

Disciplined initiative; freedom to improvise under directive leadership

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ABSTRACT, This research looks at if disciplined initiative allows subordinates room for improvisation in unforeseen circumstances, in order to reach an acceptable end-state. To make room for disciplined initiative, a part of the mission command philosophy, directive leaders need to loosen control and allow their subordinates freedom. To find out if it works this research analysis literature based on reports, interviews, and memoires from World War 2 veterans that served in the elite US Easy Company, as part of the 101st airborne division. Analysing cases from Easy Company it was found that giving subordinates room to improvise could indeed lead to very satisfactory results. This shows that directive leadership does not mean that leaders hold absolute control and subordinates are left with little freedom, with directive leadership you can give subordinates as much freedom as possible as long as it is not compromising the organisation of the greater group you work with. Previously directive leadership was thought of as giving little freedom to subordinates.

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1. INTRODUCTION

As technological developments succeed each other in an increasing speed organisations of all sorts of business feel the need to innovate and improvise more and more. Scientific management brought strict hierarchies and bureaucracies to the industrial world. This created organisations with a mechanical structure, a structure that “is characterized by its (1) highly centralized authority, (2) formalized procedures and practices, and (3) specialized functions. Mechanistic organization is relatively easier and simpler to organise, but rapid change is very challenging.” (Black's Law Dictionary, 2014). These structures don't hold up in highly dynamic, and global, environments that require quick adaptation.

Next to the classic mechanical organisation based on scientific management principals an organic organisation form has come up (Burns & Stalker, 1961). The mechanical structure was in line with the ideas from scientific management of hierarchy and directive leadership. While the organic organisational form, more adaptable to dynamic environments, didn't have a clear hierarchy and was better suited for a rotational leadership style, where a leader steps forward from the team to take leadership when required and steps back again if someone else is better suited for the job (van Bilsen, 2010). Organic structures are defined as not having formal job titles and responsibilities so people can do what they do best, for decision making there are no formal procedures so the organisation can quickly adapt (Black's Law Dictionary, 2014). Both structures have their advantages and disadvantages, while an organic structure is better suited to facilitate improvisation with rotational leadership, mechanical organisations can steer an organisation better into a wished direction.

The principles of Taylorisation, which started scientific management and laid the foundation for modernistic thinking, were not entirely new. These ideas were used around 300 years earlier in the Dutch military as prince Maurits of Orange sought a way to defeat the superior Spanish forces and came up with the military drill and the Mauritian formation (Caforio, 2006, pp. 398-399). He increased the amount of officers. Furthermore he broke down basic steps in the ritual of firing and reloading muskets, and handling pikes and made simple graphical instructions so mercenaries from all countries and languages could understand them. These instructions were later developed into a standardised command language. This all reduced the times between volleys massively, it used scientific management principles of analysis and time-motion studies to create simple standards and instructions.

These strict commands do not work in a modern dynamic environment where improvisation is required. In an effort to learn how to get disciplined initiative from subordinates this research will look at the military doctrine of mission command, an “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” (US Army, 2012). So the army did not go with an organic organisation but sought to make room for improvisation within the existing hierarchy and structure.

This research paper uses military science publications, those generally concern an “interdisciplinary field where technology, martial law, (military) history, military strategy, international safety studies, political science, sociology and psychology are combined”, to find useful information (Dutch ministry of defence, 2013), while being critical on the external validity to the business perspective.

1.1 Problem statement

“In times of rapid environmental change and technological turbulence, the capability to improvise is crucial for organizations, as improvisation makes it possible to react to events immediately and creatively, without careful and lengthy planning. How can improvisation be organized for the benefit of innovation? Which leadership styles are effective? Which organizational structures and resources facilitate improvisation in new product development?” was one of the call for papers for this conference.

Little research has been done into leadership with improvisation literature (van Bilsen, 2010), an already new field of research on its own (e Cunha, da Cunha, & Kamoche, 1999, p. 300). The first generation of organisational improvisation researchers looked at jazz music before a second generation looked at empirical and anecdotal examples of improvisation in organisational settings. Most improvisation literature points towards using rotational leadership in an organic structure as the best way to facilitate improvisation.

1.2 Research goal

The goal of this research is to learn important lessons from the mission command philosophy that could benefit organisations that require improvisation, defined as “Conception of action as it unfolds, by an organisation and/or its members, drawing on available material, cognitive, affective and social resources.” (e Cunha, da Cunha, & Kamoche, 1999), but without having to sacrifice the advantages of a mechanistic organisation structure and directive leadership. This research aims to accomplish its goal by looking at the field of Military Science where there already is a lot of research on leadership that is aimed to support the military, a large mechanistic institution, with a command hierarchy (a type of hierarchy with a strict chain of command, typically used in militaries around the world), that is focused on outcome and encounters a lot of need for improvisation in practice (Cocojar, 2011) (Lindsay, Day, & Halpin, 2011). To narrow the research a focus is put on the disciplined initiative principle of mission command, as this is the most differing part compared to existing improvisation literature. The mission command philosophy aims to empower people to take initiative in combating an unknown environment by taking necessary improvisations to fulfil their mission: “Highly adaptable leaders are comfortable entering unfamiliar environments, have the proper frame of mind for operating under mission command orders in any organization (FM 6-0), and seek to apply new or modified skills and competencies.” (Cocojar, 2011) (US Army, 2012). With disciplined initiative you act autonomously on unforeseen circumstances as a subordinate but towards accomplishing the greater intent of your superiors.

The research will look at available literature on mission command and improvisation, and its application in the military. It will look if by allowing subordinates to exercise disciplined initiative some of the standard characteristics of directive leadership, much control with the leader and little freedom with the subordinate (van Bilsen, 2010), can be broken.

1.3 Research question

The focus of the research will be on how mission command, and specifically disciplined initiative, can give subordinates the freedom to improvise. This leads us to the following central research question:

“To what extent does disciplined initiative allow subordinates room for improvisation in unforeseen circumstances, in order to reach an acceptable end-state?”

With disciplined initiative being a key aspect of mission command, it is about the room subordinates get to show

initiative. This initiative subordinates can take should lead to the needed improvisation to tackle unforeseen circumstances. This unforeseen circumstances would otherwise form an uncircumventable obstacle to reaching an acceptable end-state, a so called yes ending.

