

Insights and Best Practices

Focus Paper



Joint Headquarters Organization, Staff Integration, and Battle Rhythm

Second Edition

**Deployable Training Division
Joint Staff J7**

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Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited

This is the Second Edition of the Joint Headquarters Organization, Staff Integration, and Battle Rhythm Insights and Best Practices Focus Paper, written by the Deployable Training Division (DTD) of the Joint Staff J7 and published by the Joint Staff J7.

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PREFACE

The Joint Staff J7 supports the CJCS and the Joint Warfighter through joint force development to advance the operational effectiveness of the current and future joint force. This paper, written by the Deployable Training Division (DTD), helps inform both the joint warfighters and key functions within the J7, notably lessons learned, doctrine, education, and future joint force development. In addition to this paper, the DTD has also developed an overarching Joint Operations Insights and Best Practices Paper and numerous other focus papers that share insights and best practices for various challenges observed at joint headquarters. All of these papers are unclassified for broad accessibility. I commend these papers for your reading.

The DTD gains insights on operational matters through regular contact and dialogue with combatant and joint task force commanders and their staffs as they plan, prepare for, and conduct operations. The DTD observer/trainers collect and compare practices among the different headquarters, draw out and refine “insights” and “best practices,” and share them with the joint force.

We are fortunate to have several senior flag officers, active and retired, assist in development and vetting of these insights and best practice papers. Of note, General (Retired) Gary Luck, a Senior Fellow at the National Defense University, plays an active part. Their participation not only helps keep the DTD trainers at the theater-strategic and operational level, but also ensures that they retain a commander-centric perspective in these papers.

Please pass on your comments to DTD’s POC Mr. Mike Findlay so that we can improve this paper. Email address is: js.dsc.j7.mbx.joint-training@mail.mil.



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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY. Without exception, we find that command-centric organizations outperform staff-centric organizations. HQ organization, staff integration processes, and the supporting battle rhythm directly affect quality of support to the commander and direction to subordinates. Development and discipline of a HQ's organization, its processes, and battle rhythm are Commander, Chief of Staff (COS), and J-Director responsibilities.

Over the past decade our Joint Force Commanders (JFC) have increasingly integrated their operations with their interagency and multinational partners as part of whole-of-government(s) approaches across the range of military operations. Growth in information technology and increased expectations and demands for real-time information have also affected JFCs. These factors have influenced the commanders' decision-making processes as they apply both art and science to understand the situation, identify the problem, plan, and execute.

Many commands have modified their HQ organization and processes to accommodate these changes. In some cases the staff organizations have grown and processes have become more complex to perform the necessary cross-functional analysis and coordination to support commander decision-making requirements. However, we find a continuing awareness to stay focused on agile and relevant support to the commander, and not allow HQ growth or processes impede that support.

We recommend that joint headquarters continue to review both their organizations and processes in terms of how effectively they support commander decision-making requirements to operate at the speed of the challenge, and the apparatus they use to monitor and refine their organization and processes. These apparatuses can be the COS, Assistant COS, Director of Staff (in some HQ), the Secretariat of the Joint Staff section (SJS), or a Knowledge Management cell.

Organizing. Not all joint HQ are the same. Operational mission requirements drive required capabilities, which in turn drive organization, manning, and processes. The traditional J-code structure remains the preferred basic organizing construct even though commanders will often tailor the structure to their specific requirements. We find commanders focusing early-on in organizing the HQ, and getting the right key billet fills, subject matter experts, and external mission partner representation to best support their decision-making and enable unified action.

Staff Integration. Effective staff integration is achieved when functional expertise from across the staff and from external mission partners is brought together in direct support of the commander's decision requirements. Thought-out interaction between J-codes, working groups, operational planning teams, and decision boards leverage the analytical capability of the entire staff and mission partners to support decision requirements. The use of these kinds of staff integrating elements (sometimes referred to as Boards, Bureaus, Centers, Cells, and Working Groups (B2C2WG) and Operational Planning Teams (OPT)) makes staff coordination more routine, facilitates monitoring, assessment and planning, and allows for the management of activities across the three event horizons (current operations, future operations, and future plans).

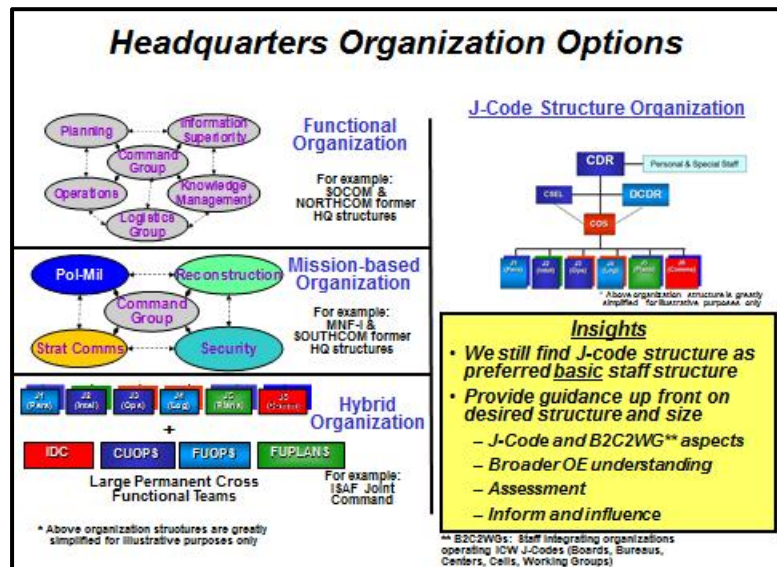
Battle Rhythm. The battle rhythm provides the structure for managing HQ's most important internal resource, the time of the commander and staff personnel, and integrates commander decision making with mission partners. The headquarters battle rhythm must not only support decisions across the three event horizons, but also account for the battle rhythms of higher and adjacent mission partners, all while enabling timely direction and guidance to subordinate units. The logical arrangement of OPTs and B2C2WGs in support of each other and commander decision-making is the mark of effective and efficient HQ.

