



By Larry Kay

Processes must adjust to the environment in which they will be utilized otherwise they risk providing solutions to yesterday's problems. The military decision-making process (MDMP) has not been updated to reflect the contemporary operating environment, the cultural upbringing and competencies of its practitioners, and the nature of multi-domain operations it must now guide. FM 6-0, *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations*, the proponent field manual for MDMP, has not been updated since May 2014.[1] For the most part, it remains an effective process for developing plans, courses of actions, and solutions to problems. Yet, as with any process, there are limitations, gaps, and shortfalls. I recommend the following updates which aim to strengthen the logical underpinning for some of the steps.

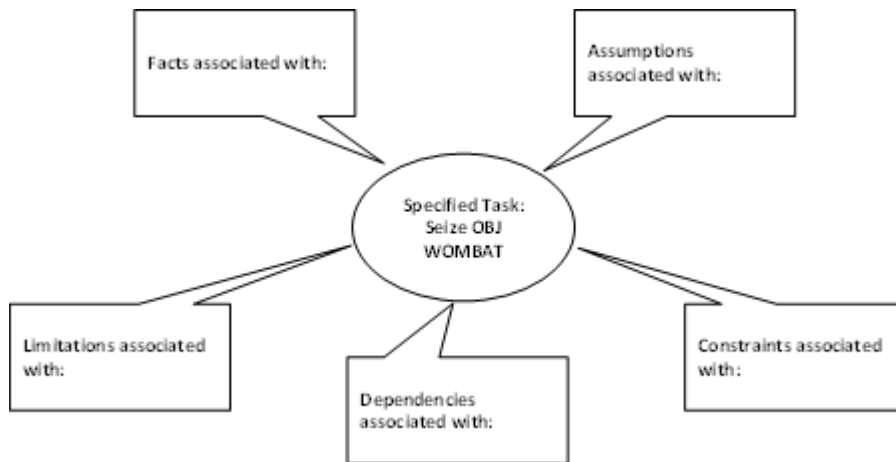
Change the first step to *initiate planning*. The first step of the MDMP is *receipt of mission*. Chapter nine of FM 6-0 clearly articulates the inputs and outputs for each step of the MDMP. In the first step, the key input is "higher headquarters' plan or order or a new mission *anticipated* by commanders." [2] Since the step's title frames the action, units often do not conduct MDMP unless they have received a mission. In complex environments or circumstances, units cannot afford to await orders from higher, so commanders and staffs should initiate MDMP whenever they believe it necessary to be successful. Therefore, MDMP should mirror the Joint Planning Process, and change the first step to *initiate planning*. [3]

Add a subtask to the first step: *determine the battle rhythm*. Most units apply a pre-existing battle rhythm, probably contained within an SOP, and attempt to apply it to their current circumstances. Units insist on ensuring the commander's decision-making cycle remains comfortably the same. Often, this prevents or prolongs seizing the initiative in an emergent environment. Making this step explicit facilitates the functional integration of plans for an organization and enables the commander to immediately adjust

his decision-making cycle to the environment. Finally, determining the battle rhythm expedites the commander's and staff's employment and integration of the targeting process - which is vital to success during large-scale combat operations (LSCO).

Articulate the synthesis required of mission analysis and elaborate the management of risk in operations. According to FM 6-0, "Commanders - supported by their staffs - gather, analyze, and *synthesize* information to orient themselves on the current conditions of the operational environment." [4] When, then, and how do staffs synthesize the information? Even the most seasoned field grade officers fail to synthesize the information gathered from mission analysis, delaying the understanding sought after by both staffs and commanders. Synthesis, which is the combination of ideas to form a theory or system, is more than the "so what and therefore" that staffs often convey to their commanders. A process that synthesizes information requires that the staff explain what the *risk relationship* is between the pertinent facts, pertinent assumptions, known constraints, limitations, and known dependencies. Of note, a dependency, which is not defined in FM 6-0, is "a fact at the time of planning, which is a critical condition or precursor (predecessor) necessary for successful execution of the task (successor)." [5] There will be planning assumptions and execution dependencies: an assumption would be, "we assume fuel will be available," while a dependency would be, "our execution will depend on fuel." [6] Clarifying dependencies in multi-domain operations, during which multiple organizations depend on each other for effects and support, is critically important.

