

## A Non-Operational Planning Tool: The Military Staff Decision Process

### Introduction

1. The Military Appreciation Process – and its associated Joint, Staff and Combat versions – are designed to aid military members in operational planning. They are less useful for planning daily military activities, projects or tasks which are not centred on defeating an adversary or creating military effects.
2. The Military Staff Decision Process (MSDP) has been created to provide a framework for military planners to support decision makers during non-operational tasks. It is designed to nest within current Australian Defence Force doctrine and many aspects mirror parts of the Joint Military Appreciation Process (JMAP). This is deliberate; comfort with processes makes for more efficient staff work.
3. The MSDP is designed to minimise the amount of time wasted on nebulous staff work. It allows the military planner to develop either a single, workable course of action (COA) or multiple COAs for consideration by the decision maker depending on the time available. The MSDP also contains inbuilt mechanisms to reconfirm the planner is achieving their higher commander's intent. This includes a double learning loop to address cognitive bias and measures for determining success. Importantly, the MSDP contains STOP mechanisms which identify when the proposed COA is no longer viable, again aimed at reducing wasted staff effort.

### Construct

4. The MSDP is based around four steps: framing, designing, deciding and refining. These provide the planner context, a plan, direction and assurance respectively. Spread across the four steps are ten questions which the military planner should work through sequentially. The construct is shown below in Fig 1.

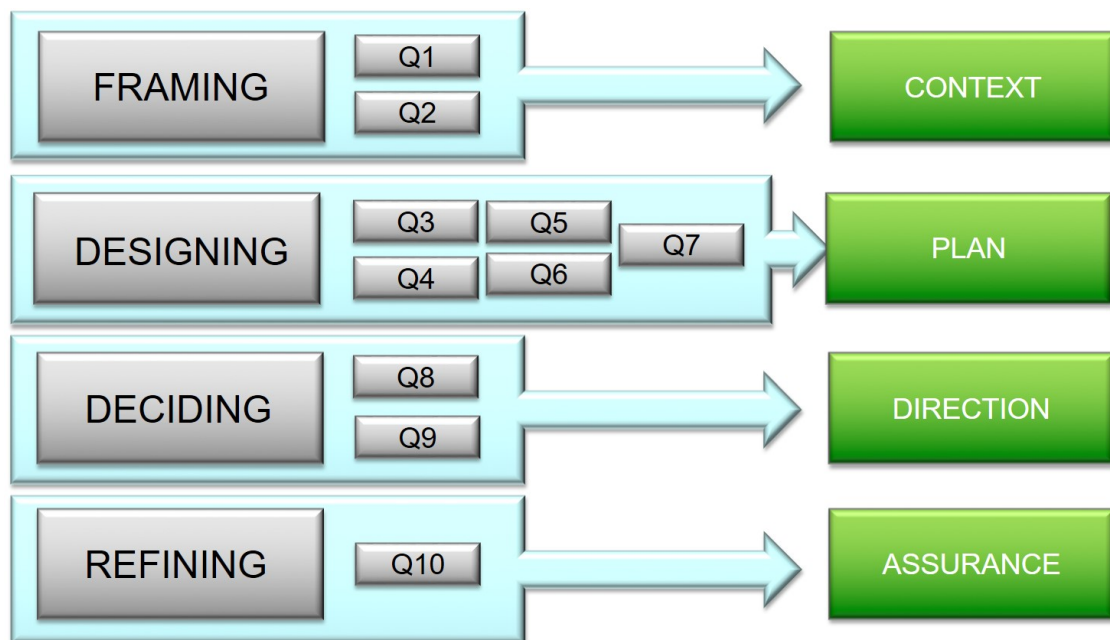


Fig 1. Military Staff Decision Process Framework

## Step 1: Framing

5. Step One consists of framing the problem set. Framing allows the military planner and the commander to develop a deeper understanding of the environment in which the problem is set and to break down complex, ill-structured problems.

### ***Question 1: What is the context / environment the problem is set in?***

6. During framing, the first step is for the planner to identify stakeholders, policies, procedures and environmental factors that impact on the problem. This includes identifying their higher commander's intent.