2.0 HEADQUARTERS ORGANIZATION. We continue to find that operational mission requirements drive a joint headquarters' organization and manning since each joint force's mission is different.

Commander's guidance up front is important on the desired HQ organizational structure and functions (see below figure). There must be clear delineation of who is responsible for the necessary HQ functions supporting commander decision making, particularly the three bottom bullets on the figure: how to gain a broader operational environment understanding beyond that only of the military threat (including identification of the problem), who conduct assessments, and who plans, conducts, and oversees inform and influence activities.

We have at times seen a tendency toward headquarters staffs growing in size over time, however, there is clear value in keeping the headquarters "right sized" – i.e., not too large. Large HQs by their very nature, often take on unnecessary functions, require more internal coordination, and have the potential to overwhelm mission partners with demands and information, all of which can slow and/or reduce focus on providing agile and optimal support to commander decision requirements.

J-Code Organization. The traditional J-code organization continues to generally be the preferred basic staff structure for joint headquarters. This basic structure provides the headquarters with effective and efficient control, accountability, and administration characteristics less evident in other types of organizations. This "vertical" J-code structure promotes unity of command, speeds hierarchical information flow, and ensures the major directorate principals remain accountable through the Chief of Staff (CoS) to the commander for the major functions of the HQ.



In addition to clear accountability and authority lines, the J-code structure also adds significant interoperability benefits when compared to other basic staff structures. It provides staff members with an "address" that is readily-recognizable within the staff, across the Services and other HQ, and with our coalition and interagency partners. The J-code structure allows different headquarters to "speak a common language," facilitates the rapid integration of staff augments, and enhances communication with outside mission partners.

As a basic organizing model, the J-code structure provides a common reference point for broad functional expertise, staff oversight, and accountability (e.g., logistics and intelligence). The drawback of a purely J-code structure is the tendency, especially in large staffs, for information and knowledge to get "stovepiped" within the directorates. This challenge can be overcome through staff integration means of Boards, Bureaus, Centers, Cells, and Working Groups

(B2C2WG) and Operational Planning Teams (OPT) which are discussed in detail later in this paper.¹

Functional/Mission-oriented/Hybrid HQ Organization. Some staffs have organized in other than a J-code structure. These structures were created with the intent to better focus on a specific function or mission area such as Theater Security Cooperation, or in the case of the hybrid organization depicted in the above figure, to make cross functional planning organizations more permanent with full time membership. We observed that one headquarters had directorates that focused on areas such as outreach, plans and programs, knowledge development, operations and logistics, and resources. Another HQ functional organizational structure was designed to allow proactive collaboration with the U.S. Government interagency community and with partner nations. The intent was to improve collective responses to regional and transnational issues.

While designed to tackle a variety of mission sets, we find headquarters that are organized other than by the traditional J-code functions (e.g., J1, J2, J3, etc.) experience significant interoperability challenges in interaction with higher, lateral, and subordinate headquarters' staffs, most of whom are designed under a traditional J-code structure. We find that subordinate and higher headquarters experience difficulty interacting with other than J-code headquarters due to lack of a common reference point (counterpart). This "address" or "phone book" problem becomes more pronounced during crisis operations and during high rotation of personnel in both the staff and subordinate organizations. We also sometimes find loss of staff (J-code) accountability for certain "traditional" functions (such as intelligence and logistics) as personnel from these staffs are redirected to work in other functional organizations.

Key billets. Key billets are a critical consideration. Up front, the commander will need to pursue getting some of these billets filled with the right people, for example; Deputy Commander, Chief of Staff (CoS), Command Senior Enlisted Leader (CSEL), principal staff officers, some of the special staff, and key Coalition embedded staff officers. By-name requests from the commander are common for filling many of these key billets. Obviously, building trust and relationships is always a challenge when forming new HQ. Some of these critical positions (e.g., Political Advisors and Cultural advisors) are often comprised of one person, but can provide invaluable input to the commander and the staff.

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Billet Considerations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deputy Commander(s)• Chief of Staff• Command Senior Enlisted Leader• Principal Staff Officers• Political Advisor (POLAD) (Foreign Policy Advisor)• Interagency liaison and assigned personnel• Coalition members• Liaison Officers <div style="background-color: yellow; border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"><p style="text-align: center;"><i>Insights</i></p><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pursue getting key billets filled with the right people• Clearly delineate roles and responsibilities</div>
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External mission partners. Think "inclusion" at the outset. Establishing a process to include external mission partners in cross-functional venues is a key element of effectively integrating a staff HQ and providing the best support to commander's decision making. A newly formed HQ has many challenges of forming, deploying, planning, and providing direction to subordinates that can take focus away from this necessary early-on inclusion with mission partners. However we continue to see the benefits of reaching out early to interagency and multinational partners

¹ We note that different Services and HQ may use different acronyms other than what we refer as B2C2WGs for these staff integrating elements. However, all use some form of integrating elements to bring together cross-functional expertise to support decision-making.

and the various supporting DOD agencies and commands during HQ formation, both through commander involvement and exchange of liaison elements. An inclusive command climate, logical organizational design, and solid internal staff procedures are all necessary to support decision making within a unified action environment.

