

**“Mission Command is All Well and Good but
Not on Graduation Day”: A Grounded Study
into the ability of a Military, Hierarchical
Organisation to put its Leadership Doctrine
into Practice**

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of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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Abstract

This investigation is a grounded study into the ability of a military hierarchical organisation to employ its primary leadership philosophy in practice. The organisation in question is the Royal Air Force which for over three decades has sought to embed a leadership philosophy known as mission command into everyday organisational life in order to counter the increasing complexity and volatility of its external operating environment. Predicated on the concept of empowerment, the doctrine's current treatment of mission command requires leaders at all levels of the organisation to devolve decision making and responsibility for task achievement down to the lowest practicable level in order to facilitate a culture of high tempo, innovative decision making that is able to take advantage the complex environment it finds itself operating in. In its simplest form it relies on the willingness of a superior to provide a subordinate with the 'what' and 'why' of a task before standing back and leaving the 'how' (i.e. the execution) of the task for them to plan, execute and monitor themselves whilst remaining responsive to a superior's direction.

Despite the concept of mission having being firmly embedded within the RAF's leadership doctrine and associated leadership training and development syllabi for over a decade and a half, there is a wealth of evidence, including the researcher's own experiences of serving over 20 years with the RAF, to suggest that the organisation's aim of embedding the concept within day-to-day organisational business has still yet to be realised. This study therefore sought to address the initial research question:

‘What if any gap exists between organisational members understanding of and their experience of the doctrinally espoused leadership philosophy known as mission command and what if any factors influence this?’

The theory has been developed by applying Strauss and Corbin’s version of grounded theory and the data has been drawn from 30 in-depth interviews across a cross-section of experienced RAF personnel as well as incorporating data drawn from the researcher’s own involvement in delivering and facilitating leadership conferences, workshops and discussions for over 500 RAF personnel during the period of the research.¹ It examines the relationship between superior and subordinate and draws on individuals’ own interpretations of how organisational members go about achieving specific objectives and the extent to which they feel empowered to achieve their goals. In doing so it aims to identify any perceived gap between doctrine and practice together with the factors that either facilitate or inhibit the adoption of mission command within the organisation. In doing so, the thesis aims to enhance the literature regarding the contextual and organisational factors that influence the development of empowerment within an organisation as well as enhancing leadership practice within the organisation under study.

The grounded data reveals that there is a widely held perception amongst RAF personnel that despite its apparent value and ongoing relevance to the organisation, mission command as presented in the doctrine has yet to be fully embraced within its day-to-day activities. In particular, it highlights that while the concept of mission command as a relational empowerment tool within certain critical contexts (e.g. operations) is deemed to occur, its employment as a motivational empowerment

¹ Recorded in the researcher’s learning journal

tool, as required by the doctrine, is at best sporadic. It also reveals that there are a number of themes, relationships and phenomena that play a major role in limiting the ability of the organisation to develop the motivational aspects of mission command. This is despite a recognition by the organisation of the organisational benefits this brings, particularly with regards to developing a culture of innovation and agility. Furthermore, the evidence also suggests that this lack of ability to employ mission command as a motivational empowerment tool across all aspects of organisational life is actually indicative of a prevalent organisational culture based on what Argyris & Schön (1974, 1978) term Model I Theories-in-use which facilitate organisational action strategies² that seek to retain unilateral control of the environment based on an overriding desire to achieve the task at hand. With regards to the adoption of mission command, the research has identified that a premium placed on task focussed commander/manager behaviours, while facilitating mission command's adoption as a relational empowerment tool, has limited its adoption as a motivational empowerment tool despite what the doctrine demands. The corresponding lack of 'people focus' is also illustrated by the low engagement scores across the MOD (e.g. AFCAS 2018) and poor assessments of the senior leadership's engagement and ability of the organisation to deliver major change.³ There is also a general sense that once away from the operational space individual performance, risk taking and innovation is not valued at an organisational level as much as task delivery and process compliance despite the current organisational strategy (in

² Argyris and Schon (1974, 1978) describe action strategies as being the strategies that organisations employ to overcome the problems they encounter.

³ The Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey 2018 revealed that only 17% of personnel who responded agreed that they felt senior leaders understood and represented their interests, only 26% said they had confidence in the senior leadership and only 19% said they thought change was managed well within the Service.

addition to the doctrine) placing a strategic emphasis on 'being able to reward, empower and motivate our people to unlock their full potential' (RAF Strategy 2017, p.22). This thesis argues that an emphasis on the commander manager role plays a major role in influencing super-subordinate relationships within the organisation and identifies how several environmental and organisational factors can hinder the ability of both individuals and the organisation to actively challenge the prevalent culture in order to achieve the doctrine's aim of embedding a more people focussed culture within the organisation that is predicated on the concept of motivational empowerment.

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List of Abbreviations

ACSC	Advanced Command and Staff Course
AFBSC	Air Force Board Standing Committee
AFCAS	Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey
AFI	Annual Formal Inspection
AP	Air Publication
AOC	Air Officer Commanding
AWC	Air Warfare Centre
CAS	Chief of the Air Staff
CLM	Command, Leadership & Management
CTW	Critical, Tame & Wicked
CWOC	Commissioned Warrant Officers' Course
DAMO	Duty Air Movements Officer
DCDC	Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre
EI	Emotional Intelligence
Flt Lt	Flight Lieutenant
Gp Capt.	Group Captain
GT	Grounded Theory
IBN	Internal Briefing Note
ICSC	Intermediate Command and Staff Course
IOT	Initial Officer Training
IP	Interview Participant
JDP	Joint Doctrine Publication

JOD	Junior Officer Development
MOD	Ministry of Defence
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
OACTU	Officer and Aircrew Cadet Training Unit
OJAR	Officers' Joint Annual Appraisal
Ops	Operations
OSIC	OACTU Staff Induction Course
PMD	Professional Military Development
PJHQ	Permanent Joint Headquarters
RAF	Royal Air Force
Sgt	Sergeant
SMEAC	Situation, Mission, Execution, Any Questions, Check Understanding
SNCO	Senior Non-Commissioned Officer
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SOSP	Senior Officer Study Programme
SRD	Syndicate Room Discussion
TOR	Terms of Reference
VIP	Very Important Person (e.g. Senior Officer, MP)
VSO	Very Senior Officer
VVIP	Very Very Important Person
VUCA	Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity
Wg Cdr	Wing Commander

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

“Mission command is all well and good, but not on Graduation Day.”

1.1 Introduction

This introduction presents an overview of the purpose of, and context for, the research study which seeks to explore the ability of the military hierarchical organisation known as the Royal Air Force (RAF) to embed its doctrinally espoused leadership philosophy, known as mission command, into day-to-day organisational leadership practice. It starts with a brief description the organisation’s purpose and structure before outlining the external environment it currently operates in and the associated strategy that it seeks to employ in order to deal with the challenges it faces. It then briefly introduces the organisation’s current leadership doctrine with which it aims to implement its strategy before explaining the background to, and rationale for, the research topic. This is followed by an introduction to the research focus, together with the associated aims and objectives, prior to outlining the philosophical framework and methodological approach adopted including a brief description of the data collection methods. Finally, it sets out the main structure of the thesis.

1.2 RAF Purpose

The RAF is a military, hierarchical organisation that plays a central role in the security and prosperity of the United Kingdom by contributing to the military element of the UK Government’s three primary instruments of power (JDP 0-01, p.14), namely:

- (i) The Diplomatic Instrument. The Diplomatic Instrument concerns the management of international relations to further national interests and is predicated on the use of persuasive negotiation, reinforced by capable and credible hard power (both military and economic).
- (ii) The Economic Instrument. The Economic Instrument involves the use of overseas investment, international flows of capital and trade and development assistance to exercise economic influence, including the use of incentives, boycotts, tariffs and sanctions.
- (iii) The Military Instrument. The Military Instrument utilises the threat of force to either deter or coerce, or the actual use of force to counter a specific threat. The military instrument is deemed to be most effective when utilised in conjunction with the other primary instruments of power.

In particular, the RAF is responsible for supporting the UK's Military Defence Tasks⁴ by providing direct support to the UK's primary Defence Task (Defence Task 1) of ensuring the defence, security and resilience of the Homeland by maintaining the integrity of the UK's sovereign air space and freedom of manoeuvre. In addition, the RAF also provides support to a number of other Defence Tasks (JDP 0-30) including:

- (i) Defence Task 2 (Understanding) through the provision of Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance.

⁴ There are currently 7 military tasks identified by the MoD as being (JDP 0-01): Defence of the UK and its overseas territories; provision of strategic intelligence; provision of nuclear deterrence; support to civil emergency organisations in times of crises; defence of UK interests through projection of power strategically and through expeditionary interventions; provision of a defence contribution to UK influence; and provision of security for stabilisation.

- (ii) Defence Task 4 (Defence Engagement) through activities such as overseas training & exercises and support to humanitarian and disaster relief efforts around the globe.
- (iii) Defence Task 5 (Overseas Defence Activity) through the use of air power in response to political tensions or crises overseas with air power being defined as the ability to use air capabilities in and from the air, to influence behaviour of actors and the course of events.

1.3 RAF Structure

In order to fulfil its defence responsibilities, the organisation currently employs just under 31,000 uniformed regular personnel⁵ together with a similar number of non-regular and civilian individuals who collectively form what is known as the Whole Force⁶, a mix of regulars, reservists, contractors and civil servants who together are utilised to help develop, deliver and sustain the organisation's defence outputs. In terms of structure, the full-time uniformed aspect of the organisation can be likened to what Mintzberg (1980) terms a Machine Bureaucracy (see section on structure in the next chapter) which employs a high degree of formalised procedures and behaviours, captured in a wide range of policy documents, known as Air Publications or APs, in an attempt to reduce organisational complexity and enhance its ability to predict and control. As a hierarchical organisation it currently employs 20 layers, known as ranks, divided between 2 main career streams with 10 levels making up what is known as the non-commissioned ranks (i.e. airmen) and 10 levels making up

⁵Current trained strength
(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/659404/20171001_-_SPS.pdf)

⁶The whole force concept is one that seeks to balance reserves, regulars and contractors, forging them into a coherent whole that delivers the required capability at a lower cost than if it were a wholly regular military affair.

the commissioned ranks (i.e. officers) – see table 1.1.

Commissioned Ranks (Officers)	Non-Commissioned Ranks (Airmen)
Air Chief Marshall (4-star - most senior rank)	Warrant Officer/Master Aircrew (most senior non-commissioned rank)
Air Marshall (3-star)	Flight Sergeant
Air-Vice Marshall (2-star)	Chief Technician
Air Commodore (1-star) ⁷	Sergeant
Group Captain	Corporal
Wing Commander	Lance Corporal (RAF Regiment)
Squadron Leader	Senior Aircraftman (Technician)
Flight Lieutenant	Senior Aircraftman
Flying Officer	Leading Aircraftman
Pilot Officer	Aircraftman

Table 1.1: RAF Rank Table – note that seniority goes sequentially from Aircraftsman to Air Chief Marshall – 19 ranks in total.

Of note, unlike other hierarchical public sector organisations that have the ability to recruit directly into the strategic leadership pool laterally from other organisations, the senior/strategic leadership of the RAF is exclusively drawn from within the Service and hence all future strategic leaders must first join the organisation as officer cadets and work their way up the hierarchy via a highly competitive merit-based promotion system. Jupp (2013) proposes that on average it takes approximately 20 years for those destined for Air Rank/strategic leadership roles to achieve Air Officer status

⁷ Air Commodore and above are known as Air Rank officers and these form the strategic apex of the organisation.

(i.e. Air Commodore and above).

1.4 External Environment

The majority of the RAF's current strategic leadership cadre joined the Service towards the back end of the Cold War, a name given to the relationship that developed primarily between the USA and the Soviet Union following the end of the Second World War. The origins of what eventually became a protracted military stand-off between the East and West can be traced back in part to a disagreement over spheres of influence and a growing ideological distrust between these two protagonists. This distrust was further aggravated by a number of diplomatic and political disagreements/blunders that took place in decades that followed the war. Consequently, for most of the latter part of the 20th century, the main threat to the security of the UK and its allies was perceived to be that of a conventional mainland invasion of Western Europe by the Warsaw Pact. This bi-polar standoff lent itself to a relatively stable environment in which the military focus from the West's point of view was primarily on deterrence through the possession of large standing forces and the use of extensive planning and rehearsing of large-scale military manoeuvres to counter any invasion. Consequently, the environment that the organisation experienced during the cold war could be said to have equated to what Osborne, Hunt and Jauch (2002) term a stable bureaucracy whereby the strategic leadership's focus was predicated on planning for, and dealing with, a complicated but predictable scenario in order to provide subordinates with highly detailed accounts of what their specific roles and responsibilities were in the event of a conventional conflict.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent end to the Cold War in the late 1980's, the expectation of a Peace Dividend⁸ led many nations, including the UK, to cut back on defence spending which in turn resulted in large scale reductions in the size of the military. For the RAF, this has resulted in a reduction from approximately 91,000 personnel at the end of the Cold War to just under 31,000 personnel today. However, notwithstanding this expectation of a more stable global environment following the end of the Cold War, many military analysts have subsequently acknowledged that the emergence of a post-Cold War multi-lateral world (as opposed to the bi-polar Cold War) has in fact led to a much more challenging and dangerous global environment resulting in the emergence of an increasing number of unconventional, complex and unpredictable national security challenges (e.g. Barnett 2004; Lawson 2011; Burrows and Gnad 2018).

As a result of this increasingly unstable external environment the RAF has in the decades following the Cold War increasingly found itself committed to ongoing operations both at home and overseas across the breadth of defence outputs. In the last decade alone, the RAF has been engaged in over 12 overseas operations while at the same time continued pressure on the public sector purse and ever-decreasing defence budget has resulted in a continued drawdown of personnel. This in turn has served to put increasing strain on the organisation to both deliver and sustain its outputs and attract, recruit and retain sufficient qualified personnel. Consequently, this post-Cold War environment could be said to equate to what Osborn, Hunt and Jauch (2002) term a Dynamic Equilibrium whereby the demands, constraints and

⁸ Peace Dividend was the name given to the expected economic benefit arising from a reduction in defence spending after the end of the Cold War. It has since been acknowledged that such a dividend never actually materialised despite a reduction in military spending, particularly amongst the world super powers.

choices faced by the organisation are becoming increasingly ambiguous and complex in the face of evolving threats, thereby forcing the organisation to try and incrementally adapt its leadership approach in order to survive. Of note, Barno et al (2013) highlight that despite the emergence of this more dynamic external environment, many of the organisational artefacts that emerged during the Cold War, such as the centralisation of decision making processes within a strategic apex, still linger on in many of today's military organisations.

1.5 RAF Strategy

The challenges of operating within this increasingly complex and contested environment are acknowledged within the organisation's current strategy (RAF Strategy 2017, p.6) whose declared purpose is to 'inspire, inform and cohere by guiding and prioritizing the work of the organisation and providing commanders at all levels within the organisation with a unifying high-level purpose for their leadership'. The strategy describes the organisation as one which 'manages risks and operates safely within an inherently and increasingly risky and complex environment whilst relying on the ability to exploit technology and innovation'. In order to continue to deliver air power successfully in light of these challenges, it highlights the following areas as being of crucial importance in maintaining the RAF's ability to meet its commitments in the next decade and beyond:

- (i) The ability to recruit, select and retain personnel against increasing competition for talent.
- (ii) The ability to respond effectively to changes to the external operating

environment resulting from ambiguous and hybrid⁹ warfare against adversaries who are willing to fight in different ways.

- (iii) The need for individuals at all levels of the organisation to think differently and innovate in order to deliver air power in an increasingly complex and contested environment.

In order to help address these challenges, the strategy is further distilled down into 3 key themes:

- (i) Focus on People in order sustain, retain, attract and recruit the motivated and capable people the Service needs.
- (ii) Deliver on Operations by remaining a world-class air force that delivers the air and space capability for the UK.
- (iii) Grow Front-Line Capabilities by reinvesting savings to enhance capacity and capability and set the conditions for further investment in the future.

Regarding the focus on people, the strategy proposes that one of its 5 top-level strategic objectives is to ‘reward, empower and motivate (its) people to unlock their full potential’ (RAF Strategy 2017, p.22) and highlights that crucial to success will be the ability to harness the full potential of its personnel through ‘leadership, delegation and empowerment’ (RAF Strategy 2017, p.34). It should be noted that although the strategy makes no mention of mission command, within the doctrine itself mission command is positioned as being the primary mechanism by which leadership, delegation and empowerment is enacted in the Service.

⁹ Hybrid warfare is a term used to describe the employment of conventional military force supported by irregular and cyber warfare tactics.

1.6 RAF Leadership Doctrine

Air Publication 7001 (Leadership in the RAF) is a document that sits beneath the RAF Strategy and details the organisation's policy in support of the development of leadership and empowerment within the Royal Air Force. It describes its purpose as being to give guidance on the leadership policy of the RAF and the tools to use for the generic Professional Military Development (PMD)¹⁰ programme undertaken by all RAF personnel.

Divided into 7 chapters, it details the 5 main areas on which the policy & doctrine for all RAF leadership development is based, namely:

- (i) Mission Command.
- (ii) The Principles of Command, Leadership and Management (CLM) including the RAF Leadership Attributes.
- (iii) Followership.
- (iv) Leadership of Change.
- (v) The Ethical Component of CLM.

In presenting these 5 main areas (which are dealt with in more detail in chapter 3 and summarized below) the document also acknowledges that academic theories of leadership are 'legion' and therefore directs that RAF leaders at all levels must first have a grasp of these 5 areas before being encouraged to explore further afield; although there is no further guidance as to what is actually meant by the term 'further afield' with regards to the plethora of models, approaches and theories that abound within the wider academic literature.

¹⁰ The PMD programme is a through life training and education programme that all military personnel engage with at various stages of their careers.

1.6.1 Mission Command

Mission command is positioned by the doctrine as the fundamental concept on which all RAF leadership is based. It is described as being the UK military's primary enabling philosophy of command based on the principle of an individual's absolute responsibility to act or, in certain circumstances, not to act, within the framework of a superior's intent' (AP7001, p.1-2) and consequently it is presented by the doctrine as the main principle to be used behind all RAF leadership. The doctrine also highlights that the application of mission command 'requires a style of command that promotes decentralised decision-making, freedom of action and initiative, but which remains responsive to superior direction'. In other words, it proposes that commanders should endeavour whenever possible to push decision-making down to the lowest practicable level depending on the context of the situation. It also highlights that subordinates, in turn, should make full use of mission command across the spectrum of organisational activities to help empower their teams to deliver their own objectives.

1.6.2 The Principles of Command, Management and Leadership and the RAF Leadership Attributes

Closely related to the concept of mission command are the principles of Command Leadership and Management (CLM), also known as the Officers' Trinity, which arise from the organisation's recognition that an individual's leadership style varies according to a number of factors, including the personality of the individual leader and the context of the situation within which they find themselves operating at any particular time. The doctrine states that personnel are required to have a full understanding of this functional approach to leadership in order for it to serve as a

practical guide to areas of leadership effort and presents each of the 3 principles as follows:

- (i) Command is described as the legal authority and responsibility of an individual by virtue of rank (i.e. seniority) that enables them to influence events and order subordinates to implement their decisions.
- (ii) Leadership is presented as the projection of personality and character to inspire people to achieve the desired outcome that goes beyond formal authority.
- (iii) Management is presented as being the allocation and control of resources to achieve objectives, often within the constraints of time. It requires the capability to deploy a range of techniques and skills to enhance and facilitate the planning, organisation and execution of business.

To highlight the relationship between each of the components above, Command is positioned as the overarching principle within which legally appointed individuals are required by the organisation to balance the functions of management with the authority that arises from positional power (i.e. hard leadership). This in turn presents the act of commanding as a coercive function of resource allocation and directive control through the use of authority. However, the doctrine also proposes that management and positional power alone are sometimes insufficient to get subordinates to comply and therefore 'soft' leadership that goes beyond the use of authority in the form of personal power is necessary to inspire followers to work towards organisational goals (Fig 1.1).

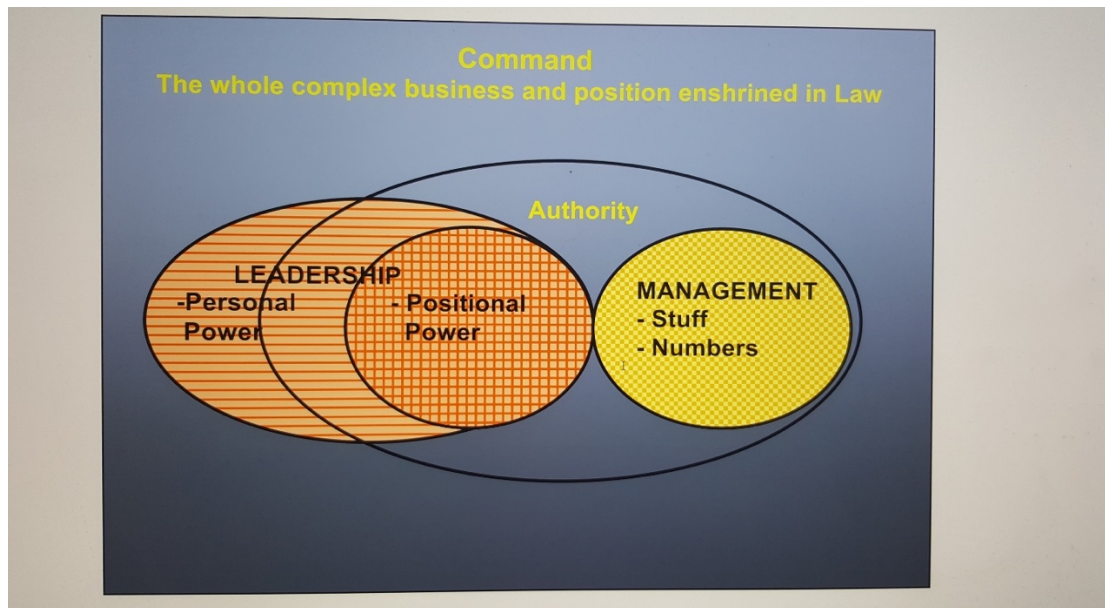


Fig 1.1 The Officers' Trinity from AP7001

Closely associated with the principles of CLM are the RAF Leadership Attributes which the doctrine presents as a list of desirable attributes which have been derived from extensive interviews with RAF personnel from all ranks, and reflect the behaviours that organisational members have declared that they want from their leaders namely:

- (i) Warfighter, Courageous.
- (ii) Emotionally Intelligent.
- (iii) Willing to Take Risks.
- (iv) Technologically Competent.
- (v) Able to Lead Tomorrow's Recruit.
- (vi) Mentally Agile – Physically Robust.
- (vii) Flexible & Responsive
- (viii) Able to Handle Ambiguity
- (ix) Politically and Globally Astute - Air Warfare Minded.

In particular, the doctrine places a high degree of emphasis on the role of emotional intelligence in allowing a leader exercise the attributes appropriately and apply or adopt the most appropriate behavioural style (i.e. command, leadership or management) depending on the circumstances they find themselves in.

1.6.3 Followership

The concept of followership recognises that all leaders within the organisation have followers and are also followers and that by ensuring good followership the organisation is able to enhance its leadership. It is based on the premise that good followership goes beyond blind obedience and encompasses the concepts of constructive dissent and constructive consent. In effect, it proposes that followers should be encouraged to question and challenge their leaders' decision-making processes when appropriate in order to help prevent undesirable or unintended consequences.

1.6.4 Leadership of Change

The section on the leadership of change recognises that as a modern-day organisation the Service will always be subject to change whether it likes it or not. Consequently, the policy places emphasis on the ability of leaders to both understand the emotional impact of change and to utilise this in order to ensure that any new processes and structures become fully embedded within the organisation. It also attaches particular importance on the ability of individuals to understand the change curve and the appropriate approach required at the various stages of the curve. Furthermore, the policy also proposes that a culture of innovation is the key to dealing with change and that leading people through change 'must be a challenge that all RAF leaders excel at' (AP7001, p.1-3).

1.6.5 The Ethical Component

The ethical component of CLM details the requirement for ‘all personnel to possess a clear and strong sense of their own moral compass and through personal example adhere to ethical behaviour both as a leader and follower’ (AP7001, p.1-3). In order to facilitate this, it highlights that an appreciation of authentic leadership theory is required together with an understanding of the key philosophical approaches to ethical behaviour and morality and a broader understanding of both the Service’s and wider defence stands on ethical behaviour and moral standards.

Finally, the doctrine highlights that all RAF leaders, irrespective of rank, are required to have a full grasp of these 5 main concepts and as such it positions itself as the authoritative framework document from which all organisational leadership development activities and associated syllabi are drawn.

1.7 Background to & Rationale for the Study

The genesis of this research project, and indeed the researcher’s own nascent career in academia, can be traced back to the quote at the start of the chapter i.e. “mission command is all well and good, but not on graduation day” and it is therefore deemed pertinent to spend a short time explaining the context and background to the quote prior to presenting a wider introduction into the aims and objectives of this research project. The quote itself was the culminating remark made by a senior officer to a junior cadet following a verbal exchange that revolved around the opening of a security gate on an RAF College graduation day. The senior officer in question had responsibility for overseeing the preparations for, and execution of, all RAF College graduations which are the culmination of a 24-week initial officer training course and occur on average five times a year. In order to assist with proceedings, the senior

officer was allocated a pool of intermediate course cadets on the day of a graduation who were duly tasked with a variety of jobs such as checking graduation guests' passes, directing car parking and escorting visiting dignitaries and VIPs. In this particular instance the cadet in question had been tasked at the morning briefing to open a security gate at 09:00 hours in order to allow a VIP's vehicle to pass through. The cadet duly collected the appropriate keys and made his way to the gate with 10 minutes to spare only to find a somewhat agitated senior officer waiting impatiently at the gate, demanding to know why he had cut it so fine. Having spent the last 16 weeks being educated in the main RAF leadership philosophy of mission command, which is predicated on a superior trusting and empowering a subordinate to achieve a task without undue interference, the cadet asked the senior officer why he had felt it necessary to come and check up on him. When the senior officer replied that he wanted to be absolutely sure that the gate was open on time the cadet felt compelled to ask "but what about mission command" resulting in the senior officer rolling his eyes and declaring that "mission command is all well and good, but not on Graduation Day."

The above incident happened whilst the researcher was a senior training manager at the RAF College where one of his primary roles was to oversee the development and delivery of a new leadership training syllabus to all officer cadet recruits undertaking their initial officer training. One of the main objectives of the new syllabus was to help the organisation embed the leadership style known as mission command that sought to place a greater emphasis on individuals being prepared to employ a more empowering style of leadership in order to supplement the predominantly command and management behaviours that were perceived to prevail within the wider

organisation. The overall intent being to expose the future leaders of the organisation to a much broader range of leadership styles in order to better prepare them for the variety of leadership challenges they would face within the increasingly complex and unpredictable environment they would be operating in. Fundamental to the successful application of this style of empowered leadership is the requirement for a superior to delegate (or decentralise) decision-making authority whenever possible to the lowest practicable level while still retaining overall responsibility for the eventual outcome. However, despite this concept of decentralised decision-making becoming firmly embedded within the organisation's leadership policies, doctrine and associated leadership development programs, both the author's own experiences and those of his colleagues when discussing the above incident appeared to suggest that what was being espoused in theory was very much at odds with that which was being applied in practice, not only at the College but also within the wider Service. Furthermore, it was also deemed to be particularly prevalent at the more senior levels of the organisation. Indeed, there appeared to be wealth of anecdotal evidence from people's own experiences and perceptions of mission command to suggest that throughout all levels of the organisation there was often a reluctance of superiors to empower their subordinates to make decisions on their behalf, despite the emphasis on developing mission command (as the mechanism through which empowerment is enacted) being present within all aspects of the organisation's formal leadership development activities. This in turn appeared to suggest that what was being espoused in theory was very much at odds with personnel's own experiences of day-to-day leadership in practice.

1.8 Aim of study

Existing academic research into organisational leadership does not appear to adequately address the internal and external factors that potentially influence an organisation's ability to put its leadership doctrine, where it exists, into practice. Focusing on the RAF, the aim of this study is to utilise serving personnel's own experiences within the organisation to explore whether or not a perceived gap exists between the theory (as espoused in its policy and doctrine) and practice of its primary leadership philosophy known as mission command. It also seeks to identify what if any factors influence this in order to help determine what if any organisational development activity can be utilised to help close any perceived gap in order to better align theory with practice. This research project therefore seeks to undertake an interpretative, qualitative analysis of the potential factors that influence a military, hierarchical organisation's ability to translate critical elements of its leadership doctrine into practice.

Having identified a grounded, qualitative methodology as being the most appropriate vehicle with which to undertake the interpretative study (see methodology chapter), the research question takes the form of a focus-of enquiry statement¹¹ that guides the initial data collection and provides the framework on which emerging theory is constructed by the research participants themselves as various themes begin to emerge. This is in contrast to the more traditional approach of presenting a precise research question in order to facilitate the testing of an *a priori* research hypothesis. Consequently, in line with the role of the research question in grounded theory,

¹¹ Given the grounded nature of the study the research will not begin with an *a priori* hypothesis but rather a research question utilised to focus the direction of the study of recognising this too may be refined as a research develops.

which serves to focus attention and identify the phenomenon rather than offer a precise view of the nature of the problem, the following focus of enquiry will be utilised:

'What if any gap exists between organisational members understanding of and their experience of the doctrinally espoused leadership philosophy known as mission command and what if any factors influence this?'

The thesis therefore seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the potential barriers facing hierarchical organisations seeking to employ an organisational leadership doctrine that is predicated on applying empowerment in practice.

1.9 Research Objectives

The main research objectives of this study are to undertake a qualitative grounded study in order to:

- (i) Explore organisational members' own understanding of mission command in theory.
- (ii) Explore organisational members' own experiences of mission command in practice.
- (iii) Compare individuals' own understanding of mission command in theory and their experiences of mission command in practice order to identify what if any gaps exist between theory and practice.
- (iv) Identify what if any factors exist that impact on the ability of individuals within the organisation to put the espoused theory into practice.
- (v) Utilise the findings and conclusions in order to help the organization under study to further enhance its organisational leadership learning and development activities in order to close any gap.

1.10 Value of Study/Axiology

The practical value of the study is deemed by the researcher to be in helping the organisation identify what if any constraining factors exist that prevent the organisation from translating its leadership doctrine into practice. The aim being to help enhance future leadership development initiatives thereby enabling individuals to adopt the appropriate behavioural approach to ensure organisational effectiveness and assist the organisation in achieving its strategic aims and objectives. Anticipated conceptual contributions include a substantive grounded theory explaining the processes that influence the ability of the organisation to put its leadership philosophy based on empowerment into practice. Consequently, the thesis aims to make the following contributions to extant knowledge:

1.10.1 Theoretical Contribution. The study aims to contribute to extant theory on the ability of hierarchical organisations such as the RAF to translate their leadership policy/doctrine/frameworks into practice. It also seeks to build on current theory with regards to the factors that influence the ability of such organisations to embed a culture of empowerment.

1.10.2 Practice Contribution. The findings are intended to inform the practice of leadership development within both the RAF and similar hierarchical organisations that seek to embed a culture of empowerment within their day-to-day business activities in order to deal with an increasingly complex external environment.

1.11 Methodological Approach

Bryman (2008) highlights that adopting a positivist stance within the field of social science requires the researcher to utilise a natural science approach in order to

explore the external reality of social interactive phenomena such as leadership before going on to propose that when attempting to uncover theoretical foundations of events that cannot be directly observed, cause is replaced by interpreting social interaction to create an understanding of it. However, Gill & Johnson (2002) highlight that use of precise models derived from the quantified operationalisation of the concepts under study often results in the element of meaning being removed from the social phenomena under investigation. Kramer (1996) therefore proposes that in order to better understand organisational behaviour, the researcher needs to explore the subjects' own interpretations of the phenomena under study based on the assumption that social reality is determined by human experience within specific contexts. Consequently, in contrast to the more traditional nomothetic approach to leadership studies which seek to undertake theory testing of pre-declared concepts and hypotheses (Gill 2002) this research employs an ideographic approach which emphasises the analysis of subjective meaning of social action (Bryman 2008) by getting inside individual's perceptions of everyday situations. The study therefore employs a qualitative approach based on an interpretative-informed grounded theory methodology (see chapter on methodology) that seeks to generate knowledge by exploring individuals' own socially constructed experiences that arise from interaction within specific contexts (Morgan & Smircich 1980, cited in Cunliffe 2010). This adoption of an interpretative approach, rather than more traditional positivist approach to the study of leadership, is based on the premise that it is the sensemaking that an individual applies to a particular situation rather than generalizable observable behaviour, that in turn is responsible for explaining social interaction. Consequently, the aim of this approach is to develop an explanation for

action rather than a compelling reason for it, particularly as the inability to control external variables naturally lends itself to an interpretative epistemology. The main focus of such an interpretative approach being the discovery of underlying social phenomena that manifest themselves as observable behaviour. In this instance the study seeks to explore the meanings and interpretations that RAF personnel ascribe to their experiences of mission command. From an ontological perspective the research adopts the position that an individual's perception of leadership is shaped by their own subjective experience within a particular context and from an epistemological perspective it utilises an interpretative methodology that seeks to uncover participants lived experiences of the phenomenon of interest (i.e. mission command). Finally, in adopting a grounded approach it must be recognised that there are 3 main approaches with regards to grounded theory that in turn place differing emphasis on the approach to collecting, analysing and conceptualising the research data (Strauss & Corbin 1994). The various approaches and the rationale for the adopted approach will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

1.11.1 Literature Review

Dey (1999) highlights that within the various approaches to grounded methodology the use of the literature review varies in respect of its purpose, necessity and intent with some approaches advocating a complete review prior to commencing fieldwork in order to help sensitise the researcher to the problem in hand (e.g. McGhee et al. 2007; McCann & Clarke 2003 & Strauss & Corbin 1998) and others abstaining from the literature review in order to keep a clear and open mind (Glaser 1998). Given the nature of the methodological approach adopted (i.e. Straussian grounded approach), an initial critical review of the literature with regards to mission command was

undertaken both prior to and during data collection in order to help develop theoretical sensitivity and form a conceptual framework with which to explore an individual's perceptions of mission command both in theory and practice. Strauss & Corbin (1990) propose that researchers attain theoretical sensitivity from a number of sources such as the literature and their own professional and personal experiences.

1.11.2 Data Collection

One of the primary data gathering mechanisms across the 3 main approaches to grounded theory is the use of the semi-structured interview (Glaser & Strauss 1994) which in this instance will be utilised to explore individuals' perceptions of mission command and its related concepts within the Service. Data will also be drawn from the researcher's own learning journal in which the thoughts and perceptions of RAF personnel undertaking the many workshops/conferences/facilitated discussions attended and delivered by the researcher during both his time in the Service and in his current role. These have been captured in various forms such as the researcher's own learning journal, whiteboards, notes on student conversations and course feedback.

1.11.3 Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in line with the University of Leeds framework for research ethics in that the anonymity of all participants was ensured and no individual was associated with any of the data gathered. A more detailed description of the ethical approach is presented in Chapter 3 (Methodology).

1.11.4 Thesis Structure

Following this introduction, the thesis will be structured as follows:

- (i) Chapter 2 will examine in more detail the RAF's structure, external operating environment and strategy in order to highlight the organisational challenges that its current leadership policy is attempting to address.
- (ii) Chapter 3 will cover the methodological approach and include justification of the research method adopted.
- (iii) Chapter 4 takes the form of an initial literature review, in line with the Straussian approach to grounded theory, that explores the underlying theory behind current RAF leadership doctrine with a particular focus on the phenomenon known as mission command.
- (iv) Chapter 5 presents the initial findings regarding the perceptions of mission command 'in theory'.
- (v) Chapter 6 outlines the theory development leading to the core category.
- (vi) Chapter 7 introduces the core category.
- (vii) Chapter 8 presents a summary of the findings and discussion.
- (viii) Chapter 9 presents the conclusion and recommendations arising from the study.

Chapter 2

THE ROYAL AIR FORCE IN CONTEXT

2.1 Introduction

This chapter builds on the outline of the organisation presented in Chapter 1 by examining in more detail its structure, external operating environment and organisational strategy in order to highlight the organisational challenges that its extant leadership policies and doctrine are attempting to address.

2.2 RAF Organisational Structure

As highlighted in the introduction, the RAF is a bureaucratic¹² military organisation that employs a multi-layered hierarchical rank structure in order to meet its defence tasks. In order to explore its structure in more detail, it is useful to consider it through the lens of Mintzberg's (1980) 'typology of 5' theory on organisational design which identifies five basic parts to an organisation (Fig 2.1) namely:

- (i) The Strategic Apex at the top of the organisation which consists of the senior managers and their staff. For the RAF this equates to HQ Air Command and the Air Force Board whose function is to provide a coherent and coordinated single Air focus to the other Services, MOD and the Permanent Joint Headquarters.
- (ii) The Middle Line which consists of those individuals who sit within the line a formal authority between the people at the strategic apex and the operating core. For the RAF this role equates roughly to the 4 main

¹² i.e. Strategic decisions are undertaken by non-elected officials (e.g. Weber, 1905)

operational Groups¹³, each headed by a 2-star officer, that sit under HQ Air's main operational command¹⁴ and are responsible to the Air Force Board for generating, developing and sustaining the RAF's air power capability.

- (iii) The Operating Core which consists of all organisational members that are involved in the production of the basic products and services of the organisation. For the RAF this function could be said to equate to the operational frontline stations, each headed by a Group Captain, who are responsible for generating the 'Force Elements at Readiness'¹⁵ to meet the RAF's Defence Tasks.
- (iv) The support staff which includes those groups that provide indirect support to the rest of the organisation. This can be mapped across to the Capability and Personnel Command¹⁶ function whose role is primarily to provide sufficient manpower to meet the trained manpower requirement of the Service in addition to overseeing the efficient and effective development of Air Capability.¹⁷
- (v) The technostructure which consists of those analysts out of the formal line structure who apply analytic techniques to the design and maintenance of the structure and to the adaptation of the organisation to its environment. For the RAF this could be said to include the RAF element of the MOD's Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre

¹³ 1 Gp, 2 Gp, 22 Gp, 38 Gp

¹⁴ Headed by DCOM Ops who sits on the Air Force Board

¹⁵ Force Elements @ Readiness refers to the units and formations that the RAF holds ready to deploy on operations.

¹⁶ Previously known as Support Command.

¹⁷ This includes Medical and Legal Services. COS Health, COS Support and COS Personnel and the Director of Legal Services

(DCDC) whose role is to develop long term strategy to help inform senior policy makers and the associated doctrine together with the RAF's Air Warfare Centre (AWC).

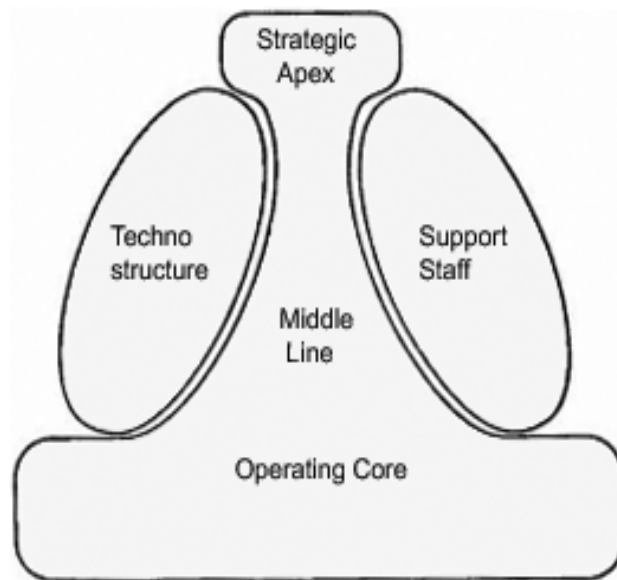


Fig 2.1 Mintzberg's Organisational Structure 'in fives'

In addition to identifying the 5 basic parts of an organisation, Mintzberg (1980) also highlights that the way in which the functions of the organisation are coordinated tends to place emphasis (or favours) one of the five parts thereby giving rise to five basic organisational configurations, namely:

- (i) The Simple Structure. Here the strategic apex is the key part of the organisation which exerts control through the centralisation of decision making and direct supervision of task accomplishment. Mintzberg proposes that this structure is primarily found in relatively young, dynamic organisations and those organisations facing crises.

- (ii) The Machine Bureaucracy. Here the primary method of coordination is through the technostructure which in turn coordinates the various functions through the imposition of standards on highly specialised and formalised work units at the operating level. Mintzberg highlights power tends to be centralised at the strategic apex with some horizontal decentralisation to the technostructure. Consequently, this form tends to be associated with mature organisations operating in relatively stable environments.
- (iii) The Professional Bureaucracy. Found in complex but stable environments, Mintzberg proposes that the professional bureaucracy relies on operating core for coordination via the standardisation of outputs and utilises extensive vertical and horizontal decentralisation.
- (iv) The Divisionalised Form. Often found in large, mature organisations operating in diversified markets, here power is delegated to a number of autonomous market-based units within the middle-line with coordination being achieved through the standardisation of outputs and extensive use of performance control systems.
- (v) The Adhocracy. Here Mintzberg proposes that coordination is achieved primarily through what he terms 'mutual adjustment' *among* all five parts with a particular emphasis on the collaboration of its support staff. Divisional units are often small and make extensive use of matrices and what Mintzberg terms 'liaison devices' with selective decentralisation in along both the horizontal and vertical axis. This form is often found in complex, dynamic environments.

Furthermore, Mintzberg (1981, p.113) proposes that in order to utilise the above configurations as a diagnostic tool they should be considered to comprise of a mix of:

- (i) Abstract Ideals which attempt to simplify the complex world of organisational structure.
- (ii) Real life structures from which organisations must 'select' one in order to survive.
- (iii) The building blocks of more complex structures.

Mintzberg (1981) argues that the key is to recognise that each of the 5 functional parts of the organisation will inevitably exert a 'pull' which ultimately influences the adoption of one (or at least close to one) of the configurations but remain under a form of tension as each component attempts to exert more influence. Mintzberg (1981, p.322) also proposes that while the effective organisation will inevitably favour one of the above configurations, influenced to a large extent by its external environment, some organisations 'will inevitably be driven to hybrid structures as they react to contradictory pressures.'

If we now apply this as a diagnostic tool to the current structure of the RAF it could be argued that despite the downsizing and continual restructuring of the Service since the demise of the Cold War, the organisation still tends towards the form of Mintzberg's (1980) Machine Bureaucracy in that it constitutes a closed organisation that continues to employ many managerial levels between the operating level and strategic apex. Important decisions are generally made at the strategic apex (even seemingly unimportant ones such as dress and uniform have to be cleared at the highest levels) and day-to-day activity is overseen by the 'middle line' and

standardised through the extensive use of procedure, process and protocol. Furthermore, the clearly delineated lines of command and control only serve to enhance the degree of centralisation of organisational decision making within the Strategic Apex. Mintzberg (1981) goes on to argue that when power is centralised vertically at the strategic apex this often results in a lack of flexibility and agility within an organisation and consequently this places limits the extent to which decisions are decentralised. This leads Ellis (1996, p.194) to propose that within a single dominant hierarchy such as that found within a machine bureaucracy 'there is little question of who is expected to provide the vision, to motivate subordinates beyond normal expectations.' i.e. it is the senior leadership that drives organisational decision making and is responsible for giving clear direction as to the organisations aims and objectives. Adler and Borys (1996) also distinguish between coercive and enabling bureaucracies in which both forms have hierarchies and rules but in the former non-contributing rules predominate and the latter what they term 'good rules' (i.e. ones which are taken for granted and rarely noticed) dominate.

Since the demise of the Cold War it could be argued that the increasing complexity of the new world order has focused the organisation on attempting to adopt a structure more in line with Mintzberg's (1980) Professional Bureaucracy. While this structure retains many of the features of the Machine Bureaucracy, it tends to be a more open system in which extensive vertical decentralisation from the strategic apex to the operating core is deemed appropriate in order to deal with the increasing complexity of the external environment. This could also be argued to have placed an increasing emphasis on decentralisation, particularly in the vertical axis, as reflected in the organisations current leadership policy and doctrine. This in turn goes

someway to explaining the drive to adopt (or fully embed) the principles of mission command (and its emphasis on decentralisation) as the primary mechanism with which to facilitate a greater degree of vertical decentralisation by pushing decision making down to the lowest practicable level. However, Mintzberg also highlights that this form of structure this is not without its own issues in that it can result in problems regarding the ability to both co-ordinate and control organisational outputs.

Finally, with regards to attempts by the RAF to re-structure itself in an attempt to adapt to the ongoing changes in the external environment Grint (2010, p.11) highlights that hierarchical organisations such as the RAF usually mistake structure ‘for the relationships that make the structure work’. Indeed, in the last couple of decades the RAF has repeatedly changed its structure (as indeed has the wider MoD) in order to respond to changes in the external environment and Grint (2010) suggests that while the change needs to come in the nature of relationships within that structure, the ability to enact such changes in the relationships are often constrained by the very nature of the structure itself. Finally, Bolman & Deal (2003) propose that attempts by hierarchical organisations to restructure themselves in order to adapt to changes in the external environment by decentralising are often thwarted by a tendency for the strategic apex to exert what they term a ‘centralizing pressure’. This in turn is aided by the use of commands and rules to both drive and develop a unified strategy, all of which could be argued to reflect the current nature of the RAF leading one senior officer (air rank) to recently report that: *“Our structures are based on 1991, when we were 100,000 head RAF. We need to be more agile and accepting of an 80% solution. We need to virtually flatten the organization.”*¹⁸

¹⁸ RAF Consulting Report (ca.2017)

2.3 The External Environment

One of the main driving forces behind attempts by the Service to place increased emphasis on mission command is the recognition that since the demise of the Cold War the external environment in which the organisation finds itself operating has become increasingly Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous, a phenomenon known in both military and business spheres as VUCA.

2.3.1 VUCA

Kinsinger & Walch (2012, cited in Kaivo-oja and Lauraeus 2018, p.41) highlight that the notion of VUCA was first introduced by the United States Army War College in the early 1990s to describe the shift from what they term the traditional Cold War military conflicts to a more volatile and uncertain complex and ambiguous environment. Horney et al. (2010, p.33) describe the VUCA environment as being characterised by the following environmental conditions:

- (i) Volatility – The nature, speed, volume, magnitude and dynamics of change.
- (ii) Uncertainty – The lack of predictability of issues and events.
- (iii) Complexity – The confounding of issues and the chaos that surround any organization.
- (iv) Ambiguity – The haziness of reality and the mixed meanings of conditions.