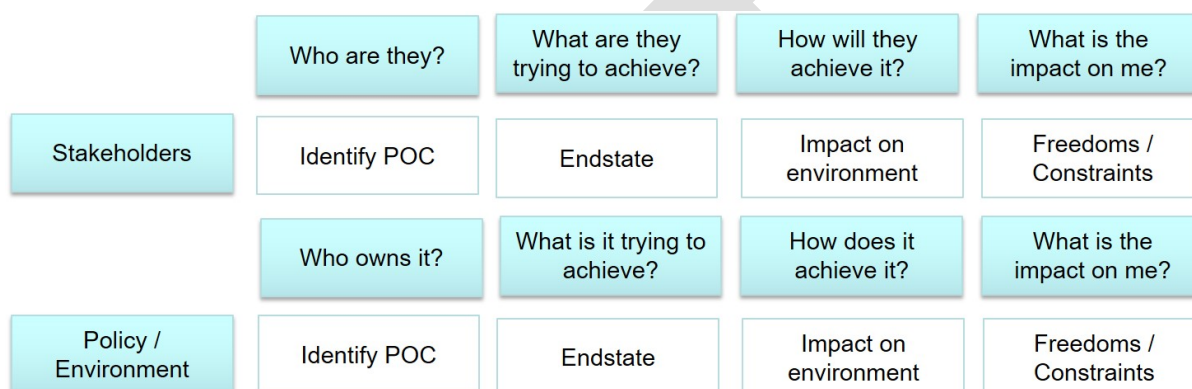


Fig 2. Understanding the environment the problem is set in.

7. At the end of Question 1, the planner should ask themselves what is it that they don't know, who do they need to ask to find out, and when they need to know the information by. This forms their list of Requests for Information (RFI).



Fig 3. Creating the RFI list.

### ***Question 2: What is the problem I am being asked to address and the desired endstate?***

8. The second step of framing is to identify the problem that the planner has been asked to solve to ensure that they are addressing the right problem throughout the planning process. During this process they ask whether what they have been asked to do is within their higher commander's intent. If it is not, then they should immediately refer it to their commander for confirmation.

9. At the end of this step the planner should have identified:

- The problem narrative
- The desired endstate
- The timeline

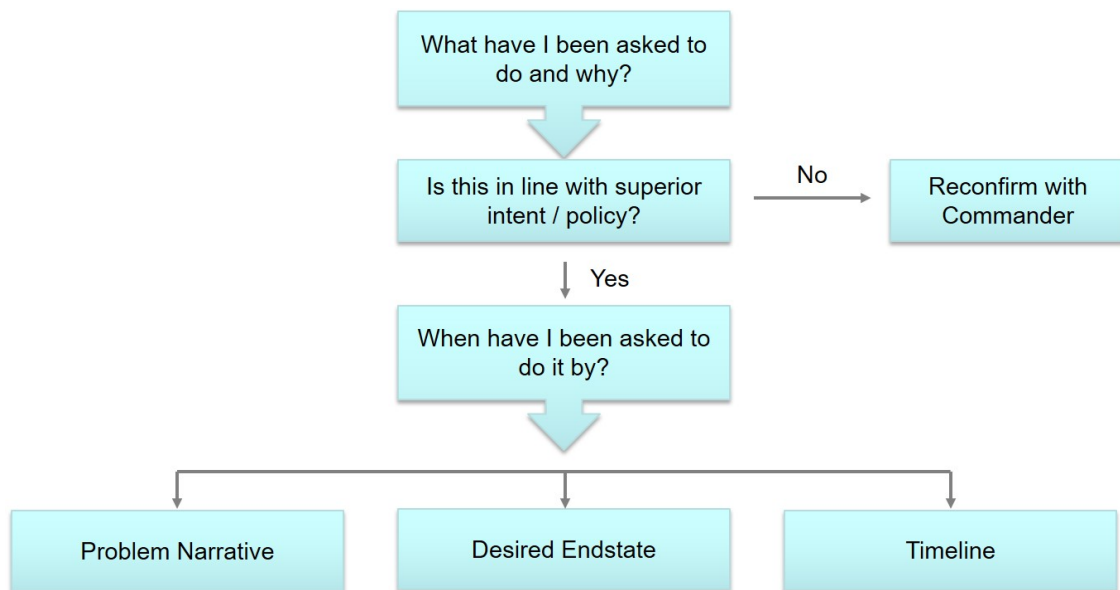


Fig 4. Framing the problem.