Joint HQ personnel will almost always be working with interagency and multinational mission partners. This has HQ implications for training, required expertise, and staff organization. When working with interagency and multinational mission partners (e.g. NATO), we find that the HQ needs to maintain a current and accurate NATO or other billet description to ensure personnel meet the experience and qualifications demanded by the position. When building a joint HQ on an existing HQ “core” staff, those existing staff sections may already have relationships built with various external agencies in the course of normal duties. Leveraging these existing relationships can speed inclusion with mission partners and stakeholders.

We frequently observe joint staffs struggling with the challenges of integrating individual augmentees and reservists, especially in HQ that have a high turnover rate. All HQ staffs deal with the challenges of integrating members from different Services; we see the benefits to staff integration and effectiveness when all members have been trained in the HQ specific processes and procedures, understand their responsibilities, and work together in support of the commander's objectives. We find that time spent up front in developing new staff member pre-deployment training plans and in ensuring continuity folders are complete and up-to-date improves staff integration by assisting incoming personnel in getting quickly up to speed.

Insights and Best Practices:

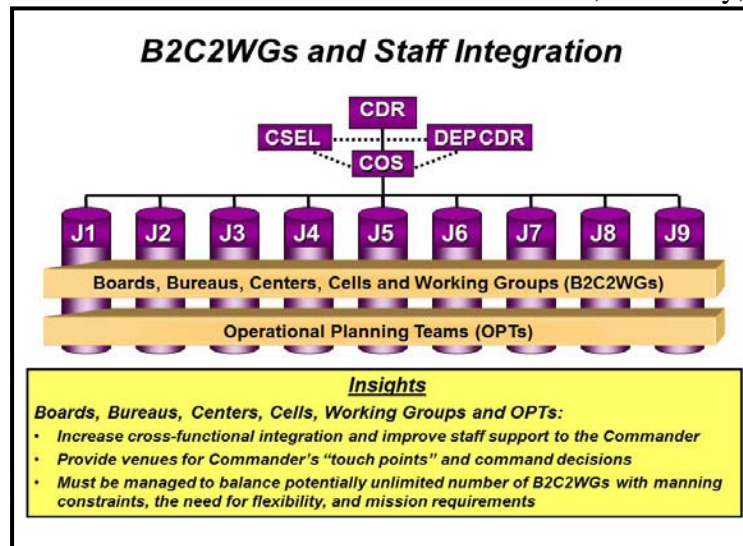
- The traditional J-code organization is the preferred basic staff structure for a joint headquarters. This vertical structure provides the headquarters with the most effective and efficient control, accountability, and administration not found in other types of organizations as well as a common reference for interaction with other HQs.
- When working with interagency and multinational partners, consider how to maintain a current and accurate NATO or other billet description, influence the personnel selection process, and ensure personnel meet the job description qualifications.
- Reach out early to mission partners and the various supporting DOD agencies and commands during the initial formation of a headquarters – both through commander interaction and exchange of liaison elements – all with the intent of inclusion to better gain unity of effort.

3.0 STAFF INTEGRATION. This section and the next section on battle rhythm are both tied to the concept of the *commander-centric nature of decision making* and how the staff can best support that decision making. This section addresses the role of centers, working groups, operational planning teams, and decision boards as a precursor for the subsequent section on battle rhythm.

B2C2WGs. There are clear benefits of the J-code structure in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, administration, accountability, and “plug and play” functionality.

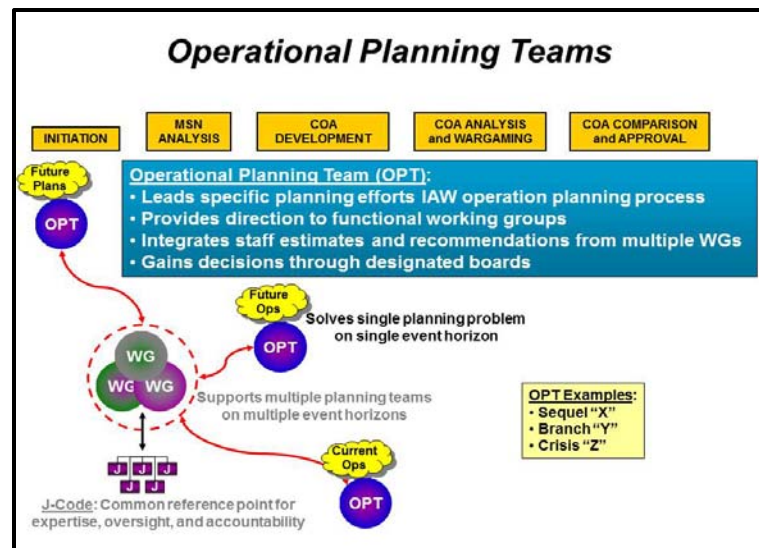
However, there is a common tendency for knowledge and expertise to “stovepipe” within the J-code directorates due to the sheer number of ongoing staff actions. B2C2WGs can mitigate this risk.

They are venues through which the cross-functional expertise of the staff is brought to bear on the planning and execution problems being addressed by the commander (see figure). Horizontal, cross-functional B2C2WGs overlaid on the vertical J-code structure provide a powerful method of staff integration that we see used successfully in many joint HQ.



For many new staff members, the concept of B2C2WGs and their interaction in support of commander decision making can be confusing. We find that the CoS must continually reinforce the value and necessity of this horizontal, cross-functional approach to include mandatory participation and support by J-code directorates.

Operational Planning Teams (OPTs). OPTs are established to solve a single problem related to a specific task or requirement on a single event horizon. In most cases, OPTs are not enduring and will dissolve upon completion of the assigned task. OPT membership is typically determined by the staff officer responsible for the event horizon in which the OPT is working; i.e., the J5 for future plans, J35 for future operations, and J33 for current operations.

