

TRADOC Focus Booklet



FM 5-0 The Operations Process



U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command

Victory Starts Here!

Foreword

The environment in which we conduct operations is characterized by four clear trends: growing uncertainty, rapid change, increased competitiveness, and greater decentralization. Given these trends, our leaders must expect and be prepared to confront a variety of complex problems, most of which will include myriad interdependent variables and all of which will include a human dimension.

With the publication of FM 5-0, *The Operations Process*, and the introduction of *design* into our doctrine, we highlight the importance of understanding complex problems more fully before we seek to solve them through our traditional planning processes.

Design is neither a process nor a checklist. It is a critical and creative thinking methodology to help commanders understand the environment, analyze problems, and consider potential approaches so they can exploit opportunities, identify vulnerabilities, and anticipate transitions during a campaign.

Commanders apply design to *understand* before entering the *visualize, describe, direct, lead*, and *assess* cycle. Einstein once said, “If I were given one hour to save the planet, I would spend 59 minutes defining the problem and one minute resolving it.” Combining design with the military decision making process provides Army leaders with a more comprehensive approach to problem solving under conditions of complexity and uncertainty. The *mission narrative* produced through design enables leaders to articulate the context in which they operate to both subordinates and superiors alike.

In addition to the introduction of design, this revision of FM 5-0 builds on and expands the body of doctrine associated with full spectrum operations described in the 2008 edition of FM 3-0, *Operations*. Moving beyond planning and orders production, this manual holistically addresses planning, preparation, execution, and assessment in the continuous learning cycle of the operations process. It reinforces the central role of commanders in the operations process through battle command—applying the art and science of understanding, visualizing, describing, directing, leading, and assessing operations—in exercising effective command and control. The intent of FM 5-0 is to encourage greater flexibility through critical thought, action, and initiative. Army leaders must not only develop effective plans, they must be able to convert those plans into timely action while maintaining the capability to reframe and adapt as the situation changes in an increasingly dynamic operational environment.

Gen. Martin E. Dempsey
Commanding General
U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command

What Is FM 5-0, And Why Is It Important?

The 2010 edition Field Manual (FM) 5-0, *The Operations Process*, represents a significant evolution in Army doctrine. Recent operational experience, lessons learned, transformational changes, and revisions to joint and Army doctrine demanded major revisions to FM 5-0. The goal of this revision effort is to provide Army leaders with a manual that assists them with the “thinking” aspects of command and control.

Army forces conduct full spectrum operations within operational environment characterized by complexity, uncertainty, and continuous changes. In operations, commanders face thinking and adaptive enemies, changing civilian perceptions, and differing agendas of various organizations in an operational area. Commanders can seldom predict with certainty how enemies or civilians will act and react, or how events may develop. Success in operations requires commanders to develop a holistic understanding of their operational environment, frame problems, and develop comprehensive approaches to solve or manage those problems. From this understanding, commanders develop simple, flexible plans that communicate their vision and intent by focusing on the results they expect to achieve through mission orders. During execution, leaders must continuously anticipate, learn, adapt, and transi-

Of the many lessons drawn from over seven years of wartime experience, one that stands out prominently is the critical need to improve our ability to exercise the cognitive aspects of battle command—understanding and visualizing.

**Lieutenant General
William B. Caldwell**



tion to overcome the dynamics of changing circumstances and adaptive adversaries. They encourage continuous collaboration across the force and with partners to better understand their situation, adjust plans, or reframe problems throughout an operation. As such, the new FM 5-0 focuses on the cognitive aspects of command and control. It describes approaches for commanders—supported by

their staff, subordinate commanders, and partners—in planning, preparing, executing and assessing operations.

What Is Changing In FM 5-0 And Why?

One of the first changes readers will note in the new FM 5-0 is its title. Changed from *Army Planning and Orders Production* to *The Operations Process*, the new title reflects significant modification to the material covered in FM 5-0. While retaining details of planning and planning products, the revised FM 5-0 expands the scope of the manual to include doctrine on the exercise of command and control throughout the operations process, as shown in figure 1. This change is intended to better describe the dynamic relationship among all the activities of the operations process—not just planning.

In addition, the Army (in coordination with the joint community) developed an approach to help commanders, staffs, and others better understand complex problems and develop approaches to resolve those problems. Collectively, the new approach is known as *design*. In addition to design becoming an essential element, the new FM 5-0—

- ***Emphasizes full spectrum operations*** (combining elements of offense, defense, stability, or civil support) throughout the conduct of operations.
- Modifies command and control techniques and products, formerly based on the battlefield operating systems, to align with the ***warfighting functions***. This affects several areas, including organizing the staff for operations and the formats for operational orders and attachments.
- Updates the ***military decision making process and operation order format*** to better account for design, full spectrum operations, the warfighting functions, and the five Army information tasks introduced in FM 3-0.

This edition of FM 5-0 provides doctrine on the operations process as a whole, a chapter on design, and a chapter for each activity of the operations process. The appendixes describe the tactics, techniques, and procedures for organizing command posts, conducting the military decision making process, conducting troop leading procedures, and writing operation plans and orders.

