

Mission command
military utility
leadership
management essay



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When organizations are experiencing rapid change and economic pressure, leadership plays an essential role in helping to survive economic and operational hard times.

Contemporary definitions of leaderships involve effective leaders, good communication skills, managers able to inspire their employees, making possible a vision where other people can identify.

According to Ussem (2001), " leadership is at its best when the vision is strategic, the voice persuasive and results tangible. In the study of leadership an exact definition is not essential but guiding concepts are needed. The concepts should be general enough to apply to many situations, but specific enough to have tangible implications for what we do."

Visionary leadership, managers able to provide trust, empower employees and create a will to

succeed are the key factors in order to survive such a challenging business environment.

Mission command is a leadership methodology originally created for military organisations, Yardley and Kakabase (2007) state that Mission command, has the power to transform a traditional employer - employee relationship into a responsibility based system which previously required orders being given, now progresses to just the information being passed down, employees will then be responsible for deciding themselves what actions need to be carried out allowing to them contribute and bring forward their innovative ideas.

This system allows employees to develop an interest in what they do as they feel responsibility for the outcomes.

In this essay I intend to explain how this leadership methodology works, characteristics and benefits followed by the possibility of implementation within commercial organizations

What is Mission Command?

Mission Command is the leadership philosophy used by the British Army it has been proven to be effective in difficult and high pressure environments over several years. It is also a management methodology and a system to deal with environmental volatility, by allowing individuals to make quick decisions in uncertain and continuing changing environment. It provides a frame work in which the individual can make decisions and translate them, without delay as the situation progresses.

As a philosophy tries to maximise vision, initiative and diligence.

Yardley and Kakabase state the four key elements of this leadership Philosophy are.

- a. A commander gives his orders in a manner that ensures that his subordinates understand his intentions, their own missions and the context of those missions.
- b. Subordinates are told what effect they are to achieve and the reason why it needs to be achieved.

c. Subordinates are allocated the appropriate resources to carry out their missions.

d. A commander uses a minimum of control measures so as not to limit unnecessarily the freedom of action of his subordinates.

e. Subordinates then decide within their delegated freedom of action how best to achieve their missions.

These principles can be translated into a four steps system to be used by organisations:

A) The leader promotes understanding of the tasks, the level of importance, a framework of action, as subordinates feel involved at the same time as understanding expectations of their superiors.

B) Subordinates know what they are expected to achieve by understanding reasons of the task and the outcome needed, they will be in line with their objective.

C) Individuals will be provide with the assets they need in order to perform their task effectively.

D) Once the task is been understood, subordinates know what to achieve and the resources to do so the manager can take a passive position, providing guidance when it is needed.

E) Employees will have the autonomy to decide how to use the resources and when is this appropriate in order to be successful. This will increase their initiative and commitment towards what is required to do.

Mission command states by performing these elements organisations will experience fluid communication between managers and subordinates, clear goals, knowing what is require from them, the tools and resources to achieve it. Subordinates are able to use their free will to determinate how to perform effectively their tasks, understanding what they have to achieve and also have knowledge of what resources are available. All this will be achieved by having a supportive and informative leader.

Employees will be empower by taking a very active role, this is an extremely essential characteristic in a continuing changing environment. Managers will then simply supervise, giving assistance only when it needed.

Positive effects:

Fluent communication, promoting understanding based on comprehension and discernment of the task, Individual must understand the purpose, the process and how to perform in order to achieve it.

Clinton O. and Sonny S (2009) explains that, the interaction can enhance an employee's understanding of the situation, can calm their fears, reduce their stress levels and can let the employee know that they are an integral and valued part of the turnaround process.

Trust communication will be clear only when there is a high level of trust, mutual understanding between managers and employees. The leader must build trust in order to practice Mission command.

Yardley (2010),” Trust is built by behaving with integrity, consistency, and by setting and maintaining high standards of behaviour and having to follow through on the difficult decisions where you know you have a choice between the right and the expedient. Its probably one of those truisms that it takes a long, long time to build up trust and you can quite quickly throw it away if you take the wrong action”.

In order to build trust managers have to be aware of their behaviours and attitudes, basically because they need to be the example to follow in terms of showing values, becoming a model and guide for subordinates to imitate.