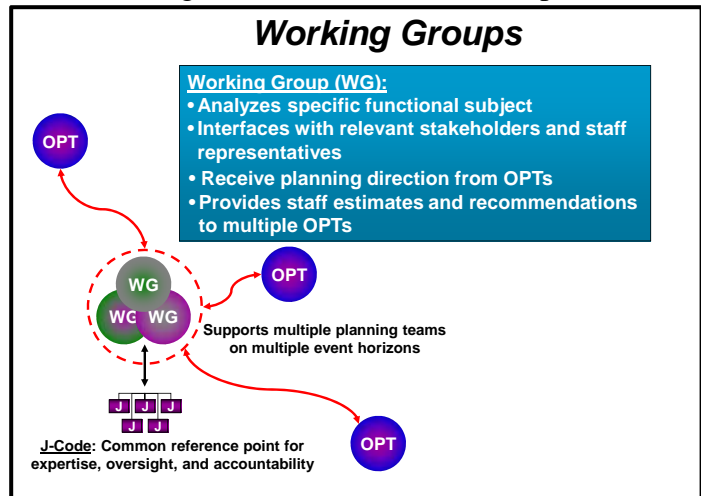


The chart on the right depicts the interaction between OPTs, working groups, and J-code directorates. The two-way arrows represent the flow of information as OPTs request and receive support from the multiple working

groups (WGs). As the OPT works its way through the Joint Operation Planning Process (JOPP), it provides planning guidance to multiple working groups, receiving cross-functional expertise in the form of analysis and staff estimates in return.

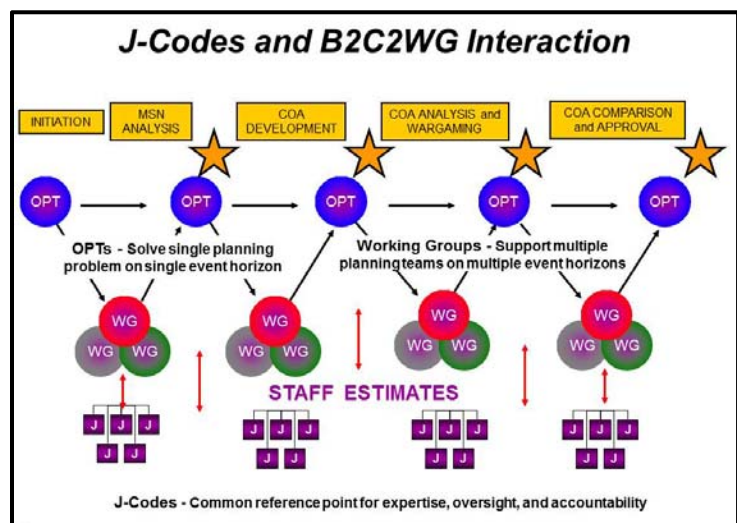
Working Groups. Working groups also play an important role in supporting decision making. A working group is an enduring or ad hoc cross-functional organization formed to develop, maintain, and leverage expertise from within and external to the HQ in order to provide analysis to users across all three event horizons.

Working groups are manned by the J-codes and other sources of expertise pertaining to the working group's function. It is important to emphasize that information flows in both directions between working groups and the J-code directorates. Working group members both inform their parent directorates and are informed by them. For example, the J4 representative to a working group would be expected to provide subject matter expertise and recommendations regarding the logistics supportability of various courses of action while also keeping the J4 Director and staff informed of working group actions and receiving Director guidance. We observe the importance of consistency of subject matter expertise and directorate level staff estimates throughout various working groups in the functioning of the HQ staff. It is often not possible for the same SME to attend all working groups, thus making consistency and knowledge of the staff estimates essential.



Decision Boards. As the OPT works its way through the JOPP, it briefs the commander on the status of the plan, seeking guidance or decisions at specified intervals, normally at a board. A board is an organized group of individuals within an HQ appointed by the commander (or other authority) that meets with the purpose of gaining guidance or decision. The board's responsibilities and authority are governed by the authority which established the board. Command Boards are chaired by the commander; functional boards are chaired by another senior staff member to whom the authority to decide a particular matter has been delegated. We often see functional boards used to synchronize assets, prioritize plans, or allocate resources.

A best practice associated with decision boards is bringing multiple requirements for decisions to a single, regularly scheduled board venue. This type of logical and coordinated scheduling uses the commander's