10. At the end of Step One – Framing, the military planner will understand the problem they are addressing, the desired endstate, the time they have in which to solve the problem, the stakeholders and policies that influence the environment in which the problem is set and will have identified the information they need to source which will have been captured in their RFI list. Framing gives the military planner context.

## Step 2: Designing

11. Step Two consists of developing a plan for consideration by the decision maker. Depending on the time available, this step either allows for the development of a single, workable COA or the creation for multiple COAs for comparison.

### ***Question 3: What tasks do I need to complete to reach the desired endstate and what delegation to I need to develop the plan?***

12. The first sub-step is to identify all those tasks required to reach the desired endstate. At this step the planner should think laterally and consider a range of feasible tasks or steps to achieving the endstate.

13. The planner should then ask themselves whether they are best placed to achieve these tasks. If not, they should either delegate or request support as appropriate.

14. Once the tasks are identified, the planner examines each task and asks whether the endstate can be achieved without completing it. If it cannot, the task is added to the essential task list. If it can, the planner then asks whether that task, while not critical, reduces risk, the resource bill or improves the outcome. If the

answer is yes, it is added to the Optional Task List. If the answer is no, it is discarded.

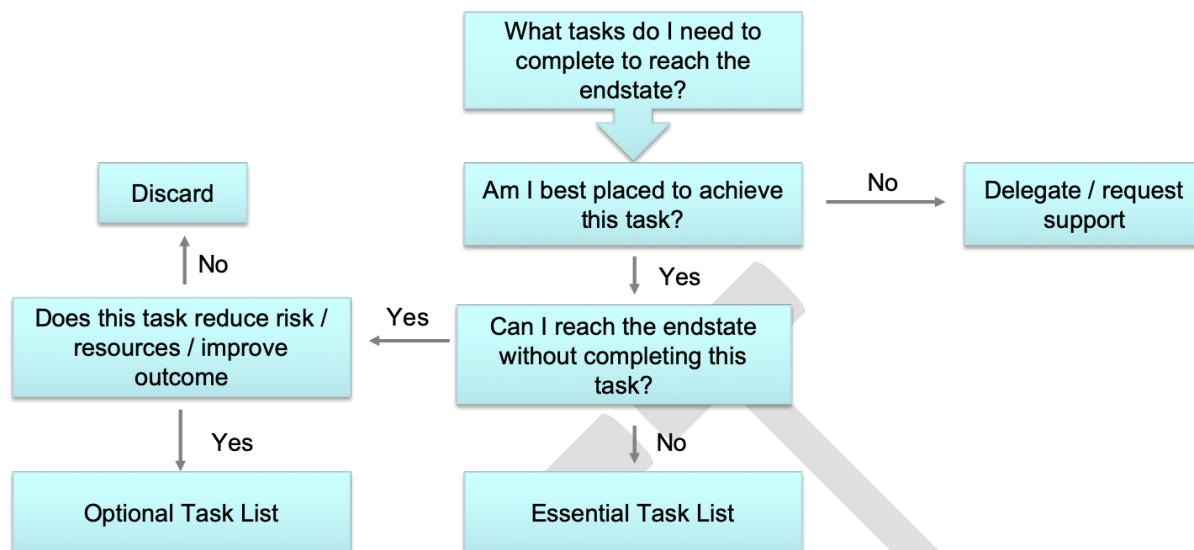


Fig 5. Identification of Tasks

**Question 4: How can I best achieve each task?**

15. These tasks are then inserted into a Morphological Box (often referred to as a Ways Matrix) and different ways of achieving each task are identified. COAs are built by identifying different ways to achieve all the desired tasks. Sometimes these are depicted as linked with a line. The planner should resist doing this at this point. Instead, they should concentrate on identifying feasible ways of achieving each task. If there is a critical task that cannot be achieved, and thus the desired endstate not met, the commander should be informed. If there is an optional task that cannot be achieved then a cost-benefit analysis should be conducted to assess the impact.

Method Task	Method 1	Method 2	Method 3	Method 4	Method 5
Critical Task 1		●	●		●
Critical Task 2	●			●	
Optional Task 1			●	●	
Optional Task 2	●	●			●

Is there a critical task I cannot achieve?	Yes	Inform Comd	Is there an optional task I cannot achieve?	Yes	Conduct CBA
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Fig 6. Identification of Ways to Achieve Each Task

**Question 5: Where and when should tasks take place in relation to each other?**

16. The planner then plots the executing of these tasks in time and space. This can be done in several different ways depending on the problem being solved. If there are several different lines of effort (or lines of operation) required, then a campaign planning methodology can be used. For other projects, a Gantt Chart may be more appropriate. Regardless of the method, the planner must ensure that they result in the achievement of the desired endstate and that the endstate is line with the higher commander's intent.

