

DEFINING ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP IN THE CONTEXT  
OF MISSION COMMAND

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MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE  
General Studies

by

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## ABSTRACT

DEFINING ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP IN THE CONTEXT OF MISSION COMMAND, by Major Jeremy M. Holmes, 91 pages.

Today's Army is undergoing significant change, completing its modular transformation and adopting mission command as a war fighting function in an effort to meet the needs of a constantly adapting enemy and uncertain environment. Mission command is the exercise of authority and direction by the commander and the commander's staff to integrate the war fighting functions using the operations process and mission orders to accomplish successful full-spectrum operations. Mission command enables agile and adaptive leaders and organizations to execute disciplined initiative within commander's intent as part of unified action in a complex and ambiguous environment. In the definition of mission command exists the term adaptive leadership. This term is not currently defined in the Army's mission command literature or anywhere else in Army literature. Soldiers able to master mission command must also have a strong understanding of what adaptive leadership is in the context of mission command. This paper defines adaptive leadership in the context of mission command by drawing from information in the Army mission command, leadership and operations literature, as well as the Army's Starfish Program readings concerning interpersonal relationships, and finally considering contemporary business leadership writings.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACC	Army Capstone Concept
AOC	Army Operating Concept
FM	Field Manual
OCS	Officer Candidate School
OE	Operating Environment
ROTC	Reserve Officer Training Corps
TRADOC	Training and Doctrine Command
US	United States
USMA	United States Military Academy

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

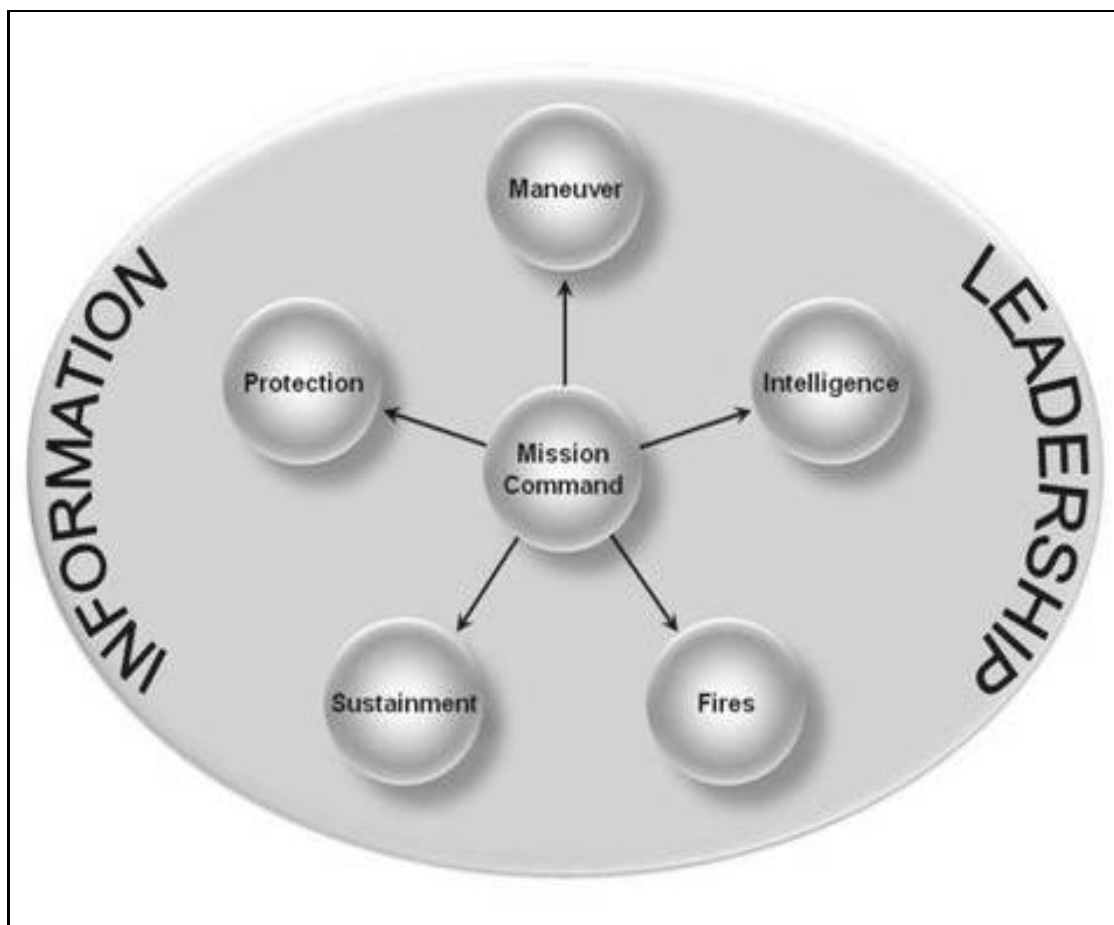
### Background

The United States Army published the TRADOC Pam 525-3-3, *Functional Concept for Mission Command* on October 13, 2010. The pamphlet describes how the Army must reshape its approach to the exercise of authority and direction over its forces. Commanders apply mission command concepts, which enable them to utilize decentralized authority over their forces and succeed in three critical areas of military operations: the contest of wills, strategic engagement and the cyber/electromagnetic contest. The TRADOC Pam 525-3-3 acts as a base for future force development regarding mission command and the mission command warfighting function (US Army 2010b, iii). The pamphlet renders guidance on the application of mission command by focusing on developing agile and adaptive leaders at all echelons while emphasizing the development of unique and innovative solutions to military problems by empowering leaders at the lowest practical level (US Army 2010b, iii). The research question is what is adaptive leadership within the context of mission command?

### Mission Command

First, it is important to understand the evolution of mission command. The concept of mission command has a heritage dating back to the 1980s (U.S. Army 2010, 8). The concept has just recently reached its full potential due to the advancement in battlefield communication, access to information and knowledge, and the decentralized nature of counterinsurgency and stability operations (Dempsey 2011). In 2008 TRADOC

Mission command is an evolved concept. It has been the Army's preferred command since the 1980s, and in 2008, was integrated into the Army's combat operations. The concept of mission command and its definition have evolved to anticipate operational demands, which are detailed in the ACC and AOC and this pamphlet as catalysts for change. The evolved concept of mission command encompasses the Army's philosophy of command aimed at adapting and achieving an advantage in complex and uncertain operating environments, and an integrating function that combines the warfighting functions to accomplish the mission. Commanders use leadership to apply combat power through the warfighting functions (see figure 2-1).



**Figure 2-1. The six warfighting functions**

Figure 1. The Six Warfighting Functions

Source: US Army, TRADOC Pam 525-3-3, *The United States Army Functional Concept for Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010), 8.

Mission command integrates the six warfighting functions in the conduct of full-spectrum operations by enabling commanders, supported by their staffs, to exercise authority and direction, using the art of command and the science of control. Mission command uses mission orders to ensure disciplined initiative within the commander's intent, enabling agile and adaptive commanders, leaders and organizations (US Army 2010b, 9).

The beginnings of mission command for the US Army trace back to the German concept of *Auftragstaktik*, meaning mission-type orders or tactics. According to Pam 525-3-3, *Auftragstaktik* held every commissioned and non-commissioned officer duty bound to do whatever the situation required, as he personally saw it. The broader purpose to be accomplished was the confining mechanism. This system disdained omission and inactivity. The system also allowed for the disobedience of orders if the broader purpose called for it.

The US Army adopted mission orders and mission command into its doctrine in the early 1980s to provide subordinates the freedom to find and employ unique and innovative solutions to mission problems (US Army 2010b, 9). Mission command accounts for the fog and friction of war and promotes the cohesion that bonds individuals and groups in times of conflict. Mission command is broad enough to apply to all levels of war, specific enough for each echelon of command and compliments the Army's warfighting philosophies (US Army 2010b, 9).

The concept of mission command has evolved based on five strategic and operational factors: the broad range of potential missions, increasingly uncertain and complex operating environment, ill-structured situations, replacement of the command

and control warfighting function with mission command, and the establishment of the Mission Command Center of Excellence (US Army 2010b, 9).

According to the mission command pamphlet, the Army must be prepared to fulfill a broad range of missions while remaining ready to conduct full-spectrum operations. Army forces must be prepared to conduct operations in the interests of the US against adversaries employing a broad range of capabilities.

Along with being prepared for a broad range of missions, the operating environment may be just as broad, encompassing uncertainty, complexity, social change and a wide range of clever, adaptive and networked adversaries (US Army 2010b, 10). Army forces must be able to adapt their execution to meet this threat in the face of reduced decision-making time, increased ambiguity and complexity, while operating in degraded conditions (US Army 2010b, 10). This proves to be a non-permissive environment for centralized decision making. Army leaders will have to use mission command to prevail in the three dimensions of military operations: the contest of wills, strategic engagement and the cyber/electromagnetic contest (US Army 2010b, 10).

The Army must also be prepared to operate in ill-structured mission situations, whose operational variables must be analyzed and understood to frame problems and develop approaches to solving these problems. Soldiers must apply the design methodology in these environments in order to understand the problems associated with them (US Army 2010b, 12).

### Scope

This paper will analyze the concept of mission command for components of the definition of adaptive leadership, within the mission command context, in order to piece

together a coherent meaning. The frame of reference is mission command as described in the Army TRADOC Pam 525-3-3, *The Functional Concept for Mission Command*. The research will also analyze other Army literature and literature outside of the Army to uncover meaning for the term adaptive leadership. The research does not involve a human study or interviews. The reach of analysis will focus within the last twenty years and will only cover the US Army and US businesses. The research and analysis will not cover foreign militaries or delve into detailed history of mission command. It will include historical examples of mission command from the American Civil War.

### Importance

The Army must have a definition for adaptive leadership within the context of mission command, which it currently lacks. In explaining and discussing mission command, the Army discusses adaptability and adaptive leaders. However, the Army does not define adaptive leadership. The Army must accurately and precisely define adaptive leadership in order to accurately and precisely describe how leaders should behave within the framework of mission command.

Agile and adaptive leaders must carry out the Army's functional concept of mission command. The idea that agile and adaptive leaders are key to mission command is important. However, the functional concept for mission command fails to define what adaptive leadership is. In fact, no-where in current Army doctrine or literature exists a definition for adaptive leadership. Although one might be able to draw logical conclusions as to what adaptive leadership is, every soldier's idea might be slightly different. Since the idea of doctrine is to form a standard platform from which to deviate,

there must exist a common definition for adaptive leadership in the context of mission command.

A key aspect of adaptive leadership with respect to mission command is mutual trust. The Army will need to analyze, review and in some cases change every aspect of current operations to ensure an environment of mutual trust and prudent risk taking exists in order for mission command to reach its full potential. The Army will need to focus and in some cases re-focus on its leaders and their qualities of agile and adaptive leadership. The Army must question what it does and how it operates in different settings to ensure this desired environment exists.

### Key Terms

This section includes key terms used in this research and throughout this paper. The reader should use these definitions of these terms versus his own in order to ensure consistency and understanding.

Adapt: 1. to make suitable to the requirements or conditions; adjust or modify fittingly. 2. To adjust one's self to different conditions or environments. To adapt easily to all circumstances (Random House Dictionary 2011).

Decentralized Operation: A manner of conducting military operations which enables subordinates to act aggressively and independently with disciplined initiative to develop the situation; seize, retain, and exploit the initiative; and cope with uncertainty to accomplish the mission within the commander's intent (US Army 2010b, 49).

Leadership: The process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation, while operating to accomplish the mission and improve the organization (US Army 2006, 1-2).



Mission Command: The exercise of authority and direction by the commander and the commander's staff to integrate the war fighting functions using the operations process and mission orders to accomplish successful full-spectrum operations. Mission command enables agile and adaptive leaders and organizations to execute disciplined initiative within commander's intent as part of unified action in a complex and ambiguous environment (US Army 2010b, 59).

Mission Orders: A technique for developing orders that emphasizes to subordinates the results to be attained, not how they are to achieve them. It provides maximum freedom of action in determining how to best accomplish assigned missions (US Army 2011a, Glossary-10).

Operational Adaptability: The ability to shape conditions and respond effectively to a changing operational environment with appropriate, flexible, and timely actions (US Army 2011a, Glossary-11).

Starfish concept: The concept of an organization of people, built on trust and operating in a decentralized manner to achieve a common goal. The members collaborate in a decentralized environment without a direct hierarchy of command and control. These decentralized organizations rely on groups of people taking the initiative and making decisions. Everybody in the organization has access to information and they do not rely on leaders to direct them. Observers consider these decentralized organizations “flat,” that is, no dominant leader exists and the organization’s power and initiative resides at the edge with the “doers” (definition derived from *The Starfish and the Spider*) (Brafman 2006).

## Assumptions

Assumption #1: The Army is undergoing a cultural shift by executing the mission command concept as outlined in TRADOC Pam 525-3-3. The Army does not currently function as envisioned in TRADOC Pam 525-3-3.