In figure 1 an overview is given of how the independent variable of allowing more or less disciplined initiative influences should cause the dependent variable of having more room for improvisation to increase. The added room for improvisation in turn is meant to increase the change of reaching an acceptable end-state.

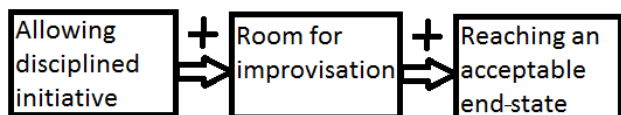


Figure 1. Schematic overview of questioned relations

1.4 Key concepts

1.4.1 Rotational leadership, and not directive leadership, is the best leadership form for improvisation in the creation process

Based on the research from van Bilsen (2010) rotational leadership is assumed to be the best leadership style to increase improvisation in the creation process (van Bilsen, 2010). Rotational leadership (or shared leadership as it is often called¹) is defined as when “multiple leaders² contribute combined knowledge and individual authority to lead an organization toward a common goal or mission. Shared leadership involves sharing authority and responsibility for decision making, planning, and executing.” (US Army, 2006, pp. 3-9). Individual team members can steer the creation process by stepping into a leadership position when they believe they have the most to offer at that moment. With the more classical directive leadership style, commonly associated with hierarchies, the quality of improvisation seemed dependent on the quality of the leader’s ideas, and when compared to other forms of leadership scored not very good on average. Another study in the medical field seemed to confirm this finding. They concluded that their research provided “some evidence for the appropriateness of sharing leadership in situations with high task load induced by a non-routine event, especially regarding the advantages of distributing leadership style according to skill set rather than formal leadership ranking.” (Künzle, et al., 2010). Formal leadership can be defined as an individual’s leadership that is legitimised by “assignment to positions of responsibility” and works with ranks (US Army, 2006, pp. 3-6) (Lindsay, Day, & Halpin, 2011). This is opposed to informal leadership, informal leadership doesn’t depend on rank or hierarchy position, it comes from the knowledge and experience of individual team members and requires the team member to take responsibility him/herself even if it is not designated to him (US Army, 2006, pp. 3-9) (Lindsay, Day, & Halpin, 2011).

1.4.2 Leaders must be able to autonomously adapt their operations to a changing environment

“No one leadership style or behaviour pattern will be universally effective. In fact, a single leader will exhibit a changing array of behaviour patterns in varying situations.” (Fiedler & Chemers, 1968, p. 11) was a conclusion from research from the 60’s and

states that leaders already adapt their style to the situation. Lieutenant Colonel William J. Coccojar (2011) opens his research with “Today’s Army leaders have accepted adaptive leadership as a practice and a methodology, integrating it into the way we train leaders to meet the challenges of the contemporary operating environment.” (Coccojar, 2011, p. 1). With the doctrine on mission command there is a focus on creative thinking, unfamiliar problems and new situations will require new solutions and creative thinking must find these new solutions. Leaders can use adaptive approaches where they draw from previously encountered situations with similar circumstances but they can also use the innovative approach where they come up with a completely new idea to accomplish a given mission (US Army, 2010, pp. 1-6).

1.5 Methodology

A conceptualisation of the mission command doctrine is done based on studies of US Army doctrines, US Army doctrines are chosen as they are easily accessible and the US Army is a dominant and advanced military power. The found principles of mission command are then compared to existing improvisation literature. When the conceptualisation is done operationalisation of mission command is performed. This operationalisation is then used to identify aspects of the mission command philosophy in recollections of military operations to look at their effect.

1.6 Structure ‘roadmap’ of this research

After this introduction the conceptualisation section is done. This section will start with explaining more in-depth the aspects of the mission command doctrine. After this an operationalisation is performed on mission command aspects.

After the operationalisation journalistic pieces and memoirs from World War 2’s American Easy Company veterans³ will be studied. In this part the effectiveness of disciplined initiative, as a facilitator of improvisation, is analysed.

The results will then be presented and a conclusion will follow. The conclusion will include a discussion, implications and recommendations for the academic field on leadership and for practitioners, as well as recommendations for future research. The list of references can be found all the way at the end of the paper.

2. CONCEPTUALISATION

2.1 Mission command

The military mission command philosophy 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” (US Army, 2012). This philosophy is guided by six principles that are designed to mix the art of command and the science of control (US Army, 2012), the principles are:

- Using mutual trust to build cohesive teams
- Creating a shared understanding
- Providing a clear intent of the commanders wishes
- Exercising disciplined initiative
- The usage of mission orders
- Accepting prudent risks

This should ensure that the army can exploit the initiative to gain and maintain a position of relative advantage in military

¹ Rotational and shared leadership are treated as synonyms in this research.

² Everyone in the (military) organisation is recognised as a leader in this literature, as well as in other military army doctrines.

³ Easy Company is chosen as there is a lot of material from different perspectives and backgrounds available on how they handled directive leadership. Here you can see clear cases of varying degrees of freedom that subordinates have to show initiative.

operations characterised by human endeavours in complex, ever-changing, and uncertain operational environments.

With mission command a commander communicates his intent to his subordinates, they are told the purpose of the operation with key tasks and the end-state he is aiming for. Subordinates are not told exactly how to perform the mission but all subordinates are expected to show disciplined initiative to fulfil the mission.

2.1.1 Mission command principles

2.1.1.1 Using mutual trust to build cohesive teams

To build a strong team all members, commanders and subordinates, must have confidence in each other's performance (US Army, 2012). This trust is to be built up over time by upholding the organisational norms and values. It will be formed through planned exercises as well as singular occurrences.

As trust must come from both sides 2-way communication is necessary within a team. Teams are built by interpersonal relationships and different teams can work together through good interpersonal relations. A great help in this can be 'unity of effort', where the team members or different teams strive for the same goal, this helps to create trust that the others are acting in your interest.