In order to deal with the challenges posed by the above, Rodriguez & Rodriguez (2015, p.858) propose that a leader's capacities must develop and adapt to fit the social and situational contexts of their various roles, assignments, and organisations. This in turn requires 'individuals who aspire to be able to lead in such contexts to be able to understand the complex dynamics that prevail in order to appreciate the

requirement to adopt a more collective approach to both understanding and solving problems, spread through networks of people'. Similarly, Kutz & Bamford-wade (2013, p.64) highlight that within a world characterized by VUCA, 'it is critically important that a leader not only knows how but also knows what to do to in order to be successful' although the actual measure of that success is not fully articulated. Furthermore, Horney et al (2010, p.33) propose that there is an increasing requirement for leaders to possess what they term 'leadership agility' which they describe as being the ability to rapidly sense and respond to changes in the external environment with actions that are 'focused, fast and flexible'. They go on to highlight that this ability to anticipate and initiate changes in a timely manner to deal with strategic challenges is seen as a major differentiator between high and low performing teams in VUCA environments and identify 4 specific behaviours associated with agile leaders (Horney et al. 2010, p.33-34):

- (i) The ability to provide guidance and direction to diverse teams aided by clarity of communication and mutual understanding.
- (ii) A willingness to take increased risk by connecting talent and moving information and knowledge around the organisation.
- (iii) The ability to maintain what they term a '*razor like focus*' on employee engagement and commitment across all aspects of the organisation.
- (iv) The ability to embed a collaborative culture across all aspects of the organisation.

This in turn places a greater emphasis on leaders of organisations such as the RAF who are operating within a VUCA world to focus on people, empowerment and engagement in to order to build and develop these collaborative networks than the

more traditional focus of organisational bureaucracies on task and process. Furthermore, while Heifetz (1994, cited in Kutz and Bamford-Wade 2013) highlights that the ability to operate effectively in a stable environment requires the application of explicit knowledge, captured through the use of existing policies and procedures to overcome any technical difficulties that arise, Kutz & Bamford-Wade (2013) also propose that these types of technical problems often require little in the way of innovation, creativity, or contextual intelligence to solve. However, when problems are novel or have not been experienced before, such as those found in the VUCA environment, Kutz and Bamford-Wade (2013, p.65) go on to propose that it is 'leadership rather than direction or management' that is required which in turn requires 'tacit knowledge in order to organise solutions from synchronous, vicarious, or analogical experiences.' Finally, Argyris & Schön (1978) propose that for organisations facing a predictable unstable external environment, key to surviving such times is the ability for the organisation to continually learn by regularly challenging its commonly held beliefs and assumptions in order to identify suitable mechanisms for dealing with problems as they arise.

2.4 RAF Strategy

As highlighted in the introduction the latest RAF Strategy, while not acknowledging VUCA directly, does highlight that the organisation is facing unprecedented challenges in its centenary year driven primarily by the increasingly complex and contested environment within which it finds itself operating and the innovative ways in which the UK's adversaries, both conventional and unconventional, are themselves adapting. In order to ensure that the organisation remains able to respond to these challenges, the strategy places greatest emphasis on growing and developing the

organisation's people element and in particular the requirement to attract, recruit, and retain personnel who are 'agile, adaptable and capable' (RAF Strategy 2017, p.10). Furthermore, the strategy also recognises that key to achieving its aim of developing a motivated workforce are the secondary goals of 'transforming structures and processes to remove unnecessary constraints' and 'transforming training to make it as relevant effective and efficient as possible' (RAF Strategy 2017, p.21) which indicates that the organisation is aware of some current limitations placed on personnel due to organisational structure and training.

2.5 The Role of Mission Command

In order build its workforce for the future, the current RAF strategy proposes that the organisation needs to place increased emphasis on rewarding, empowering and motivating its personnel to unlock their full potential; all of which come under the umbrella of the current doctrine's approach to the concept of mission command as the Service's overarching 'philosophy of empowerment' deemed necessary to allow agility (AP7001, p.3-1). It is therefore worth at this juncture considering how the concept became adopted into RAF leadership doctrine together with a brief overview (expanded in the literature review) of how the concept is currently presented within the doctrine.

2.5.1 Background to Mission Command

The roots of modern-day mission command within the British military can be traced back to the concept of 'Auftragstaktik' (loosely translated as mission tactics) developed by the Prussian army in the latter half of the 19th Century in response to a series of crushing defeats at the hands of the French (Bungay 2003). At the time, Bungay (2003) highlights that the prevalent military strategy employed by the

Prussian army to overcome the inherent chaos and confusion that invariably arose on the battlefield was to attempt to impose order and control through the application of Taylorian based principles of enforced standardisation and cooperation. However, the inherent inflexibility that this imposed on tactical level commanders, by forcing them to seek further guidance when things did not go according to plan, meant that they were unable to respond quickly enough to take advantage of rapidly changing situations. In contrast, the French were able to take advantage of unforeseen events by empowering subordinate commanders to act on the spot, without seeking further orders, and use their initiative in order to take control of the situation. The result, according to Bungay (2003), was that the French were able to achieve and sustain an operational tempo that left the Prussians having to react to everything they did. Consequently, following analysis of the French scheme of manoeuvre the Prussian army instigated a shift away from an orders (Befehl) based doctrine towards a task (Auftrag) based doctrine which placed the operational emphasis on achieving the task rather than the mechanism by which it was to be achieved.

2.5.1.1 Adoption into UK Military Doctrine

Simpkin (1985, p.228) in his study of land-based warfare proposes that the British Army first began to contemplate the concept of mission command through a process of what he calls 'directive control' in the early 1960's when army planners realised that with the advent of tactical nuclear weapons to counter the numerical superiority of the Soviet Union, the employment of highly directive and detailed orders would not work on the 'nuclear battlefield' as the situation following the employment of tactical nuclear weapons to halt a Soviet advance would be too unpredictable. As a result, Simpkin (1985) highlights that the use of detailed operation orders was

replaced, under certain circumstances, by a new form of operational directive along the lines of Auftragstaktik. However, it was not until the late 1970s and early 1980s that the British Army began to attempt the cultural transformation required to incorporate the concept of mission command into its doctrine and philosophy under what have become to be widely known as the Bagnall reforms.

2.5.1.2 The Bagnall Reforms

Despite the underpinning philosophy of Auftragstaktik originally being considered as an appropriate response to the possible use of tactical nuclear weapons on the battlefield, McInnes (1996, p.59) proposes that it was actually 'an increasing disillusionment with an overreliance on nuclear weapons' that was the eventual catalyst that led to the British Army to reconsider its approach to leadership on the battlefield. This disillusionment, coupled with an increasing recognition that Soviet numerical superiority and manoeuvre tactics could actually enable them to win a conventional conflict before the decision to employ tactical nuclear weapons was taken, highlighted the need for battlefield commanders to be given the flexibility to deal with rapidly changing situations and the way to do this was deemed to be through the use of mission command (McInnes 1996, p.59). McInnis (1996) goes on to propose that this cultural change ultimately fell to one individual, General Sir Nigel Bagnall, who implemented what subsequently became known as the Bagnall reforms. Shamir (2011, p. 111) proposes that one of main drivers behind these reforms was Bagnall's personal vision of a cultural transformation within the British Army to facilitate a culture of 'flexible and responsive command within a rapidly changing and fast-paced battlefield' which in turn led him to recognise the need to adopt the principles of Auftragstaktik or mission command. Storr (2003) highlights

that much of the incorporation of mission command into Army doctrine in the late 1970s and early 1980s stemmed directly from Bagnall's influence who he proposes was in turn influenced by his studies of the successes enjoyed by both the Wehrmacht and Israeli Defence Force through the application of command philosophies that were predicated on the basic tenets of Auftragstaktik. Importantly though King (2011, p.390) posits that while the Bagnall reforms sought to empower junior commanders to make decisions about how to achieve a mission, they were not intended to provide junior commanders with 'free reign to do as they pleased' to enact campaigns. Indeed, King (2011) goes onto argue that the reforms implemented by Bagnall actually increased the control of senior commanders over the battlefield through the employment of explicit intent of what was to be achieved and that in designing his reforms Bagnall 'did not conceive mission command as the emancipation of junior commanders' (King 2011, p.391). Consequently, the initial adoption of mission command, based on the principles of Auftragstaktik, into British Military Doctrine can be seen primarily to have been driven by the British Army's recognition of the need to devolve some degree of decision-making authority to junior commanders in order to overcome a perceived organisational difficulty; in this instance the difficulty being the need to ensure a flexible and timely decision cycle to counter a Soviet doctrine based on speed of manoeuvre. Following the end of the Cold War, UK military planners soon realised that they no longer had a well-defined and predictable adversary and that they now had to prepare for a highly unpredictable future environment, the nature of which no one could specify. Consequently, it was recognised that traditional methods of centralised command and control were no longer appropriate and hence attention turned towards

embedding the concept of mission command into wider British military doctrine

2.5.1.3 Adoption into RAF Doctrine

While the adoption of mission command (based on the principles of Auftragstaktik) into British Army doctrine is can be traced back to the Bagnall reforms of the 1980s, it was not until the early-to-mid 2000s that the RAF appears to have formally adopted the concept of mission command into its own doctrine following the formation of the RAF Leadership Centre and the subsequent development and publication of AP7001 (Jupp 2019). While the actual route into AP7001 is somewhat hazy, Jupp (2019) highlights that the concept was taught at the Tri-Service Defence Academy Staff College Course for several years prior to its adoption by the RAF and subsequent inclusion in single-Service Professional Military Development courses; hence its adoption could well have been driven by influential senior officers attempting to align RAF doctrine with wider tri-Service doctrine rather than any attempt to overcome a perceived organisational difficulty at that time.

2.5.1.4 Current RAF Doctrine

Current RAF leadership doctrine (AP7001, p.3-1) acknowledges that mission command 'was originally devised as an army tactic to overcome the difficulty of a commander being able to communicate with and direct the action of all his subordinates at all times and because the friction, or the fog of war, did not allow him to see all that was going on'. This in turn implies that the concept was originally employed primarily as a relational empowerment¹⁹ tool in which some degree of decision-making authority is devolved to a subordinate in order to overcome an organisational difficulty (in this instance the ability to communicate) when faced with

¹⁹ Relational empowerment is described in more detail in chapter 4 – Literature Review.

a critical problem. However, the doctrine (AP7001, p.3-2) also goes on to propose that in order to make the most of mission command within today's complex operational environment it is 'important that teams work at the highest levels of empowerment' and that this involves the team not only making the decisions but also deciding what and when to inform the leader in order to ensure that the leader's time is not overburdened. This extra dimension therefore appears to take the concept of mission command beyond the realm of relational empowerment and into the realm of motivational empowerment and indeed the doctrine (AP7001, p.3-1) makes a brief mention of what it terms true empowerment within the context of mission command as being 'the way we work with others to nurture their autonomy, personal growth and self-esteem' all outcomes which initiatives based on motivational empowerment try to achieve.

2.6 Summary

In summary, the organisation has recognised the need to adapt both its structure and its culture in order to meet the challenges posed by an increasingly complex and dynamic environment and that key to this will be the ability to grow a culture in which innovation, agility, empowerment and appropriate levels of risk taking are fully embedded, all fundamental principles of the doctrinally espoused approach to mission command. This suggests that if the organisation is indeed able to employ its current doctrine in practice, then it should find itself in good shape to deal with the challenges of the future. It would also appear that the genesis of mission command into British Military Doctrine was primarily predicated on a recognition that in order to 'win' at the tactical level, commanders had to devolve some degree of decision making down to their subordinates, albeit within a very clear explicit statement of

intent. This in turn appears to be based on a form of relational empowerment in which a superior delegates some degree of decision-making authority down to a subordinate in order to overcome an organisational difficulty, in this instance the inability of a commander to sustain a high operational tempo, primarily due to communication issues. However, current RAF Doctrine now appears to go beyond the employment of the concept as a relational empowerment tool and presents it as a motivational empowerment tool in which subordinates have a much freer rein to take risk and make decisions within a wider framework of both explicit and supportive intent in order to enhance motivation and increase innovation within the organisation (see chapter 4).

Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND STRATEGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter starts with a discussion of the philosophical approach adopted regarding the ontological, epistemological and axiological foundations of the research prior to introducing in more detail the chosen research strategy and methodological tools utilised to conduct the research.

3.2 Philosophical Approach (Research Philosophy)

Flick (2011) proposes that the research assumptions created by the adoption of a particular research philosophy provide the justification for how the subsequent research is undertaken. Morgan (1983, p.13) proposes that within social science, 'new knowledge is generated primarily via engagement between the researcher and phenomenon under investigation.' Consequently, the form of engagement is influenced by the researcher's own particular frame of reference, or philosophical approach, to the topic under scrutiny and hence different researchers will engage the problem in different ways. A number of academics highlight that the most effective way to determine which approach to adopt is to select the one that best fits the aims of the researcher (e.g. Locke 2003; Kenny & Fourie 2015). Furthermore, Jones & Alony (2011, p.97) highlight Walsham's (2006) salient point about the importance of fit between the selected method and researcher's own philosophical approach arguing that 'by selecting a method that he/she likes, enjoys and can engage with, it makes the process of justification a much easier task'. From the researcher's own experience of the organisation under study, it has historically employed what could

be termed a predominantly positivist ontological approach in its attempts to understand the nature and function of leadership. This is particularly evident in its approach to leadership development through which it has traditionally sought to identify, assign and develop a universalistic set of attributes, behaviours and functions to the activity of leading. This positivist approach, together with its associated empiricist epistemology, is firmly positioned within what Cunliffe (2010) terms an objectivist problematic methodology wherein the focus is on quantitative, deductive methodologies that seek to explore the behavioural elements of relationships in a pre-existing structure in order to generate predictive theories. This approach also resonates with a large percentage of leadership development literature that appears to adopt quantitative methodologies that employ empirical research methods to derive generalisable outcomes. In other words, the dominant approach to leadership studies and literature appears to utilise a positivist ontology and empirical epistemology. However, Yukl (2006) highlights that the complexities of leadership cannot be captured through the use of deductive, empirical quantitative approaches and Conger (1998) proposes that the quantitative approach to leadership adopts a perspective in which leadership is reduced to a phenomenon that is static, well delineated and with universal dimensions; all criteria which are very much at odds with the researcher's own world experiences of the subjective nature of leadership. Furthermore, Gill & Johnson (2002) posit that due to the requirement for precise models involving quantified operationalization of the concepts under study, the element of meaning or purpose of concepts such as leadership are often lost when applying a such a quantitative, empirical approach. Finally, Bass & Avolio (1994, cited in Mumford et al. 2000, p.19) propose that in

complex organisational systems, causal linkages for phenomena such as leadership 'are often obscure and difficult to diagnose'. Consequently, in order to gain a better understanding of how social context affects both cognition and behaviour in organisations Kramer (1996, cited in Lyon et al. 1996)²⁰ emphasises the importance of accessing individuals' subjective interpretations of their own social reality, arguing that it is this interpretative account that is crucial to understanding organisational behaviour rather than a study of the objective nature of the situation.

This alternative interpretative philosophical approach to leadership research resonates with the researcher's own real-world experiences of leadership. In particular, it goes some way to explaining his struggle to reconcile the organisation's apparent attempts to apply an objectivist paradigm to its leadership development to what he himself perceives to be a very individual and subjective phenomenon that is highly context dependant in nature. Hence it is the researcher's own view that a greater understanding of the phenomenon of leadership cannot be achieved by external 'objective' observation, but resides in the individual's own perceptions of leading and being led, perceptions to which each individual bring their own prior knowledge and experience. In other words an individual's understanding of mission command is based on their own subjective experience and observations of the phenomenon in action. Fairhurst & Grant (2010) highlight that this approach to capturing 'knowledge' through the lens of follower experience rather than the observation of an external agent is reflected in the work of phenomenologists, ethnomethodologists and Weber's (1967) notion of ideal types. Benton and Craib (2011) combine these approaches under the banner of an interpretative approach to

²⁰ Cited in Lyon et al., (1996)

social science whereby social reality is constructed in the meanings that actors share and that these meanings are only ever located in a particular context or time.

If we now apply this approach to Cunliffe's (2010) adaptation of Morgan and Smircich's (1980) typology it locates the research in a subjective, social constructionist ontology whereby social meaning is constructed by actors but experienced as perceived objective realities that are open to change. With regards to determining what constitutes acceptable knowledge (i.e. epistemology) the approach adopted takes the view that 'facts' are not absolute and are instead drawn from individual's own interpretations of the phenomenon under study and hence adopts an interpretivist approach in which the focus of the research is to uncover the 'meanings' that actors share within a particular context.

3.3. Research Approach

Having located the research within a subjective problematic, the researcher aims to adopt what Pike (1954) terms an emic perspective in that it will seek to utilise the voices of the participants themselves to gain a meaningful description of the behaviour and sense making activities from the actors involved rather than draw conclusions through external observation. The aim being to try and make sense of the meaning that individual's attach to the concept of mission command (as a leadership philosophy), identify any differences between individuals and contexts, and determine the potential impact this could have on the application of the concept in the day-to-day activities of the organisation. Having identified an underpinning philosophical position based on a constructionist ontology and interpretivist epistemology, this in turn lends itself to the adoption of an interpretative orientated research methodology that seeks to explore Service personnel's own perspectives on

mission command within their own particular contexts. Tekin & Kotaman (2013, p.85) highlight Noblit and Eaker's (1987) proposal that in contrast to positivism, interpretivism is a subjective approach that seeks to gain an understanding of 'the meaning of social realities for those experiencing them'. Tekin and Kotaman (2013, p. 85) go on to propose that 'how people interpret and make sense of their world has to be understood well in order to gain insight into why people behave the way that they behave and why social institutions, customs, beliefs function in the way they function.' Punch (2005) proposes that the aim of such an interpretivist approach is to explore how individual's behaviour is in turn influenced by the values, attitudes and beliefs that they possess while Hallberg (2006, p.141) proposes that this form of qualitative approach involves the study of phenomena such as leadership 'in its natural setting' where the focus of the research is to 'come close to the actor's perspective and try to capture his or her point of view or lived experience'. Given one of the main aims the research project was to develop a comprehensive account as to how mission command is personally experienced by Service personnel, this in turn reinforced the need to adopt a qualitative research approach in order to capture an individual's own experiences of mission command across a range of contexts.

3.3.1 The Qualitative Approach

Drawn from the constructivist paradigm, Banister et al. (2011) highlight that this involves the researcher refraining from imposing their own perception of the meaning of social phenomena such as leadership on the participant. Instead Bryman & Bell (2011) posit that the approach is utilised to investigate how participants interpret their own experience of the phenomenon i.e. their own reality. Consequently, qualitative research is perceived to be more suited to providing

understanding of social situations that are not easily measured using quantitative means. Furthermore, Bryman (2008) proposes that while a clear distinction between quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches can be considered ambiguous due to some academics employing the terms to demonstrate a clear contrast and others claiming that any such contrast is false (e.g. Layder, 1993 cited in Bryman 2008, p.21) it can still represent a useful means to classify and clarify the different approaches to social science. Bryman (2008) goes on to propose that while quantitative approaches tend to in principle employ a deductive approach to test theory based on a positivist epistemology and objectivist ontology, qualitative approaches employ an inductive approach to generate theory predominantly based on an interpretivist epistemology and constructionist ontology. Furthermore, Bryman (2008) also proposes that the adoption of a such a qualitative approach allows the researcher to uncover how participants interpret their own experience of the phenomenon. With regards to leadership research in particular, Kempster and Parry (2011, p.107) propose that by adopting a qualitative approach this in turn 'enables the emergence of nuanced and contextualised richness within organizational structures, relationships and practices.' In addition, the qualitative approach allows the researcher to access the internal experiences of the participants (as representatives of the wider organisation) to help derive their perceptions of mission command. Conger & Toegel (2002, p.176) also propose that as a particular phenomenon, leadership possesses 'certain attributes that are difficult to capture through quantitative methods' due to its 'dynamic character, its multiple levels and its symbolic dimensions'. They go on to highlight that a qualitative approach has

several distinct advantages of adopting a qualitative approach over a quantitative approach, including (Conger & Toegel 2002, p.181-182):

- (i) Providing more opportunities to explore the phenomenon of leadership in greater depth.
- (ii) Allowing greater flexibility to detect unexpected aspects of the phenomena as they emerge during the research.
- (iii) The ability to investigate process more effectively.
- (iv) More chances to explore and be sensitive to contextual factors.

Finally, Creswell (2007) proposes that the qualitative approach allows the researcher to explore participants experiences and perceptions of such a phenomenon in order to arrive at a suitable interpretation by utilising research methodologies such as grounded theory and thematic analysis. By employing a qualitative, interpretative approach to generate descriptive detail of the 'who and why' it is therefore hoped that the findings will generate insights that will resonate with practitioners in a way in which, from the researcher's own perspective, the 'what and when' approach of quantitative, positivist enquiry has so far failed to do.

With regards to the inductive nature of the qualitative approach Bryman & Bell (2011) highlight that the process of induction involves the researcher using their own observations as the starting point for research project i.e. rather than seeking to use theory to confirm observations and findings, it utilises observations and findings to develop theory, although they also acknowledge that as the data is analysed it can often be found to fit into an existing theory. Given that in this instance the research problem arose from the researcher's own observations that organisational doctrine did not appear to be employed in practice, it was therefore determined that a

qualitative, inductive approach was the most suitable research approach as the project sought to determine possible explanations for this apparent gap rather than test any a priori hypotheses.

3.4 Research Strategy

From a subjectivist, interpretative perspective, social constructionism is one methodological approach that has been adopted by leadership researchers (e.g. Fairhurst & Grant 2010; Grint 2005; Crevani et Al 2010) as an alternative to the more traditional positivist approaches in order to explore how an individual's perceptions of reality are socially constructed. Berger & Luckman (1966) propose that rather than emerging from external observation of objective events, knowledge that arises from social process is more closely linked with ideology, interest and power concluding that an individual's common-sense knowledge rather than ideas must be the central focus for the sociology of knowledge. With regards to studying the phenomenon of leadership, Uhl-Bien (2006) highlights that in contrast to the more traditional approach that observes leadership from the standpoint of individual actors involved in a leadership exchange and their attributes, a social constructionist methodology seeks to focus on each individual's perceptions, intentions, behaviours and evaluations relative to their own relationships with one another. Likewise, Blumer (1969, p.19) when discussing the concept of symbolic interaction which underpins the development of grounded theory highlights that humans 'interpret or define each other's actions instead of merely reacting to each other's actions. Their response is not made directly to the actions of another but instead is based on the meaning which they attach to such actions.' Meindl (1995) proposes that such an approach also eschews the predominantly leader centric approach of mainstream leadership

research by proposing that it places a premium on the ability of the follower to make sense of and evaluate their organisational experiences, a factor which the researcher believes is key to exploring the nature of organisational leadership within the RAF.

Kempster & Parry (2011) are amongst a number of scholars who highlight that social science researchers have started to recognise the importance of incorporating context and process into leadership research and that this newfound emphasis is reflected most strongly in the methodology of grounded theory. They highlight that the purpose of grounded theory is to generate credible descriptions and sense making of peoples' actions and words that can be seen as applicable within a given context i.e. it seeks to generate theory about everyday social practices. Bryman (2008) also states that grounded theory has become one of the most widely used frameworks for analysing qualitative data while Creswell (2008) highlights that the approach is particularly helpful in generating theories about a particular phenomenon for which extant theory is either inadequate or non-existent. Kempster & Parry (2011) also highlight the growing number of calls for a grounded, qualitative approach to the relational (e.g. Parry 1998), processual (e.g. Bryman 2004; Day 2000) and contextual (e.g. Bryman, Stephens & Campo 1996) issues of leadership and its related concepts. Importantly for the researcher, Jones & Noble (2007) highlight that a particular feature of grounded theory is its ability to generate theory that is of direct interest and relevance for practitioners. This in turn presents it as a suitable method for helping to bridge what the researcher perceives to be an academic/practitioner and theory/practice divide within the field of leadership studies in that it can add to the body of knowledge in a way which that can help enhance practitioner practice and organisational development activities thereby helping close

any perceived theory-practice gap. Finally, Kempster & Parry (2011) propose that in addition to being an ideal research technique for leadership research, grounded theory analysis has the additional benefit in that its interpretative epistemology enables a contextually rich perspective to be captured of the processes shaping leadership, a view they propose that is echoed by several other scholars (e.g. Bryman 1996; Parry 1998; Egri & Herman 2000). This makes the approach ideally suited to benefit both researcher and practitioner in that it allows the researcher to develop an explanatory model with which the practitioner can construct subsequent interventions.

3.5 Grounded Theory

Unlike more traditional qualitative methodologies Creswell (1998) highlights that with grounded theory the emphasis is on the generation of theory rather than the testing or verification of theory. Consequently, Strauss & Corbin (1990, p.38) highlight that grounded theory research questions 'tend to be orientated towards action and process' which aligns with this research project as it seeks to determine individuals subjective understanding and experience of mission command.

Furthermore, Hughes & Jones (2003) propose that grounded theory studies within the interpretative tradition have become increasingly common due to this very ability to generate context-based explanations of phenomenon. It uses the development of emergent theories of social action through the identification of analytical categories and the relationships between them. i.e. the purpose of grounded theory is to gain an insight to/understanding of a social phenomenon by identifying reoccurring data patterns. The roots of grounded theory can be traced back to the 1967 publication 'The discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research' by Barney G.

Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss. When initially developing grounded theory, Glaser & Strauss (1967) positioned the methodology as a qualitative, inductive, theory building process of inquiry with the two central features being the emergence of theory from data and the iterative nature by which data collection and analysis proceed in tandem. The underlying purpose being to discover theory from the data, rather than utilising deductive reasoning to prove or disprove a preconceived or a priori hypothesis, which in turn could be utilised to explain the behavioural phenomena under investigation. Holton (2007) highlights that unlike traditional qualitative methods which attempt to generate conclusive results or verify facts, grounded theory seeks to explain theoretically a latent pattern of behaviour within the substantive area of interest. Likewise, Glaser (1978) proposes that the ultimate aim of grounded theory is to discover a theory that not only accounts for a pattern of behaviour but is also relevant and significant to those involved in the study. In doing so it allows the researcher to 'get through and beyond conjecture and preconception to exactly the underlying processes of what is going on so that professionals can intervene with confidence to help resolve the participants main concerns' (Glaser 1998, p.5) and thereby generate theory that is both relevant and significant for those involved. Consequently, it commences not with a research question but with a research phenomenon to be investigated. Kelle (2005, p.2) identifies that one of the main aims of this new grounded approach was to 'challenge the hypothetico-deductive approach which demands the development of precise and clear-cut theories or hypotheses before the data collection takes place' in response to what Glaser & Strauss perceived to be an 'overemphasis in current sociology on the verification of theory, and a resultant de-emphasis on the prior step of discovering

what concepts and hypotheses are relevant for the area that one wishes to research' (Glaser & Strauss 1967, cited in Kelle 2005, p.2). This in turn led Dunne (2011, p.112) to propose that the development of grounded theory can be best viewed as a reaction to the dominance of quantitative research methods that dominated social science research during the 1960's and in particular a frustration with the use of a priori assumptions to generate theory. Jones & Noble (2007, p.84) highlight that as an inductive methodology for generating new theory from data, the method has proven popular in management research for 3 main reasons:

- (i) Its ability to develop new theory or present fresh insights into old theory.
- (ii) Its ability to generate theory that is of direct interest and relevance to practitioners.
- (iii) Its ability to uncover micro-management processes in complex and unfolding scenarios (from Locke 2001) which from the researcher's perspective makes it suited to the VUCA environment.

With regards to social phenomena such as leadership, Kempster & Parry (2011, p.108) highlight Fassinger's (2005) proposal that the notion of grounded theory analysis acknowledges the discreet contexts within which social phenomena take place and draws on the relational experiences of participants to produce a social theory. The final product is a (grounded) theory that is able to uncover basic social processes that explores the relationship between agency and structure through the use of codes, memos and concepts that avoids the risk of the researcher forcing the data to fit the theory. However, Fernandez (2012) highlights that the application of grounded theory is not without its risks and points to the fact that Glaser (1978) himself states that one of the main risks with grounded theory is that having collected

the data and undertaken the analysis, the researcher may not actually uncover anything of significance with regards to advancing theory. Finally, Stevens et al. (2015) highlight that one of the additional benefits of a grounded theory methodology is that the substantive theory derived from a particular area of study (e.g. leadership) can be often be applied as a general theory to other problems in other domains (e.g. organisational design). This echoes Glaser's (2004) proposal that the findings that emerge from grounded theory often have general implications for others beyond the more local population of the research.

3.5.1 Classic v Straussian v Constructivist?

Jones & Alony (2011) highlight that having identified the most appropriate philosophical approach, a further problem facing a researcher is to subsequently select the most appropriate research method. Having identified grounded theory as a suitable approach to undertake one's analysis the problem does not stop there. With regards to the methodology itself, Fernandez (2012) highlights that there are currently three main grounded theory methodologies that are widely utilised within mainstream academic research namely: Classic Grounded Theory (CGT) first developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and seen by many as the 'true' grounded approach that primarily seeks to discover theory solely via its emergence from the data; Straussian Grounded Theory which seeks to create theory via a more structured process of verification; and Constructivist Grounded Theory (e.g. Charmez 2000) which seeks to construct theory through the researcher's own interpretation of the data. The primary differences between the 3 approaches arising from their opposing philosophical positions are primarily related to the collecting, handling and analysing the data (Evans 2013) particularly with regards to coding and the use of the extant

literature (Kenny & Fourie 2015). Furthermore, Strauss & Corbin (1994) highlight that in addition to these differences, the application of the theory has often been subject to both misinterpretation and misuse when studying social phenomenon.

3.5.2 Classic Grounded Theory.

Given its roots in a positivist ontology, Jones & Alony (2011, p.99) highlight that the Classic or Glaserian approach to Grounded Theory advocates that the researcher commences the research project with a 'general wonderment' and an 'empty mind' which in turn requires the researcher to ignore or set aside any existing knowledge both prior to and during the research process and in doing so allow the theory to emerge from the data. This blank sheet also includes suspending any form of literature review and Kelle (2005, p.31) proposes that ultimately Glaser's position was inspired by the positivist "concern to not contaminate, be constrained by, inhibit, stifle or otherwise impede the natural emergence of theory from data' and thus 'encapsulates the positivist's concern to remove the researcher from the research'. Hence Glaser and Strauss (1967) initially proposed that the main aim of grounded theory was to develop an explanatory formal theory of behaviour that emerged via a process of discovery from the data without any requirement to force or verify the categories as they emerged. Creswell (2008) proposes that this classic approach encompasses an emerging design which is more flexible and deals with abstract levels rather than specific categories. Finally, Timonen (1994) highlights that a key difference between classical grounded theory and other interpretations such as the Straussian approach is that the former cautions against what it terms early crosscutting of the data in order to avoid forcing conceptual links to emerge whilst the latter tentatively looks for connections between developing concepts. In other

words, the difference is a question of when the researcher starts to make connections.

3.5.3 Straussian Grounded Theory.

Jones & Noble (2007, p.86) highlight that in contrast to the 'Glaserian notion of the non-knowing researcher who allows only the emergent data to shape theorising' (i.e. is predicated on theory emerging solely from the data) the Straussian approach 'allows a much more provocative, interventionist, and interrogationist approach to the data by the researcher'. Consequently, Hallberg (2006, p.145) proposes that this 'reformulated grounded theory tends to adopt a more pragmatic approach in accepting that while reality can never fully be known it can always be interpreted.' Strauss & Corbin (1990, p.70) subsequently described this divergent approach to grounded theory methodology²¹ as encompassing 'the progressive identification and integration of categories of meaning from data' highlighting that theory emerges during the actual research process due to the 'continuous interplay between analysis and data collection.' Consequently, it is an approach which enables the researcher to develop a theory which provides an explanation regarding an organisational concern and, importantly for this researcher, help identify how the organisational concern can be subsequently resolved or in some way mitigated. This difference from classic grounded theory arises from their 'substantively different renditions of researchers' relationships to the worlds they study' (Locke 1996, p. 241). Consequently, Jones & Noble (2007) propose that the Straussian approach allows some degree of researcher influence in utilising personal and professional experience to enhance theoretical

²¹ Note Glaser refused to accept the Straussian approach as a modified version but rather a new methodological approach unrelated to grounded theory.

sensitivity. Furthermore, Strauss' (1987, p.84) himself argues that 'if you know an area, have some experience . . . you don't tear it out of your head' and rather than obscuring knowledge or expertise, and actively encourages researchers to view their own experience and acquired knowledge as a welcome and positive advantage to their research, particularly with regards to enhancing theoretical sensitivity. A key argument regarding the Straussian approach is that the theories that emerge are not based on a pre-existing reality but 'are interpretations made from given perspectives' (Strauss & Corbin 1994, p.279). Consequently, the Straussian approach advocates having a general idea of where to begin and proposes the use of semi-structured questions during the data collection phase to enable a more structured emergence of theory. Furthermore, although the Straussian approach shies away from advocating a full, in depth literature review prior to commencing the research, it does advocate engaging with the literature at all stages of the research process. Dunne (2011) highlights several scholars who articulate the benefits of undertaking some form of early literature review including McGhee et al (2007) who propose it can provide a cogent rationale for a study and McCann & Clark (2003, cited in Kenny & Fourie 2015) who state it can help contextualise the study, develop sensitizing concepts and enhance theoretical sensitivity. Consequently, Heath & Cowley (2004) propose that this approach is more suitable for the novice researcher while Annells (1997) highlights that it is also more likely to provide useful recommendations for practitioners.

3.5.4 Constructivist Grounded Theory. A more recent addition to the realms of grounded theory methodology is the constructivist approach developed by Charmaz (2006) a former student of Glaser and Strauss. Adopting a more constructivist

philosophy, this approach 'eschews the prescriptive, rule bound approach to coding employed by both Classic and Straussian techniques and instead employs a more flexible series of coding 'guidelines' in order to help capitalise on the researcher's own creativity' (Charmaz 2008, p.160). Furthermore, Kenny & Fourie (2015 p.79) highlight that while this approach shares many of the techniques employed by the other two schools (e.g. coding, memoing, sampling and theoretical saturation) the coding procedure itself is 'patently more interpretative, intuitive and impressionistic than the Classic or Straussian GT' (p.79). However, some argue (e.g. Hallberg 2006) that its reliance on utilising in-depth interviews means that such an approach usually takes the form of the researcher's own interpretation of the research topic, presented as a narrative or story, rather than a prognostic or predictive theory. Indeed Charmaz (2006) herself proposes that this approach revolves around exploring the multiple realities of each participant rather than developing broad themes and categories which attempt to explain the truth. Table 3.1 (adapted from Jones & Alony 2011) identifies the main similarities and differences between the main approaches.

Glaserian	Straussian	Constructivist
Beginning with general wonderment (an empty mind)	Having a general idea of where to begin	Having a general idea of where to begin
Emerging theory, with neutral questions	Forcing the theory, with structured questions	Constructing the theory by in-depth, intensive interviewing
Development of a conceptual theory	Conceptual description (description of situations)	Conceptual interpretation (rather than explanation) presented as a Narrative
Theoretical sensitivity (the ability to perceive variables and relationships) comes from immersion in the data	Theoretical sensitivity comes from methods and tools	Theoretical sensitivity comes from studying multiple vantage points and making comparisons.
The theory is grounded in the data	The theory is interpreted by an observer	The theory is constructed by the researcher interacting with the data (uses the researcher's ideas)
The credibility of the theory, or verification, is derived from its grounding in the data	The credibility of the theory comes from the rigour of the method	The credibility of the theory comes from the rigour of the method
A basic social process should be identified	Basic social processes need not be identified	Basic social processes need not be identified
The researcher is passive, exhibiting disciplined restraint	The researcher is active the role of the researcher's own experiences and knowledge help theory to emerge and is crucial in producing an initial understanding of the phenomenon	The researcher is active
Data reveals the theory	Data is structured to create the theory	Data is interpreted to construct a conceptual interpretation,
Coding is less rigorous, a constant comparison of incident to incident, with neutral questions and categories and properties evolving. Take care not to 'over-conceptualise', identify key points	Coding is more rigorous and defined by technique. The nature of making comparisons varies with the coding technique. Labels are carefully crafted at the time. Codes are derived from 'micro-analysis which consists of analysis data word-by-word'	Coding is impressionistic
Two coding phases or types, simple (fracture the data then conceptually group it) and substantive (open or selective, to produce categories and properties)	Three types of coding, open (identifying, naming, categorising and describing phenomena), axial (the process of relating codes to each other) and selective (choosing a core category and relating other categories to that)	Employs a more fluid framework with at least 2 stages to coding: Initial and Refocused Coding
Regarded by some as the only 'true' GTM	Regarded by some as a form of qualitative data analysis (QDA)	Regarded by some as a form of qualitative data analysis (QDA)

Table 3.1 The similarities and differences between the main approaches to grounded theory. Adapted from Jones & Alony (2011).

3.5.5 Potential Problems with Grounded Theory.

The application of grounded theory is not without its difficulties and for the inexperienced researcher this can often result in applying a mix of the 3 approaches, primarily due to a lack of understanding as to what each approach actually entails. This in turn is fuelled by the ontological and epistemological disagreements between the main schools. However, Dey (1999) proposes that rather than argue over procedure, such arguments would be better placed if they were to examine the overall accomplishment in terms of how the research actually works. Bryman (1998) also argues that many research methods are much more adaptable than epistemological purists would like to believe. However, some (e.g. Charmaz 1990) also argue that rather than place being left open to interpretation, the location of grounded methodology within a specific ontological and epistemological tradition actually serves to enrich the research process.

3.5.6 Selection of Straussian Approach

Having already identified the importance of fit between the philosophical approach and aim of the researcher, the method most aligned to this research project is deemed to be that of the Straussian school in that it both explores the wider contextual dynamics at play with regards to the adoption of mission command 'in practice' in addition to generating theory that can subsequently inform said practice. Furthermore, the approach also provides the inexperienced qualitative researcher a comprehensive framework with which to analyse the data (Strauss & Corbin 2008). Of note, Glaser (2003) proposes that while a basic understanding of grounded

methodology is required prior to commencing the research process in order to set the researcher on the right path, its actual application as a research tool is best learnt through hands on experience. Finally, Rodon & Pastor (2007) propose that in comparison to other approaches, the Straussian approach is particularly suited to the novice researcher as it provides an enhanced degree of pragmatic rigour and clearer techniques for those less familiar with the rigorous process of data collection and analysis.

3.6 Methodological Steps

Having determined that the Straussian approach is best suited to my own research objectives, primarily due to the fact that it creates theory rather than discover it and therefore, according to Strauss & Corbin (1988), is more suitable to developing a theory can be subsequently utilised in practice, this next section will detail the methodological steps applied in conducting the research. This is particularly important when adopting a Straussian approach as theoretical sensitivity comes from the method and the tools employed and both the credibility and validity of the theory come from the rigour in the method.

3.6.1 Research Problem

Alammar et al. (2018, p.5) highlight that unlike the Glaserian approach to grounded theory which places emphasis on the research problem being 'emergent or discovered' during the data collection phase, the Straussian approach allows the researcher to identify a research problem before hand and thereby offers much more flexibility in addressing a particular organisational issue. This in turn has a particular advantage when it comes to developing a suitable research proposal and gaining organisational sponsorship as it provides a suitable focus with which to determine if

the research itself is of value to the organisation in question. With regards to this research project, the research problem as detailed in Chapter 2 emerged from a sense amongst organisational members that what was being espoused within the organisation's leadership doctrine was not necessarily being enacted in practice, particularly with regards to the its primary leadership philosophy known as mission command. This in turn resulted in a desire by the researcher to explore the potential reasons behind this apparent gap between theory and practice while investigating if the doctrine was still fit for purpose in light of the contemporary environment the RAF found itself operating in. Furthermore, if there was found to be a gap, and assuming the concept was deemed to be still relevant, the further intent was to help identify what if any interventions could be enacted to improve the situation (i.e. close the gap).

3.6.2 Research Question

Sandberg & Alvesson (2010) propose that robust research questions are key to developing interesting stories and focussing a researcher's work. Furthermore, Eisenhardt & Graebner (2007) propose that in order to build theory, a researcher must take the additional step of justifying why the gap is better addressed by theory building rather than theory testing research. With regards grounded theory, Strauss & Corbin (1994) propose that unlike most other research methods, the research question is not utilised to guide the researcher through a series of steps to achieve a research outcome but rather to identify the general phenomenon that the researcher wishes to study. In other words, the research question should aim to outline the phenomenon of interest without making too many assumptions about it. Likewise Dey (1999) states that when applying a grounded methodology the researcher will

usually start with a general problem conceived only in terms of a general disciplinary perspective. Furthermore, both Dey (1999) and Strauss & Corbin (1994) go on to state that the research question should become progressively focused as the research progresses and, in some instances, can change completely in light of emerging categories. In light of this, the research question has been reframed from an original exploration that focussed on the role of trust within mission command to reflect what has in effect become a much wider exploration of the phenomenon under investigation and is now.

‘What if any gap exists between organisational members’ understanding of and their experience of the doctrinally espoused leadership philosophy known as mission command and what if any factors influence this?’

3.6.3 Researcher Bias & Reflexivity

One of the main pitfalls to befall a researcher employing a grounded theory methodology is the failure to recognise the role of their own personal bias in addressing the research question. Kempster and Parry (2011) highlight the problem of remaining in the data and the challenge of the researcher remaining objective towards the emerging data while at the same time recognising the role of personal experience in interpreting it. One of the ways to ensure that the researcher remains objective is through the use of reflexivity and the ability of the researcher to constantly ask themselves about the perspective that they themselves represent (Deady 2011). Robson (2002, p.22) highlights that reflexivity is ‘an awareness of the ways in which the researcher as an individual with a particular social identity and background has an impact on the research process.’ When applying grounded theory, Jones and Alony (2011, p.101) highlight that the process of conducting grounded

theory itself 'encompasses and acknowledgement of the researcher's bias consequently the risk of bias can be removed or reduced by strictly following the Straussian framework for collecting and analysing data. Strauss & Corbin (1998) also highlight the importance of reflexivity in grounded theory and that this reflects the researcher's ability to use personal and professional experiences as well as methodological knowledge and thereby see data in new ways and think abstractly about data in the process of developing theory. Theoretical sensitivity can also be seen as the researcher's manipulation in order to explain data in a way that best reflects reality. Therefore, this theoretical sensitivity should be complemented by reflexivity, concerning for example, how the researcher-participant interaction and the researcher's perspective affect the analysis and the results (Hall & Callery 2001).

3.6.4 Theoretical Sampling

Having identified a general research question Bryman (2008) highlights that the next step is to undertake theoretical sampling of relevant people and/or incidents. The purpose of sampling is to assist in making a research project manageable by reducing a population of interest to a manageable size in order to collect and analyse data. Tracey (2013) highlights a number of different approaches to sampling including random, opportunistic, snowball, and theoretical construct samples and proposes that irrespective of method, researchers should engage in purposeful sampling, through which they purposively choose samples that fit the parameters of the research project's questions, goals and purposes. Eisenhardt & Graebner (2007) highlight that given the purpose of an inductive approach is to develop theory rather than test it, and that the use of purposive sampling is entirely appropriate, the goal should be to sample participants in a way which is relevant to the research questions

being posed. Furthermore, Bryman (2008) states that rather than being a convenience sample, a purposive sample should be selected due to its relevance to understanding a social phenomenon. From a grounded theory perspective, each of the three main schools (e.g. Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1998; Charmez 2014) position theoretical sampling as a core activity within the process and posit that the key to employing grounded theory research effectively is to generate sufficiently rich data sources to highlight specific themes within a given phenomenon. Hence the research sample size is dictated by expanding the data sources until such time as no new data emerges. This in turn involves concurrent activity whereby data analysis and collection is carried out in tandem until successive interviews and observations have both formed the basis for the creation of a category and confirmed its importance (Bryman 2008). Glaser & Strauss (1967, p.45) describe this method as 'the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the researcher jointly collects, codes, and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them in order to develop their theory as it emerges'. Consequently, the process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory, whether it is substantive or formal. During the initial stages of the research project Strauss & Corbin (1990) propose that data is gathered in order to identify a wide range of predominantly descriptive categories. Glaser and Strauss (1967) also highlight that the iterative nature of this approach provides the researcher the opportunity to utilise the findings from an initial sample group to then explore the area of interest in more depth as the theory starts to take shape by employing experts who are able to provide the best data available regarding the phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss 1998). Timonen et al. (2018) also highlight that within grounded theory, the process

of theoretical sampling becomes more focussed towards specific aspects of the data as the study moves towards the stages of conceptual clarification.

Theoretical sampling was applied throughout the process as initial interviews highlighted particular contexts in which individuals had experienced differing levels of mission command. For the purpose of this research an initial purposive sample comprising 6 pilot interviews was undertaken to determine formally if indeed there was a perceived gap amongst RAF personnel between mission command as espoused by the doctrine and its application in practice with an initial focus on the role of trust. In accordance with the Straussian approach, this initial sample size was selected based on relevance and purpose of the research and hence a pool of mid-ranking RAF officers who also had current or recent leadership instructional experience was selected in order to garner their views on whether or not what they were teaching in practice was backed up by their own experience in the wider Service. In addition to confirming that such a perceived gap did indeed exist, the resultant data also revealed a wide variety of potential causal conditions for the gap as well as a sense that the application of mission command varied to a significant extent across the organisation, both in terms of hierarchy and organisational context. Consequently, as this data began to emerge it was in turn utilised to direct further data collection in accordance with the process of constant comparison (see section on constant comparison later in this section) in order to address the needs of the emerging theory. For example, the data collected from two individuals with recent operational experience appeared to suggest that their experience of mission command on operations was very much different from that back home in the business space and hence I ensured that future sampling where possible utilised individuals who had

recent experience both on operations (i.e. in last 5 years) and in the business space. Furthermore, the data also suggested that seniority also influenced an individual's willingness to apply mission command and so the sampling was expanded to include several senior officers working at the strategic level of the organisation.