Assumption #2: The transformation of Army culture to one of accepting adaptive leadership and mission command, as the norm will take time. The amount of time required may be years.

Three additional assumptions from the TRADOC Pam 525-3-3 are also essential in this paper and will be further explored.

Assumption #3: The Army will be able to assess the leader competencies that enable an agile and adaptive force (US Army 2010b, 6). This assumption has two key aspects: the ability to assess individual leader qualities of agility and adaptability and the leader's effect on small unit agility and adaptability. In order for the Army to assess adaptive leaders, the Army must know what an adaptive leader is and the qualities of adaptive leadership.

Assumption #4: The Army will be able to recruit, develop, track and retain sufficient numbers of leaders with such competencies. All of the components of this assumption require particular attention and are critical for the Army to be an adaptive force and transform into the type of force envisioned in the *Army Capstone Concept* and *Army Operating Concept*.

The Army's ability to recruit agile and adaptive leaders will be key. The ability to recruit adaptive leaders implies the Army's recruiting system can identify agile and adaptive leadership qualities according to TRADOC Pam 525-3-3 during screening for

the United States Military Academy (USMA), Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) interviews and Officer Candidate School (OCS) selection.

The Army's ability to develop agile and adaptive leaders will depend upon Army leaders and organizations adopting and applying the true concepts of mission command and adaptive leadership as well as fostering an environment where this type of leadership exists. This could prove to be a challenge in environments and organizations where clear direction or orders have existed in the past.

The Army's ability to track agile and adaptive leaders will prove a challenge for senior Army leaders and the Army organization as a whole. Many of the qualities of agile and adaptive leadership are intangible and difficult to measure at best. Leaders again can track agile and adaptive leadership development in 360 reviews and performance reports. Much of the performance will remain subjective to senior leaders as well as the organization making these behaviors difficult to quantify.

The Army's ability to retain agile and adaptive leaders will rest with the overall retention strategy of the Army. The Army must ensure the climate supports agile and adaptive leadership if these are indeed the officer qualities of value. The Army must foster, encourage and support a climate where individual initiative exists and reward officers and units who can achieve a commander's desired end state with general guidance along, absent of specific orders or direction.

Assumption #5: The future force must inculcate a climate of mutual trust and prudent risk-taking.

The Army's ability to inculcate a climate of mutual trust and prudent risk-taking will need to exist in almost every facet of Army life not only deployed, but in garrison.

The Army must analyze almost every aspect of operation to ensure an environment of trust and prudent risk-taking exists.

### Limitations

The definition of adaptive leadership as it applies to mission command is based on Army Publications along with adaptive leadership literature of the US business world. The intent of the research is to find a definition of adaptive leadership to be used in the US Army mission command concept. Wider uses for the definition may prove useful, but that is not the explicit goal or intent of this research.

Only a small amount of Army literature specifically written on adaptive leadership exists and most of this literature was written in the last few years. As a consequence, the research will focus on the near present time. Some Army literature relevant to mission command emerged or became available during this research. For example, new versions of the FM 6-0, *Mission Command* became available, incorporating many ideas of the Army Pamphlet 525-3-3. The Army also released Field Manuals 3-0, *Operations* and 5-0, *The Operations Process* during this research that incorporate mission command and design concepts.

### Delimitations

This study will focus on Army doctrine regarding mission command and adaptive leadership with Starfish Program and business leadership literature to support derived concepts. It does not include interviews, surveys or statistical analysis.

### Pronoun Disclaimer

In some cases, this paper will use the pronoun ~~he~~” for such words as ~~leader~~” or ~~commander~~” for consistency. The use of the word ~~he~~” is not intended to reflect gender discrimination. In all cases, the reader can substitute the word ~~she~~” with no meaning lost to the context.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

The literature considered for this paper consists of three categories: US Army doctrine and concepts, Starfish readings, and social science articles focused on adaptive leadership. The primary piece of literature for this subject is the TRADOC Pam 525-3-3, *Functional Concept for Mission Command*. Supporting documentation in the same vein, describing mission command is the TRADOC Pam 525-3-0, *The United States Army Capstone Concept* and the TRADOC Pam 525-3-1, *The United States Army Operating Concept*. The United States Army Field Manual 6-22, *Leadership*, provides the Army's basic doctrine for leadership. General Martin E. Dempsey's five articles entitled "Campaign of Learning" provide his thoughts on where the Army is headed with regards to operations and preparing for those operations and give further insight into preparing for adaptive leadership and mission command.

#### US Army Doctrine

The Army Capstone Concept describes the need for operational adaptability and the requirement for leaders to operate collaboratively in an ever-changing environment. The publication also describes decentralized operations, based on mission orders, in an uncertain environment.

The Army Operating Concept describes how future Army forces conduct operations as part of the joint force to deter conflict, prevail in war and succeed in a wide range of contingencies in the future operational environment.

The Army Field Manual 6-22 is the keystone leadership manual for the United States Army, establishing leadership doctrine: the fundamental principles by which Army leaders influence and inspire their people to accomplish missions and care for their people during the realities of persistent conflict (US Army 2006, vii). This field manual applies to officers, noncommissioned officers and enlisted Soldiers of all Army components and Army civilians. The field manual defines leadership, its roles and requirements, and how to develop leadership within the Army (US Army 2006, vii). It also incorporates the leadership qualities of self-awareness and adaptability and describes their critical impact on acquiring additional knowledge and improving in the core leader competencies while operating in a dynamic operational environment (US Army 2006, vii).

General Martin Dempsey's "Campaign of Learning" articles are a five-part piece that highlights initiatives that support the Army's campaign of learning (General Dempsey was the commanding general, US Army Training and Doctrine Command when he wrote the articles and as of April 2011, the Chief of Staff of the Army). The goal of the articles is to generate an Army-wide dialogue regarding emerging concepts in order to establish a broader understanding of Army adaptation as an institutional imperative in an era of persistent conflict (Dempsey 2010b, 34-35). The articles' subjects include: Driving Change Through Concepts, Leader Development, Mission Command, How to Fight at Echelon and Series Summary. All to varying degrees give Gen Dempsey's vision of how to prepare for and execute Army adaptation dealing with mission command

## Starfish Readings

The Starfish Readings are so named for the required readings in the Army's ILE Starfish Program. This literature outside of Army production includes *The Starfish and the Spider*, which analyzes the power of small groups of people and how decentralized, leaderless organizations, working in a trust-based environment can achieve success. The success and profit that these groups reach is in many cases comparable or exceeds that of their centralized, hierarchal-based peer organizations. Starfish organizations have five main characteristics or "legs" explained below.

The first characteristic is the idea of a circle of people. A Starfish organization has circles or is made up of small groups of people with a singularity of purpose or goal. These people have established rules or "norms" to keep the group and each other in check as they proceed toward their goals. The most important characteristic of the group is that its members are motivated to contribute the best of their abilities.

The second characteristic of Starfish organizations is that they have a catalyst. The catalyst gets a decentralized organization going and then cedes power to its members (Brafman 2006, 62). The catalyst inspires action from the members of the group, but not necessarily focus or direct leadership.

The third characteristic of Starfish organizations is that they have an ideology. The ideology of the group acts as the glue that holds the decentralized organizations together (Brafman 2006, 64). Part of this ideology fuels a desire to create a better product and respect contributions by the members of the group.

The fourth characteristic of Starfish organizations is that there is a preexisting network available. The group has already worked together in circles and shares a



common ideology. These decentralized networks provide circles and an empowered membership and normally have a higher tolerance for innovation (Brafman 2006, 66).

The fifth characteristic of a Starfish organization is that it has a champion. The champion is a believer in the group's ideology. The champion has the zeal and the drive to push the group to success and is the implementer. The champion promotes the new idea relentlessly (Brafman 2006, 66). Champions can reach and influence every member in the group and are inherently hyperactive (Brafman 2006, 68).

Another piece of literature is the book *Click*. This book's author, Ori Brafman, examines what makes people "click" with certain people. The author explores why people can click with certain people and what situations or circumstances these people require in order to click. The author discusses "click" accelerators that include: vulnerability, proximity, resonance, similarity and a safe place. The author also describes people as being able to click as "high self-monitors" or people who can modulate emotional expression, quickly incorporate norms of behavior and manage others' perceptions (Brafman 2006, 96). The author describes the outcome of clicking as reaching a "magical state," having quick set intimacy and attaining personal elevation.

The book *Primal Leadership* describes the importance of emotional intelligence in leaders. Primal leaders elevate the human spirit and make our societies and organizations' lives better (Goleman et al. 2002). Primal leaders help their organizations succeed by using their emotional intelligence to create an atmosphere in which the organizations' members will want to do and be their best (Goleman et al. 2002). The authors explain the connections between outstanding leaders and their emotional intelligence.

The authors describe three main points to emotional leadership. First, outstanding leaders move the people in their organizations (Goleman, et al. 2002). Second, people can develop the qualities of emotional leadership and use them for the betterment of their organization. Third, leaders in all facets within the organization can produce resonant teams and cultures that produce emotional intelligence and bring out the best in others in the organization (Goleman, et al. 2002).

Another important work supporting the idea of this research question is the book *People Skills*, which describes the interactions between people. It offers ways to view peoples' perspectives, while providing methods for people to listen, be heard and understood (Bolton 1979). Essentially, this book is a communication-skills handbook in which the author provides techniques to eliminate barriers to communication. The author describes twelve most common barriers to communication and provides ways to overcome them.

Finally, a wealth of knowledge concerning adaptive leadership exists in scientific journal, reports and essays. Most of these works describe adaptive leadership in the private business arena and other organizations outside the US Army. These works describe how leaders adapt to their co-workers or others in their organization, the environment the leaders exist and operate in and the changing goals of their organization.

### Social Science Literature

In *The Challenge of Adaptive Leadership*, Omar Khan discusses the challenge and the importance that organizational leaders face regarding personal adaptation. Khan goes on to say leaders require two additional aptitudes. First, leaders need courage as they make themselves more transparent and vulnerable to scrutiny. Second, leaders must avoid

relapses into symptomatic remedies including: shifting around the organizational chart, reassigning people, introducing a new technology or launching a new marketing drive. Khan uses two vignettes of business leaders who had to become more transparent and seek feedback from their subordinates in order to improve their performance as leaders and, in turn, enable their subordinates' performance, ultimately bettering the company. This article relates to the topic of adaptive leadership and mission command because it discusses the importance of personal adaptation in order to be a better leader for your subordinates. The article also touches on concepts of the desires of subordinates with regard to mission accomplishment and success, relating to the idea of mission command.

Another writing from the realm of private business is *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* by Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky. The authors break down leadership challenges into two categories: technical (environment) challenges and adaptive (or people) challenges. The book further divides the subject into three sections: diagnosing your organization and the nature of the challenge you face, how to mobilize the system and finally, seeing how you, yourself are part of the system. Like the previous article, the authors analyze how leaders can look at themselves in the context of their work environment and see how their actions are working or not working with regarding to managing people and the success of the company. Also, the book deals with how leaders can change their work or business system to meet the changes of the business or organizational environment. Once again, this book touches on the subjects of how to lead an organization and how to adapt with the changes. The book is very relevant as many parallels can be drawn from successful business adaptable leadership to mission command and how leadership is defined with in its context.

Another book from the business leadership realm is Morten T. Hansen's *Collaboration*. In it, Hansen explains that collaboration can be a problem in an organization when it is un-focused. He discusses the pitfall that business leaders experience when they push collaboration and cross-talk amongst the organization's teams without a shared end-state or goals in mind. Hansen calls this focus "disciplined collaboration." The book details examples of when to collaborate and when not to collaborate. Some of the collaboration traps that Hansen outlines include: the "not invented here" syndrome, hoarding, search problems and transfer issues. Hansen includes three strategies which promote the proper degree of collaboration which include: reducing motivational barriers and getting buy-in towards a common goal, encouraging what he calls, "F-Shaped Management" which rewards the proper level of vertical and horizontal achievement, and how to create nimble networks across the organization to achieve goals. The book has relevance in adaptive leadership regarding mission command by giving leaders insight on how people in their organization can carry out mission orders and when to rely on more direct guidance regarding the changing environment when the situation permits.

### Trends and Patterns

Both business organizations and the Army are tending to emphasize the importance of adaptive leadership in their operations. Literature inside and outside of the US Army describes the greater importance of paying attention to the variables surrounding leaders. These readings diverge from the traditional "top-down" approach to leadership within organizations based on several factors external to a leader's inherent leadership philosophy. Most of this divergence stems from the fact that the work force or

the people inside a leader's organization are better educated and better informed than in the past. Current literature supports these trends. Current Army leadership doctrine, along with the mission command concept, draw on adaptive leadership ideas from the business world and vice versa. Similar to the Army adjusting its doctrine to counter insurgencies, asymmetric and unknown threats in a changing environment, the business community continues to adjust with technological advances to survive and thrive in an uncertain economic future.