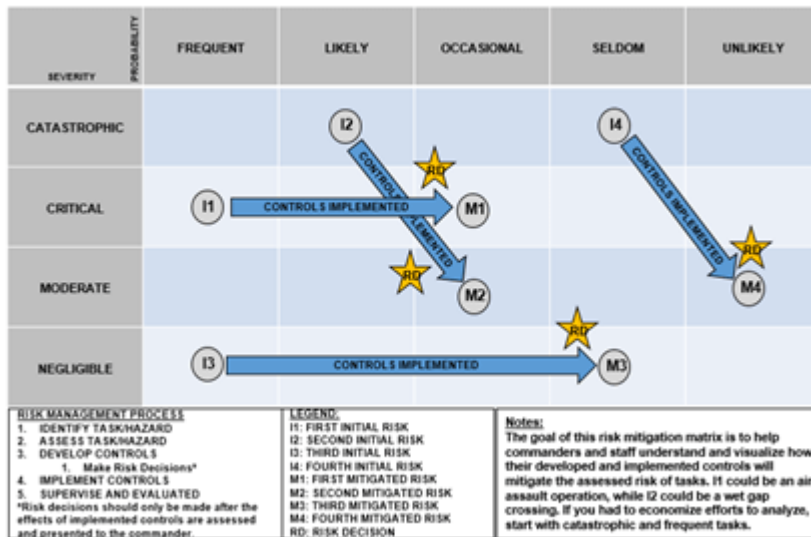
Begin risk management after gathering tasks, facts, assumptions, limitations, dependencies, and constraints. Every task, whether specified, implied, or essential, exists within circumstances (a reality) characterized as either facts, assumptions, dependencies, limitations, and/or constraints. While mission analysis does not require staffs to perform its sub-steps in any designated order, there is a reason why *begin risk management* occurs after tasks, facts, assumptions, limitations, and constraints are gathered. The management of risk requires staffs to synthesize the relationship of these factors to explain to the commander the risk associated with conducting a task, specified or otherwise.



Staffs are responsible for identifying where the commander might make risk decisions. The relationship between facts and assumptions is clear: staffs should seek to either confirm assumptions as facts, or disconfirm facts as being untrue. It then follows that the more facts and fewer assumptions a task has associated with it, the less risky the task is. If a task has few facts, and many assumptions, while also having many limitations, dependencies, and constraints, the more risky the task is. Synthesizing the information in this manner helps the commander make a *risk decision*, which is a commander's determination to accept or not accept the risk(s) associated with an action he or she will take.[7]

Unfortunately, risk is defined differently in the process of risk management and as an element of operational art. In the context of risk management, controls and actions are taken to eliminate a hazard or to reduce its risk.[8] As an element of operational art, ADP 3-0, *Operations*, states, "Commanders accept risks to create and maintain conditions necessary to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative...The willingness to incur risk is often the key to exposing enemy weaknesses that an enemy considers beyond friendly reach...Experienced commanders balance audacity and imagination against risk and uncertainty to strike at a time, place, and manner unexpected by enemy forces." ATP 5-19 views tasks and hazards as the same, rather than to view hazards as accompanying tasks, which steers organizations to avoid risk rather than to smartly embrace it. This semantic difference is confusing. To overcome this, staffs can employ a risk mitigation matrix. Operational risk management seeks to enable organizations to achieve better or greater outcomes in the face of risk.

Risk Mitigation Matrix



Delineate two types of priority intelligence requirements (PIR), one for planning, and one for execution. According to ADP 1-02.1, *Operational Terms*, and FM 6-0, “A priority intelligence requirement is an intelligence requirement, stated as a priority for intelligence support that the commander and staff need to understand the adversary or other aspects of the operational environment..”[9] With some slight nuance, FM 3-98, *Reconnaissance and Security Operations*, defines a PIR as “an intelligence requirement, stated as a priority for reconnaissance and security tasks and intelligence collection that the commander needs to understand about a threat, enemy, or adversary or about the operational environment.”[10] The MDMP requires *CCIR refinement* as an output of course of action approval but does not describe what these refinements entail. In the early stages of the planning process, when neither the staff nor the commander fully understand the operating environment, the PIRs should focus on gathering information to assist planners in the development of a plan. As the mission progresses, and the planning horizon collapses, the PIRs should focus on decision-making during execution. At the battalion level, this may be tricky given the limited number and capability of organic collection assets. However, at the brigade and division level, this is more easily achieved based on the varying echelons and capabilities of information collection platforms and reach back capability. Articulating this delineation would force staffs to truly refine PIR throughout the operations process.[11]

Change Develop a Proposed Problem Statement to Develop a Proposed Problem Narrative. For starters, this will settle the asinine dispute as to whether the problem statement should be in the form of a question or statement. Developing a proposed problem narrative encourages a realistic assessment of environments that likely contains multiple interrelated problems.[12] For instance, one way to develop a problem narrative is to

include the interrelated elements of time, space, and people.[13] Furthermore, this would more closely match the problem framing described in ADM, which will help standardize problem understanding and solving across the Army, despite which doctrinal manual a staff may utilize.

