'unacceptable' is defined. Sanctions or punitive measures.	"near misses" Learn about tolerances and robustness of processes. Learn about the complex dynamics leading to outcome.	Confirm what was already known or guessed

The shaded boxes are hopefully very rarely visited. Most events will fall in the other four boxes and there are significant learning opportunities in each of them except for the bottom right box when both the action/decision and the outcome are 'right' or as expected. Contrast the failure tolerances of the civil aviation domain (the only sin is not reporting a near miss) and the medical field (the only sin is admitting a mistake since then you will be sued and your medical insurance will be invalidated) and the corresponding safety record in the two domains (civil aviation – high; medical – low).

Argue that defence needs to move away from the medical model and towards the civil aviation model of failure tolerance and learning.

In addition, the Adaptive Stance also requires:

- accurate persistent awareness of what are the assumptions and hypotheses in one's mental models and constructs that are used for interpreting observations, and for generating and assessing action options

- ability to simultaneously maintain alternate versions of above
- continuously seeking ways to test assumptions and being prepared to revise them as a result
- whenever a prediction is made, being willing to observe the real outcome when it transpires and to objectively assess what can be learned in order to improve future predictions and to gain a more accurate sense of the quality of one's predictive ability
- realising that every decision or action taken contains an implicit prediction, making those predictions explicit and ensuring that the means are put in place to observe what actually happens, to compare that to the predictions, and to use that comparison to learn and develop better mental models of the situation
- extending the notion of 'every soldier is a sensor' to have every soldier be:
 - aware of the current shared understanding, or 'model', of the complex causal and influence networks (as opposed to simple causal chains) operating in the theatre,
 - aware of the critical uncertainties, conjectures and hypotheses in that understanding or model ('critical' meaning that it impacts on significant decisions to be made), and
 - therefore alert to observing evidence and indications in the course of their daily operations, that would reinforce or contradict any aspect of that shared understanding or model, and
 - assiduous about reporting such observations through appropriate means (yet to be determined, but there is evidence that US soldiers in Iraq have been doing something like this informally through a chat facility - not necessarily the best or safest way!) so that the shared understanding / 'model' can rapidly evolve to better reflect the real complex dynamics of the situation, by leveraging from the individual learnings and observations of every soldier.

The theses are that

- the Adaptive Stance is a necessary complement to Mission Command - neither will work without the other,
- it needs to be adopted throughout the force and especially at upper echelons first and then downwards - in order to enable subordinates to adopt it too,
- it is trainable (which has implications for how we do our training and development) given certain aptitudes and conditions, which in turn
- has implications for recruitment and selection.
- It also has implications for information collection, processing and dissemination policies and priorities, and
- For how supporting systems are designed and implemented.

Discuss how these theses might be experimented with – to support the necessary design process and to test the critical assumptions and conjectures.