



Soldiers from the 742nd Support Maintenance Company attend a deployment ceremony on Feb. 26, 2017. The South Carolina Army National Guard unit will maintain and repair vehicles, electronics, and small-arms weapons in support of Operation Atlantic Resolve while assigned to the 16th Sustainment Brigade. (Photo by Sgt. Tashera Pravato)

The Effect MTOE Has on Mission Command in Support Companies

Adding two Soldiers to the headquarters section of a sustainment company could improve the unit's ability to conduct mission command.

■ By Capt. David A. Ferreira

When I was a combat engineer in command of a maintenance company in an armored brigade combat team brigade support battalion, I saw some strange things. My company's modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) is what bothered me the most.

My formative years as an officer were spent as a platoon leader and executive officer of an engineer company in an echelon-above-brigade

engineer battalion. That company's headquarters' MTOE included 19 Soldiers, 11 of whom were medical, communications, supply, and chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear personnel. The remaining eight Soldiers were dedicated to executing mission command for the subordinate platoons.

The maintenance company headquarters, however, consists of only three Soldiers (the command team) other than the supply section. This

leaves one of the most complex companies in the brigade combat team with a commander, a first sergeant, and an executive officer to execute mission command over the entire company.

During my first three months in command of the maintenance company, it was difficult to figure out why it was hard to complete routine tasks and to communicate across the company in a fast and efficient manner. After discussing the MTOE

with the brigade support battalion commander, the issue became very clear. Based on its structure, the maintenance company is not designed to execute mission command.

Hierarchical Versus Linear Units

Line companies have a clear and coherent hierarchy that makes communication and mission command flow downward smoothly. The command team and headquarters mission command structure is replicated in the platoons. A platoon leader and platoon sergeant lead subordinate squads and teams within each platoon.

This hierarchy is built to absorb change and allow leaders to adapt to new tasks as missions occur. When commanders task line units, the impact on the subordinate units is minimal because of their redundant structures.

This redundancy does not exist within a maintenance company. The company is linear rather than hierarchical. Once information gets to the company command team, there are numerous directions that it must go. The team must receive, interpret, and analyze information in a way that allows subordinate units to act on it as soon as it is disseminated.

As tasks come in, they affect the linear formation more than they would affect a hierarchical one because the subordinate formations are not designed to execute the operations process. Rather than having a handful of robust platoons, the maintenance company has many very small sections. As a section loses an individual or is given another mission, the company quickly loses capability.

The Effect on Mission Command

In order to execute mission command, a command team must be able to turn raw data into information that can be acted on. Staffs receive data of all shapes and sizes at varying speeds. They must analyze the data in a timely manner and turn it into a product that the commander can use

to visualize the operational environment. (See figure 1 on page 54.)

Staffs use tools such as the Army design methodology and the military decisionmaking process to turn data into an achievable plan. These processes contribute to the commander's ability to make timely and informed decisions.

The ability to exercise mission

A coherent structure with the right personnel absolutely enables the operations process and functional mission command.

command is directly tied to organizational structure. A brigade staff is designed to help a commander understand and visualize a problem set or mission so that he can direct a course of action. The battalion staff mimics the same capability on a smaller scale for the battalion command team.

However, sustainment units are not set up to successfully execute mission command. For example, the brigade support battalion is the only battalion in the brigade that has a captain as a battalion S-3, and it has a very limited operations staff.

Three key points demonstrate why organizational structure is important to mission command and how making sustainment organizations hierarchical could increase the agility of sustainment companies in executing mission command. First, sustainment companies are oversaturated with mission command systems. Second, the operations process is inhibited by the Army's linear sustainment structures. And third, the linear flow of information affects communication and, in turn, execution.

Oversaturation of Systems

With the move to decisive action, the company echelon has lost the ability to operate digital systems

outside of the Joint Capabilities Release and Blue Force Tracking in a theater of operations. This lack of data connectivity means that companies must use analog methods and practice functional mission command on the move with FM radios and digital communications inherent to their organizations.

What the decisive action model

does not capture is the multitude of digital requirements on companies in a garrison environment. Systems are placed at the company level without regard for supporting structures and personnel. When operating at home station, companies must operate nearly every digital system that battalions operate.

To build subject matter experts for digital mission command systems at every echelon, the digital master gunner concept is being pushed to the company level. This concept is a great asset, but in companies with a headquarters limited to the command team, Soldiers must be pulled out of a shop or section in order to be trained and used.

Those outside of the company often argue that running digital mission command systems is an "additional duty."

This is absolutely inaccurate. To operate systems such as the Command Post of the Future, Digital Training Management System, Medical Protection System, and eProfile, the company needs a capability built into its headquarters to manage them effectively.