17. If the endstate cannot be completed in the allocated time, or if it no longer meets the higher commander's intent, then the decision maker should be informed

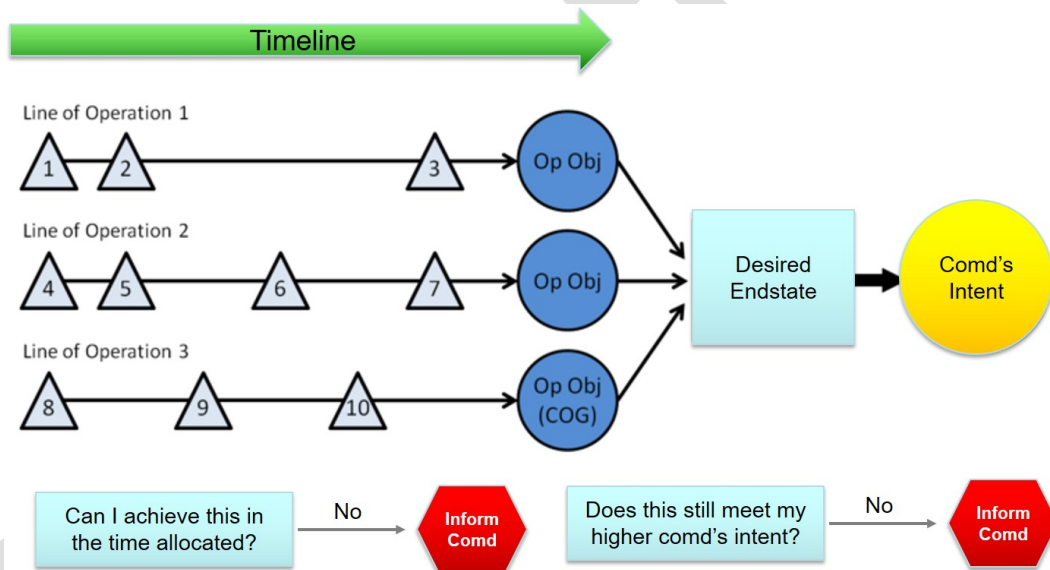


Fig 7. Synchronisation of Tasks - LOO

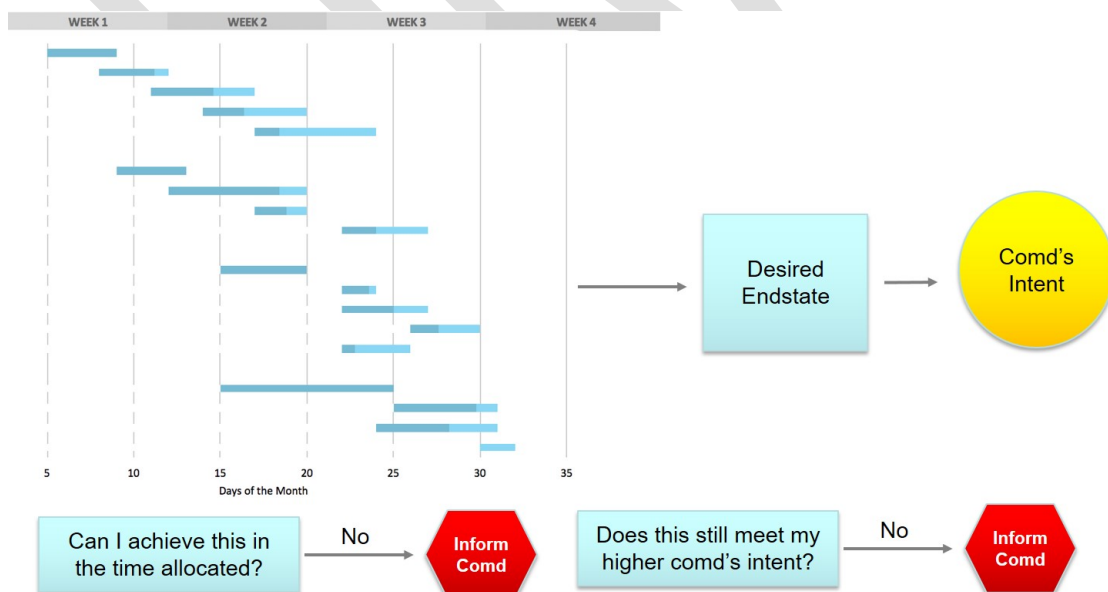


Fig 8. Synchronisation of Tasks – Gantt Chart

**Question 6: What resources do I need to achieve each task?**

18. Once these tasks have been plotted in time and space, resources need to be allocated to them. Planners should list resources against the tasks in the timeline. This is a better method than creating an Excel spreadsheet, as clashes can be immediately identified where the same resource is required to achieve two tasks at the same time. This may result in a need for deconfliction, at which point the task can be moved within the timeline. Note, if a task cannot be resourced the commander should be notified.

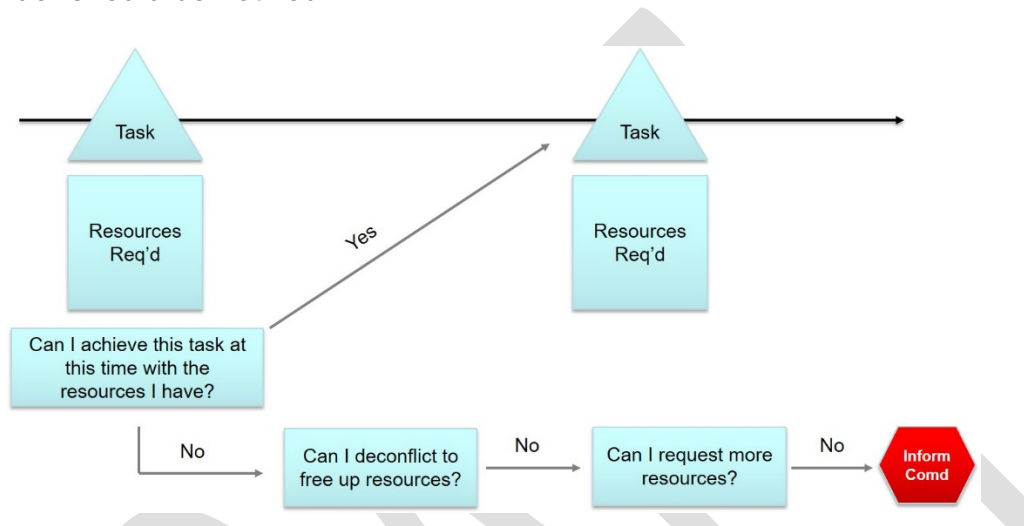


Fig 9. Allocation of resources.