What Is The Operations Process?

The operations process is an organizational learning cycle consisting of the major command and control activities performed during operations: planning, preparing for, executing, and assessing the operation. Commanders drive the operations process through **battle command**. Battle command applies leadership and direction to the operations process to translate decisions into actions—by synchronizing forces and warfighting functions in time, space, and purpose—to accomplish the mission.

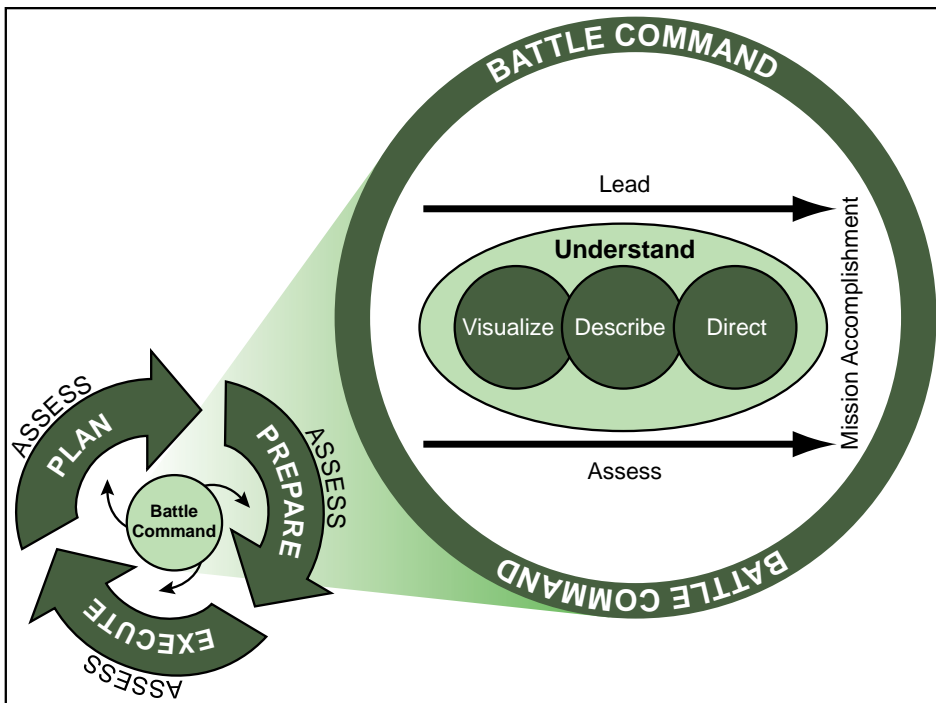


Figure 1. The Operations Process

The activities of the operations process may be sequential—especially at the start of an operation. However, once operations have begun, a headquarters often conducts parts of each activity simultaneously and cycles through the activities of the operations process continuously as the situation requires. While simple in concept (plan, prepare, execute, and assess), the operations process is dynamic in execution. Commanders and staffs use the operations process to integrate numerous activities consisting of hundreds of tasks executed throughout the headquarters. The doctrine in FM 5-0 assists commanders in

organizing their staffs and training them to think critically and creatively throughout the operations process.

Incorporating Design Into Army Doctrine

Design is a methodology for applying critical and creative thinking to understand, visualize, and describe complex, ill-structured problems and develop approaches to solve them. Today's operational environments present situations so complex that understanding them—let alone attempting to change them—is beyond the ability of a single individual. The design methodology assists leaders in understanding the context of a situation and then deciding how, if, and when to act. Successfully applying design seeks four concrete goals that, once achieved, provide the reasoning and logic that guide detailed planning. The goals of design are—

- Understanding ill-structured problems.
- Anticipating change.
- Creating opportunities.
- Recognizing and managing transitions.

Commanders use design to ensure they are solving the right problem. When commanders use design, they closely examine the symptoms, the underlying tensions, and the root causes of conflict in the operational environment. From this perspective, they can identify the fundamental problem with greater clarity and consider more accurately how to solve it. Design is essential to ensuring commanders identify the right problem to solve. Effective application of design is the difference between solving a problem right and solving the right problem.

Design underpins the operations process, guiding the iterative and often cyclic application of understanding, visualizing, and describing aspects of battle command. Design supports the conceptual aspects of planning, including understanding the operational environment, framing the problem, visualizing a desired end state, and conceptualizing a broad operational approach to solve or manage a problem. Commanders describe their

We often fail not because we fail to solve the problem we face, but because we fail to face the right problem.

Russell L. Ackoff

understanding and visualization in a ***design concept*** that drives more detailed planning. Commanders practice design continuously throughout the operations process. As commanders learn during execution, they update their understanding, modify their visualization, and describe their visualization. This leads to modifying their plan. In some instances, commanders may go beyond modifying the basic plan. They may decide to reframe the problem and develop a new operational approach resulting in an entirely new plan.