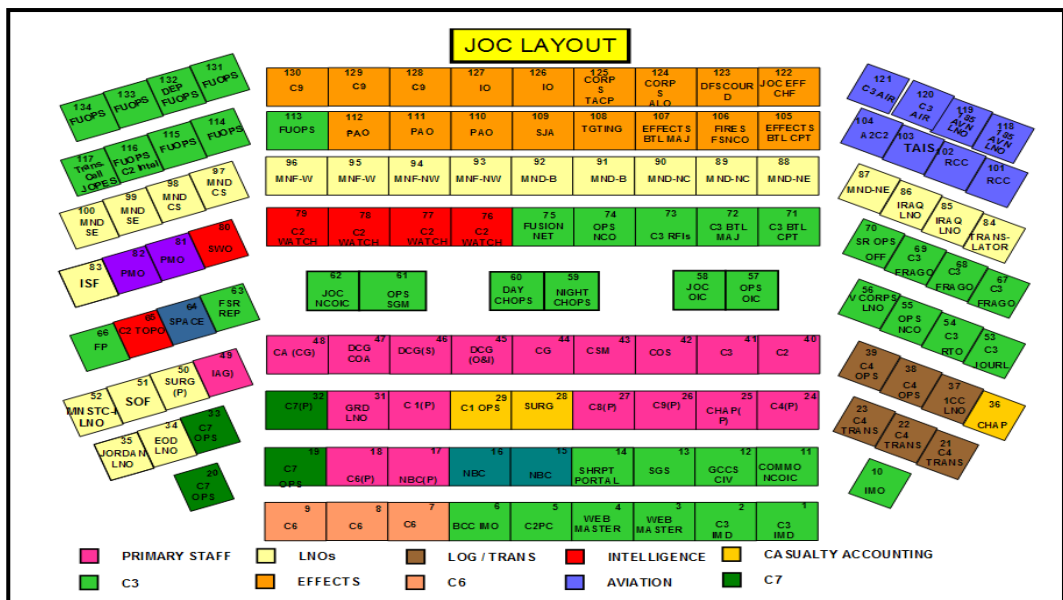


time in the most efficient manner, helping to maximize the amount of “white space” in the battle rhythm is discussed in Section 4.0. The interaction between boards, centers, WGs, J-codes, and OPTs is the key to the efficient and effective functioning of the staff in supporting commander decision making and to effective staff integration. The figure on the previous page depicts this interaction. Along the top of the figure are the first five steps of the JOPP. Starting on the upper left-hand side, an OPT is formed to address a particular problem on a single event horizon. As the OPT progresses through the planning process, it interacts with the WGs that can provide expertise related to the specific planning problem. Each WG is typically supporting multiple OPTs at the same time.

J-code staff principals are actively involved in this process. They provide manpower and expertise to both the Working Groups and OPTs and receive feedback from each, but their responsibilities do not end there. Each staff director also ensures a common staff estimate is shared with the OPTs and WGs, and fully vet courses of action (COAs) brought to the commander. We observe that staffs that struggle with producing quality decision-making material to the commander often have a breakdown in the interaction between the J-codes, WGs, and OPTs. We also observe the value of the staff estimate process in ensuring that the COAs briefed to the commander are feasible.

Centers. Centers are permanent, cross functional staff integrating organizations. The Joint Operations Center (JOC) is the most familiar center typically found in a joint HQ. We observe that every HQ

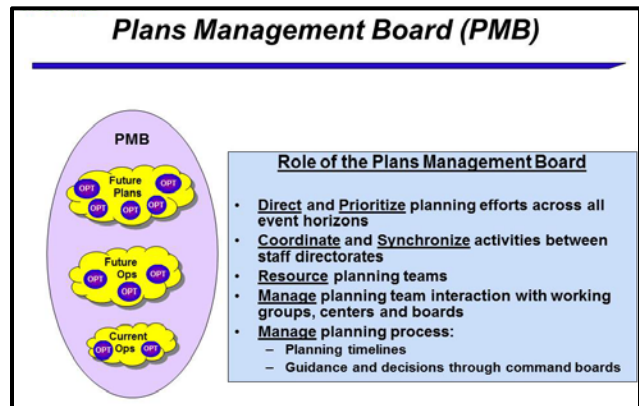
uses some form of a JOC with dedicated manning and facilities to integrate the staff within the current operations event horizon. The JOC focuses on supporting the direct, monitor, assess, and plan functions for the commander - most often out to a 72-96 hour time horizon.



The JOC requires significant support from the entire staff and liaison officers (LNOs) of subordinate units and other mission partners. It is necessary to have cross-functional representation from all critical functions affecting the mission. Placement of the various functions on the JOC floor is a deliberate process that facilitates cross-functional coordination and synergy. Collocating functions like public affairs and information operations in the JOC provides added value and speed of coordination. The above chart depicts an example of a layout for a mature JOC supporting an enduring mission.

Planning Management and Synchronization of Activities.² With limited manpower and subject matter experts a HQ cannot support an unlimited number of B2C2WGs. We typically observe a higher demand than supply for trained and experienced planners. We also see that low density staff sections (i.e., legal or interagency) often cannot support unlimited planning efforts. Prioritization and resourcing of planning efforts is an important function to retain staff focus on those actions important to the commander.

We have observed a variety of different methods of prioritizing and resourcing planning efforts. We find it necessary that the CoS prioritizes planning efforts and J-code support IAW the commander's priorities. A Plans Management Board (PMB) or other venue with the



appropriate decision authority is a best practice and ensures that the highest priority problems receive the most planning attention and resources. As depicted in the adjacent figure, the PMB directs, prioritizes, coordinates, and synchronizes activities between staff directorates. This allows for more efficient use of time and prioritization of resources.³

In addition to a PMB that may meet on a weekly basis, we have observed other examples of staff synchronization that complement the management and prioritization process by meeting on a more frequent basis. A Synchronization Board, held at the Operations or Plans directorate level is a useful tool for ensuring missions and tasks are coordinated across different event horizons. We have also observed the utility of a periodic synchronization event termed the "Council of Colonels" that helps to synchronize the efforts of the staff (but not as a substitute for a PMB). This type of event ensures directorate level cross-functional synchronization by reviewing the events of the past 24 hours and prioritizing tasks for the next day.

Insights and Best Practices:

- Spend time up front developing training plans and continuity / turnover procedures designed to quickly integrate incoming personnel into the staff.
- Use Decision Boards as an opportunity to combine multiple requirements for guidance or decisions by the commander into one venue.
- Ensure cross-functional representation from all critical mission areas in the HQ centers.
- Ensure working group members both inform their parent directorates and are informed by them. The consistency of subject matter expertise and directorate level staff estimates informing B2C2WGs is critical to effective staff work.
- Use a Plans Management Board or similar venue to coordinate, synchronize, and prioritize planning and staff resources across the three event horizons (current operations, future operations, future plans).

