

Leadership Frameworks for Multi Domain Battle: Mindsets for Organizational Adaptability and Future Viability

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

Leadership Frameworks for Multi Domain Battle: Mindsets for Organizational Adaptability and Future Viability, by Maj Andrew M. Miller, USAF, 41 pages.

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While this monograph does not advocate for a wholesale update to the traditional command and control system, it argues that the US military should rethink its hierarchical leadership perspective. To breed innovation, creative thought, and adaptability, the US military must continue to evolve its traditional military leadership hierarchy model. Acceptance that an updated mindset for the way traditional military structure supports the military element of national power will enable future viability in joint operations and multi domain battle.

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Acronyms

JP Joint Publication

US United States

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I. Introduction

It is paradoxical, yet true, to say, that the more we know, the more ignorant we become in the absolute sense, for it is only through enlightenment that we become conscious of our limitations.

—Nikola Tesla, “The Wonder World to Be Created by Electricity”

As adversaries increasingly lack clear definition and the joint community turns to concepts like joint, integrated, multi domain battle, the military organizational enterprise must evolve. Predictive, linear battlefields of the past have given way to dynamic uncertainty that requires adaptive leadership in flexible, innovative organizations. Due to this change in dynamics, structures and leadership perspectives appropriate in the past may no longer be appropriate. Modern leadership and organizational theory provide novel insights into how military organizations might work efficiently in complex future environments.

Just as Berger and Luckmann suggest that acquired role-specific knowledge and internalization of institutional subworlds define secondary socialization, so, too, do service parochialisms pervade every aspect of an officer's development.¹ Unilaterally, variations in service culture enable efficiency in that service's domain. Although service culture is purposeful, the resulting lack of commonality hinders joint operations by adding confusion, doubt, and misperceptions to circumstances that require unimpeded service solidarity and interoperability. Unwritten service cultures promote variance in leadership expectations that reduce cohesion and camaraderie in joint and multinational environments, threatening the underlying trust required for successful multi domain operations. Military forces will have difficulty executing effective operations in joint environments if they do not have a common, foundational understanding of leadership expectations both within and between individual services. The need for joint strategic leadership guidance is extraordinarily relevant in today's consistently collaborative battlespace. As a result, this monograph's audience spans services, modal competencies, and age groups.

¹ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor, 1967), 138.

As the military enterprise begins to transition its leadership focus through the employment of “mission command” or “multi domain battle,” it becomes increasingly important to understand service culture, and simultaneously acknowledge, apply, and implement modern leadership theories in order to remain effective in the complex future operational environment. Future military requirements may be too broad and undefined to assume that they can be controlled by rigid adherence to traditional leadership perspectives. Traditional military hierarchies, and their associated cultures and mindsets, are organizational leadership structures that privilege doctrinal orderliness, top-down control, and complete subordinate compliance.²

Unfortunately, the leadership model that traditional military organizations employ may be suboptimal to lead joint organizations effectively in the complex, multi domain environment of the future. Current military organizations already exist in the future operating environment; and it is significantly different and more complex than that of even fifty years ago. As adversaries become more ambiguous to define, nebulous concepts like non-state actors, terrorism, and social media add to the complexity that the traditional military hierarchy may have difficulty mitigating. Traditional notions of hierarchical power and compliance leadership are no longer appropriate in organizations that require capability in complex environments.³ Attempted understanding of once binary concepts such as the definition of an adversary, or the threat of non-kinetic violence magnify complexity to extremes. This is the genesis of multi domain battle: preparation for “possible future battlefields, in which current American strengths could become future weaknesses, and domains of present dominance could become areas of violent struggle.”⁴ It is the

² Mary Uhl-Bien and Michael Arena, "Leadership for Organizational Adaptability: A Theoretical Synthesis and Integrative Framework," *The Leadership Quarterly* (2018): 11.

³ James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds* (New York: Anchor, 2005), 282.

⁴ David Perkins, “Multi-Domain Battle: Driving Change to Win in the Future,” *Military Review* 97, no. 3 (July - August 2017): 7.

US military's conceptualization of a framework for victory in a "more complex world" across multiple domains.⁵

Strategic leadership in a multi domain environment cannot effectively address ill-defined strategic-level problems without available tools.⁶ Worse, there is strong potential for mission failure because the employment of experience-based doctrine may not account for complex problems in future organizations and their operations. Conventional, doctrinal approaches to complex problem solving may bring about incomplete results, and unsatisfied endstates.⁷ The manner in which an organization defines a problem impacts the tools used in attempt to solve it.⁸ However, before any tool can be employed appropriately, there must be a culture of adaptability within the greater strategic organization in order to incorporate ideas and potential solutions from all echelons of the organization and its area of interest.

Of utmost importance in preparation for multi domain battle is the development of adaptive organizations and the adaptive leaders that enable them to coordinate across domains. Organizational adaptability provides the collaborative skills required to address complex problems in modern operational environments and multi domain battle.⁹ Due to its immense scale, effective execution of multi domain battle will require adaptive leaders who solicit input from subordinates, while trusting them to make appropriate decisions. Although the concept is defined in current US military doctrine, there is nothing that describes how to become an adaptive leader in a joint, multi domain environment.

⁵ Perkins, "Multi-Domain Battle," 10.

⁶ Charles McMillan and Jeffrey Overall, "Wicked Problems: Turning Strategic Management Upside Down," *Journal of Business Strategy* 37, no. 1 (January 2016): 41.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 38.

⁹ Ibid.

Given a lack of common organizational background and vastly different leadership requirements between the services, the application of modern adaptive organizational leadership to traditional military organizations may improve efficiency in joint interaction, including joint mission command and multi domain battle. Consequently, the US military must pursue an organizational leadership evolution based on trust and adaptability. Traditional military hierarchy has difficulty executing effectively in complex environments because it is not adaptive by nature.¹⁰ In this context, the traditional military organization is characterized by rigid command structures, built for compliance leadership, and led by commanders who hold all authority and responsibility as singular decision-makers. If complex environments require organizational adaptability based on trust and individual autonomy, the traditional military structure may not be adept in multi domain battle. Although much of leadership doctrine emphasizes an individual leader's adaptiveness, an increased focus on organizational adaptiveness may empower the military command and control structure to meet present-day requirements, enabling it to meet the complexities of multi domain battle.

This monograph provides a model for the development of adaptive leadership within a traditional military hierarchy. Although hierarchical rank structure in the US military will remain, traditional mindsets must change in order to promote compatibility with the multi domain battle concept. "Mission command," "multi domain battle," and "agile and adaptive leadership" must not exist merely as doctrinal catchphrases, but be understood, internalized, and iterated within and between joint services.

Modern leadership theory and scholarship on the interaction of complex systems demonstrate the need for trust-based organizational leadership in today's military. Significant literature exists in the business field, and modern leadership theories on organizational

¹⁰ Yaneer Bar-Yam, *Making Things Work: Solving Complex Problems in a Complex World* (Cambridge, MA: Knowledge Press, 2005), 19.

adaptability may have significant, positive impacts on hierarchical military institutions and culture. Doctrinal relationships within and between military services must evolve to consider the application of modern leadership theories to the joint military environment. However, traditional military leadership structure and associated perspectives are extremely resistant to change. In the words of Sir Basil Liddell Hart, “the only thing harder than getting a new idea into the military mind is getting an old one out.”¹¹

II. Doctrine Review

Mission Command & Adaptability

Joint Mission Command

There is no definitive joint leadership publication for mission command or adaptability. The most robust discussion of mission command in joint doctrine is found in Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations*. In a passage discussing Commander Centric Leadership, it defines mission command as a concept that is “built on subordinate leaders at all echelons who exercise disciplined initiative and act aggressively and independently to accomplish the mission.”¹²

From a leadership perspective, each service has their own doctrinal leadership definitions, based on unique operating requirements. There is no higher authority for leadership doctrine than the service’s own publication. Moreover, United States Air Force Doctrine Vol. II, *Leadership*, clearly illustrates that fact on its title page, stating that there is “No Equivalent Joint Publication.”¹³ Individual services are free to pursue their own leadership philosophies, for better or worse. The services tailor their definitions to meet their service’s needs, but they simultaneously become more difficult to integrate at a joint level. If services are expected to

¹¹ B. H. Liddell Hart, *Thoughts on War* (London, United Kingdom: Faber & Faber, 1944), 115.