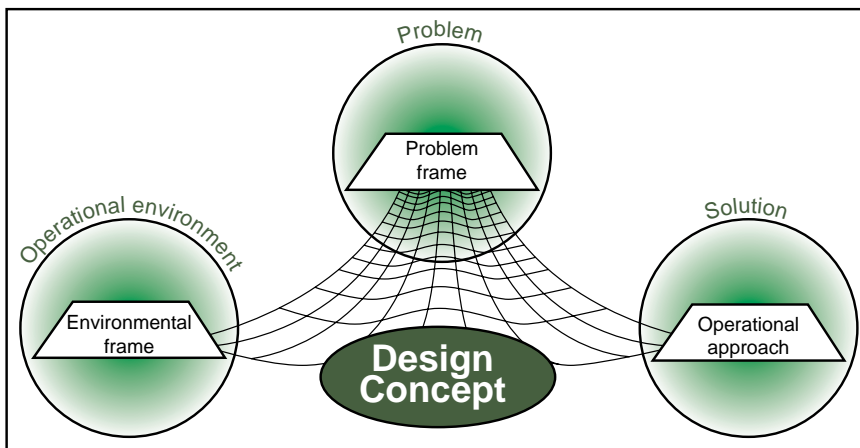


Figure 2. Activities of Design

The revised FM 5-0 devotes a chapter to design that describes the fundamentals of design and offers a design methodology. Design is also addressed throughout the manual to include chapters on the fundamentals of the operations process, planning, preparation, execution, and assessment. Furthermore, the revised appendix on the military decision making process describes how design interfaces with the military decision making process.

Fundamentals Of The Operations Process

In addition to the principles of operations found in FM 3-0, the doctrine that FM 5-0 prescribes is built on six fundamentals. These fundamentals are emphasized throughout FM 5-0.

- ***Commanders drive the operations process through battle command.*** Staffs perform essential functions that amplify the effectiveness of operations; however,

commanders play the central role in the operations process through battle command. All activities of battle command occur in planning, preparation, execution, and assessment but vary in emphasis throughout the operations process. The relationships among the activities of battle command and the activities of the operations process are dynamic. For example, during planning, commanders focus their activities on understanding, visualizing, and describing. During execution, commanders often focus on directing, leading, and assessing while improving their understanding and modifying their visualization.

- ***Situational understanding is fundamental to effective command and control.*** Throughout the operations process, commanders (supported by their staffs, the staffs of higher headquarters, subordinate commanders, and other military and civilian partners) seek to build and maintain their situational understanding. Situational understanding is the product of applying analysis and judgment to relevant information and knowledge. It is essential to developing effective plans, assessing operations, and making quality decisions during execution. Commanders and staffs must continually work to maintain their situational understanding and work through periods of reduced understanding as a situation evolves.
- ***Critical and creative thinking aid in understanding and decision making throughout the operations process.*** Critical thinking is purposeful, reflective, and self-regulating judgment to determine the meaning and significance of what is observed or expressed. Creative thinking involves creating something new or original. Creative thinking leads to new insight, novel approaches, fresh perspectives, and new ways of understanding and conceiving ideas.
- ***Commanders continually consider and combine tasks focused on the populations (stability or civil support operations) as well as those tasks focused on enemy forces (offensive and defensive operations).*** Military operations involve more than combat between armed opponents. Winning battles and engagements while shaping the civilian situation is critical to long-term success. Because of this, commanders continually consider and combine stability tasks focused on the population with offensive and defensive tasks focused on the enemy during planning and execution. For homeland security, commanders focus operations on civil support.
- ***Mission command is the preferred method of exercising command and control.*** Because of the complex, uncertain, and ever changing nature of operations, mis-

sion command—as opposed to detailed command—is the preferred method for exercising command and control. Prerequisites for mission command are the use of mission orders; full familiarity with the mission, commander’s intent, and concept of operations throughout the force; and mutual trust and understanding between commanders and subordinates. Mission command fosters operational adaptability—a quality that Army leaders and forces exhibit based on critical thinking, comfort with ambiguity and decentralization, a willingness to accept prudent risk, and the ability to make rapid adjustments based on continuous assessment of the situation.

- ***Continuous assessment enables organizational learning and adaptation throughout the conduct of operations.*** Assessment is a continuous activity of the operations process and a primary feedback mechanism that enables the command as a whole to learn and adapt. Plans are based on imperfect understanding and assumptions on how the commander expects a situation to evolve. Continuous assessment helps commanders recognize shortcomings in the plan and changes in the operational environment. In those instances when assessment reveals minor variances from the commander’s visualization, commanders adjust plans as required. In those instances when assessment reveals a significant variance from the commander’s original visualization, commanders reframe the problem and develop an entirely new plan.



Conclusion

This revised FM 5-0 provides Army leaders a starting point for the exercise of command and control during operations. It establishes a common frame of reference and intellectual tools Army leaders use to plan, prepare for, execute, and assess operations. By establishing a common approach and language for exercising command and control, doctrine promotes mutual understanding and enhances effectiveness during operations. The doctrine in this manual is a guide for action rather than a set of fixed rules. While it provides an authoritative guide for leaders and Soldiers, it requires original applications adapted to circumstances. In operations, effective Army leaders recognize when their training, experience, or understanding of doctrine no longer fit the situation and apply design principles to adapt accordingly.



Notes

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