Whether it is Army doctrine, Starfish readings or business examples, common themes emerge. Organizations and businesses exist to accomplish things: succeed at the mission, sell products, make money etc. Leaders run these businesses and organizations. Businesses and organizations are made up of different people from different backgrounds. These businesses and organizations operate in constantly changing environments. In order for these businesses and organizations to be successful, leaders must adapt themselves to their people and their approach and organization to the ever-changing environment in order to be successful.

#### Contribution of this Study

The concept of adaptive leadership is paramount to the success of mission command. Due to adaptive leadership's importance, it is equally important to have a descriptive, accurate definition within the framework of mission command. This study will provide a way ahead as the Army uses the concept of mission command in an uncertain and ever changing environment. The TRADOC Mission Command Center of Excellence could utilize findings from this research to further refine, develop, and teach how mission command is applied in an operational environment. Commanders in the

field and at home can use this research to further facilitate mission command when given mission orders from higher authority. Leaders at all levels of the Army can use this research as a “how to” when translating orders to Soldiers at the operational and tactical arenas. Finally, leaders in all services can use concepts in this paper as a strategy when communicating to other services in a joint and international environment with the goal of mission accomplishment.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

This chapter will lay out the research methodology, providing a roadmap in uncovering a definition for adaptive leadership in the context of mission command.

#### Purpose of Research

The US Army's concept of mission command requires adaptive leadership from those involved. Although the Army discusses adaptive leadership as a necessary part of mission command, it does not clearly define what it means to be an adaptive leader. To answer the research question proposed in chapter 1, this study draws on key components of adaptive leadership mentioned in the Army's mission command pamphlet and ties these components with adaptive leadership principles in other Army leadership literature. This study also uses examples of adaptive leadership from the Starfish readings and business leadership. Finally, this study proposes a definition for adaptive leadership within the context of mission command based on these findings.

#### Organization

First, this chapter describes the steps taken to obtain relevant information pertaining to mission command and adaptive leadership. Next, this chapter presents research criteria to include the criteria's development, the feasibility of the research method, a selection of relevant case studies and the credibility of sources. Then, this chapter describes the research methodology applied and closes with a discussion of strengths and weaknesses of this approach.

### Information Obtainment Method

Limited to Army doctrine, field manuals, and pamphlets, this study made use of the Army electronic publications site. The U.S. Army Combined Arms Research Library at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas provided access to the Starfish readings as part of the Command and General Staff College's Starfish Program, as well as pertinent business leadership literature. Web-based research provided supplementary information regarding contemporary writings on mission command and adaptive leadership both in and out of the U.S. Army.

### Criteria Development

Initial research examined a wide spectrum of leadership literature ranging from examples produced by the Army to examples produced outside of the Army, including business. Although a wealth of literature on leadership exists, the literature used in this study required specific and direct relevance. Field Manual 6-22, *Army Leadership* became the most relevant piece of Army literature to this study, as it is the keystone leadership manual for the Army, establishing leadership doctrine. The next most relevant items of Army literature as they related to adaptive leadership in mission command, as described in the mission command pamphlet became the Army's *Operations, Operations Process*, and *Mission Command* field manuals. Army Field Manual 3-0, *Operations* is the Army's capstone doctrinal publication, detailing guidance and direction for conducting Army operations. Army Field Manual 5-0, *Operations Process* builds on Field Manual 3-0, *Operations* and focuses on planning, preparing, executing, and assessing operations. Finally, Army Field Manual 6-0, *Mission Command* is the Army's keystone manual for mission command, replacing the Army's legacy term of command and control.



## Research Methodology

Simply put, this research methodology will define adaptive leadership in the context of mission command by drawing from information in Army and non-Army literature in a logical way. The method begins in Army mission command literature, with the TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-3 and the Army Field Manual 6-0 in order to understand mission command and answer the secondary research question: what is mission command? In the aforementioned literature, the term “adaptive leadership” does not appear defined in the glossary and one can only derive meaning from the surrounding text. Next, the research will delve into the Army’s leadership manual for the definition and search for meaning in order to understand adaptability in leadership and answer the other secondary research question: what is adaptive leadership? Once again, no specific definition for adaptive leadership exists in the leadership manual and meaning must be derived from the term’s context in the surrounding ideas and text. Following this step, the research moves next into the Starfish Program readings, since the program was designed to aid in the understanding of, and the transition to, mission command and enlightenment regarding adaptive leadership. The knowledge about adaptive leadership discovered in this step, combined with other non-Army literature to include business leadership writings on the subject will connect previous analysis regarding the areas of mission command and defining adaptive leadership. Finally, the Army’s other main field manuals provide some in-context understanding of the term—the Army Operations and the Operations Process. After this research and analysis, a coherent and concise definition for adaptive leadership in the context of mission command may be produced by combining

the answers from the secondary research questions to answer the primary research question: what is adaptive leadership in the context of mission command?

To summarize the aforementioned process and to answer the primary and secondary questions proposed in chapter 1, the approach of this study is divided into six steps:

1. Understanding Mission Command. This first step will identify and summarize the aspects of mission command where leaders are required to be adaptable in their leadership methods. The Army pamphlet and field manual on mission command are the primary sources for this step.

2. Understanding Adaptability in Leadership. Once aspects of mission command that require leaders to be adaptive in their leadership methods are identified, this next step will identify and summarize the aspects of adaptable leadership from the Army's primary leadership reference, the Army leadership field manual.

3. Understanding Adaptability in Leadership from Starfish Readings. After the first two steps have achieved an understanding of mission command and adaptability in leadership, this next step will identify and summarize the aspects of adaptable leadership from the Starfish Program Readings. This program and its readings were selected by General Dempsey to bridge the understanding gap to mission command and the aspects of Army operation in an uncertain environment.

4. Understanding Adaptability in Leadership Outside of the Army (business and other enterprises). Army leadership doctrine and the Starfish Program readings draw heavily from research and literature accomplished in the academic realm, especially in

regards to business. This step will identify and summarize adaptability in leadership literature left uncovered by the previous steps.

5. Understanding Adaptability in Leadership in Army Operations and the Operations Process. This step will identify and summarize mission command-like aspects and situations where adaptability in leadership is required.

6. Adaptive Leadership in the Context of Mission Command. This final step will combine the results of the previous steps, where aspects of adaptability in leadership and mission command or mission command-like situations were uncovered. The end result of this step will produce a concise definition for adaptive leadership in the context of mission command.

#### Observations and Summary

First, the mission command concept will be examined and distinct and distinguishing characteristics will provide a framework. From this framework, cases where the term adaptive leadership is required will be identified. To ensure validity and reliability, these cases and contexts where adaptive leadership appears will be compared first with the established Army definitions of leadership and adaptability. Next, similarity will be identified. Finally, Starfish and business examples, similar to situations of Army mission command, will be examined and adaptive leadership characteristics will be identified. The identified adaptive leadership characteristics, from the Army manuals, Starfish and business leadership literature will be evaluated and combined to form a working and acceptable definition for adaptive leadership within the context of mission command.

## Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the research methodology for discovering a definition for adaptive leadership within the context of mission command. The following chapter will follow these steps and analyze the information regarding mission command and adaptive leadership examples inside and outside the Army. The analysis will provide sufficient depth and breadth to draw specific conclusions for the definition.

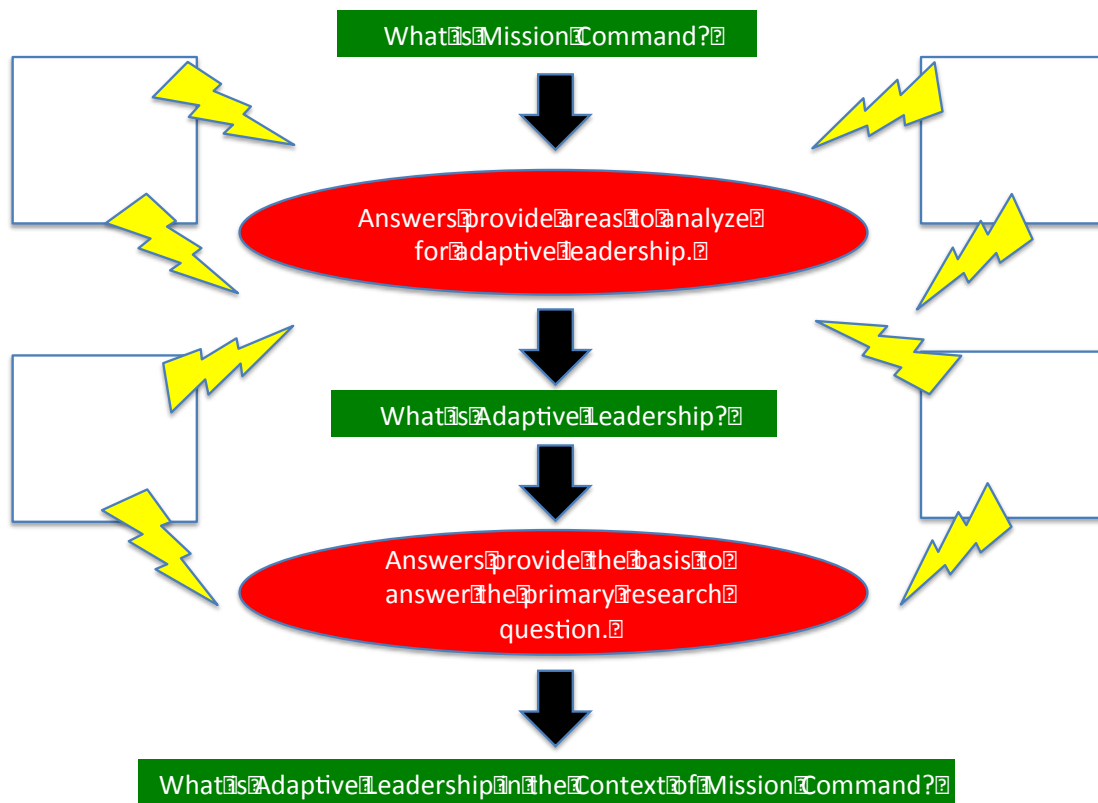


Figure 2. Visual Depiction of the Research Methodology  
*Source:* Created by author.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS

#### Introduction

This chapter will restate the purpose of the research and discuss the organization of the research analysis. Next, the chapter will present findings and answer first the secondary research questions then the primary research question. The chapter will conclude with a definition of adaptive leadership within the mission command context and provide a summary.

#### Purpose of Research

The US Army's concept of mission command requires adaptive leadership from those involved. Although the Army discusses adaptive leadership as a necessary part of mission command, it does not clearly define what it means to be an adaptive leader. To answer the research question proposed in chapter 1, this study draws on key components of adaptive leadership mentioned in the Army's mission command publications (TRADOC Pam 525-3-3 and FM 6-0) and ties these components with adaptive leadership principles in other Army leadership literature. This study also uses examples of adaptive leadership from the Starfish readings and business leadership. Finally, this study proposes a definition for adaptive leadership within the context of mission command based on these findings.

#### Analysis Organization

The analysis in this chapter will follow the research methodology outlined in chapter three. Specifically, the analysis in this chapter will begin with answering the

secondary research question—what is mission command? Understanding mission command will provide insight to the importance or necessity of adaptive leadership. This leads to the next step where the analysis will answer the other secondary research question—what is adaptive leadership? Finally, once mission command and adaptive leadership are both understood, the analysis will lead to the last step, understanding adaptive leadership within the context of mission command.

### Findings

#### Answering Secondary Research Question #2-Understanding Mission Command The Definition of Mission Command

The analysis of mission command begins with understanding its definition as described in FM 6-0. Mission command is “the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander’s intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of full spectrum operations” (US Army 2011c, Glossary-2). It is commander-led and blends the art of command and the science of control to integrate the warfighting functions to accomplish the mission (US Army 2011c, Glossary-2). The subject in this definition is the “exercise of authority and direction.” The actors in the definition are the “commander” and “agile and adaptive leaders.” The method which the commander exercises authority and direction is through “mission orders.” Mission orders “enable disciplined initiative within the commander’s intent.” For further analysis, comparison with the previous definition of mission command provides some contrast.

### Previous Definition of Mission Command

The 2003 definition of mission command is: ~~the~~ “conduct of military operations through decentralized execution based upon mission orders for effective mission accomplishment” (US Army 2003, Glossary-10). Successful mission command results from subordinate leaders at all echelons exercising disciplined initiative within the commander’s intent to accomplish missions (US Army 2003, Glossary-10). It requires an environment of trust and mutual understanding (US Army 2003, Glossary-10). In this definition, the subject is ~~the~~ “conduct of military operations.” The method is ~~decentralized~~ “execution based upon mission orders.”

### Mission Command Definition Comparison

The similarities of these definitions are the use of mission orders, disciplined initiative, commander’s intent and mission accomplishment. All these terms are presented and utilized in the definitions in the same fashion. Differences exist however.