In current improvisation trust is also seen as an important team quality as was shown in the work by Vera & Crossan (2005). Interviewees named trust as an important factor to having high teamwork skills, which in turn translated to high levels of improvisation and innovation (Vera & Crossan, 2005). Other research showed that a subordinates trust in his leader made them show signs of "altruism, courtesy, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, and civic virtue" (Deluga, 1995). In the military trust is seen as the cornerstone of leadership (Brown G. E., 1992).

Trust can also be seen as a psychological state in a unit that is notable for its acceptance of vulnerability based on a understanding on expectations of behaviours or intentions of others within the team (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998) (Cummings & Bromiley, 1996). Leaders must be able to trust that subordinates are working towards their objectives, are able to achieve the objectives, and are generally competent (Gibson & Cohen, 2003). Leaders must be able to trust that subordinates give their best effort in trying to accomplish their job.

2.1.1.2 Creating a shared understanding

By continuing to uphold dialogue and actively collaborating throughout the entire process of an operation a commander can create a shared understanding within a team (US Army, 2012). This dialogue and collaboration helps to build trust, human connections, and the shared understanding. Participants in the dialogue can get to know each other and create joint solutions, to be successful a leader needs to engage team members from all levels. Shared understanding is supposed to "eliminate fog and friction in war and stimulate 'self-synchronisation' between friendly units" (Maltz, 2010).

In businesses the shared understanding is said to come from the Company vision. A good vision and a good communication of the vision have a positive effect on venture growth in entrepreneurial firms (Baum, Locke, & Kirkpatrick, 1998).

2.1.1.3 Providing a clear intent of the commanders wishes

With a clear intent subordinates will know what is required of them. They can accomplish the mission successfully and provides a unity of effort for different cooperating teams (US Army, 2012). Lower ranked commanders can express their own intent within the limits of the superior officers intent so lower level subordinates will also know what is expected of them. An

easy to understand intent is key for subordinates to operate effectively.

As commanders cannot foresee all contingencies, so it is paramount that the intent provides a framework within subordinates can still manoeuvre. "A well-written intent focuses subordinate leaders on what has to be accomplished to achieve success even when the plan and concept of the operation no longer apply" (Sutherland III, 1997). By cascading intents low-level subordinates should still receive a clear mission in which they can operate with their abilities without the higher level commanders having to work out every detail of every possibility. According to Sutherland III (1997) an intent is defined as purpose and end-state.

2.1.1.4 Exercising disciplined initiative

"Disciplined initiative is action in the absence of orders, when existing orders no longer fit the situation, or when unforeseen opportunities or threats arise" (US Army, 2012). Disciplined initiative is where the improvisation process takes place, facilitating it, without losing track of the commanders intent or breaking their orders. If a subordinate exercises disciplined initiative he improvises within the limits set by his or her commander. Because subordinates are aware of their commanders intent it encourages them to act upon a situation. They are motivated to act on an unforeseen circumstances by deciding how to best accomplish the desired end-state given the new circumstances, this ensures subordinates do not sit idly when the situation requires action and that they will exercise disciplined initiative.

Taking initiative is necessary for a subordinate in order to maximise his value to his superiors, superiors need their subordinates initiative in order to fully exploit the organisation (Delany, 2000). Delany (2000) also mentions that initiative taking is always driven by some self-interest with subordinates, leaders should make it so that a subordinates self-interest drivers are beneficial to the entire organisation.

2.1.1.5 The usage of mission orders

Mission orders make it clear to a team what their specific part in fulfilling a commanders intent is (US Army, 2012). These mission order directives guides a team on what its specific intent should be in an attempt by a superior commander to coordinate multiple teams. Mission orders should be made as minimally constricting as possible in order to maximise a subordinates room for improvisation. Mission orders avoids that commanders will have to micromanage every aspect of an operation and leaves room for improvisation by subordinates.

In the mission orders the why question is most important from the who, when, when, where, and why questions. The superior commanders intent should be clearly specified (Fischer, 1994). For the rest they should give just enough detail to coordinate the participating teams.

Mission orders should however not be interpreted as that subordinates can make their own mission assignment. This is a mistake that is commonly made by subordinate unit leaders (Brown B. G., 1982).

2.1.1.6 Accepting prudent risks

Leaders will have to accept prudent risks as every operation is not without the risk of losses. By deciding when a risk is worth the potential outcome a commander can clear his intent to subordinates and if the risk is well deliberated can create trust and understanding. To be successful as an organisation the commander must look to create opportunities instead of simply averting defeat (US Army, 2012).

When put under more risks the importance of the leader showing signs of integrity and ability is increased compared to acts of benevolence (Lapidot, Kark, & Shamir, 2007). Putting subordinates in a place of high vulnerability gives a high change that the trust in a leader is lowered.

2.1.2 Tying the principles together

These six principles are all tied together around how much room there is for improvisation as can be seen the schematic we developed (figure 2). The foundation of the mission command philosophy is 2-way trust.

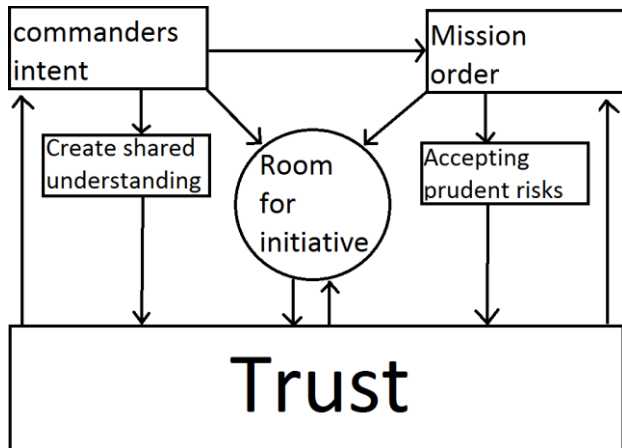


Figure 2. Relationship between mission command principles

This intent of the superior sets a location for where the improvisation is to lead to, and it will give the team a direction to work to. He will require the team to achieve a certain intended end-state from their current position (starting point), thus already disciplining the room for exercising initiative. When you have a broad intent many actions can lead the right way, with a very specific intent the number of actions that lead to this end-state is more focussed. Creating a shared understanding helps to make clear what the desired end-state is. It will motivate subordinates to desire the same end point and build trust between leader and subordinate.

