Mission Command and Swift Trust

The authors consider two key dimensions of trust: reputation and vulnerability.

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Mission command and professional military relationships in general are usually expressed in terms of the mutual trust between superiors and subordinates. In the context of logistics support, however, mission command is especially complex because it relies on the trustworthiness of a web of interconnected organizations, processes, and often confusing or informal authorities.

This interorganizational network must "self-organize" as missions rapidly change and complex operations fold and unfold. As a substitute for management controls, trust permits this necessary self-organization process. Trust as a substitute for formal control is not only a key driver of efficiency; it is a key enabler of effectiveness.

There is one special type of trust we would like to highlight with regard to mission command and logistics networks: the requirement for swift trust. Swift trust refers to the quick formation of socially reliable relationships that enable logistics networks to unify their efforts.

The Chairman's Capstone Concept for Joint Operations, Joint Force 2020, and the emergent Joint Concept for Rapid Aggregation highlight the growing need for swift trust. The future joint force qualities of being globally dispersed and of having a rapid aggregation of capabilities rely on logistics not being "owned" by military command and control systems.

Unity of effort in rapid aggregation is possible only with high levels of mutual trust, without which nothing will work as it should. Usual trust-building among organizations takes time; however, rapid aggregation disallows having time available to foster trustworthiness.

We want to highlight two critical dimensions of swift trust: institutional reputation and vulnerability. Institutional reputation includes the degree to which other customers have experienced relationships with participants in the network of logistics providers.

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For example, while we may not know individuals who work at Amazon.com or its fulfillment centers, we can confirm the company's reputation rather quickly. Almost every Amazon item is backed by transparent customer ratings and comments on both the product and the level of service provided by either Amazon.com or its vendor.

Performance track records play heavily in attracting customers. Although even a minor negative review can be extremely damaging, having 4,800 excellent ratings out of 5,000 will build a good reputation—hence, swift trust.

Could the Army's logistics enterprise establish excellent fulfillment reliability and include transparent customer ratings about its supply chain performance? Could we develop a similar customer rating program for defense logistics transactions?

Continuously assessing how vulnerable the global logistics network is to disruption is central when dealing with relatively disaggregated customers who need to aggregate rapidly. The ongoing appraisal of that vulnerability is what we would call logistics network intelligence, which ideally reveals a web-like picture of threats to our global, self-organizing logistics network.

Will our supply chain partners take the initiative to manage change and resolve problems without waiting for centralized or top-down directives or lethargic contract modifications? What are the barriers to taking such initiative? What "bad guys" are out there, seeking to prevent access to our rapidly changing distribution schemes and data streams? How can we produce products and services closer to the point of need? Can we design materiel systems that reduce demand and the need for complex physical distribution networks?

We believe that understanding the swift trust dimensions of mission command—reputation and vulnerability—is crucial to the development of effective future logistics capabilities. Swift trust is central in designing and building disaggregated logistics capabilities that can aggregate as swiftly as the operators they support.

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