¹² US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017).

¹³ US Department of the Air Force, “U.S. Air Force Doctrine > Core Doctrine > Vol. 2, Leadership,” accessed November 13, 2017, <http://www.doctrine.af.mil/Core-Doctrine/Vol-2-Leadership/>.

function at a joint, multi domain level, they must be more adaptable than service-specificity allows. Although each service fosters a cultural mindset appropriate to its own requirements, the services' doctrinal offerings are service-specific at best, and, at worst, incompatible.

Service-Specific Application

The philosophy of mission command is the foundational US Army concept that defines understanding, decision making, and mission execution. Army Doctrine Publication 6-0, *Mission Command*, defines mission command as “how commanders, supported by their staffs, combine the art of command and the science of control to understand situations, make decisions, direct action, and accomplish missions.”¹⁴ It 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 unified land operations.”¹⁵ Fundamentally, Army mission command doctrine states that its execution requires adaptive leadership, a foundational principle related to the exercise of authority and direction of an organization. The Army’s six principles of mission command are: build cohesive teams through mutual trust, create shared understanding, provide a clear commander’s intent, exercise disciplined initiative, use mission orders, and accept prudent risk.¹⁶ The first of these is arguably the most important. Foundational trust throughout cohesive teams relates directly to organizational efficiency.

Mission command and adaptability are two concepts intertwined in Army doctrine. Adaptability is also standard Army doctrinal terminology, and it is typically attached to the concept of agility. According to Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-22, agility is flexibility

¹⁴ US Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), ii.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

that enables adaptability in ill-defined situations.¹⁷ Further, “agility provides organizations with operational adaptability to develop situational understanding.”¹⁸ Given a simple comparison of doctrinal definitions (and that some form of adaptability is used in each definition of agility), the US Army finds adaptability the superior of the two virtues. Due to the multitude of references to “agile and adaptive” leadership in Army doctrine, and the fact that agility is secondary, it would behoove the Army to give closer consideration to organizational adaptability. Therefore, the question becomes: what does adaptability mean to the US Army in an organizational context?

In an article published by *Military Review* in 2011, Dr. William Cojocar asserts that Field Manual 6-22, *Leader Development*, “provides a solid definition for adaptive leadership,” however, the 2006 version he referenced contained nothing more than a few sentences about innovation and creative thinking.¹⁹ The closest it comes to providing a definition of adaptive leadership is that “all leaders can and must think creatively to adapt to new environments” and “Army leaders should seize such opportunities to think creatively and to innovate.”²⁰ Moreover, there is a difference between adaptive leadership as an individual trait, and adaptability within an organization. Current iterations of Army leadership doctrine repetitively state that leaders must be “agile and adaptive” in order to conduct mission command.²¹

In US Air Force doctrine, adaptability is only mentioned in the context of strategic vision.²² However, the best discussion of adaptability in a current US Army context comes from

¹⁷ US Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-22, *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 5–1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ William J. Cojocar, “Adaptive Leadership in the Military Decision Making Process,” *Military Review* 91, no. 6 (December 2011): 24.

²⁰ US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 6-22, *Leader Development* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), 6–2.

²¹ US Army, ADP 6-0, (2012), 1.

²² US Department of the Air Force, “U.S. Air Force Doctrine > Core Doctrine > Vol. 2, Leadership.”

the current version of Field Manual 6-22, *Leader Development*. It states “adaptability for the purpose of performance is an effective change in behavior in response to an altered or unexpected situation.”²³ Although defined in Army doctrine, adaptability must be widely understood and practiced in order to become more than academic Schlagworte – doctrinal buzzwords used to oversimplify complex military ideas.²⁴

Organizational Structure

According to JP 3-0, “Command is the authority that a commander in the armed forces lawfully exercises over subordinates by virtue of rank or assignment.”²⁵ In the traditional military leadership structure, leadership is often synonymous with commandership. Simply put, in a military organization, referent leadership, regardless of quality or competence, is always subordinate to command by virtue of rank or position. Even in the highest level of doctrinal publication in the Department of Defense, there is no consideration for leadership supported by referent competence. Doctrine assumes that the most competent leaders are promoted to higher rank, every time. According to Army Regulation 600-8-29, the primary requirements for officer promotion eligibility are date of rank and time in grade.²⁶ The primacy of those two requirements implies that competence varies directly with time in service. This premise is the backbone of military hierarchical organizations.

Doctrine therefore assumes that empowered individuals, potentially commanding massive organizations, are the most competent members of the organization, and can make the

²³ US Army, FM 6-22, (2015), 5-7.

²⁴ David T. Zabecki, ed., *Germany at War: 400 Years of Military History* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2014), 1168.

²⁵ US Joint Staff, JP 3-0, (2017), xi.

²⁶ US Department of the Army, Army Regulation (AR) 600-8-29, *Officer Promotions* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2005), 3.

best decisions. By extension, they are also the best to coordinate their capabilities externally. Unfortunately, due to culture and structural constraints, a position-enabled commander may not be the most effective conduit of innovative information, which is required to efficiently execute joint operations in multiple domains. While promotion based on time in grade is likely the best standard for military advancement, officers must cultivate a pervasive humility as they advance in rank, acknowledging both their position within the hierarchy and requirement to interconnect with other organizations.

Doctrinal understanding of the culture that drives military hierarchy and its parochial, service-based underpinnings must evolve in order to breed efficiencies as joint integration and multi domain battle increase in importance. The US Air Force Core Doctrine, Vol.1, *Basic Doctrine* provides the most concise guidance, highlighting the immediate relevance of doctrinal evolution in a changing operational environment: “Innovation has always been a key part of sound doctrinal development and continues to play a central role. Doctrine should evolve as new experiences and advances in technology point the way to the operations of the future.”²⁷

II. Problem

Organizational structure is the way in which personnel are divided into distinct capabilities, and how coordination is achieved amongst them.²⁸ Traditional military hierarchy is formal, rigid, and results-based. In its foundational form, it does not have the capacity for, or interest in, organizational adaptability. Due to traditional military organizational structure and cultural mindsets, leadership is often disconnected from cohesiveness at lower echelons. This disconnect limits the leaders’ access to creative thought from lower echelons; consequently, his or

²⁷ US Department of the Air Force, “U.S. Air Force Doctrine > Core Doctrine > Vol. 1, Basic Doctrine > Sources of Doctrine,” accessed November 13, 2017, http://www.doctrine.af.mil/Portals/61/documents/Volume_1/V1-D05-Sources-of-Doctrine.pdf?ver=2017-09-13-150320-993.

²⁸ Henry Mintzberg, *Structure in Fives: Designing Effective Organizations* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Longman Higher Education, 1982), 2.

her organizational capacity for innovation is largely limited to their own individual capability. Further, mission command philosophy between services is non-standard, which increases internal complexities in joint, integrated, and multi domain operations. Military leadership must pursue a cultural mindset evolution in order to enable increased efficiency in multi domain battle while ensuring future viability.

Military Hierarchy

Military hierarchy works when soldierly orders require absolute, unquestioned compliance. It enables compliance at the lowest levels, and keeps unquestioned decision making authority relegated to the highest. Based on thousands of years of experience, the nature of military hierarchy remained consistent from antiquity to the present. However, the potential for organizational inefficiency and potential failure increases with every successful endeavor, or previous enjoyment of dominance.²⁹ As the basis for military interaction evolves, so too should the military organization. According to Dr. Jamshid Gharajedagi, exaggerated success over time relates directly to an eventual, if not inevitable, reduction in effectiveness.³⁰ Military operations change the nature of the environment, which should drive a corresponding update in the way the organization operates.³¹ However, the military enterprise, from an organizational perspective, continues to operate as if its environment has not evolved around it. The traditional military culture and organizational hierarchy is too embedded in its own past to contemplate a much-needed adjustment required for joint multi domain battle.³²

²⁹ Jamshid Gharajedagi, *Systems Thinking: Managing Chaos and Complexity: A Platform for Designing Business Architecture* (Burlington, MA: Morgan Kaufmann, 2011), 6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

Military commanders (and other high-level organizational leaders), due to experience, are predisposed to identifying decisions made at lower echelons as errors, based on their own understanding of each decision's validity.³³ Unfortunately, military leadership culture tempts leaders to believe, due to rank and position, that they can do better, they are smarter than their subordinates, and that they can better coordinate action.³⁴ JP 3-0 specifically decrees that "the art of command resides in the commander's ability," which, by omission, discounts the abilities of subordinates within the leader's organization. Often, in complex situations, this perspective leads to "information overload," a manifestation of inefficiency which is, as Henry Mintzberg, a leading authority on modern organizational structure, suggests, based on micromanagement of decision making.³⁵ Although information can be transmitted to one central authority, it's specifics may not be entirely comprehended, leading to inefficiency or ineffectiveness.³⁶ Outcomes of those decision paths lead subordinates at lower echelons to limit sending information up the chain of command, or to defer to senior leadership who may be unaware of the complex reality of the environment.³⁷ Traditional military hierarchy is built on that leadership perspective, socializing its acceptance generationally. In traditional military hierarchical structure, there are few checks on a commander's influence. Therefore, there are few means to suggest circumstances in which decisions contrary to a commander's perspective would increase efficiency or effectiveness.