The mission order limits the room the team has to get to the end point from their starting point. Very strict orders can leave the team with a very small window to show initiative in the path they take, while very open mission orders can leave the team with a lot of room for initiative in choosing the path to be taken. This further disciplines the room for exercising initiative. In giving the mission orders the superior must need to know and make clear which prudent risks he is willing to take with his subordinates as not to decrease their trust in him.

Finally the subordinates must have trust in their superiors in order to be willing to set a course to the end-state the superior intends to reach. The must also trust in their superior to be willing to stay within the set limits of the path they can take. Furthermore they must be trusting that their superior is ok with them seeking the borders of what is allowed in order to take all the initiative that is needed to effectively reach the end-state. Being able to operate within some room for initiative in term is supposed to enlarge their trust in their leaders as they feel empowered.

2.1.3 Each principle's effect on the available leeway for exercising disciplined initiative

This research specifically looks at these relationships concerning disciplined initiative. All the relations related to the room for exercising disciplined initiative are given in a schematic we developed in figure 3. In figure 3 the starting point represents the current status quo, the (red) obstacles represent any unforeseen

circumstances that hinder a team from fulfilling their mission, the desired end-state represents what a team should try and achieve, the (blue) outline represents the bounds within which the team must stay, and the arrow shows the path a team takes to reach the desired end-state from the current status quo with every corner representing an act of improvisation.

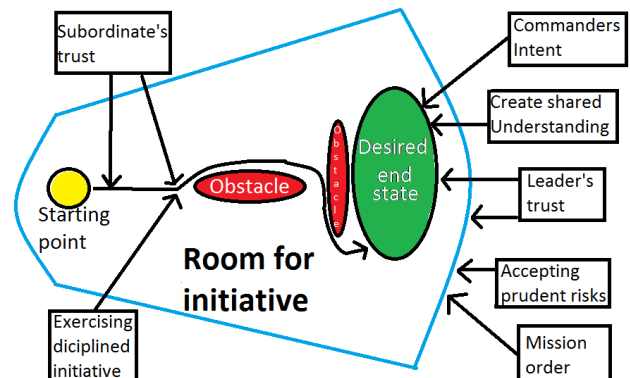


Figure 3. Showing every principles influence on the room for exercising disciplined initiative

It takes a subordinate's trust in his leader to move out of the current status quo towards a new end-state. A subordinate must also have to trust that he is allowed to improvise his way around an obstacle. It is the trust in a units capabilities that makes him desire a certain end-state for that unit, a leader must also show trust in his subordinates capabilities to give him enough room within which to operate.

To get around encountered obstacles, or even in anticipation of hypothetical obstacles, subordinates must exercise initiative to stray from their set path and choose a new course. Exercise that is disciplined with the given desired end-state and the limits within which to operate.

It is the commanders intent that sets the desired end-state, with a broad intent there are more destinations that are acceptable to the commander, with a narrow intent you have to manoeuvre to a more specific end-state. If a commanders intent is simply to hinder an opponent, any action that hinders an opponent the slightest will move you directly into an acceptable end-state. If a commanders intent is to hinder the opponent by taking out one of his key assets, than you will have to manoeuvre towards an end-state where you don't just hinder the opponent but have taken out this specific asset. With the narrow intent a subordinate has to direct his course of action a lot more. Creating a shared understanding can make the desired end-state clearer for subordinates, making it easier to reach it.

It's the orders that bounds the room a subordinate has to improvise. If a subordinate has to reach the end-state in a very specific way he cannot show any initiative. When a very open mission order is given out the subordinate has a lot more room to reach the end-state as he thinks is best. Accepting prudent risks is something that has to be considered when setting the limits of the allowed initiative.

3. OPERATIONALISATION

To see if setting a frame for disciplined initiative leads to actually exercising initiative, in unforeseen circumstances, several combat situations from World War 2 will be analysed. The western front of World War 2 is chosen as its one of the first big, and well documented wars that had no infantry square formations or trench wars (notable for strong directive leadership and strict orders from the top), and was full of situations that required improvisation. The analysis mostly focusses on the commanders intent, mission orders, and exercising disciplined initiative as the

subjects of trust, creating shared understanding, and taking risks is well researched in improvisation literature.

For every analysed situation all the commanders intents and given missions are collected, then for each mission it is determined how much free room was left for the subordinates to improvise and how clear the commanders intent was. If the intent was not clearly stated as such, the intent is extracted from the 'why' part of the given orders. Finally you will have to analyse how subordinates responded to the given room during the operation, did they improvise when they encountered an obstacle. To see if people improvised we looked if they took the initiative to do actions, they devised themselves, that were not stated in the given orders. If the action was within the boundaries set by the given orders and aimed at reaching the end-state the commanders desired it was seen as disciplined initiative. If the action went outside of the boundaries set by the orders and/or was not aiming for the desired end-state by the commander it is seen as undisciplined initiative.

To see if the operation was successful the satisfaction about the end-state is determined, as well as any obstructions to the desired end-state by looking at how well the mission was executed and how well the end-state aligns with the commanders intent.

The important results are than posted in section 4 of this paper. These results are entirely based on the chosen source materials and the theory from section 2.

3.1 Source materials

The first book is Stephen Ambrose's book 'Band of Brothers: E. Company 506th regiment, 101st airborne from Normandy to Hitler's Eagle's nest' (called simply Band of Brothers from now on) on which the TV-series with the name Band of Brothers was based on (Ambrose, 1993). The book documents the story of Easy Company from their first training in 1942 to their final operations in World War 2. It is based on interviews with nearly all surviving members of Easy Company, as well as available writings from the surviving members about the events of World War 2.

The second book is 'Beyond Band of Brothers: The War Memoirs of Major Dick Winters' By Richard 'Dick' Winters (Winters, 2006), which was co-authored by military historian Cole C. Kingseed. Dick Winters was the commanding officer of Easy Company and later the commanding officer of the Battalion that Easy Company was part of.