3.6.5 Literature Review

As highlighted in the previous section, one of the most contentious areas when applying a grounded methodology to a research question is the role of the literature review and Dunne (2011) highlights one of the difficulties in adopting a grounded approach compared to other, more traditional, methodologies is knowing not only when but also how to incorporate existing literature during a grounded theory study. Andrew (2006) highlights that the role of the literature review within grounded theory has been an issue since its inception due to its main purpose being different from other qualitative methodologies and the tendency to confuse it with its more traditional role within research as an essential foundation on which to build a study in order to facilitate the emergence of theory. Unlike these more traditional research methodologies, the main concepts that arise during a grounded study do so from the empirical data rather than from the extant literature. Consequently, Strauss himself originally argued against engaging with the extant literature prior to collecting primary data proposing that the most appropriate strategy when commencing a grounded study is to effectively ignore the literature regarding both theory and fact of the area under study (Glaser & Strauss 1967). This is based on the premise that prior knowledge runs the risk of violating the basic premise of grounded theory by compromising the researcher's ability to identify new, emerging theory that does not already feature in the literature thereby eroding the researcher's sensitivity (Glaser

& Holton 2004 cited in Kenny & Fourie 2015, p.1284). Within this original approach it was therefore deemed that only when the core category has emerged should the literature be consulted and even then, restricted to a constant comparison of data already gathered (Kenny & Fourie 2015). However, following his split from the Glaserian approach, Strauss subsequently revised his position to recognise the benefits of conducting an early review of the literature in order provide a degree of supplementary validity to the study, stimulate theoretical sensitivity and help direct initial theoretical sampling (Strauss & Corbin 1990). This position is backed up by other qualitative researchers such as McGhee et al (2007, p.334) who argue that given a researcher is often likely to be close to the field and therefore already theoretically sensitised and familiar with the literature, this should not prevent the reflective researcher, who is able recognise and suspend any preconceptions, from successfully employing the inductive-deductive interplay that is at the heart of the grounded theory methodology. Henwood and Pidgeon (2003) also propose that if a literature review has already been carried out then adopting a position of theoretical agnosticism may help to resolve or remove some of the wider contention in the literature. In line with the Straussian approach, for the purposes of this research project an initial literature was conducted (see chapter 4) which presents an overview of the extant doctrine together with the associated theoretical underpinnings. Furthermore, while recognising that the focus of the research enquiry is on the concept of mission command, the related concepts of CLM, followership and leadership of change were also included in the review as in the researcher's own experience they both influence, and are influenced by, an individual's willingness to

apply the principles of mission command, something which also became apparent during the data analysis.

3.6.6 Data Collection

Strauss & Corbin (1990) propose that their approach to grounded theory is compatible with a wide range of qualitative data collection techniques including the use of semi-structured interviews, participant observation and focus groups. Kvale (1983) states that the purpose of the qualitative interview is gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation on the meaning of the described phenomena. Furthermore, Kvale (1983 p.174) also proposes that 'technically the qualitative research interview is semi-structured, it is neither a free conversation, nor a highly structured questionnaire.' Bernard (1988, cited in Partington 2001) proposes that one of the main advantages of the semi-structured interview is that the interviewer is in control of the process of obtaining information from the interviewee i.e. is free to follow new leads as they arise while Bryman (2008) highlights that in allowing an individual room to go off at a tangent, it often generates additional insights into what the interviewee sees as relevant and important to his own life-world experience. Given that the researcher is attempting to identify how individuals apply their own perception of trust within a mission command scenario, the use of the semi-structured interview was deemed appropriate to provide a focus on participants understanding and experiences of mission command while utilising the researcher's knowledge of the topic under investigation to help steer the conversation. This in turn enabled the researcher to explore each participant's view of mission command without directly imposing his own assumptions whilst retaining a degree of flexibility in facilitating an iterative approach whereby themes identified

by early interviewees could be incorporated and explored with later participants. Furthermore, by incorporating different data sources and collection methods Bryman (2008) also proposes that this allows the researcher to triangulate and in doing so bring greater confidence as the data emerges that theoretical saturation (see later in chapter) is being approached. For the purposes of this study, the primary data was drawn a series of semi-structured interviews with 30 service personnel drawn from across the rank spectrum:

- (i) 6 pilot study interviews were undertaken with personnel with leadership instructional experience.
- (ii) A further 24 semi-structured interviews were undertaken with a range of RAF personnel across the various branches.

These took the form of face-to-face interviews with the researcher either in a private meeting room at the interviewee's place of work or via Skype for those individuals whose geographic location made it difficult to access (e.g. one participant was in Cyprus). Each interview was scheduled for one-hour although the actual duration varied from 50 minutes to one-hour 40 minutes. As the employment of the semi-structured interview within a grounded methodology is predicated on the use of focussed enquiry to initiate the dialogue, an interview framework was devised to initially focus on the core phenomenon of mission command. This involved the use of a common set of open-ended factual questions used with all participants in order to establish the required level of meaningful interaction between the researcher and interviewee. However, the semi-structured framework also allowed for flexibility to diverge to a more informal conversational style to enable interviewees to elaborate on particular topics of interest as they emerged. The specific purpose of each

interview was to gain a deep insight into participants' understanding of the theory and experiences of the practice of mission command within their own particular organisational context. Interviewees also were given the opportunity to offer their own thoughts as to why (if applicable) any gaps between the theory and practice of mission command arose and offer any suggestions as to how these gaps could be closed. Further data was also drawn from the researcher's own records (i.e. journals) of his role as a leadership lecturer/instructor within both his former role in the Service and in his current role as a senior fellow in leadership studies at the RAF College, Cranwell including:

- (i) Records of facilitated discussions (led by the researcher) with the Senior Officer Study Programme (SOSP)²² in the form of comments captured on whiteboard, feedback forms and the researcher's own journal notes. (Approximately 6 sessions each with 10 personnel over a 4-year period).
- (ii) Records of facilitated discussions (led by researcher) with the Commissioned Warrant Officer Course²³ (CWOC) in the form of comments captured on whiteboard, feedback forms and the researcher's own journal notes. (Approximately 10 sessions with 8 personnel per session over a 4-year period).
- (iii) Records of facilitated discussions (led by researcher) with the OACTU Staff Induction Programme²⁴ (OSIC) in the form of comments captured on whiteboard, feedback forms and the researcher's own journal notes. (Approximately 20 sessions of 6 personnel over a 4-year period).

²² A 3-week residential leadership development course aimed at mid-ranking RAF officers transitioning to the senior level.

²³ A 2-week residential course for warrant officers transferring from the ranks to the commissioned career stream

²⁴ An 8-week induction course for personnel destined to be instructors on the RAF Initial Officer Training Course.

The research data sources are shown in table 3.2.

Source of Data	Description	Purpose
Pilot Interviews (x6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-time interview of RAF leadership instructors (mid-rank) • Semi-structured interview focused on trust and mission command • 45-60 mins • Transcribed verbatim 	Begin to investigate role of trust in facilitating mission command
Purposeful Interviews (x 24)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured in order to explore wider perceptions of mission command • 60 mins • One-time interview of a cross section of personnel from junior to senior rank • Individuals with recent experience of both Ops and Business Space • Transcribed verbatim and transcription service 	Purposive sample to explore avenues that emerged during the pilot study to investigate wider factors that influenced ability/willingness of service personnel to employ mission command
Senior Officer Study Programme Participants (approx. 6 groups of 10 personnel over 4-year period)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated discussion/focus groups of senior officers on a 3-week leadership development Programme • Captured thoughts/ideas/experiences via whiteboard, learning journal, feedback 	Gain senior officer views, thoughts and experiences on the practice of mission command in the Service.
OACTU Staff Induction Course (approx. 20 groups of 6 personnel over 4-year period)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated discussion/focus groups of new instructors undertaking an 8-week induction course to become leadership instructors at the RAF Officer and Aircrew Training Unit • Captured thoughts/ideas/experiences via whiteboard, learning journal, feedback 	Gain junior officer and senior non-commissioned officer views, thoughts and experiences on the practice of mission command in the Service
Commissioned Warrant Officer Course (approx. 12 groups of 6-10 personnel over 4-year period)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated discussion/focus groups of Warrant Officers undertaking a 2-week commissioning course at the Royal Air Force College • Captured thoughts/ideas/experiences via whiteboard, learning journal, feedback 	Gain Warrant Officer views, thoughts and experiences on the practice of mission command in the Service

Table 3.2 Research Data Sources

3.6.7 Coding

Bryman (2008) highlights that coding is one of the most central processes within grounded theory and involves the researcher reviewing the material (e.g. interview transcripts, field notes and research journals) and labelling component parts that appear to be theoretically significant for the participants under study. He goes on to highlight Charmaz's (1983, p.186) proposition that codes 'serve as shorthand devices to label, separate, compile, and organise data'. Furthermore, Bryman (2008) also highlights that this form of coding differs from that normally utilised within quantitative methodologies (e.g. data drawn from surveys) in that rather than primarily being a way of managing the data, coding within grounded theory is the important first step in the generation of theory and consequently tends to be in a constant state of potential revision and fluidity. Bryman (2008) goes on to highlight that the coding process within grounded theory begins soon after the collection of initial data (e.g. from a pilot study) and Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.63) propose that the concepts that arise from the initial stages of data analysis are 'the basis unit of analysis in a grounded theory method' which in turn help to illuminate meaning through the process of conceptualisation. Unlike quantitative studies, which require data to fit into preconceived codes, Charmaz (2000) also states that it is the researcher's own interpretation of data that shapes their own emergent codes. The purpose of coding is therefore to help the researcher to develop indicators of certain types of events or behavioural actions that can then be utilised to identify linkages and causes by attaching meaning to pieces of text. While a number of coding approaches exist within grounded theory, the coding process from a Straussian perspective utilises a 3-step approach (Strauss & Corbin 1998) namely:

- (i) Open Coding. In which the data is broken down into distinct units termed Codes.
- (ii) Axial Coding. In which the data is reconstructed to form Categories
- (iii) Selective Coding. In which the Core Category is identified.

While open and axial coding help to identify the variables of importance, selective coding is utilised to articulate the dimensions of the properties of those variables (Fig 3.1).

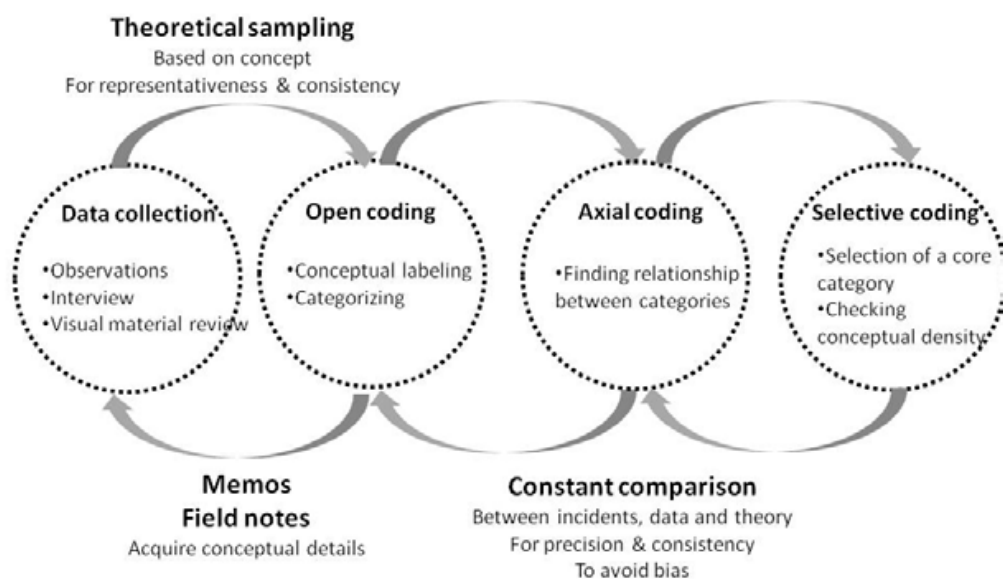


Fig 3.1 Data Analysis procedure of grounded theory (from Cho & Lee, 2014)

3.6.7.1 Coding Process – Recording of Data

All interviews were audio recorded by the researcher with the permission of the interviewee. Hand-written notes from observations made by the researcher during the various leadership discussions and workshops were also transcribed by hand into an electronic (word) format on a regular basis during the research process. Several of the initial interviews were also transcribed verbatim into electronic (word) format by hand in order to allow the researcher to get a ‘feel’ for the data before use was made of a professional transcription service recommended by the University to transcribe

the remaining interviews in order to save time and allow the researcher to commence a deeper engagement with the analysis of the data. For the initial generation of codes, from both the interviews and researcher's journal notes, NVivo qualitative data analysis software was utilised to both generate and capture the open codes as they emerged. The use of such software also allowed the storage of audio files and transcripts and enhanced the ability of the researcher to interrogate, record, and sort the data during the initial coding phase.

3.6.7.2 Open Coding

Strauss and Corbin (1998, p.63) describe open coding as 'the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in the data' and that codes can take the form of a single trigger word, a phrase, sentence or many pages of observation or abstraction. It is the process by which the raw is examined prior to being 'fractured' (i.e. broken down) into 'discreet threads of datum' (Jones & Alony 2011, p.104) and analysed in order to help illuminate what the data is actually saying and thereby generate concepts and categories of meaning, through a comparison of similarities and differences, in order to build theory. As such Strauss & Corbin (1994, p.70) propose that the categories that emerge during these initial stages of coding are often at a 'low level of abstraction' and therefore 'function as a descriptive label or concept' resulting in the generation of primarily descriptive, rather than analytic, labels for occurrences and phenomenon. Consequently, the process is purely descriptive in nature and deconstructs the data without any form of analysis, the aim being to generate concepts that fit the data. The result being the generation of indicators in the form of observations, words, statements or phrases that are subsequently utilised to develop concepts (Strauss & Corbin 1998).

Throughout the coding, the process of constant comparison (see section on constant comparison later) was employed to help reveal fresh insights into the data until such time as theoretical saturation was achieved (see section on theoretical saturation later). For this project the researcher undertook a line-by-line examination of the interview transcripts in order to create the initial codes for comparison. Additional coding was also drawn from the secondary data once it had been transcribed into word format. This initial process was conducted without applying any specific models or frameworks in order to ensure that it remained purely descriptive rather than analytical at this stage of the process. Each interview was initially coded immediately following transcription utilising NVivo software which allowed each block of data to be captured electronically and traced back to its original context within the relevant interview. This also facilitated further the exploration in subsequent interviews of key themes as they started to emerge as well as providing data to help inform the selection of future sample choices (i.e. interviewees). On completion of open coding the initial codes were subsequently grouped and organised into categories. Throughout the process memoing was utilised to capture the researchers own conceptual thoughts as the concepts began to take shape (see section on memoing).

3.6.7.3 Axial Coding

Strauss & Corbin (1998) highlight that this is an additional step within the Straussian approach that sits between the more traditional or classical steps of open and selective coding that arose due to the tendency for the initial stage (i.e. open coding) to generate a broad variety of codes, as was experienced during this research project. This abundance of codes in turn meant that an additional phase of more focussed coding was required in order to help generate a grounded theory. The axial coding

process begins once categories start to become apparent (Corbin & Strauss 1990) and is the method by which data is reassembled after open coding in order to identify connections between categories, consequences and causes in order to initiate the process of conceptual abstraction (Strauss & Corbin 1998). This in turn involves the researcher employing a series of specific questions about *'what is happening here'* with regards to context, the interactions between participants within that context and the consequences of such interactions (Corbin and Strauss 2008). This therefore interprets the data with regards to what the participants themselves understand. It provides the skeleton or axis around which the data is built and begins to reveal the social processes that underpin the phenomena under investigation.

3.6.7.4 Selective Coding

Selective coding (also known as integration) is the final procedure of selecting the core category around which the research narrative is constructed, relating it to other categories and filling in those that require further refinement and development (Corbin & Strauss 2008). This stage is reached once all the sub-core categories have emerged which are described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as the issues on which the basic social process under investigation is centred. It explores the interrelationships between the categories in order to develop theory. Hence according to Strauss & Corbin (1998, p.148), selective coding is the final analytical process by which the research 'story line' is explicated through the identification of the core variable. Goulding (1999, p.9) highlights that the core category is the one which 'pulls together all the strands in order to offer an explanation of the behaviour under study and that it has theoretical significance and its development [can be] traced back through the data.'

3.6.7.5 Developing the Core Category

Strauss & Corbin (1990, p.44) present the core or central category as being 'the fundamental essence' of the research and culmination of analysis and as such plays a central role in integrating the emergent categories into a conceptual framework. Strauss (1986, p.36) presents 6 fundamental criteria with which to validate the core category:

- (i) It must be at the heart of the analysis and operate as the hub or catalyst of all other categories and dimensions.
- (ii) The indicators pointing to the phenomenon represented by the core category are recurrent and form a stable pattern traceable to all other categories.
- (iii) The core category relates easily to other categories through frequent and clearly identifiable connections.
- (iv) The core category of a substantive theory has clear implication for a more general theory.
- (v) The level of analytic work employed in the construction of the core category is ancillary to the development of a working theory.
- (vi) The core category caters for all the variation expressed by the diversity of dimensions, properties, conditions, consequences and strategies transparent across data.

Jones & Noble (2007, p.89) state that the core category is the central feature of grounded theory that it 'accounts for the variation in the pattern of behaviour, reoccurs frequently in the data, and relates meaningfully and easily to other category' while La Rossa (2005, p.852) highlights that one of the criteria for selecting a core

category in a substantive study is that it 'has clear and grabbing implications for formal theory'. Likewise, Strauss (1987, p.21) positions the core category as being 'central to the integration of the theory' in that it 'best holds together (links up with) all the other categories'. In order to derive the core category Jones & Noble (2007, p.90) propose that the researcher must search for one of the following: the main idea; the main problem; the primary issue; or what seems most striking, while Hallberg (2006, p.143) highlights that the 'identification of a core category is central for the integration of other categories into a conceptual framework or theory grounded in the data'. In doing so Hallberg (2006, p.143) also contends that the 'core category determines and delimits the theoretical framework'. Hence the core category can be likened to the research study's main story (La Rossa 2005).

3.6.8 Constant Comparison

In contrast to other qualitative approaches that employ a process of deductive reasoning together with a priori assumptions in order to generate theory, grounded theory utilises the iterative process of constant comparison in order to compare all elements of the data to explore variations, similarities and differences (Glaser 1978). This is the main analytical process and is described by Jones & Alony (2011, p.105) as 'the simultaneous and concurrent process of coding and analysis' (as shown in figure 3.2). Timonen et al. (2018, p.7) highlight that the process of constantly comparing data against data involves the researcher looking for 'similarities and differences (variation) between conditions (i.e. context) and consequences surrounding key events, incidents, and patterns in the data which in turn advances the process of coding, category development and conceptualisation'. Timonen et al. (2018, p.7) go on to propose that within grounded theory the actual process of engaging with the

data ‘constitutes another form of data’ and that ‘connections must develop from close reading of the data that may not be apparent at face value’ and consequently any ‘argumentation and theorising must ultimately be brought back to and justified against the data’. This in turn facilitates the process by which the researcher begins to reflect on and conceptualise the data primarily through the use of memos to capture the researcher’s thoughts and reflections and in doing so help to develop an explanation of the phenomenon under study through observations that are grounded in the data (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Likewise, Charmez (2006) describes the process of constant comparison as the process by which data from a particular category is constantly compared with other instances of data in the same category which in turn reveals the analytic properties of the codes and data thereby allowing the researcher to abstract the underlying theory through a process of rigorous examination.

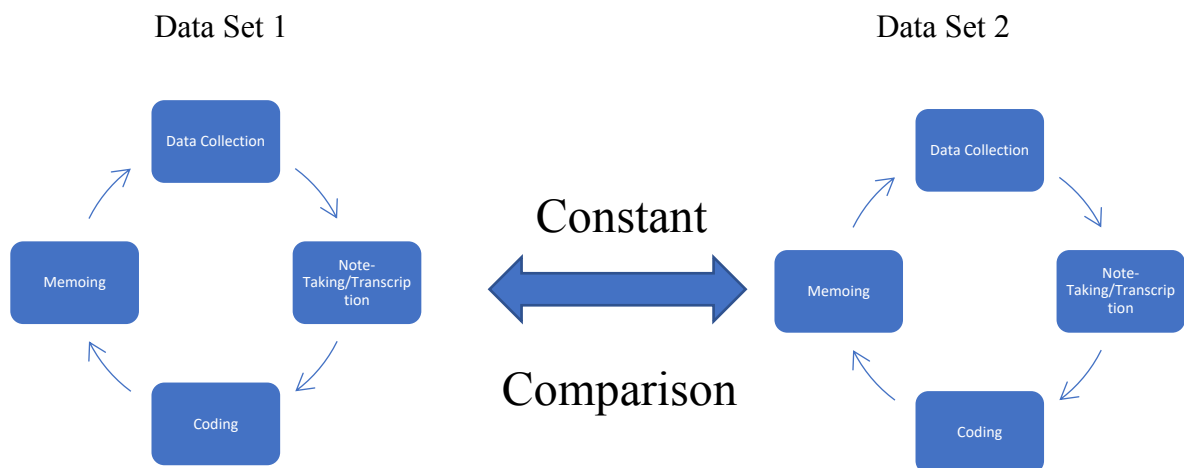


Fig 3.2. Constant Comparison taken from Jones & Alony (2011).

With regards to the method itself, Strauss and Corbin (1998, p.98) describe two main approaches to the constant comparison method, the first being ‘the comparing of

incident to incident' to look for similarities and/or differences that takes place during the initial phases of coding and the second involves a comparison of 'the emergent categories to similar or different concepts to bring out possible properties and dimensions' that are not immediately apparent to the researcher during the latter stages of the coding process. Strauss & Corbin (1994, p.71) also highlight that 'the ultimate objective of constant comparative analysis is to link and integrate categories in such a way that all instances of variation are captured by the emerging theory.' This in turn necessitates the processes of both memoing and constant comparison in which multiple rounds of data analysis ultimately leads to the emergence of theory. Timonen et al. (2018, p.7) further highlight that the process of constant comparison involves the 'continual comparing of data against data in order to identify similarities and differences (variation) both within and between different contexts and the associated consequences' and consequently it is a process that 'advances coding, categorisation, and conceptualisation'. Bryman (2008, p.542) describes it as a process of maintaining a close connection between data and conceptualisation, that the correspondence between concepts and categories with their indicators is not lost and by adhering to the constant comparison method this ensures that the resultant theory fits the issue or phenomenon that is under investigation.

3.6.9 Memo Writing²⁵

Described by Strauss & Corbin (1990, p.72) as being 'a written record of theory development' the activity known as memo writing or memoing is closely linked to the

²⁵ 1998: paradigm model dropped by Corbin and an emergent process based on memo sorting is again stressed.

concept of constant comparison and is one of the uniting principles behind the various approaches to grounded theory. As such it is viewed as 'the core stage in the process of generating theory, the bedrock of theory generation' (Glaser 1978, p.83). Glaser & Holton (2004, p.314) describe memos as 'theoretical notes about the data and conceptual connections between categories' the basic purpose of which is to 'develop ideas on categories with complete freedom into a memo fund that is highly sortable'. Glaser (1998, p.177) also describes the purpose of memo writing as the means by which the researcher is able to capture, track and preserve conceptual ideas describing them as the 'theorising-write up' of the various codes and their relationships as they emerge. As such memo writing remains an intrinsic feature to each of the main approaches to grounded theory and is viewed as being one of the main mechanisms in providing an audit trail by which the researcher can articulate the journey from initial conceptualisation to emergent theory.

As concepts start to emerge, memos also provide the mechanism through which the researcher captures his/her thoughts and reflections as to the meaning that is starting to emerge and this in turn develops the framework for further ideas and codes to emerge (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Consequently, memos are the primary vehicle through which the researcher is encouraged to engage reflexively with the data and this in turn helps to develop/identify further data for analysis. Therefore, the development of memos runs concurrently with the coding process as a way in which to record, order and analyse the researcher's thought process as he/she moves from data collection to theory development. For the purposes of this research project, memos were created for the following:

- (i) Interview Transcripts.

- (ii) Workshop discussions/conference notes.
- (iii) Each stage of coding.
- (iv) Relevant literature.
- (v) Researcher's own reflective journal.

3.6.10 Theoretical Saturation

Mertens (1998) states that unlike other qualitative methods of analysis, which require rigour through multiple layers of confirmation or triangulation, grounded theory builds by constantly seeking new categories of evidence. Ultimately however, there will come a point where no new data emerges from the additional data collection and this is known as the point of saturation. Hallberg (2006, p.144) highlights that this is a somewhat subjective decision as 'one can never know if further interviewing would give more information'. As a process, Bryman (2008) highlights that it relates to 2 phases in grounded theory: the point at which coding of data no longer reveals further categories, concepts or relationships; and the collection of data at which point it no longer provides insight into the concept under study. Once a category has been saturated the researcher then looks for relationships between categories in order to generate hypotheses about connections as they emerge. If further data is required, this process continues until such time as no further categories will connections emerge at which point researcher then test hypotheses in order to generate substantive theory. Note that Dey (1999) refers to it as sufficiency rather than saturation to indicate that data sources are not exhausted but that it enables the full development of the category to take place.

3.7 Research Ethics

With regards to research ethics the following procedures were adhered to:

- (i) Interviews were conducted in accordance with Leeds University Ethical Requirements and extant MOD Research Ethics Council guidelines.
- (ii) All interviewees were provided with a fact sheet prior to interview that detailed aims and objectives of the research project (included at Annex 1).
- (iii) Prior to the start of each interview, all participants were again reminded that the process was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw their participation/break off the interview at any stage without having to provide a reason why. Interview participants were also informed that all data would be treated in the utmost confidence and anonymised prior to write up so that no individual or department would be identifiable within the final work.
- (iv) The data was kept securely on an encrypted storage file only accessible by the researcher.
- (v) All names, dates and places were removed/anonymised in order to maintain participant anonymity.

Chapter 4

LITERATURE REVIEW

“Doctrine is a guide to anyone who wants to learn about war from books: it will light their way, ease their progress, train their judgement and help them to avoid pitfalls. Doctrine is meant to educate the minds of future commanders.... not to accompany them to the battlefields.”²⁶

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present a theoretically sensitising review of the literature as it pertains to current RAF Leadership Doctrine and its application in practice. This is in accordance with the Straussian approach to grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) which proposes that limited engagement with the literature, as opposed to full and exhaustive, prior to data collection engenders many benefits including:

- (i) Acting as a secondary data source.
- (ii) Guiding theoretical sampling.
- (iii) Developing interview questions/framework.
- (iv) Provision of supplementary validation.
- (v) Highlighting existing theories and philosophical approaches.

It starts with a brief discussion the role/purpose of military policy/doctrine followed by an overview of Argyris & Schön’s (1974; 1978) work on Theories of Action which emerged as a potential theoretical framework during the data analysis stage. It then proceeds to examine the concept of mission command in more detail together with

²⁶ Carl Von Clausewitz *On War* (cited in JDP 0-01, p. iv)

its related concepts and the underlying theory/theories from which they are drawn, namely:

- (i) Empowerment.
- (ii) Trust.
- (iii) Risk.
- (iv) Control.
- (v) Intent.

Although the main focus of the enquiry is on mission command, it was deemed relevant by the researcher to include the other 4 components of RAF leadership doctrine in this initial literature review as they undoubtedly influence, and are influenced by, the extent to which mission command as the espoused primary leadership philosophy is employed within day-to-day practice by the organisation.

4.2 Policy v Doctrine

Jackson (2017, para. 2) describes military doctrine as being 'a tangible representation of a military's institutional belief system regarding how that military understands, prepares for and (in theory at least) conducts its military activities'. Importantly, he goes on to highlight that doctrine differs from theory in that it is institutional and hence even if some its members disagree with it, they are expected to conform to this organizationally endorsed way of doing business. It is useful at this juncture to highlight the difference between military policy and doctrine as in the researcher's own experience both are used interchangeably by military personnel despite the fact that they are fundamentally different. Jackson (2017) proposes that while policy is taken to be authoritative direction as to what an organisation is to achieve, doctrine, while still authoritative in nature, involves

guidance of how an organisation is to achieve its objectives. An organisation's leadership doctrine can therefore be taken to be the set of beliefs, values or guiding principles, developed from extant leadership theory, that it believes to be the most appropriate form of leadership to help it achieve its organisational goals and objectives. Johnston (2000) defines doctrine as being the officially sanctioned approach to military actions i.e. the considered opinion as to the best way to go about doing things that is found in certain texts. He goes on to propose that it is meant to form behaviour, specifically that of armies in battle. However, he also suggests that there are often good reasons for suspecting that the official doctrine found in manuals only exercises a rather weak, or at best indirect, effect on organisational leadership behaviour. Sloan (2012, p. 244) proposes that as an object of thought, doctrine can be considered as embodying 'the vital link between theory and practice' and therefore 'acts as a bridge between thought and action'. Storr (2003) in his treatment of mission command in the information age proposes that mission command is endorsed doctrine and as such is neither right nor wrong but is agreed, is authoritative and is taught. He goes on to highlight that 'importantly, it is espoused behaviour: the way the Services wish their commanders to act. Similarly, it is doctrine, not dogma; and is guidance, not instruction' (Storr 2003, p.120). With regards to AP7001, the words policy and doctrine are indeed used synonymously but this could be argued to be due to the dual nature of the document; it provides authoritative direction to course designers as to what is to be taught within the RAF's generic training and education syllabus while at the same time giving authoritative guidance to serving personnel about how to lead. The focus of this study is on the latter i.e. its role as guidance to individuals on how it

wishes its leaders to behave and the extent to which this guidance is acted on rather than a critique of the guidance itself.

4.3 Espoused Theory v Theory in Use (Theory of action v Theory in use)

Given Storr's (2003, p.120) proposal that military doctrine such as AP7001 details espoused behaviour in order provide authoritative guidance on the way that 'the Services wish their commanders to act', it is worth at this juncture to consider Chris Argyris' work (in collaboration with Donald Schön) on espoused theory versus theory in use. Argyris (1982, cited in Shamir, 2011, p.22) proposes that the values an organisation wishes to aspire to are frequently captured in written statements which he goes on to term 'theories espoused' and that organisational members are often required to learn these statements in order to become to become socially accepted members of the organisation. Consequently, these 'theories espoused' are the theories that organisational members articulate when asked what drives their actions (Argyris 1980). However, research by Argyris & Schön (1974, p.6) also echoes Sloan's (2012) observation that often individuals within an organisational setting 'fail to practice what they preach' and actually employ what Argyris & Schön (1974) term 'theories in use' in their day-to-day organisational practice. Based on their assumption that theories are in effect 'vehicles for explanation, prediction or control' (p.5) they posit that human action invariably involves the utilisation of mental maps to inform their reaction to particular situations or problems and that in doing so they are often unaware of these 'theories in use' that drive their behaviour. Importantly, they go onto propose that often these maps are not congruent with the theories that they articulate when asked what drives their action i.e. their 'theories espoused'. Argyris (1995, p.20) proposes that theories espoused arise from an individual's

'beliefs, attitudes and values' whereas 'theories in use' are the theory models that they actually employ and consequently govern their day-to-day behaviour. Argyris (1980) goes on to propose that maximum organisational effectiveness occurs when there is congruence between the espoused theory and theory in use.

4.3.1 Theories in Use and Organisational Learning

To better understand the concept of 'theories in use' Argyris and Schön (1974, 1978) introduce two main models of the processes involved with regards to organisational learning based on their premise that learning ultimately involves the detection and correction of error (i.e. problem solving) and an individual's assumptions about what constitutes a desirable outcome. At its simplest level they propose that there are 3 main processes at play as follow (Argyris & Schön 1974):

- (i) Governing Variables. These are based on one's individual assumptions which in turn influence why we do what we do.
- (ii) Action Strategies. These are the mechanisms in day-to-day practice based on one's governing variables and are seen in what we do.
- (iii) Consequences. These are the outcomes of one's actions (can be either intended or unintended) i.e. what we get.

Argyris & Schön (1974) further highlight that when the consequence or outcome is as intended then the theory-in-use is confirmed and both the governing variables and action strategies remain unchanged. However, when there is a mismatch between expected and actual outcomes, they propose two possible responses, namely single and double loop learning.

4.3.1.1 Single Loop Learning

Argyris & Schön (1978) propose that single loop learning takes place when individuals seek to employ another action strategy that does not require a change to the underlying governing variables i.e. it addresses the problem without having modify or question the values or assumptions that underlie the action strategy (Fig 4.1 – single loop learning).



Fig. 4.1 Single Loop Learning

From a leadership perspective Drath, McCauley and Palus (2008, p.647) highlight that this includes engaging in a different practice ‘based on the same leadership beliefs’ and in doing so treats the current use of practice ‘as the linear and immediate cause of the outcomes’ without examining the underlying belief and value structures that underlie such practices. Argyris & Schön (1978) further propose that when any error that has been detected and corrected through a change in action strategy, this in turn enables the organisation to carry on with its present policies and hence in-use goals, values and rules are operationalised rather than questioned (Argyris & Schön, 1974). This also suggests that any bias towards particular leadership behaviours is itself not questioned, but the strategy and tactics in employing those behaviours is the actual focus of corrective action. Argyris (1991) goes on to propose that often an individual’s focus is on problem solving which in turn involves identifying and

correcting errors or problems in the external environment. Consequently, Argyris also proposes that highly skilled professionals are very good at single-loop learning as they have spent most of their careers mastering the skills to solve problems. Furthermore, they get to their senior positions by being perceived to be successful, and because they have seldom been perceived to have failed, they have never learned how to learn from failure, so in the event that their corrective strategies do not result in the desired outcome, they become defensive and blame anyone but themselves and hence 'their ability to learn shuts down precisely at the moment they need it most' Argyris (1991, p.100). Finally, Argyris & Schön (1978, p.24) posit that in an organisation that employs primarily single-loop learning, 'the criterion for success is effectiveness' and that individuals respond to problems by 'modifying strategies and assumptions within constant organisational norms.'

4.3.1.2 Double Loop Learning

Argyris & Schön (1974) propose that in double loop learning the organisation/individual actively questions the governing variables i.e. the framing and learning systems which in turn drive the organisation's goals and strategies (Fig. 4.2) and that only when such beliefs and values are themselves questioned can double loop learning occur. Furthermore, while single loop learning tends to focus primarily on making organisational processes more efficient (e.g. decentralising some degree of decision control in order to increase the operational tempo at the tactical level), double loop learning involves examining the basic assumptions and values that in turn form the framing systems that actually govern behaviour. Consequently, Argyris & Schön (1978, p.22) propose that double loop learning is a 'double feedback

loop which connects the detection of error not only to strategies and assumptions for effective performance but to the very norms that define objective performance.'

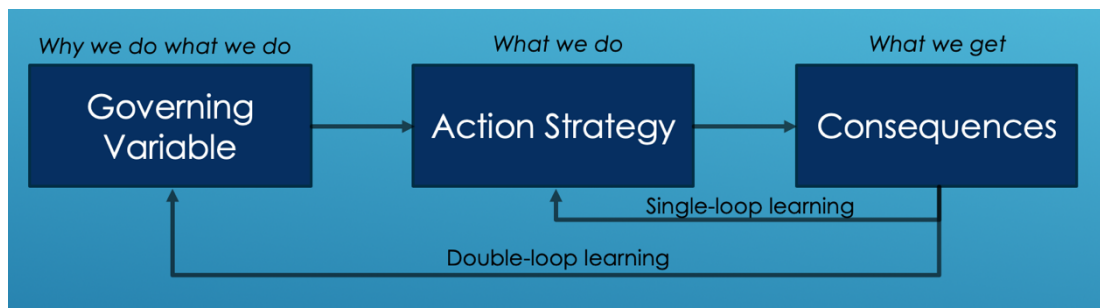


Fig. 4.2 Double Loop Learning

4.3.1.3 Model I and Model II

In order to explain the apparent difficulty that organisations and individuals have in applying double loop learning, Argyris & Schön (1974: 1978) introduce 2 further models in an attempt to identify the specific features of their theories-in-use model that in turn either prevent or facilitate double loop learning. According to Argyris (1990) Model I theories-in-use involve action strategies that seek to retain unilateral control of the environment based on an overriding desire to 'win' which in turn can lead to deeply entrenched defensive behaviours at all levels of the business. Consequently, Argyris et al. (1985) propose that governing variables of the Model I type theories-in-use revolve primarily around achieving the task (as the individual perceives it) and emphasising rationality resulting in an action strategy, either at the individual or organisational level, that seeks to control both the environment and task 'unilaterally' (Argyris et al. 1985, p.89). Argyris (1995) also argues that an individual's own sense of competence, self-confidence, and self-esteem are highly dependent on their Model I theories-in-use and organizational defensive routines' and hence this

makes it very difficult to challenge the governing variables which in turn serves to inhibit double loop learning. Importantly, Argyris (1995, p.23) further proposes that often Model I theories-in-use 'are so internalised that they are taken for granted' and are predicated on achieving a minimum acceptable level of control to achieve a desired outcome, predominantly based on winning and behaving rationally.

Unlike Model I 'theories-in-use' which seek to establish unilateral control over both task and environment, Argyris and Schön (1978) purpose that Model II theories-in-use place greater emphasis on governing values that revolve around notions of valid information, free and informed choice and internal commitment resulting in action strategies that include a greater sharing of control based on these values. By encouraging inquiry and challenge into established norms, Argyris and Schön (1978) propose that the consequences are not only increasing the capacity for single loop learning to occur by employing action strategies that are more efficient, but also allowing organisations to select between competing norms, goals and values. In other words, Model II provides the capacity to undertake double-loop learning. Importantly, Argyris (1995) highlights that as Model II requires individuals to relinquish some degree of control, this can often be difficult for individuals who have been socialised within an organisation that sustains a predominantly Model I environment. However, Argyris (1995) also proposes that once individuals are able to employ Model II behaviours, they can craft them into action strategies to change the underlying values that inhibit organisational learning and the adoption of new values. This therefore suggests that any attempt to inculcate a new organisational way of doing business, such as embedding a concept like mission command, can either employ a Model I approach in which any adaptation of the action strategy

remains congruent with the established governing variables driving the theory in use (i.e. single loop learning) or employ a Model II approach in which the governing variables themselves are challenged. Finally, Anderson (1997) proposes that while no reason is offered by Argyris and Schön with regards to why individuals and organisations tend to espouse Model II it is probably due to Model II values being more in line with how individuals and organisations like to view themselves in western society.²⁷

4.4 Praxis

Given that one of the aims of the thesis is to explore the whether or not the organisation's leadership doctrine is enacted in practice it is worth considering the role of praxis at this point. Wheeler (2013) describes praxis as the contextualisation of theory within action and goes on to propose that it can be seen in the outcome experienced when theory is applied to practice, highlighting Freire's (1970) assertion that Praxis involves 'reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it'. In other words, not only does theory inform practice, but theory in action (i.e. practice) also informs theory and so in effect acts as a causal loop. Wheeler (2013) goes on to highlight Quinlan's (2012) proposal that not only does a theoretical framework influence your practice, but experience also continues to shape your framework or understanding of theory. This phenomenon, which in turn suggests that that what happens in practice can never fully be captured by theory, is sometimes referred to as 'under determination', a concept first developed by Luke (1981) who proposed that within the social sciences there are often cases where theories may be

²⁷ Seniors like to see themselves as 'leaders' employing Model II values rather than 'commander/managers' employing Model I values.

incompatible with each other and yet compatible with all possible data. This has obvious implications for a phenomenon such as leadership where traditionally doctrine has often been derived according to a natural science paradigm of applying a deductive approach in order to describe, explain or predict inter-relationships. In a study of nursing practices, Rolfe (1993) highlighted that what actually happened in nursing practice rarely, if ever, matched what was supposed to happen according to the text books (i.e. doctrine) and that attempts to close the theory-practice gap often appeared to defy resolution. This resulted in a tension between what individuals thought they should be doing in particular situations according to the text books and pressure to conform to real-life situations. Rolfe (1993) goes on to highlight that from the theorists' perspective the gap occurs between what theory says should ideally be happening and what actually happens in the imperfect clinical area and as such could be closed by nursing practice moving closer to theory. However, from the practitioners' perspective he highlights that the gap is between what the theory says should happen and what actually works and hence could be closed by adapting the theory to fit more closely with the realities of clinical life. Rolfe (1993) concludes by proposing that the prevalent model of viewing theory as informing and controlling practice should be replaced by what he terms a 'mutually enhancing' model whereby theory informs but is also derived from practice²⁸.

4.5 RAF Leadership Policy & Doctrine

Current RAF Leadership Policy & Doctrine is presented in the Air Publication (AP) 7001 which describes its primary purpose as being to give guidance on the leadership

²⁸ At its simplest praxis is action based on reflection but what if knowledge of theory itself is flawed. Is there a tension between what is taught (i.e. theory presented as doctrine) and organisational pressures to conform to a different style of behaviour in 'real life'?

policy of the RAF and the tools to use to develop leadership skills. Divided into 7 chapters, it details the 5 main areas on which the policy (and doctrine) for all RAF leadership development is based, namely: Mission Command; The Principles of CLM, including the RAF Leadership Attributes; Followership; Leadership of Change; and the Ethical Component of CLM. In presenting these 5 main areas, it acknowledges that while academic theories of leadership are 'legion' all RAF leaders irrespective of rank should first obtain a grasp of these 5 areas before being encouraged to explore further afield.

4.6 Mission Command

For over 30 years the RAF has sought to embed a leadership philosophy within the organisation which seeks to promote a superior-subordinate relationship that fully supports de-centralised decision making, freedom and speed of action and initiative, while at the same time remaining responsive to superior direction when a subordinate over-reaches them self (JDP 0-01). Known as mission command, it is a leadership philosophy that in its simplest form relies on the willingness of a superior to provide their subordinates with the 'what' and 'why' of a task before standing back and leaving the actual execution of the task (i.e. the 'how') for them to plan, execute and monitor themselves. Indeed, the current version of RAF leadership doctrine starts with a foreword from the Chief of the Air Staff²⁹ in which he states that *"Mission command, if used correctly, will set the conditions for innovation to flourish"* before going on to highlight that it is the UK Military's enabling philosophy that promotes decentralised decision making and freedom of action while remaining responsive to superior direction.

²⁹ The Chief of the Air Staff is the most senior officer in the RAF and its professional head.

4.7 Mission Command In Theory

Having initially been adopted into UK military doctrine during the 1980's Watters (2002) highlights that the application of mission command within the UK military has continued to be refined and developed in recent years to the extent that contemporary thinking on the approach now identifies 5 main tenets that underpin its application as part of a modern-day organisational leadership philosophy, namely the requirement for a leader to:

- (i) Ensure his/her subordinates understand his/her intent.
- (ii) Inform subordinates what effect they are to achieve and why.
- (iii) Allocate sufficient resources to carry out their tasks.
- (iv) Exercise the minimum of control over their subordinates while retaining responsibility for their actions.
- (v) Allow subordinates to determine for themselves how best to achieve their intent.

The above is summarized by Watters (2002) as presenting the underlying requirement being the fundamental responsibility to act (or decide not to act if that is the right thing to do) within the framework of the Commander's intentions.

Accepting that current RAF Doctrine fulfils the role of organisational 'Theory Espoused' this next section explores the current way in which mission command is presented by the doctrine and how it informs current leadership development syllabi.

The current version of AP 7001 (p.1-2) opens with statement that the concept has become 'the UK military's enabling philosophy of command' before going on to say that its fundamental guiding principle is 'to act, or in some circumstances, not to act, within the framework of a superior's intent' which could be argued to still reflect the

original intent behind the adoption of mission command. However, in its detailed treatment of the concept the doctrine also introduces a number of separate but related organisational and social phenomena which it proposes are pivotal in ensuring that the organisation is able to employ mission command to its fullest effect. These in turn appear to have evolved the concept beyond its original application to deal with the critical and unpredictable (i.e. complicated) environment on the battlefield to cover the spectrum of organisational activities both in war and during peacetime. In particular, the current doctrine (AP 7001, p.3-1) proposes that mission command is: the Service philosophy of *empowerment* necessary to allow agility ; it requires deep and enduring *trust* both up and down the command chain; leaders must be able to deal with the consequences of *risk* and *failure* in a way that does not break down the trust necessary for mission command to work; the level of *control* by a superior should be kept to a minimum; and finally that a full understanding of *intent* is required in order to for individual to understand the bounds to their decision making authority.

4.7.1 Empowerment.

The term empowerment features predominately in the current doctrine's treatment of mission command. It proposes that empowerment helps create an organisational culture that allows others to take ownership of problems and that mission command is the primary method used in the RAF to provide the understanding that will allow empowerment to work. With regards to the concept of empowerment itself, its treatment within the doctrine is limited to a brief acknowledgment of Pastor's (1996) 5 levels of empowerment and the proposal that there are 2 main aspects to empowerment, namely (AP7001, p.3-2):

- (i) Those things that each individual has to do to feel empowered and take responsibility.
- (ii) The way in which leaders work with others to nurture their autonomy, self-esteem and personal growth.

Examination of the wider literature reveals that there are 2 main approaches to empowerment which bear some similarities to the 2 aspects highlighted above, namely relational empowerment and motivational empowerment. With regards to the 5 levels of empowerment, it offers no detail on the various levels apart from stating that within today's lean structures, teams should endeavour to work at the highest level of empowerment in order to make the most of mission command by allowing the team to make decisions and decide what and when to inform the leader, thereby ensuring the leader's time is not overburdened with unnecessary information. This in turn appears to be drawn from Pastor's (1996, p.6) description of level 5 empowerment which she proposes involves the manager delegating the bulk of decision making to the team and that in doing so 'the team operates completely autonomously, making crucial decisions at which they may or may not, at their discretion, inform management.'

4.7.1.1 Relational Empowerment.

Conger & Kanungo (1988) position relational empowerment as a process by which a leader shares some of his or her power with subordinates, with power being defined as the possession of authority or control over resources. They state that this aligns with Burke's (1986, p.51) position that 'to empower, implies the granting of power-delegation of authority'. Furthermore, Conger & Kanungo (1988) highlight that within the management literature, the de-centralisation of decision making power is

central to the process of empowerment (e.g. Burke 1986; Kanter 1983). Couto (1992, cited in Ciulla, 2010) proposes that relational empowerment involves a psycho-symbolic approach to empowerment that involves the leader delegating power to a follower in order to overcome some kind of organisational difficulty thereby reducing the dependencies that can make it difficult to complete a particular task. It primarily involves giving individuals greater discretion over their own tasks rather than the organisation itself thereby raising their self-esteem and ability to cope with what is basically an unchanged set of circumstances. This delegating of decision-making authority to followers while increasing accountability is facilitated by increased information sharing and the development of a subordinate's decision-making skills. Of note, it is the individual leader and not the organisation that empowers (hence the use of the term relational) primarily through a transfer of power to make decisions in order to reduce the subordinate's dependency on the leader's own decision-making process. Here the emphasis is on the sharing of authority by the leader through giving some of their power and associated resource away within an organisational framework (process) in order to ensure that subordinates do not use this increased power at the expense of the organisation. Ciulla (2010, p.19) argues that one of the biggest problems with this form of empowerment is that it raises 'unrealistic expectations' in employees when they are told that they are to be empowered. This is a particularly important point to note with regards to relational empowerment as there is often little or no change in the relationship with their superiors and no real change to the amount of power and control they gain over their tasks as the ultimate outcome is still very much controlled by the superior. This leads Ciulla (2010) to conclude that workers soon become disappointed when they

discover the limits to their new-found power. Of note, employee participation in organisational decision making is often taken to be evidence of relational empowerment but this does not actually consider the effect, or more importantly the affect, that this form of empowerment has on the subordinate. Indeed, it is generally applied for the benefit of the superior rather than the benefit or development needs of the subordinate.

