

Seven Steps to Systems Planning and Preparation*

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There are numerous ways for organizational leaders to go about addressing myriad of problems that face them within the full spectrum of combat operations. Planning and preparation in wartime are especially challenging. In our case study you will observe three officers at two different leadership levels, operational and strategic, attempting to establish a positive command climate and instill their vision of mission accomplishment.

The Army has a number of doctrinal decision making processes that are familiar to you, Troop Leading Procedures (TLP) and Military Decision Making Process (MDMP). However there are other approaches and one in particular for the organizational leaders that specifically addresses planning and preparation steps to achieve a positive command climate and ultimately leads to mission accomplishment.

The one approach that is especially effective has been called the Seven Step Method of Systems Planning. It is rooted in previous Army doctrine and provides an intellectual vehicle to assist organizational leaders in solving command problems related to command climate, establishing a command vision leading to mission accomplishment.

The Seven Steps of Systems Planning are:

1. Establish a clear vision.
2. Identify and set specific goals.
3. Determine exact objectives.
4. Determine tasks to achieve goals and objectives.
5. Establish priorities.
6. Prepare by maintaining oversight.
7. Follow-up by evaluating and validating the progress.

Establish a Clear Vision

To start the organizational leader must have a clear intent of what he wants as a command climate that will be able to fulfill his vision of what mission accomplishment would look like at some point in the future. Visualizing the end-state initially is essential and will avoid needless confusion among subordinates as to the organizational leader's expectations. The mission of the organization is critical in determining the organizational leader's vision and it should be provided early to a staff and subordinate leaders to insure sufficient planning time. A brigade organizational leader's vision might be:

- The best Brigade Combat Team (BCT) in the U.S Army
- One that is supported by the finest installation in CONUS
- Trained to the highest level and able to deploy anywhere with relatively short notice
- Flexible to accomplish any mission required by the Nation
- A model of Army Values and the Warrior Ethos

To accomplish this, organizational leaders determine how the vision affects the various systems within their command. By actions and command presence, with their subordinates support, organizational leaders emphasize their vision to their people at all levels.

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Set Goals

With a clearly defined vision, organizational leaders, assisted by their subordinate leaders and staffs, establish the specific goals for their unit. The goals then provide the vision framework. For example, the goal to improve the method of conducting house to house searches in Counter Insurgency Operations could support the vision that states the BCT is “trained to the highest level and able to deploy anywhere ...” Organizational leaders involve themselves in establishing goals and priorities to execute their vision. They acknowledge that unrealistic goals hinder the mission accomplishment and subordinate moral.

Determine Objectives

Once the goals are set organizational leaders establish precise, measurable objectives. For example, in COIN operations, the goal of improving house to house searches might well be insuring that ninety percent of the force is qualified during the urban terrain training. However, establishing objectives is difficult since the process requires making precise decisions from a wide vary of options. With limited time and resources organizational leaders must make decisions as to what can and cannot be accomplished. They must also monitor key system nodes and subsystem functions.

Determine Tasks

Following establishing objectives the organizational leader determines measurable, specific steps required on the way to the objective. For example, a BCT commander aware of the unit rotation schedule within the current operating environment might ensure adequate family readiness by requiring a newly arrived Soldier with a family not deploy without having a vehicle in country and household goods delivered.

Establish Priorities

Once tasks are established they require prioritization. This process allows subordinates to utilize one of their most precious commodities and that is time. The system of establishing priorities is essential for the organization and especially the organizational leader who must practice it in all aspects of command. Indeed it is the only way that organizational leaders to manage all the demands placed upon them. Time is a precious commodity and these leaders must make the time to assess and synthesize the ever increasing information flow in order to make timely decisions. Leaders who are able to identify distractions and stay focused become better at using their time wisely and are more productive. By their actions they pass on their techniques to subordinates make for a smooth running organization.

Prepare

Although organizational leaders face more complex missions and organizations than their subordinate direct leaders they also have additional assets to support their requirements. These include a staff, subordinate leaders, specialists, and equipment. This support allows their preparations to meet mission requirements to be diverse and complete. With this direct leaders prepare by guiding individual in the correct direction while organizational leaders can remove themselves from the process flow and , from their vantage point, continuously check to make certain the systems necessary to support the mission are in place and functioning correctly.

Follow Up (Evaluate and Validate)

System Planning requires organizational leaders to follow up. They need to assess the following: Do the organization's members understand the tasks at hand? Are the organization's members prioritizing their tasks and taking the necessary actions to complete them? Check the chain of command and see if everyone has the same information. Organizational leader's follow up not only validates the priorities it also demonstrates that the leader is involved and serious about seeing mission success. Those who fail to follow up send a message that priorities are not important and orders are not firm.