The third book is 'Parachute Infantry: An American Paratrooper's Memoir of D-Day and the Fall of the Third Reich' by David Webster (Webster, 2011). Webster was a Harvard graduate in English literature and joined Easy Company voluntarily as an infantryman/ journalist. He always stayed in the lowest rank by choice and was one of the first (and only before the popular series came out) to extensively write about his experiences in the war, even though his story was only published after the series came out (long after his death). David Webster was not present with Easy Company in all of the analysed cases, as he was wounded for a part of the war.

Together these books provide an overview of the experiences of the surviving members with a special focus on Easy Company's most important direct leader and the soldier that stayed a soldier for the longest duration. We chose these multiple perspectives to increase the validity of the source material and to research how disciplined initiative works for both the superior and the subordinate. Because the first book takes the most perspectives into account and is the most respected of the three it was taken as the lead for this research.

3.2 Analysed campaigns in the war

The source materials detail the deed of Easy Company from the start of their training in 1942 till the end of the war in 1945. Out of this three military campaigns where analysed for this research.

First is the Normandy campaign, consisting of Operation Overlord with D-day as starting point (June 6th 1944). D-day was the first day that Easy Company saw real war action and could put their training to the test. At this point nearly all men trained with each other for 2 years. The Normandy campaign ends for Easy Company after they took the city of Carentan (July 12th 1944).

The second campaign is in the Netherlands starting with Operation Market-Garden (September 17th 1944) and ends after a long front-line defence operation on November the 25th for Easy Company. In the Netherlands Easy Company brought a lot of actual war experience with them and still had a lot of people from the original team they had during training.

The third, and last, campaign that is analysed is the defence of Bastogne. It starts for Easy Company on December the 18th just after Germany launched a final big surprise attack on the western front and Easy Company has to suddenly help in the defence. All of the officers of Easy Company are replacements by now, they were not with the team that did the 2 years of training and there are extensive trust issues. It ends after Easy Company had taken the cities of Noville and Rachamps (January 17th). For this campaign the book from David Webster could not be used, as he was not present because of sustained injuries in the Netherlands.

After these three initial campaigns most of the original Easy Company team that went through training together is either dead or injured and replaced with new men that received far less training. Because it is effectively a new team with new dynamics and modus operandi and a lower combat effectivity (Easy Company was at their best in the campaigns in the Netherlands and Bastogne) trust levels were not as high as previously, it was not as much of a Band of Brothers anymore. We decided not to take these further campaigns into consideration as the literature also put less focus on these further campaigns, making it harder to analyse the events.

4. ANALYSIS RESULTS

In this section the literature from Easy Company is analysed. Easy Company was a paratrooper Company consisting of 3 platoons operating under 2nd battalion of the 101st airborne division of VII army corps. Specifically their actions during World War 2 are analysed in their campaigns in France, the Netherlands, and Belgium when Easy company was "at the peak of its effectiveness, in Holland in October 1944 and in the Ardennes in January 1945, it was as good a rifle company as there was in the world" (Ambrose, 1993).

Easy Company was an elite Company that received more and better training than most companies operating for the allied forces in World War 2, their achievements gained them worldwide fame and a lot of reading material is available on them. As literature for this research three books were chosen detailing the operations from a wide variety of perspectives from Easy Company veterans.

4.1 Having a clear intent

In nearly every studied case the intent of the superior commanders was clear. There was off course the overall intent to bring down Nazi-Germany, but also the specific intent for the main campaigns was always clear. Even the smallest intents of for example taking out a single soldier or moving a squad to a certain defensive position were easily communicated.

There were however problems with the shared understanding concerning these intents. Often subordinates did not understand why their superiors had certain intents or they had a wrong understanding. This did not have big implications for big operations were a relatively high ranked subordinate did not have the same understanding as his superior. High ranked officers were under more scrutiny than lower soldiers, the consequences for not following orders could be much higher thus aligning his desired end-state with his leader's desired end-state. When it was a low ranked subordinate that did not get the understanding it often resulted in not acting toward the desired end-state as the subordinate himself did not always desire the same end-state.

4.1.1 Misunderstanding at a high level

One example of a misunderstanding at a high level was when Captain Dick Winters, in this instance the commander of the 2th battalion of the 101st Airborne Division, understood the intent of his superior (the general commanding the 101st airborne) to press further north from Bastogne and take the city of Noville in high speed. Winters thought that his superior did this to impress his own superiors by showing he could quickly launch an offensive on the Germans, something his predecessor failed to do "It just had the flavor of an ego trip for General Taylor, a play to show Eisenhower that now that Taylor's back his troops will get off their asses and go into the attack." –Winters (Ambrose, 1993). The operation took extra risk because the 2th battalion was forced to attack in broad daylight, a risk Winters would rather not take just so that his superior could show off.

The commanding general did it however because it was the only change to cut off a group retreating German tanks so they could be taken easily. He was ordered to do so by his own superiors.

Winters followed the order but for the marching towards the destination he chose a formation that spared his troops some hardship in the thick snow (single line formation), but put the group at greater risk to be stopped if they encountered enemies. Had Winters understood his superiors intent it is possible he would have chosen a more careful formation that was better suited to combat enemy opposition.

Looking at figure 4 we can imagine the above situation with point 1 in the figure being the starting point, in this case being at Bastogne. Point 4 is the desired end-state, taking the city of Noville quickly, but in its path 2nd battalion encounters obstacle 2, a lot of snow blocking the path. Captain Winters changed the formation to single line so as not to expose his troops to the snow as much. This however gave the risk that 2nd battalion could not properly handle hypothetical object number 3, the possibility of encountering enemy forces that would stop 2nd battalion. In this case there were no opposing enemy troops and 2nd battalion could easily continue their march to Noville. But if Winters knew the true reasons behind his commander's intent he might have chosen a different course of action that did not take as much risk of being stopped by a possible obstacle of enemy troops. Taking the harder way through the snow with a multi-line formation would have been more acceptable to Winters if he understood why his commander wanted them to be quick.