Two main differences exist: the terms ~~agile and adaptive leaders~~” and ~~the~~ “conduct of full spectrum operations.” The term agile and adaptive leaders appears in the latest version of the mission command definition as more precise descriptor of ~~subordinate leaders~~” which appears in the 2003 version of the definition. The term ~~full spectrum operations~~” appears as opposed to the term ~~military operations~~” as in the 2003 definition. The addition of the term ~~full spectrum operations~~” along with the basic fundamentals of mission command, provide insight into what exactly adaptive leaders are and adaptive leadership is (this paper treats the term agile leaders and adaptive leaders separately and only focuses on defining adaptive leadership). Full spectrum operations are defined as the Army’s operational concept: Army forces combine offensive,

defensive, and stability or civil support operations simultaneously as part of an interdependent joint force to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative, accepting prudent risk to create opportunities to achieve decisive results (US Army 2011a, Glossary-7). They employ synchronized action—lethal and nonlethal—proportional to the mission and informed by a thorough understanding of all variables of the operational environment (US Army 2011a, Glossary-7). Mission command that conveys intent and an appreciation of all aspects of the situation guides the adaptive use of Army forces (US Army 2011a, Glossary-7). There exist important aspects of this definition that relate to the fundamentals of mission command. Before these connections are made, it is important to understand the fundamentals of mission command.

#### The Four Fundamentals of Mission Command

The 2011 version of FM 6-0 focuses on the fundamentals of mission command instead of the details by reinforcing the human aspects of command instead of the technological or procedural aspects (US Army 2011a, viii). Four new areas of emphasis that lead into the fundamentals are:

1. Emphasizing the commander's role in combining the art of command and science of control.
2. Emphasizing how mission command fosters operational adaptability—a quality that Army leaders and forces exhibit based on critical and creative thinking, comfort with ambiguity and uncertainty, a willingness to accept prudent risk, and their ability to rapidly adjust to changing circumstances.
3. Incorporates the methodology of design to assist commanders in understanding complex operational environments and ill-structured problems.



4. Provides an expanded discussion on the importance of team building among modular formations and interorganizational partners throughout the conduct of operations.

In analyzing these four fundamentals, common themes emerge. The emphasis on the commander's role in combining the science of command and the art of control harkens back to the definition of leadership as it is a process of influencing people to accomplish the mission. The second emphasis provides insight as to how a commander provides this leadership in mission command to foster operational adaptability—based on critical and creative thinking, comfort with ambiguity and uncertainty, a willingness to accept prudent risk, and the ability to rapidly adjust to changing circumstances. The emphasis on design, by its definition, provides a creative and critical thinking avenue for leadership, within the context of the second emphasis, to understand the environment in which they lead (US Army 2011d, Glossary-4). Finally, the emphasis on the importance of team building among modular formations and interorganizational partners describes the people the leader must lead: different and unfamiliar; different people as in people from outside the leader's organization who are from different cultures, backgrounds and have different norms; unfamiliar as in people who the leader is not acquainted with as a result of modular formations being pieced together for full spectrum operations.

#### The Four Categories of Mission Command

For further understanding, the analysis of the fundamentals of mission command result in the separation into four categories: nature of operations, mission command as a philosophy, mission command as a warfighting function and operational adaptability (US Army 2011c, 1-1). All of these fundamentals or principles serve to describe mission

command, provide a context for leaders exercising mission command and provide groundwork for understanding adaptive leadership in the context of mission command.

### Nature of Operations

The nature of operations as a fundamental of mission command is characterized in two ways: complex, ever changing environments and uncertainty (US Army 2011c, 1-1). First, the operational environment is described by the Joint definition as a composite of the conditions, circumstances, and influences that affect the employment of capabilities and bear on the decisions of the commander (US Army 2011c, 1-1). Therefore, mission command exists where all of these entities of the environment are complex and ever changing. The description further states that complexity describes situations with diverse, connected, interdependent, and adaptive parts and subparts (US Army 2011c, 1-1). Secondly, the environment is ever changing and continually evolving. It is logical if mission command is the exercise of authority and direction by the commander, characterized by a complex and ever changing environment, it must take into account the factors of complexity and change.

The second part of the nature of operations in mission command is uncertainty. This uncertainty is described as what is not known about a given situation or how the situation may evolve (US Army 2011c, 1-2). In this sense, uncertainty manifests itself in the form of unknowns about the enemy, the people and the surroundings, with chance and friction contributing to these areas (US Army 2011c, 1-2). In this environment in mission command, effective leaders accept that they conduct operations in operational environments that are inherently uncertain (US Army 2011c, 1-2). The factors of complex and ever changing operational environment and uncertainty provide a hurdle for

leaders to overcome as they exercise direction and authority to accomplish their mission in full spectrum operations.

### Mission Command as a Philosophy

Along with the nature of operations, mission command is also characterized as a philosophy. To account for the uncertain nature of operations, mission command (as opposed to detailed command) tends to be decentralized and flexible (US Army 2011c, 1-2). Using mission orders, commanders concentrate on the purpose of the operation, which allows subordinates the greatest possible freedom of action to accomplish assigned tasks. This freedom of action is necessary in uncertain and ever changing environments due to the fact that commanders and leaders can not be everywhere in the operational environment to understand all the factors and impacts on operations as they rapidly change.

In keeping with this philosophy of mission command, the concept operates more on self-discipline than imposed discipline (US Army 2011c, 1-2). Due to the nature of this decentralized execution style and significant freedom of action, commanders and leaders consider the following fundamentals to the effective exercise of mission command (US Army 2011c, 1-2):

1. Build cohesive teams through mutual trust
2. Create shared understanding
3. Provide a clear commander's intent
4. Exercise disciplined initiative
5. Use mission orders
6. Accept prudent risk

All of these fundamentals for the effective exercise of mission command reflect the decentralized nature of the method. Building cohesive teams through mutual trust emphasizes the nature of relying on other people and subordinates for mission accomplishment in an environment of decentralized execution. Creating a shared understanding is realized in part by providing a clear commander's intent. Leaders and subordinates at all levels exercise disciplined initiative with mission orders as their guide. Prudent risk is a deliberate exposure to chance of injury or loss when the commander can visualize the outcome in terms of mission accomplishment or damage to the force, and judges the outcome as worth the cost (US Army 2011c, Glossary-2). Accepting this prudent risk is made possible by all involved through teams built on mutual trust, a shared understanding through clear commander's intent, and disciplined initiative framed by mission orders. All of these components aid commanders in the exercise of mission command to accomplish missions in an uncertain and ever changing operating environment.

General Grant's orders to General Sherman in 1864, during the American Civil War, illustrate the fundamentals of exercising effective mission command. Grant, having trust in Sherman's ability, issued his intent and mission orders to establish a shared understanding, which allowed Sherman to exercise disciplined initiative and accept prudent risk. General Grant writes:

It is my design, if the enemy keep quiet and allow me to take the initiative in the Spring Campaign to work all parts of the Army together, and, somewhat, toward a common center. . . . You I propose to move against Johnston's Army, to break it up and to get into the interior of the enemy's country as far as you can, inflicting all the damage you can against their War resources. I do not propose to lay down for you a plan of Campaign, but simply to lay down the work it is

desirable to have done and leave you free to execute in your own way. Submit to me however as early as you can your plan of operation. (US Army 2011c, 1-4)

Sherman responded to Grant immediately and sent Grant, as requested, his specific plan of operations, demonstrating that he understood Grant's intent. Sherman writes:

That few are now all to act in a Common plan, Converging on a Common Center, looks like Enlightened War . . . I will not let side issues draw me off from your main plan in which I am to Knock Joe [Confederate General Joseph E.] Johnston, and do as much damage to the resources of the Enemy as possible . . . I would ever bear in mind that Johnston is at all times to be kept so busy that he cannot in any event send any part of his command against you or [Union Major General Nathaniel P.] Banks. (US Army 2011c, 1-4)

### Mission Command as a Warfighting Function

Mission command, as well as existing as a philosophy, is also a warfighting function. The third fundamental of mission command is its existence as a warfighting function that acts to assist commanders in blending the art of command with the science of control, while emphasizing the human aspects of mission command (US Army 2011c, 1-6). The mission command warfighting function integrates the other warfighting functions into a coherent whole to achieve objectives and accomplish missions (US Army 2011c, 1-6). The mission command warfighting function consists of the mission command tasks and the mission command system (US Army 2011c, 1-6). Although the warfighting function is a critical aspect of mission command, analysis in this section focuses on the philosophy of mission command and will not analyze mission command as a warfighting function.

### Operational Adaptability

The final fundamental of mission command is operational adaptability. Again, operational adaptability is the ability to shape conditions and respond effectively to a changing operational environment with appropriate, flexible and timely actions (US Army 2011a, Glossary-11). Operational adaptability requires a mindset based on flexibility of thought essential to creating shared situational understanding and seizing, retaining and exploiting the initiative under a broad range of conditions (US Army 2011c, 1-7). Operational adaptability reflects a quality that Army leaders and forces exhibit based on four areas:

1. Critical and creative thinking
2. Comfort with operating under conditions of uncertainty
3. Willingness to accept prudent risk
4. An ability to make rapid adjustments based on continuous assessment

### Critical and Creative Thinking

First, operational adaptability requires timely and effective decisions based on applying judgment to available information and knowledge (US Army 2011c, 1-7). Commanders and staff apply critical and creative thinking in order to increase their understanding and decision-making throughout the conduct of operations (US Army 2011c, 1-7). Critical thinking is a deliberate process of thought whose purpose is to discern truth in situations where direct observation is insufficient, impossible or impractical (US Army 2011c, 1-7). In analyzing this concept, it becomes clear that critical thinking fits well in an environment that is ever changing and uncertain as described as part of mission command.

As critical thinking assists commanders to make timely and effective decisions, creative thinking involves creating something new or original, especially when faced with unfamiliar problems or old problems requiring new solutions (US Army 2011c, 1-7). As previously stated, this environment is uncertain and ever changing, which requires leaders to adopt novel solutions. Leaders view different options to finding solutions by using adaptive or innovative approaches, applying imagination and departing from the old way of doing things (US Army 2011c, 1-8). One approach to critical and creative thinking that assists commanders with understanding, visualizing and describing ill-structured problems and developing ways to solve them is Design (US Army 2011c, 1-8).

Design, as defined in Army FM 5-0, The Operations Process, is a methodology for applying critical and creative thinking to understand, visualize and describe complex, ill-structured problems and develop approaches to solve them (US Army 2011d, Glossary-7). According to paragraph 3-5 of FM 5-0, innovation, adaptation, and continuous learning are central tenets of design (US Army 2011d, 3-1). The field manual goes on to describe the tenets of design as they relate to critical and creative thinking. Innovation involves taking a new approach to a familiar or known situation, whereas adaptation involves taking a known solution and modifying it to a particular situation or responding effectively to changes in the operational environment. Design helps the commander lead innovative, adaptive work and guides planning, preparing, executing and assessing operations. The pamphlet states that design provides an approach for leading innovative, adaptive efforts from which to effectively act on and efficiently solve a complex, ill-structured problem (US Army 2010b, 3-33). All of these aforementioned

excerpts from FM 5-0 are examples of how adaptability is a key to design, which involves understanding and adapting to a changing environment.

The pamphlet says a creative design tailored to a unique operational environment promises, among other things, effective adaptation once the situation changes (US Army 2010b, 3-34). The pamphlet also says design requires the commander to lead adaptive, innovative efforts to leverage collaboration and dialog to identify and solve complex, ill-structured problems (US Army 2010b, 3-35). Once again, both statements mention adaptation as necessary along with a changing environment. With these facts, design is an excellent method of understanding complex problems in the environment of mission command.

An ill-structured mission situation is ambiguous and has multiple objectives, parallel and sequential logical lines of operations, fragile informal alliances, multiple shadowy and non-hierarchical adversaries, and unclear contextual boundaries (US Army 2010b, 48). In this case, a leader cannot count on experience and doctrine to guide decision-making. The complexity of the situation derives from dynamic interactions with multiple, novel actors interacting along complex hidden casual chains (US Army 2010b, 13). Success requires learning and iterative adaptation to inform and refine the problem frame. In this case, the different people and operating environment the adaptive leader must take into account are not necessarily under his control.

### Comfort With Uncertainty

In analyzing the operational environment as uncertain and ever changing, the future becomes hard to predict even if commanders know most factors and elements that exist. This kind of environment creates the necessity to adapt operationally, while



applying critical thinking and using creative approaches. In this type of environment, commanders can draw on past experiences, but also need to anticipate change and adapt their leadership accordingly.