Empowering : enable employees to make decisions without having to consult the leader, involving employees in the process , how things are getting done. Managers have to encourage employees to play a more active role.

Decentralisation: establishing a less centralized, task oriented approach to operational leadership and decision making. Taking initiative promoting freedom of speed and action. Giving clear direction that explains the ‘ why’ and the ‘ what’ but letting employees to decide ‘ how’.

Timely & Effective Decision Making: employees having the power to adapt to a constantly changing environment are crucial to answer the challenges organizations face experiencing rapid change and economic pressure.

Can Mission Command work in any type of organization?

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Difficulties to implement Mission Command.

Within a military structure mutual trust is much easier to develop than in a commercial organisation. This is because commanders and soldiers are experiencing a life threatening experience. Under this circumstances trust is a need in order to communicate clearly and coordinate effort to succeed.

In relation with critical circumstances, organisation had experience in the past year the effects of an economy crisis. Many companies were not clear regarding how they will manage this situation, causing lack of trust from employees towards their organisation. Individuals felt insecure on their jobs, less motivated as a result of the redundancies, feeling under stress and pressure to prove they were worth in order to secure their job.

This experience confirms how difficult is for managers to promote trust under stressing circumstances, without trust, communication between managers and employees will not be effective, consequently it will be very difficult to empower employees.

Mission command promotes employee empowerment; this is a strategy and philosophy that enables employees to make decisions about their jobs, giving the opportunity to decide how they will perform a task. The problem is not every employee is ready to take responsibility for making decisions, employees might not be interest to gain more responsibilities, if this is the case they will experience a feeling of stress and discontent when performing the task.

Also there are jobs where is specially needed to attach to the pre establish rules, like workers in a factory performing operational activities, there is no opportunity to decide how to achieve the task in the best possible way, if an employee does not follow the procedures to manipulate a machine his / her health and safety will be compromised.

This leadership methodology does not consider the multiple roles of an individual in a society.

Misti Stoddard & Susan R. Madsen (2007) “ In order for employers to attract and retain the most capable human resources, attention must focus on the relationships among the interdependencies of the work-family interface and a variety of constructs, including individual health. Understanding the benefits of combining work and family will assist men and women in their quests for greater satisfaction in life. It will also help employers understand how to cultivate greater job satisfaction among their employees and improve individual and organizational performance”.

Individuals within a company are also parents, students, professionals, athletes. They do have others interest outside the organisation.

In contrast, armies operates in a different context, when in a mission individuals are normally travelling to distant destination, they live within military bases.

It can be said while working in the army individuals are able to interact merely with other soldiers, they are limited to act only with other in the army forces, under this circumstances there is no possibility to play any other role

individuals take part in a society with like enjoy social activities or been able to spend time with their families. While in a mission they just play their actions as soldiers.

Mission command propose decentralisation as part of the leadership style, this characteristic refers to the ability to delegate.

Some organizations managers often feel the need to retain control simply because they are uncomfortable with delegating power, by doing that they feel as if control is being lost and that unnecessary risk is being introduced to the job. This type of managers might be very good in terms of creating budget, reducing costs but does not necessary mean they are good as leaders.

Furthermore organisation working with line production, this is a fabrication design for the creation of large amounts of standardized products, will not find necessary to delegate as they had a system based in simple and repetitive task design to maximise production.

Conclusions

To facilitate the implementation of Mission Command it is necessary to create trust within individuals. Without it individuals will not experience fluid communication.

A combat is a life threatening scene, under this experience trust between soldiers and commanders will not be difficult to achieve.

Organisation experience a different context, further research has to be done in order to discuss the characteristics of trust in commercial organisations.

The diversity of roles individuals can play in society, has to be taking into account, their interest and reason to work can differ from an individual to another. Understanding the benefits of combining these roles will bring positive outcomes for organisations.

Mission command leadership style, requires managers ready to provide guidance towards employees if autonomy is expected.

In reality not every manager is a good leader, additionally not every job requires individuals able to discern methodologies, in this cases organisations will not find suitable to empower employees as they might require people to carry operational activities, a good example can be mass production, organisations will define the best ways to use all the resources.

To conclude further investigation has to be done in other to find a solution to issues such as the difficulty to build trust, how to promote leaders able to provide guidance and the multiplicity of roles individuals' plays in today's society.