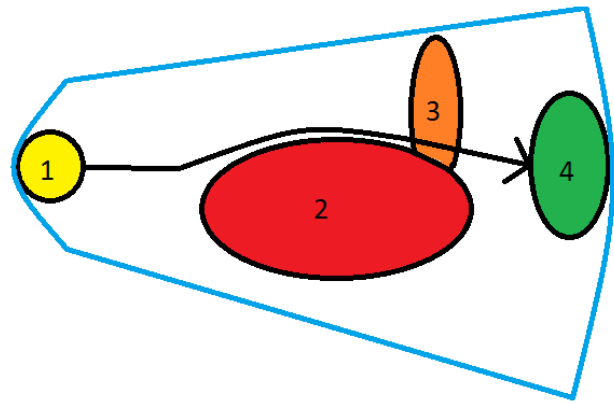


Figure 4. Taking Noville from Bastogne through snow

4.1.2 Misunderstanding at a lower level

Misunderstandings at a lower level were more commonplace and often resulted in subordinates ignoring orders. This was especially noticeable in the 2 year training period. The commander of Easy Company at the time (captain Sobel) gave Easy Company the hardest training of all companies in the 101st airborne division. Most people thought it was because Sobel had a great dislike to most of the men and in return he disliked Sobel. This led to people disobeying orders, people doing pranks on Sobel that hindered combat effectiveness, and even mutiny. It was only during the actual combat experiences that most men learned to appreciate the training given by Sobel as Easy Company turned out to be the most elite Company in the army because of it. Partially because of his trouble with his men Sobel was transferred to a different position before Easy Company entered the war though. No case of mutiny within the higher ranks of the 101st airborne division occurred in the researched data. It was even very rare to ignore orders for highly ranked officers when there were misunderstandings, while this seemed commonplace with people in lower ranks.

4.1.3 No clear intent

There is only one documented case where there is no clear intent from the commander. During the assault on Foy when Easy Company had to cross a 200 meter long field to reach the town of Foy the Company commander (Lieutenant Dike) ordered a halt to the charge and froze in fear of the incoming German fire. "Lieutenant Dike, in Lipton's judgment, had "fallen apart." He was frozen behind the haystacks, he had no plan, he didn't know what to do." (Ambrose, 1993). This rendered the Company practically leaderless and no one knew what to do and everybody had to hide like sitting ducks behind some haystacks. The assault's success depended on a full unity of the Company's operations so the individual platoon leaders couldn't do anything. It was not until a new Company leader stepped up and gave a clear intent with some quick orders that the platoons could go ahead with the assault and successfully take the town of Foy.

Looking at figure 5 we can imagine the above situation with point 1 being the starting point opposite a field from Foy, point 3 being the desired end-point of taking Foy that Easy Company's superior officer gave, and point 2 being the enemy fire that was between Easy Company and taking Foy. Looking from the point of view of the platoons in Easy Company they got ordered to stop the charge across the fields making it impossible to handle obstacle 2 and achieve the earlier given intent of taking Foy (Shown by the blue line cutting them off in figure 5). As the new orders did not specify why they were given the platoons could not try and reach a new desired end-state and had to stop the assault causing them to hide from enemy fire and sit idle. When a new commander was sent in whom gave new orders

(shown by the dotted blue line in figure 5) it was again within the realm of possibilities to reach the original desired end-state of point 3.

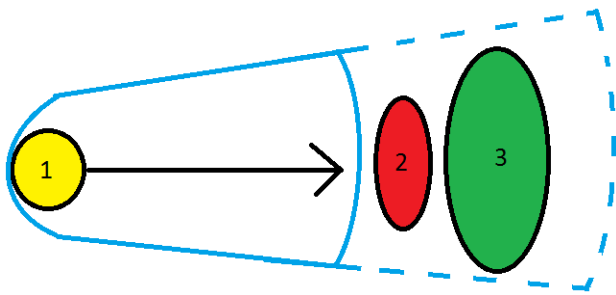


Figure 5. Graphical representation of what happened at Foy

The above example shows that a clear intent is necessary for a team to show initiative as a team, with no intent people went for what was safest if they operated only as an individual (hiding or routing in most warfare cases). Though there is only one clear case where there is no commanders intent, there are numerous cases where a clear commanders intent leads a team to operate effectively. One noticeable example when was all of the subordinates froze in fear and it was the commanding officer of Easy Company (Dick Winters at the time) risking his life to order everyone to get up and keep charging that led the team back into action. Because of this they finally succeeded to take the city of Carentan in the Normandy campaign.

Though a misunderstanding about why a commander rarely endangered a mission it did lead to initiatives that led away from the optimum course towards the desired end-state. It led to soldiers ignoring some orders, or taking them easy, from a direct superior and also higher commanders to take unnecessary risks in preference of other end-states he deemed more acceptable himself (like having a more comfortable march in the example from section 4.1.1) “Noncommissioned officers usually ignore the fact that the army has lieutenants” (Winters, 2006). Having a shared understanding might not be necessary at all times to reach an acceptable end-state, it does seem to make it much more likely that people will show the initiative and right improvisations to reach the desired end-state though.

4.2 Strictness of orders

The strictness of orders varied wildly over the different campaigns. From Generals micromanaging the exact time, distance, and direction of every Company moving to Carentan in the Normandy campaign “It had taken all night for regiment to get the men in position. Stop, move out, stop, move out, so many times that the men were worn out.” (Ambrose, 1993), to platoons doing a combat patrol where the soldiers had no idea where they even where patrolling in the defence of Bastogne “We are being led by Mister Indecision himself; to infiltrate into the German lines without a good plan is a tremendous, bungling, tactical error.” –Christenson (Ambrose, 1993). The first led soldiers to become overly tired because they took ineffective roads and constantly had to stop, and go, and stop, and go again etc. (illustrated in figure 6 with soldiers having to go through easy avoidable obstacles). The second led to soldiers losing their platoons in the fog until everyone individually decided to go back into safe territory.

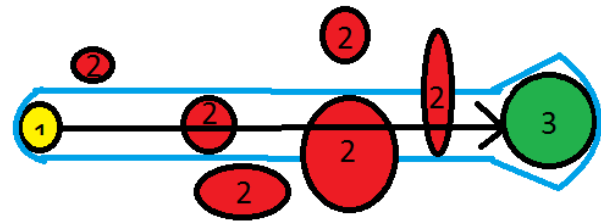


Figure 6. Marching to Carentan under strict orders

In general orders were best given from the lowest rank preceding over the entire relevant team if you look over all the analysed campaigns. In the first example of Carentan this could mean that army HQ would order a division from which direction to approach Carentan and at what time, Division HQ on which side which Battalion had to stand, Battalion HQ should give the companies their desired position and the companies should be free to choose how to walk exactly leaving it for the platoons to set up positions leaving it to squads to dig proper foxholes. In the second example the platoon should have received a clear intent from the Company which region to patrol, and the platoon leader should have kept the platoon together and directed his subordinates in the right direction.