The defining problem of mission command is the need to operate effectively within conditions of uncertainty (US Army 2011c, 1-8). Operationally adaptive leaders accept that they conduct operations in operational environments that are inherently uncertain (US Army 2011c, 1-8). Likewise, it is difficult for leaders to understand the motivations and reactions of various population groups with respect to the enemy and friendly forces (US Army 2011c, 1-8). Analyzing leaders operating in this environment, it becomes clear they must execute a process of constant assessment to adapt as situations evolve in order to maintain their situational understanding, so as to empower people in their command through mission command. Commanders must constantly ask if the plan of operation or mission goals are still relevant considering the constant changing environment. As commanders assess and learn throughout the operation, they determine if achieving their original objectives leads to the desired end state (US Army 2011c, 1-8). The particular aspects of this environment include timely, constant assessment, collaboration with the people around the commander, as well as quantitative and qualitative analysis which contribute to the commander's understanding (US Army 2011c, 1-8). The combination of these things prepares the commander to adapt to changes and better direct the force to mission accomplishment.

### Areas For Adaptive Leadership: Common Themes of Mission Command

In analyzing mission command based on the previous fundamentals, common themes appear which lead to discovering a definition for adaptive leadership within the context of mission command. In summing up mission command the following are five concepts that a commander or leader exercising mission command must embrace:

1. Uncertain environments
2. Operational adaptability
3. Influencing different people
4. Critical and creative thinking (design)
5. Teams built on mutual trust, which enable disciplined initiative that allows for prudent risk taking

Now that mission command analysis is complete, to include common themes in its description, these themes provide a starting point for answering the secondary research question #1: What is adaptive leadership?

### Answering Secondary Research Question #1– Understanding Adaptive Leadership

TRADOC Pam 525-3-3 mentions adaptive leadership several times. The forward of the pamphlet states the idea is toward developing agile and adaptive leaders throughout the Army, along with (the vision detailed in the AOC & ACC) imparting essential guidance on the application of mission command at every echelon and while promoting the development of unique and innovative solutions to military problems by empowering leaders at the lowest practical level (US Army 2010b, iii). The pamphlet goes on to declare mission command represents a significant step forward in an ongoing

campaign of learning and directly contributes towards the achievement of a greater institutional adaptation across our Army (US Army 2010b, iii). These declarations infer that mission command contributes to adaptation across the Army. Here, just on page three of the forward in Pam 525-3-3 the Army states the importance of adaptive leadership and adaptation within the context of mission command.

Leadership, as defined by Army FM 6-22 is the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction and motivation while operating to accomplish the mission and improve the organization (US Army 2011b, 1-2). Within the context of this research this definition of leadership will remain the foundation. Pam 525-3-3 also includes three solutions to the mission command concept: empower the lowest practical echelon; become skilled in the art of design; educate and train the force for the uncertain and complex future OE (US Army 2010b, 2). These solutions contain elements of adjusting to people and changes in an uncertain environment.

The pamphlet also states that a more collaborative process between commanders and their staffs at each echelon, enabling improved understanding of the OE and operational adaptability, which leads to adaptive teams that anticipate transitions, the acceptance of risk to create opportunities and the integration of information tasks to influence friendly forces, neutrals, adversaries, enemies and joint, interagency, intergovernmental and multinational partners (US Army 2010b, 15). This statement once again drives home the point regarding the definition of adaptive leadership, that the leader must be able to trust and influence a wide range of different people in different environments.

Commanders must understand their operational environment before determining the level to centralize or decentralize. Understanding the international, national and host nation legal, political and cultural authorities and caveats, formal and informal, will assist in institutionalizing the cultural bias for a risk-acceptance mindset and unconditional trust and confidence vertically and horizontally across the force (US Army 2010b, 17). This statement implies a leader must adjust to the environment again, as well as the people around him in order to be successful.

Regarding the “people” aspect of the proposed definition of adaptive leadership within the context of mission command, FM 5-0 indicates that design requires effective and decisive leadership that engages subordinate commanders, coordinating authorities, representatives of various staff disciplines, and the higher commander in continuing collaboration and dialog that leads to enhanced decision-making (US Army 2011d). The segment about “engages subordinate commanders” and “representatives of various staff disciplines” implies the adaptive leader, while applying design, is working with or influencing people who are different, both inside and outside of his organization.

Design requires agile, versatile leaders who foster continuous organizational learning while actively engaging in iterative collaboration and dialog to enhance decision making across the echelons (US Army 2011d). This statement implies the adaptive leader using design is engaging and influencing different people within the organization in a critical and creative fashion. The discussion of the importance of design ties in collaborative, critical, and creative thinking amongst trusting team members in order to better anticipate and react to changes in an uncertain environment. With this said, a further understanding of adaptability from the Army leadership manual is warranted.

To understand adaptive leadership in the Army, a natural place to start is the FM 6-22. The specific definition for adaptive leadership does not exist in the FM 6-22, however, page 10-7 contains a section titled “Tools For Adaptability,” which provides an adequate starting place in defining adaptive leadership. This section defines adaptability as “an individual’s ability to recognize changes in the environment, identify the critical elements of the new situation and trigger changes accordingly to meet new requirements” (US Army 2011b, 10-7). Separating the definition reveals the distinct entities in it: the individual’s ability to recognize changes in the environment; the individual’s ability to identify the critical elements of the new situation; and the individual triggering changes accordingly to meet new requirements. Breaking the definition up into these three distinct parts begs more questions. What are the changes in the environment that the individual must recognize? What are the critical elements of the new situation? Finally, what changes must the individual trigger accordingly to meet the new requirements?

#### Tools For Adaptability

The Army Field Manual 6-22, *Leadership* acts as a springboard and a starting point as to how Soldiers can apply the concept of mission command. This field manual provides doctrine and principles regarding Army leadership. Section 10-46, entitled “Tools For Adaptability,” describes the importance of being an adaptable leader in the Army today (US Army 2011b, 10-7). The word “Tools” in the title of the section is a bit of a misnomer, as the section only describes what an adaptable leader in the Army should look like and what leaders should do to adapt. This section in the FM 6-22 will be a central piece to answering the research question as it declares adaptability is important in

the Army environment. It defines adaptability as: “an effective change in behavior in response to an altered situation” (US Army 2011b, 10-7).

The FM 6-22 section, “Fools For Adaptability,” makes several statements about adaptive leaders to include the following:

1. Adaptive leaders scan the environment, derive the key characteristics of the situation and are aware of what it will take to perform in the changed environment.
2. Highly adaptable leaders are comfortable entering unfamiliar environments.
3. Adaptive leadership includes being an agent of change.
4. Leaders lacking adaptability enter all situations in the same manner and often expect their experience in one job to carry them to the next.
5. Deciding when to adapt is as important as determining how to adapt.
6. Adaptable leaders are comfortable with ambiguity.

The “Fools For Adaptability” section claims adaptability has two key components. First is the ability of a leader to identify the essential elements critical for performance in each new situation. Second is the ability of a leader to change his practices or his unit by quickly capitalizing on strengths and minimizing weaknesses. Further analysis of these concepts is explored later in the paper (US Army 2011b, 10-7).

The “Fools for Adaptability” section also lists three things leaders should do to become more adaptable: 1. Learn to adapt by adapting, 2. Lead across cultures, 3. Seek challenges. The section further defines adaptability as “an effective change in behavior in response to an altered situation” (US Army 2011b, 10-7). The section then closes by stating, “while adaptability is an important tool, leaders at all levels must leverage their

cognitive abilities to counteract the challenges of the operational environment through logical problem solving processes which FM 5-0, *The Operations Process* discusses in detail (US Army 2011b, 10-7).

### Connecting Tools for Adaptability to Areas of Mission Command

An analysis of the Tools for Adaptability section reveals several connections to mission command which are important to understand in finding a definition for adaptive leadership in mission command. Operational adaptability is one of the categories of mission command and it contains the areas of critical and creative thinking, uncertain environments, prudent risk taking and the ability to assess and make rapid adjustments. Even a quick comparison to the tools for adaptability reveal linkages between the two.

The first tool, scanning the environment, deriving key characteristics and being aware of what it will take to perform in the environment speaks to the areas of operational adaptability, especially uncertain environments and the need to make adjustments. This point reinforces this tool of adaptability to be included with a definition of adaptive leadership within the context of mission command.

The second tool regarding how adaptive leaders are comfortable in uncertain environments again emphasizes the point of uncertainty regarding operational adaptability.

The third tool, adaptive leaders are agents of change, reinforces the point of operational adaptability regarding the ability to make rapid adjustments based on continuous assessment. The third tool also provides an indication as to the way a leader can be an agent of change, and that way is through the critical and creative thinking component of operational adaptability.

The fourth tool, leaders lacking adaptability enter all situations in the same manner and often expect their experience in one job to carry them to the next, acts to emphasize all the components of operational adaptability in mission command: the need for critical and creative thinking, uncertain environment (not entering the situation the same way), prudent risk taking along with the need to make rapid adjustments based on continuous assessment.

The fifth tool, deciding when to adapt is as important as determining how to adapt, points to the area requiring the ability to make rapid adjustments based on continuous assessment, regarding operational adaptability as a fundamental of mission command.

The final tool of adaptability regarding a leader's comfort with ambiguity once again reinforces the quality of being comfortable with operating under conditions of uncertainty as a component of operational adaptability being a fundamental of mission command. As one can see, all the tools of adaptability reinforce the four areas of operational adaptability as a fundamental of mission command. This fact validates the applicability of the tools for adaptability to be used by leaders and incorporated with a definition for adaptive leadership within the context of mission command.

Along with the tools for adaptability connected to the areas of operational adaptability, an analysis of some of the Starfish literature can be used to reinforce some of these components for adaptive leadership within the context of mission command.



## Starfish Readings

Along with clues to describing adaptive leadership that exist in Army field manuals, the Army's Starfish Program readings further elaborate on the subject of adaptive leadership.

In the book, *Primal Leadership*, the authors describe the leadership quality of adaptability as:

leaders who are adaptable can juggle multiple demands without losing their focus or energy, and are comfortable with the inevitable ambiguities of organizational life; such leaders can be flexible in adapting to new challenges, nimble in adjusting to fluid change, and limber in their thinking in the face of new data or realities. (Goleman et al. 2002, 219)

This definition has several similarities to the Army definition of adaptability. The reference to organizational life is analogous to the environment in the Army definition of adaptability. Being comfortable with ambiguity is a linkage to mission command; in the way mission command discusses ambiguous environments. The terms new data or realities is similar to how the Army definition of adaptability discusses identifying critical elements of a new situation. The similarity in the two definitions support one another while providing a way forward into understanding adaptive leadership within mission command. The *Primal Leadership* definition appears in the Emotional Intelligence appendix of Goleman's book and provides another avenue for analysis of other Starfish-like readings. Other works go further defining adaptive leadership and reinforcing the connections between these definitions.

In the book, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, adaptive leadership is defined simply as: the activity of mobilizing adaptive work (Heifetz, et al. 2009, 280). The book defines adaptive work as: holding people through a sustained period of disequilibrium

during which they identify what cultural DNA to conserve and discard, and invent or discover the new cultural DNA that will enable them to thrive anew; i.e., the learning process through which people in a system achieve a successful adaptation (Heifetz, et al. 2009, 280). The activity of mobilizing adaptive work relates to the Army definition of leadership. A sustained period of disequilibrium relates to how mission command discusses ambiguity. Cultural DNA is a reference to biology. The book explains that human and chimpanzee DNA is 98 percent similar, yet they are drastically different, further making the point that only small changes can lead to big differences (Heifetz, et al. 2009, 25). This act of inventing or discovering new DNA that will enable people to thrive anew is again similar to the Army definition of adaptability about triggering changes accordingly to meet new requirements. But out of *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* example a new characteristic is derived and applied to the definition of adaptive leadership in mission command. Relatively speaking, the definition emphasizes that only a small change may be necessary.

In some ways, the idea of making small changes to adapt is similar to how Brafman, in *The Starfish and the Spider* describes how a Starfish or decentralized organization takes shape. Brafman's leg four of a decentralized organization is the preexisting network. Brafman states that almost every decentralized organization that has made it big was launched from a preexisting platform (Brafman 2006, 64). Brafman describes how Alcoholics Anonymous was derived from the Oxford Group (Brafman 2006, 64). In adapting to trigger change to meet new requirements, AA adopted the small group circles and a step recovery program to better suit their needs. This adapting in a decentralized way, allowing the group to meet its needs at a local level is analogous to

commanders providing clear mission orders with commander's intent permitting subordinate leaders to accomplish the mission and improve the organization.

In this case, many analogies exist between mission command, adaptive leadership and the previous definitions of adaptation that tie these concepts together for the application of adaptive leadership in mission command. Mission Command is decentralized similar to Starfish organizations which Brafman describes. The adaptations are somewhat small and based on a preexisting network, much like adaptive leadership and adaptive work were defined previously. The goal of AA, to achieve and maintain sobriety, is specific, yet does not give strict details on how to do it aside from the 12 steps which provide a framework, much like mission orders do. The small circles of people within the trust-based team of AA support each other and determine how best to cope and achieve sobriety. This concept is similar to the way mission orders are used in mission command to describe the end result, but not precisely directing how to achieve the result. It leaves the "how" up to the trusting team members.