Organizational Culture

Commanders in each service operate with different expectations and perspectives on their mission sets. For example, one of the US Air Force's Tenants of Airpower is "Centralized

³³ Mintzberg, *Structure in Fives*, 96.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

Control, Decentralized Execution.”³⁸ That core concept provides foundational leadership perspectives that delegate decision making and enable subordinates to execute independently at their level. Some services are less willing to cede as much authority to their subordinate echelons, reserving decision making authority for the highest levels of responsibility. Those differing perspectives are uniquely suited to the operational requirements of each service, and serve a purpose. Unfortunately, this conflict of leadership perspectives in service culture drive parochial rifts in joint integrated or multi domain operations.

Joint doctrine defines service and capability integration as “the arrangement of military forces and their actions to create a force that operates by engaging as a whole.”³⁹ By extension, that definition applies to multi domain battle, asserting that commanders are able to make dynamic, appropriate decisions based on their situational understanding and commander’s intent.⁴⁰ However, it does so in purposefully vague language that provides beneficial flexibility without limiting parochial service perspectives. This benefit can also be a liability. Although joint doctrine provides significant flexibility to combatant commanders, there is no doctrine mediating how the military prioritizes or assumes risk between services at a joint level. Furthermore, the questions of which service’s concept of mission command takes primacy, and how organizations are to interrelate, are left unanswered. This is contrary to the concept of integration in multi domain battle, which requires creating a combined force that operates effectively as a single entity. Forces cannot effectively engage as a whole if service parochialisms inhibit their actions. Since a combatant commander may come from any service, his service and organizational backgrounds probably bring significant biases.

³⁸ US Department of the Air Force, “U.S. Air Force Doctrine > Core Doctrine > Vol. 1, Basic Doctrine,” accessed November 13, 2017, <http://www.doctrine.af.mil/Core-Doctrine/Vol-1-Basic-Doctrine/>.

³⁹ US Department of Defense, Joint Publication (JP) 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010), 113.

⁴⁰ US Joint Staff, JP 3-0, (2017), xi.

As an example, operational leadership differs appreciably between the US Air Force and the Army because the Air Force operates functionally, where the Army is very commander-focused. The Air Force is more apt to delegate authority to a competent but (sometimes significantly) junior officer, which can make joint interactions very inefficient. Where rank is the ultimate indicator of competence in the US Army, the Air Force allows more trust in the credibility of an autonomous, purpose-driven subordinate. When it comes to authority, rank, and echelon, individual services exist in similar structure, but can operate very differently within them. Commonality in leadership and organizational adaptability, from a joint doctrinal standpoint, would make great strides in mitigating difficulties stemming from service parochialisms in joint integration and multi domain battle.

Service parochialisms create the potential for a lack of cohesiveness in joint integration and multi domain operations. The gap between doctrine and inter-service culture is significant. Although doctrine provides implicit flexibility through limited requirements, it should provide explicit flexibility through the advancement of a culture of leadership and organizational adaptability in order to ensure interoperability. Omission of leadership standards in joint doctrine condones a culture of inefficient traditional military hierarchy, and emboldens restrictive aspects of service culture. However, the evolution of adaptable leadership mindsets and cultures can make joint military hierarchy (and individual services' traditional substructures) more efficient in the face of increasing complexity.

Complexity

Complexity is not new. However, the means with which we organize and communicate are more complex than ever before. New technologies enable faster communication, and myriad rule sets define how communication takes place. As a result, our social and economic systems continue to grow in complexity and interdependence.⁴¹ The world itself is not more complex, but

⁴¹ Bar-Yam, *Making Things Work*, 61.

due to technological advancement, the environment in which the military operates is multifaceted and constantly changing.

Complexity increases with time. Actions drive outcomes that influence subsequent actions, change dynamics over time, and disconnect causes from intended effects.⁴² This concept is the essence of evolving complexity. Any manipulation of a system changes its makeup and its perspective, regardless of time, space, or purpose.⁴³ It is especially true in the military environment that, “we can never do merely one thing.”⁴⁴ Actions compound, causing unforeseen events which continually change the current version of reality. Given an evolution in reality, there should be a corresponding evolution in the organization which operates within that environment.⁴⁵ Change in environmental complexity should be a stimulus for organizational change.

Structure of the Problem

The most common error in organizational design is the centralization of decision making in complex environments.⁴⁶ The problem breaks into two parts: an organization’s need for results and its concurrent need to innovate.⁴⁷ The need for results is based on measurable short-term effectiveness, while the need to innovate concerns the future requirements that must be addressed in order to enable future viability.⁴⁸ Short-term success often veils the necessity for innovation, underscoring the US military’s consternation with change.

⁴² Robert Jervis, *System Effects* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 48.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Gharajedaghi, *Systems Thinking*, 7.

⁴⁶ Mintzberg, *Structure in Fives*, 96.

⁴⁷ Michael L. Tushman and Charles A. O’Reilly III, “Ambidextrous Organizations: Managing Evolutionary and Revolutionary Change,” *California Management Review* 38, no. 4 (Summer 1996): 24.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Elliot Cohen, in his 2017 book *The Big Stick*, outlines several rules for the use of military power.⁴⁹ The most applicable, in this discussion, is “While engaging in today’s fight, prepare for tomorrow’s challenge.”⁵⁰ This statement, taken for guidance, cogently expresses the fundamental dilemma in planning, and the root of the problem discussed here: how does an organization plan an effective balance between the need for results now, and the need for innovation that enables viability in the future?

Need for Results

Military hierarchy is the ultimate formal organizational network. Hierarchy is simply a control structure.⁵¹ Organizations formalize behavior in order to control and coordinate activities, while maintaining a consistency that enables efficiency.⁵² In traditional military operations, a commander’s legal authority provides the consistency of unquestioned compliance, potentially with lives at stake. Mintzberg suggests that formalized behavior within organizations may not always have valid underpinnings.⁵³ In fact, the desire for order may be mildly inappropriate, or entirely arbitrary.⁵⁴ While it should remain clear that military operations often require high levels of formalized order for the sake of compliance and cohesion in the face of danger, that same formality can hinder the innovation required to manage evolutionary complexity. Military commanders are no longer managing linear formations pitted against an enemy’s linear formation on an open battlefield. Unfortunately, tenets of traditional military leadership created for linear

⁴⁹ Eliot A. Cohen, *The Big Stick: The Limits of Soft Power and the Necessity of Military Force* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 216.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁵¹ Bar-Yam, *Making Things Work*, 66.

⁵² Mintzberg, *Structure in Fives*, 34–35.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

and singular domain conflicts may be inappropriate in overcoming complexity in modern operational environments.

Hierarchy consciously stifles entrepreneurial leadership, innovation, and outside-the-box thinking. Although military doctrine pays lip service to agile and adaptive leadership, it falls short by forcing agile and adaptive leaders to function within a culture of strict and rigid hierarchy. Adherence to traditional military organizational systems in modern environments stifles adaptive space by culturally inhibiting innovation, learning, and growth in favor of formality and standardization. Militaries often require strict order and discipline, and prefer to maintain an organizational structure reminiscent of 17th century Prussia. That structure cultivates cultures that struggle to evolve organizationally or meet modern desires for efficiency, effectiveness, and a range of new threats unimaginable in previous generations.