4.7.1.2 Motivational Empowerment

In contrast to the practical approach outlined above, whereby empowerment is primarily seen as a practical management technique involving the delegation or decentralisation of some aspects of decision making in order to overcome an organisational difficulty, Conger & Kanungo (1988) propose that within the psychology literature, motivational empowerment is positioned more as an enabling approach rather than a delegative one. Here, the focus is on managerial strategies that empower an individual by strengthening an individual's perceptions of self-determination and self-efficacy (e.g. Bandura 1977) in addition to the sharing of resource or decision-making responsibility. Akhtar (2008) describes self-efficacy as the belief that individuals' have in their own abilities and specifically the ability to meet the challenges they face and complete their tasks successfully. From a psychological perspective, Yukl & Becker (2006) propose that this form of empowerment involves the perception that personnel can help determine their own work roles, accomplish meaningful work and influence important decisions before going on to highlight that despite what they term the positive rhetoric that often surrounds empowerment programmes, they often fail to achieve the benefits promised. Conger & Kanungo (1988, p.474) propose that motivational empowerment

can best be described as 'a process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organisational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organisational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information'. Furthermore, they propose that as a motivational phenomenon, the process of empowerment is closely linked to expectancy theory (e.g. Lawlor 1973) and self-efficacy theory (e.g. Bandura 1977; 1986). With regards to the former, Conger and Kanungo (1988) posit that an individual's effort to achieve a particular task depends of two types of expectations, namely; that their effort results in a desired level of performance; and that their performance produces the right outcomes. With regards to the latter, they highlight Bandura's (1986) assertion that the relationship between effort and desired level of performance relates to an individual's self-efficacy expectations whereas the relationship between performance and outcome relates to an individual's outcome expectation. Importantly, Conger and Kanungo (1988) highlight that while the process of empowerment will result in an individual's self-efficacy expectations being strengthened, their outcome expectations are not necessarily affected. In other words, according to Conger and Kanungo (1988) motivational empowerment as an enabling construct raises a subordinate's convictions in their own effectiveness rather than their expectations of a favorable outcome and hence is a people focused construct rather than a task focused one. Importantly, they also propose that even under conditions of failure, individuals can retain a sense of empowerment through their self-efficacy being enhanced by the leader's recognition of their performance which in turn suggests a positive attitude to risk taking and failure. Couto (1997) presents motivational empowerment as a psycho-political approach which aims to

enhance individuals sense of self-esteem through a redistribution of power and resource to enable individuals to bring about real change themselves and proposes that this is what most people think about when hearing the term empowerment and that it involves developing the ability, confidence and desire of individuals to bring about change. Yukl & Becker (2006) also propose that psychological empowerment is usually conceptualised as an increase in the task motivation of an individual that results from their positive orientation to their work role and describe four defining cognitive factors identified by Thomas & Velthouse (1990) that give rise to the associated intrinsic motivation:

- (i) Self-Determination (Choice). Is presented as the ability of individuals to determine work outcomes without undue external influence or interference. Yukl & Becker (2006) posit that the concept is similar to locus of control whereby individuals with a strong internal locus of control believe that their actions are determined by themselves rather than by chance and those with a strong external locus of control felt that most events are determined by chance or fate (Rotter 1996). They go on to highlight deCharms (1968) assertion that the former is the fundamental basis for intrinsic motivation in addition to Liden & Tewksbury's (1995, p.211) claim that the degree of choice an individual has in the work setting is the 'crux of empowerment.'
- (ii) Meaningfulness. Described by Thomas and Velthouse (1990, p. 672) as 'the value of the task goal or purpose, judged in relation to the individual's own ideals or standards; the individual's intrinsic caring about a given task' and by Spreitzer (1997) as being the engine of empowerment

in that a sense of meaning is the thing that energizes individuals to work towards achieving a task.

- (iii) Competence. Described by Thomas and Velthouse (1990, p.672) as being 'the degree to which a person can perform task activities skillfully when he or she tries' which Yukl and Becker also link to Bandura's (1986) and Conger & Kanungo's (1988) notion of self-efficacy.
- (iv) Impact. Yukl (2013) proposes that this involves giving people the opportunity to influence what happens in their department. Thomas and Velthouse (1990, p. 672) describe it as 'the degree to which behavior is seen as "making a difference" in terms of accomplishing the purpose of the task, that is, producing intended effects in one's task environment'. Yukl and Becker (2006) go on to highlight that the concept builds on Rotter's (1966) locus of control and in particular the extent of influence that individuals have on organisational-level decisions or policy.

Yukl (2013) goes on to propose that the ability of an individual to both determine how their work is done and have a direct influence on important events and outcomes leads to a greater sense of empowerment which in turn can lead to a stronger task commitment (i.e. determination to see the task through), stronger organisational commitment and enhanced initiative and innovation in dealing with problems, all aspects that the RAF seeks through the application of its leadership doctrine. It is important to note that unlike relational empowerment, which employs specific management practices (and hence could be argued to be focused on process and task accomplishment), motivational empowerment involves characteristics that reflect an individual's personal experience and view about their role in the

organisation and as such should be viewed as a mindset rather than a process. In order to embed this mindset, there are a number of steps that Yukl (2013) proposes a leader needs to take:

- (i) Commence by understanding the motivational needs of their followers.
- (ii) Model empowered behaviour for the followers.
- (iii) Encourage co-operative behaviour.
- (iv) Encourage intelligent risk taking.
- (v) Trust people to perform.

With regards to these the two main forms of empowerment, research has shown that true organisational empowerment comes from a combination of the two whereby relational empowerment can be utilised to enhance the efficiency of decision making which in turn may lead to higher levels of discretionary effort whilst motivational empowerment has been shown to improve the quality of decision making and has generally been shown to lead higher levels of discretionary effort. But as highlighted above, organisations often pursue the latter but only succeed to developing some degree of the former. Finally, Singh (1986) argues that fully empowered employees demonstrate a greater commitment to complete a task based on their increased sense of self-confidence, self-determination and personal effectiveness leading to enhanced discretionary effort.

4.7.1.3 Barriers to Empowerment.

One of the biggest barriers to organisational empowerment therefore appears to be a lack of understanding as to what the term actually means (including confusion over the terms relational & motivational) and what the organisation actually wants. Ford

(2014)³⁰ argues that senior leaders often perceive the problem of lack of empowerment to sit at the mid-levels of the organisation and that the very act of declaring an empowerment programme or initiative is deemed sufficient to overcome the problem; however, she goes on to highlight this often ignores the reality of middle-managers being willing to let go of their own control needs. Ford (2014) also highlights other issues such as; empowerment programmes being viewed as the latest fad; the lack of a strategic framework to embed the practice; a lack of appropriate boundaries; and in particular many organisations promising (and expecting) motivational empowerment but actually only having the structures and processes in place to deliver relational empowerment. Conger & Kanungo (1988) highlight several specific contextual and organisational factors put forward by management theorists that potentially impact negatively on personnel's sense of self-efficacy including: authoritarian management styles (Block 1987); demanding organisational goals (Conger 1986); and lack of informal political influence (Kanter 1986). Furthermore, Conger & Kanungo (1988) also propose that for organisations undergoing significant change and those that have highly centralised organisational resources, this often results in their personnel feeling increasingly powerless, particularly when autocratic managers strip control and discretion from their subordinates. Finally, Mishra (1996) highlights research into de-centralised decision making (e.g. Dutton 1986; D'Aveni 1989) that supports the notion that organisational decision making has a natural tendency to become more centralised in organisations when responding to a crises.

³⁰ Taken from researcher's RAF Leadership Conference Notes – CAS Conference 2014.

4.7.2 Trust.

McGregor (1967) was one of the first scholars to highlight that in order for superiors to effectively delegate decision making authority, that they should first be able to trust that their subordinates would not put the organisation's interests ahead of their own. Furthermore, Ouchi (1981) highlighted the concept of mutuality within the decision to decentralise decision making by proposing that superiors will only allow subordinates to make decisions on their behalf if they trust them and employees will only be willing to make those decisions if they trust the management in return. Research by Mishra (1996) and Mishra & Spreitzer (1998) found a positive correlation between a superior's trust in their subordinates and a willingness to decentralise decision-making, particularly at the lower levels of organisational, while Lester & Brower (2003) found that a subordinate's perceptions of trust in them is positively related to their performance in pursuit of organisational objectives. Conversely, Wells & Kipnis (2001) found that when managers have low trust in subordinates they often deny them the opportunity to make their own decisions.

Unsurprisingly then, the role of trust in facilitating mission command features heavily in the current doctrine which highlights the importance of trust as one of the most important factors in successfully employing mission command (AP7001, p.3-2) and that 'without deep and enduring trust, both up and down the command chain, the full benefit of mission command will not be realised' (AP7001, p.2-5). The doctrine goes on to state that leaders must encourage a culture that is not risk averse by supporting the trust 'that allows and encourages subordinates to act rather than consult, knowing that a failure to act is a more serious fault than making a genuine mistake although it does not highlight what type of trust this is. The doctrine also

highlights the particular importance of mutual trust between a commander and subordinate in facilitating empowerment and agility and the willingness to take risk (AP7001, p.3-3):

'For mission command genuinely to work there has to be great trust both up and down the command chain. Trust that subordinates will make the decisions to further the intent. Trust that subordinates will take responsibility and risks. Trust that commanders will deal appropriately with failure; for if genuine risk is taken, things will go wrong sooner or later. Trust that one works in a learning organisation to blame culture. Trust that both subordinate commanders are open and admit mistakes to all; that unacceptable poor performance negligence are also dealt with openly. If this trust is not there then it becomes more acceptable to delay and not to act quickly and a mistake has much more serious consequences. Decisions are then referred the chain; empowerment fails.'

However, closer scrutiny of organisational doctrine reveals that while trust is deemed a critical organisational feature, there is no guidance as to what is actually meant by the term itself thereby reflecting Gambetta's (1988, cited in Mayer et al. 1995) observation with regards to the use of the term by scholars in that they 'tend to mention trust in passing, to allude to it as a fundamental ingredient or lubricant, an unavoidable dimension of social interaction, only to move on to less intractable matters' which in turn echoes Porter's (1975, p.497) observation that 'trust is widely talked about and it is widely assumed to be good for organizations. [However] when it comes to specifying just what it means in an organizational context, vagueness creeps in.' Therefore, it could be argued that key to the application mission command should be a full understanding of what is actually meant by the term trust.

Mayer et al. (1995) highlight that despite the concept of trust having been around since the time of Aristotle there is general agreement within the research community that a consensus has yet to be reached on what the phenomenon actually entails (e.g. Bhattacharya et al 1998; Bigley & Pearce 1998; Clark & Payne 1997; Dirks & Ferrin 2002; Jones & George 1998; Rousseau et al. 1998). Whilst the Oxford English Dictionary describes trust as the 'confidence in or reliance on some quality or attribute of a person or thing, or the truth of a statement' a brief foray through the academic literature quickly reveals that trust to be a more complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon than this simple statement would suggest. Indeed the literature appears to present a spectrum of trust ranging from Tyler et al.'s (1996) economic view that positions trust as a purely rational, calculative probability judgment to a Williamson's (1993) assertion that it is a psychological state of mutual expectation that should only ever be reserved for deep personal relationships that are non-calculative in nature. While there are some common themes running through the literature, such as confidence (e.g. Shapiro, 1987) integrity (e.g. Dirks & Ferrin 2001), reliability (e.g. Mayer et al. 1995), vulnerability (Bhattacharya et al. 1998) and risk (e.g. Rotter 1980) there is often sufficient ambiguity to prevent any one definition having precedence over another in a given situation. Even within the construct of trust itself there appears to be further disagreement as to the role of potential sub-phenomena such as swift trust (e.g. Meyerson et al. 1996; Robert et al. 2009), cognitive and affective trust (e.g. Johnson & Grayson 2005; McAllister 1995), unconditional and conditional trust (e.g. Jones & George 1998), weak and strong trust (e.g. Barney & Hansen 1994) and competency and benevolence trust (e.g. Sitkin 2005). This 'pot pourri' (Shapiro 1987, p.625) of definitions and approaches to trust

obviously presents the researcher who seeks to explore the role of trust within a particular phenomenon with the problem of determining which conceptualisation both researcher and participant are utilising in the data. Dirks & Ferrin (2001) suggest that by applying differing trust constructs to leadership, the researcher will often identify differing antecedents and consequences within the work outcomes under investigation. While the majority of studies into trust begin by acknowledging this multifaceted and complex nature of trust, they often are quick to focus on one particular aspect of the phenomenon without a wider consideration of the context within which the study is taking place (Hay 2002). Furthermore, Rousseau et al. (1998) propose that whilst trust is generally accepted by scholars to be an important aspect of organizational behaviour, the lack of a universally accepted definition of trust was undoubtedly problematic and often led to the term 'trust' being used when actually it was another phenomenon under investigation, highlighting terms such as co-operation, confidence and faith. In order to develop some common ground within the trust literature, Lewicki & Bunker (1996) building on work by Worchel (1979) proposed that research can be grouped into 3 categories which consider trust as either an individual difference based on an assessment of a trustee's ability to fulfil an obligation (psychological approach), an institutional phenomenon based on a need to reduce the transaction costs of opportunism (economic approach) or a transactional expectation based on a need to apply certain organizational values (sociological approach). This mirrors earlier work by Sitkin & Roth (1993) who proposed similar categories by classifying trust as being an individual attribute, a specific behaviour in response to a situational feature or an institutional arrangement. Jarvenpaa et al. (1998) attempt to simplify this even further by

aggregating the literature into 2 main perspectives through the argument that trust can be viewed as either a rational economic or social phenomenon; the former being centred around a framework of self-interest based on an assumption that the greater the trust, the less the transaction costs associated with having to protect against opportunistic behaviour; and the latter taking the view that trust revolves around the concepts of moral duty and an individual's obligation towards the group or society. Smith & Barclay (1997 p.5) adopt a similar view by suggesting two most dominant conceptualisations of trust are those which view it as a risk taking behaviour in the face of opportunism (e.g. McAllister 1995) and those which view it as an affective sentiment or cognitive expectation (e.g Mayer et al. 1995).

4.7.3 Risk

Closely linked to the role of trust and decentralised decision making with regards to mission command is the concept of risk, with the doctrine stating that (AP 7001, p.3-4):

'Every decision carries a degree of risk and there is clearly a place to take risk and a place where risk should be minimised. These are defined by the consequences of the risk. Nevertheless, a willingness to take risk is vital to agility and speed of manoeuvre.'

The doctrine (AP 7001, p.3-4) goes on to highlight Kanter's (2006) assertion that to get more successes, organisations have to be willing to risk more failures, in addition to proposing that 'avoiding necessary risk is an abrogation of leadership responsibility, as is hiding behind process'. (AP7001, p.2-1). However, while it also acknowledges that there are many processes for dealing with risk, the doctrine does not offer any further detail other than to state that whatever process is used to deal

with the risk, the impact, probability and immediacy of the risk will need to be estimated (AP7001, p.3-4). The doctrine also proposes that within mission command taking risk by decentralising decision making will mean failure at some point and that these failures must be learnt from and not blamed on those willing to take the risk (AP 7001, p.3-6).

In order to help explore the mediating role of risk in facilitating trust and mission command, it is first worth considering, as with trust, what the term risk actually entails. Notwithstanding the various approaches to trust highlighted above, Costa (2003) posits that irrespective of definition or school, risk is central to most conceptualisations of trust and Johnson-George & Swap (1982) propose that a willingness to take risk may be one of the few characteristics common to all trusting situations. Furthermore, while early research into trust (e.g. Deutsch 1960; Rotter 1967) proposed a mediating role for risk in facilitating trust, more recent research tends to emphasise the importance of risk, to the degree that most researchers now propose trust would not be required if all actions could be undertaken without risk to the trustor (e.g. Lau & Liden 2008). However, with regards to the term itself, Kaplan & Garrick (1981, p.11) highlight the many different ways in which the term risk has been used within the literature to address a variety of different organisational issues, from business and economic risk to social and safety risk, and in doing so identify the need for 'a uniform and consistent usage of words' when applying the term within a research setting. In an initial attempt to draw a distinction between risk and uncertainty, Kaplan & Garrick (1981) go on to propose that the notion of risk involves both uncertainty and the potential for an undesirable outcome (which they term damage) for one or more of the parties involved. They also highlight that when

applying a judgement regarding uncertainty and potential outcome, risk can only ever be measured relative to the observer i.e. it is a subjective issue that can only be described in terms of perceived risk, thereby suggesting that risk is highly dependent on individual perception and context and hence could vary between trustor and trustee. Bierman et al. (1969 cited in Mayer et al., 1995) propose that in assessing the risk in any particular situation an individual will consider the likelihood of both positive and negative outcomes and Mayer et al. (1995) go on to build on this by proposing that if a decision involves the potential for both positive and negative gains, the balance between potential gain and potential loss will affect the interpretation of the risk involved. Importantly, Das & Teng (2001) highlight that given this subjective nature of risk, any mechanisms enacted to reduce risk (e.g. trust) can only ever be guaranteed to reduce the perceived level of risk and hence the actual level of risk may remain the same. This suggests that an organisational interpretation of risk may well be viewed differently when conceptualised at the individual level and any mechanisms (such as mission command) employed to reduce organisational risk may not necessarily be recognised as such by those employing such mechanisms at the individual level i.e. organisational risk may not be conceptualised as risk at the individual level and hence the need for trust may also be subject to debate. Finally, in considering whether or not to take risk (such as allowing a subordinate to make a decision on your behalf) Sitkin and Pablo (1992) propose that factors such as familiarity with the problem domain, organisational control mechanisms, and social influences all serve to influence an individual's actual perception of the risk they are about to undertake. Furthermore, within the field of prospect theory Kahneman & Taversky (1979) suggest that empirical evidence

indicates that decision-makers are often seen to be risk averse in the domain of gains but become risk seeking in the domain of losses, leading Singh (1986) to propose that a direct negative relationship exists between performance and organisational risk-taking.

4.7.4 Risk and Trust

As the terms risk and trust appear inextricably linked within the doctrine, it is worth considering in more detail the relationship between the two phenomena. Early trust literature (e.g. Deutsch 1960; Rotter 1967) identified similar situational parameters for risk to exist by suggesting that the phenomenon incorporates both ambiguity with regards to a future course of action (i.e. uncertainty) and a subjective risk assessment of the benefit of the likely course of action. It also introduces a third variable into the equation by proposing that risk within trust is primarily dependant on the behaviour of others. Later trust literature (e.g. Mayer et al. 1995) also proposes that not all risk taking behaviour involves trust and that only those instances where the risk involves becoming vulnerable to the behaviour another, who has some control over the outcome, can therefore be classified as trust. From a sociological perspective Coleman (1990 p.91) is one of a number of scholars who suggest that trust is intimately linked to risk and risk taking to the extent that situations involving trust are in fact nothing more than a sub-class of risk, adopting the view that they are situations in which 'the risk one takes depends on the performance of another actor'. Coleman (1990 p.92) also proposes that in deciding to trust another 'an individual will rationally place trust if the ratio of the probability that the trustee will keep the trust to the probability that he will not is greater than the ratio of the potential loss.' In other words, an individual will only trust if the chance of gain in a particular course

of action is greater than the chance of loss in another thus suggesting that there is a threshold at which an individual will become willing to trust. From an economic perspective Bigley et al (1998, p.407) highlight that many authors (e.g. Bradach & Eccles 1989; Bromiley & Cummins 1995; Chiles & McMacklin 1996) view trust as nothing more than a mechanism that mitigates against opportunistic behaviour within economic transactions. Bradach & Eccles (1989) go on to propose that the risk of opportunism must be present for trust to operate thereby indicating that the main vulnerability or potential for damage, from an economic perspective, resides in the opportunistic behaviour of a trustee when charged with fulfilling a particular obligation. Williamson (1993, p.458) describes opportunism within trust as being a 'self-interest-seeking assumption' whereby individuals pursue their own interests 'with guile'. This raises questions regarding situations whereby a trustor perceives there to be risk in allowing a trustee to undertake a task on his behalf but does not believe that the trustee will act opportunistically; can this still be said to involve trust? From a psychological perspective the presence of vulnerability would suggest so, whereas from an economic perspective the lack of potential for opportunism would suggest not, but how do the parties involved perceive the exchange? Williamson (1993) offers some insight into this by proposing that whenever a situation arises where, following analysis, a trustor concludes that the potential for opportunism is absent, then in order to engage in an exchange there is no need for trust as rational, calculative decisions would prevail. Luhman (1988) introduces a further condition for trust to exist within the concept of risk by proposing that as well as being exposed to risk individuals must also have viable alternatives available. Hence in a situation where there is no viable alternative,

relying on another to undertake a particular action even, if he has the opportunity to behave opportunistically should not be construed as trust. Luhman (1988) goes on to state that when deciding on a particular course of action if the potential for the level of vulnerability to exceed the level of risk is not present, then the risk would remain within 'acceptable' limits and hence any decision would simply be a rational calculation (i.e. economic) rather than a decision to trust. But what are the implications of labelling this trust from both the trustor's and trustee's perspective? Does an illusion of trust have the same organizational effect as actual trust or can it lead to unforeseen consequences if and when individuals become aware of the calculative nature of the relationship? Does this impact on reciprocity in a neutral or negative way particularly when considering the role of trust within mission command? The next section will look at the role of reciprocity in the establishment of trust.

4.7.5 Risk and Reciprocity

Closely related to the concept of risk and trust is that of reciprocity. Das & Teng (1998, p.503) highlight that within the majority of the behavioural trust literature, trust and risk are viewed as having a reciprocal relationship which manifests itself through trust leading to risk taking which, assuming that the desired outcome then emerges, leads in turn to an increased sense of trust. This view is mirrored by Rousseau et al. (1998) who suggest that the presence of risk creates an opportunity for trust which in turn leads to risk taking. Kramer (1999, p.575) cites a number of scholars (e.g. Deutsch 1958; Lindsold 1978; Pilisuk et al. 1971; Pilisuk & Skolnick, 1968) whose research shows that reciprocity in exchange relations increases trust, whilst the absence or violation of reciprocity erodes it. McAllister (1995) offers a

simple explanation for this by arguing that the underlying logic is one of 'I trust because you trust' implicit in this is a secondary logic the one is willing to take risk if the other is also willing to take risk. This reciprocity is a key theme adopted by social psychologists such as Mayer et al. (1995) who, by adopting the assumption that trust involves a belief about how another party will behave, propose a model of trust in which a trustor's assessment of a trustee's ability, benevolence and integrity results in their willingness to take risk by allowing the trustee to act on their behalf in a 'risky' situation. The subsequent risk-taking behaviours that arise are viewed as a behavioural manifestation of trust, evidence of which then reinforces the trustor's perception of the trustee leading to greater trust. Furthermore, Serva et al (2005, p.627) maintain that equivalence is not a requirement of reciprocal trust and that it manifests itself as a dynamic, interactive process during the lifecycle of which trust is constantly in the process of either growing or diminishing. Finally, Johnson & Grayson (2005) attempt to differentiate between different types of trust and the risks contained therein by arguing that rational, calculative (economic) trust at the inter-organisational level is based on objective risk assessment whereas affective, interpersonal trust is emotionally [subjectively] based and is therefore less transparent to economic risk assessments thus highlighting a potential for conflict when organisational risk mechanisms are enacted at the individual level. What is unclear however is whether or not differing forms of trust, if applied within a particular situation, can act in a reciprocal manner to enhance, maintain or diminish trust within a complex relationship?

4.7.6 Control

Singh (1986) draws attention to the fact that research has tended to confirm the view

that organisations tend to respond to the risks posed by poor performance by tightening control (Burns & Stalker 1961; Smart & Vertinsky 1977) with Straw et al. (1981) proposing one of the main ways to do this is through enhancing control and coordination, leading to centralisation. Faunce (1981) observes that irrespective of the reason for development, most technological advances provide management with the potential for some form of enhanced control over employees with Leifer & Mills (1996 p.117, cited in Das & Teng 1998) describing control as being 'a regulatory process by which the elements of a system are made more predictable through the establishment of standards in the pursuit of some desired objective or state'. Early research into the role of trust and control undertaken by Argyris (1952) suggested that an adverse relationship existed between the two due to the fact the increased regulation provided by control could be taken to signal distrust. More recently, this concern has been echoed by a number of researchers (e.g. McEvily et al. 2003; Lewis & Weigert 1985) who highlight the potential problems that increasing the ability to control may have by proposing that this may foster an attitude of distrust by signaling suspicion. Strickland (1958) cited in Mayer et al. (1995) also found that low trust in workers tended to lead to a greater amount of surveillance by management whilst Kruglanski (1970) suggested that a frequently monitored employee may interpret the act of being monitored as a lack of trust and that this may in turn lead to him attempting to retaliate by double crossing the supervisor whenever the opportunity arises. This could then lead to the supervisor anticipating this opportunistic action and cause him to continue or increase his surveillance thus leading to a mutually reinforcing causal loop. Adopting a different approach, McEvily et al. (2003) highlight work by Perrone et al. (2003) that indicates when organizations limit the autonomy

of their employees, it often becomes more difficult to ascertain the trustworthiness of individuals as their true intentions and motives are often masked by the restrictions that this places on them thus raising issues for the role of reciprocity within a trusting relationship. McAllister (1995) has also proposed that trust is negatively related to control based monitoring and comments that in situations of interdependence when one individual cannot rely on the performance of another, then monitoring is often a way of managing the uncertainty inherent in the situation. Other researchers however (e.g. Sitkin 1995) argue that control can increase trust as its objective nature can help to institute a track record for those who do well leading to appropriate reward whilst empirical research by Bijlmsa (1998) found that workers trust in managers was positively related to monitoring by managers. Fichman (1997) proposes that most analysts of trust do in fact recognise that not all instances of cooperation between self-interested parties should be classed as trust. He proposes that when cooperation is enforced by monitoring or authority, trust is not necessary to explain this cooperation even if trust is perceived to exist within the interaction or exchange. However, if this cooperation is perceived as trust, does this run the risk of non-trustworthy behaviours subsequently impacting on the cooperative relationship? Following a study of inter-organizational trust, Hardy et al. (1998) propose that trust is in fact in opposition to control and that in situations within dyads where there is an asymmetrical interdependence, such as those found within mission command, this power differential may lead to a façade of trust when what is actually happening is domination however, the resultant implications of this are not explored further. Macaulay (1963, cited in Rousseau 1998) also observed that when an exchange was already highly controlled and easily monitored there was in fact no

need for trust - implicit in this is the assumption that by enhancing control, the need for trust reduces but is the preference between trust and control predicated on the situation, the nature of the relationship or the type of trust under consideration, assuming that different types exist? Adopting an opposing view, Costa (2003) proposes that as engaging in trust involves a high-degree of cooperation this in turn can lead to a lack of monitoring and hence could lead to trust being utilised as a substitute for control.

From a social psychological perspective, Rousseau et al. (1998) view trust not as a control mechanism, but as a substitute for control that reflects a positive attitude towards another and hence argue that control only comes into play when adequate trust is not present. This positioning of trust as being a substitute for control is echoed by many scholars (e.g. Bijlmsa & Bunt 2003; Fichman 1997; Das & Teng 1998; Edelenbos & Kijln 2007; Lewicki & Bunker 1996) who view trust as a mechanism to reduce the transaction costs that are normally associated with guarding against opportunistic behaviour by another party, by acting as a low-cost substitute mechanism for monitoring and control. This suggests that trust can therefore be viewed as a preferred alternative to, rather than necessary replacement for, control; but is this indeed the case and if so why? Kipnis (1996) is one of the few scholars who have attempted to address this by proposing that increasing the ability to control (whether intentionally or not) in turn reduces a manager's dependence on the actions of the employee and hence as dependence declines so does the need for trust. Implicit in this is that the reverse must also be true and that when decreasing the ability to control, a manager's dependence on the actions of an employee must increase and so must the need for trust. Importantly though, Kipnis (1996, p.40) goes

on to suggest that whilst most people 'like to be trusted' as it gives a sense of power over others, most people do not like to have to trust as they are 'socialised to value autonomy'. In other words, individuals prefer to reduce their dependence on another rather than deal with the risk and uncertainty that the requirement to trust would bring. Utilising Curral's (1990) economic definition of trust as being an 'individual's reliance on another person under conditions of risk' Kipnis (1996) proposes that when we trust we have to transfer power to the trustee and that the greater the reliance, the greater the power which in turn leaves us feeling uncomfortable. Kipnis (1996) therefore proposes that a popular strategy to reduce dependence on a trustee is to attempt to increase control over their actions and that technology can be utilised as a non-coercive means of increasing this control over employees thereby removing the need to trust. This therefore suggests that in situations whereby organisational governance mechanisms are predicated on reducing control, a tension will exist between the trustor's desire to increase control and the institutional desire to reduce control.

Reed (1997) argues that trust and control are in fact different sides of the same analytical coin with trust acting as a co-ordinating mechanism for collaboration based on shared moral values and norms and control acting as a co-ordinating mechanism based on asymmetric relations of power and domination³¹. In other words, they are situational dependant and would each appear to be legitimate processes with specific organizational contexts; but what are the implications of applying one mechanism within the other context? Given mission command's position within a hierarchical relationship it would appear to indicate that control should be the

³¹ As found in a hierarchical organisation

default co-ordinating mechanism whilst in practice the organization is attempting to apply the former approach of shared moral values and norms but is this crossover between situations and co-ordinating mechanisms achievable and if so sustainable, particularly when the balance of control is either increased or diminished? Das & Teng (1998) may offer some insight into this by rejecting the notion of that trust is purely a substitute for control and utilise both approaches to offer a contingent perspective in which they suggest that the effects of trust and control may not be the same in all situations. They argue that formal control, through the use of regulatory procedures, enforced by rules and objectives, inhibits autonomy leading to an atmosphere of mistrust. On the other hand, social control, through the adoption of social norms and values, enhances mutual understanding thereby leading to what they term 'trust-breeding'. In a follow on publication (Das & Teng 2001) they maintain that in any uncertain situation, the level of perceived risk is determined by two separate factors, namely trust and control, as both are utilised to reduce the perceived probability of undesirable outcomes. They differentiate between the two by suggesting that trust fulfils its role in reducing risk by inducing positive expectations of a partner thereby reducing the chance of adverse outcomes whereas control is utilised to influence the behaviour of a partner to achieve the same effect (coercion v collaboration?). Das & Teng (2001, p.254) go on to say that 'trust leads to low risk perception without doing anything about the partner. In contrast, control is a more proactive and interventionist approach and leads to a low risk perception through affecting the behaviour of the partner'. If from an organizational perspective trust is unable to take into account the attributes of the individual partners and specific situations in which they collaborate within the organisational structure then

the latter would appear to be a rational approach; however, from an individual perspective who may have knowledge of or be able to monitor the behaviour of the exchange partner, together with a much more detailed understanding of the specific context within which an exchange is due to take place, then the former could appear to offer the most logical choice.

Das & Teng (2001) support their argument by citing research by Dirks (2000) that indicates whilst authority is important for behaviours that can be observed or controlled, trust is important for those behaviours that cannot be observed or controlled thus suggesting they are both legitimate organizational processes whose use is dependent on the ability to monitor. Fichman (1997) argues that at individual level there is an evaluation process prior to exchange which is mediated by level of trust; in high trust situations there is less monitoring and less requirement for evaluations but this does not address the situation where the ability to monitor is available without any additional impact on transaction costs. In one of the most widely cited and utilised definitions of interpersonal trust within the social psychological sphere Mayer et al. (1995, p.712) attempt to integrate research from multiple disciplines and differentiate it from other similar constructs by proposing that 'trust is a willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other party will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control' thus suggesting that the ability to control should play no part in a decision to trust. But given their assumption that trust involves a decision that one is willing to become vulnerable to the actions of another, should not the ability to monitor, and if required control, those actions form part of the decision to trust process? In a follow up publication by the same

authors (Schoorman et al. 2007) they attempt to address this by proposing that control systems can play a mediating role in a decision to trust by offering an alternative mechanism for dealing with the amount of risk that an individual is willing to take. In other words, control can be utilised in a trust/risk relationship to lower the level of perceived risk to one which can be managed by trust. This would appear to suggest that a trustor has a risk threshold below which point he is willing to trust another and above which he may seek to utilise control as a mechanism of manipulating risk in order to meet that threshold.

4.7.7 Decentralised Decision Making

Closely related to the concept of control is the concept of decentralised decision making which Bowditch & Buono (1994) describe as being the extent to which organizations disperse decision making to the lower levels of the organizational hierarchy. Within the doctrine it highlights that in turn the application of mission command promotes decentralised decision making and that this is a key component of innovation and creativity (AP7001, p.5-A-2). Furthermore, it proposes that if subordinates are not allowed to make their own decisions, everything is referred back up the hierarchy and consequently bureaucracy and cumbersome process stifle any chance of agility and hence innovation. McGregor (1967) was one of the first management commentators to suggest that in order for managers to delegate decision making authority, they should first be able to trust that employees are concerned with the organisation's interests although the nature of this trust is unclear. In addition, early research by Driscoll (1978) found that employees trust in management was enhanced when they were able to participate in the organisations decision process; both findings therefore suggesting a mutually reinforcing situation

(reciprocity) whereby trust in a subordinate by a manager leads to decentralisation which in turn leads to increased trust in a manager by a subordinate. Rosen & Jerdee (1977) support this by proposing that when managers share control they are in fact demonstrating to both the employee and other observers that they have significant trust which is then often reciprocated. Ouchi (1981) also highlights the concept of mutuality in the decentralisation process by proposing that managers will only allow subordinates to make decisions if they trust them and that employees will only be willing to make those decisions if they trust the management in turn. Furthermore, Tyler & Lind (1992) maintain that employees value being involved in decision making because it confirms their standing and worth (i.e. enhances the perception of self-efficacy) which implies they will accept this responsibility in order to maintain the trusting relationship. This is also supported by research conducted by Spreitzer and Mishra (1999) who found a positive correlation between managements' trust in employees and their subsequent involvement in the organizational decision making process. Mishra (1996) also highlights management literature (e.g. Davidow & Malone 1992; Ouchi 1981; Kirkpatrick & Locke 1991) that identifies evidence of a positive linkage between decentralised decision making and trust, particularly at the lower levels of organizational hierarchy. However, the need for decentralisation often appears to be driven by other organisational factors and hence increased trust appears as a consequence of decentralisation rather than a reason for decentralisation. What appears not to have been explored is the extent to which this purported increase in trust is sufficient to sustain decentralisation if and when the organisational issue that drove it in the first place (e.g. an inability to control) is subsequently resolved by other means.

At the other end of the spectrum research by Wells & Kipnis (2001) indicates that when managers have low trust in subordinates they often deny them the opportunity to make their own decisions. Singh (1986) draws attention to the fact that research has tended to confirm the view that organisations tend to respond to the risks posed by poor performance by tightening control (citing Burns & Stalker 1961; Smart & Vertinsky 1977) with Straw et al. (1981) proposing one of the main ways to do this is through enhancing control and coordination which in turn leads to centralisation. Based on the points highlighted above this would suggest a decrease in the amount of trust perceived to exist between a manager and their employees. Mishra (1996) highlights research into decentralised decision making (e.g. Dutton 1986; D'Aveni 1989) that supports the notion that decision making has a natural tendency to become more centralised in organisations when responding to a crises but is this due to enhanced perceptions of risk or a decrease in the levels of trust or a combination of both? Dutton (1986, p.508) argues that it is because 'decision makers want to enhance their ability to act quickly and decisively in the wake of a crises [whilst] lower level members want to disassociate themselves with any responsibility or blame' thereby suggesting that managers are reluctant to take on increased risk and hence look to control to reduce this and that the employees' trust in supervisors that any mistakes will be dealt with appropriately declines when the perception of risk increases. Singh (1986) also notes early literature that suggests organizations tend to respond to the risk posed by declining performance by tightening control through increased centralisation of authority (e.g. Burns & Stalker 1961; Smart & Vertinsky 1977) whilst Straw et al. (1981) propose that even the perception of threat or increased organisational risk leads to a perceived need to enhance control and co-

ordination again resulting in greater centralisation thereby suggesting that the greater the perceived importance of a decision, the greater the preference for control. Finally, Mintzberg (1980, p.326) defines decentralisation as 'the extent to which power over decision-making in the organisation is dispersed among its members' before going to highlight two main types of decentralisation:

- (i) Vertical decentralisation which describes the extent to which formal decision-making powers delegated down the chain of line authority.
- (ii) Horizontal decentralisation which refers to the extent to which power flows informally outside the chain of authority i.e. to those in the techno structure and support staff.

For the RAF it would appear that its predominant structure is vertical centralisation whereby formal and informal decision making remains primarily within the strategic apex.

4.7.8 Intent

The doctrine highlights that a fundamental guiding principle of mission command 'is the absolute responsibility to act or, in certain circumstances, not to act, within the framework of a superior commander's intent' (AP7001, p.1-2). However, it offers no formal definition of the concept of Intent other than to say that its formulation is not easy and requires time and deep thought and while the issues faced by individuals will invariably be complex and ambiguous, intent 'must state purpose clearly' (AP7001, p.3-4). It goes on to state that it is essential that 'the commander (superior) alone creates the final expression of intent'. However, the higher-level doctrine (i.e. JDP 1-01) does propose that a commander's intent is a concise and precise statement of what a commander intends to do and why, with a particular focus on the overall

effect to be achieved and the desired situation it aims to bring about. What is quite clear from the doctrine is that in order for mission command to work, a subordinate should have a clear understanding of their superior's intent and make good decisions in order to further that intent. Furthermore, when dealing with the relationship between context and intent, it proposes that as the level of understanding of the former becomes clearer, so the freedom of manoeuvre for subordinates to fulfil the latter becomes greater. In other words when the context is ambiguous or uncertain then a superior is required to retain control of the decision-making process and give explicit intent i.e. adopt individual command style behaviours towards the orders-based end of the empowerment spectrum. As and when the context becomes clearer, they are able to relinquish a degree of control and adopt more managerial style behaviours by delegating decision making to their subordinates.

Storlie (2010) proposes that within mission command, intent is an explicit description and definition of what a successful mission will look like i.e. its end-state. Dempsey & Chavous (2013) expand this definition further by proposing mission intent 'succinctly describes what constitutes success for the operation. It includes the operation's purpose, key tasks, and the conditions that define the end state. It links the mission, concept of operations, and tasks to subordinate units. A clear commander's intent facilitates a shared understanding and focuses on the overall conditions that represent mission accomplishment.' In a similar vein, Yardley and Kakabadse (2007) propose that it is through the framework of intent that a subordinate's context is shaped and that intent presents the concept of a future state developed from their understanding of the present, while Williams (2016) highlights that mission command comes with an expectation that superiors respect and acknowledge their

subordinate's judgement and consequently issue orders or directives that focus on intent rather than specific tasks. Flynn & Schrankel (2013) state that intent should be utilised to empower agile and adaptive leaders and provide the framework within which subordinates should be encouraged take prudent risks. By doing so, subordinates are effectively given permission to solve unexpected problems within the commander's intent and come up with novel solutions without having to constantly refer back up the chain of command, in line with the motivational empowerment aspect of mission command. Flynn & Schrankel (2013, p.31) go on to highlight General Dempsey's assertion that in order to achieve mission command leaders 'must be taught how to receive and give mission orders, and how to clearly express intent. Students must be placed in situations of uncertainty where critical and creative thinking and effective rapid decision making are stressed. Training must place leaders in situations where fleeting opportunities present themselves, and those that see and act appropriately to those opportunities are rewarded. Training must force leaders to become skilled in rapid decision making. Training must reinforce in commanders that they demonstrate trust by exercising restraint in their close supervision of subordinates'.

In a wider treatment of command and control behaviours, McCann & Pigeau (1999, no page numbers) propose that the concept of establishing intent involves a superior determining what to do and how to propagate it among their subordinates and hence is broader than simple decision-making. They go on to propose that the formulation of intent 'requires a creative act whose purpose is to bound an infinitely large space of possible actions into a finite number of precise, focused objectives' and that 'intent embodies a human commander's vision and will, and is inevitably the product of

history, expertise and circumstance.’ In a later study, Pigeau and McCann (2006) introduce the concept of common intent which they define as being the sum of explicit intent plus operationally relevant implicit intent. The former relates to the use of dialogue to transmit a precise, stated objective while the latter to what they term the socialisation process which ‘guides or bounds, but does not direct, the actions of subordinates when faced with unanticipated events’ (Pigeau & McCann 2006, p.92). They go on to propose that explicit intent involves the sharing of overt knowledge through dialogue (i.e. a process) whereas implicit intent involves the sharing of tacit knowledge on how to interpret the objective through socialisation (i.e. a mindset). In other words, implicit intent according to Pigeau & McCann (2006, p.85) is effectively ‘that which remains unsaid’ but carries with it the expectation that subordinates will find their own solutions to the problems they encounter. This appears to be similar to the concepts of relational and motivational empowerment in that explicit intent delegates a degree of decision-making authority while implicit intent confers the ability to undertake the job/task as they best see fit. Stewart (2006, p.25) builds on the work of Pigeau & McCann by proposing that effective decentralisation of decision making requires organisations to possess a ‘deep, broad, reservoir’ of implicit intent which in turn is shaped by the organisations culture, and in particular ‘the extent to which knowledge is shared, reasoning ability encouraged and commitment and motivation shared.’ He goes on to propose that it is the extent to which these cultural enablers are developed that heavily influences the prevalent command/leadership approach adopted by the organisation and that those organisations that fail to develop the appropriate level of implicit intent tend to operate at the centralised end of the decision-making spectrum (as opposed to

decentralised) irrespective of what the organisational doctrine espouses. This in turn limits their ability to decentralise effectively and allow people to determine their role outside of the short-term task focus driven by explicit intent. Stewart (2006) concludes by arguing that the permissive culture required to build implicit intent is highly reliant on the organisation rewarding appropriate behaviour and not being quick to punish mistakes that inevitably arise as individuals embrace risk within their new-found authority. This in turn suggests that the extent to which risk-taking behaviour is encouraged is directly linked to the extent to which motivational empowerment is embedded within the organisation.

4.7.9 Innovation

Finally, AP 7001 opens with a forward by the Chief of the Air Staff who highlights that as the RAF enters its second century as an organisation it requires 'great leadership to provide the creativity and innovation needed to take us through the next one hundred years in good shape' before going on to state that 'mission command, if used correctly, will set the conditions for innovation to flourish' and highlights that understanding innovation is an integral element of leading change. The doctrine (AP 7001, p.5-A-2) also proposes that in order to help facilitate this culture of innovation 'leaders must not be averse to risk' and that 'to be innovative is to fail successfully' which in turn implies that the ability to learn from mistakes is crucial element of organisational development.

In order to bring about an innovative culture within the RAF the doctrine also links to a high-level initiative known as Thinking to Win which seeks to 'establish a climate of creativity' in which 'personnel will be empowered to think to win' (AP7001, p.5-A-2). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the current academic literature highlights that

in order to develop a culture of innovation, the role of the leader is to set the conditions for innovation through the development of collaborative networks that stimulate interaction and involvement amongst all participants at all levels of the organisation. Hence the leader's role is to set the conditions for innovation rather than innovate themselves and this in turn could be argue to place an increasing emphasis in the ability of more senior leaders within the organisation to switch mindset from their role as problem solver to the role of problem finder whereby decision making in the face of uncertainty is not pulled up the organisation but is devolved down the organisation to those who are closest to the uncertainty.

Yardley & Kakabadse (2007, p.74) propose that mission command is inherently a 'management risk taking activity which empowers individuals to analyse directives, question their relevance as the situation unfolds and to take executive decisions when required'. This emphasis on risk taking is echoed by Ghikas (2013) who states that mission command is a philosophy that values those who take prudent risk however Ben-Shalom & Shamir (2011, p.102) posit that 'notwithstanding the manifest attractiveness of mission command as a philosophy of command, it is one which requires individuals to ignore a common basic human tendency for the aversion to risk' which in turn often results in senior commanders attempting to keep a tight control over events.

4.8 Dealing with VUCA

One of the key concepts with regards to the nature of the problems facing an organisation, and hence the ability to select the appropriate balance of CLM behaviours to deal with them, is a clear understanding of the context within which the problem has evolved. Notwithstanding the differing emphasis on which is the

dominant component of the trinity (i.e. command, leadership or management), there is common agreement on the importance of understanding context in order to determine the appropriate behaviours to employ depending on the situation. Howieson and Khan (2002) highlight Warren Bennis' (1988) claim that in order to lead effectively leaders must understand the context in which they are working and that the organisation (i.e. RAF) requires leaders who are able to conquer context through unlocking potential rather than managers who attempt to manage context through process and bureaucracy. Likewise, AP7001 opens with the acknowledgement that the context within which the RAF works is constantly and ever more rapidly changing and that this in turn requires the organisation to continue to be innovative in its thinking to meet the challenges this entails. It also proposes that a full grasp of the context is essential for both commanders and followers to make the appropriate decisions when working towards an end state.

4.8.1 Complicated v Complex.

Given that most hierarchical organisations were effectively designed to deal with complicated contexts rather than the complex contexts found within a VUCA environment, it is important to differentiate between what is meant by the terms complicated and complex. Uhl-Bien et al. (2007, cited in Kutz & Bamford Wade 2013) highlight two main approaches to dealing with complicated and complex contexts. Complicated contexts are characterised by problems that can be described in reference to the number of internal parts and stakeholders that make up the event and can be understood by breaking the system down to its smallest component parts and studying them. They can then be solved through the application of rules and processes framed by an explicit statement (direction) of what the outcome should

look like. These problems can be dealt with effectively through centralisation whereby the uncertainty surrounding an event is prioritised by the superior who, accepting that they will never have perfect information, brings uncertainty to themselves and deals with whichever uncertainty assails them at the moment in order to achieve and maintain some degree of control. Complex contexts are characterised by problems that also have many parts but cannot be understood by solely breaking them down into, and then studying, the component parts. They require a much wider understanding of the internal and external contexts in play and the outcome will often evolve as the nature of the problem becomes clearer. Complex contexts therefore require effort from a collective entity and current complexity theory proposes that the most appropriate way to deal with complexity and the huge amount of data it generates is to encourage adaptive responses by decentralising decision-making close to the source of the complexity. Unlike complicated contexts, where the role of the superior is to solve the problem and oversee/direct the solution, complex contexts require the superior to engage in conversations to understand the situation and reframe their understanding of the context in order to move forward. Consequently, Klein (2008) proposes that in an environment characterized by ambiguity a penchant to break thinking down into hyper-rationality can cause leaders/commanders to miss the big picture and mistake the compiling of products for sound judgement. In order to help differentiate between complicated and complex contexts, Osborn et al. (2002) propose that each can be defined by the key characteristics of volatility and complexity and the resultant demands, constraints and choices that leaders face. They highlight 4 main

scenarios which require differing degrees of direction and engagement dependent on the extent to which the problems are complicated or complex.