Things can still go wrong this way if a leader is not up for the assigned task. Captain Sobel for example turned out to be completely unable to interpret maps, while he had to find the right roads for the route that was assigned to Easy Company. This often led Easy Company to get lost. An issue here was that Captain Sobel had little trust in most of his subordinates. Other leaders in similar circumstances but with more trust in their staff (and from their staff) could often depend on others to take on the tasks they were less capable of off doing themselves.

There seemed to only be two good reasons not to let people under you have all the initiative. The first is because you need different teams below you to operate under a unity of effort, and the second is because the direct subordinate under you is incapable to accomplish the task on his own or with his team.

4.3 Exercising disciplined initiative

In the one flawless operation of all the analysed operations there was no need for improvisation, in this case were a group of refugees had to be picked up from enemy territory across the Rhine everything went according to the developed plan “So well organized and executed was this undertaking that the enemy never knew an evacuation had taken place.” (Ambrose, 1993). In all other cases however unforeseen circumstances required some form of improvisation to no longer be a problem.

Soldiers seemed most keen to show initiative if it could help them to reach their own desired end-state. This could be undisciplined, not in line with his superiors’ wishes (like shooting oneself in order to be relieved for medical reasons). Or it could be disciplined, for example to risk their life in order to satisfy their leader’s intent, a leader in whom they have put their trust. In the single case where there was no clear commanders intent (discussed in section 4.1.3) all subordinates reverted to undisciplined initiative by hiding behind haystacks and some trees in order to save their life.

But in most cases there was a lot of disciplined initiative. Nearly all obstacles thrown in Easy Company’s path were conquered in the end with an aim to achieve their commander’s intent. From Easy Company’s first real Company action on Normandy, where they took 4 German cannons down against an unsuspected superior German force by smart use of covering machine gun fire, to stealing ammunition from their own forces in order to

accomplish a successful defence of Bastogne (ultimately satisfying their superior officers).

Satisfying a superior's intent seemed to have the priority over following orders. There were several examples when subordinates went outside of the boundaries set by strict orders in order to better satisfy their superior's intent, trusting that your commander trusted you seemed to play a big role in this.

One example is when Webster and some of his comrades were ordered to shoot a wounded German across from a small river. The wounded German soldier was bound to attract attention from other Germans that could come to the location and initiate a fire fight. When Webster made ready to swim across the river and shoot the German one of his fellow soldiers warned him that it could be a trap by the Germans. They decided to throw a grenade instead of shooting him, believing that their commander's intent was not to shoot the German *persé* but to terminate the threat he posed. Though this is a small example it clearly demonstrates that disciplined initiative can even occur outside of the planned mission path when there is a (hypothetical) obstruction to reaching the intended end-state. Webster never got any punishment for not following the exact order. The above is illustrated in figure 7 with point 1 being the status quo, point 2 the hypothetical German trap, and point 3 the desired end-state of eliminating the German. It should be noted that in figure 7 part of the desired end-state falls outside the room that is set by the orders.

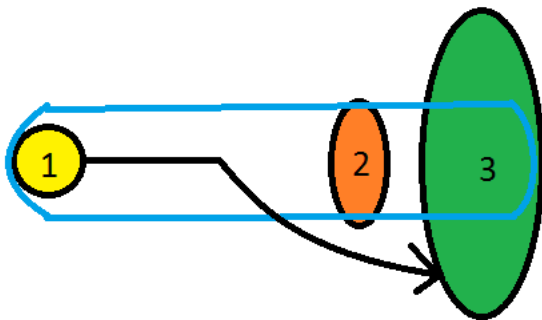


Figure 7. Ignoring orders to reach the desired end-state

4.4 Valuation of improvisation

The valuation of improvisation is often not about if the desired is achieved but if the actual end-state is acceptable given the circumstances. Except for the one mission that needed no improvisation (mentioned in section 4.3) none of the cases achieved the most desired end-state. Yet Easy Company was often famed for their achievements. Even after the completely failed Operation Market Garden Easy Company was heralded as a bunch of heroes. The achieved end-state after their campaign in the Netherlands no one believed possible given the circumstances, the path they choose to try and reach the best possible end-state was paved by good initiatives.

Though disciplined initiative is developed to reach a certain desired end-state the improvisation is valued by the process and not the outcome. That Easy Company often performed so well and showed a lot of initiative is because of the excellent teamwork, great leadership, and high levels of trust according to the books.

Failures to provide initiative could often be attributed to bad leadership, as was the case when the march to Carentan was micromanaged and there was no given room for any initiative (section 4.2), or when Lieutenant Dike froze in fear during the assault on Foy (section 4.1.3). In the case of the march to Carentan this was resolved by later allowing the lower echelons

more freedom in their movements in other missions. In the case of Lieutenant Dike he was replaced by a more capable officer (Lieutenant Speirs). Another cause for failing to exercise initiative was the unwillingness of subordinates. A lack of trust in their leader could have them ignore orders, and not having personally desired end-states aligned with their superior's intents could have them pursue their own interests (like self-sabotage to leave the battlefield with medical reasons).

Trusting that your commander would appreciate it if you take initiative can give a huge boost to taking initiative. A clear example was when Webster went against an order to eliminate a German enemy by shooting him, believing he found a solution that would be much more desirable to his commander (see section 4.3).