Compliance

Traditional military hierarchy generates control for the sake of compliance. In militaries of the past, traditional hierarchies produced desired results because of a leadership culture that did not require subordinates to participate in planning within the operational environment.⁵⁵ On simplicity alone, a commanding general such as Fredrick the Great was able to dictate the entire order of battle himself, without regard for subordinate input.⁵⁶ Nothing more than compliance was required of subordinates due to the commander's power distance, the linearity of the battlefield, and the clear predictability of their expectations.

⁵⁵ Michael Bonura, *Under the Shadow of Napoleon: French Influence on the American Way of Warfare from Independence to the Eve of World War II* (New York: NYU Press, 2012), 16.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Power Distance

Within Hofstede's Implicit Models of Organizations, traditional military organization is one of large power distance coupled with weak uncertainty avoidance.⁵⁷ Power distance is the extent to which subordinates agree that the leadership holds power.⁵⁸ Uncertainty avoidance is the extent to which a culture feels threatened by the ambiguous or the unknown.⁵⁹ In traditional military organization, leadership power is unquestioned, and doctrine (its core of experiential-based best practices) is based on predictability. Doctrinally-based predictable problem sets play so significant a role in decision making that unknown problem sets can spawn significant organizational discomfort.

Power distance in military organizations is directly related to rank. Military rank structure is integral to the influence and effectiveness of the traditional military hierarchy, which falls within the paradigm for high power distance cultures. In Hofstede et. al's example of high power distance within an organization, the organization is the family (unit) belonging to the almighty father (commander), where the ultimate answer to any question defers to the father's decision.⁶⁰ While not representative of all examples of traditional military organization, it creates the mindset at lower echelons that achievement is based on pleasing the leadership.⁶¹ In this environment, achievement may be attributable to a 'yes' answer (regardless of veracity), because simply contradicting the leadership is often a prelude to individual failure.⁶² This mindset is a significant

⁵⁷ Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, and Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2010), 306.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 306.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

challenge in traditional military leadership culture, and the epitome of the effects of high power distance.

Leadership at the top of high power distance organizational cultures may be less likely to enjoy objective information from subordinates. Subordinate relationships with high power distance are less likely to share information with perceived negative impact or trends, and filter information available to leaders simply because of institutionalized reverence for the command leadership. Up until a point of crisis, even mid-level leaders often prefer to spin information provided to commanders in return for a perceived or unspoken extension of job security. As a result, high-level decision making is based on limited or incomplete information, and is at best inefficient, and potentially ineffective, decreasing the overall capability of the organization. High power distance in military hierarchy is an impediment to mutual trust, which can make the organization fundamentally less capable in multi domain environments.

That decrease in organizational capability due to high power distance relationships can be remedied through an increase in trust relationships. Too much power distance within an organizational leadership structure mitigates foundational trust required to exploit advantages that Complexity Leadership Theory's brokerage concept has to offer. Even highly cohesive organizations may fail if mutual trust between leadership levels collapses. As power distance increases, trust decreases, and the organization cannot exploit the advantages that leadership brokerage offers. Therefore, power distance must be decreased, and leaders must work towards building trust within an organization.

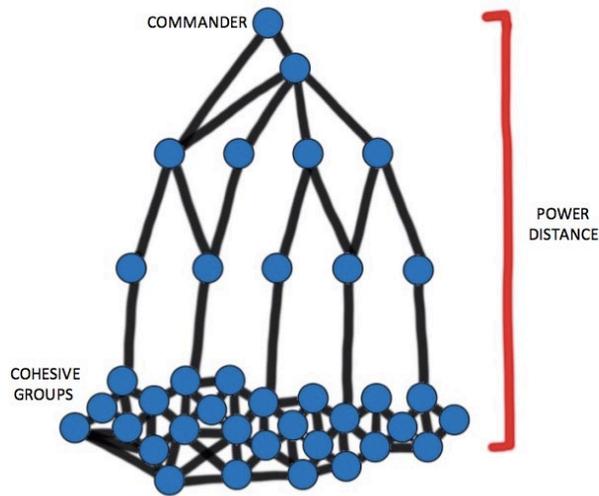


Figure 1. Power Distance v. Cohesiveness in Military Hierarchy. Created by author, adapted from Michael J. Arena and Mary Uhl-Bien, “Complexity Leadership Theory: Shifting from Human Capital to Social Capital,” *People & Strategy* 39, no. 2 (Spring 2016): 24.

The Infallible Commander

Traditional military organizations rely on the commander to make decisions based upon military genius – Clausewitz’s *coup d’oeil* – the commander’s intuition, judgement, and experience that empowers him or her to succeed.⁶³ Over time, that concept of genius transformed. Once reserved for brilliant military commanders like Napoleon, military genius is now an expectation of any military commander, conferred upon him incrementally, as he pins on successively higher rank. JP 3-0 emphasizes this expectation, while giving little credence to subordinate capabilities.⁶⁴ Of great importance in doctrine is the dominance of the commander’s virtuosity, asserting that joint objectives are achieved through commander’s guidance, intent, experience, and intuition.⁶⁵ While it does mention delegation based on mission command, joint doctrine supports the constant superiority of the commander’s decision making, which can

⁶³ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Eliot Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 102.

⁶⁴ US Joint Staff, JP 3-0, (2017).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, xi.

suppress competing (but subordinate) perspectives within an organization.⁶⁶ This phenomenon is a direct result of the US military's adherence to traditional hierarchy. Professional competence, or at least the assumption of competence, is based mostly on rank in many organizations, and the primary requirement for promotion is time in service. However, the primacy of a commander's ability is a culturally accepted norm.

Unfortunately, while this mindset provides a commander with immediate compliance from his subordinates, it does not consider the referent power of other competent members of the organization. A traditional military leader who believes in his own primacy is less culturally inclined to accept the input of a subordinate, even if their perspectives are credible. Instead of trusting a competent subordinate's judgement when faced with a complex problem, the traditional military culture may accept the execution of an inferior plan based solely on the commander's own "experience and intuition."⁶⁷

Daniel Kahneman, in *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, suggests that intuitions and judgement heuristics may be useful in the short term, but they eventually lead to catastrophic errors.⁶⁸ Kahneman's "Fallacy of Intuition" suggests that intuition can only be trusted where stable regularities exist in the environment.⁶⁹ If a military environment is complex, dynamic, and ever-changing, subjective intuition should not be privileged over the objective inputs of competent subordinates. A cultural environment that prizes intuition to such a degree that it stifles inputs from below makes little sense when desiring an effective solution, or dealing with concepts with outcomes as grim as close-proximity warfare. In a complex environment, priority must go to potential for success over compliance-based leadership. Therefore, the effective leader cannot

⁶⁶ US Joint Staff, JP 3-0, (2017), xi.

⁶⁷ US Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 4-6.

⁶⁸ Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 10.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 241.

afford to believe in the primacy of his own opinion at the expense of external, but better-informed sources. The leader's attitude toward and respect for subordinates directly relates to the organization's ability to innovate and adjust to contingencies.

Need to Innovate

Organizational leadership must balance the need for results now and the need to innovate for the future. This is a fundamental requirement for adaptive leadership, and adaptive organizations. On either the individual or the organizational level, effectively-managed tension between these two requirements drives both current and future effectiveness.⁷⁰ Developing the culture of a hierarchical organization may impede the execution of highly complex tasks.⁷¹ In order to effectively manage operations in complex environments, military organizations must work toward a networked culture and focus on organizational adaptability.

III. Solution

Organizational adaptability is the solution to the problem. It enables organizations to be effective when faced with "normal science" problems, but more importantly, it empowers organizations to simultaneously work toward future viability.⁷² Adaptability encourages organizations to implement change as the operational environment develops.

Complexity in the operational environment should drive organizational structure adaptation simply due to the inability to accurately determine future requirements.⁷³ In increasingly complex operating environments, organizational structure must be increasingly decentralized to remain efficient.⁷⁴ Furthermore, the more decentralized an organization, the more

⁷⁰ Arena and Uhl-Bien, "Complexity Leadership Theory," 24.

⁷¹ Bar-Yam, *Making Things Work*, 19.

⁷² Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 36.

