



By [Josh Powers](#) and [Joe Byerly](#)

In many organizations, the letters “MDMP” will send staff officers running. The process can be painful and daunting, but it doesn’t have to be that way. As field grade officers, we control the planning timeline and we synchronize the staff.

We both served as the battalion and brigade level, and we picked up some lessons along the way that takes some of the pain out of the planning process and make it another routine staff exercise.

**Set expectations.** In reality, the process of MDMP is more important than the product it yields. The MDMP enables a conversation between commander, staff, and subordinate units if executed effectively. As a field grade officer, your job is to create a quality product, an operation, by managing this process. To do this effectively takes countless repetitions, all while gaining and losing staff officers.

**Get your reps in.** Both of us executed countless repetitions of MDMP as S3s and XO. Joe's squadron staff we did MDMP over 15 times in one year. It was ugly at first, but over time, we got more comfortable with the process, and we started doing it quickly. Josh's brigade staff did about 10 full iterations of MDMP during their train up for the National Training Center, each improving the unit's staff standard operating procedure.

**Do MDMP for everything.** Most staffs only do MDMP for tactical problems, but it has application for anything the staff does. For example, use MDMP for the Unit Training Plan. This is a great way to ensure that training is synchronized and less likely to get stepped on by other requirements.

**Do not rush it.** There is an old adage in the military that you should know doctrine before you deviate from it. The same holds true for MDMP, where the team collectively learns and relearns the process as individuals transition to and from a staff assignment. Refrain from altering the process until your staff is proficient in the basics. Adjustments to the base frame work should be a conscience decision, not an error or omission.

**Everyone gets a job (or two).** We have found that everyone on the staff has different talents, and some of those fall outside their job specialty. Do not let the org chart determine roles in MDMP. For example, Joe's S6 was really good at drawing (and tactics), so he did the concept sketches. You can cut down on time to produce products when multiple people help out.

On Josh's staff, special duties included recorders for key information such as decision points, information requirements, assumptions, and requests for information. If the staff identified a decision point in a collaborative session, the chosen person would capture it and begin work on the decision support matrix. These duties became muscle memory, and the officer responsible for the information became vested in not only capturing it, but championing it in subsequent sessions.

**Nobody knows how to war game-but do it anyways.** A lot of staffs are scared of war-gaming because very few people understand how to do it. No two staffs war game the same; effectiveness includes tailoring the process after multiple iterations in training. A good war game is about creating discipline and structure to enable collaboration across the staff, usually in a time constrained environment.

**Sync often.** As the field grade running the planning process, it's your job to make sure everyone is on the same page. If you don't bring everyone together throughout the planning process, you run the risk of staff members developing plans in silos. We recommend syncing at least once during each step of MDMP to ensure that everyone is moving in the right direction.

Again, stay oriented on the process of MDMP and not the products you'll capture on CPOF or PowerPoint. The most powerful sessions are those where staff officers collaborate across war-fighting functions, identifying gaps or opportunities that they would not have realized otherwise.

**Practice before you brief.** No matter how great your plan is, if you can't communicate it to the commander or subordinate leaders you fail. By practicing the mission analysis or the course of action brief, you make sure that your delivery is smooth and your staff briefs confidently. Make time in your planning timeline for multiple rehearsals.

As a field grade leader, one role in a rehearsal is to think beyond a singular product, connecting the current brief to the overarching process.

*What were the key deductions that the boss focused on in mission analysis? What were his thoughts on risk?*

*What did you identify as key terrain?*

*How was the enemy's course of action impacted by this terrain?*

An effective field grade officer connects the threads, pulling the pertinent bits of information along the storyline of an operation as it develops. The rehearsal is your final opportunity to look back through your notes and ensure continuity of these thoughts, overlaying the cognitive overlays to present the best possible plan.

On yeah - the printer will inevitably die directly before your brief. Rehearse directly before bed and have the night shift print before a morning brief.

### **Don't Run from MDMP-Embrace it!**

So there you are, a few insights from a few combined years of reps in the field. As a field grade leader, your job is to take what can be a tedious process and train your team to use it effectively. The only way to accomplish this is through countless iterations both successful and disastrous staff processes, codified in a solid staff SOP. Training like you fight, i.e. using the MDMP in day-to-day garrison will build your staff's muscle memory and set conditions for success in the field.

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