

BREAKING THE BATHSHEBA SYNDROME: BUILDING A PERFORMANCE EVALUATION SYSTEM THAT PROMOTES MISSION COMMAND

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The 2014 National Defense Authorization Act has directed the Department of Defense to reconsider the way the Army evaluates and selects leaders. This call for reform comes after repeated surveys from the Center for Army Leadership have suggested widespread dissatisfaction with the current approach. Research in talent management shows that an effective performance appraisal system should promote and encourage the leadership attributes identified as most important to the organization. The Army leadership doctrine describes a philosophy of mission command based on mutual trust and decentralized initiative as the cornerstone of its leadership approach. To help inform the discussion, the research for this monograph examined the current performance evaluation system to determine whether that system properly assesses and selects officers suited to exercise mission command.

Assessing the evaluation system required a number of steps. First, it was necessary to understand the essential leader attributes required for the exercise of mission command and then consider methods for evaluating this behavior. The next step included a review of the history of the existing Army performance evaluation system and an analysis of how well this system conformed to the attributes of mission command. An examination of the body of research done by the Army into its existing performance evaluation model greatly aided assessment of the current system. Finally, it was necessary to investigate other methods of performance evaluation outside of the Army to determine if those methods could provide a better model. The research examined a variety of best practice models in private business and the public sector and identified alternative approaches to performance evaluation. Three alternative models

were chosen for scrutiny because they demonstrated an ability to specifically identify and select for the leader attributes essential to mission command.

The analysis found that the Army's current officer evaluation system is ill-suited to evaluate mission command attributes. The findings suggest that a combination of top-down evaluations, peer and subordinate reviews, and objective testing of critical skills might equip Army boards to identify better the best practitioners of the mission command philosophy. Two specific proposals are suggested for further research in the appendix.

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