⁷³ Mintzberg, *Structure in Fives*, 136.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

professionally it operates, because subordinates are able to act autonomously and flexibly in the face of dynamic circumstances.⁷⁵ The modern operational landscape in joint integrated, multi domain battle requires greater flexibility, thus the military organizational structure must become less rigid.⁷⁶ Therefore, it is incumbent upon military leaders to evolve their leadership culture, and embrace a mindset of adaptability. Another of Elliot Cohen's maxims drives home the point: "Planning is important; being able to adapt is more important."⁷⁷

Adaptability

In order to break down bureaucratic territorialism between military services and organizations within the Department of Defense, leadership at all echelons must work to evolve mindsets surrounding traditional military hierarchy and develop leaders as a series of brokers between organizations. The leader should not imagine himself at the top of a pyramid structure, but within the organization as the foremost information broker between subordinate groups.⁷⁸ This concept is outlined in modern Complexity Leadership Theory.

Complexity Leadership Theory

In Complexity Leadership Theory, Dr. Mary Uhl-Bien and Dr. Michael Arena suggest that efficiency in talent management within an organization is best served by prioritizing improvement of social capital ahead of individuals with specific capabilities.⁷⁹ This focus allows organizations to capitalize on competitive advantage gained from the way individuals interact, as opposed to their individual talents alone. Complexity Leadership Theory is used to improve

⁷⁵ Mintzberg, *Structure in Fives*, 110.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁷⁷ Cohen, *The Big Stick*, 217.

⁷⁸ Arena and Uhl-Bien, "Complexity Leadership Theory," 23.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

organizational excellence through the observance of two major tenants: group cohesion, and information brokerage between groups.⁸⁰ The efficiency with which individuals interact within an organizational system is significant, and the organizational system's de facto structure may bear little resemblance to the organization's doctrinal underpinnings.

Cohesion and Brokerage

Group cohesion describes the interconnectedness of individuals within a group with clusters of other individuals within the same group.⁸¹ A cluster's cohesion is directly related to redundancy of connections between individuals in the group – and that cohesiveness enables efficiency and innovation.⁸² While a military organization typically enjoys the innovative capability of significant group cohesion at lower echelons, due to constraints of military hierarchy, leadership often exists outside the subordinate cohesiveness, thereby disconnecting decision-makers from pursuing creativity and innovation.

There is little consideration for social capital in the grand scheme of US military talent management. An individual's social and interpersonal skills, the traits that enhance organizational networks, are insignificant in movement decision making or promotion processes. Individual promotion is primarily based on time-in-service, followed by previous duties, and finally, job performance. This reinforces the ill-conceived concept that age equates to professionalism and leadership capability, and bears no consideration for brokerage or social aptitude required of effective, adaptive leaders.

Furthermore, based on strict adherence to military hierarchy and chain-of-command, leaders' ability to function in a brokerage role varies directly with their rank and influence. Leaders often cannot act as brokers because pyramidal hierarchy bars them from the richness of

⁸⁰ Arena and Uhl-Bien, "Complexity Leadership Theory," 23.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

innovative cohesiveness at the lower levels of organization. Traditional military hierarchy and high power-distance can impede an organization's ability to forge cohesion across levels of leadership, leaving those in decision making roles functionally disconnected from beneficial knowledge.

Operational and Entrepreneurial Systems

Power distance has a significant influence on organizational structure. Within any organization, power distance impacts interaction between two pervasive, competing regimes: operational and entrepreneurial systems.⁸³ The operational system is results based, lives in the now, and is driven by rigid formality.⁸⁴ The entrepreneurial system is innovation based, looks to the future, and is driven by creativity.⁸⁵ The tension between these two systems, called adaptive space, is harnessed and leveraged by adaptive organizations, catalyzing the growth of emergent concepts between the two systems.⁸⁶ These emergent concepts enable organizations to increase potential for future viability. Specific leadership structures support each of these organizational systems.

Three Types of Leadership

In Complexity Leadership Theory, organizational adaptability is derived from the tension between operational and entrepreneurial systems, however, this organizational systems paradigm also correlates to the classification of leadership styles.⁸⁷ Three distinct types of leadership exist to support each of these organizational systems: operational, entrepreneurial, and adaptive leadership. Military doctrine speaks often about adaptive leadership, but falls short in precisely

⁸³ Arena and Uhl-Bien, "Complexity Leadership Theory," 23.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 24.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 23.

defining it. In order to better understand adaptive leadership, there must be a discussion of the types of leadership from which it originates.

Like Complexity Leadership Theory's operational system, operational leadership is administrative leadership.⁸⁸ Its practitioners enable existing organizations to follow existing processes based on existing expectations and known problem sets. It focuses on compliance, behavior, rules, and formality. Operational leadership typifies high power distance relationships, and can be performed by any leader. Positional power constitutes the justification for the operational leader's authority. Based on the prevalence of rules and formal structure, subordinates are expected to defer to the leader's perspective. Operational leadership is the traditional military standard.

Conversely, entrepreneurial leadership is creative leadership, carrying traits from Complexity Leadership Theory's entrepreneurial system.⁸⁹ Its proponents anticipate that situations change, and yesterday's problems will differ from tomorrow's. Entrepreneurial leadership advocates for creativity, innovation, and group cohesion. It respects subordinates and their capabilities, and expects them to think outside-the-box. It requires trust in subordinates to be effective, and it thrives on autonomy. However, its flexible nature is not well-suited to process-based requirements.

Effective organizations employ leaders who execute both of these leadership styles appropriately, within each system. Moreover, it is the capable leader's balance of these two systems that engage subordinates and enable effectiveness. The tension between them is where the Adaptive leader drives an organization to creative outcomes within routine operations, while enabling innovation for the future.⁹⁰ Adaptive leaders execute a third type of leadership.

⁸⁸ Arena and Uhl-Bien, "Complexity Leadership Theory," 23.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 25.

Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive leadership is brokerage leadership. The effective leader is the foremost connection of information, who balances the tension between the operational and entrepreneurial systems within his organization.⁹¹ However, when paired with current military doctrine of the same title, definitions need to evolve. Furthermore, adaptive leadership will not develop through simple codification in doctrine. The adaptive leadership discussion, based on humility and trust, must permeate the ranks of military organization in order to enable organizational adaptability, and to drive toward future viability. Military leaders must evolve their mindset.

Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, in their work *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, define adaptive leadership as the “practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive.”⁹² By extension, adaptability enables organizations to thrive, which preserves the institution for continued effectiveness, eliminates expectations or requirements when they no longer apply to the mission set, and gives the organization innovative capabilities with which to employ in future challenging environments.⁹³

Adaptability allows leaders to articulate challenges, leveraging the innovative capabilities of all subordinate functions without loss of fidelity due to their brokerage involvement throughout the organization. Instead of a singular, doctrinal planning model within which every conceivable crisis is to be solved, adaptability within the organization enables leadership to define the crisis as the isolated variable. Innovative, cohesive groups within the organization are then free to explore novel methods to solve novel problem sets. Adaptive problem-solving allows creative models to

⁹¹ Arena and Uhl-Bien, “Complexity Leadership Theory,” 23.

⁹² Ronald A. Heifetz, Marty Linsky, and Alexander Grashow, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 14.

⁹³ Ibid.

efficiently solve unique problems. Adaptive problem-solving can best be executed by broker-led, cohesive groups within adaptive organizations.

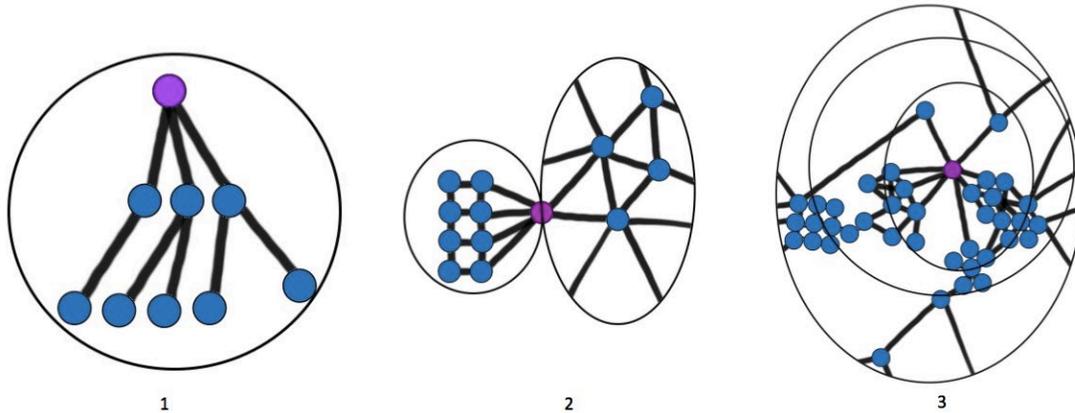


Figure 2. Mindset Transition from Traditional Hierarchy to Organizational Adaptability. Created by author, adapted from Arena and Uhl-Bien, “Complexity Leadership Theory,” 24.