² This entire topic is further addressed in the July 2013 Design and Planning focus paper. See URL inside of the front cover.

³ Ibid.

4.0 BATTLE RHYTHM. The creation, management and use of an effective HQ battle rhythm directly support commander decision making. Battle rhythm events directly support the commander’s decision requirements. Inputs and outputs of the various battle rhythm events should logically support each other and the decision requirements.

The joint HQ battle rhythm is “a routine cycle of command and staff activities intended to synchronize current and future operations.”
 Joint Pub 3-33

A staff battle rhythm needs to have flexibility, adaptability, and the ability to handle dynamic changes in mission requirements and HHQ demands. At the same time, it should have a structure and foundation for staff and unit level interaction, planning, and prioritization. With all the complexities and demands on staffs, we have observed that the one constant is that the commander is the best place to start regardless of mission, size, or scope.

Commander - Centric Approach. The commander’s decision making style will affect interaction with the staff. We refer to the actual interaction points between the commander and staff as “touch points.” Every commander has unique personal decision making and staff interaction preferences, which may be additionally influenced by the mission and the demands of HHQ. The adjacent figure depicts some examples of touch points. The level of involvement between the commander and staff can vary significantly based on preferences as well as the requirements of higher headquarters.

“Touch point” Examples	Commander A		Commander B	
	Req?	Freq?	Req?	Freq?
Campaign Assessment	Yes	once / month	No	delegated
Operational Environment Assessment	Yes	twice / month	No	delegated
Commander’s Update Assessment	Yes	5 times / week	Yes	once / week
Small Group with Staff Directors	No	delegated	Yes	once / week
Plans Management (Prioritization and Resourcing of planning activities)	Yes	once / week	No	delegated
Planning Guidance / Meeting with planners	Yes	once / week	Yes	once / month
Decision Boards (for planning and execution)	Yes	3 times / week	Yes	twice / month
CCIR Reporting and Wake up Criteria	Yes	as required	Yes	as required
Higher HQ Requirements	Yes	6 times / week	Yes	once / week

Considerations

- “Touch points” are Commander-centric
- Commander’s preferences and decision-making style underpin the battle rhythm

Another key implication of a commander-centric approach is the nesting of the unit battle rhythm with its higher headquarters. The HQ is always interacting with HHQ, mission partners, and subordinates. The importance of linkages with HHQs at the Combatant Command and National Command Authority is intuitive; a HQ battle rhythm must nest with the battle rhythms of HHQ. At the same time, the JTF battle rhythm must support subordinate decision making and execution.

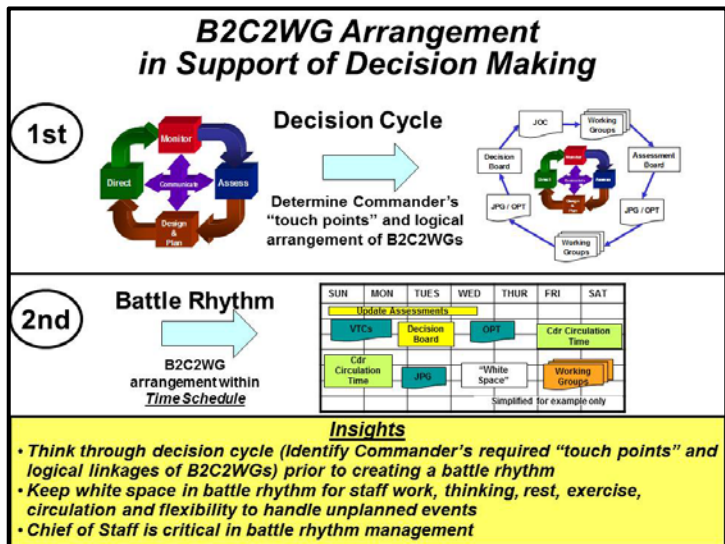
We observe many staffs that spend significant effort, manpower, and frustration attempting to provide support in ways that the commander may not want - or in ways that did not meet the demands of the mission or HHQ. As depicted in the figure “Commander A” has directed more interaction with the staff than “Commander B.” Also note that the HHQ requirements for the two commanders are significantly different. Understanding these “touch points” and using them as the first step in developing the battle rhythm can save time, energy and frustration, especially when adapting to a new commander, standing up a new HQ, or adjusting to higher headquarters requirements.

Understanding the commander’s touch point requirements and preferences begins the process of creating an effective battle rhythm that supports the commander’s decision making. Once these “touch points” are understood, the staff can develop processes that will maximize the effectiveness of their support to the commander.

One example of a touchpoint is the fairly common daily update brief to the commander. In some cases, briefs have been more informational, providing a recap of past events. In other situations, briefers ensured that the information provided to the commander was relevant, provided analysis or assessment, and was focused on answering the “So What?” question. The commander often uses this opportunity to provide guidance, intent, and decisions.

Another example of how touch points and the commander’s interaction with the staff can benefit information sharing and decisions is seen in the planning effort. During the early phases of the design process and mission analysis, the commander can provide useful guidance and direction to the planning team. Understanding this interaction and finding the balance of preserving the commander’s time and ensuring the planners remain focused and in synch with the commander’s intent is a critical aspect of effective staff integration.

Logical Arrangement of Battle Rhythm Events. Building upon the foundation of commander’s “touch points,” the battle rhythm can be created in two distinct steps. The first step is to start with a logical arrangement of B2C2WGs around the commander’s decision requirements with decision venues (boards) as culminating events. We have observed many HQs successfully use a “critical path” construct to map inputs to and outputs from the B2C2WGs to focus this effort. The second step lays out these B2C2WG events on a calendar or time schedule. The figure on the right depicts the process.