At the company level, populating and managing these systems is a full-time job. If the mission command architecture is changing for the future, then the company struc-

ture must also change in order for it to be successful.

The Operations Process

Commanders at all levels drive the operations process. Each command above the company level has a staff to assist the commander in executing this process and facilitating operations. Naturally, a company does not need a staff, but it still must complete the operations process in order to facilitate successful operations.

Line units have measures in place to complete the operations process. A line company headquarters facilitates this with a sergeant first class as an operations noncommissioned officer-in-charge. This Soldier is typically a high-performing platoon sergeant that is being groomed to become a first sergeant. Line companies also possess clear and coherent platoon structures, led by a platoon leader and a platoon sergeant, supporting the operations process.

A coherent structure with the right personnel absolutely enables the operations process and functional mission command. In most sustainment units, the commander is the only one

executing the operations process at the company level. If the commander is executing the process rather than driving it, he will be unable to visualize the relationship between current and future operations, and in turn, the company will not have clear direction.

Information and Execution

By receiving, processing, and analyzing information, commanders create time and space in which subordinates can take action. Space is the physical area subordinates operate in based on the time allotted by the commander. The more time subordinates have, the more creative and comprehensive their plans can be. This directly improves the quality of their actions.

Little time with little space creates poor action. A balance of time and space, created by effectively turning data into knowledge for subordinate units, creates actions that are more functional and effective.

Most commanders have staffs that process data into knowledge. In most sustainment formations, a company's ability to do this ef-

fectively is voided. Instead, the assumption is made that by the time the company receives information, it is ready to be used for mission execution. More often than not, this is not the case.

Typically, data flows in quantities so large and so fast that it comes crashing down at the company level with little refinement. Companies receive data rather than knowledge, without time and with very limited space. Then they are expected to act on it with a limited personnel structure.

I have a unique perspective after commanding a company that executed missions on par with a battalion and another that had to create a mission command capability out of what was available in its mechanic population. Although the latter unit executed missions well, a simple change in the unit's structure would yield a high payoff.

Having an operations sergeant and one administrative noncommissioned officer at the company level would greatly enhance a sustainment company's capabilities. Commands up to the brigade level would benefit from their companies having a greater capacity to execute mission command and process information and requirements.

The Army is moving to a place where companies are more agile and have a greater need to process data into actionable knowledge. Some MTOEs support this, and some clearly have not caught up. Adding a few personnel to a sustainment company headquarters not only will improve the function of the company but also will improve the entire sustainment force.

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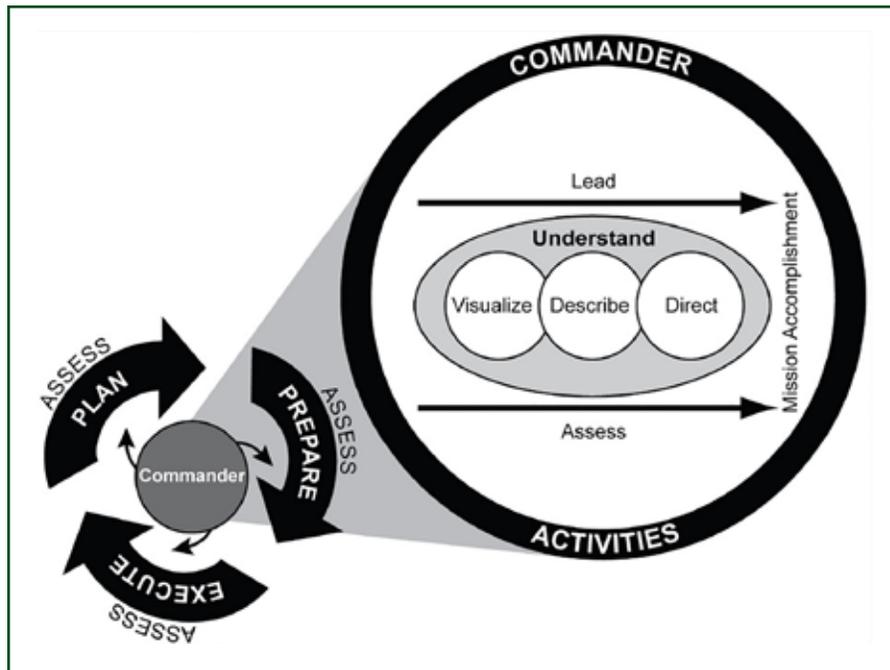


Figure 1. The operations process as depicted in Army Doctrine Reference Publication 5-0, The Operations Process.