4.8.1.1 Complicated Contexts

The majority of organisations that employ rigid hierarchies evolved within what Osborne et al. (2002) term 'Stable Bureaucracies' whereby the senior leadership's main focus is on dealing with complicated problems in order to sustain medium term predictability and indicate to subordinates what is important. Occasionally however, a 'Crises' may emerge where there is a sudden emergence of unforeseen threats to high priority goals and the main focus of the leader then becomes to solve the problem and direct the solution. In both these instances, the organisation has evolved rules and processes to help the leader identify a suitable solution to deal with the problem and direct the appropriate action. These contexts therefore lend themselves to the adoption of commander/manager behaviours to sustain the process and adapt it to deal with problems as they arise. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that leaders who provide rapid and authoritative responses to problems in times of crises are more likely to be followed even if their decisions are questionable.

4.8.1.2 Complex Contexts.

For organisations undergoing a sustained period of change, Osborne et al. (2002) use the term 'Dynamic Equilibrium' to describe a context whereby the demands, constraints and choices faced by an organisation are becoming increasingly ambiguous as they attempt to incrementally adapt to a changing external environment. Ultimately the environment may become so turbulent that an organisation finds itself operating on the 'Edge of Chaos' whereby the organisational

context is characterised by uncertain futures and rapid, non-linear change. In these instances, Osborne et al. (2002) propose that leaders influence through facilitating innovation and developing collaborative networks in order to stimulate interaction and involvement amongst participants at all levels of the organisation. Furthermore, they also argue that the traditional notion of the charismatic leader who is able to transform the institution is no longer valid as solutions that help restore order, cohesion and viability often emerge from the lower levels of the organisation. Hence, the Leader's role is to set the conditions for innovation rather than innovate themselves and this in turn requires a major switch in mindset from leader as problem solver to leader as problem finder.

While the current doctrine does not explicitly deal with complicated and complex contexts, it does highlight Grint's (2005) work that builds on Rittel & Weber's (1973) typology regarding the nature of problems that organisations are likely to encounter within each of the contexts above. Organisations operating within what effectively are stable bureaucracies are predominantly faced with what Grint (2005) terms tame problems in that they are likely to have been encountered before and the answer is readily apparent. Here the role of the superior is relatively straightforward and involves the application of management techniques and processes to solve the problem. During crises, critical problems emerge that may present an immediate danger to the organisation and therefore need to be averted. As with tame problems the solution is readily apparent within the given context however, due to the urgency involved, the most appropriate behaviour for a superior to adopt is that of commander in order to provide the answer and direct/coerce subordinates to address the threat. Finally, organisations operating somewhere between Dynamic

Equilibrium and the Edge of Chaos will tend to encounter wicked problems which have no obvious solution and no fixed end state. In this environment, the superior is required to adopt the role of leader through influence by asking questions rather than giving solutions and employing personal influence in order to enhance organisational collaboration (Grint, 2005).

4.8.2 Contextual Intelligence.

Within the wider leadership literature, a number of scholars (e.g. Kutz & Bamford-Wade 2013; Rodriguez & Rodriguez 2015) have highlighted that to be able to deal with complexity, leaders need to reach out from beyond traditional hierarchical structures in order to develop collaborative processes that are spread throughout networks of individuals both under command and within the wider organisation. Hays and Brown (2004, cited in Kutz & Bamford-Wade 2013) propose that a key part of success in a VUCA world is the ability of a leader to understand/diagnose context and know what works within that specific situation. This in turn requires a high level of contextual intelligence which, they argue, transcends the application of authority and resource that tends to be prevalent in task focussed organisations. From a military perspective, Schatz et al. (2012) talk about military officers being required to operate at the edge of chaos in fast-paced, decentralised and ambiguous contexts. This places even greater emphasis on the requirement for individuals who have tended to operate within rigid hierarchies and deal with short-term complicated events to develop the less formal collaborative networks that are needed in order to address longer-term complexity. However, Kanter (1979) also proposes that within hierarchical, mechanistic organisations, predictability and decisiveness is often valued (and therefore rewarded) more than flexibility and innovation. Logmen

(2008) suggests that it should be the ability of the leader to understand context, rather than their ability to apply their expert knowledge or background, that should ultimately define a senior leader's actions in setting the direction for an organisation. By failing to correctly reach out into the external context there is often a tension between a leader's focus on operating the organisation through the use of authority and resource to sustain short to medium term stability and improving or developing the system by enhancing organisational capacity to sustain the organisation over the longer term. Consequently, Ulmer (1998, p.149) proposes that the main impediment to optimal organisational functioning in a turbulent environment 'arises from a failure to recognise that the efficacy and de facto legitimacy of an authoritarian approach to leadership differs dramatically depending on the situation context.' In order to account for the mediating impact of context on a superior's ability to apply the correct balance of CLM behaviours, there is growing evidence to indicate the importance of developing leadership skills that include the ability to read the context prior to identifying a solution. Hence there is a requirement to develop leadership skills utilising a much wider contextual appreciation of the culture and organisational environment. This in turn develops the ability of individuals to think beyond the apparent restrictions of their role and formal responsibilities and grow the ability to move between the various forms of influence (i.e. CLM) as appropriate. The ultimate aim being to develop contextually intelligent leaders who are capable of reading and providing external context for opportunity and risk and internal context for work to be done and people to flourish (Stamp 2015). Ulmer (1998, p.149) therefore proposes that 'individuals at all levels of the organisation should be encouraged to reach out into the context of their work even when they are busy delivering or the context itself

is just too full of uncertainty or confusion'. This in turn will drive a paradigm shift from leadership residing in the individual, to leadership being distributed across a network of individuals both vertically and horizontally across the organisation.

4.9 Conclusion

The practical application of mission command as presented in the doctrine appears to chime with the origins of mission command whereby decision-making authority (power) was delegated to subordinates in order to initially overcome the problem of communication on the battlefield and subsequently to also enhance the flexibility of junior commanders to react to rapidly changing situations on the ground i.e. it is 'bounded' empowerment which sits more towards the control end of mission command. However, while the current doctrine acknowledges that mission command was devised as an army tactic to overcome communication issues and enhance agility on the battlefield, what it fails to explicitly acknowledge is that the origins of mission command arose out of necessity to overcome a specific organisational difficulty. Hence the adoption of mission command was predicated on a relational form of empowerment in which a senior commander delegated some degree of decision-making authority to a subordinate in order to reduce their dependency on responsive superior direction which in turn could make it difficult to complete a particular task. The UK's adoption of mission command therefore arose primarily as a transactional tool in which a senior commander delegated some of their power in an attempt to overcome a very specific organisational difficulty. In other words, it was adopted as a relational empowerment tool in order to deal with the complicated scenarios found within a critical context rather than as a motivational empowerment tool in order to deal with the complex scenarios found

within a wicked context, a key point which appears to be missing from the doctrine.

Chapter 5

INITIAL FINDINGS – MISSION COMMAND IN THEORY

5.1 Introduction

In order to address the research focus *'What if any gap exists between organisational members understanding of and their experience of the doctrinally espoused leadership philosophy known as mission command and what if any factors influence this?'* the researcher deemed it necessary to first establish each interviewee's conceptual understanding of the theory in order to determine if their subsequent assessment of its application was based on an appropriate knowledge and acceptance of what it entailed. Then, having identified what participants understood by the term mission command, the next phase was twofold: firstly, to determine their views on the continuing relevance of the concept entitled *'All well and good?'* and secondly to gain insight into their personal experiences of mission command in practice, entitled *'But not on Graduation Day?'* In effect the researcher was seeking to determine if the perceived organisational issue that led to the development of the research focus was generalisable across the wider organisation beyond the initial training environment where the concern was first raised. This approach was also deemed an important starting point in order to help determine in later analysis of any potential gap, the extent to which the level of understanding and acceptance of mission command played a role in an individual's willingness to embrace and employ the concept.

5.2 Mission Command as ‘Theory Espoused’.

‘Generally, I think we get it.’[IP]

Having outlined the purpose of the research and informed each participant of the ethical safeguards with regards to the conduct of the research, each of the semi-structured interviews began with the question from the researcher to the participant *“What do you understand by the term mission command?”* The aim of this was twofold; firstly, to explore each participants’ understanding of the concept; and secondly, to provide a common ground for the subsequent discussion to occur. From the very early stages of the research process it soon became apparent from the data that most if not all participants, from both the interview stage and those attending the various leadership workshops facilitated by the researcher, generally possessed a fundamental grasp of the main tenets (i.e. general statements) of mission command as detailed in the doctrine and taught on the various PMD courses that individuals attend as their careers progress. Indeed, the key components of empowerment, intent, delegation, authority and accountability emerged either explicitly or implicitly from the majority of participants’ understanding of the concept. Importantly, the key principle of a superior outlining the ‘what and why’ of a task but leaving the ‘how’ up to the individual also appeared to be fully embedded in each participant’s theoretical understanding of how the concept should be applied in practice, for example:

“In theory it’s all about setting a task, giving the boundaries and intent and then leaving it up to the individual to determine the how”. [IP]

“It’s a philosophy or a sort of conceptual approach to leadership, which requires people to act within the commander’s intent and I’ll come onto what I mean by that or what I take it to mean, but essentially it tells people what is expected of them as in the task, what they want to do and why they are to achieve that. But crucially, they leave the how up to the individual.” [IP]

“...it's the ultimate level of delegation and what you're trying to achieve is the commander's intent it's to give as much latitude and free rein in order to achieve the objective, without being too prescriptive.” [IP]

“If you said mission command, if I was explaining it to somebody else, I would say it’s a leadership and management technique where the leader sets out what he wants to achieve and the framework around that, but allows the team, the subordinates to decide how they’re going to achieve it. So, it doesn’t decide for them how, but it gives them the why, the what.” [IP]

“Mission command, in terms of how I perceive it to be is, you are given a task and you're given the authority and the responsibility to execute that. You are then held accountable for the actions that you take. That is, I suppose the simplest view of it. That’s applicable the platoon level, all the way up to wing or group level.” [IP]

“So, I'll give you a good doctrinal answer... the idea is to give subordinates a clear understanding of what the superior officer is trying to achieve. Any necessary freedoms and constraints that allows subordinates the freedom to

determine how they meet that intent and how they complete their part in the plan.” [IP]

“Really, it’s about setting, once you’ve set a task, i.e. a mission, you give an individual or a group of individuals that task and you pretty much leave them to get on with it, such that you empower them to make decisions and act on your behalf, and if they’re unsure at any stage, they come back to you. That’s the way I certainly use it....” [IP]

In addition to demonstrating their own knowledge of mission command, a number of interviewees also went on to suggest that, in their experience, a basic understanding of the concept was also embedded across the wider organisation i.e. they were of the opinion that the majority of RAF personnel, if asked, would be able demonstrate a basic grasp of theory’s fundamental tenets, for example:

“I think that the policy is well understood and I’d be surprised if people gave you definitions that were wildly different from what I’ve given you.” [IP]

“In principle I think everyone understands it.” [IP]

“I’m pretty sure the guys who graduate over the road³² could reel off stuff like intent, what and why not how, empowerment, trust and all that.” [SOSP]

³² The individual was referring to officer cadets undergoing their initial officer training.

“We talk about it a lot... it is pretty well wedged in and it’s hammered into you in Phase 1³³.” [IP]

“I think if you asked most officers and actually a good proportion of airmen, certainly from sergeants and a lot of corporals I think would be able to give you a reasonably coherent explanation of what it [mission command] is supposed to be.” [IP]

“I’m pretty sure you could have a reasonably coherent conversation about what mission command is meant to be with most people in the Service.” [OSIC]

The data therefore indicates that in terms of providing a basic comprehension of the concept, the training and educating of mission command within the various formal training establishments employed by the organisation appears to be generally successful in providing Service personnel at all levels of the organisation with a basic workable definition and technical understanding of the concept (i.e. in as much as they can describe the process). This in turn would suggest that the PMD syllabus that is drawn from the doctrine remains fit for purpose with regards to its ability to impart a basic technical knowledge of the theory and its fundamental tenets. It would also suggest that any subsequent difficulty in translating the theory into practice would not be overly influenced by a fundamental lack of knowledge within the organisation as to the basic tenets of mission command. The data also supports Argyris & Schon’s (1974) proposal that organisational members are often able to articulate when asked

³³ Phase 1 refers to the Initial Officer Training Course (for officers) or the Recruit Training Squadron (for airmen).

the values that the organisation aspires to, particularly as they are required to learn them in order to become socially accepted members of the organisation.

5.3 All Well and Good? ³⁴

“In principle, it’s a great idea.” [IP]

In addition to determining the extent to which organisational members possessed a grasp of the theory as detailed in the doctrine, the data was also analysed to determine participants’ own views on the extent to which they felt that the concept of mission command was still relevant to the organisation’s day-to-day activities. Comments regarding the continued relevance of the concept arose either as a result of direct questioning from the researcher having confirmed their understanding of the concept (e.g. *“To what extent do you feel the concept of mission command is still of value within today’s Service?”*) or more often were proffered by participants themselves during the general discussion of the concept. The aim of this analysis was to determine if individuals either thought the concept to be out of date or if they perceived the theory itself to be fundamentally flawed and consequently did not agree with it. Both factors which could in turn influence or bias an individual’s willingness or ability to employ the concept in practice despite it being an organisationally endorsed way of doing business. The data revealed that the vast majority of both interviewees and workshop participants appeared to hold the view that the idea of mission command as a concept was in principle still ‘a great idea,’ with the intent behind the concept itself being held in high esteem, as reflected in the following comments:

³⁴ Data for this theme drawn almost exclusively from interviewees.

“I think the concept of mission command, which is to back off and not overly involve yourself in your subordinate’s work, is a great one and one that should be commended.” [IP]

“I think the idea and the aspiration of mission command is great.” [IP]

“Is mission command still valid today, definitely yes. In fact, I would say that in today’s...in today’s climate it is more important than ever.” [IP]

“I’m pretty sure if you asked anyone here about mission command, they would all say yes, it’s certainly worth pursuing?” [AWC WS]³⁵

A number of participants also went on, without prompting, to speak of the potential benefits of employing mission command in practice, such as enhancing employee engagement, increasing feelings of self-efficacy and increasing the willingness of subordinates to put in enhanced levels of discretionary effort, for example:

“I’ve got a lot of interest in employee engagement and getting people to go the extra mile for organisations, to really tap into them, and I think mission command helps you to do that rather than hinders.” [IP]

“I think it’s a very good aspiration and it undoubtedly makes people feel more valued and it gets more out of them. It’s a funny old thing, if you give someone, even a relatively junior person, a really important job, normally they nail it out of sight just as well as anyone else would have done.” [IP]

For some of the more senior participants (i.e. Wg Cdr and above) the principles of mission command were also deemed to be important in helping the organisation

³⁵ WS – Workshop. Also suggests concept yet to be embedded.

meet the needs of highly capable and self-motivated individuals within the Service, for example one participant focussed on the ability to make people feel involved:

“I like the concept of mission command, because I think it allows people to have, to feel that they have more of a say in what we’re doing...we’ve got, some really capable people that work for me and they’re in the Service who don’t really need or want to be told exactly what to do. They want the opportunity to think for themselves and deliver.” [IP]

Along similar lines the concept was also seen to help keep people interested in their work:

“If you have a really capable individual, and I have had a few work for me, you need to let them think for themselves, otherwise they stagnate, and mission command lets you do that.” [IP]

“The more you let people think for themselves, the more involved they feel, the more effort they put in, if you just tell them what to do all the time they soon lose interest, I know I have.” [SOSP]

Importantly, innovation, which forms a large part of the RAF’s current strategy was also seen to benefit from the application of a mission command philosophy:

“If you want to innovate, which seems to be the big buzz word at the moment, then you need to let people get on with it, let them experiment, let them fail, let them try different ways, that’s what mission command means to me, you just let your guys get on with it.” [IP]

“We keep talking about thinking to win, thinking better, thinking faster and thinking differently, you can’t tell someone to do that, but what you can do is set the or develop the culture or environment to allow that to happen, and to me that is where mission command comes in. Tell them what and why but

leave them to figure out the how for themselves and they will surprise you.”

[IP]

Several individuals when discussing the value of mission command also went on to described the benefits of working for a superior who, in their view, fully embraced the concept:

“That was one of the best tours I’ve done because I was given...it was recognition, it was delegation of the task, it was empowerment.” [IP]

“The best thing a boss ever said to me was ‘what do you think’ and you know what, he listened and having made a decision told me to crack on ‘make it so’ and left me to get on with it. That was mission command, he told me what he wanted, why he wanted it...and because of that I respected him, the only problem is that he was in the Navy (said with a smile).” [SOSP]

In my experience it [mission command] doesn’t happen often but when it does it’s quite...motivating.” [OSIC]

“It’s much better to work for a boss who just lets you get on with it.” [CWOC]

One senior participant [OF5 -Gp Capt] proposed that notwithstanding any difficulties in fully embedding the concept of mission command with certain organisational contexts, the various tenets themselves were still of use within all aspects of the organisation’s business to varying degrees and that wherever possible, effort should still be made to employ as many of tenets as possible even if mission command as a whole was deemed too difficult i.e. it should not be seen as an all or nothing approach:

“I think even if you can’t employ mission command in its truest form like we do on operations with the good constructs, the discipline that drives intent one

and two up, scheme manoeuvre, main effort, a mission statement with a qualifying statement, an end state and all that good stuff, even if you can't employ that construct, you've got to try and take the tenets of that construct and apply it to the business that we have on a daily basis and make it fit." [IP]

Another participant also gave a detailed description of the different approaches to the use of mission command adopted by two immediate superiors and how these impacted on his levels of discretionary effort and feelings of efficacy.

"I had two bosses during that tour and the difference between the two was remarkable. The first, although he appeared quite laid-back, was very switched on and the key moment for me was when we had a VVIP³⁶ visiting the base and I was the duty movements officer. Because of the status of visitor, I approached the boss to see if he would be running that shift but he said that he was quite happy for me to run it as I was the DAMO³⁷, he would make himself available in the event that I needed any assistance. To me that was very empowering and visit went off without problem. A few weeks later the new boss arrived and I assumed that he would be the same, so we had a fairly minor UK politician coming on a visit I went to see him just to run through the details, expecting him to leave me to get on with it. However, to my surprise he told me that he would be running the shift effectively because he couldn't afford anything to go wrong. I don't think it was because he didn't trust me but more that he was generally not willing to allow someone else to run a visit that ultimately, he had responsibility for. You can guess which boss I preferred working for, it's just a shame that more people can't be like that. The downside is if you expect mission command and it doesn't happen, it can be quite demotivating." [IP]

³⁶ Very Very Important Visitor E.g. Head of State or Member of a Royal Family.

³⁷ Duty Air Movements Officer.

This demotivating effect of having experienced and subsequently expecting mission command was also captured by several other participants:

“The trouble is if you have a boss who lets you get on, crack on with it and uses mission command your next boss may well be different and pretty soon you become disillusioned.” [SOSP]

“You give the cadets here a wonderful story about this great thing called mission command but when you get out into the real world I think mostly you are disappointed.” [CWOC]

Some participants also highlighted a concern that while a lack of mission command was apparent at the level below a superior, at the level above (i.e. their superior) this often went unnoticed.

“Having tasted, if that’s the right word, mission command it makes you realise how bad some other bosses are in terms of trying to control everything, the problem is their bosses don’t see it that way because they get things done.” [OSIC]

Finally, in describing the theory and benefits of mission command several individuals went on, without prompting, to indicate that notwithstanding the presence of a fundamental grasp and positive view of the concept, it did not align with the realities of organisational life.

“Then [having described the concept] they will probably follow up very quick by saying, “but the world doesn’t work like that.” [IP]

“It’s great in theory, it’s just difficult in practice.” [IP]

“I think we do tactical mission command, when things are quite clear cut and there isn’t much room for manoeuvre, but we don’t do strategic mission

command whereby you are given an operational output and resource and left to get on with it. Here³⁸ the barriers are too narrow and the interference from on high is too great to fully allow people to decide on the how.” [IP]

In summary, the data revealed that almost without exception participants were able to demonstrate a fundamental grasp of the main tenets of mission command and that also there was an almost universal acknowledgement within the organisation that principles of mission command remained valid within the current organisational climate. However, as highlighted above, despite it being ‘All well and good’, there was a definite sense that the theory itself did not necessarily readily translate into practice and this is explored in more detail in the next section.

5.4 But Not on Graduation Day – Theory in Use?

Having established what individuals understand by the term mission command and their perceptions as to its continued value within the RAF, the second theme explores participants’ own perceptions as to the extent to which mission command is embedded within every day organisational life by capturing their experiences of the theory being applied in practice. In order to initiate discussion regarding their perceptions of mission command in practice, both interviewees and workshop participants were asked by the researcher to what extent did they agree with a statement made by a former Chief of the Air Staff during a keynote address to a RAF Leadership Conference that, in his opinion, the organisation had indeed been successful in embedding the concept within every aspect of the organisation’s daily business:

³⁸ HQ Air Command

Interviewer: *“A former Chief of Air Staff speaking at a recent RAF Leadership Conference said, when questioned³⁹, that the reason he had not mentioned mission command in his future vision for the organisation was because in his opinion the concept was already fully embedded in everything that the RAF does. From your own experience to what extent do you agree with this statement?”*

For a number of participants, the response was an unequivocal no:

“Definitely not, not in my experience, and I’m pretty sure you’ll get the same answer from the others.” [IP]

“No way, it’s not at all, I would say very few people actually fully understand mission command⁴⁰... I’d say the Air Force are really bad at doing any form of mission command...I would say we don’t allow our juniors to make decisions.” [IP]

“Of course, it’s not, no it’s not.” [IP]

“Well, I don’t think from my perspective it is.” [IP]

“Not from where I sit, there’s too much interference and not enough just leaving us to get on with it.” [OSIC]

“Is it? Said with a question mark, definitely with a question mark. I think it’s because it is difficult.” [IP]

“I think looking down our seniors think it is but looking up our juniors would definitely disagree.” [SOSP]

³⁹ The question was raised by the researcher.

⁴⁰ Suggests there is a gap between knowing and understanding – explored later.

For some participants the extent to which individuals were either willing or able to use mission command varied across the different functions, roles and levels of the organisation:

"I would smirk sarcastically. I don't feel like we use it at all. I don't think the branches, I'm an engineer, I don't feel like the Engineering Branch allows it to happen, it can't." [IP]

"From my own experience I would disagree with that. I don't think that I have experienced mission command in the way that I would characterise it wherein I've been told, these are your specific bounds, this is what I'm asking you to deliver in those specific bounds.... pretty much throughout my general service experience." [IP]

"It depends what you mean by mission command, if you mean allow your immediate subordinates to make a decision day-to-day then yes we do see that, I try and do that, but if you mean allow a department or station or unit to decide how to achieve its output, then I think the type of people we have at the top are often reluctant to do that, they want a brief on this and a brief on that, and this leads to them making the big decisions, probably because they feel they have to." [IP]

"If you look at the type of... of people we have at the top, they have got there by making decisions and getting things done. So, I think it is very difficult to change that mindset, particularly if their competitors for the next job are being seen to do exactly that." [SOSP]

"I think people often think that mission command only applies to more task oriented, operational type circumstances and as most of the Air Force potentially doesn't operate in that environment routinely because a lot of the Air Force operates on a main operating base....and they're working in a relatively constrained aviation, air worthiness construct so I don't think they

necessarily association mission command with their routine daily business. So, if they don't, they don't practice it and therefore it doesn't become second nature." [IP]

For some participants the practicalities of organisational life meant that despite individuals' both possessing a grasp of the fundamental principles of mission command and recognising the benefits of employing the concept that it was practically quite difficult to employ:

"It's [mission command] just practically difficult to do." [IP]

"Too many things get in the way of doing mission command, its often easier just to do it yourself or be very direct in what you want doing". [IP]

"I think it would be great if we could just be left to do mission command, the problem is there are just too many barriers." [SOSP]

"It's that classic theory versus reality where the theory doesn't quite match up with what happens in reality." [CWOC]

One participant indicated that the amount of bureaucratic process employed by the organisation had the effect of generally constraining free thinking which in turn impacted on the ability or opportunity to practice mission command.

"I think the, I don't think you can look at mission command in its, I'm trying to think of a good phrase for it, but in its perfect world and 'I don't think we ever will do [mission command] in the military because there are just too many things that will constrain free thinking. I don't think generally we get an awful lot of complete free reign. I mean there are so many things now that are bounded by policy, procedure, working instructions here and the likes that, in a lot of respects, you jump through a few hoops to get to where you need to

be. So, the number of opportunities that are available for or to practice mission command as a subordinate are quite limited and they're generally done as a consequence of things you've initiated yourself." [IP]

For other participants, there were varying degrees of agreement with approximately half the interviewees appearing to feel that the Chief's position was somewhat of an overstatement when it came down to the reality of organisational life, particularly at the lower levels of the organisation.

"I think that particular Chief of Air Staff was probably [inaudible 00:02:44] if he thought that it was fully embedded in the organisation, I would ... you can find evidence everywhere to show that it's not. It might be practised a little bit and people might talk about it and people might say "in this team we practice mission command" but scratch the surface and you'll find that it really isn't." [IP]

"I would say that he needs to come down and see the lower levels of the Royal Air Force and actually see how the issues and day to day running of our jobs because I think he'd be probably quite surprised." [IP]

"That's a good question. I think it's very mixed [inaudible 00:01:49] ...I reckon I've experienced certainly a gap from how we like to think of ourselves and how we like to think that we do it and how we do it." [IP]

"Very little. I would say that in many cases there is significant interference with the how. And an unhealthy obsession with detail at the high levels, which is simply not required." [IP]

"But it also depends if their boss lets them get on with it." [SOSP]

One interviewee then went on to propose that one of the issues facing the concept was that individuals either did not understand it sufficiently beyond the basic tenets

to recognise the overarching philosophy behind mission command or were actively trying to block the concept:

“In principle I think everyone understands it. The problem is, it’s ruined by individuals who effectively either don’t believe in mission command or don’t understand how to practice mission command properly. I think we all know the long screwdriver.” [IP]

Similarly, several other interviewees suggested that even when the doctrine was fully understood there was still a definite gap between knowing the theory (i.e. comprehension) and employing it in practice:

“I think the concept is fully understood. I don’t think it is enacted and even at the one-star level, from just a conversation I had today is that there’s a lot of scrutiny and a lot of classic, long handled screwdriver activity that goes on even after the [Inaudible 0:06:05]. I certainly find that in my daily activity today. So, you’re given a certain amount of space, but not enough to actually constitute mission command. It’s do what you can, but always come back to me.”

“There’s lots of evidence to demonstrate, if you run any work unit within the Air Force or even the Army, anywhere really, that demonstrates that it’s not that widely practised, [even] if it is well understood.” [IP]

“... I reckon I’ve experienced certainly a gap from how we like to think that we do it and how we do it.” [IP]

Finally, some participants questioned the totality of the statement with regard to the various contexts within which the organisation operates thereby suggesting that the extent to which mission command was embedded was to some degree dependent on the nature of the context within which individuals find themselves:

“Mission command is fully embedded in everything that we do. Oh dear, I think it’s a bit of a ‘depends answer’ for that. Is he talking peace time in a staff environment? Is he talking in the training environment? Is he talking in phase one, phase two? Is he talking in war fighting headquarters, training or is he talking war fighting on ops?” [IP]

“It varies, it depends. It’s not fully embedded but also its not totally ignored, I have seen some or experienced mission command but maybe not as much or often as the Chief seems to think.” [IP]

“Day-to-day yes, particularly on operations, but not in terms of major changes, for example I can make a change to an exercise but I can’t remove the sword drill as the seniors have visibility of this, even though the value of a nice parade with swords is far less than the value of spending more time developing their leadership skills.” [IP]

The impact of personality was also deemed to play a role in addition to context suggesting that some individuals are more comfortable in some contexts than others.

“I would say that and the personality of the individual employing the concept to some extent, and I think that the policy is well understood, and I’d be surprised if people gave you definitions that were wildly different from what I’ve given you, but in practice it’s very much dependent on human nature and how comfortable individuals are in certain environments and how much risk they are personally willing to take.” [IP]

In particular it was also suggested that the nature (context) of operations, as opposed to the business space (i.e. headquarters activity) meant that individuals had to employ a form of mission command i.e. the context itself was seen to drive people more towards employing mission command:

“In my experience I think we do a form of mission command on operations, mainly because we have to, back home and...headquarters, I don't think I've ever really experienced what I would call true mission command, there are just too many barriers.” [IP]

“We do at the day-to-day tactical level, maybe not as much as such as we should, but I think we try and do it to get the job done but at the strategic level, our lords and masters, I don't see it happening there, they look downwards and inwards rather than leaving us to get on with it and looking outwards.” [SOSP]

One individual spoke about what he termed the illusion of mission command:

“I think that often people think they are doing or receiving mission command because they have been allowed to make a decision, but if you delve a bit deeper the decision is an almost given anyway, there is sometimes no opportunity to arrive at a different conclusion, it's if you like an illusion of mission command.” [SOSP]

“I think if the consequence of a decision stays local, there is no visibility beyond the unit or station, then yes, I think we do allow some freedom for our guys and girls to make decisions, the problem is if the impact goes beyond, goes onwards and upwards, if the AOC or whoever gets sight of it, then I think the boundaries get tightened, what I'm trying to say is that if the impact stops with me I try and do it, if it goes onwards and upwards then if I am honest I probably do want to keep a closer eye.” [IP]

This is a suggestion that if a decision and its outcome remain local, i.e. does not have ramifications beyond the immediate superior-subordinate relationship than there is some form of mission command in allowing the subordinate to make a decision, but if the ramifications reach further up the command chain then this would appear to

draw decision making in a similar direction i.e. up the command chain. Of note, at no time did any individual, either during the interview stage or any of the workshops facilitated by the researcher, agree that mission command as they understood it had become fully embedded within everyday organisational life as required by the doctrine despite a general consensus that 'in principle' the idea/concept/philosophy was one to be encouraged. At best individuals perceived the concept to be somewhat context dependant with some evidence to suggest it was more prevalent in the operational space (subsequently used to inform theoretical sampling of individuals with recent operational experience) and at worst individuals felt that they had experienced very little in way of mission command in their Service careers to date. Notwithstanding the ability to describe the basic principles, interviewees were asked at various stages throughout the interview what benefits they believed the employment mission command could bring to the organisation. Of note, rather than focus on task related benefits (i.e. ability to increase operational tempo et cetera), the majority of participants when talking about the benefits of employing such a leadership style tended to focus on the motivational aspects of the process i.e. the impact on the individual rather than the task. Overall, the analysis revealed that almost without exception participants were able to demonstrate a fundamental grasp of the main tenets of mission command and there was an almost universal acknowledgement that it remained a valid concept although a definite sense of the practicalities of organisational life getting in the way also started to emerge and this is explored in the next chapter.

5.5 Summary

The data reveals that participants disagree to a greater or lesser extent with statement that mission command is fully embedded in every aspect of what we do although there is evidence emerging to suggest that it is more likely to be encountered on Operations (i.e. a high tempo critical environment but that this may be by necessity rather than choice. There is also a definite sense that there are just too many barriers and these will need to be explored in the next section along with the suggestion that a lack of willingness to take risk is one of the main barriers to mission command and in particular decentralised decision making.

Chapter 6

THEORY DEVELOPMENT

6.1 Introduction.

Having identified a general consensus amongst RAF personnel that the underlying philosophy of mission command had yet to be fully embedded within the organisation's day-to-day leadership behaviours, and acknowledging individuals' perceptions as to the varying extent to which it was embedded in organisational life, the researcher then turned his attention to exploring the potential reasons as to why the organisation appeared to find it difficult to facilitate the transition from doctrine into everyday organisational practice. Consequently, this next section explores participants' own experiences and perceptions with regards to the practice of mission command together with the moderating impact of various organisational and environmental contexts that the organisation operates within. In doing so, it develops the main findings of the study and builds the theoretical basis to explain why the gap between theory and practice identified in the initial phases of the analysis exists.

6.2 Open Coding & Development of Initial Concepts

As anticipated when employing grounded theory, the initial pass of the data generated an abundance of codes consisting of trigger words and short sentences which the researcher began to assign both descriptive and conceptual labels. Then, by identifying links and similarities between the raw data, the codes were further refined to reveal 17 primary concepts with regards to participants' perceptions of the organisation's ability to employ the mission command 'as espoused' in practice:

- (i) Just the Basics
- (ii) Going Through the Motions
- (iii) In the Real World
- (iv) Seen as a Process
- (v) More of a Mindset
- (vi) Focus on Task
- (vii) The Long Screwdriver
- (viii) Devil for Detail
- (ix) Lack of Coaching
- (x) Confidence not Trust
- (xi) Appraisal and Promotion
- (xii) Culture of Blame
- (xiii) Fear of Failure
- (xiv) Allergic to Risk
- (xv) No Choice
- (xvi) Explicit Intent
- (xvii) In it Together

6.3 Axial Coding and Development of Categories

During axial coding, which is the additional coding step introduced within the Straussian approach to help focus the coding and identify relationships and linkages, the 17 sub-categories in turn led to the identification of 4 main themes or categories that appeared to capture the participants' main concerns with regards to their experience of mission command in practice, namely:

- (i) Knowledge not Know How

- (ii) Task not People
- (iii) The Ethical Egoist
- (iv) Different on Ops

The remainder of this chapter details each of main themes or categories that emerged during the axial coding stage together with the concepts that underpin them with reference to the various data sources (i.e. interviews, workshops and discussion sessions). An example of the coding and data reduction for the first category (Knowledge not Know-how) is included at Appendix D.

6.3.1 Knowledge not Know-how.

“I get it, but I’m not sure I fully understand it.” [CWOC]

The first main category ‘Knowledge not Know-how’ refers to a perception that emerged from a broad cross-section of participants that while the organisation appeared able to embed some level of practical knowledge regarding of core principles of mission command through its formal training syllabus, it also appeared to find it difficult to subsequently develop an individual’s ability to apply this knowledge in practice. The category itself is drawn from 5 sub-categories, namely:

- (i) Just the Basics.
- (ii) Going Through the Motions.
- (iii) In the real World
- (iv) Seen as a Process.
- (v) More of a Mindset.

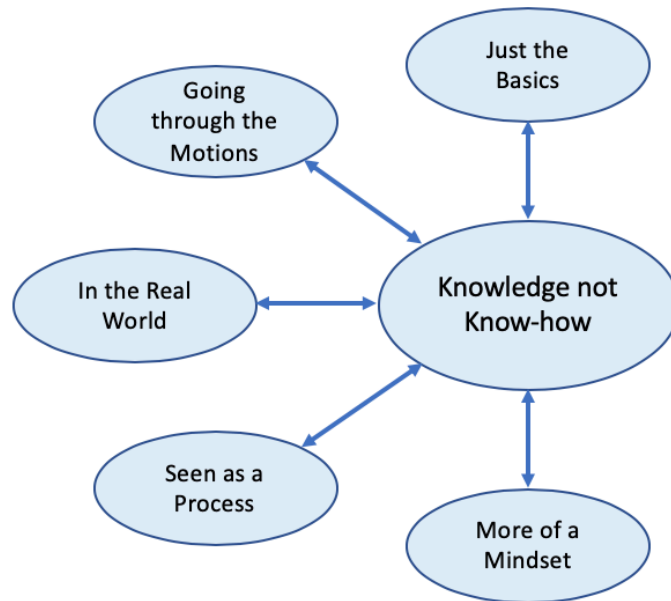


Fig 6.1 The category of Knowledge not Know-how

6.3.1.1 Just the Basics

One of the main concerns to emerge from the data was the perception that often a brief introduction to the basic theory of mission command in the classroom was deemed by the organisation to have met its objective of embedding the concept within day-to-day organisational life. However, in reality participants' own experiences indicated that its application was much more complex than the ability to follow a prescribed set of procedures as taught in the classroom. For some participants part of the issue lay with the fact that the syllabus as taught in the classroom provided just a basic overview of the concept without any real depth to the underlying concepts such as empowerment and motivation and how the concept worked in the real world. A particular concern being the perception that some personnel often assumed a basic knowledge of the concept was sufficient to allow them to apply it in practice for example:

"I suppose the doctrine is fine, but to me it is just the basics." [SOSP]

"I think as an officer...the lesson[s] we get taught, it's not massively in mission command, it's very basic tenets and theory." [IP]

"You get an overview, but there's a lot more that sits underneath and I'm not sure people realise that." [IP]

"To me mission command involves a number of wider concepts that you need to understand before you can apply it, the problem is we list these concepts but don't develop or explore them in any detail." [IP]

"It's like many skills or aptitudes, you can read about, pass the exam but it doesn't mean you can actually apply it in practice." [IP]

"I think a lot of people think that they understand it [mission command] although I am not sure that the ability to describe it automatically means that you can apply it." [IP]

"Knowing about it doesn't mean you can do it." [OSIC]

For others the concern was not so much how the theory was taught but how it was developed in practice:

"I think it's [the doctrine] well taught and the theory is one side of it, it's the practical application of it that is the problem." [IP]

"We get taught what it is in theory, but not how to use it in reality." [IP]

"The key thing for me is that as an organisation we're pretty good at developing the...theory [of mission command] but pretty poor at learning how to use it properly." [SOSP]

“I think getting the understanding across to people for what it [actually] is, is something that I don’t think that we do probably enough work on.” [IP]

There was also a concern that the way in which the doctrine was presented as authoritative policy rather than endorsed guidance:

“It’s a classic case of ‘you are to do mission command’, and it’s a bit like saying ‘you are to be a motivational and inspiring leader’.” [SOSP]

“You can’t get people to do mission command by telling them to do mission command, a bit like that thinking and winning, you have to get the conditions right first.” [OSIC]

6.3.1.2 Going Through the Motions

With regards to the practical application of mission command, the way in which the concept was developed during the various practical leadership exercises conducted by the FTE’s was perceived to result in personnel just ‘going through the motions’ of mission command, again without fully understanding what they were doing:

“We try and teach mission command but most of the time it’s just going through the motion[s].” [IP]

“There is a lot more to it than just knowing about the various aspects that are presented. But this isn’t always apparent, it’s a case of ‘do this’ [i.e. follow the doctrine] and you are doing mission command.” [SOSP]

“I think the way we train it [mission command] is quite linear. By that I mean it’s like a step by step process you have to go through, tick off a few steps and you are doing mission command but it’s much more fluid than that.” [IP]

“The emphasis [in training] is on knowing it, rather than doing it. Often the fact you have given a basic intent is sufficient to get the tick in the box that you are doing mission command.” [IP]

“It’s [mission command] a bit like jumping through hoops. They [junior officers on completion of initial training] can repeat the tenets, they can say the words and go through the actions but that’s about it.” [IP]

This view was reinforced by a number of current and former IOT leadership instructors who viewed the practical application of mission command within the initial officer training environment as being essentially being learning by rote. Furthermore, some also highlighted that while the practical leadership syllabus on IOT was adapted to include the mission command terminology, the exercises themselves were often insufficiently flexible to allow mission command to actually take place:

“Yes, the cadets can brief an intent, yes they can say that they will leave the how up to the 2 i/c or whoever, yes they can allocate resource and allow others to make decisions but it’s because they have to, its expected, not because they want to...I’m not sure they know why they are applying it.” [IP]

“It’s akin to how we assess functional leadership, we need to check the box about looking after the needs of the individual which really means binding them to the team and vision, but you can’t do that in a 60-minute exercise task, so we adjust it to making sure that they have a drink of water, that gets the tick in the [individual needs] box. That’s a resourcing issue not a motivational assessment. But the cadets think that is what leading the individual is all about, it’s the same with mission command.” [OSIC]

“It’s [mission command] actually very difficult to do in the training environment, I think the best we can hope for is some form of demonstration that they understand the principles, that they capture the main points, where

we struggle is allowing them to see the wider benefits, how it actually can increase all that stuff about motivation.” [OSIC]

“I remember when mission command first came in to the syllabus and we developed the Exercise Mil Aid, it was all about following the steps and giving intent and that good stuff but the exercise was so scripted there was not a lot of room to actually allow the cadets to practice mission command and as soon as anything went wrong the staff had to get it back on track so that it didn’t interfere with the rest of the exercise. So, we said we were training mission command because we had been told we had to, but to be honest I don’t think we were.” [IP]

“The last thing you want on a training exercise is a lot of cadets going off and showing initiative as the whole thing soon gets out of hand. We’re still trying to teach them basic command skills so the exercises are tightly scripted, we might say there is an element of mission command but in truth, probably not.” [IP]

“I don't think in this establishment⁴¹ we have the time currently to fully let every cadet have a go at practising mission command, which would then give a better... they'd be trained to our level, they'd understand it, they'd have actually used it in a safe environment.” [OSIC]

For one former instructor this meant that the application of mission command in the training environment was more in line with a command and control approach to task accomplishment than a leadership approach:

“They [officer cadets] say what their intent and their 2-ups intent is, give the what and why and tick all the [mission command] boxes, but then go on to control the exercise because that’s what they are actually assessed against,

⁴¹ Officer and Aircrew Cadet Training Unit

so in effect their early experience of mission command is actually a form of task command and control, a very narrow version of tightly controlled mission command if you like.” [IP]

A number of participants also highlighted that in the view the only way you can learn about mission command is to actually apply the concept away from the training environment i.e. in the real world:

“The only way they can actually learn how to apply it is from experience, experience of leading, which is very hard to do in the formal training environment when you are leading peers in an assessed task.” [IP]

“Most people are taught the definition, and could probably reel off stuff like intent, trust, 2-up, what not how...but do they actually get it? I’m not sure, I know I struggled with it. I think the key point is that the only way you can actually learn it is by doing it, and I don’t think the environment here [i.e. Initial Officer Training] allows you to do that. I think we put trust in the fact that once they leave here they get the opportunity to put their learning into practice, but often that doesn’t happen.” [IP]

6.3.1.3 In the Real World

Having identified concerns over how the concept was taught and developed within the formal training establishments, participants also raised concerns with regards to the extent to which individuals were subsequently able to apply mission command in their day-to-day organisational roles, particularly during their early careers, and the potential impact this had on reinforcing a management/process approach to mission command as opposed to the leadership approach. One of the key principles of the Professional Military Development (PMD) syllabus that all personnel are exposed to during their careers is the emphasis placed on allowing individuals to contextualise

the knowledge or learning they receive on their formal training courses in the workplace between each formal training event. Consequently, a particular shortcoming was deemed to be the fact that having learnt about mission command in the classroom, there was a distinct lack of formal development in the wider Service with regards to the ability to use it 'in the real world' where it was perceived that the real learning took place:

"It's not particularly well taught in terms of actually applying it, in terms of learning by doing, that's how most people learn about it [mission command]."
[IP]

"I think they [officer cadets] get the bog standard, I say 'bog standard,' the basic information when they first go through training..., but I think we tend to forget that then and don't develop it enough as we probably should do once they get out into the wider Service." [OSIC]

"You can't learn it in the classroom or running around the training area, it's not like something like map reading, you can only really learn it by doing it in the real world, seeing how it works in real life, but I don't think we focus enough on that, allowing people to develop in the workplace, I know I certainly didn't." [IP]

"Do you remember the Red Blob? The diagram by [name] that showed most learning comes on the job, when you put into practice and contextualise what you've learnt on the various courses, the thing is we don't do this as much as we should, we're too busy just getting things done." [OSIC]

"...from our perspective we kind of give that basic knowledge, we give that basic theoretical knowledge and that's all well and good, yeah, I can read it on a piece of paper, I can see that it's developed throughout time and this is how we should be using it. What I think the gap lies is the fact that when we

go on operations, when we go on exercising, that development isn't there from that perspective." [IP]

"...even though you might have been taught it in some sort of career course unless you're practicing it on a daily basis, it doesn't become second nature, it doesn't become ingrained in the way you operate." [IP]

"I'm not sure at what point we train people to do that [empower] because I've never come across anywhere where we actually get people to practice what it feels⁴² like doing mission command." [IP]

"I think we talk about it far more than we maybe practise it, or certainly effectively practise it. I think we talk about, "Oh, this is a great example of mission command," and actually in terms of pure mission command, in terms of the pure tenets and the freedoms and the willingness of the commander to let his juniors get on and do stuff, I'm not sure that it always matches up." [OSIC]

"The number of opportunities that are available for or to practice mission command as a subordinate are quite limited and they're generally done as a consequence of things you've initiated yourself." [IP]

A key point reinforced by several respondents is that individuals can only learn mission command by applying it and reflecting on it when undertaking 'real world' tasks however the emphasis appeared to be on the how the task went rather than the extent to which mission command was employed:

"To me the best way to learn about leadership is to do it, and then reflect on it, get feedback, and think about the so what in terms of how people felt. This is something we don't do, yes we debrief how did the task go, but often

⁴² Note the use of the word feel i.e. an emotion rather than a process.

we neglect to ask how did it feel. Hence a task that goes well but leaves people feeling...I don't know...that they had no say tends to be viewed externally as one that went well rather than failing to achieve a task but people felt really involved. I think you can learn more about mission command from the latter." [IP]

6.3.1.4 Seen as a Process

The next category 'Seen as a Process' follows on from the previous category and refers to a perception amongst participants that having been exposed to just the basics of mission command during their formal training interventions and subsequent lack of practical development and opportunity to contextualise their new-found knowledge in the work place, resulted in personnel adopting the practical view that mission command was nothing more than a management or basic delegation tool. This in turn resulted in the concept being only applied in its narrowest sense (i.e. as a relational empowerment tool wherein the boundaries are kept quite tight) when facing a specific organisational difficulty (such as an inability to communicate with a team) rather than being adopted as a wider leadership philosophy or culture. For some participants the root of this issue lay with the way in which the doctrine itself was often conceptualised as a linear step by step process:

"I think the big thing for me is a fact many people assume mission command is a process, a bit like [a] tick list, you know like SMEAC⁴³ which you use to get a particular job done." [IP]

"I think most people view it as a sort of process to get the job done when you can't do it yourself." [SOSP]

⁴³ Acronym for Situation, Mission, Execution, Ask any questions, Check understanding – a basic framework or SOP for briefing a team that is taught during initial officer training.