**Question 7: How can I measure and report progress and completion?**

19. Too often plans are developed and implemented with little, if any, thought on how progress or effectiveness will be measured and reported. In essence, delivery of the program is judged as the mark of success, rather than the effect that the program has on the environment or the extent to which it support the higher commander's intent. Identification of how progress will be measured, when it will be measured, and the resources required to measure it should be identified prior to the plan being briefed to the decision maker.

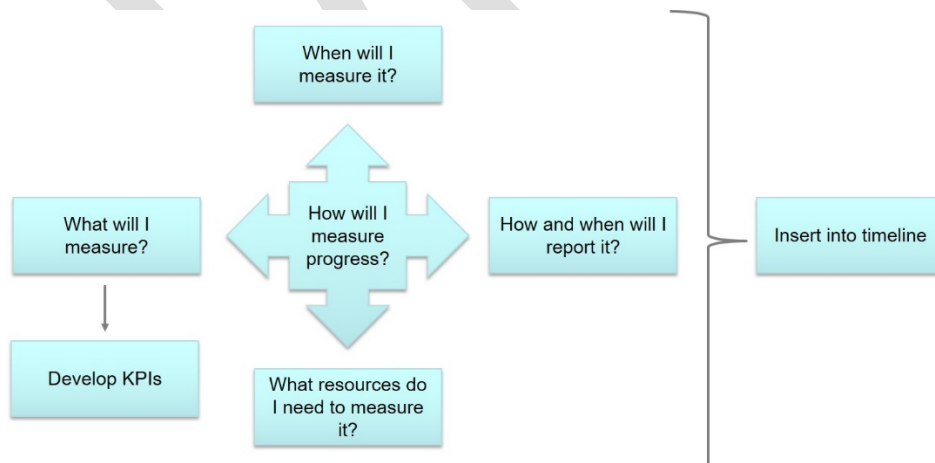


Fig 9. Designing Measures of Effectiveness



20. At the end of Step Two the planner will have developed a comprehensive plan which solves the problem identified in Step One through completing a series of tasks, resourced and synchronised in time and space, and which are tracked through measures of effectiveness. Throughout the planning process, a number of STOP mechanisms have directed the planner to the commander at the moment the plan has become unfeasible, thus avoiding time being wasted developing unworkable plans.

