***Competence***

Soldiers should continually develop competence through institutional education, realistic training, and self-development. Organizations must also develop competence through realistic and complex collective unit training. Mutual trust and shared understanding between leaders and subordinates will grow once competence is established (Department of the Army, 2019b).

In November 1950 of the Korean War, the Eighth Army Rangers embodied this principle by trusting in one another and their training as they defended six consecutive attacks from Chinese forces on Hill 205. The Rangers, led by 1st Lt. Ralph Puckett, trusted in the specific and realistic training they received (Piasecki, 2010). When asked about that night, now retired Col. Puckett said, “we had the confidence that came from believing that we were the best that the United States of America could produce” (Piasecki, 2010, para. 14).

***Mutual Trust***

According to *ADP 6-0*, “Mutual trust is shared confidence between commanders, subordinates, and partners that they can be relied upon and are competent in performing their assigned tasks” (Department of the Army, 2019b, p.1-7). Trust allows leaders to focus on the big picture instead of individual units or Soldiers.

The 75th Ranger Regiment is a prime example of mutual trust. New Rangers arrive at the organization with a foundation of tactical and technical competence and team leaders trust the assessment and selection process (Department of the Army, n.d.). This builds a shared trust as new Rangers arrive and develop within the unit.

***Shared Understanding***

The foundation for creating shared understanding is built into Army doctrine, institutional training, Army culture, and a professional lexicon (Department of the Army, 2019b). This foundation promotes shared understanding by keeping Soldiers informed throughout the operations process and collaborating whenever possible. Whether in garrison, or preparing for combat, the Army presents opportunities for leaders to practice effective communication and increase overall participation. This solidifies shared understanding of unit vision, values, commander's intent, and mission orders.

In 2014, the 1st Infantry Division (1ID) learned first-hand the challenges in creating shared understanding without a foundation. Working with Iraqi and coalition partners introduced challenges in language, communication systems, and collaboration. The 1ID overcame these obstacles by establishing a Combined Operations Center to alleviate the strain of incompatible communications systems. This resulted in increased collaboration between forces and 1ID conducting hundreds of successful coalition and joint strikes in support of Iraqi operations (Lemay, 2016).

***Commander's Intent***

The commander is responsible for clearly communicating his or her intent down to the lowest level. The intent must articulate the purpose of the mission and desired end state (Department of the Army, 2019b). A common saying in the military is that no plan survives first contact with the enemy (Oxford University Press, n.d.). A clearly articulated commander's intent allows leaders at all levels to continually adjust plans after first contact because every Soldier understands why they are doing the mission and what the commander expects.

From personal experience, as a reconnaissance team sergeant, every contingency plan has to align with the commander's intent. Reconnaissance teams experience a wide array of challenges and obstacles during every operation. With few teammates, and hundreds of kilometers between the team and friendly forces, the commander's intent keeps the team grounded in achieving the mission end state, regardless of the situation.

***Mission Orders***

The unit staff should construct mission orders describing the situation, commander's intent, desired results, and required subordinate tasks. The commander's intent and mission orders serve as the guide for subordinates to execute disciplined initiative. The staff must take care not to specify exactly how subordinates are to accomplish the tasks. This maximizes their freedom of action and creativity (Department of the Army, 2019b).

Former Gen. of the Army Dwight Eisenhower's plan for *Operation Overlord* (the successful invasion of Normandy during World War II) is a prime example of a well-crafted commander's intent and mission order. Authors Stephen Seitz et al., (2002) stated, “Despite the magnitude of Overlord and the numerous tactical operations required, the commander's intent was clear, simple, and succinct. Understanding conveyed to subordinates enabled confidence, encouraged freedom of maneuver, and was the key to both operational and tactical success” (p. 4).

***Disciplined Initiative***

According to the Department of the Army (2019b), there are two considerations subordinate leaders must evaluate before deciding to execute disciplined initiative: “whether the benefits of the action outweigh the risk of desynchronizing the overall operation and whether the action will further the commander's intent” (p. 1-12). Experienced leaders understand the importance of exercising disciplined initiative because failing to do so can be fatal.

In 2005, a team of Navy SEALs realized the seriousness of their decisions while conducting a reconnaissance mission in support of *Operation Red Wings* in eastern Afghanistan. The team experienced a soft compromise from local goat herders after insertion but did not move from their surveillance positions. This decision, which risked desynchronizing the operation before the assault force conducted the infiltration, failed to further the commander's intent. However, any other decision may have also failed to further the commander's intent. The following is the impossible decision laid out before the SEAL team when deciding what to do with the unarmed civilians:

All military operations have a certain amount of risk associated with them, and leaders will inevitably face ethical dilemmas throughout their career. While killing the unarmed civilians during *Operation Red Wings* would have been the easy choice for mission success, it was also an illegal choice under the rules of engagement. There was no choice that didn't end in someone's death. The result of their decision was the death of 19 Americans, the destruction of a Chinook, and a failed mission to capture the intended target (Sof, 2017). But the result of illegally killing unarmed civilians could also have been a court martial, jail time, and the loss of trust between joint forces, possibly resulting in more deaths.

***Risk Acceptance***

A commander must assess the risk to mission, and risk to force, while mitigating risks with control measures. Much like with Operation Red Wings, it should be assumed unit communications with higher echelons will go down. Commanders must trust their intent has been relayed and every decision made by subordinates is based upon that intent.