“We use it when we have to, like most leadership tools but I think most people prefer to have some say in what their juniors are doing.” [CWOC]

For some participants their experience of mission command was that it was often used as nothing more than a basic delegation tool:

“People will say the words mission command but what they’re actually meaning half the time is delegation or just basic delegation and if you actually ask them to fully tell me what it’s all about, they wouldn’t be able to tell you.” [IP]

“I think people say when they’ve delegated a task, no matter how effectively that’s been delegated or no matter what firm constraints and parameters have been put on that delegated task, people think that that is mission command.” [IP]⁴⁴

“Delegation is an important part, and I think most people are able to delegate, but there is a difference between just allowing someone to make a decision to speed things up, which is how most people think of it [mission command], and allowing someone a much wider freedom to achieve an objective or task as they see fit, which is how I certainly feel it is meant to be used.” [SOSP]

“I’ve had bosses who have allowed me to make decisions, but they tend to be relatively straight forward ones, ones that have little impact, for more serious decisions they tend to want to be kept in the loop and effectively have a say on what I decide”. [IP]

For one participant the use of mission command as a process meant that often the latitude for subordinates to make decisions was kept very tight, contrary to what the

⁴⁴ Link to RAF Leadership conference survey that 80% said they did mission command but only 20% said they experienced mission command.

doctrine espoused i.e. that the boundaries within a subordinate can act should be kept as wide as possible:

“For me, and I include myself in this and am pretty sure the others will agree, I think the problem is with mission command that our default is to start with fairly narrow boundaries and unless there is an overriding reason to widen them, like if you have no alternative, that’s how we tend to apply [it]. However, what I believe we are trying to achieve, in order to develop people, what we need to do is to start with wide boundaries and narrow them as situation dictates, but this is where the risk lies.” [IP]

6.3.1.5 More of a Mindset

In addition to holding concerns about mission command being viewed as a process resulting in personnel just going through the motions and saying the right words, a number of interviewees, having highlighted this concern, went on to explain that in their view in order to embed the concept it should in fact be seen more as what they termed a ‘mindset’ rather than a process, something which appeared to be missing from the taught syllabus and something perceived to be lacking in most people’s understanding of the concept:

“The lightbulb moment for me was when I realised, in fact when somebody told me, it’s actually more of a mindset⁴⁵ with the tenets being there for guidance rather than a rigid framework. It’s all about empowering and willing to take risk I’m not sure everybody gets that.” [IP]

“It’s a mindset and a culture as well, it’s a cultural issue.” [IP]

“You need to understand it’s much more than just following the words...it’s a way of doing things rather than doing things in a particular way.” [SOSP]

⁴⁵ Mindset as a philosophical stance codified in the mind.

“There’s not enough emphasis placed on the implicit aspects, it’s like most of the training we do, a kind of ‘do this and you are leading’ approach when in fact there is a lot more to it than just following or saying the right words, it’s a form of leadership that grows over time.” [OSIC]

When asked to explain further what individuals meant by the term ‘mindset’ the following explanations were offered:

“I suppose a mindset is a way of doing things without thinking too much about it, it’s not a case of thinking ‘oh I’m going to do mission command today’ but something that on reflection you realise you were doing mission command.” [IP]

“It means it’s embedded in everything you do, yes you set the boundaries, but wherever possible you empower, so it just happens almost without realising it.” [IP]

“It’s just like a type of culture, the classic way things are done round here, rather than something that you use when you have no other option.” [IP]

The adoption of an incorrect mindset was also raised by a number of participants on the SOSP when discussing the application of mission command who questioned the extent to which the concept was used to develop people rather than complete a task:

“Most people view it as a sort of I can’t be there so I have to trust you to do it, that sort of thing. Not many see it as something they can use to develop their people”. [SOSP]

“In my experience we use it by default, and by that it’s something that we do when other alternatives or options are not available, and because of that I

don't think we feel comfortable. Yes, will let you make a decision, but only if I can't make it myself." [SOSP]

In doing so, this could be argued to place the emphasis on mission command as a task accomplishment tool rather than a relationship development tool.

"It's more than just allowing an immediate subordinate to make a decision, which is what most people think means they are doing mission command, it should be a culture, the biggest barrier comes from the top and the need to know and control, when senior officers get involved in the day to day, so yes I think we do some form of mission command in allowing juniors to make a decision, but we don't do mission command as an organisation as there is a lot of control over what we do." [IP]

"[There is a] a tendency to jump in and take control rather than allow the experience to be of benefit to the individual concerned also asked the question how is it assessed that something is not going well is in relation to the outcome or in relation to the way the individual is executing the task which may not be in accordance with the commander's view? If anything goes wrong, they have tendencies to rather than the reinforce the what and why, it's to start stipulating the how." [IP]

"I think that if you expect mission command to work, people need to be used to empowerment and trust and unless we're practicing that on a daily basis in our routine work, whatever that work may be, if we're not practicing empowerment down to the lower levels [sounds like 06:35] and trust then mission command will not be second nature because that's what mission command is, it's empowering down to the lowest levels [sounds like 06:43] and trust, in simple terms." [IP]

6.3.1.6 Discussion

In summary, the category 'Knowledge not Knowhow' arises from participants' concerns that while the organisation appears able to instil a basic knowledge of the principles of mission command through its formal leadership development programmes, the way in which it is practical application is taught and a subsequent lack of on-job development results in the concept being utilised as a specific management SOP to overcome a particular organisational difficulty, rather than a more general leadership mindset or philosophy to motivate and empower. Consequently, while service personnel appear able to provide a relatively straightforward description of the approach as described in the doctrine, the data suggests that the way this is interpreted into organisational behaviour is influenced by individuals applying the concept primarily as a formal management process rather than a more flexible organisational development tool. In other words, there is a general perception emerging from the data that while individuals appear to possess knowledge of the motivational aspects of the theory, they often lack the know-how of experience.

6.3.2 Task not People

"There's too much emphasis on task, not enough on people." [SOSP]

The next main category 'Task not People' presents what many participants perceived as an overriding focus on task accomplishment within the organisation, often at the expense of a focus on people. The category arose from data gathered either in response from a direct question from the researcher asking what they perceived the

main focus of the organisation to be or as a result of the interviewee highlighting the task related nature of the organisation in response to being asked what they perceived the main barriers to mission command to be. The category itself comprises of 6 related sub-categories:

- (i) Focus on Task
- (ii) The Long Screwdriver
- (iii) Devil for Detail
- (iv) Lack of Coaching
- (v) Confidence not Trust



Fig 6.2 – The category Task not People and related sub-categories.

6.3.2.1 Focus on Task

There was a general sense across all participants that the main focus or priority for superiors at all levels within the organisation, from the strategic to the tactical, was on achieving objective task outputs rather than the on-job development of

subordinates. In other words, despite the doctrine's emphasis of the role of the leader in developing the leadership competencies of their subordinates, the main effort of a superior appeared to be geared towards operating the organisation in order to meet their specific targets rather than developing the organisation in order to deal with future complexity:

"I think the problem is we put a premium on the task, irrespective of the context. At the end of the day it's all about getting the job done, and despite what the AP says achieving the task is about an objective, a measurable outcome and I don't think we include our people in this, we don't see developing our people as being the main task, and maybe it should be." [IP]

"You're definitely task orientated, you have to get it done. You don't cut corners, but you definitely just, you're task orientated." [IP]

"I'd love to spend more time developing my people, but at the end of the day it's the task that gets noticed, did you do X, Y and Z as promised, on time and to a decent standard. That's what is expected." [CWOC]

"I think we are still too task driven. I think we would rather the task got done quickly and exactly as we want, and the individual learnt nothing, than the task didn't go quite so well, you know, you learnt something, so it's not about growing the people, it's about getting the task done." [IP]

"If I'm honest at the forefront of my mind is getting the task done, if I can spend time developing the guys and girls great, but most of the time I have to get the job done first". [CWOC]

One of the potential factors perceived to influence an individual's willingness to employ mission command was a sense that if a particular task was not completed

first time, on time, then a lack of capacity to subsequently complete it to a satisfactory standard would reflect negatively on the superior:

“We don’t have the time to let people make mistakes, at least I don’t, otherwise I am always playing catch up.” [IP]

“There isn’t a lot of spare time, there isn’t a lot of resilience in the system so when you task⁴⁶ work out, it needs to be done and when it comes down to a group leader, and I mean group with a small G so a team leader, a group leader, who’s got a bunch of people, he may be reticent to empower them and then walk away and expect them just to get the job done because he knows if they don’t get the job done right, he won’t have time to recover that and then it’ll look bad on him.” [IP]

“I am nervous letting the team just crack on without keeping a close eye, because if what they do is not what you think that the boss wants, then often I don’t have the spare time to fix it, so the temptation is to do it yourself.” [IP]

Likewise, the knock-on effect of failing to achieve one’s own task on other tasks that were linked or related was raised as a concern which also meant that any opportunity to learn was potentially lost:

“It would be great if we could let people make mistakes and learn but often my task links to someone else’s and if I don’t get it done on time there is a knock-on effect, and it’s me who is seen to be holding things up. If we make mistakes and still finish on time great, let’s learn from that, but that doesn’t happen very often, the boss gets annoyed and you’re onto the next thing without asking ‘right, what went wrong there?’” [IP]

⁴⁶ i.e. delegate work to subordinates

“It would be great to have the time to let everyone experiment and try different ways, but if you do that it adds more pressure on you, you have your job to do and your boss expects it to be done.” [IP]

For some the focus on task was deemed to start even before individuals commenced their Service careers during the initial recruitment and selection process for officers and aircrew:

“We’re looking for people who can get the job done, fly a plane, fix a plane, run an admin cell. We have 3 or so days to look at them, and one of the main areas we assess during the [selection] process is can they direct a team, make themselves heard, and think on their feet. So there’s no, to my mind there’s no emotional intelligence aspect or whatever can be used to select leadership, its can they direct and control under pressure”. [OSIC]

“I don’t think I was selected for my leadership abilities, it was my ability or aptitude to that got me through OASC.” [IP]

The focus on task was also deemed to play a major role during an individual’s initial training:

“We don’t do leadership here (Initial Officer Training) we can’t, cadets can’t have a vision, and inspire and motivate and all that good leadership stuff. The other cadets do what they say because they have to. Don’t get me wrong, the skills they get are important as they will mostly be junior commanders pretty soon after they leave here but leadership, maybe we should rename the syllabus the CLM syllabus and emphasise C and M aspects?” [OSIC]

Finally, some participants highlighted that people development was not seen as a core task for a superior and proposed that in order for the full spectrum of mission command to occur that the organisation should look to making it so:

“If you want to develop your people change it into a task, one that is assessed, reported on and monitored, and I don’t just mean the stats, and I am pretty sure you would see a lot more people focussed behaviour.” [IP]

“You build your reputation getting the job done, not on bringing your people on, so we may need to think about changing that.” [SOSP]

“The answers pretty simple, bring in 360-degree reporting and make people development something that individuals are fully assessed against.” [CWOC]

6.3.2.2 The Long-Screwdriver

One phrase that was often used when talking about the emphasis on task was the term long-screwdriver which is often utilised in the military to denote excessive micromanagement by a superior. The phrase is believed to have originally been coined by the US Army to describe the perceived high-level interference of President Johnson in their conduct of the Vietnam War. This category therefore describes a number of participants’ perceptions of excessive interference from the higher levels of the organisation.

“We are not really left to get on with it ...there's quite a few micromanagers with long screw drivers.” [IP]

“...even at the one-star level, from just a conversation I had today, is that there's a lot of scrutiny and a lot of classic, long handled screwdriver activity that goes on.” [IP]

“...I think we all know the long screwdriver approach.” [IP]

“Micro-management is an ongoing issue.” [SOSP]

“I think ACSC issues all its graduates with a long screwdriver, the closer your career is managed⁴⁷, the longer the screwdriver.” [SOSP]

“In my experience the tighter the control at the top, this is felt at the bottom.” [SOSP]

This approach to micromanaging was in turn perceived to increase the levels of frustration of those operating at the lower levels of the organisation who found their own initiative gradually eroded until such time as they start to anticipate high-level interference from above before making their own decisions and in effect become what one participant termed the dependent child i.e. they were constantly seeking assurance from high levels as to the veracity of their own decision-making process which in turn incurred a vicious circle by increasingly pulling the commander down the decision-making hierarchy. There is a plethora of evidence from the management literature to suggest that excessive micromanagement of subordinates by superiors typically results in a degradation of overall organisational performance with individuals becoming both frustrated and disengaged. This again was reflected in some participants observations of working for such individuals:

“I had a boss in the Falklands who was just into everything, the classic kind of ‘you can make the decisions, but run them by me first’. And this had a number of effects, first of all [we] got pissed off and secondly everything just... just

⁴⁷ Implied reference to a fast track – while no fast track officially exists there is a general perception within the Service that the closer your career is managed, the higher you are likely to advance within the organisation.

became so slow. In the end we would just ask him straight out what he wants to do? So, no initiative, no motivation, and I was pretty glad when my time was up.” [OSIC]

“We had one boss at [unit name] who was on detachment and we had been given some money to decorate the Mess. But rather than let the Mess committee get on with it and come up with ideas he was reaching back in [from] theatre and getting involved in every single aspect even down to the shade of paint that we were planning to use. I think everyone found this very frustrating and in time a few of them were heard to mutter ‘why don’t we just leave it for him to do when he gets back’. So, the initiative, good ideas I suppose motivation just out the window, it was his project, his ideas and you are just there to enact them. And you know what, he’s now gone on to very high level.” [SOSP]

“I’ve worked for several bosses who weren’t leaders but that didn’t stop them going onwards and upwards, probably because they made sure the job got done.” [IP]

“You end up becoming, what’s the term the psychologists use, the dependant child, yeah that’s it, it gets to the point that you just refer back up the chain because you know any decision you make will be questioned.” [IP]

“It sucks the initiative right out of you, there’s no point trying anything different if it’s not the boss’s way, so yes I do keep my head down and just do what he wants, if I’m working for a boss like that.” [CWOC]

This also raises the issue that whilst the senior may have a semi-legitimate reason for overseeing and directing a task due to the fact that ultimately, he or she has responsibility for the outcome, they run the risk of not paying attention to the issues that arise at the level at which they should be operating. One individual was keen to

point out that the occasion he felt most able to do mission command (and in turn facilitate innovation) when he was left to get on with the job with very little oversight, i.e. the interference from the higher levels was removed although this was primarily due to circumstance rather than deliberate intent:

“So, in terms of developing staff, my sort of guiding direction to them was as long as it didn’t cost me money or it was illegal, try it. Go and do stuff, get involved, if you stagnate you die and you just get left behind. So that encouraged a whole process off people just trying something different. So as long as it wasn’t illegal and I hadn’t funded for it, it was okay. So we had a great process of innovation. So that was just an example of where it could go right. I wouldn’t think I’m brilliant, but someone had the capacity to do it, because I was an independent unit effectively, with very little oversight, which gave me the space in which to operate and develop lots of different operational techniques which are still used today.” [IP]

While some spoke of the fact that the requirement for a superior to take corrective action in the event a task goes wrong or is incomplete impacts on their own capacity in a climate of limited resource i.e. a superior would rather get it right first time through being directly involved than risk having to re-run the task having left it up to a subordinate due to the perception that they do not have time to play catch up:

“If it [the task] goes wrong I don’t have time to re-set and start again.” [SOSP]

“Too often I have had to get involved because of deadlines and issues and thought I might as well have done this myself.” [IP]

6.3.2.3 Devil for Detail

Closely related to the concept of the long screwdriver is the category ‘Devil for Detail’.

A number of mid-ranking participants (i.e. Sqn Ldr to Gp Capt) highlighted that in

addition to micromanagement they often found the higher levels of the organisation exerted a pull for information which in turn limited their ability to allow their subordinates to have a free reign in how they went about achieving their tasks. In effect there was an expectation that when asked, they would know the detail of where each task was how it was progressing:

“I think [that] the Air Force does tend to be uncomfortable with mission command because they’re [i.e. leaders] not able to know from minute to minute, what is happening beneath them.” [IP]

“My last 2-up⁴⁸ was a devil for detail, to the extent that my 1-up admitted that he often had dreams or rather nightmares in which he was strangling his boss, such was the stress it was causing, this constant pull for information. This in turn had an impact on him, he kept asking me for the detail, often preceded by an apology, but it meant that the 2-ups’ demands worked their way down to me and my colleagues.” [IP]

A similar story was told by a current Station Commander (OF5 – Gp Capt):

“So, I would say that in many cases there is significant interference with the how. And an unhealthy obsession with detail at the high levels, which is simply not required. I could give some specific examples from the last month, both concerning recent routine activity and operational activity. Where in my view Air Command is poking its nose into things that I think it just does not need to. Then trying to tell me exactly how to deliver the outputs I’m supposed to deliver.” [IP]

⁴⁸ 2-up refers to 2 layers of hierarchy up the organisation i.e. your bosses’ boss.

When asked why superiors appeared to have this insatiable appetite for detail some senior participants went on to suggest that the information pull and demand for detail often emanated at the very top of the organisation:

“I think there's multiple reasons. There's top down pressure even from a political level. So, I spent my last two years PJHQ⁴⁹, the amount of detail that had to be passed up to the political level about tactical considerations was phenomenal. If you're having to do that in the political sphere then clearly the operational level of command is going to demand and interfere with detail that perhaps it would otherwise not do so.” [IP]

“...one of our current three stars is in that mould. He demands so much information, some of which I don't think he needs because he likes detail, he likes to dive in. The two stars that are now going in front of him for weekly, what are normal weekly briefings in the CAG⁵⁰, now go to those briefings not only with more information than they need but also with lines to take when he starts asking questions. And that is, to my mind, you're overpreparing for that. Now, that overpreparation is driven by the two-star feeling exposed because he keeps getting hammered when he doesn't know the answer when why won't the three star accept the, 'I don't know the answer because I just don't know. I'll get back to you, it's a good question' or, 'I've got half the answer, I'll get the rest to you next time', or, 'I tell you what, sir, Blogs in the corner knows this because he's my expert in this area'. And we've got so few people and yet the resource we've got is being busied preparing principals to go in front of higher-level principals and not look stupid because of the way that that higher-level principal behaves and the culture he has generated in the meetings he holds.” [IP]

⁴⁹ Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ) is the UK's tri-service headquarters from where all overseas military operations are planned and controlled

⁵⁰ CAG is a weekly meeting of VSOs and their staff at HQ.

“We had a one star drilling down, drilling passed to me and he'd come and say... Do you know about...something one of the organisations was doing...? And I would say “well no, I don't know about that”, and he would reply “well I think you should”, and what this ends up doing is making the whole chain of command more data hungry, because you've got that pressure from above, because they drilled past you, that you need to know otherwise you're going to make me look foolish, and a whole organisation can grind to a halt because of that.”[IP]

For one senior officer the issue appeared to be deeply embedded with the culture of the organisation:

“I think it's cultural and I can refer back to the various factors I've mentioned earlier in terms of I think it is cultural. It's cultural within government, my first exposure to the interface between political government and department would say it was probably at the back end of the Blair years. So, I can't speak to what it was like before then, but I think since then there has been this sort of we must control, we must have the detail to hand. We must never be caught out, not knowing something. We must always be very directive in the way that the MOD is told to deliver. Rather than just giving them, “Right that's the intent, go away and do.” [IP]

Another senior participant also highlighted that a lack of knowing what a subordinate was up to was often seen as a lack of control:

“I suppose part of it is needing to know why decisions are made. If you let some below you make a decision and then someone above you wants to know why that decision was made, the expectation is that you know the answer. Saying that you don't know and that you will get back is often perceived as you have not got a grip, you're not in control.” [IP]

This in turn was deemed to add a great deal of friction to the day-to-day running of the organisation and ultimately a slowing down of the organisational decision-making process, one of the fundamental things that the adoption mission command into British military doctrine sought to overcome. This appeared particularly evident when the pull for information started to by-pass the decision chain and there was an expectation that each level should know what exactly the level below was up to. The subsequent impact on agility and innovation was highlighted by several participants, for example:

“In an operational context, if you insist on managing detail from the highest level then you effectively fail to, or you may fail to exploit fleeting opportunities and things that are seen at the lower level, but then have to be passed up and down the chain for permission. In a business context, then I think the main risk of not doing it is that if the [Inaudible 0:04:43] are focusing on what is to my mind working level detail, then they're probably not focusing on the really big and difficult questions which can only be solved at the air rank.” [IP]

“I think our seniors have a chronic unease about not knowing what their juniors are up to at any moment in time, driven by their seniors have the same unease and this just slows everything down.” [SOSP]

One respondent also highlighted a link between obsession for detail and impact on trust while also linking it to reputational risk:

“...it's probably not that they don't understand it, but there are characters, it's character driven I think, and there's people that just cannot let go of anything and have to be involved at all stages, which is demoralising, time consuming and it just completely hampers the process, and also leads to people not trusting, it makes their performance such that they don't trust their own

decisions because they know that at any point those decision are going to be questioned and potentially countermanded. I suppose it could be that they're utter detail monsters and they just have to know all details, and it could also be a level of trust that they just, you know, yes, decisions can be made, but because they're being made in their name, they can't let go." [IP]

While several also raised concerns regarding the impact of this tight control on the Service itself, particularly with regards to motivation and innovation:

"We have a considerable difficulty holding onto people in what you might call the sort of middle ranks. So middle to senior corporal, junior sergeant, senior flight lieutenant, junior squadron leader. At the point where they even know they're competent, they know they've mastered their trade and they've been told to expect this mission command style, and then they don't get it. It's one of a number of factors that may lead people to leave." [IP]

"I recently read a report in which a VSO⁵¹, I think he was a 2-star, admitted that the ability to innovate was moribund within the service, and another admitted that innovation was not embedded in the culture, it wasn't in the core of the organisation." [SOSP]

6.3.2.4 Lack of Coaching

There appears to be common agreement in the current leadership literature that coaching is an essential part of the leader's repertoire (e.g. Day 2000; Marion & Uhl-Bien 2001; Yukl & Becker 2006) and this is also captured to some extent in the current doctrine which acknowledges the role of the superior in coaching a subordinate although it tends to use the terms coaching and mentoring synonymously (e.g. *'Leadership development is generally considered to consist of experience,*

⁵¹ VSO – Very Senior Officer i.e. 2* and above

mentoring/coaching and theory' AP7001, p.7-4). However, the data reveals the perception that within the organisation a coaching skillset is not believed to be employed effectively, if at all. When participants were asked about their experiences of coaching the following comments were received:

"I'm not sure we do coaching." [OSIC]

"It's [coaching] been very sparingly used in my experience. There have been a couple of times where it's happened from one of my senior officers. They've not really engaged with it but they have attempted it." [IP]

"I don't think I've ever been coached, but then again I suppose I haven't coached either." [CWOC]

"I don't know if individuals see it as a core task for them." [IP]

"I thought I was a coach because of my instructional background, but when I did my certificate course, I found out I was definitely not a coach." [IP]

"There is a definite lack of coaching. [The] Problem is we often talk about coaching and mentoring as if they are the same but they're not, we do the mentoring bit but not the coaching bit." [OSIC]

For some this perceived lack of coaching was one of the key elements missing across the organisation's leadership development programmes:

"I think we need to coach more, it comes down to developing the fundamental responsibilities you have as a leader." [IP]

"You can't expect people to be able to coach if you don't develop it in the first place, it's not something in my view that you pick up as you go along. You need

to understand the principles first and then use it on a regular basis, not just something you do occasionally.” [IP]

While some individuals did not relate directly to coaching, they did perceive a lack of feedback (which is arguably key role when employing the ‘boss as coach’ role) to play an important part in limiting the development of the ability to employ mission command:

“In my experience, it [the lack of mission command] comes down to feedback. This is where I think the danger is and it’s something I’ve had to consciously re-educate myself. My branch being quite closely aligned to aircrew, the feedback is it revolves around the critical aspects of it, as in you would take somebody on for a session in the live environment and afterwards the feedback might well be, right you did this, don't do that again...as a result, that influences the mindset all the way through and therefore, we are quick to criticise, less quick to support and empower.”

“We’re quick to point out mistakes in feedback and tell them what to do right, rather than get them to reflect and come up with their own answers which is what a leader should be doing.” [SOSP]

“But also, but not about, again not just how the task was achieved, but what were the other benefits, did the people involved with it [the task] grow... did you get anything for them and from them?” [IP]

Finally, some participants did highlight the value of working for a superior or line manager who was able to employ a coaching style:

“When you've got a really strong relationship or a leader who has got a coaching style, you see more openness, more connections, more reactions to the flavour of the day or the vibe of the day.” [IP]

“The best thing a boss ever said to me was what do you think, and he meant it and he listened.” [IP]

6.3.2.5 Confidence not Trust

This concept revolves around the notion of trust which was one of the top 20 most frequently used words by interviewees when discussing their experience of mission command within everyday organisational life. The doctrine itself highlights that *‘for mission command to genuinely work there has to be great trust up and down the command chain’* (AP7001 p3-3) albeit without any firm guidance as to what the term itself actually means. As highlighted in the literature review, the term trust is often positioned as a critical organisational feature without any real guidance as to what is actually meant by the term, echoing Porter et Al’s (1975, cited in McAllister 1995 p.24) observation that *‘trust is widely talked about and it is widely assumed to be good for organizations. However, when it comes to specifying just what it means in an organizational context, vagueness creeps in.’* When discussing the concept of mission command and individuals’ own experiences of its day-to-day application within the Service, the importance of trust often emerged without any form of prompting by the researcher as a key factor in its employment. Indeed, a number of participants positioned trust as being one of the, if not the, most important attributes in exercising mission command:

“I honestly think it [the application of mission command] lays in the trust, the trust of what we can actually achieve.” [IP]

“Trust is the biggest leadership attribute I think in exercising it [mission command].” [IP]

“At the end of the day, it’s all about trust.” [IP]

Furthermore, while acknowledging and talking about the importance of trust as an essential component of mission command, a number of individuals also went on to associate what they perceived to be a lack of trust, either in the individual or the system⁵², as being one of the main barriers to the effective employment of mission command at all levels of the organisation, for example:

“But it’s [trust] absolutely fundamental I think, because lack of that trust I think goes to the heart of many of the issues that people have in terms of not giving that mission command to operators. We’ll come onto the difference between what happens in the UK, close to home operations, versus what’s on deployed operations.” [IP]

“The big barrier to it [mission command] I guess is that lack of trust where you keep a tight rein, the long screwdriver constantly poking in.” [IP]

“There are two main aspects to it [mission command], trust and intent, and I don’t think people feel there is much trust particularly at the senior levels.” [SOSP]

“It needs a level of trust which I’m not entirely convinced is there always.” [IP]

“So, like I said, our work environment, we’ve all had the training and we’re all striving for the commanders’ intent... I’m not sure there’s that trust to let people get on.” [IP]

⁵² Trust was also used to describe a relationship with an individual as well as relationship with the organisation interestingly the same form of trust which again suggests the lack of an emotional judgement when it comes to the decision to trust.

“... [one example] was a theatre level activity, being authorised back in the UK. That's just one example of where I think people either don't trust the system or trust the people.” [IP]

One senior participant, with experience of working in a higher-level headquarters, when talking about a perceived reluctance to apply mission command indicated that it was the repercussions and perceived risk of an individual making a mistake that often impacted on a senior's ability to put trust into a subordinate's decision-making process:

“I think it's definitely a lack of trust and I think obviously mistrust comes out because of a personality so who you are putting your trust into. The lack of trust is definitely there and I think, kind of, look into that would be the repercussions of putting trust in that individual and him messing up or levels of risk.” [IP]

Having established that trust was seen by the vast majority of participants as being a key component (facilitator?) of mission command and conversely that a lack of trust was perceived as being a major barrier to its employment, interviewees were then asked what they actually understood by the term trust. The data revealed that main language used when talking about their experiences of trusting and being trusted tended to revolve around the concepts of belief, confidence, ability, familiarity, experience and expectation:

“The word trust, the belief that the action will be carried out as if you were doing it yourself almost. So, to the same levels of standards, to the same levels of integrity. You are confident when you give a task to somebody, that it will be done to the level that you asking. It might not be done to the way you would have done it, but you trust, you have an expectation that it doesn't

need to be constantly checked up on. You allow people to get on with doing it.” [IP]

“You're working with someone, you have to trust that they're capable of carrying out their job, but you don't necessarily know who they are. I think that level of trust requires a good understanding of the person not just the position.” [IP]

“I suppose to me [trust] probably means that the person delegating mission command, for want of a better term, knows you well enough or knows enough about you that they have sufficient confidence in you to be able to interpret their... what's the word I'm looking for... their intent in the way that they would wish it to be interpreted....so trust to me is about character, about somebody understanding another person's character enough that they can second guess, is that the right word.” [IP]

“The big word is obviously trust I think. The commander has to trust that if he gives that sort of power to a delegate, or a subordinate, that they get it, they understand it and that they're able to do it.” [IP]

A number of participants also suggested that an assessment that a subordinate would make a similar decision to them (i.e. would enact a similar decision-making process and come out with a similar outcome) also played a large part in the decision whether to trust or not:

“So, if you want me to execute your intent, the more trust you have in my decision-making process the more...I'm more likely to feel supported if I go and do those things. I'm more likely to, yeah, maybe push up to the envelope because I know that I'm supported in that process.” [IP]

"I think you tend to trust people who think like you more than those who don't, whether you realise it or not." [IP]

Some participants also suggested that a subordinate's previous failure to achieve a task may subsequently result in a diminished level of trust when considering future options to empower or devolve decision making:

"You know who your good people are and you know when you can turn around and say, 'Well, I'm on leave tomorrow and this is very important but I trust you, I've worked with you for a year, I know you're really good, crack on, Smith' and you know he's going to get it done. If it's somebody who you don't know or somebody who's got it wrong for you before, that level of trust in them and their ability is diminished and you may well not devolve it to them and empower them." [IP]

"I think there's a question of trust is that the right word? If somebody is given the freedom and makes a mistake, then that mistake tends to be remembered and people are given less freedom the second time round." [IP]

"I think we want to trust generally but often all it takes is one mistake and that trust tends to be diminished." [CWOC]

With regards to a subordinate placing trust in a superior the following comments were also received:

"Do I trust my boss? Erm, I'm not sure trust is the right word. Most of my bosses have been decent...but I think that their focus is on getting the job done, and if I screw up and it impacts on them then I suppose.... I suppose I try not to screw up in the first place. So, the more ambitious my boss is, the more I probably try to keep him in the loop, to do what he wants. So maybe trust doesn't come into it." [SOSP]

"I think I know from the outset that if I screw up, then it, it probably won't reflect too well on me. Will I get blamed? Not sure that is the right word, I've never had a boss say it's your fault, but they have commented on things that went wrong in my OJAR, so maybe that is the way which we blame people? I certainly don't think the boss went around telling everyone it was my fault, but they weren't necessarily happy I hadn't managed to do what I was supposed to do." [OSIC]

"I suppose if I screwed up the boss would think twice about letting me loose next time. He'd probably want to keep a tighter rein, but I'm not sure he wouldn't trust me any less." [IP]

6.3.2.6 Discussion

There is a plethora of evidence from the management literature to suggest that excessive micromanagement of subordinates by superiors typically results in a degradation of overall organisational performance with individuals becoming both frustrated and disengaged and the category 'Task not People' highlights a general sense of disengagement across the organisation due to a lack of motivational empowerment as promised by the doctrine. Furthermore, a number of military commentators have argued that the ability of the senior commanders to become involved in lower-level operational activities in today's networked world has led to an increase in individuals at the strategic level of the organisation dipping in and out of ongoing activities at the tactical level. Consequently, due to their not having a full understanding of contextual or environmental nuances at that level they often 'interpose their assumptions on what they see' (Singer, 2009) and in effect take control. This is evidenced by the perception of the long screwdriver being employed at all levels of the organisation whereby individuals at the highest levels (i.e. strategic)

become involved with the lower levels (i.e. tactical) and bypass several layers of hierarchy. In the days of enhanced communication networks this undoubtedly runs the risk of pulling decision making back up the decision chain away from the context and complexity, contrary to what complexity theory demands. The data also indicates that while the doctrine presents trust as being both a rational economic and social phenomenon, in practice trust within the superior-subordinate relationship is generally perceived to be based almost exclusively on the former i.e. a form of risk-taking behaviour that revolves around an assessment of the transaction costs of whether or not to decentralise decision making. These 'costs' in turn appear to be based on an assessment of ability and experience rather than an affective sentiment based on the concept of moral duty and superiors' obligation towards a subordinate as detailed by the doctrine. This is evidenced by the fact that when talking about trust individuals tend to use terms such as confidence, knowledge, ability, the ability to second-guess rather than any consideration of the extent to which an individual superior has a duty or moral obligation towards another (i.e. subordinate). Furthermore, the data reveals that the concept of vulnerability between a superior and subordinate is primarily perceived to reside in the subordinate's potential inability to complete the task rather than any risk of opportunistic behaviour on the part of the subordinate. This again suggests that it is primarily an individual's ability to fulfil or complete a task that drives the calculative element within a mission command scenario rather than any consideration of opportunistic behaviour on behalf of the subordinate. According to a number of scholars (e.g. Williamson 1993; Luhman 1998) this lack of opportunism, whereby a trustor (superior) perceives there to be a risk to allowing a trustee (subordinate) to undertake a task on his behalf but

does not believe that the trustee will act opportunistically cannot therefore actually be said to involve trust.⁵³ The vulnerability is therefore perceived to lie in an objective failure of the task and subsequent impact on reputation/promotion/assessment rather than any potential for opportunistic behaviour on behalf of the subordinate.

6.3.3 The Ethical Egoist

Linked to the concept of calculative trust is the concept of ethical egoism which is based on the notion that social actors base their decisions and behaviour almost exclusively on egotistical motives, i.e. what best meets their own individual needs and motivations (Bachmann 2001). Similarly, Coleman (1990) argues that social actors make the decision to trust or not based on a rational calculation of the gains and losses of taking such action. From the data there was again an overwhelming sense that individuals only appeared willing to employ a limited form of mission command for egoistical motives rather than benevolence and moral obligation to develop their subordinates. These motives appear to be driven by the following 4 sub-categories [Fig 6.3]:

- (i) Allergic to Risk
- (ii) Fear of failure
- (iii) Culture of Blame
- (iv) Appraisal and Promotion

⁵³ Of note not one individual in the data pool spoke about the possibility of opportunism when talking about trust or a lack of trust.



Fig 6.3 The Ethical Egoist sub-categories

6.3.3.1 Allergic to risk

The current doctrine places a great deal of emphasis on the willingness of service personnel to take risk and highlights that leaders at all levels of the organisation must encourage a culture that is not risk averse and be prepared to accept an 80% solution in 20% of the time thereby moving away from what it terms unnecessary gold plating. The doctrine also goes on to emphasise that a willingness to take risk is vital to agility and speed of manoeuvre and that in order to get more successes you have to be willing to risk more failures. Data from both interviews and facilitated workshops indicated that while participants fully recognised the role of risk within mission command, in most people's experiences there was a general lack of willingness throughout all levels in the organisation to take risk when it came to allowing subordinates to make important decisions on a superior's behalf. Indeed, almost

every interviewee suggested that a lack of appetite to take risk rather than a willingness to take risk was often a major factor in their experience of mission command to date. The sub-category 'Allergic to Risk' therefore refers to participant's perceptions across the data pool that rather than embrace a willingness to take risk in order to enhance innovation and agility as required by the doctrine, the current organisational culture appeared to not only avoid risk where possible but actively discouraged it.

"I think as an organisation we are becoming increasingly allergic to risk. It's not encouraged or rewarded." [AWC WS]

"It's the element of risk, they [i.e. superiors] don't want to take the risk. I think as an organisation, we don't like to take much risk." [IP]

"You can't employ true mission command, which is set an intent, because you have to be willing to take risk and as an organisation I don't think we encourage that enough, in fact I would go as far as to say we actively discourage risk in many places, and I'm not just talking safety risk, it's risk across the board from organising an AOC's visit to running a mess committee." [IP]

"Is risk taking, which I think mission command relies upon, is that rewarded as much as it could be? I think sometimes no." [IP]

From a subordinates' perspective, individuals felt that their superiors were often constrained in their willingness allow them to make decisions due to an organisational emphasis on reducing, rather than embracing risk:

“Even in my short tenure⁵⁴ I think the appetite for risk has just really, really gone down. There is limited appetite for risk. All of the work that I’ve done on risk registers and matrixes is all about let’s get this to absolute rock bottom, which sometimes means completely removing a training serial, for example, in order to completely remove the risk.” [IP]

“It comes from the top, this aversion to risk, probably due to some of the high-profile incidents we have suffered but it has leaked across into other areas so it’s not just safety risk, its financial risk, people risk, reputation risk, if there’s a risk then we try and avoid it.” [IP]

The lack of willingness to take risk was also directly linked several participants to a lack of willingness to tolerate experimentation despite the doctrine’s emphasis on this as being essential for innovation:

“I think as a Service we are not tolerant of experimentation or failure.” [IP]

“They [i.e. the senior leadership] have to value experimentation where applicable. They’d have to value innovation, even if it failed. They’d have to embrace failure a bit more. They’d have to let people try and fail, or recognise the trying.” [IP]

“A risk averse culture is limiting our ability to innovate; free thinking is risky and can damage your career.” [SLSR]⁵⁵

“We need a culture that rewards bold decision making.” [IP]

Some participants also suggested that an increase in risk aversion within the organisation meant that individuals had to started to push decision-making back up

⁵⁴ Tenure as an instructor at the RAF College on IOT.

⁵⁵ Senior Leadership Survey Report

the chain due to a lack of willingness for people to make decisions, even when given the opportunity, for fear of something going wrong, thereby impacting on agility:

“I think risk is a really, really interesting subject. From a Flight Lieutenant’s perspective, we see more and more people with less and less willingness to take any kind of risk. [I] see it more as, obviously the lowest level to take that risk, if feasible, and I personally think I see that less and less and I think because there seems to be so much of a reaction if something was to go wrong, I think people push it up and up and up rather than it should be coming down.” [IP]

“You only have to be bollocked once [for] failing and then that sets the scene for the rest of the tour and you tend to defer back up to the boss rather than take more risk.” [SOSP]

In addition, the lack of appetite for risk was seen to limit personnel’s participation in what historically have been well received professional military development activities such as staff rides⁵⁶ and station visits:

“The amount of scrutiny you get for even doing something as simple as going on a station visit with your guys is ridiculous, the risk assessment, well it’s got to the stage it’s too much hassle trying to organise.” [CWOC]

“Don’t even think about trying to organise an overseas visit, the amount of hoop you have to go through to get it approved means any benefit from letting the team just get on and plan it is removed, every bit of risk has to be accounted for.” [IP]

⁵⁶ Staff rides are guided tours of sites of military interest and significance for which participants have to research and present on topics relevant to the sites.

It was also perceived that in allowing a subordinate to take risk, that rather than reward this form of behaviour, the organisational default was to frown/look down on risk taking activity when it goes wrong.

“If you let them [subordinates] take risk, and it doesn’t work then it reflects on you, not the fact that you let them take risk, oh no, but more the fact that you haven’t done or achieved what you said you would.” [SOSP]

As with the concept of trust, a lack of understanding of what was meant actually meant by the term risk was also suggested by one senior participant as a possible reason or driver for the reluctance to take risk:

“I don’t know that we specifically encourage risk. I think a lot of people don’t understand it and therefore don’t know how to approach it. So, they might say that they are encouraging risk but what do they actually mean by that?” [IP]

Yet another participant believed that there was some confusion between the drive to reduce safety risk as a result of some recent high-profile safety investigations and more general risk-taking within wider organisational business and that there was also the potential for this to be used as an excuse to keep control:

“So, you have this drive to reduce or eliminate safety risk following things like Haddon Cave⁵⁷ which to my mind has influenced [an] individual’s willingness to take risk in all aspects of organisational business not just safety. So, I think people confuse safety risk i.e. where there is a risk to life and everyday organisational risk and dare I say some even use it as an excuse to keep tight control over everything in their empire.” [IP]

⁵⁷ Haddon Cave was an investigation into an aircraft accident in which 14 personnel died that found systematic failures in leadership, culture and priorities as being responsible for the accident and resulted in a wide range of risk mitigation measures being implemented by the RAF.

As with the concept of mission command itself, several individuals felt that an individual's willingness to take risk (including their own willingness to take risk) was partly down to the fact that they did not have the opportunity to be exposed to decisions involving risk taking during their early careers which in turn implied that a built in 'risk aversion' emerged from very early on in one's career. It was also thought that risk taking was actively discouraged by the training mechanisms employed by the organisation to develop its future leaders. For example, when talking about Initial Officer Training, several participants made a direct link between the lack of ability to take risk in the training environment and the ability to develop mission command:

"They⁵⁸ don't have the opportunities to try and learn from [their] mistakes, whatever the consequence is of [taking] that risk...it's very closely held now which impacts on mission command because it constrains the boundaries you are able to operate in." [IP]

"The task was to get to a location on the exercise area by a certain time via a bridge over a river that had been constructed by another group of cadets. The idea being that the first team would 'test' the construction made by the second team while enroute. However, before they got to the bridge they came across a team of marines training on the river with RIBs⁵⁹ and in true mission command style they stuck to the intent (get to a certain location) but changed the plan and decided to ask the marines to ferry them across rather than have to trek all the way to where the bridge was being built. However, on completion of the exercise the exercise director sought the Flt Cdr out and gave him a huge rollicking in front of the other instructors because he had

⁵⁸ i.e. Junior Officers under training

⁵⁹ Rigid Inflatable Boats

allowed the team to deviate from the plan and use their initiative. He was more concerned that the second group had not had their bridge tested in accordance with the plan than the cadets had not stuck rigidly to the plan and had allowed them to deviate. To me this was the first time the cadets had had the opportunity to practice mission command in action on the training area and it was effectively punished because it was not 'according to the plan'. This obviously impacted on the instructors' willingness to allow their cadets to show initiative and deviate from the plan on future exercises."
[IP]

"We are not good at nurturing individuals who are comfortable with risk taking." [IP]

A number of participants also openly admitted they were more inclined to make decisions themselves if there was any likelihood that things could go wrong:

"Which comes back to me anyway, if I'm going to be held accountable for something that's not worked, I'd rather be because of my direct call rather than someone under my command's direct call." [IP]

"It's all well and good you telling me how I should take more risk and use adaptive behaviours, but what if when I go back to my day job the organisation and my bosses do not want me to behave in that manner, why should I risk whatever career I have left." [SOSP]

"If someone is going to screw up on a task then I would rather it was because of decisions I made rather than decisions they made." [SOSP]

6.3.3.2 Fear of Failure

Closely linked to the apparent lack of willingness to take risk was a sense that prevailed across most of the interviews and various workshops that rather than being

willing to risk more failures and learn from them and being prepared to deal with the consequences of taking risk (i.e. failure), the current organisational culture was not particularly tolerant of failure despite the developmental value of both accepting and learning from 'failure' being highlighted in the doctrine. This in turn was suggested to inculcate a 'fear of failure' particularly during an individual's early career:

"I don't think the current culture we have got accepts people making mistakes or failing as much as it should. And you can pull that old quote out 'you should let people fail but not be failures because people will learn by failing.'" [IP]

This was also perceived to have a knock-on effect down through the hierarchy in that a lack of willingness of a superior to fail was also seen to impact on the ability of the individual to tolerate failure from his/her subordinates:

"It can only go through a fear culture of being told off or having an impact into your own career, that kind of thing,whereas everything is so key, you can't be seen to do anything wrong, that is more of a fear from themselves, that they're unwilling to take that risk or trust in their juniors to be able to do it...It constrains my ability to, well my hierarchy to give me mission command and me to go down, particularly in this organisation." [IP]

Yet another participant highlighted that even when an individual is willing to risk failure, any adverse outcome in the training environment tended to be frowned upon rather than being utilised as an appropriate learning vehicle that rewarded risk taking and use 'failure' (in this instance to achieve a task) to help learn valuable lessons:

"We don't encourage risk taking even in training, and if someone does take a risk and it goes wrong, it tends to be frowned and 'don't do it again' rather than what can we learn from that." [IP]

One individual linked also the fear of failure to the willingness to trust others:

"... there is a fear of failure at home, in terms of career, and wanting to advance that has a marked influence on people's decisions to trust others."

The term reputation was mentioned several times when discussing the potential consequences of failure by several participants indicating that the aversion to failure was primarily due to the impact on reputation and career prospects rather than a wider risk to organisational objectives:

"I think the first thing in the front of people's minds is risk to self. Not physical risk as I think the fact we are in the military means we can cope with that, but risk to our reputation." [IP]

"It was a really tiny mistake and no massive issues but because of who got involved, I think it genuinely really hurt his reputation. Everyone knew about it. It was back in the UK within 10 seconds." [IP]

"It comes back to career, reputation and risk to individual advancement, I think. That is my reading of it but then again, I'm basing that on the comments that have been said to me about, understand what your one up wants, do what your two up wants." [IP]

"Reputational risk is huge, huge. Let's be honest, you're not promoted on your appraisals, you're promoted on your reputation to a point. How your one up has written your appraisal is all about that perception, that reputation, that relationship you have, not fact." [IP]

6.3.3.3 Culture of Blame

Being held to account by a senior in the event that a subordinate makes a mistake or 'gets it wrong' also emerged from the data. A number of individuals, both interviewees and workshop participants spoke of being held to account in the event that their subordinates get it wrong despite having adopted what they believed to be the type of leadership that the organisation encouraged:

"I think the difficulty we [the RAF] face is that whilst people make all the right noises and often want to empower their people, in the way that we operate now in terms of holding people to account and, for want of a better description, the constant arse scrubbing exercise we go through, people become reticent in practice to empower people because when they get it wrong, they feel that they'll hold the responsibility." [IP]

"Things happen very quickly, we haven't got a lot of resources to get things done when things go wrong, the perception often, it mightn't be true, but the perception of people doing things wrong and failing as an organisation is that you're going to be held to account." [IP]

Other individuals were more specific/explicit in relating the lack of risk appetite and a willingness to empower what they perceived to be an embedded blame culture within the organisation:

"Risk aversity, so if something comes back to bite somebody on the ass, in this day and age of culture of blame of risk ownership, to trust somebody when it's your career/neck on the line if it goes wrong. That where the trust element really comes into it." [IP]

“A classic [example] being the weapons issue. No one was prepared to say that we need to take weapons into training, whatever the risk because God forbid there was an accident. They [the superiors] own the risk so they're going to get the blame for it so there is definitely a risk aversion.” [IP]

“Some of our station commanders are introducing forums where they're giving tasks down to much lower levels so I think there is, in some areas some of our OF5s, one stars, two stars are trying to do this but I think the blame culture is still out there and that blame culture in certain areas does hamper this empowerment and trust.” [IP]

“But I think if we can sort out our blame culture better...and allow them to then practice mission command or a facsimile of mission command in a slightly different context because it's not an operational environment, and remove the blame culture, that might work.” [IP]

“I think the default is why did it go wrong, who is to blame rather than what can we learn.” [IP]

“I think the blame culture is still out there and that blame culture in certain areas does hamper this empowerment and trust.” [IP]

Finally, there was also a perception that the more senior an individual became, the more 'immune' to blame they also became:

“Interestingly having worked in MOD our seniors never get it wrong, they don't make mistakes, if something, a decision, is announced that is wrong then we don't change it, we run with it because to change it would be to admit that the mistake was made, we might 'adjust' at a later stage but we never say so and so was wrong.” [IP]

“Classic example being the Staish⁶⁰ at Lyneham who landed at the wrong airfield, as far as I know it was the Co and Nav who were deemed to be at fault, not the Staish.” [SOSP]

“The whole outer office thing is about making the boss look good, not embarrassing him in front of the other brass, and I think this sends the message to get to the top you don’t make mistakes, so if you’re on the ladder, you want to get there then I think you won’t risk making mistakes at all, and this makes its way down”. [IP]

6.3.3.4 Appraisal and promotion

Finally, the current promotion and appraisal system was deemed to have a major influence on a superior’s focus on either achieving task or developing the individual with many participant’s perceiving the main emphasis on task achievement rather than people development:

“If we promote people that get the task done, then surely there is nothing wrong with getting the task done if you want to be promoted.” [SOSP]

“If you have a promotion system that’s linked into people failing when they’re on a single task, then I think you’re in a very, very binary situation where the people are going to never want to fail on something. If they’re allowed to fail on some small stuff, and ordered to develop themselves and evolve as an organisation unit, and that’s almost encouraged, then that’s great. But I don’t think we are in that, I don’t think we differentiate properly.” [IP]

“I think it does inherently, no matter how good a commander you are and how interested in doing the right stuff, are you looking down and not looking up? No matter how interested you are in looking down, as soon as you get put into that position I think people’s behaviour does change.” [IP]

⁶⁰ Staish is the slang term for Station Commander – normally a Group Captain and the most senior officer on a station.