A clear indication that improvisation within the limits of given orders is valued is how Dick Winters was quickly promoted from lieutenant to Captain and within a few months was put into the position of battalion commander, a function normally reserved for Lieutenant-Colonels and "wore the only Distinguished Service Cross in the 2nd Battalion" (Ambrose, 1993). He had to thank his excellent initiatives in Normandy, when everything went wrong with the dropping, and in the Netherlands, when the given mission was impossible to achieve, for that. He had to thank the enormous trust his subordinates put in him that his initiatives could be successfully executed as well. A clear sign of this trust was when he convinced his Company to run straight into machine gun fire when Easy Company entered Carentan after they at first froze in fear. "We couldn't believe that people like Winters, Matheson, Nixon, and the others existed," Private Rader remembered. "These were first-class people, and to think these men would care and share their time and efforts with us seemed a miracle. They taught us to trust." Winters, Rader went on, "turned our lives around. He was openly friendly, genuinely interested in us." (Ambrose, 1993)

5. CONCLUSION

After analysing many cases of disciplined initiative we can answer the main research question: "To what extent does disciplined initiative allow subordinates room for improvisation in unforeseen circumstances, in order to reach an acceptable end-state?" and the answer is that disciplined initiative can give subordinates the freedom to improvise under directive leadership, leading to more acceptable end-states.

Using the mission command philosophy a directive leader can loosen control over his team members and allow them more freedom. This way subordinates are able to make their own impact on the end-state. As a result the outcome will be less dependent on a single leader.

This conclusion is based on analysis of situations where subordinates were giving the freedom to exercise disciplined initiative. To recognise these situations a study of the theory behind mission command was done first.

5.1 Discussion

We found that by using the mission command philosophy subordinates under directive leadership can be given more freedom to act as they deem necessary, this leads to more improvisation in the team. This research showed that even under directive leadership subordinates can be given enough freedom to improvise as needed in even highly chaotic wartime scenarios. A lack of freedom was the biggest problem with directive leadership (van Bilsen, 2010), but this research shows that it is wrong to assume all scenarios with directive leadership restrict this freedom to much. The cases about Easy Company have clearly shown that there is improvisation taking place on many levels during the varying levels of freedom and control they

received during the war. Even though Easy Company operated in a mechanistic structure with directive leadership, they still had a lot of opportunities to take the initiative and improvise as deemed necessary. The appreciation Easy Company got from their superiors shows that this room is intended for the initiatives from Easy Company members in the organisation.

It will be very interesting for future research to see how much freedom and control gives optimal results under directive leadership. Though this research showed the possibilities of allowing freedom to take initiative under directive leadership, it could not test the mission command philosophy's statement about how much freedom is optimal because it only (qualitatively) analysed a select number of cases. What we can conclude is that too much freedom can lead to disorganisation within/between teams, and too little freedom can obstruct subordinates from reaching the best end-state, even if they would be capable of it with more freedom. Using a controlled environment to do a quantifiable research, comparing directive leaderships with varying amounts of given freedom, should teach how effective the mission command philosophy can actually be.

If leaders give this freedom to exercise disciplined initiative it can lessen the risk of the leader being a critical point of failure for the entire operation. It has to be said though that the leader must actually properly enable this freedom or you will still have all the known problems with directive leadership, and it can be hard to do so "I always felt that my position was where the critical decision had to be made" (Winters, 2006). The key aspects that discipline the room for initiative are the commanders intent and the orders he gives out. The analysed cases show that if the intent is not clear subordinates have no freedom in trying to get to the desired end-state, as they do now know what this end-state is. If the orders are to restricting you have the old directive leadership problem that subordinates do not have the required freedom to show initiative and improvise. In these cases the success of the operation is still dependent on the leader. The research also shows that with the right amount of freedom for exercising disciplined initiative it remains a problem if subordinates will actually exercise it. They can simply be unable to show initiative but it can also be unclear to a subordinate what he should do, or he simply does not trust his leaders intents and orders. So even though this research focused mostly on the effect of a commanders intents and orders on exercising disciplined initiative, the other principles of mission command (shared understanding, trust, and risk taking) should not be ignored by leaders.

5.2 Limitations of research

Due to the qualitative nature of this research with a limited number of cases, in an uncontrolled environment, it is hard to say how effective disciplined initiative and the mission command philosophy are. Several cases did show that subordinates having room for initiative lead to them improvising their way around obstacles, toward an acceptable end-state, but you cannot tell if this is the best way of leading people. As all the cases focussed on a single group, even though it was a diverse group that represented a proper sample of US society (Ambrose, 1993), it is hard to pin successes and failures on the system or on individual leaders. Maybe the good leaders would also thrive under other systems. Still it can be said that they at least could have successes and failures in the analysed cases.

In the analysis we also encountered several single occurrences, it is hard to take lessons from them as there is a low validity. Nonetheless they did provide helpful insights.

The analysed subjects were unfamiliar with the mission command philosophy. Though the principles of mission command could be recognised or noted absent it could be insightful to look at cases where the subjects are familiar with mission command.

5.3 Implications & recommendations

5.3.1 Recommendations for practitioners

When using directive leadership you should allow your subordinates freedom to handle unexpected events. The right amount of freedom in every situation seems to be to give subordinates as much freedom as possible, that still directs them to operate as a single entity when necessary according to the mission command philosophy. The success will depend on many things and it seems wise to keep in mind the 6 principles of the mission command philosophy (see section 2.2: trust, shared understanding, clear commanders intent, exercising disciplined initiative, mission orders, and accepting prudent risk).

Failure in any of these principles led to ineffectiveness in the researched cases. A lack of trust make people unwilling to follow orders and go for the desired end-state or to dare and give out the orders at all. No shared understanding led people to have a less clear role of the end-state and deteriorated the trust levels. No clear commanders intent led to unit fall apart as everyone started to act only in his own interest as there was no more cohesion. Not exercising disciplined initiative hinders a unit from dealing with unforeseen obstacles that were not part of the mission details. Mission orders limit the amount of unnecessarily restricting orders, failing to properly give them will hinder your team from showing improvisation in all freedom. Failure to accept prudent risks will limit your orders to much to the point where a unit can't operate anymore within its constraints.

5.3.2 Recommendations for future research

Using a controlled environment to do a quantifiable research, comparing directive leaderships with varying amounts of given freedom, should teach how effective the mission command philosophy can be. This will also eliminate some of the problems we encountered as discussed in section 5.2, like only investigating a single group and having single occurrences.

It will also be interesting to test the mission command philosophy in a different environment. Separating it completely from any warfighting function.

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