In the same vein as the Starfish organizations, the Army's Starfish Program attempts to foster trusting teams by emphasizing emotional intelligence along with critical and creative thinking. I had the distinct privilege to be a part of the Starfish Program during my time at Army Command and General Staff College. Especially as an Air Force officer, I can attest to the importance of knowing yourself, knowing your teammates and knowing the goals of the organization. Much like AA, there were several times during the school year where my classmates and I were faced with ill-structured problems in uncertain or ambiguous environments. Many times, the only way to arrive at a solution efficiently and effectively was to be fully aware of the goals or mission of the

organization, be aware of your teammates' strengths and weaknesses and trust them to arrive at their part of the solution by way of critical and creative thinking. Barking orders or making demands without fully understanding your teammates could be problematic to arriving at the best solution in this case.

After time, we came to trust one another and understand the strengths and weaknesses of the group. This understanding bred trust that allowed us to hone our critical and creative thinking within the group. Sometimes the solutions we arrived at were novel or just plain off the wall, but all of the time, we accomplished the mission we set out to complete. My Starfish experience reinforces the analysis uncovered so far and interconnects with many aspects of adaptive leadership as it relates to mission command. With the previous analysis complete, an interim progress check and definition of adaptive leadership is warranted here.

#### Combining the Army Definitions of Adaptability and Leadership

At this point in the research and analysis, can one simply combine the Army's definition of adaptability and leadership together to reach an adequate definition of adaptive leadership in mission command? The Army's defines leadership as "the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation, while operating to accomplish the mission and improve the organization" (US Army 2011b, 1-2).

Adaptability is an individual's ability to recognize changes in the environment, identify the critical elements of the new situation and trigger changes accordingly to meet new requirements (US Army 2011b, 10-7). When combined the two definitions could appear as:

Adaptive Leadership (interim definition): the process of recognizing the differences in people and the changes in the environment, identifying the critical elements of both and triggering changes by adjusting how the leader influences to provide purpose, direction and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization.

At this stage, the analysis may be close to uncovering a definition for adaptive leadership within the context of mission command. However, further research, analysis, and case study contrast and comparison with an operational environment example will serve to further illuminate the answer to the primary research question.

### Traits of Army Leadership

As well as identifying changes in the environment, in the act of an Army leader's adaptation, part of that environment also concerns the Soldiers he influences. In this case, changes in the environment could be analogous to differences in people. Although everyone in the Army is the same in the fact that they are Soldiers, all Soldiers are not the same. They are individual people who act and behave differently from one another. Field Manual 6-22 also deals with the aspect of these differences.

Field Manual 6-22 details the differences between people and how a leader handles these differences in the Interpersonal Tact section. Effectively interacting with others depends on knowing what others perceive; it also relies on accepting the character, reactions, and motives of oneself and others (US Army 2011b, 6-3). Interpersonal tact combines these skills, along with recognizing diversity and displaying self-control, balance, and stability in all situations (US Army 2011b, 6-3). This is an important section in the FM when it comes to a leader being able to recognize the differences in the people he leads or the people he influences.

In the Recognizing Diversity section of FM 6-22, the manual makes statements to the fact that Soldiers and Army civilians originate from vastly different backgrounds and are shaped by their education, race, gender, religion and other influences (US Army 2011b, 6-3). It further states that a leader's job is not to make everyone the same; it is to take advantage of their different capabilities and talents (US Army 2011b, 6-3). Following these statements, the FM declares that a leader should keep an open mind regarding the differences in people, but doesn't go into detail regarding exactly how a leader can adapt to influence and leverage these differences to achieve the organization's goals.

This part of the FM also has sections on self-control, emotional factors, balance and stability. As a whole, these sections describe themselves as important factors and describe how leaders should act with regard to them. But a gap exists between recognizing the importance of these factors in interpersonal tact and how a leader should act. This gap, to some degree, does not justify the importance of recognizing and accounting for differences in people as a concept to be part of adaptive leadership in mission command. Further support must be found elsewhere in Starfish readings and General Martin Dempsey's articles emphasizing adaptive leadership in Army operations.

#### Bridging the Gap Between the Army Leadership Definition and Adaptive Leadership

The book *People Skills* by Dr. Robert Bolton, bridges the gap that FM 6-22 has from recognizing that people are different to what a leader should do. Bolton describes how a person should communicate and influence people with regard to biological, cultural and social differences in people. The ideas in his book support the need for

leaders to collaborate effectively with interorganizational people, which is required in an uncertain environment in mission command. He reaches the conclusions that successful groups of people rely on the ability to trust one another and communicate ideas effectively, which enables better working relationships. In a mission command perspective, this translates into applying critical and creative thinking regarding ways in which leaders influence people both in and outside their organization. General Martin Dempsey takes this one step further in his articles about mission command and adaptive leadership.

#### General Dempsey, Mission Command and Adaptive Leadership

In General Dempsey's article series, *A Dialogue About Our Army*, he discusses the importance of adaptation and decentralization as it relates to mission command. He reinforces the fact that our Army will continue to operate in an environment of uncertainty. The most effective way to meet mission requirements and be successful as an organization is if an environment of organizational learning exists that encompasses empowering the "edge" or trusting leaders at lower echelons to carry out the mission. His statements reinforce mission command's existence in an uncertain environment that requires leadership with critical and creative methods, and empowered, decentralized execution (Dempsey 2011a, 43).

In General Dempsey's article entitled, "A Campaign of Learning to Achieve Institutional Adaptability," he states that the Army has increased its emphasis on adaptation due to the fact that significant trends have emerged which include: hybrid threats of regular, irregular, terrorist and criminal groups with significant capabilities; the exceptional pace of technological change; and greater complexity. General Dempsey

argues these trends make the operational environment dangerous, increasingly competitive and unpredictable. He says in response to this scenario the Army profession must accept a culture of change and adaptation. The Army must change its thinking regarding how it develops leaders, as well as organize, train and equip its Soldiers (Dempsey 2010b, 34).

After analysis of General Dempsey's article and comparison to previous analysis regarding mission command and adaptive leadership, the relationships and similarities are very strong. General Dempsey alludes to the all the areas of operational adaptability including critical and creative thinking as a way forward in an uncertain environment where prudent risk taking and rapid adjustments are required. With General Dempsey's emphasis on adaptation as an institutional imperative, along with leader development, a definition for adaptive leadership in the mission command environment he describes is definitely justified and warranted (Dempsey 2010b, 34).

In General Dempsey's next article entitled, "Concepts Matter," he identifies the importance of the Army Capstone Concept describing who the Army is and what the Army needs to be after nine years of persistent conflict. In the Army Operating Concept, General Dempsey describes the importance of institutionalizing learned ideas and a commitment not to overlook the things that endure. He describes that current military operations are often unpredictable, unforgivingly brutal and intensely demanding of leaders (Dempsey 2010c, 39). He emphasizes interaction between different people on the ground who will determine the outcome of the Army's actions. General Dempsey also emphasizes a continuous process of incremental improvements and adaptations; for leaders to expect and anticipate change rather than react to it. He explains the other



important aspects about the AOC are mission command, the implications of decentralized and centralized operations on organizational design and leader development, along with describing the relationship among echelons as the cocreation of context to emphasize the importance of collaboration and trust in the new operational environment (Dempsey 2010c, 40).

In analysis of the aforementioned article, General Dempsey makes a case for continuous adaptation and for leaders to expect and anticipate change in the mission command environment. This statement once again makes strong ties back to operational adaptability as a category of mission command and with it, the leader's tools for adaptability. The environment he describes is a perfect scenario to marry mission command with a leader's adaptability as described in FM 6-22. The adaptive leaders must scan the environment he describes and determine key characteristics of the situation while being aware of what it will entail to perform in the changed environment. These adaptive leaders must also be able to know how to motivate action by influencing different people, both in and outside of their organization.

In his article entitled, "Mission Command," General Dempsey describes that following the Vietnam War and a decade of engaging in low-intensity conflict, prominent general officers of the time focused the Army on winning the first battle of the next war. Army leaders created an Army that could centralize, mass and synchronize forces quickly; emphasizing the first battle of the next war could be the last. Doctrinal focus during the Cold War shifted to centralized fighting, massing combat power at a decisive point, but our current conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq teach us that in order to fight a decentralized enemy, the Army must decentralize its capabilities and distribute its

operations (Dempsey 2011a, 43). General Dempsey states that leaders in these environments must embrace adaptability and mission command as a better reflection of how the Army must approach the art and science of command due to the hybrid threats it confronts and will confront in the future (Dempsey 2011a, 44).

He states that mission command supports the Army's move toward operational adaptability by demanding a complete knowledge of the operational environment, by promoting adaptive teams who are able to manage transition while acknowledging that Soldiers must share risk at all levels to create opportunities to accomplish the mission. Mission command accounts for the fact that military operations will also include a diverse group of international, non-governmental and host-nation partners (Dempsey 2011a, 44).

In analyzing these words, direct comparisons appear with aspects of operational adaptability and a leader's tools for adaptability. One of a leader's tools for adaptability is that the leader is an agent of change. The ability of the leader to be an agent of change can be linked to his ability to rapidly adjust to changing circumstances and his willingness to accept prudent risk. If an adaptive leader is going to be an agent of change or promote change, he must be able to make these changes timely, or anticipate the change. Also, making a change for a better outcome in an uncertain environment implies the willingness to accept some prudent risk or risk that is justifiable to the adaptive leader in order to obtain a more desirable outcome.

Going on in the article, General Dempsey then justifies mission command and explains the difference between mission command and earlier models by stating the terms battle command and command and control do not completely speak to the increasing

need for a commander to regularly reframe an environment of ill-structured problems in order to achieve the appropriate context of operations by constantly challenging assumptions before and during all phases of execution (Dempsey 2011a, 44).

After studying what General Dempsey says, it becomes clear that an adaptive leader in this environment can put the tools of critical and creative thinking to work along with the process of design. This concept emphasizes the point that an adaptive leader, as an agent of change, must continue to assess his environment in order to be able to ascertain the critical aspects that he can apply while influencing people in his command.

General Dempsey further explains that mission command stresses the acute function of adaptive leaders of all ranks in contributing to a common assessment of co-created context while utilizing resources and passing responsibility to the operational edge while recognizing the need to collect information and intelligence from the edge. He states mission command reinforces a truth that the most thorough understanding does not come from the top down; it comes from the bottom up. (Dempsey 2011a, 44).

In analysis of this article alone, General Dempsey connects the traits of operational adaptability within mission command and the tools for adaptability that a leader must use to be successful. His description of commanders needing to reframe ill-structured problems resembles the discussion in the Army publications regarding design and the leaders' ability to think critically and creatively. He points out that the environment and its variables are uncertain and directs the reader to the conclusion that a leader's ability to influence different people and foster trusting teams while empowering the edge is critical.

In his article, “Leader Development,” General Dempsey emphasizes the importance of leader-development programs in developing leaders who can effectively operate in a much more transparent, complex and decentralized operational environment as well as aligning with mission command doctrine (Dempsey 2011b, 25). He elaborates on the importance of adaptive leadership in the context of mission command by stating the Army’s leadership development programs must incentivize while they create adaptive leaders who are creative and inquisitive. He states that leaders who operate in the environments of complexity and ambiguity, like those faced in Iraq and Afghanistan, will be to the Army’s advantage (Dempsey 2011b, 26). General Dempsey also states that one area that requires immediate attention regarding education in the Army is the need to move away from “platform-centric” learning to one that is centered more on learning through facilitation and collaboration (Dempsey 2011b, 27). He says, “Developing these adaptive leaders is the number-one imperative for the continued health of our profession” (Dempsey 2011b, 28).

In analysis of this article, General Dempsey emphasizes the importance of not only adaptive leadership but also the development of adaptive leaders that flourish in complex environments characterized by mission command. He promotes the idea of building on programs that foster creative leaders who are capable of critical thinking and action. By stating the importance of a leader’s ability to thrive in an uncertain environment while employing critical thinking and creative methods to influence people, he supports collaborating and operating in effective teams capable of accomplishing the mission given to them.

In his final article in the series, “Win, Learn, Focus, Adapt, Win Again,” General Dempsey states that in order to provide forces capable of achieving speed of action, identifying and exploiting opportunities, and protecting against unanticipated dangers, the Army requires forces capable of exercising mission command by decentralizing authority enabling them to act faster than the enemy (Dempsey 2011c, 26). General Dempsey describes what Army forces must do by saying our forces must function in a decentralized manner. Leaders must consider the experience and competence of those around them along with their ability to integrate with other units and other people outside of the Army. Leaders must decentralize and empower decision-making as far down the chain of command as possible to enable the greatest freedom of action. Commanders will apply critical and creative thinking as part of design to better understand the situation and changes in an ambiguous and uncertain environment to most effectively execute mission orders. Commanders and leaders at all levels must be able to communicate effectively with everyone they influence in order to most efficiently empower the edge.‘ In doing this, adaptive leaders need to collaborate effectively in order to understand the capabilities and limitations of the people around them in order to successfully influence them in accomplishing the mission (Dempsey 2011c, 26).