Adaptive Organizations

Through deliberate, adaptive leadership, adaptive organizations are able to harness creativity throughout organizational structure, incorporating innovation into routine daily operations enabling viability for the future.⁹⁴ Adaptive organizations are efficient. They operate with engaged membership, to the greatest extent of their capability, because of mutual trust, cultural anticipation for change, and an expectation for innovation.

Adaptability and Effectiveness

The US military’s effective capability in joint operations or multi domain battle directly relates to its degree of organizational adaptability. When circumstances evolve, military organizations must be able to evolve in kind. Often, unit performance and predictability define a unit’s effectiveness based on standardized doctrine. However, expectation for doctrinal correlation to future problem sets hampers measurements for unit effectiveness. Future

⁹⁴ James March, “Exploration and Exploitation in Organizational Learning,” *Organization Science* 2, no. 1 (1991): 71.

problems will not directly match past problems from which experience-based doctrine originates. Therefore, adaptability should be the focus of any question of readiness or effectiveness.⁹⁵ Although the US military is arguably effective within its current understanding of its requirements, it may be too focused on current success at the expense of viability in unknown future circumstances.

According to Uhl-Bien and Arena, adaptive space develops with a leader's deliberate management of connections between operational and entrepreneurial systems.⁹⁶ Adaptive space within an organization improves the likelihood for future success based on the balance between conflict and connection.⁹⁷ Ford's Chief Information Officer, Marv Adams, points out that the modern global operating environment is based on numerous volatile and interdependent conflicts, and the requirement for connections within an organization must exist to combat that volatility.⁹⁸ The US military, from the lowest echelon, must learn to balance the conflict between entrepreneurial and operational areas of each organization, harnessing the adaptive tension which drives effectiveness into the future.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Arena and Uhl-Bien, "Complexity Leadership Theory," 23.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 24.

⁹⁷ Uhl-Bien and Arena, "Leadership for Organizational Adaptability," 4.

⁹⁸ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 275.

⁹⁹ Arena and Uhl-Bien, "Complexity Leadership Theory," 24.

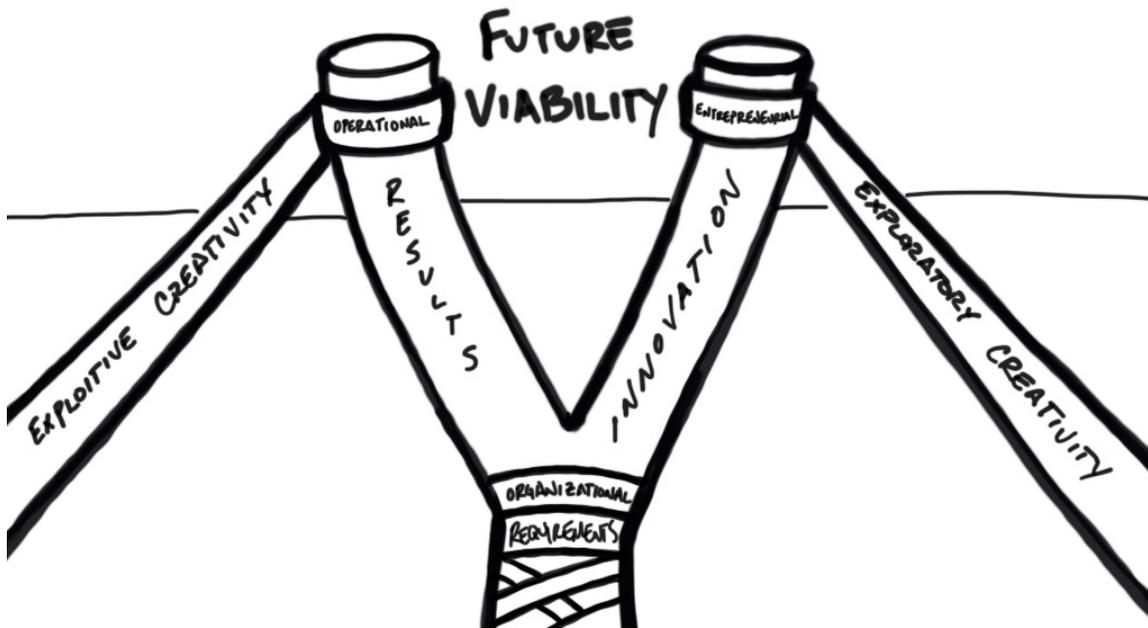


Figure 3. Adaptive Tension and Future Viability from an Adaptive Leader’s Perspective. Created by author, adapted from Uhl-Bien and Arena, “Leadership for Organizational Adaptability,” 9; March, “Exploration and Exploitation in Organizational Learning,” 71.

IV. Implementation

Leadership Perspective

Organizational adaptability combats modern complexities, thus improving efficiency in dealing with adversaries. When organizations must change based on mission complexities or emergent requirements, culture and structural design must be initiated from the highest levels of leadership.¹⁰⁰ Leaders must believe that they are reaching out to their organization, rather than down, realizing that they merely facilitate change, and allow others to implement it.¹⁰¹

Leadership perspective drives an organizational mindset, and enables cultural development. A leader’s vision for change becomes a reality when organizational membership believes they can impact the future of the organization.¹⁰² Organizational membership must

¹⁰⁰ Mintzberg, *Structure in Fives*, 46.

¹⁰¹ Henry Mintzberg, “Rebuilding Companies as Communities,” *Harvard Business Review* 87, no. 7/8 (August 2009): 142.

¹⁰² Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 215.

believe that their actions directly impact the organization and its efforts, which transforms their requirement for compliance to an outlook of commitment.¹⁰³ Lasting, positive change in an organization develops from leadership that displays competent emotional intelligence, providing a catalyst that draws enthusiastic personal commitment from all echelons.¹⁰⁴ They do so by exemplifying mutual respect and cooperation, even from their position of power.¹⁰⁵

Network

Organizational change requires networking.¹⁰⁶ Network connections enable organizational professionals (not limited to leadership) to socialize and implement organizational changes. All elements must be willing to accept updates to organizational expectations. Without network engagement throughout, updates are likely to be ineffective. Connectivity within an organization works to manage the balance between structure and flexibility, which in turn generates adaptive capability for future success.¹⁰⁷ In military organizations, networked connections are most often limited to lower echelons where rich entrepreneurial cohesiveness exists. In order to enable lasting, effective change of focus to adaptability as a measure of effectiveness, the US military must make a sustained effort to overcome cultural norms associated with traditional compliance-based hierarchy.

Without networks, new ideas within the hierarchy cannot reach a decision maker or translate into action.¹⁰⁸ Brokerage leaders within the networked organization facilitate

¹⁰³ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 215.

¹⁰⁴ Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Unleashing the Power of Emotional Intelligence* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2013), 256.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Arena and Uhl-Bien, "Complexity Leadership Theory," 26.

¹⁰⁷ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 276.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 319.

connections, relay data, and build capacity to integrate new concepts.¹⁰⁹ This networked leader enables efficiency between innovative groups, building upon existent networks – all the while maintaining a connection to decision making leadership.¹¹⁰ Adaptable, networked connections enable innovative capability of cohesive groups at lower echelons to reach the decision making process at the highest echelons of the organization.

Formal and Informal Networks

Organizational adaptability requires both formal and informal networks.¹¹¹ Doctrinal military hierarchy is an example of formal organizational networking. Within that formal hierarchy, however, informal network systems enable efficiency. Organizational structure and behavioral expectations must encourage informal networking, and prevent short-term requirements from overcoming the need to innovate.¹¹² Informal networking provides organizational efficiencies that transcend rigid structure and simple compliance; it needs to thrive in order to build adaptability.¹¹³ Development of appropriate, effective informal relationships within an organization require that a high degree of trust emerge from the leadership and extend through all echelons of the organization.¹¹⁴ Change requires cohesive, trust networks to facilitate the process.

¹⁰⁹ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 319.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 320.

¹¹¹ Uhl-Bien and Arena, "Leadership for Organizational Adaptability," 5.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 42.

¹¹³ Arena and Uhl-Bien, "Complexity Leadership Theory," 24.