Change and reorganize the steps of course of action development. A review of subtasks *Assess Relative Combat Power* and *Array Initial Forces* illustrates that both contain the words *relative* and *ratio* so much that their definitions and outputs are nearly the same, and are often abbreviated, if not omitted. When staffs assess combat power, they are brainstorming which friendly and enemy elements of combat power to avoid and exploit. Implicitly, both sub-steps result in the comparison of forces as it relates to either's task.[14] Combining these subtasks will make the outputs more holistic and encourage their utility and execution.

Change Assign Headquarters to Determine Task Organization and Command Support Relationships. Articulating the output of the subtask will contribute to the full and more effective completion of the task. Furthermore, asking and answering how the unit will organize to accomplish assigned tasks *is task organizing* and determining command support relationships during this subtask will ensure this important step is not omitted. Currently, command support relationships are not mentioned in MDMP itself, but relegated to Annex B of FM 6-0.[15]

Current Course of Action Development	Proposed Course of Action Development
1. Assess Relative Combat Power	1. Assess and Array Elements of Combat Power
2. Generate Options	2. Generate Framework Options
3. Array Initial Forces	3. Develop a Broad Concept
4. Develop a Broad Concept	4. Determine Task Organization and Command Support Relationships
5. Assign Headquarters	5. Produce COA Statements and Sketches
6. Develop COA Statements and Sketches	6. Conduct a COA Briefing
7. Conduct a COA Briefing	7. Select or Modify COAs for Continued Analysis
8. Select or Modify COAs for Continued Analysis	

Overall, adjusting and reorganizing the steps would more effectively contribute to development of valid courses of action. Changing *Generate Options* to *Generate Framework Options* hones the staff more deftly on the output of the subtask, while changing *Develop COA Statements and Sketches* to *Produce COA Statements and Sketches* focuses on the tangible requirements and results of the process.

Change Sketch Note to Effects Note. Changing the name of this rarely utilized tool will help staffs simultaneously employ multiple defeat mechanisms to present multiple dilemmas to enemy decision-makers thus enabling the unit to impose its will, in the form of physical,

temporal, and cognitive effects. The synchronization matrix tool focuses on synchronizing units' actions by time, space, and purpose while the *Effects Note* focuses on synchronizing units' effects on the enemy by time, space, and purpose. Finally, the use of both wargaming tools facilitates the staff's comprehension of the plan.

Mastery of any subject or process requires years of dedicated and informed practice. Stewardship of the profession requires mastery of some if not many elements of it; and improvement follows mastery. The MDMP has not paralleled the changes to the environment within which it will be utilized. Surely, many Soldiers have thought to themselves, "how can we make this better?" This article is an articulation of just that: notes taken in a green notebook and questions silently asked of myself regarding the improvement of a process which is central to organizational success. Much of it is semantic in nature, but that does not make it any less important, because any process aimed at getting people to think about a problem or situation a certain way is centered on semantics. Eventually, just as there was a decision making process before the MDMP, there will be one after. For now, at least, our current planning process must enable functionally integrated decision-making to avoid becoming obsolete in a dynamically complex world.

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[1] US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 6-0, Commander and Staff Organization and Operations (Washington, DC: Government Printing Officer, 2014).

[2] Ibid, 9-3.

[3] US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, Joint Planning (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), vii.

[4] FM 6-0, p 9-6.

[5] The University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies (UFMCS), The Red Team Handbook, version 9.0 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: TRADOC G2 Intelligence Support Activity,

2018), p 191.

[6] Ibid.

[7] US Department of the Army, Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 5-19, Risk Management (Washington, DC: Government Printing Officer, 2014), p 1-1.

[8] US Department of the Army, Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 5-19, Risk Management (Washington, DC: Government Printing Officer, 2014).

[9] US Department of the Army, Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) 1-02.1, Operational Terms (Washington, DC: Government Printing Officer, 2019), p 1-82.

[10] US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-98, Reconnaissance and Security Operations (Washington, DC: Government Printing Officer, 2015), p 4-7.

[11] LTIOV (latest time information is of value) helps to a degree, but the specific information requirement, whether for planning or for execution is different, and is gathered for different reasons. Certainly, both planning and execution PIRs would have their own LTIOV.

[12] US Department of the Army, Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 5-0.1, Army Design Methodology (Washington, DC: Government Printing Officer, 2015), p 4-3.

[13] There are plenty of other variables, but this example is simply effective.

[14] US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 6-0, Commander and Staff Organization and Operations (Washington, DC: Government Printing Officer, 2014), 9-104. The sub-step *array initial forces* itself described as, "tricky, inexact work, affected by factors that are difficult to gauge..."

[15] Ibid.

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