“Again, we talk very much about promoting leaders and being interested in leaders. I’m not convinced that we are. I think that we want technical skillsets in certain positions. Leadership comes into it, certainly, but yeah, I think there’s far more weight on the job that you do and the experience you’ve had in that job and [inaudible 00:35:49] the technical thing that you do. Are you excellent at your [job] yeah, there is a leadership element in all of those jobs as well so it is quite vague but I think we are hamstrung slightly by a reporting system that looks at task accomplishment overall.” [IP]

“...the promotion system is one of the biggest barriers to empowerment in my view. As you get further up the chain its everyone for themselves and so you have to make your mark early on. Particularly as the only real reward you get is promotion. I suppose to some extent there is a sense that if you’re not promoted after a couple of tours in rank that you have failed, rather than others have succeeded.” [IP]

The perception that individuals were primarily reported on their followership rather than their leadership was also commented on i.e. that when assessing a subordinate, the system tends to focus on their role as a follower rather than assess their ability to develop their own followers (i.e. leadership) and apply mission command:

“So who writes your report? Your boss, so effectively you are being reported on as a follower, there isn’t much...any input from below on how you are as a leader, so did you achieve your tasks, yes, well done have a promotion. Did you develop your team, not sure, never mind? I’ve worked for several bosses who have gone onwards and upwards, some to quite senior levels, who were always looking up and not down, great managers, but leaders? I didn’t think so.” [IP]

“At the end of the day who writes your report? It’s your 1-up and your 2-up, they’re the ones who assess you and guess what, they are assessing you on your followership, how well you have done or completed what they have tasked you with, not how well have you coached or mentored your followers. So, who is or are the best people to assess you as a leader, or not, those who you are meant to be leading.” [IP]

“If you look at the OJAR for example, there is a box for subordinate development and I, and indeed I am pretty sure most others, tend to put in the average grade from the other boxes. I’m not sure we actually consider subordinate development which to me is the best indicator of their leadership. Otherwise we are actually assessing them as followers and not leaders.... thinking about it, it is probably easier to assess the command and management skills of a follower than their leadership skills.” [IP]

“I would love to OJARs move to that and be more honest. I think when people are filling in [the] personnel development box, I don’t think they fully using in the lens of mission command, certainly not in my experience.” [IP]

“I think the way we reward and select is based on the command and management bits, getting things done, but we call them leaders, so maybe that’s the problem, that we push a big C [command] big M [management] but little L [leadership] agenda and that’s what people think leadership is about.” [SOSP]

This in turn was deemed to influence individuals with career aspirations to look after themselves by focusing on the task rather than put the development of their subordinates first.

“Increasingly the people I’ve seen around me are very driven, very focused on their careers, almost to the exclusion of other people’s.” [IP]

“I think probably the guys in the middle [of the career ladder] are bounded by either by their aspirations, their desires, their career paths, their desire to impress the boss.” [IP]

“I can think of a few examples where people have been promoted very rapidly based on the delivery of the task, and then when they look over, if they looked over their shoulder on the way up, they’d see the carnage they’ve left behind. There’re quite a few characters like that, I’m sure you recognise from your time in the service. And, we still reward task delivery more than anything else I think.” [IP]

“But I think innately, the military does promote task focused people and I think that’s just an organisational design issue.” [IP]

A number of participants went on to suggest that in order to embed mission command there needed to be a change in emphasis within the overall assessment system:

“They have to bring in a less task orientated reporting system. So, they have to value experimentation where applicable. They’d have to value innovation, even if it failed. They’d have to embrace failure a bit more. They’d have to let people try and fail, or recognise the trying. It doesn’t seek out innovation in subordinate development.” [IP]

Finally, of particular note was the perception that once individuals were no longer on the promotion ladder, for whatever reason, they tended to adapt their behaviours to be more in line with mission command. For example, one individual who had already acknowledged that further career advancement was highly unlikely believe that the

lack of promotion prospects had certainly made him more willing to take risks as he no longer felt constrained by the reporting system:

“I don’t have to play that game anymore, so I can be a little bit controversial, I can speak up a little bit more. Because if I’m viewed as a shit stirrer or a blocker or a negative, if I think what I’m doing is the right thing, I’ve got that leeway to do it, because it’s not going to ... If it’s reflected in my OJAR it doesn’t really have any impact on my career or future. [Therefore, I am] more willing to speak my mind, whether it’s take risk, it’s different, I’m not constrained by the reporting system. Whether that’s more willing to take risk, and whether taking risk is a good thing or not....”

Whilst others highlighted the benefits of working for a boss was not on the fast track:

“Bizarre as it may seem, people seem to be more willing to do mission command once they peak, some of the best bosses I have had have been those who were no longer on the slippery pole.” [IP]

“I had an FTRS boss in my last job, so promotion wasn’t an issue with him, and you know what, I found it refreshing not to be told what to do all the time, he let me get on with it, told me what he wanted and let me get on and do it.” [OSIC]

6.3.3.5 Discussion

A majority of interviewees appear to perceive there to be a lack of motivational empowerment within the organisational culture primarily due to the way in which risk and failure is viewed by the organisation. This in turn suggests a predominant culture of success rather than a culture of learning with success being perceived (and rewarded) as task accomplishment rather than people development. This in turn placed an emphasis on the adoption of transactional, egoistic behaviours that sit at

the relational empowerment end of the mission command spectrum rather than the adoption of transformational, altruistic behaviours that sit towards the motivational empowerment end. Miller (1999) describes ethical egoism within the business world as an overriding concern with one's own self-interest whereby motivation is almost exclusively geared towards gaining advantage over others. Jencks (1990, cited in Joseph 2015) highlights that on the opposite end of the scale sits altruism which depicts a motivation and behaviour that prioritizes the long-term welfare of another; independent of one's own interests which is what the doctrine alludes to in its treatment of mission command. Furthermore, Avolio & Locke (2004) highlight the ongoing debate amongst leadership theorists on whether leaders should primarily serve their own interests (i.e. adopt an ego centric approach) or look after the needs of their followers (i.e. adopt an altruistic approach). From an RAF perspective, the doctrine itself undoubtedly places an emphasis on the latter through its emphasis on transformational leadership whereas the realities of organisational life appear to firmly place the act of 'leadership' in the former (i.e. egotistical) domain.

6.3.4 It's Different on Ops

The final category that emerged from the data concerns the perception across the vast majority of participants that while in their experience there was a lack of mission command in the day-to-day running of the organisation, they had experienced some degree of mission command whilst deployed on operations. Although it can vary depending on branch or specialisation, RAF personnel on average undertake a 4-6-month operational tour (also known as an Out of Area or OOA) every 3-6 years. Consequently, while the majority of personnel most of their time back home supporting the development of air power in what essentially is the business space,

this is also interspersed with short, high intensity tours directly engaged in the delivery of air power in the operational space. The category 'It's different on Ops' arises from the following 3 sub-categories [Fig 6.5]:

- (i) No Choice.
- (ii) Explicit Intent.
- (iii) In it Together.

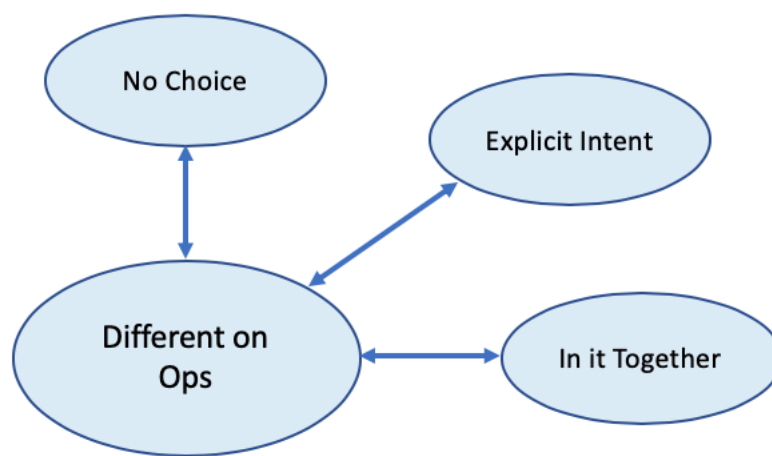


Fig 6.5 Different on Ops sub-categories

6.3.4.1 No Choice

The sub-category No Choice arose from a general sense that the high operational tempo experienced on operations generally meant that individuals had no option but to employ a relational form of mission command due to a lack of capacity to do everything themselves:

'I think you have no choice but to do mission command on Ops, you have to do some form of mission command, you don't have time not to.' [IP]

“In an operational context, if you insist on managing detail from the highest level then you effectively fail to, or you may fail to exploit fleeting opportunities and things that are seen at the lower level.” [IP]

“I was left to make some pretty important decisions on ops, take some pretty big risks even as a relatively junior officer. For example, it was up to me to clear the runway after a PAR⁶¹. But this was mainly due the boss not being around, being on a different part of the airfield.” [IP]

“I prefer ops but I'm used to ops. And I feel free to do whatever I want to make decisions but again, the environment, people haven't got the time, the effort or the inclination to be monitoring every single thing, so I can authorise a compassionate, fly them home, come back two weeks later, I can do whatever I want to, yet here I can't even allow someone to drive a car to [inaudible 00:28:39] for two hours.” [IP]

Again, the term ‘an illusion’ of mission command was used to describe a sense that people were doing a limited type of mission command (i.e. relational as opposed to motivational empowerment) on operations:

“I think that there is an illusion of mission command on ops, and by that I mean yes you are left to make pretty important decisions, but mainly that's because that is the easiest option, easier than your boss doing it themselves.” [SOSP]

6.3.4.2 Explicit Intent

For some participants the task orientated nature of operations resulted in a different mindset with people more willing to take increased risk and an acceptance or recognition that the task was the primary focus rather than the people and this in

⁶¹ Post Attack Recovery i.e. the actions taken on an airfield following a rocket or mortar attack.

turn matched the expected context and expected behaviours for both superior and subordinate i.e. the role of the superior on ops is to operate not develop and this is expected. This in turn was seen to lend itself to the expectation of highly directive behaviours through the transmission of explicit intent:

“So much more, when we went away it was task and everybody understand that was the focus, task regardless.” [IP]

“When you’re out on ops, the intent is your task, that is what you’re there for, that’s what you’re all driving towards.” [IP]

“It tends to be, it must be something about the act of leaving the UK, people seem to be more comfortable in most cases dealing with things of a question of mission command or the philosophy of mission command when they're deployed away from the main base. I think when you're deployed on an operation, in most cases your outputs are much narrower. So, it's well defined what you're trying to achieve. Many of the daily distractions are not there.” [IP]

“I think it is, but I wonder if the perception is related to, when you go on ops a lot of the annoying diversions and other stuff that you get inflicted with back at home base, generally gets removed. So, you do have a focus, an intent, and everybody is so busy charging round doing stuff, that you do tend to get left to get on with your own piece while people are busy.” [IP]

“...the problem is evident and everyone knows what they need to do, be it post attack recovery, aircraft arrival or departure, casevac⁶², etc. VIP visit etc. There is no time to sit and discuss because as soon as one thing is over you are on to the next.” [IP]

⁶² Casualty Evacuation

“My recollection is that most definitely, on ops there is that greater, “Right, that’s the team, we’re going to deliver this, this is the way we’re heading”. And, perhaps that offers an intent and an overall broad framework that people then feel more comfortable to work in.” [SOSP]

6.3.4.3 In it Together

For other participants it was more to do with a sense that on Ops everyone is in it together and therefore working towards the same goal and hence thoughts of promotion and self-serving behaviours tended to be put on hold:

“People tend to forget promotion when they're on ops. They're more about task, task, task. I guess your incentives change, they still realise that by doing a good turn on ops, that will help.” [IP]

“In the business space most people look after themselves, it’s all about the ‘I’ in the ops space I think it is more about the ‘we’ and therefore we tend to look out for our guys and girls a bit more.” [IP]

Concerns about appraisal also appeared to be alleviated on Ops:

“Everyone tends to get a good report from Ops unless they really screw up. It’s the fact that you’ve been on ops that counts [towards promotion] not necessarily what you do on ops.” [SOSP]

“A glowing report from Ops is almost expected, I understand that they tend to be taken with a pinch of salt on promotions boards, it’s what you do back home that counts.” [OSIC]

The nature of Ops also appeared to make individuals more tolerant of failure or mistakes and there was a sense that they were in fact to be expected:

“I do think we do it [mission command] quite well on operations, when people are on operations there’s almost an acceptance that things will go wrong because it’s operational and we all know that in the fog of war, things go wrong.” [IP]

“Most people will tend to make some kind of mistake on ops but as long no one ends up hurt or dying, it tends to be forgotten as soon as the next task comes in as people are too busy to dwell on what has happened.” [SOSP]

6.3.4.4 Discussion

The category ‘It’s different on Ops’ reveals a perception that in high tempo, critical environments there is a sense that superiors are more willing to employ the fundamental requirements of mission command to take risk, tolerate mistakes and in doing so allow subordinates to make decisions and enact solutions without having to refer back up the chain. However, this again appears to sit within the realms of relational empowerment in which a superior devolves decision making in order to overcome an organisational difficulty (i.e. the inability of themselves being able to make all the decisions) rather than a genuine desire to empower their people to enhance motivation and feelings of self-efficacy and develop them to meet complex challenges in the future. Furthermore, while the increased employment of relational empowerment may in some instances give individuals a sense of motivational empowerment, it appears that these ‘benefits’ are secondary and do not form part of the original intent to empower.

Although somewhat tempered by the sense that mistakes are expected and everyone is in it together, this still indicates that the employment of mission command within the operational environment is primarily utilised as a task accomplishment tool.

Chapter 7

PRESENTING THE CORE CATEGORY

7.1 Introduction

As highlighted in Chapter 2, the core category is the highest order category through which the similarities and differences of the phenomenon under investigation are explained and therefore accounts for all the variation across the various dimensions, properties, conditions, consequences and dimensions of the data (Strauss 1986, p.36). The core category, which is usually used to name the theory, arises as a result of the selective coding process which is the final process of data analysis within the grounded theory methodology in which the various categories and themes that emerged during the axial coding stage are integrated to build the theoretical framework. Strauss (1986) highlights that the category itself can be any kind of theoretical code (e.g. a process, a condition, two dimensions, a consequence, a range and so forth) and that its primary function is to integrate the theory and render it dense and saturated. Hallberg (2006, p.143) highlights that the identification of the core category is itself central for the integration of other main categories into a conceptual framework or theory grounded in the data and in doing so provides the mechanism to explain the underlying social processes at play. For the purposes of this research project the categories identified in the previous chapter to be integrated during the selective coding stage were:

- (i) Knowledge not Know-how
- (ii) Task not People
- (iii) The Ethical Egoist

(iv) Different on Ops

In this instance the core category which appeared to explain the variation (i.e. praxis gap) between the organisation's theoretical approach to mission command and its actual practical employment was deemed to be a condition of current organisational culture that places increased emphasis on practical task accomplishment (i.e. task focus) at the expense of people development (i.e. people focus). Consequently, the core category was named the Cult of the Commander Manager (with the word cult taken to mean an overemphasis on something) predicated on an organisational 'theory-in-use' that placed an increased emphasis on the accomplishment of task and enactment of process at the expense of engagement with people. This emphasis on task focussed behaviours at the expense of people focused behaviours was deemed to arise from an imbalance in the officer's trinity and in particular the apparent ability of personnel to apply the correct 'balance' of CLM behaviours across the organisational spectrum of activity.

7.2 The Cult of the Commander Manager

The core category 'The Cult of the Commander Manager' (fig 7.1) arose from a recognition during the selective coding stage that the majority of the concerns and observations regarding the perceived gap between mission command in practice and in theory was predicated on an excessive emphasis on the enactment of primarily command and management orientated behaviour across all aspects of organisational activity. In other words, that the application of mission command as motivational empowerment tool was constrained by the tendency of a superior to employ predominantly command and management orientated behaviours at the expense of people focussed behaviours. The lightbulb moment for the researcher came during

the selective coding stage when he recognised that there was a very close relationship between the ability to employ mission command effectively as both a relational and motivational empowerment tool and the ability to balance the officer's trinity (i.e. the principles of CLM) depending on the context that the individual found themselves operating in. While the doctrine or 'theory espoused' presents the philosophy of mission command as being the overarching principle under which all leadership activities sit, this in turn suggests that its application should influence and direct the ability to balance the trinity according to context. However, what appeared to be happening is that an inability by service personnel to balance the trinity, due to an emphasis on task focussed command and management behaviours at the expense of people focussed leadership behaviours, was in turn limiting their ability to apply the motivational (as opposed to relational) aspects of mission command as required by the doctrine. Consequently, the researcher recognised that such an imbalance in the trinity, resulting in a tendency to favour one particular set of behaviours over others irrespective of context, could explain the apparent difficulty the organisation faces in attempting to embed the concept of mission command as both a relational and motivational empowerment tool.

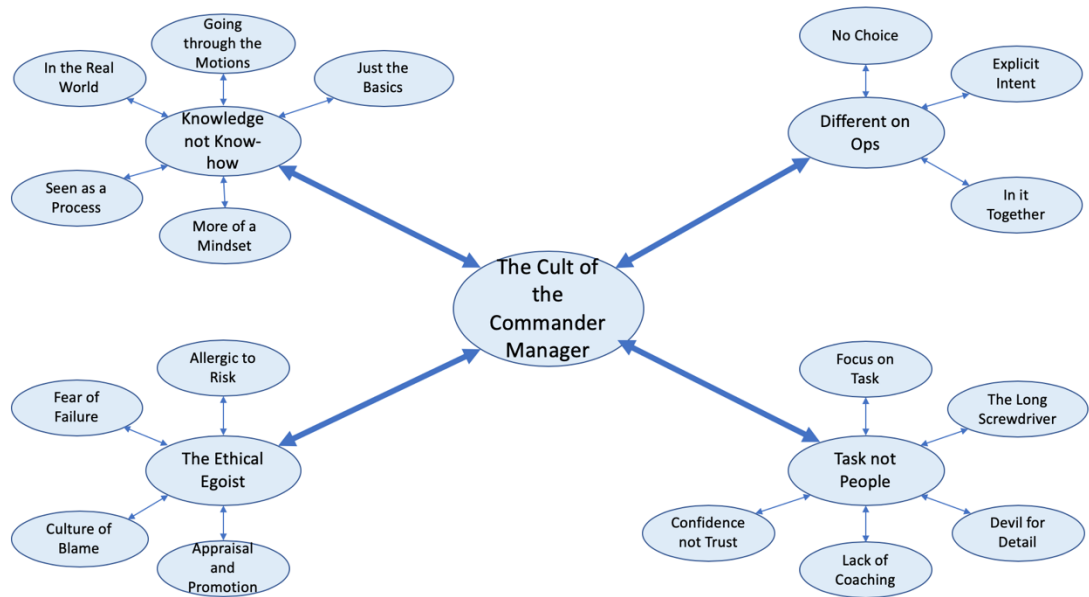


Fig 7.1 The Core Category – Cult of the Commander Manager

7.2.1 The impact on Knowledge not Know-how

The category Knowledge not Know-how revealed a sense across the organisation that while personnel were able to demonstrate a reasonable comprehension of the underpinning tenets of mission command as a ‘theory espoused’ they were often unable or unwilling to apply it in practice. This in part was perceived by participants to be due to the way in which the concept was taught and developed in the various training schools together with the lack of opportunity for individuals to practice mission command once out in the workplace, despite the emphasis in the doctrine on the ability to do so. The data therefore suggests that the way in which mission command is taught and assessed within the organisation’s formal training establishments puts the emphasis on retaining knowledge of the principles and then applying the principles in order to achieve a singular or end goal. In other words, it is presented as a form of relational empowerment tool whereby decision making is

delegated to a subordinate in order to overcome some form of task related difficulty such as an inability to communicate or a lack of capacity to do something oneself. This in turn reflects the original intent behind the adoption of mission command into British military doctrine i.e. as a relational empowerment tool to overcome a specific organisational difficulty (i.e. a counter to the Soviet scheme of manoeuvre).

Within the wider literature, the phenomenon of placing emphasis on developing technical knowledge in the classroom rather than the practical knowledge that comes from experience, is captured by the concept of Episteme and the related concepts of Techne and Phronesis:

- (i) Episteme is described by Rawlins (1950) as being a general knowledge, truth or understanding of a matter that comes prior to Techne. It therefore involves the ability to retain a knowledge of principles.
- (ii) Techne is described by Rawlins (1950, p.390) as being the act of putting that knowledge of principles into action and is 'strictly limited to a grasp of the processes involved'. Scott (1998, p.400) proposes that Techne is most suitable to activities that 'have a singular end or goal, an end that is specifiable apart from the activity itself, and one susceptible to quantitative measurement' and his in turn would suggest it was particularly suited to developing management and command skills that rely on the implementation of formal procedure and process through the expression of explicit intent.
- (iii) Phronesis is described by Shotter and Tsoukas (2014, p.224) as a form of practical wisdom based on lived experience involving 'a refined capacity to intuitively grasp salient features of ambiguous landscapes' and hence is more of a developmental process than a knowledge learning process.

(iv) Metis is described by Scott (1998, p.400) as being a 'form of flexible, context-attentive intelligence' and is therefore a 'mode of reasoning most appropriate to complex material and social tasks where the uncertainties are so daunting that we must trust our experienced intuition and feel our way'. Importantly he goes on to state that we gain practical wisdom through trial and error as this type of knowing in action is not learnt quickly and requires a long interaction between the 'bearer, the local environment, and the skill set' in order to develop a suitable level of 'flexible, context-attentive intelligence'. Finally, Scott (1998) highlights that Metis knowledge is not learned quickly. It grows from a long interaction between the individual and the environment and this long period of time allows for the skill to be adapted to local variables and needs. This in turn suggests that this learning approach is more suited to embedding the motivational empowerment aspects of mission command by allowing people to learn by doing i.e. taking risk, making mistakes but importantly learning what it feels like to do, and be exposed to, the full spectrum of mission command i.e. both relational and motivational.

By employing the process of Techne by which the principles of mission command are taught in the form of rules, principles and propositions, this lends itself to the instruction of the concept within the formal training environment (*e.g It's taught as process; We get taught what is in the theory*). Furthermore, while the data suggests that this is sufficient to provide most personnel with a basic grasp of the fundamental tenets of mission command (*e.g. I think the policy is well understood; it is pretty well wedged in*) it appears insufficient to enable individuals to move beyond the ability to apply the concept as nothing more than basic form of delegation or management

process (*e.g. People will say the words mission command but what they're actually meaning half the time is delegation*). Consequently, while the Episteme/Techne approach is sufficient to impart a knowledge of the 'what' and the 'how' of Mission command it appears insufficient to allow personnel to gain a full grasp of the 'why' which comes not from the doctrine itself but from their own lived experiences of mission command i.e. through the application of Phronesis and Metis (*e.g. We're pretty good at developing the...theory [of mission command] but pretty poor at learning how to use it properly; the key point is that the only way you can actually learn it is by doing it*). In other words, the wider role of mission command as a catalyst for innovation and motivational empowerment requires the development of practical real-world experience that develops through a degree of trial and error. Consequently, in an organisation that appears averse to risk and failure, individuals are not provided with the opportunity to see and experience the true motivational benefits of mission command (*e.g. To me the one of the best ways to learn about it is to let them (subordinates) crack on, experiment, see what works, see what doesn't, but learn from failure. But we are reluctant to do that*). Thomas (2011, p.23) highlights that Phronesis is considered to be practical knowledge based on personal experience and knowledge of the 'right thing to do in the circumstances' but if the experience of mission command in practice is missing, the question remains how can you gain the practical knowledge to allow you to adapt depending on the situation? While the presence of knowledge of the principles of mission command across the organisation would appear to facilitate its employment as a relational management tool through the application of Techne, the absence of know-how gained from experience of mission command as a motivational leadership (i.e. Metis) appears to

prevent its full application as across the spectrum of organisational activity as required by the doctrine. Whilst this lends itself to developing the ability to apply mission command through explicit intent in those situations which rely on command and management behaviours (i.e. require decisive control and the ability to manage resource effectively) it is insufficient to highlight the intrinsic benefits of applying mission command as a motivational empowerment tool to enhance motivation and increase feelings of self-efficacy. In other words, the formal development of mission command positions it as what Couto (1998) terms a psychosymbolic approach to empowerment in that it is used as a command/management tool to allow individuals to overcome some form of organisational difficulty which again aligns with the original intent behind the adoption of mission command. Couto (1998, p.580) goes onto highlight that psychosymbolic empowerment often only results in temporary changes to the environment by allowing individuals 'to handle an unchanged situation better' and as such is only useful to deal with an unchanged set of circumstances which also aligns with Argyris & Schön's (1978) approach to single loop learning. This could also explain why in critical situations, such as those found on operations where clear decisive action is required within a framework of explicit intent, there is a sense that mission command is enacted (e.g. *It's different on Ops*) however the data also suggests that this generally due to a lack of alternative rather than a conscious effort to take risk and empower (e.g. *I think you have no choice but to do mission command on Ops...you don't have time not to*). This also reflects the original intent behind the adoption of mission command within the British military as a tool designed to enhance the speed on manoeuvre on operations rather than mechanism to enhance an individual's sense of self-efficacy and motivation. This

focus on developing mission command through the application of the principles of Episteme and Techne is further compounded by the lack of opportunity of personnel to learn from experience by practicing the full spectrum of mission command (i.e. both relational and motivational empowerment), particularly away from operations (e.g. *The number of opportunities are quite limited*). Having been given a basic grasp of the fundamental tenets, the lack of ability to contextualise through trial and error due to an organisational emphasis on 'getting the task done' in turn leads to a praxis gap which limits the ability of phronetic learning from taking place. Any phronetic learning that does take place appears to be primarily due to a secondary effect of applying the concept as a relational empowerment tool rather than a motivational empowerment tool and would therefore appear to be somewhat ad hoc at best. Finally, Wheeler (2013) describes praxis as contextualization in action that arises from the actions of people who are able to act for themselves, and is not simply action based on reflection but of making sure every action has an informed basis developed through both knowledge and a full experience of applying that knowledge in action (Carr & Kemmis 1986 cited in Wheeler 2013).

7.2.2 The Impact on Task not People

Throughout the data analysis phase there was an overriding sense that the main organisational focus from a behavioural perspective was the use of command authority and resource allocation (i.e. management) to accomplish the task often at the expense of leadership (i.e. coaching and engagement) to develop the individual. Observations such as *'It's the task the gets noticed'* and *'I have to get the job done first'* reflect the widely held sentiment that from an organisational perspective *'we are still too task driven...we would rather the task got done quickly...and the individual*

learnt nothing...than it didn't go so well... and you learnt something'. This in turn suggests that any people development is a secondary consideration to task achievement which can often be achieved primarily through controlling, directive behaviours. Likewise the perception of a constant pull for information from the top of the organisation (i.e. Devil for Detail) and unwarranted interference by superiors (i.e. the Long Screwdriver) reflected in comments such as *'We are not really left to get on with it'* and *'micromanagement is an ongoing issue'* is deemed to have a demotivating effect and constrain initiative and innovation, as one senior participant highlighted *'the initiative, good ideas, I suppose motivation just goes out the window'*. This desire for information coupled with a sense of constant interference from the strategic level, lack of coaching (e.g. *'I'm not sure we do coaching; .it's not seen as a core task'*) and the perceived absence of relational trust (e.g. *I don't think there is much trust*) appears to have distorted the ability to balance the CLM trilogy in practice so that leadership (i.e. the art of inspiring and motivating people to get things done) is now actually construed as an amalgam of command and management driven by a common task-focussed approach, with little acknowledgement of the people dimension (e.g. *It's all about the task; we don't see developing our people as a core task; we just don't have the time to develop them*). This lack of people engagement is not only reflected in the data gathered during this research project but also in the most recent Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey⁶³ which reveals that less than 1 in 5 RAF personnel believe that their senior leaders understand and represent their interests and less than 1 in 4 have confidence in the senior leadership. Consequently, while there is sense of relational empowerment being enacted

⁶³ AFCAS 2019 published by the MoD

particularly within the critical environment found on Ops (e.g. *You're left to get on with it, which is great; You tend to get left to get on with your own piece; I prefer Ops...I feel free to do whatever I want to make decisions again*) there is little evidence within the wider organisational context of individuals feeling truly empowered and motivated to take ownership of the problems they face without referring back up the chain, despite what the doctrine calls for (e.g. *In the end we would just ask him straight out what he wants us to do, so no initiative, no motivation*). This in turn appears to have mutated the CLM trinity and resulted in a mindset prevalent within the organisation that leadership is primarily about superiors exercising command authority supported by the ability to plan and manage resource effectively, irrespective of the context within which they are operating (Fig 7.1).



Fig 7.1. Leadership conceptualised as command and management.

7.2.3 The Impact of the Ethical Egoist

Kanungo & Mendonca (1996) highlight that leaders' values are often a combination of both altruistic and egotistic motives i.e. the desire to look after the interest of followers and the desire to put one's own career interests first. The category 'Ethical Egoist' arises from a perception amongst participants that 'leaders' within the organisation tend to put their own career interests ahead of their subordinates' interests, particularly when there is a tension between the two. The data suggests that the overt focus on task achievement captured in statements such as *'It's all about the task; we are still too task driven; It's the task that gets you noticed'* and the negative way in which both risk and failure are perceived to be viewed by the organisation (e.g. *We actively discourage risk it comes from the top this aversion to risk; There is a fear of failure at home; The blame culture is still out there*) places limits the ability and willingness of superiors to employ the full spectrum of mission command. In particular it appears to drive individuals, and in particular those with career ambitions, to adopt an ethical egoist approach (i.e. make decisions based on their own self-interest) to the function of leading and in doing so limit or restrict their willingness to employ the full spectrum of mission command beyond the relational empowerment form when it serves their own career interests (e.g. *If I'm going to held accountable I'd rather it was because of my direct call; wanting to advance has a marked influence on people's willingness to trust; people are reticent to empower because when they get it wrong, they feel they will hold responsibility; what if when I go back to my day job the organisation and my bosses do not want me to behave in that manner, why should I risk whatever career I have left*). Of note it was also perceived by some individuals that often the superiors most likely to employ a more

relational form of mission command were those whose career ambitions had effectively peaked which in turn meant they appeared more willing to take risk (e.g. *people seem more willing to mission command once they peak; some of the best bosses I have worked for have been those no longer on the slippery pole; promotion wasn't an issue for him [and] I found it refreshing not to be told what to do all the time*). Hence the focus on career and desire to be seen to get results can be argued to reinforce the adoption of the highly directed and controlling behaviours associated with the command and management end (relational empowerment) of the leadership spectrum.

7.2.4 The Impact of it being Different on Ops

The category 'It's Different on Ops' reflected the view that in a predominantly critical environment, people did experience a form of mission command however this again appeared to be more towards the relational end of the empowerment spectrum, as captured in statements such as *'You don't have time not to (do mission command); it's the easiest option; if you insist in managing detail then you may fail to exploit fleeting opportunities'*. Here a superior, within a very clearly defined context, is perceived to be able to devolve some degree of decision-making authority to their subordinates to overcome the organisational difficulty of being unable to deal with every problem as it arose. This also reflects the original intent behind the adoption of mission command into British military doctrine in that it gives the commander the capacity to cope with rapidly changing scenarios which, due to the nature of operations, he/she are unable to deal with directly. Furthermore, on ops it was commonly recognised that task achievement was the primary goal (e.g. *people...are more about task, task, task; when we went away it was task and everybody*

understand that was the focus) and that the critical nature of the environment lent itself to clear unambiguous direction (e.g. *Right, that's it team, we're going to deliver this, this is the way we're heading*), all contexts within which the application of primarily command and management behaviours are expected.

Chapter 8

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

8.1 Introduction

The data revealed a sense across the organisation that the prevalent behaviours across all aspects of organisational business are predicated towards task achievement and avoidance of risk (*e.g. It's all about the task; we are increasingly allergic to risk*) with a corresponding lack of people focussed behaviours (*e.g. We don't see developing our people as a main task; we would rather get the task done and the individual learned nothing; at the end of the day it's the task that gets noticed; spending time developing people...is great, but most of the time I have to get the job done first*). Furthermore, this emphasis on the application of command and management orientated behaviours is also perceived to stifle innovation and agility (*e.g. A risk averse culture is limiting our ability to innovate; as a Service we are not tolerant of experimentation or failure*) the very attributes that both the organisation's strategy (RAF Strategy 2017) and leadership doctrine (AP7001) are seeking to embed in order to develop the organisation to meet the challenges of the future. There can be no doubt that the organisation is facing a number of challenges brought about by the external VUCA environment, the ever-present challenges of continued cuts to defence spending and the increasing war on talent making it difficult to attract and retain from an ever-decreasing labour pool (Burt, 2018). The literature on VUCA, both in the military and business spheres, is unequivocal in highlighting the importance of developing leaders with leadership agility involving a willingness to take increased risk, the ability to maintain focus on people engagement and the

ability to embed a collaborative culture across all aspects of the organisation (e.g. Horney, 2014). However, this research reveals a sense that the main focus of the organisation is on task achievement (rather than people engagement) and mitigation of risk (rather a willingness to take increased risk) through the application of command and management behaviours. This in turn has obvious implications for the ability of the organisation to achieve its strategic aim of building a workforce for the future through leadership, delegation and empowerment (RAF Strategy 2017, p.34). This focus on the application of command and management behaviours is also reflected in the perception that when individuals do experience what they perceive to be mission command tends to be employed as a relational motivation tool to overcome a critical organisational difficulty, particularly on Operations (*e.g. You have to do some form of mission command, you don't have time not to; I think there is an illusion of mission command [on ops]...but that's mainly because it is the easiest option*) rather than as a motivational tool to develop the individual and enhance innovation. Furthermore, the perception that the prevalent behaviours within the organisation revolve around the application of command and management behaviours to achieve the task reflects the academic argument that often senior leaders are 'addicted to command' (Grint 2010, p.310) and feel most comfortable enacting the direct, coercive behaviours that served them well during their early careers. Ulmer (1998) proposes that in any military hierarchy that a tendency towards immediate task focussed action is reinforced in the junior leadership years when prompt, aggressive control of the tactical situation (i.e. command style behaviours) represents laudatory behaviour and is rewarded as such. Ulmer (1998) goes on to suggest that the type of task orientated behaviours that serve individuals

well in their early careers are often counterproductive when they achieve more senior positions where the emphasis shifts from operating the organisation (task focus) to developing the organisation (people focus) in order to build the social capacity to deal with problems that have yet to emerge. This is particularly important within the VUCA world where the role of the leader is to ask questions and build collaboration to deal with complexity rather than provide answers to overcome complications (Grint 2005). Grint (2010, p.1478) also highlights that 'the more senior decision makers constitute the problem as 'wicked' (i.e. complex) and interpret their leadership power as soft normative the more difficult their task becomes especially within cultures that associate leadership with the effective and efficient resolution of problems'. This leads Grint (2010, p.1478) to conclude that the irony of leadership is that 'it is often avoided where it might seem most necessary'. He also argues that this addiction to command is not just restricted to power hungry commanders but also involves anxiety prone and responsibility-avoiding followers who will seek direction rather than taking the initiative. This is again reflected in the data (*e.g. In the end we would just ask him straight out what he wants to do? So, no initiative, no motivation, and I was pretty glad when my time was up; you end up becoming, what's the term the psychologists use, the dependent child, yeah that's it, it gets to the point that you just refer back up the chain because you know any decision you make will be questioned*). Here however, it would appear that rather than actively avoiding responsibility, individuals working for 'power hungry commanders' become resigned to the fact that any initiative they do show is effectively stifled by their superior and therefore view it as nugatory effort (*e.g. Why don't we just leave it from him to do?*).

8.2 Failure of Doctrine or Failure of Practice?

The findings demonstrate that notwithstanding the doctrine's emphasis on operating at the highest level of empowerment (i.e. motivational) in order 'to get the make the most of mission command within the lean structures of today's forces' (AP7001, p3-2), there is a general consensus that personnel's experience of the concept in practice is at best sporadic and tends to sit towards the relational end of the empowerment spectrum. In other words, there is a definite gap between the theory and practice of mission command as an empowerment tool. Rolfe (1993) highlights from the theory perspective that those who write organisational doctrine often believe that this gap should be closed by moving practice closer to theory i.e. it is practice that is deemed to be at fault. However, from the practitioner's perspective Rolfe (1993) proposes that the realities of 'real-life' and pressure to conform is perceived as being down to a gap between what the says people should do and what works actually works for the i.e. it is the theory that is deemed to be at fault. In order to try determine where the fault line for the apparent gap between mission command in theory and mission command in practice it is worth revisiting mission command at this juncture through the lens of Argyris & Schön's (1974, 1978) framework on Theories of Action and re-examining its initial introduction into British military doctrine.

8.2.1 Failure of Doctrine?

As highlighted in chapter 2, the adoption of mission command (based on the principles of Auftragstaktik) by the British Army was originally intended to provide senior commanders with the flexibility to deal with a rapidly changing scenario and help counter the manoeuvres tactics of the numerically superior Soviet army (McInnes 1996). Importantly, King (2011, p.391) highlights that while it sought to

empower junior commanders to make decisions on the battlefield, it's adoption was not conceived as 'the emancipation of junior officers' and that it actually increased the control of senior commanders through the employment of explicit intent. In other words, its adoption into British military doctrine would appear to be predicated almost exclusively on facilitating a tightly controlled version of relational empowerment in which some degree of a superior's decision-making power is devolved to a subordinate in order to overcome a specific organisational difficulty. This in turn reflects Argyris & Schön's (1978) model of single-loop learning (fig 8.1) in that a perceived problem (i.e. the need to counter Soviet manoeuvre tactics) was addressed through a change in action strategy (single-loop learning) without having to modify or question the organisation's underlying governing variables i.e. the adoption of mission command was not in fact predicated on a cultural transformation but on a change in action strategy based on existing culture and values which placed a premium on command and control in order not to fail.

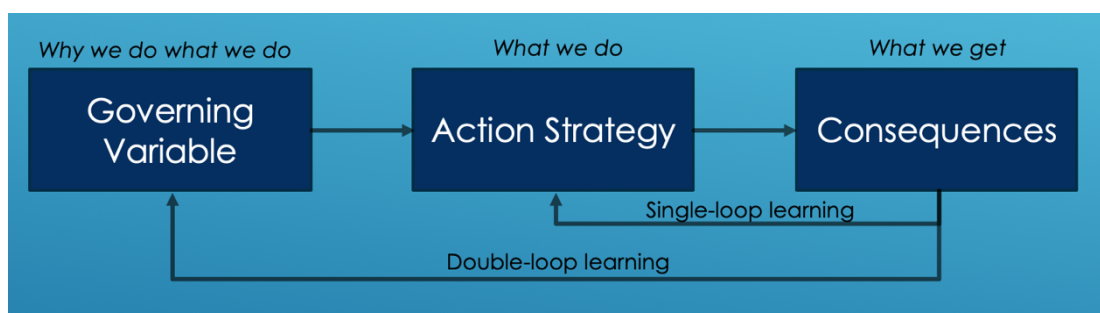


Fig 8.1 Single Loop Learning

Furthermore, Argyris & Schön (1974, 1978) propose that when a problem has been detected and resolved through an adaptation to an existing action strategy, this in

turn enables the organisation to carry on with its present policies and hence in-use goals, values and rules are operationalised rather than questioned. When it comes to leadership, Drath et al. (2008) highlight that the application of single-loop learning often involves engaging in a different practice (e.g. relational empowerment) whilst still retaining the same leadership values and beliefs. It could therefore be argued that mission command still does what it was originally intended to do i.e. a suitable tool to facilitate the decentralisation of decision making to overcome the limitations of a commander's ability to communicate with, and direct the action of, their subordinates in time critical and rapidly changing situations. This is evidenced in the research findings that personnel do perceive mission command to be enacted on operations (i.e. It's different on Ops). Irrespective of whether it is down the fact that a commander has *'no choice but to do mission command'* or that if one continues to manage detail *'you effectively fail to exploit fleeting opportunities'* the research suggests that the original concept behind the adoption of mission command based on the concept of Auftragstaktik is still alive and that it is still being effectively employed in the very context with which it was originally adopted to deal with.

8.2.1 Failure of Practice?

While there is a clear audit trail to explain the adoption of mission command as a relational empowerment tool into British military doctrine to overcome an organisational difficulty, what is less clear is the mechanism by which the original intent behind the concept has evolved into the motivational empowerment tool that is presented today by the RAF's doctrine. What is clear from the research is that in re-positioning the concept from a form of relational empowerment to a form of motivational empowerment the doctrine and related PMD activities (e.g. Initial

Officer Training) does appear to have succeeded in embedding a ‘theory espoused’ (Argyris & Schön, 1978) predicated on the latter that organisational members are able to articulate when questioned. However, while they appear to be able to learn by rote the theories espoused within official doctrine, their actual behaviour is perceived to be driven by opposing or competing values. This reflects Argyris’ (1982, cited in Shamir 2011, p.22) proposal that it is the doctrinally espoused version of mission command that organisational members subscribe to when asked, primarily driven by a desire to confirm their status as socially accepted members of the organisation or society within which they are operating. However, the research findings also reflect Sloan’s (2012) observation that individuals often fail to practice what they preach in that the data has revealed a distinct absence of the willingness and or ability to apply the concept of mission command as motivational empowerment tool across all aspects of organisational business. This in turn supports Johnston’s observation (2000) that official doctrine often only exercises a rather weak, or at best indirect, effect on organisational leadership behaviour. Consequently, it can be argued that it is not the application of mission command to achieve its original purpose that is fault, but the subsequent adaptation of mission command to fulfil a much wider organisational need (i.e. motivational empowerment) in which the organisation attempted to change its action strategy from relational to motivational empowerment in response to external pressures without attempting to address underlying governing variables that drives organisational members to do what they do.

8.3 The Cult of The Commander Manager & Governing Variables.

The core concept of the 'Cult of the Commander Manager' can therefore be argued to reflect a prevailing organisational culture within the RAF predicated on Argyris & Schön's (1974, 1978) Model I characteristics in that it employs a set of governing variables based on achieving the task and maintaining control. This in turn restricts the ability of both organisation and individual to employ double loop learning as and when changes in the external environment arise. Hence any perceived organisational difficulty resulting from such changes is resolved through an adjustment to action strategies without any challenge or change to the governing variables themselves. Having initially recognised the difficulties of communication on the post-nuclear battlefield, and then subsequently identifying an organisational requirement to adapt in order to counter a high tempo Soviet scheme of manoeuvre, the British Army can be said to have employed a form of single-loop learning. This in turn led to an adjustment to its action strategy by devolving some degree of decision-making authority down the command chain, albeit bounded by an explicit statement of intent. Consequently, there was no requirement to question the organisation's underlying values or governing variables and therefore challenge or adapt the prevalent culture of command and control.

Having adopted the term 'mission command' into wider British military doctrine in the mid 1990s, its route into RAF doctrine is less clear. What is apparent is that the formation of the RAF Leadership Centre in the early 2000s appears to have been the catalyst for the RAF to develop its own single-Service specific leadership doctrine and it is likely that having been exposed to the concept during their time on the Joint Command and Staff Course, the senior officers involved in developing the doctrine

saw it as an essential concept to adopt. However, what is even less clear is how the concept has evolved within the doctrine from a fairly limited application of relational empowerment on the battlefield to a much wider requirement to enact motivational empowerment across the full spectrum of organisational activity. The most likely scenario is that influential figures in the organisation, having recognised the challenges posed by the post-cold war VUCA world, have attempted to address them by seeking out the wider academic responses to such challenges and embedding these within the organisation's action strategies. But whatever the scenario, it would appear that similar to the British army in 1970s/1980s they have attempted to adapt to a perceived problem in the external environment by changing 'what we do' but without addressing the underlying reasons as to 'why we do it' (i.e. the governing variables). Consequently, while the adoption of mission command as relational empowerment tool appears to have been successful and endured due to the fact it appears not to have resulted in an incongruence between theory-espoused and theory-in-use (as evidenced by its employment in the operational space) its subsequent evolution within the doctrine as a motivational empowerment tool has, according to the data, resulted in incongruence between theory-in-use and theory espoused. The research reveals that primary reason for this appears to be an organisational culture within the RAF predicated on Argyris & Schön's (1974, 1978) Model I theory of action which places a premium value that revolve around the notion of achieving the task and retaining control. Having been socialised into this environment during their careers to date, leaders at all levels of the organisation appear to employ theories-of-action (i.e. what they do) predicated on reducing risk, maintaining control and achieving the task despite the doctrine's apparent attempts

to embed a Model II culture predicated on greater sharing of control and internal commitment. As highlighted previously, Argyris (1995) proposes that as the adoption of a Model II culture requires superiors to relinquish some degree of control, this often be difficult for individuals who have been socialised within an organisation that sustains a predominantly Model I environment.

Chapter 9

CONCLUSION

9.1 Research Objectives

The main research objectives of this study were to undertake a qualitative grounded study of the hierarchical, military organisation known as the RAF in order to:

- (i) Explore organisational members' own understanding of mission command in theory.
- (ii) Explore organisational members own experiences of mission command in practice.
- (iii) Compare individuals' own understanding of mission command in theory and their experiences of mission command in practice order to identify what if any gaps exist between theory and practice.
- (iv) Identify what if any factors exist that impact on the ability of individuals within the organisation to put the espoused theory into practice.
- (v) Utilise the findings and conclusions in order to help the organization under study to further enhance its organisational leadership learning and development activities in order to close any gap.