¹¹⁴ Ivan Yardley and Derrick J. Neal, "Understanding the Leadership and Culture Dynamic within a Military Context: Applying Theory to an Operational and Business Context," *Defence Studies* 7, no. 1 (March 2007): 37.

Process

Adaptability is the solution to the problem. As traditional military cultures enjoy a prescriptive, process-based guide to any problem set, perceived solutions typically follow a linear progression. This organizational trust process model, outlined in six steps, evolves from a foundational increase in leadership humility. Each complementary step reinforces trust, all contribute to engagement, and organizational adaptability develops as an outcome. Humility spawns a decrease in power distance, which updates the organizational perspective on hierarchical structure. Changed perspective builds cohesiveness throughout, fosters an expectation for professional dissent, and enables positive change, which, in turn, motivates impactful subordinates. The resultant effect is organizational ability. Each step promotes trust, drives engagement, and ends with organizational adaptability.

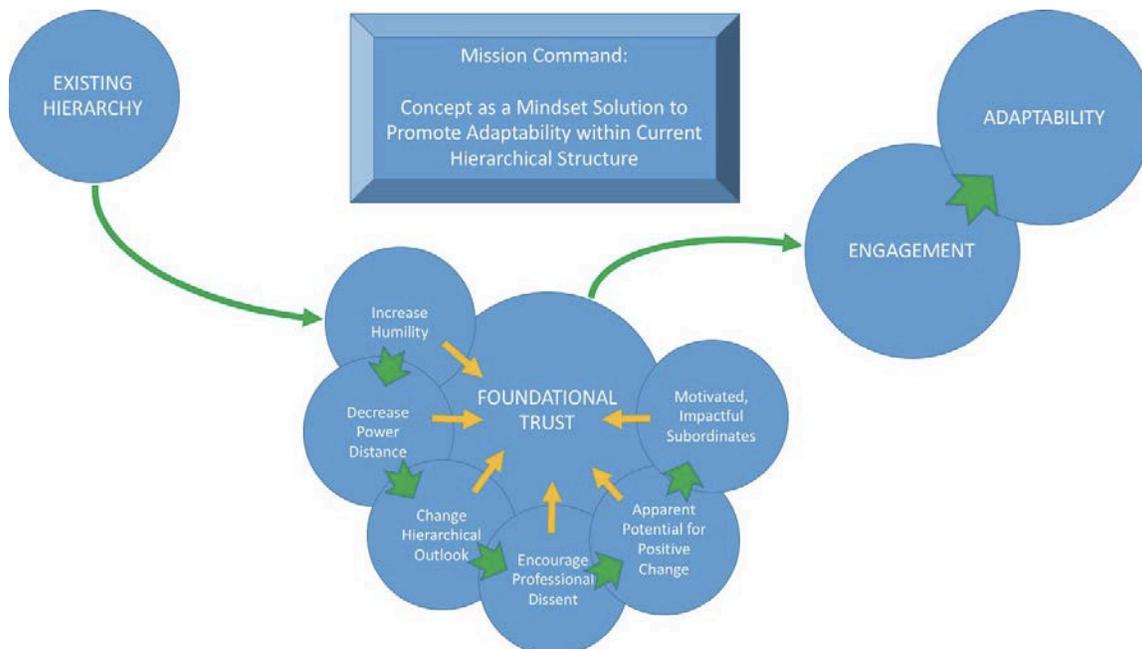


Figure 4. Organizational Trust Process. Created by author.

Trust

Military leaders focus on success under the shadow of their legal and moral responsibilities to both the mission and their organization.¹¹⁵ However, potential for mission success varies directly with the level of compliance from subordinate support and the foundational trust shared throughout the chain of command.¹¹⁶ That essential trust decreases power distance and allows greater flow of information, and therefore innovation, to connect with decision makers. A pervasive, trust-focused mindset within current military hierarchy will increase efficiency by creating autonomous, purpose-driven subordinates. A trust-based application of current mission command concepts is the core of an adaptable organizational mindset, and simultaneously facilitates and grows engagement and adaptability. The greatest opportunity for future viability comes from an adaptable organization that encourages trust throughout the organization, relying on decision makers to synthesize the collective judgement of the group to arrive at the best course of action.¹¹⁷ The transformative journey to organizational adaptability centers on trust, and begins with humility.

Humility

In order to execute in a multi domain battle environment, joint military commanders must be humble. To lead effective organizations in complex environments, commanders must allow (and expect) that capable individuals exist within their structures, and that they have skill sets that can benefit the organization. Although culture and doctrine expect the commander to be the best at everything, they choose their own leadership culture. They can choose to lead from a distance, communicating only with those they favor, or they can be humble and approachable, increasing

¹¹⁵ Yardley and Neal, "Understanding the Leadership and Culture Dynamic within a Military Context," 32.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds*, 282.

their potential for organizational success. Humility is the foundation for positive organizational change.

Power Distance

Humble leadership decreases power distance. Suboptimal organizational performance stemming from rigid command hierarchies can be overcome by decreasing power distance and increasing trust. Rich, cohesive, innovative networks exist within the US military. However, cohesiveness decreases up the chain of command, as leadership is purposefully separated from their organizations by power distance. Military commanders maintain significant power distance from their subordinates in order to promote fast compliance when necessary, and preserve ultimate decision making power. However, that accepted, structured power distance is an impediment to innovation because subordinates are less likely to bring abnormal perspectives or improvement suggestions to decision making authority. With significant power distance, there is no requirement for organizational buy-in for change, the leader simply expects his idea to be implemented. Unfortunately, experience and time in service do not always translate into optimal decision making, nor do they allow the decision-maker the best access to required information. High-level leadership does not often directly experience the consequences of their most important decisions, and therefore cannot capitalize on experiential growth.¹¹⁸ Dr. Peter Senge, in his book *The Fifth Discipline*, calls this phenomenon “the delusion of learning from experience.”¹¹⁹

Furthermore, without immediate experience for guidance, and an understanding that his experience is not superlative, it becomes much more important to build relationships within the organization that strengthen the leadership’s access to relevant knowledge.¹²⁰ Leaders who descend from the top of organizational structure to act within the organization, in a brokerage role

¹¹⁸ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 23.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 280.

between organizational groups, will be better positioned to access relevant information and disseminate it.¹²¹

Hierarchical Mindset

Humble leadership decreases power distance, creating relationships that can significantly change hierarchical mindsets. Although the culture of the traditional military's hierarchical organization is unlikely to change appreciably, a degree of organizational adaptability is derived from changing the way members think about vertical relationships within the hierarchy. Change must permeate organizational echelons; commander's intent should include buy-in from subordinate groups who execute the change. This connectedness will promote efficiency from motivated subordinates included in the process, which will enable adaptive space and maximize entrepreneurial capabilities within the organization.

Professional Dissent

When an organization begins to collectively rethink its organizational hierarchy, it opens avenues for professional dissent. No human is omniscient or infallible, therefore no human alone can make perfect decisions. Consequently, organizational aptitude for success is directly related to the leadership climate, and leaders' willingness to encourage professional dissent. Leadership at all echelons should be willing to accept suggestions and honest feedback from capable and well-informed subordinates. Organizational leadership without appetite for professional dissent ties the probability of success to a leader's mind alone, and greatly increases potential for failure. An adaptive leader has faith in the capabilities of his subordinates, and considers their input when appropriate. Leaders who encourage professional dissent generate trust throughout the organization and build potential for positive change.

¹²¹ Arena and Uhl-Bien, "Complexity Leadership Theory," 23.

Motivated Subordinates

Encouragement of professional dissent allows subordinates to believe they have a potential for positive impact on the organization. Motivation breeds innovation. In order to harness the innovative powers of motivated individuals, leaders must foster a climate in which subordinates are motivated to improve the organization. If the organization desires innovation, traditional military leadership mindsets limited to dutiful compliance may be woefully inadequate. Dr. Daniel Pink, in his book *Drive*, makes this point succinctly: control builds compliance, autonomy builds engagement.¹²²

Not only does autonomy hasten engagement that enables innovation, it also builds trust. Development of trust through humility and professional dissent remains at the core of motivation and is cyclical. It enables leadership to provide autonomy, openly explain and develop the organization's purpose, and encourages subordinates to work toward mastery of their skills and environment. These three topics, autonomy, mastery, and purpose, drive intrinsic motivation.¹²³ Intrinsically motivated subordinates allow leadership more opportunities to build trust, brokerage, and adaptive space within the organization. When an organization is motivated to perform, it is engaged in its purpose. Engagement cultivates innovation and efficiency in adaptive organizations.