General Dempsey mentions the importance for Army forces to inform allies, partners and indigenous populations, while influencing the attitudes and actions of adversaries. He also states that a commander’s responsibility includes building cohesive teams capable of withstanding the demands of combat while leaders prepare their units to fight and adapt to uncertainty in the environment. He identifies the importance of lower

echelon units to building cohesive teams, mentoring subordinate leaders and establishing the level of trust necessary for successful decentralized execution (Dempsey 2011c, 28).

In the final analysis of his article series, General Dempsey accentuates the points about the operating environment being uncertain, leaders needing to collaborate and foster teamwork, the requirement for leaders to anticipate and adapt to changes in the environment and the same leaders having to work and depend on people both in and out of their organization. All of these areas require a leader to be able to think and act critically and creatively and inevitably, being able to foster trust and teamwork with the people he works with in order to accomplish the mission.

After analyzing and answering the secondary research questions, the results can be processed together to analyze and answer the primary research question.

#### Adaptive Leadership in the Context of Mission Command

In order to analyze the definition of adaptive leadership within the context of mission command, it is necessary to once again display the definition and break it down into its components.

**Adaptive Leadership:** the ability to anticipate and react to change in an uncertain environment by critically and creatively influencing people while fostering trusting teams to accomplish the mission.

Adaptive Leaders anticipate the need to adjust to changes in the uncertain environment and apply critical and creative thinking to the process of influencing people. Adaptive leaders, in some cases, lead their superiors to change their goals or even change the mission, in order to achieve organizational success, based on the adaptive leader's first hand knowledge of the people and the changing environment around him. Adaptive leadership, within the framework of mission command, has several components: the

leader, people within the leader's organization, people outside of the leader's organization, the changes in an uncertain environment and mission accomplishment. The people within the leader's organization are: the leader's subordinates, the leader's fellow "peer" leaders, the leader's superiors and people within the organization but outside of the leader's chain of command.

### Colonel Chamberlain at Gettysburg: Mission Command and Adaptive Leadership

The following story is a classic and well known example of an adaptive leader, operating in a mission command setting, who was able to influence people in his unit by anticipating and reacting to changes in an uncertain environment through critical and creative thinking in order to accomplish the mission. Colonel Joshua Chamberlain exhibited the fundamentals of mission command and many traits of adaptability in leading up to and during the American Civil War battle at Gettysburg and the Union defense of the left flank at the Little Round Top.

Colonel Chamberlain's 20th Maine arrived at Gettysburg after marching more than one hundred miles in five days with only two hours of sleep. They were tasked to defend the critical position on the Union flank at a hill called Little Round Top. Their mission orders were only to hold the hill "at all hazards."

Colonel Chamberlain issued his commander's purpose and intent to his men. He mentally rehearsed possible courses of action to counter probable enemy moves against his position. He issued mission orders to his subordinate commanders regarding their duties on the flank. Shortly after Chamberlain's men were in position, the Confederates attacked.

Chamberlain's Union forces held against the first attack but he quickly realized a large enemy force was moving to outflank his position. He knew if the force outflanked him, his unit would fail the mission and face annihilation. He had no Army manual solutions for his predicament but had to act fast regardless. He mentally combined battle drills to arrive at a solution and ordered his men to stretch his line left to counter the Confederate flanking maneuver while keeping a steady rate of fire. After the maneuver was complete, his line was only one rank deep but was able to throw back the advancing Confederates repeatedly by becoming twice their normal front size.

After exhausting almost all their ammunition, Colonel Chamberlain's men still faced the Confederate threat of advance. He realized that if he withdrew, the entire Union Army would be at risk. If he held his position, his unit would be destroyed. After weighing his options, he decided to attack, thinking the Confederates would not expect it and his men would have the advantage of attacking downhill. He realized there was nothing in the tactics manuals detailing what he was about to do. He described to his commanders that the men would fix bayonets and swing down the hill in a line, from the left, like a barn door on a hinge, making it even with the right side of the Union line.

Backed up by Union sharp shooters, the impromptu and non-doctrinal maneuver surprised the Confederates and succeeded. The Confederates facing the 20th Maine retreated and the Union Army was able to hold Little Round Top and win the Battle at Gettysburg (US Army 2006, 2-5-2-6).

Interpreting his commander's intent and applying disciplined initiative, Colonel Chamberlain made sure that every man in his unit knew what the consequences of failure were when he prepared them for the battle. Prior to the engagement, he prepared and



developed his leaders and built his unit into a team with mutual trust between leaders and subordinates (US Army 2006, 2-6). Colonel Chamberlain showed respect and compassion for his men and their diversity, which strengthened the bond between himself and his men (US Army 2006, 2-6). During the engagement, he communicated his commander's intent effectively and led by example. His tactical abilities, combined with creativity, critical thinking and initiative helped him anticipate and react—transitioning from a defensive to offensive maneuver that achieved victory over the Confederates he faced (US Army 2006, 2-7).

Further analyzing the scenario, it is apparent that Colonel Chamberlain's adaptive leadership while leading the men of the 20th Maine at the Battle of Gettysburg encompassed all the aspects of adaptive leadership in a mission command setting. The environment was uncertain, both physically and conceptually. Colonel Chamberlain must have been fairly certain that the Confederates would attack at some point, but did not know exactly when, how or in what strength. He did not know exactly how his men would perform, as they were exhausted and had little to eat. The relative position of his unit, the status of his ammunition, combined with his given commander's intent did not leave him to draw a scripted conclusion from his training. He had to trust his men and rely on his experiences along with his critical and creative thinking to devise a plan to hold Little Round Top and defeat the Confederates. Colonel Chamberlain had already built a team based on mutual trust and he had the trust of his commanders, which enabled him to exercise disciplined initiative in creating and executing a plan for the scenario for which he had not necessarily trained specifically. All of these factors combined enabled Colonel Chamberlain to take prudent risk in carrying out his plan, knowing the cost of

losing his position at the top of the hill. The example of Colonel Chamberlain's 20th Maine holding off the Confederates during the Battle of Gettysburg is an example of adaptive leadership in the context of a mission command environment.

The story of Colonel Chamberlain at the Battle of Gettysburg provides a culmination point to tie in all the research questions and their answers. Although not stability operations or wide area security, Colonel Chamberlain's scenario at the Little Round Top illustrated the mission command concept and displays the fundamentals of mission command to aid in illustrating the answer to: what is mission command? The fundamentals of mission command provide areas of focus for adaptive leaders to thrive, in particular: an uncertain environment, operational adaptability, influencing different people, critical and creative thinking and teams built on mutual trust, which enable disciplined initiative that allows for prudent risk taking. All of these areas are points for a leader to anticipate and react in making adjustments while leading people in a mission command setting; answering the second research question: what is adaptive leadership? Finally, as the scenario unfolds in the story, an example is provided answering the primary research question: what is adaptive leadership in the context of mission command?

#### Summary of Analysis: Adaptive Leadership in the Context of Mission Command

The analysis in this chapter deconstructed mission command and adaptive leadership into their component parts, connected common themes and supported ideas with Army publications, Starfish Readings and General Dempsey's articles on mission command and adaptive leadership.

To answer mission command, the analysis compared and contrasted the current definition with the previous definition to discover differences in which to focus. Next, four fundamentals of mission command were analyzed to provide further areas for analysis. From these fundamentals tied in four categories of mission command, with particular emphasis on operational adaptability and mission command as a philosophy. These aspects of mission command provided common areas to link a leader's tools of adaptability to develop common threads for a definition of adaptive leadership in the context of mission command (see figure 3).

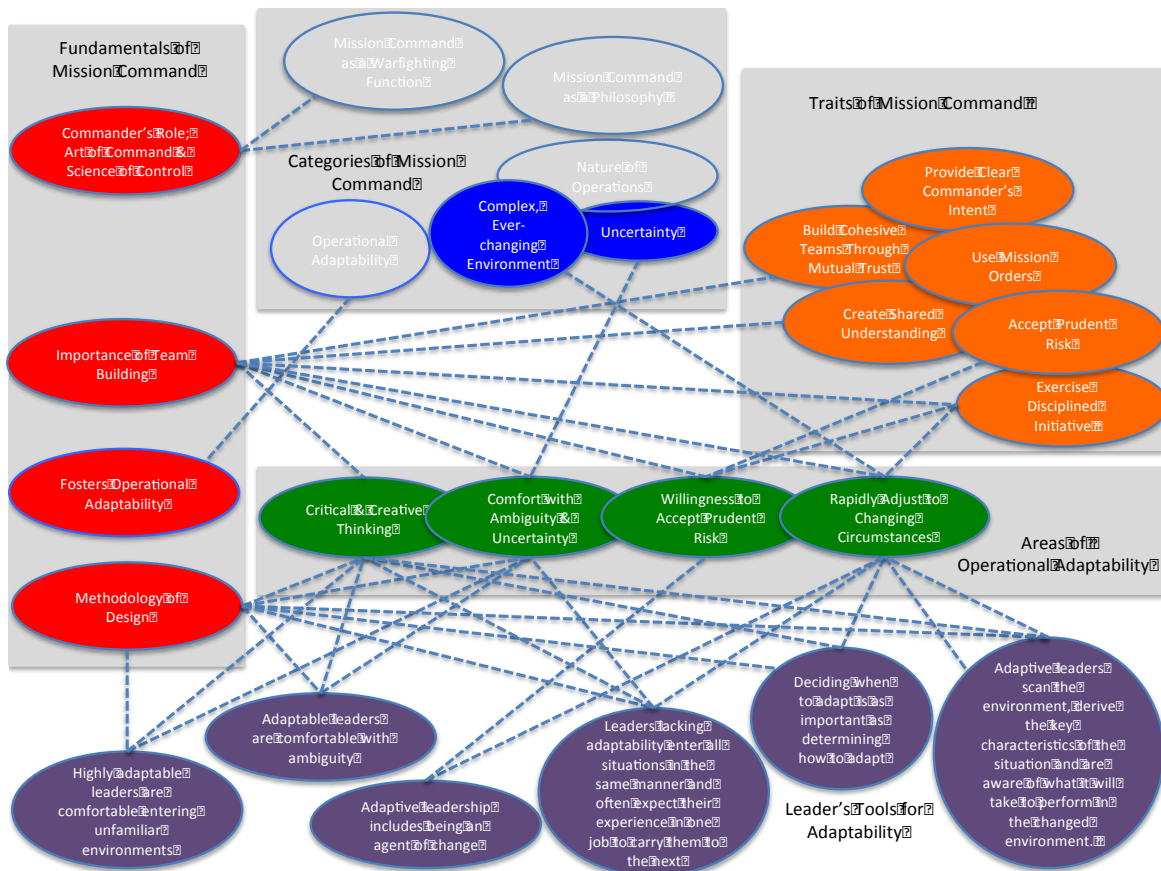


Figure 3. Linkages Between Mission Command and Adaptive Leadership  
 Source: Created by author.

The tools for adaptability serve to highlight the previously mentioned fundamentals and categories of mission command, which provide areas to examine when searching for an adaptive leadership definition. Along with the tools for adaptability for leaders, Starfish reading examples and General Dempsey's emphasis on mission command and adaptive leadership did not necessarily create new areas of focus, but reinforced emphasis on the areas the analysis already identified as important to mission command and adaptive leadership. All boiled down, the common themes of adaptive leadership and mission command result in the following areas: the Army root definition of leadership, uncertain environments, anticipating and reacting to change, critical and creative thinking and trusting teams. Once again, these ideas combine to give us the definition of adaptive leadership in the context of mission command:

The ability to anticipate and react to change in an uncertain environment by critically and creatively influencing people while fostering trusting teams to accomplish the mission.

Starting with the fundamentals of mission command and then analyzing the categories of mission command, the most prominent similarity was operational adaptability. Analyzing the components of operational adaptability and linking them to the traits of the mission command leadership philosophy and the leadership tools for adaptability, many strong connections and similarities became apparent. As these connections developed through the analysis, prominent themes for adaptive leadership in the context of mission command emerged.

Leaders who lead by way of critical and creative thinking require people and teams that trust one another. These trusting teams make coping with and preparing for uncertain and ambiguous environments more tolerable. A leader who has fostered and

maintained a trusting team of people is more willing to accept prudent risk himself and let subordinates accept prudent risk as well. This trusting team better enables the adaptive leader in a mission command environment rapidly adjust to the changing circumstances.

A leader with a trusting team is better able to use critical thinking methods like design and lead Soldiers in his unit critically. A trusting team is better able to flex with the needs of an uncertain environment when they know they can count on each other. The trusting team also supports creative thinking and creative methods necessary in design to solve the ill-structured problems an uncertain and ambiguous environment poses.