9.1.1 Mission Command in Theory – All Well & Good?

The research clearly demonstrates that across the organisation personnel at all levels appear able to articulate the doctrinally espoused version of mission command which is predicated on a set of governing variables or organisational values based on the concept of motivational empowerment. This reflects Argyris & Schön's (e.g. 1974) research into organisational learning that proposes within an organisation members

are often able to articulate when asked the values that the organisation wishes them to aspire to as they are required to both learn and espouse them when asked in order to become socially accepted members of the organisation. Furthermore, in espousing the motivational approach to mission command as presented in the doctrine, personnel also support the notion that it remains a valuable aspiration.

9.1.2 Mission Command in Practice – But not on Graduation Day?

The research clearly demonstrates a perception across all levels of the organisation that the employment of mission command as demanded by the doctrine (i.e. a motivational empowerment tool predicated on the willingness of a superior to take risk and employ the minimum of control depending on context) is at best sporadic and in most cases experience of the concept appears to be limited to operations where the perception is that superiors have no option 'but to do mission command' in order to achieve the task. It would therefore appear that while the employment of mission command within the RAF remains very much in line with the original intent behind the concept i.e. a relational empowerment tool in which some degree of decision-making authority is devolved a subordinate to assist a commander in achieving the task, it has failed to keep up with the subsequent evolution of the concept as a motivational empowerment tool.

9.1.3 Theory v Practice

The research findings indicate that there is a clear gap between personnel's understanding of mission command as presented in the doctrine (i.e. theory espoused) and their experiences of the concept in day-to-day organisational practice (i.e. theory-in-use). While the category 'It's Different on Ops' captures the fact that the concept is being employed as a relational empowerment tool within time critical,

high tempo environments such as operations as it was originally adopted to do, there is very little evidence of its use as a motivational empowerment tool across the wider aspects of organisational activity as demanded by the doctrine; the former utilising decentralised decision making to overcome an organisational difficulty; the later to enhance feelings of self-efficacy and motivation. Furthermore, despite the apparent difficulties in embedding a culture of motivational empowerment in the organisation, personnel generally do perceive the doctrinally espoused version of to be one of value and one which the organisation should continue to pursue in light of the challenges it faces. Importantly though, it would also appear that personnel remain unaware of the original intent behind the adoption of mission command as a relational empowerment tool to be employed in a very specific context. Although the doctrine does make mention of the fact that the concept was originally 'devised as an army tactic to overcome the impossibility of a commander being able to communicate with and direct the actions of his subordinates' (AP7001, p3-1) it then leaps straight into the realms of agility and empowerment without any real consideration of the cultural, practical and organisational challenges that the organisation would need to overcome to facilitate this cultural transformation. Ford (2014) highlights that often when faced with external problems that are subsequently require an increase in motivational empowerment, senior leaders often perceive the problem of lack of empowerment to sit at the mid-levels of the organisation and that the very act of declaring an empowerment programme or initiative is deemed sufficient to overcome the problem. This certainly seems to have been the case with regards to RAF Doctrine in that by adapting the concept of mission to command (i.e. decentralising decision making) to embrace motivational empowerment, this

appears to have been deemed sufficient by the organisation to subsequently assist organisational members in embedding the concept in practice. However, as Ford (2014) also states, that often such initiatives fail due to organisations only having the structures and processes (i.e. culture) to deliver relational empowerment – and this appears to have been the case within the RAF.

9.1.4 Limiting Factors

The primary factor inhibiting the ability of organisational members to put the doctrinally espoused theory of mission command into practice as a motivational empowerment tool has been revealed by the research to be an emphasis across all aspects of the organisation from training through to the business space on the employment of predominantly task focused command and management behaviours (to get the job done) at the expense of people focused leadership behaviours (to develop the organisation). This ‘Cult of the Commander Manager’ is deemed to arise due to the organisation adopting/employing a culture predicated on Argyris and Schön’s (e.g. 1974, 1978) Model I characteristics based on a set of governing variables that are primarily concerned with achieving the task (i.e. winning) and maintaining control. Having been socialised into this environment during their careers to date, leaders at all levels of the organisation are perceived to employ theories-of-action (i.e. what they do) predicated on reducing risk, maintaining control and achieving the task despite the doctrine’s apparent attempts to embed a Model II culture predicated on greater sharing of control. This in turn inhibits or prevents members (and in doing so the organisation) from both challenging and subsequently adapting the underlying values and assumptions through the process of double loop learning resulting in

any change to their action strategy (i.e. what they do) still being predicated on retaining control wherever possible, unless they have no option. This is clearly demonstrated by the adoption of a form of decentralised decision making on operations in order to prevent loss of control of the task but the struggle to adopt similar approach across the wider organisation to enhance motivation and innovation where the ability to control and mitigate risk remains.

9.2 Recommendations Arising from the Study

There can be little doubt that the organisation known as the RAF is facing unprecedented challenges as it passes its centenary and looks to the next 100 years. The increasing challenges of operating in a VUCA environment together with ever increasing pressures on the Defence budget and a shrinking talent pool place an increasing importance on harnessing the talents of its people in order to develop a culture of agility and innovation necessary to succeed (RAF Strategy, 2017). The organisation recognises that key to this is the requirement to encourage individual's flexibility, innovation and risk taking across all aspects of organisational business underpinned by a culture of empowerment based on the principle of delegating responsibility, supervision and decision-making to the lowest practical level. However, despite this concept of motivational empowerment being already firmly embedded with the organisation's leadership doctrine under the banner of mission command, and reflected in the theories-espoused by its personnel, the findings have demonstrated that personnel's day-to-day experiences of mission command are very different and tend to be limited to a sense of relational empowerment associated with the high tempo, critical environment found on operations. It could be argued that a simple solution to close the theory-practice gap with regards to mission

command (and overcome the sense of frustration that this engenders) could be to reframe the concept within the doctrine as a purely relational empowerment tool where a superior devolves some degree of decision-making responsibility to a subordinate to overcome a specific difficulty. In other words, take the concept back to its original role of speeding up decision-making in critical contexts by bringing theory closer to practice and removing the element of motivational empowerment. However, this does not address the wider issue of a recognised and valid organisational need to develop a leadership culture predicated on motivational empowerment in order to succeed in a VUCA world. Hence any move to realign the concept of mission command to its original form could be seen to be based on semantics. Therefore, recognising that mission command having evolved as a concept is now embedded as the theory-espoused with regards to motivational empowerment, the researcher believes that the strategic aims of the organisation can be best met through challenging and adapting its current governing variables (based on retaining control) by embedding a Model II structure that facilitates double loop learning. Indeed, this research project has taken the form of a 'double-loop' learning system in employing advocacy and enquiry to uncover the organisational barriers that inhibit the adoption of an action strategy that is congruent with the values the organisation seeks to adopt. Furthermore, the following recommendations on how to remove or overcome some of the barriers to adopting a more collaborative, empowered culture can also be applied to other organisations that are attempting to embed a culture of empowerment but struggling to adapt their governing variables (i.e. values) beyond the amendment of their organisational doctrine or mission statements.

9.2.1 Knowledge not Know How

The current focus within the organisation's leadership development programmes appears to be predicated on the principles of Episteme and Techne whereby individuals are required to demonstrate an ability to retain knowledge of the principles of mission command and then put those principles into effect in order to achieve an objective end goal. Indeed, from the researcher's own experience as a leadership instructor at the RAF College, the leadership exercises that purport to employ mission command primarily involve cadets having to solve a problem then give an intent and direct and control the subsequent activity which is deemed sufficient to get the mission command 'tick in the box'. In other words, any learning is strictly limited to demonstrating a grasp of the processes and this in turn appears insufficient to enable personnel to move beyond the ability in their early careers to apply the concept as nothing more than basic form of delegation or management process. To overcome this barrier, the organisation needs to firstly recognise the limitations of its leadership training approach (e.g. by potentially renaming the leadership syllabus to the command and management syllabus?) and place increased emphasis on the role of line managers during an individual's early career to allow them to develop their skills through trial and error by taking risk with their own subordinates and importantly allowing them to learn from their mistakes. This in turn would benefit from an organisational emphasis on developing an individual's ability to have 'coach like' conversations with their subordinates to help them reflect and learn from their own experiences and develop the appropriate mindset.

9.2.2 Task not People

One of the key obstacles to challenging and adapting current governing variables and adopting a culture of motivational empowerment appears to be the overriding sense that the main priority at all levels of the organisation is achieving the task rather than developing the people. In other words, the current culture places an emphasis on operating the organisation to deal with the here and now rather than developing the capacity of the organisation to deal with its future challenges. This in turn puts pressure at all levels for superiors to keep tight control rather than allow their subordinates sufficient flexibility to take full ownership of their own tasks and report back when required. A constant pull for information coupled with a desire to be seen to be 'in control' appears to have distorted the CLM trilogy so that command and management behaviours are now perceived to be the prevalent behaviours employed at all levels of the organisation. Key to overcoming this barrier will be the ability to 'rebalance the trinity' by introducing organisational mechanisms that refocus emphasis on the role of the leader in developing their people and that this is of equal, if not sometime greater, importance than achieving the task. From participants' own concerns about the lack of coaching within the organisation it would appear that this could be one intervention that could help to rebalance the trinity. Firstly, by developing the coaching skills of all 'leaders' in the organisation through exposure to the basic principles of coaching (e. g. asking not telling) during their PMD courses and secondly by providing access to professional coaches for more senior personnel as their careers progress who could then embed a more coaching style in their respective areas through role modeling. However, even the introduction of basic coaching techniques could go a long way to helping motivate

and empower subordinates at all levels of the organisation as reflected in the comment made by one participant that “The best thing a boss ever said to me was what do you think, and he meant it and he listened.”

9.2.3 The Ethical Egoist

One of the main barriers Service personnel perceive with regards to the employment of mission command as a motivational empowerment tool is a lack of willingness to take risk across the organisation due to a fear of failure and a perceived culture of blame. As previously highlighted Kanungo & Mendonca (1996) highlight that leaders’ values are often a combination of both altruistic and egotistic motives i.e. the desire to look after the interest of followers and the desire to put one’s own career interests first. However, within the Service it would appear that the latter predominates and this reflects Argyris (1990) view that organisations that employ Model I theories-in-use tend to engender an overriding desire to ‘win’ which in turn can lead to deeply entrenched defensive behaviours at all levels of the business based on a primary strategy of control and self-protection. In order to overcome this barrier and encourage the adoption of more altruistic motives there are several possibilities. Firstly, the use of coaching could help individuals question and explore their ethical approach to the task of leading and identify any shortfalls or discrepancies in how they think they are behaving. Secondly, a greater emphasis within the assessment and promotion system on a superior’s ability to ‘develop and motivate’ their subordinates could in turn utilise the ‘desire to win’ or get promoted to drive the adoption of these behaviours – while this could be construed as more of a ‘stick’ approach it could in time allow people to realise the benefits of adopting a more altruistic approach which in turn becomes the carrot.

9.4 And Finally....

While the above recommendations are not exhaustive, it is hoped that the very act of this thesis challenging the underlying assumption that mission command has been 'fully embedded in everything we do' will go some way towards helping the organisation gain a better understanding of its governing variables and associated values thereby closing the gap between what 'it thinks it does' and what 'it actually does'. It is also hoped that this will provide the catalyst for the organisation to critically reflect on its current leadership activities and in doing so begin the process of developing a learning organisation that is fully able to meet its strategic objective of transforming its people structures and training systems in order to empower and motivate its people to unlock their full potential.

The final word in this thesis goes to a 3* officer who undertook a brief spell of coaching prior to leaving the Service and at his final RAF Leadership Conference before retiring, spoke about the fact that despite his achieving the success he had, he had been neglecting the people element for most of his career, which he had built primarily through the application of knowledge and authority and concluded by saying in front of the assembled all ranks audience:

"I was the arrogant, self-confident fighter pilot who knew best, who knew how to do things, if you shout a bit louder people would just jump a bit higher, and that was definitely how I had been taught to think about leadership."

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A comparative Investigation into the willingness of individuals to apply Mission command within the operational and non-operational environment – Information for participants

1. As a serving member of the RAF, you are being invited to take part in a research project that is being overseen by Leeds University Business School into the willingness of individuals to apply mission command within the operational and non-operational environment. Before you decide if you wish to volunteer it is important for you to fully understand what the research is about and what any participation will entail. I would therefore be grateful if you could take time to read the following information sheet in order to decide if you wish to take part or not. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to discuss with your colleagues or contact me direct.

2. The aim of this research project is to investigate what if any differences there are in an individual's willingness to apply mission command when in the operational and non-operational environment. You are one of up to 30 individuals who have indicated that you would be willing to share your experiences of applying mission command both in an operational and non-operational role. Participation for all personnel is purely voluntary and all information gained during the interview will be treated as personal-in-confidence and will not be shared with any other individual without your express consent. In order to preserve anonymity, at no time will individuals taking part be made aware of the specific details of any other participant. Furthermore, you may subsequently remove yourself from the process at any time without having to explain your reasons for doing so. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form which will confirm the voluntary nature of your participation and your right to leave the process at any time.

3. If you choose to take part in the interview stage you will be required to undertake a 1-hour interview at your duty unit where your experiences of mission command will be discussed with the researcher. Prior to the interview you will be reminded that all information provided will be treated in strictest confidence.

4. In the unlikely event that the interview leads you to feel uncomfortable in answering the questions posed you may stop the process at any time. You may also discuss any concerns you may have about the interview with the researcher at any stage prior to, during or after the process. Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those individuals participating in the project, it is hoped that this work and your input will help inform future leadership training and development activities.

5. All information will be treated as personal-in-confidence according to MoD information guidelines and the data protection act and stored securely. No individual will be identified by name in any report or publication arising as a result of the research. The results of the research project will be available on completion of research and participants may request a copy of the abstract detailing the findings if they wish.

6. The research project has been sponsored by the RAF Leadership Centre as part of the leadership development scheme. The researcher is a former Wing Commander who is now working as a Senior Fellow with the University of Portsmouth at Cranwell.

7. Contact for further information Mr Carl Hartford:

Tel - 01400 266044

Example of Interview Transcript

Int: The question I ask everybody to start with just to frame the discussion is what do you understand by the term, 'Mission command'?

R: My practical understanding is that you get the freedom to conduct activity in order to meet senior officer intent within the bounds of clearly defined areas. And you kind of get an operating space that has been delegated to you to operate within and if you need to go outside the bounds of that then you have a conversation and discuss whether you can or you can't.

Int: Which captures the essence of Mission command so, my next is really a statement and it's the extent to which you agree with it. And I don't know if you've been to a CAS leadership conference lately but about three iterations ago, the then chief of air staff was asked a question from the audience about Mission command, to which he effectively said that he didn't need to worry about Mission command anymore because, from where he was, it was, 'Fully embedded in everything we do'. What's your thoughts on that?

R: I would say that to some extent, and I think that the policy is well understood and I'd be surprised if people gave you definitions that were wildly different from what I've given you, but in practice it's very much dependent on human nature and how comfortable individuals are in certain environments and how much risk they are personally willing to take.

Int: So, there's a few things there. So, there's obviously human nature which is either exacerbated or mitigated by environment, I would imagine, and degree of risk.

So, what about human nature, in terms of your own experience then of people either being on the end of Mission command or watching other people and their approach to Mission command, what, if any, aspects of behaviour do you think may influence a willingness to actually follow the policy?

R: Well, I think the problem set is that it's all very well having the doctrine or whatever we're calling it which was the definition at the start, but Mission command applies to so many different areas across defence and so many different scenarios and so many different contexts that you can't actually define from a policy position where those lines should be and so that is very much up to the commander himself and some people, I guess, by human nature are happy to trust people more than others, and that's probably fairly uncontroversial to say that, and so that those lines will necessarily get drawn in slightly different places. So, I think as you go through your career you see people who are happy to give people more freedom than others.

Int: Have you got any thoughts as to what drives a sort of risk averse behaviour in individuals? Is it purely down to innate nature characteristics or is there anything about the culture which may influence that?

R: Oh, I think culture's massively important. I mean we can go onto some specifics I guess a bit later if you like?

Int: Yeah, sure.

R: And then how I've received Mission command and how I feel that I've done Mission command and then the benefits and stuff like that.

Yeah, in terms of how I've been on the receiving end of it, it has varied greatly even within the same role, so when I was a squadron boss I had two different station commanders and one of them was quite unpredictable in how he behaved and what

he was going to be interested in, which made it quite difficult to freely operate because you didn't quite know where his risk appetite was and you didn't know what he was going to spike into and what he was going to let you get on with. So, that provoked a lot more uncertainty, which is never a good thing.

And then the second, [inaudible 04:36] from the guy that took over from the first, I had a much better understanding with, he was much clearer with his direction, he was much more consistent with what he wanted, and that enabled me to work with intent a lot more.

Int: So, you think the second individual was able to clarify his intent which made it easier for you to work within the Mission command boundaries?

R: Yeah, absolutely. And I guess coming back to your original question about why people behave differently, I think you've got a number of different factors there and off the top of my head I'd be saying that human nature, like an innate character would behave in slightly different circumstances depending on how stressed they're feeling, environmental factors, the culture that they themselves are working within, so if their own boss screwdrivers them, they're more likely to be more into the detail themselves, for example.

I think you've got some people who are motivated by different factors. You get the classic, do people get motivated by a drive for success or do they get motivated by a fear of failure? And so, the latter individuals are probably tending to be a bit more risk averse because they don't want anything to happen on their watch. So, I think you've got a massive spectrum.

So, I think the tension here is that the principle is good to create boundaries for people and give them the space to operate. In practice, what you get is very different boundaries set by different individuals for the same problem set.

Int: You mentioned at the start you think the policy's understood and, arguably, people can give a rote definition. Do you think the actual application is well understood of Mission command, if that makes sense, i.e. the sort of mindset approach rather than the four or five steps?

R: No, there's not much training on that. We do various courses like ACSC and fire side chats and senior officers and things like that and I think this probably falls under the somewhere or is aligned to the realm of leadership that gets studied in some detail and this is one of a number of things that you've got to do as a commander. And I think it depends on, also, the scale of the task that you're dealing with and how busy you are at the time depends on how much you delegate, how much you retain, how involved you get and I think largely that is down to the individual about how comfortable they feel and so that's why I think, in practice, some people are very good at Mission command and other people are quite bad because if you're talking to a control freak, they want to know everything all the time, they don't delegate anything and they don't even know when they're getting maxed out, and it's at the very point where you're getting maxed out that actually you've got to delegate more.

Int: And that leads me onto another something that's emerging in my research so hopefully you understand the question or statement. Would you say that doing Mission command actually allows you to do Mission command? Does that make sense to you? i.e. it gives you the freedom and capacity then to allow people that if

you don't do Mission command, it's sort of like a vicious circle, the fact you're not doing it then doesn't lead you to allow other people to do it?

R: I'd say that actually doing Mission command creates efficiency and effectiveness and trust and improves morale and is a real virtuous circle, actually. You can probably apply it to different people so my own experience, I think I was quite good at letting people get on with the things that they needed to get on with and then having a conversation with them if they wanted to, and that's something that I invested quite a lot of thought into. But there are certain, on the squadron as a wing commander I had about five or six squadron leaders working for me and I would allow different amounts of freedom to different individuals. And so, it's not something you can just scattergun and say, 'Yeah, just crack on, it needs a lot of thought, I think.

But then if you give people that trust and that space to do it, then I guess they're more likely to do the same and it can improve. But at every level, you've got human beings who are very fallible and who have got different views of judgement and all the rest of it.

Int: You mentioned detail there, notwithstanding there's a spectrum of ability or willingness to do Mission command, do you perceive that a drive for detail from the very top and even maybe the strategic leadership level, does that arguably constrain everybody's ability to do Mission command irrespective of where you sit on the spectrum, or do you think that just applies in certain areas?

R: I don't think it's, again, it's complex, it's not just a black or white because the seniors need detail because as soon as you summarise an issue into two sentences and you send that up the chain, you then just get a volley of questions back. So, they need the detail but I think where we fall down, I think, is that at the political level

people are very reactionary and therefore very short term and so they're constantly asking for lots of detail yesterday rather than having a plan. And I think that's the nature of politics because they want to make the safest decision which means generally making it at the last minute when they know all of world events. And that kind of trickles down.

I think on something like a squadron, where you're not dealing with that ambiguity and that uncertainty, you've got the ability to make a plan for the delivery of your task. And of course, there's stuff day to day that gets in the way but broadly speaking, you've got to get a certain amount of flying hours, you've got to make sure the pilots are up to a certain standard and there's all these known events, and you can come up with a plan for that and then you can give people the freedom to go away and develop that plan. So, I think it's different at different levels.

Int: So, if we look at, you mentioned the squadron and one of the things that seems to be emerging, particularly at squadron leader, flight lieutenant levels, is there a perception that when they go on ops, they experience Mission command to a greater extent than when they're working in the headquarters. Now, by ops I mean either on a squadron preparing for ops, etc., but when they're in somewhere like an SO3 or an SO2 staff appointment they get the impression that we don't do Mission command. What are your thoughts or experience of that?

R: I think, I'd have to know some greater specifics, but I'd say in big handfals as an SO3 in a staff headquarters, you are at the very bottom of the food chain and everything rolls down to you, whereas as an SO2 on a flying squadron, you could be second in command. And so, probably the world looks quite different and I can really only talk from a typhoon squadron but I was a squadron commander of one squadron

so I could run the whole flipping thing. I've come into my staff job and I'm literally the lowest rank, so all the shit rolls down to me, and so the world looks very different now than it did six months ago. And so, there's probably an element of home life in a headquarters and away life on ops.

I think the other thing, ops is simpler in some ways in that you get a reduction in home distractions and that can be everything from family issues right through to the fact that you're not having to organise [inaudible 12:31] and trivia and you've just got that ongoing battle rhythm of orderly officer [sounds like 12:37] and rubbish at home that, when you're away, you're cut free from.

I think there is also an element of slightly increased risk on operations and you do get a bit more freedom to move it and we did feel that when we went away to Cyprus in all the Iraq and Syria stuff and we were a typhoon squadron deployed and I felt very trusted by the chain of command. I thought the Mission command that I received from home to go and get on with it was absolutely excellent and we were very much trusted to get on with it without the normal kind of constant phone calls from the FHQ and people like that that you get at home.

So, I think it feels like it's different on operations and maybe it is a bit but it's probably due to a number of different factors.

Int: Do you think that there's an increased willingness to apply Mission command or, as some perceive, that actually you've got no real alternative but to do what is perceived to be Mission command, i.e. allow subordinates to make decisions on ops? Where do you sit?

R: I think it's a very good aspiration and it undoubtedly makes people feel more valued and it gets more out of them. It's a funny old thing, if you give someone, even

a relatively junior person, a really important job, normally they nail it out of sight just as well as anyone else would have done. So, I think generally speaking we don't trust people enough to get on with their jobs because I think actually they can generally do them really well and just having that little dialogue when they get stuck is actually the important thing.

So, I think, no, it's a really worthy concept but I think there's lots of worthy concepts in defence that are spoken and largely ignored. And another classic one is face time, where people will say, 'Look, just do your job and then go home' and then at seven o'clock at night in the MOD if I'm still sitting there looking at the computers but not really doing anything because no one wants to go. It's a classic, 'What are we all doing?' but no one wants to break the mould and it's similar to that. Mission command, absolutely, everyone would sign up to it, but even in the place I'm sitting now, there's a lot of one star and two stars who are actually terrible at it and yet they've obviously been promoted about six or seven times to get where they are.

Int: So, what do you think they've been promoted on? If we're looking to promote leadership which, to my mind, is empowerment and Mission command, what is it that allows individuals to rise through the ranks who arguably don't display Mission command, because it is our primary leadership philosophy?

R: So, you're asking a kind of different question there.

Int: Sort of, the reason I'm asking that, I'll be honest, is because I've got a slightly different work thread working looking at commander management and leadership behaviours, so you've just given me something which ...

R: Yeah. I mean, there's a whole raft of reasons people promote and being a good leader, I'd say, is one of them. I think one of the issues, and there's lots of

others, like being good at your primary role, luck and timing, SQEP [sounds like 15:45], there's all sorts of reasons why people promote. Leadership is undoubtedly critical to that. We promote some very good leaders and we promote some not so good leaders and that's quite evident. And I think probably it's different at different ranks as well, people maybe reach a threshold at which they're no longer feeling comfortable and so maybe they get worse at it as they go up the ranks. And then you also get people who are supported by a very good team beneath them and appear good and I think, I actually think our reporting system and our promotion system's very good. I know it's easy to sit there and criticise it but I can't think of a better way of doing it, if I'm honest.

And I'd say maybe the one area that could be done, and I know it was looked at and discounted and you could maybe look at why it was discounted, but the kind of 360 thing and you could almost say, well, if someone gets a bad 360 report they could say, 'Well I took some really difficult decisions and yeah, they were unpopular but leadership's not about a popularity contest and I got penalised for it by my juniors', and that's quite difficult to argue against but most people, after a beer, could sort of, you can pin who you're good leaders are and who your effective people are and who aren't and there are plenty of the latter that do go up the ranks and I think part of that is because they're good at working the people above them, at the expense of those below.

But I think innately, the military does promote task focused people and I think that's just an organisational design issue.

Int: Do you think, and this is slightly bridging both topics now and bringing it back towards Mission command, do you think the current, not the appraisal system per se

but the way people are reported on, do you think we accurately capture subordinates' willingness to apply Mission command when we report on them? So, people understand that this person is not just task focused, he's developing his people he's empowering?

R: No, I don't think we do probably. I mean you'd say that that person is achieving their task and you'd identify if they were good with their people to some extent, but it gets a little bit subjective there and I think a lot of second ROs and third ROs wouldn't know if they were good with their people or not. And there's a lot of flight lieutenants, for example, have very little contact with their station commanders and that goes up at every rank. And I think maybe when you get very senior then the reporting officers, they all know each other a bit more, but it's quite difficult to judge someone on how good they are Mission command, I think, if you have little contact with them.

So, that's probably a design fault of the system but as soon as you start to get subjective, because again, one person's view of how well they're treating people might be different from someone else's, so it is really difficult.

Int: You mentioned trust a little bit earlier, you mentioned trust a few times and that is a key concept, to what extent, is there any environmental or contextual factors which make people less willing to take risks? So, some external influences irrespective of their own risk appetite?

R: I think it's their, what people generally do is reflect the risk appetite of their boss and so it comes down to what you're allowed to do, and in the aviation environment then there are some really clear rules about what you can and can't do, right through from how you strap in to how you execute a mission. And so, actually

by writing all this stuff down and making sure that people know it, you provide a really easy framework for the pilots to operate within, and the engineers when they're fixing the aeroplanes and everybody else.

So, I think that's not a bad thing but then occasionally you do come up with situations where there aren't rules necessarily catered for that particular scenario and then you're relying on people's good judgement. And the degree to which they take risk will largely be on the culture that they're involved in, I think, and whether they know that the risk they're taking is calculated or whether they can easily stop that risky activity. And I'm thinking about maybe operating a typhoon in some poor weather or something like that, something that needs a snap decision. You kind of need to be in the mind of your one up and what their mind is, really. Does that make any sense?

Int: It does. And again, it's very contextual in terms of close relationships between you and your superior. One thing I am interested in though is one of the attributes is willingness to take risks. It's something we do at IOT, we try and get the cadets, we tell them that we want you to take risks and I'm just wondering what your thoughts are with your background as to how that actually plays out in practice and whether or not we allow people to make mistakes and learn from them or do we constrain that willing?

If we take it out the aviation safety environment, but in that general day to day, Corporal So and So running the barbecue or a VIP visit and a flight lieutenant, to what extent do we allow people to take some risks, accepting that they may go wrong and, if they do, we learn from it?

R: I think we're culturally risk averse actually.

Int: Can you think what drives that?

R: I think we sometimes forget that we're in the Royal Air Force and I think it would come back very quickly if there was a genuine war, a proper war. You know, if we had aircraft over the skies of Kent, a lot of the rules that we're slaves to now would kind of go out the window because I think it's all about necessity and right now if we started bending rules and taking more risks and if we lost a few aeroplanes, the politicians would probably say, 'Well why on earth are you doing that? Because what we're actually doing is discretionary and we're not asking the RAF to take lots of risk at the moment. Actually, were asking you to be quite sensible with the risk that you take because what we're doing is actually within our gift to upscale and downscale'.

So, the priority right now, for example, is to have a very effective safety culture and to deliver precision weapons without causing collateral damage and that sort of thing. We don't really need to be taking lots of risk and I know I'm talking aviation again but I think just generally, if the station commander was putting so much risk onto a flight lieutenant when he's organising a visit that he had to cut corners, well then, he's probably doing it wrong.

So, I think we've gone a bit far in our risk aversion and I'd like to see a few more freedoms creeping in to be perfectly honest, but in terms of the big-ticket items, as an air force I don't think we need to be in the manner of increasing risk broadly because there's not the political demand signal to do so.

Int: What are your thoughts then on the sort of trends we find that if Mission command is a mindset and it is empowering subordinates to make decisions for you and risk appetite is constraining that, is that not going to be an issue if we do go to a large war fighting scenario whereby our people aren't used to operating in that

means or do you think the scenario itself would actually lend itself to very quickly getting more into that Mission command risk?

R: Well I think just because we're taking not so much risk it doesn't mean that what we're doing in terms of training isn't very really hard already and actually quite effective so let's just [inaudible 23:37] a couple of scenarios, so in terms of typhoon air to air sorties, you don't want to lose aeroplanes first and foremost, right? So, you make sure that your safety is absolutely paramount and then the degree to which you'll fly a risky tactic is then very carefully managed. And so, you'll be doing large 20 ship night formations that are very effectively shooting enemy aircraft down with bogus missiles or dropping real pave way fours [sounds like 24:07] and you can increase the risk of those sorties by authorising the pilots to get a little bit closer to the enemy aircraft or something like that.

But in practice actually, you can max people out by just increasing the training complexity [sounds like 24:20] and we do that already. So, you can do that without really increasing the risk. I guess if you're talking about doing something a bit wacky with an aeroplane like landing a C17 on a beach or something because there might be some requirement to do it in an emergency neo [sounds like 24:38] or something and the crews aren't training for it, well then you could say, 'Well, what's the likelihood?' and make a judgement on that.

So, I think actually where we're taking a lot of risk at the moment is more in terms of equipment capability, procurement, where we're spending our money, size of the force, harmony, where we are allocating probably not enough resources to a task that's too big, i.e. the size of our military compared with political appetite to use

it. I think they're the areas we're taking risk, not so much the individual's ability to be a bit more wary, if that makes sense?

Int: Yeah, no indeed. So, one of the things I'm looking at now and I'd be interested in your experience is back into this business space which is where arguably that empowering, if you look at Mission command as something which develops people, enthuses them, as you've mentioned, motivates them, there is a perception out there that we don't do it maybe as well as we should do.

Is there anything else apart from a risk appetite which would explain why SO2, SO1 level within HQ air feel as though they're not given the flexibility to make decisions that arguably they should be given?

R: Well, risk appetite's one thing, I guess communicating the boundaries and the issues.

Int: So, back to intent?

R: Yeah, yeah, I think probably intent. It's not something you can define probably in your first day on the job and then that's it done because the world changes fast, doesn't it? Other characters around you change, individuals are different and have slightly different requirements and have got different capacities and knowledge, so it might be that if someone was working for you with a rotary wing background, you'd give him much more freedom to manoeuvre in a JHT [sounds like 26:40] environment than you would do for someone who's only flown bulldogs or something.

So, I think where I'm coming to with this is that the environment and the dynamic changes, and you probably need quite a lot of continued conversations and maybe at the air command, SO1 example, there isn't the time with seniors to talk

about all these areas all the time so maybe time and access to get the intent. So, I guess it comes down to communication.

Int: Do you think people actually take, you mentioned time and access and capacity, do you think that seniors actually do come up, because again I'll just rewind, on ops we have the seven questions, we have estimate process which actually lay out intent quite well so we have the framework to deliver an intent or help you to craft it. Is there anything like that in the business space or is intent something which, arguably, a lot of the time people are somewhat oblivious to maybe that a mission statement here or there?

R: Yeah.

Int: And do we need that intent? That's the other question, because the other question I would ask is do we need Mission command in the business space? It maybe we struggle to do it but actually, do we need it? Is there anything wrong with a detail minded boss who, notwithstanding the empowerment and the motivational issues, is it ...?

R: I think it's the same whether you're doing strategy or policy or operations, I think ultimately, you're working to somebody, doing something for someone. Even if you're the chief of defence staff, you'll still working for the Secretary of State, she still needs to know what that person wants him to do. And you know, the Secretary of State's working for the PM, isn't it, so this goes right up the chain and it's all about being in the mind of your boss, having a good relationship so that you can talk honestly about what you think the issues are, understanding what they want and what they need and what their boundaries are and then not being afraid to challenge it if you think that there's an option up for debate.

And on that latter point, I think we do often see that challenge function not being executed because people are worrying about rocking the boat and their own careers and things like that.

Int: So, do you think reputational risk, we talk about the sort of physical, financial, do you think reputational risk, and again, it is a perception at the lower levels that their bosses don't want to be seen to screw up because of promotion prospects, etc., is that something that ...?

R: Yeah, I think that's entirely [inaudible 29:12], yeah. And I'd say that's very much down to personalities because I've had bosses who talk very honestly to their bosses and I respect them enormously. Then I've worked for other people who will agree to doing something that's probably slightly wrong just so they don't challenge their boss and they stand a better chance of getting a better OJAR. And having written a lot of OJARs, actually in my own experience I find that it's the people who challenge me as the boss who I respect more and someone who I can have a good conversation with and provide me with a new opinion, actually, I respect a great deal more. So, I think that just agree to everything your boss says is a tactic that you do see a lot in the military but I actually think it's not the right one.

Int: If we just look at your experience now in terms of your ability, willingness to do Mission command, is there anything other than a detail from above, i.e. the relationship with your one up, which you would take into consideration from the context of environment when you're working out where to set those boundaries which may constrain you, or do you feel that actually you feel comfortable that you do Mission command as you see fit?

R: So, I think it's the one up and it's the two up and it's the three up and it's, when you're running a squadron you've got to know what your station commander wants but you've also got to know what your force headquarters wants. When you deploy on operations you've got to know where your operational risk boundaries lie and that means having an understanding of the risk appetite and the context of the op that you're in through the EAW and the expeditionary air group. So, you're actually, you've got about four masters, so you've got about four first ROs [sounds like 31:02] if you like when you're on ops. Maybe that's not so apparent to the boys and the girls but certainly I felt it when I was out there.

So, I think you've actually got to assimilate quite a few views in your view of Mission command and then individually work out where you're going to take a bit of risk and where you aren't. And I guess in the aviation safety environment, my risk appetite and threshold was very, very low in that we wanted to absolutely play by the rules to the greatest extent possible, and we did and there was very much the culture that I support people who terminated missions or whatever due to flight safety reasons and we made sure that people read the reports and all the rest of it. So, a very small box, if you like. And then in other areas when people were developing good ideas or working out different ways to write the programme or something, then I'd give them an awful lot of choice to get on with their work.

And in other areas, we'd deliberately break policy because we thought it was bad. So, one of these was the development of a squadron bar, it sounds silly but up at Lossiemouth we had a brand new squadron building, we wanted to build an engineers' bar and the policy is that you're not allowed to do that because ISS have got all the contracts for bars so I just deliberately ignored it and we cracked on and

built a brilliant bar, a recreation facility for the junior ranks, and then when the chief of the air staff came round [inaudible 32:44] they had a pint at the bar and they said, 'Good job, this is awesome'.

So, I think it's, you've got to kind of understand now just the rules but actually the context, haven't you, and what's important.

Int: So, does that lend itself to a degree of, I don't know if you've come across the term political intelligence or PQ, i.e. that political savviness to sort of ...

R: I've never heard that expression.

Int: It's one of the five intelligences, there's a chap, is it Andrew [name] it's something that they do in the STLP, they're looking at PQ, so there's political, emotional, IQ which is your cognitive, ethical quotient and another which I can't remember off the top of my head. So, do you think the ability, OK I'll just reframe that. So, there's a couple of intelligences which, I've got another five or ten minutes, is that OK with you?

R: Yeah, that's fine.

Int: So, IQ is cognitive which is sort of your command plan, etc. Emotional quotient, EQ, to what extent do you feel that plays a role in ability to do Mission command?

R: I think it's critical, I think it's absolutely critical and I think it's dismally bad in a lot of senior officers.

Int: Do we develop it as an organisation?

R: Do we develop emotional intelligence? That's a good question.

Int: Do we give people the chance to reflect?

R: We need to get some more people doing yoga probably. I mean, I think it's one of these things that's a bit more innate probably than some of the others and you see your natural empathetic leaders who are very good with people out there. You go back to someone like Keith Park in the Battle of Britain who was fantastic at it, and then you've got other people kicking around defence now who are like automatons and robots who are very, very good at their inbox but you talk to them and they've got no empathy at all.

So, I think it's something that we would benefit from being better at actually but it's, I can't see a day when we're going to promote that over someone getting their job done, sadly, because I think in some ways, having a little bit more of that would probably make a much better working environment.

Int: I think you started the conversation, you mentioned ACSC [inaudible 34:57]. To what extent have they developed you as an individual in terms of emotional intelligence? And to me, that means the ability to self-reflect and have a better understanding of self and how you influence other people, which is arguably coaching, it's sort of where coaching comes in.

R: Well, I've got a degree in philosophy so I spent years doing that. ASCS, as an example, I thought was absolutely brilliant because even though we didn't have lessons specifically on that, it's clearly a really good by product of what you're doing there and exposing people to different branches of different services and to different people from different nations naturally just increases your horizons, doesn't it? I mean, just talking parochially about who was in my syndicate, we obviously were joint but I had a bloke from the UAE Navy, I had a bloke who'd fought the civil war in Sierra Leone, and you get to know these people really well over the year, you get to

know their different perspectives, and it does make you, you can't help but self-reflect on your narrow view of the world.

And so, I think courses like that are really good at that sort of thing and the more that you get exposed to different views and different people, different experiences, different headquarters, different ops, it will offer those opportunities. But I guess, ultimately, some people will change more than others, so it's not like you could just put someone through a course and you're going to get a known product out at the end, I think some people will always be emotionally pretty dim and other people will be naturally brilliant at it.

Int: This sort of links back into Mission command scope in that one of the arguments to develop empathy and develop emotional intelligence in order to facilitate Mission command is the ability to use critical self-reflection doing the day to day job, so it's not about doing JOD [sounds like 36:58] or ICSC which give you some tools and frameworks, but it's about the ability to self-reflect day to day on your experiences, what that means, why they've happened. Do you think that's something we, as an organisation, facilitate and allow?

R: We probably allow it but we probably don't facilitate it very well. I've never actually heard that, albeit it I did Cranwell a little while ago. So, it's a kind of ongoing self-development, isn't it?

Int: It is. Cranwell still does what I would call leader development so it develops the individual and it gives them an uplift of knowledge, as does JOD [sounds like 36:58], ICSC and ACSC, whereas a lot of the later literature on leadership development, it's all about actually it's not in the classroom, it's in the workplace and it's the ability to have that self-reflection, critical self-reflection using the tools you've

had from IOT, etc. in order to build up that self-awareness and look at how your emotions impact on other people.

And I tend to get the impression, a lot of people just say they don't have the time to do that and that's where coaching comes in, having somebody who allows you to explore your own performance and then actually understand why you are performing like that.

R: I think it sounds like a brilliant idea. I think it would need to be formally tasked.

Int: Have you ever been coached, do you think? Have you ever had a boss who has actually allowed you to critically self-reflect and identify and motivate yourself to address things?

R: Probably informally.

Int: Were they the better bosses, would you say?

R: I've had good bosses where I've had good conversations with. The last boss actually up at Lossie, my last station commander, I'd see him every week, normally we'd end up just having a coffee and just chatting about what was going on and what I was worried about and how we were tackling various issues. And so, I think those sorts of conversations, although they've never been called coaching and he was probably doing it just because he's naturally a very empathetic and good leader, would actually go some way towards doing that.

Int: And that is what a coach, we call it coach like [sounds like 39:07] because you can never have a proper coaching relationship with a superior or subordinate because there are certain barriers in place, if you can call them barriers.

R: I think if you get a lot of emotionally intelligent people around you, that probably starts to happen by itself.

Int: Definitely. OK, so recognising the time, I've got to be out of here on the hour to go teach some cadets.

Do you think there's an issue then with Mission command in the service that puts us at risk in the future and, if so, what sort of risk? Can we carry on as we are or is there a risk, particularly as we're moving to Luca [sounds like 39:38], we get a smaller air force, the people joining today are joining for a few years and feeling it's an occupation, not a profession anymore. Is there a risk?

R: Do you mean by that people aren't joining for life like they used to?

Int: Yeah, it's what we call, there's a shift from an institutional way of life like when I joined and maybe you, you had a lifetime career if you so desired and you got the housing, you got the benefits, you got the travel. A lot of the guys coming through now who I speak to are, 'I'll do this for six, seven, eight years and then I'll probably do something else', and I'm just wondering is our current approach to Mission command, is there a risk to the future of the organisation, is my first question, or is it one of those concepts that we'll never fully get but as long as we do what we're doing, we should be OK?

R: Well before I took over as a boss I read quite a lot of books and I did an MSc and elements of this were common themes, so the ones you touched on, because Mission command's actually just about, I think, getting the best out of the organisation and the people, and it's the same in every walk of life, isn't it? Deloitte would want to do the same, as would the English rugby team. So, it's nothing that's unique to the military and actually, probably if we look to large other organisations and sporting teams and things, we could learn an awful lot from them and I know that we do a bit.

Is it in decline or is it in growth? I think generally speaking we're probably a bit more aware of this stuff now than we were but I haven't seen any great change over the last few years. But the other thing is, you keep changing within the organisation, don't you? So, 15 years ago I was a junior pilot and now I've been a boss and actually, the world's changed but my position's changed. So, it's quite hard to give an idea of a trend. I think that probably we're getting a bit more relaxed and a bit more open and I imagine that the sort of conversations that a junior officer can have with a station commander now, might not have happened 20 or 30 years ago. And talking to my old boss who [event removed by researcher] really sadly a few years ago, when he arrived on the squadron as a junior pilot, his boss wouldn't even talk to him or acknowledge him until he got combat ready and that was normal [inaudible 42:04] back in those days.

Int: No, I remember it well.

R: And we're miles apart from that now and in a much, much happier, better place and I think things like TRiM [sounds like 42:12] are evidence of the fact that we are more emotionally aware. But I think at the same point there's no way we can be complacent because it's not still not very good and we could get better.

Int: So, my final question and I don't know if you've had time to reflect on this and if not, what I do say to everybody is we can have another conversation later or by all means, drop me an email if you're driving home or having a conversation and think, 'Actually, that would interest Carl and what he's looking at', is if you were to be asked your thoughts on how we could enhance Mission command within the service and empower people, are there any steps you can immediately think of or that you've

thought about, about how we could go about improving, enhancing, embedding Mission command as a sort of day to day activity?

R: That's a really good question. I think off the top of my head, you'd need to somehow embed it in the culture more, so you'd need to look at cultural change and how you achieve cultural change and that would probably need to be through a number of different measures. There would need to be a bit of reward, probably, at the end of it through, I don't know, 360 reporting or something like that. There would probably need to be some nudging to get people better at it through some courses, maybe some workshops, you probably need to show the benefits of it, get some personal experiences out there.

I don't think there's a silver bullet for this or we'd already have used it but I think it's a weight of effort, isn't it? So, if you're going to start to, given that actually people are busy, if you're going to invest more in Mission command, where's the compensating reduction in something else? Or is it actually some small stuff that you could do just to make it better?

And I think it's really valuable that we do get better at it because, having seen both sides, if you can get Mission command working, the whole place gets better and people are more effective and they're happier.

Int: Quick question, have you done the wing's [sounds like 44:36] leadership programme?

R: No, I haven't. I know someone who did but I'd quite like to do it.

Int: I used to run the programme and I can't remember if I've seen your name on it. But for certainly somebody in your position it's a great course and it's the type of course, when you talk about doing it better in the service, there's hardly any lectures

and it's just sitting, having conversations with a broad selection of people and listening to outsiders come in.

R: How do you get on it?

Int: You will need, best thing to do is drop, there's a Warrant Officer [name removed by researcher] who works up in the Leadership Centre up here, I think it's the SLD they call it now, drop him a quick line, just say you've spoken to me and I've mentioned it because it's aimed at post-command executive stream SO1s. I think it's still held by that office. Now, {name} just left and there's a guy called {name} I don't know if you know him?

R: Oh, vaguely, yeah.

Int: So, he's coming in to take {name} post so I think he still chairs the wings of leadership [sounds like 45:31] allocation, we get five places a year. But it's just from you saying there, that type of self-awareness is, I've had people writing in saying it's the best leadership course they've done in their service careers and these are all post-ACSC, high flying wing commanders. So, just as aside there it might be worth ...

R: Yeah, that sounds really good.

Int: Anything else for me before, again you can always drop me an email, give me a call if you think ...

R: That sounds really good and I think if we're teaching our cadets all this stuff, I think that sounds really, really valuable.

Appendix D: Example of Coding and data reduction:

Open Codes (example)	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
<i>Just the basics, noddys guide, basic knowledge, bog-standard information, an overview, wider concepts, more to it, basic description, lack of detail, knowing rather than doing, apply in practice, think they understand, more complex than people realise, brief introduction, skimmed over, lack of depth, some confusion, scratch the surface, poor at learning, you can't just tell, a lot more underneath, rushed through, learn & dump, not taught well, little practical application.</i>	Just the basics	Knowledge not Know-how
<i>Just going through the motions, follow the doctrine, just do this, do what's expected, just give an intent, jumping through hoops, its expected, check the box, think they are doing it, a façade, tick in the box, basic intent, repeat the tenets, linear approach, follow the steps, step by step, best we can hope for, demonstration of principles, more fluid, main points, told we had do, doing by rote, go through the actions, tightly scripted, constrained by environment, tightly controlled, saying rather than doing.</i>	Going Through the Motions	
<i>In the Wider Service, lack of development in real Life, lack of opportunity, busy getting things done, life's not like that, too many distractions, lack of focus, talk not walk, need to practice, need to experience, lack of willingness, tendency to forget, just too difficult, too many barriers, not important, not assessed, human nature, too many different contexts, depends on the task, lack of trust, largely ignored, lack of alternatives, over control, easier to control, no risk.</i>	In the Real World	
<i>Assume it's a process, used when we have to, a tool in the tool box, process of delegation, used to speed things up, tight boundaries, lack of alternatives, if the task requires it, useful when busy, lack of alternatives, straight forward decisions, gets the job done (on Ops).</i>	Seen as a Process	
<i>It's more of a mindset, not a rigid framework, a mindset and culture, more than just words, willingness to (take) risk, importance of culture, do without thinking, second nature, takes time to develop, embedded in everything, develop not delegate, continuous practice.</i>	More of a Mindset	