When creating a battle rhythm, maintaining sufficient unscheduled time or “white space” is crucial.

Without a conscious effort to preserve valuable time for both the commander and staff to think and work, the battle rhythm can become overwhelming and counterproductive. Discipline of the battle rhythm is necessary. We have found that the CoS or another senior staff member with full authority over the battle rhythm is essential to creating and disciplining the battle rhythm to best support the commander.

Special Staff and SMEs. Another important element of battle rhythm management is maintaining an awareness of critical staff positions that are in high demand for working groups and OPTs. High Demand/Low Density (HD/LD) SMEs (e.g., political advisor and staff judge advocate) are important members of B2C2WGs but may not be able to support multiple events at the same time. It is important to identify manpower limitations of these key SMEs and ensure they are utilized effectively.

The Importance of White Space. “White space” is a necessary component of the battle rhythm. Most joint HQs make a priority of ensuring a portion of every day has no scheduled meetings – what they call white space.

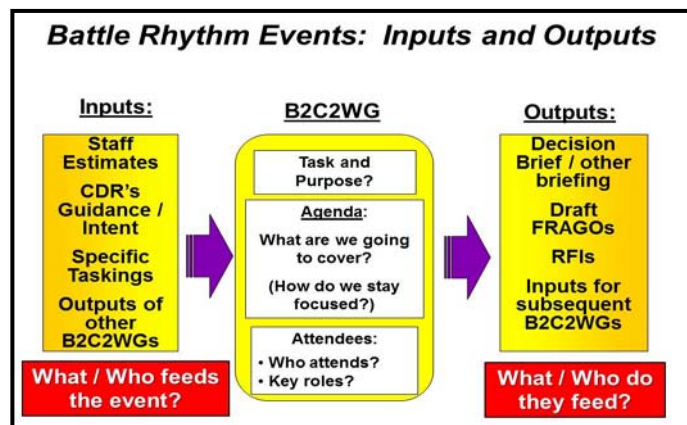
We sometimes observe HQ where the principals and action officers find themselves going to a continuous progression of meetings, working groups, and other events. Additionally, when one B2C2WG extends beyond its prescribed time causing the next one to start late or be conducted without the necessary attendees, the inflexibility caused by a lack of “white space” can be detrimental to a staff. The negative impacts on a “jam-packed” battle rhythm go beyond the commander and staff, and also affect subordinate units, often with greater severity.

The commander requires time in the battle rhythm for thinking, rest, and exercise. Time spent away engaged with subordinate units through battlefield circulation and thinking is important. Staff members also need time in their day to conduct staff work, prepare to lead the B2C2WGs, and attend to personal health and welfare. We have observed working groups that were ineffective primarily because the participants did not have enough time to review the essential inputs, prepare an agenda, and determine expected outputs of the working group. In these situations, busy staff members find themselves wasting time and not contributing effectively to commander’s decision making.

We find that the most effective battle rhythms have dedicated time periods for staff interaction with the commander, for battlefield circulation, and for staff work; this provides predictability. For example, the battle rhythm may block a morning time period for touch points with the command group, a time period mid-day for staff work, another period for cross-functional (B2C2WG) meetings, another block in the evening for scheduled or on-call meetings with the commander, while also blocking periods for battlefield circulation, meals, and personal time.

Responding to unplanned events are always a challenge to the battle rhythm. For example, when the CJCS or SecDef requires the combatant commander and the JTF commander to participate in an unscheduled conference call, this event will pull the commander away from other scheduled events on the battle rhythm. The battle rhythm must be sufficiently flexible to both provide needed support for the commander in preparing for the call and still have the battle rhythm function in the commander’s absence. We often see a deputy commander or CoS standing in for the commander in these battle rhythm events.

Discipline in the Battle Rhythm. The battle rhythm is commander-centric; that is, the efforts of the staff must be directed toward support of decision making. The figure on the right highlights two considerations. First, the reason for having a battle rhythm event should be clear (i.e., have a task and purpose). Second, inputs and outputs must be identified, providing a rationale and linkage for the B2C2WG. If a battle rhythm event is not “value added” to commander decision-making then it should not be on the battle rhythm.



We see joint HQ spending significant time logically arranging B2C2WGs to best support commander's decision making. This logical arrangement underpins the entire battle rhythm and synchronizes staff efforts. The example below shows an overarching logical arrangement of activities supporting decision making.

Not only is it important to ensure the order of battle rhythm events is logical, it is also important to ensure that staff proponents and planning team leaders have enough time to prepare between events. This ensures that the outputs from one event are understood and staffed prior to using them to inform a follow-on event.