All the leadership areas of operational adaptability are reinforced in a mission command environment and provide the basis for an adaptive leader to adapt his leadership methods. As emphasized by General Dempsey and illustrated by the actions of Colonel Chamberlain at the battle of Gettysburg, in the past, the present and surely in the future, the operational environment will be uncertain and ambiguous. There will not be a textbook answer for the problems the Army will face all the time. By training and developing his trusting team of leaders, the adaptive leader will have subordinates willing to listen to his creative methods required for novel situations, which he derived through critical thinking. With these methods practice, fostered and institutionalized, the adaptive leader and his subordinates will be more comfortable with uncertainty and be ready to anticipate and adjust to changes in the environment in order to accomplish the mission.

### Summary

This chapter analyzed the secondary research questions to unlock the answers to the questions: what is mission command and what is adaptive leadership? Combining the analysis from these two questions and outlining a historical example of adaptive

leadership in a mission command setting, the research and analysis provides the answer to the primary question of what is adaptive leadership in the context of mission command. The following chapter will summarize and conclude the research on adaptive leadership in the context of mission command and provide avenues for further study in this area.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### Introduction

The previous chapter provided detailed analysis of the primary and secondary research questions following the methodology outlined in chapter three. This chapter will discuss the results of chapter four and provide recommendations for the results and concepts for future study in the area of adaptive leadership in the context of mission command.

Chapter 4 analyzed the components of mission command and how those components relate to the term adaptive leadership. The analysis also revealed the components of adaptive leadership in other Army Field Manuals and literature outside of the Army. Common components and themes of adaptive leadership outside of the TRADOC Pam 525-3-3 and FM 6-0 were presented and then compared and linked to the themes inside the Army Mission Command Doctrinal Publications. The resulting components combined define adaptive leadership within the context of mission command.

#### Interpretation of Findings

Adaptive leadership in the context of mission command is:

The ability to anticipate and react to change in an uncertain environment by critically and creatively influencing people while fostering trusting teams to accomplish the mission.

After analysis, all the components of the definition relate to concepts of leadership in Army doctrine and the environment of mission command. The leader, the

people in the organization and outside the organization, the uncertain environment, the need to anticipate and react to changes and mission accomplishment are all valid components needed to make the definition relevant.

Within the context of mission command, the leader must adapt to the other variables: different people, uncertain environment, changing goals and the changing mission. To be an adaptive leader in the mission command construct, the leader must adjust the way he influences people in his organization by applying critical and creative thinking. He must adjust to the people who are his subordinates, peers and superiors in order for his organization to be successful. He must adapt to the people outside the organizations with whom he must collaborate to achieve mission success. The leader must use the tools for adaptability, which lead to adaptive leadership with people who are in favor, neutral or opposed to the mission of his organization.

The adaptive leader in mission command must detect changes and adjust to the uncertain environment he exists in for mission accomplishment and to realize the success of the organization. He must also adjust to how the uncertain environment might appear in the future. He may have little to do with how much the environment changes or whether the environment changes in his favor, but he must anticipate and react nonetheless to realize the full success of the organization. The adaptive leader must be able to influence change in his environment through the people around him or by adapting his organization's goals or mission.

The adaptive leader in the context of mission command must be prepared to adjust his organization's goals to meet the needs of his people, the uncertain environment and the mission in order to achieve success. The he must realize when his organization's



goals are out of reach or when they are set too low. He must also adjust to the people and the uncertain environment when the organization's goals are adjusted to accomplish the mission and achieve success.

The adaptive leader in mission command must also be prepared to adjust the mission in with regard to the people, the environment and the goals established for organizational success. He must know when he will be unable to adjust to influence the people in and out of his organization or adjust the goals of the organization to meet the mission.

The only constant, unchanging aspect in the definition of adaptive leadership in the context of mission command is the success of the organization. The success of the organization is the very reason the adaptive leader is in his position within the organization. The people an adaptive leader influences, inside and outside the organization may change, the environment may change and the organizational goals may change. He must be able to anticipate, respond and adjust so he can influence and harmonize all the components in order to and achieve organizational success. The definition of success or mission accomplishment may change depending upon the people, environment or goals. Some or all of these may be out of the leader's control entirely and he may not be able to realistically adjust. The definition of organizational success may change slowly or be rapidly changing. In any, mission accomplishment and organizational success are the leader's purpose.

#### Use in Army Literature

Army Field Manual authors can use this definition of adaptive leadership to not only insert and apply in an updated version of the FM 6-0, but also in other Army Field

Manuals and literature wherever mission command and adaptive leadership are discussed. In fact, since the mission command concept has permeated into the rest of the field manuals, the definition for adaptive leadership could be used by itself. Army literature will be more focused with a definition of adaptive leadership as opposed to listing “adaptable” or “adaptability” as a quality of mission command instead of continuing to use other broad terms or paragraphs to describe an adaptive leader or adaptive leadership situation. Soldiers will no longer have to guess what it means to be an adaptive leader. They can simply look it up in the glossary of their field manual like they are accustomed to doing with other words and terminology.

Adaptive leadership, coherently defined, has the potential to replace the base definition for leadership in Army literature. Based on the uncertain, ever-changing environment and the continuation of facing ill-structure problems requiring critical and creative thinking, the term adaptive leadership will endure in Army literature far into the future.

### Conclusions

The research and analysis conducted uncovered connections between the fundamentals of mission command and aspects of adaptive leadership. The components for the definition of adaptive leadership were scattered about or hinted at everywhere in Army literature and supported in literature outside of the Army. The result of this research uncovered the components and put them together in a logical way, within the framework of mission command. The only unexpected finding in this research, aside from not being able to find an Army definition of adaptive leadership, was there were no unexpected findings. This should not belittle the end result however; the term adaptive

leadership does exist in Army literature with no definition and no coherent, succinct method to describe it.

This research also uncovered some other areas that could be further explored in the future. The concept of using design to frame ill-structured problems is still relatively new in the mainstream Army. Design appears in Army literature in some of the same places as adaptive leadership and is a tool to channel critical and creative thinking to define problems in an uncertain environment. Further research could be conducted on the relationship between design and adaptive leadership. Army academics could also do more to make the concept of design appear more clearly and less confusing in the Army Field Manuals.

Along with design as a possibility for further research, the term that appears with adaptive leadership in the mission command definition is “agile leadership.” Agile leadership could also be defined or further refined within a context like mission command if it is indeed distinctly different from adaptive leadership. This study only focused on adaptive leadership due to the terms recent relevance in Army Publications.

A coherent definition for adaptive leadership in the context of mission command will also pave the way for future Army leader development, another area for further research. The analysis here will provide a starting point for more work to create definitive aspects and focus of adaptive leadership within the context of mission command in the future. This research only scratch the surface to unlocking the importance of trusting teams in a mission command environment. Many questions are left unanswered here. There exists room for more study on not only the emphasis on trusting teams, but more specifically exactly how the Army can foster these trusting teams more effectively. In this

area, it may be time to move beyond basic leadership and deal more directly with how Soldiers can communicate more effectively with each other to understand not only each others capabilities and motives but also there feelings and desires as a member of a cohesive military unit. Fostering trusting teams is much more than just knowing mission command and acknowledging the leaders tools for adaptability.

Finally, for further research and study, the Army should continue to pursue the Starfish Program and determine what other applicability it has in a mission command scenario. With only two Starfish classes in the Command and General Staff College complete, it is too early to tell the full impact the course will have on its students in the Army and other services. Research in adaptive leadership learning and the Army's Starfish Program must continue.

Mission command, although not a new concept, is experiencing a resurgence in the Army. The Mission Command Center of Excellence is still new and there will be more research and writing on mission command along with its execution, as the concept is more ingrained into the Army in the years to come.

## APPENDIX A

### COLONEL CHAMBERLAIN AT GETTYSBURG

The 20th Maine arrived at Gettysburg near midday on 2 July, after marching more than one hundred miles in five days. They had only two hours of sleep and no hot food during the previous 24 hours. The regiment was preparing to go into a defensive position as part of the brigade commanded by Colonel Strong Vincent when a staff officer rode up to Colonel Vincent and began gesturing towards a little hill at the extreme southern end of the Union line. The hill, Little Round Top, dominated the Union position and at that moment, was unoccupied. If the Confederates placed artillery on it, they could force the entire Union Army to withdraw. The hill had been left unprotected through a series of mistakes—wrong assumptions, the failure to communicate clearly, and the failure to check. The situation was critical.

Realizing the danger, Colonel Vincent ordered his brigade to occupy Little Round Top. He positioned the 20th Maine, commanded by Colonel Joshua Chamberlain, on his brigade's left flank, the extreme left of the Union line. Colonel Vincent told Colonel Chamberlain to —hold at all hazards.”

On Little Round Top, Colonel Chamberlain issued his intent and purpose for the mission to the assembled company commanders. He ordered the right flank company to tie in with the 83d Pennsylvania and the left flank company to anchor on a large boulder because the 20th Maine was literally at the end of the line.

Colonel Chamberlain then showed the skill common to good tactical leaders. He mentally rehearsed possible countermoves against imagined threats to his unit's flank. Since he considered his left flank highly vulnerable, Colonel Chamberlain sent B Company, commanded by Captain Walter Morrill to guard it and —act as the necessities of battle required.” The captain positioned his men behind a stone wall, facing the flank of any possible Confederate advance. Fourteen Soldiers from the 2d US Sharpshooters, previously separated from their own unit, joined them.

The 20th Maine had only been in position a few minutes when the Soldiers of the 15th and 47th Alabama attacked. The Confederates, having marched all night, were tired and thirsty, but they attacked ferociously.

The Maine men held their ground until one of Colonel Chamberlain's officers reported seeing a large body of Confederate Soldiers moving laterally behind the attacking force. Colonel Chamberlain climbed on a rock and identified a Confederate unit moving around his exposed flank. He knew that if they outflanked him, his unit would be pushed off its position, facing sure destruction.

Colonel Chamberlain had to think fast. The tactical manuals he had so diligently studied only offered maneuver solutions, unsuitable for the occupied terrain. He had to create a new stock solution—one that his Soldiers could execute now and under pressure.

Since the 20th Maine was in a defensive line, two ranks deep, and it was threatened by an attack around its left flank, the colonel ordered his company commanders to stretch the line to the left. While keeping up a steady rate of fire, his line ultimately connected with the large boulder he had pointed out earlier. The sidestep maneuver was tricky, but it was a combination of other battle drills his Soldiers knew.

In spite of the terrible noise that confused voice commands, blinding smoke, the cries of the wounded, and the continuing Confederate attack—the Maine men succeeded.

Although Colonel Chamberlain's thin line was only one rank deep, it now covered twice their normal frontage and was able to throw back the Confederate infantry, assaulting a flank they thought was unprotected.

Despite desperate confederate attempts to break through, the Maine men rallied and held repeatedly. After five desperate encounters, the Maine men were down to one or two rounds per man, and determined Confederates were regrouping for another try.

Colonel Chamberlain recognized that he could not stay where he was but could not withdraw either. He decided to attack. His men would have the advantage of attacking down the steep hill, he reasoned, and the Confederates would not expect it. Clearly, he was risking his entire unit, but the fate of the Union Army depended on his men.

The decision left Colonel Chamberlain with another problem: there was nothing in the tactics book about how to get his unit from current disposition into a firm line of advance. Under tremendous fire in the midst of the battle, Colonel Chamberlain assembled his commanders. He explained that the regiment's left wing would swing around "like a barn door on a hinge" until it was even with the right wing. Then the entire regiment, bayonets fixed, would charge downhill, staying anchored to the 83d Pennsylvania on the right. The explanation was as simple as the situation was desperate.

When Colonel Chamberlain gave the order, Lieutenant Holman Melcher of F Company leaped forward and led the left wing downhill toward the surprised Confederates. Colonel Chamberlain had positioned himself at the boulder at the center of the unfolding attack. When his unit's left wing came abreast of the right wing, he jumped off the rock and led the right wing down the hill. The entire

regiment was now charging on line, swinging like a great barn door—just as he had intended.

The Alabama Soldiers, stunned at the sight of the charging Union troops, fell back on the positions behind them. There, the 20th Maine's charge might have failed. Just then, Captain Morrill's B Company and the sharpshooters opened fire on the Confederate flank and rear, just as envisioned by Colonel Chamberlain. The exhausted and shattered Alabama regiments now thought they were surrounded. They broke and ran, not realizing that one more attack would have carried the hill for them.

At the end of the battle, the slopes of Little Round Top were littered with bodies. Saplings halfway up the hill had been sawed in half by weapons fire. A third of the 20th Maine had fallen—130 men out of 386. Nonetheless, the farmers, woodsmen, and fishermen from Maine—under the command of a brave and creative leader, who had anticipated enemy actions, improvised under fire, and applied disciplined initiative in the heat of battle—had fought through to victory. (US Army 2006, 2-5-2-6)

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