

Mission Command: Differentiation and Integration

■ By Dr. Christopher R. Paparone and George L. Topic Jr.

We believe the concept of mission command has profound implications for the future of military logistics. While the term mission command is relatively new, discussions on its key precepts have been ongoing for many years. An organizational study entitled “Differentiation and Integration in Complex Organizations” is a key academic treatise that undergirds the mission command concept. The study was conducted by Paul R. Lawrence and Jay W. Lorsch and published in the June 1967 issue of *Administrative Science Quarterly*.

In short, the study found that as the environments of organizations increase in complexity, so does the need for differentiation in organizational structures, such as adding new departments and specialized jobs and staffs. As organizations become more differentiated, paradoxically, the need for integration strategies also grows. Conversely, if environments remain relatively stable, so will the standardization of structures and their integration within organizations.

As we examine the Army’s recent history in organizing logistics—now under the more integrative term “sustainment”—we see evidence that these findings hold true. We witnessed the differentiation of the Army’s sustainment skill identifiers, while at the same time, the advent of the Army Logistics Corps created integration among multifunctional logisticians.

But has individual multifunctionality gone too far? As the brigade combat team’s (BCT’s) logistics needs became more complex, so did the brigade support battalion’s structure, which is integrated into the BCT. Above the BCT level, we have purposefully differentiated sustainment headquarters by mov-

ing them outside the operational chain of command—referred to as breaking the habitual support relationships. Hence, we are experiencing integration issues and must pursue new integration strategies.

At the joint force command level, the environment is decidedly more complex, especially as we work across services and with interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational organizations at the operational level. We are trying to cope with this extensive differentiation by creating coordinating structures, such as executive agencies, boards, centers, cells, and offices.

We are facing similar issues with the joint logistics enterprise that increases the differentiation even further at the strategic level. The irony is that the proliferation of entities, both formal and ad hoc, makes integration even more confounding.

We offer for consideration several ideas for dealing with differentiation and integration. First, organizations should consider how to cope with conflict resolution as they try to integrate a growing variety of organizational actors that have different values and perspectives. Our joint doctrine attempts to address this by finding common values and perspectives, which can be expressed broadly in terms of “unity of effort” or “unified action.”

Although our military education and training systems have tried to ensure that a diverse group of actors participates in classes and scenarios, we are not convinced that we are enabling students to learn and practice conflict resolution strategies adequately, particularly in time-critical, -constrained, or -sensitive situations.

Second, in the face of highly complex environments, forms of participative

decision-making are important. Lawrence and Lorsch called this “high influence at lower levels of the organization.” The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has proclaimed that the military solution to this challenge is mission command—devolving disciplined action to lower levels based on commander’s intent and mission type orders.

But, in the joint logistics enterprise, the mission command strategy is limited. The consensus-building and negotiating skills required of our logisticians is a more comprehensive, participative form of decision-making than our current mission command doctrine encompasses.

Third, organizations must be able to identify and reward talented integrators. Integrators are difficult to reward because many of our personnel management tools are oriented toward achieving objectives inside our organizations. The ability to integrate across organizational boundaries is hard to measure, as the performance of the greater enterprise rides on variables that the integrator’s home organization cannot control.

We hope to generate at least some interesting spinoff discussions on the organizational issues of differentiation and integration as these relate to mission command.

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