Engagement

Engagement is derived from intrinsic motivation – the development of autonomy, mastery, and purpose in organizational membership.¹²⁴ Traditional military organization is typically effective at mastery and purpose, but lacking in autonomy based on the need for

¹²² Daniel H. Pink, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2011), 108.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 226.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 222.

compliance, and restrictive control mechanisms for subordinate actions. While compliance leadership can be an effective tool for specific, survival-based situations, it sometimes cannot build engagement.¹²⁵ Lack of autonomy, and therefore, lack of engagement, may become a problem because it stifles adaptability. Future viability cannot be ensured without adaptability.

Intrinsic motivation and engagement germinate in cohesive groups. Organizational adaptability enables and fortifies cohesion, connecting them to the leadership to implement new ideas. The result is continually re-motivated subordinates committed to organizational effectiveness. Creative, intelligent people need autonomy to thrive.¹²⁶ Organizational membership engaged with their environment are more likely to take on more difficult problems – those that compliance-based followers might ignore.¹²⁷ Motivated, engaged subordinates do more than simply meet the demands of their superiors.¹²⁸ In order to attract and retain people who innovate and think creatively in complex environments, leadership must allow them initiative to make decisions and build the engagement to act.¹²⁹

Mindset for Adaptable Military Organizational Structure

Cohesive groups gain efficiency when leaders serve as brokers between groups. Leaders should work to improve the organization from within, enabling exchanges of innovative information between subordinate groups, and providing ready access to informed decision-makers. The leader should be the center of organizational trust and information flow, the foremost information broker and the chief decision maker. This relationship structure connects decision-makers throughout the organization by fostering a leadership culture that decreases power

¹²⁵ Pink, *Drive*, 110.

¹²⁶ Mintzberg, *Structure in Fives*, 97.

¹²⁷ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 282.

¹²⁸ Pink, *Drive*, 110.

¹²⁹ Mintzberg, *Structure in Fives*, 97.

distance. A new model follows below, illustrating how an adaptable organizational leadership mindset can replace hierarchical mindsets within and between organizations. In figure 5, proximity between central leadership and the subordinate groups that surround them is indicative of decreased power distance. Furthermore, figure 6 illustrates a leadership mindset that acknowledges that group cohesiveness can exist at any echelon, within or even beyond organizational structure.

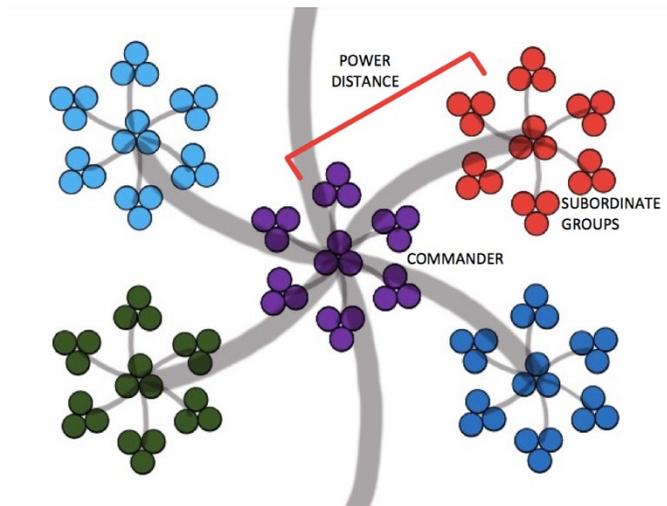


Figure 5. Mindset Model for Adaptable Military Organizational Structure. Created by author.

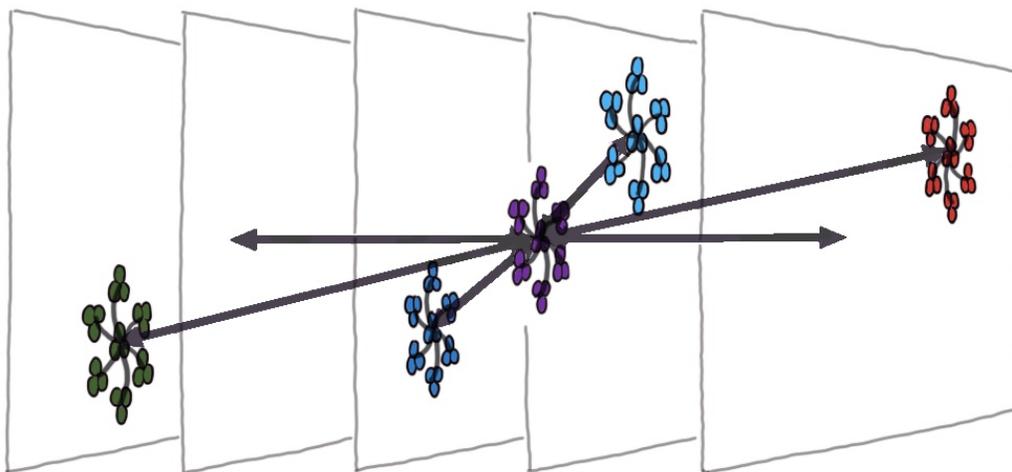


Figure 6. Mindset Model for Adaptable Military Organizational Structure Expanded. Created by author.

V. Effects

The mission command concept can be used as a mindset solution to promote adaptability within current military hierarchical structures. Mission command, executed with humility and decreased power distance, improves connections, command relationships, and efficiency through production and preservation of adaptive space. It also enables brokerage leaders, while allowing the organization flexibility to adapt to emergent requirements. Unfortunately, any toxic leadership in the mission command process will likely decrease its effectiveness. Although leaders at all echelons have responsibility and legal authority, they also have a responsibility to trust capable subordinates and exercise humility in order to enable adaptability.

Foundational trust, bred from humility, enables commanders to exercise their intent, knowing that subordinates will make appropriate decisions and deliver outcomes in the best interest of the organization (even when they deviate from the initial intent). Encouragement of professional dissent in the mission command mindset enables disciplined initiative from subordinates without fear of reprisal from the commander. Leaders must consciously choose to trust able subordinates to exercise their delegated authority and responsibility, while underwriting the potential for any mistakes. Essentially, with this mindset, effective mission command and effective leadership are one in the same.

This leadership mentality creates a command climate that conditions organizations to trust each other. That attitude extends to interactions with other organizations and other services, significantly benefitting joint operations and multi domain battle. Furthermore, that mindset, when institutionalized in peacetime, conditions organizations to trust each other in complex, stressful environments, including times of war when trust and effectiveness are of utmost necessity. Contemporary military organizations are capable of the trust, humility, and professional dissent required of effective mission command. However, these leadership principles must be internalized throughout all echelons of leadership in order to increase effectiveness in face of changing complexities.

Conclusion

In a system, actions have unintended effects on the actor, others and the system as a whole, which means that one cannot infer results from desires and expectations and vice versa.

—Robert Jervis, *System Effects*

The best of intentions cannot accurately predict outcomes, especially in a military environment where precious blood and limited treasure hang in the balance of decisions.¹³⁰ At the most basic level, complex interactions spawn unintended consequences.¹³¹ Therefore, the US military cannot expect to be effective in the future conduct of multi domain battle while maintaining the current leadership culture.

Although military doctrine regarding organizational structure is unlikely to change in the near term, environmental complexities require a change in the way the military thinks about its organizational interactions. Military leaders of the future should not hold positions of authority primarily based on their time in service. They must be empowered cultural brokers, set apart by their ability to synthesize. Most importantly, they must be aware that their organization's capability is the collective capability of individuals, and their ability to innovate and adapt. Organizational adaptability is the key to future viability, and individual leader mindsets directly impact that adaptability.

Until there is joint strategic leadership doctrine that provides specific frameworks for effective execution of multi-domain battle, the implementation of leadership mindsets that enable organizational adaptability will bridge gaps between organizations, and between services. Organizational adaptability, which stems from leadership humility and trust, enables services to undertake multi domain battle operations from a position of efficiency. With standardization of

¹³⁰ Jervis, *System Effects*, 61.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

joint mission command mindsets, the US military can become more adaptable, increase potential for success in multi domain battle, and meet the challenges of an increasingly complex operational environment.

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