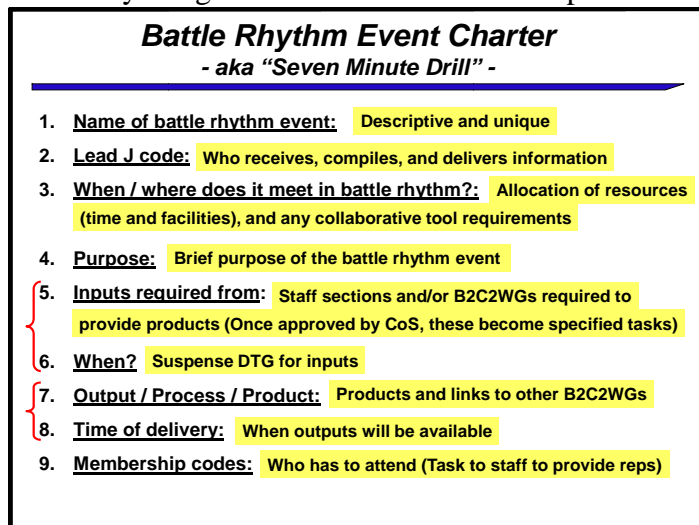
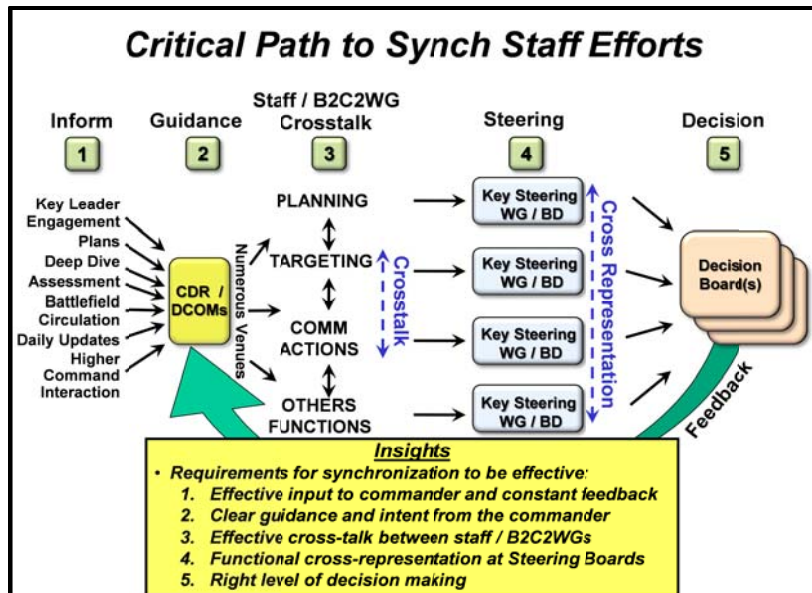
Maintaining control over the battle rhythm is challenging. We recommend the CoS manage the battle rhythm. The CoS has the requisite authority as well as frequent interaction with the commander and the most immediate sense of the commander's priorities. The battle rhythm is crucial to staff time management. We observe staffs struggling with balancing the potentially large number of B2C2WGs desired for full staff analysis against the limited number of personnel and competing scheduling requirements.

A best practice that we see widely used to discipline the number of events on the battle rhythm is ensuring each battle rhythm event has a "charter" or what many call a "Seven Minute Drill" (see figure – name came from a past COS requirement to be able to explain the rationale for the event within 7 minutes). We find this charter to be very effective in both describing and vetting battle rhythm events. The charter is typically approved by the CoS and has enabled many joint HQ to ensure that every event

on the battle rhythm has a necessary purpose and defined inputs and outputs. A proposed battle rhythm event that has no output and only provides generic situational awareness, or an information brief outside the decision-making process may not belong on the battle rhythm.

Insights and Best Practices:

- Identify the commander's decision-making preferences and touch point requirements early to underpin the staff battle rhythm.



- Build the staff battle rhythm with the flexibility to handle changes in mission requirements and HHQ demands. At the same time, ensure it has a structure and foundation for staff and unit level interaction, planning and prioritization.
- The CoS or another senior staff member should manage and discipline the battle rhythm, including vetting and approval of battle rhythm events through some form of a charter or seven minute drill.
- When creating a battle rhythm, identify manpower limitations of key SMEs and ensure they are utilized effectively.
- Nest the battle rhythm with other HQ – HHQ, adjacent HQ, and subordinates.
- Provide as much predictability as possible in the battle rhythm and maintain sufficient white space in the battle rhythm for circulation, work, and personal time.

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Glossary

Abbreviations and Acronyms

APAN – All Partners Access Network	OPT – Operational Planning Team
B2C2WG – Boards, Bureaus, Centers, Cells, and Working Groups	PMB – Plans Management Board
CJCS – Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff	POLAD – Political Advisor
COA – Courses of Action	RFI – Request for Information
CoS – Chief of Staff	SecDef – Secretary of Defense
CSEL – Command Senior Enlisted Leader	SME – Subject Matter Expert
CUOPS – Current Operations	SOUTHCOM – United States Southern Command
DTD – Deployable Training Division	WG – Working Group
FRAGO – Fragmentary Operation Order	
FUOPS – Future Operations	
FUPLANS – Future Plans	
HD/LD –High Demand/Low Density	
HHQ – Higher Headquarters	
HQ – Headquarters	
J1 – Personnel Directorate of Joint Staff	
J2 – Intelligence Directorate of a Joint Staff	
J3 – Operations Directorate of a Joint Staff	
J33 – Joint Staff Current Operations Officer	
J35 – Future Operations Cell of a Joint Staff	
J4 – Logistics Directorate of a Joint Staff	
J5 – Strategic Plans and Policy Directorate of a Joint Staff	
J6 – Command, Control, Communications, and Computer Systems Directorate of a Joint Staff	
J7 – Operational Plans and Joint Staff Development Directorate of a Joint Staff	
J8 – Force Structure, Resources, and Assessment Directorate of a Joint Staff	
J9 – Civil-Military Operations Staff Section	
JDEIS – Joint Doctrine, Education, and Training Electronic Information System	
JLLIS – Joint Lessons Learned Information System	
JOC – Joint Operations Center	
JOPP – Joint Operation Planning Process	
JP – Joint Publication	
JTF – Joint Task Force	
LNO – Liaison Officer	
MNF-I – Multi-National Force-Iraq	
NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization	
NORTHCOM – United States Northern Command	
OE – Operational Environment	

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