### Step 3: Deciding

21. The aim of the military planner is to provide the decision maker with the information they need, presented in a logical manner, to make a decision. This applies as much for non-operational decisions as it does for combat. The planner should identify who the decision maker is and the information they need to make a decision.

#### ***Question 8: Who is approving the plan and what information do they need?***

22. More often than not, because the Department of Defence operates in a collegiate manner based on consensus, there will need to be consultation with external stakeholders. These should have been identified in *Question 1*. It is important the planner captures their comments and indicates where suggestions have been incorporated into the plan and where they have been not accepted, and why. Once this is complete, the decision maker needs to be briefed and their decision recorded.

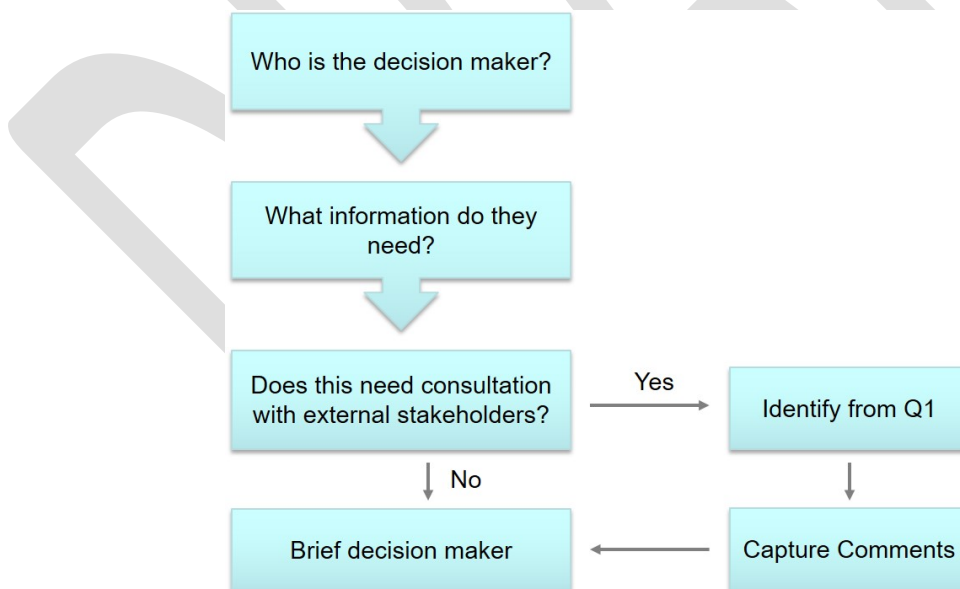


Fig 10. Supporting the decision maker.

#### ***Question 9: What direction is required to implement the plan?***

23. Once the decision is made, the planner needs to turn that into action and ensure that the tasks are executed by the appropriate people or organisations in accordance with the timeline. Resources need to be allocated and stakeholders

informed of how progress will be measured and of any reporting requirements. This is usually issued as orders or direction from the decision maker.

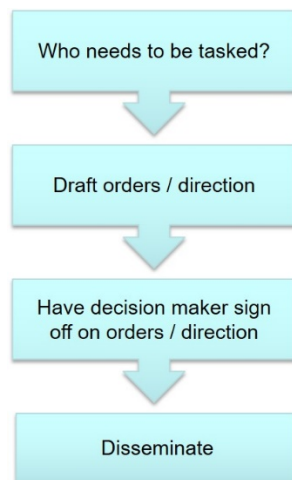


Fig 11. Dissemination of Direction

24. At the end of Step Three, the plan will have been approved and orders allocating tasks and resources disseminated. This provides direction.

#### Step 4: Refining

25. Monitoring should take place in accordance with the plan to measure the effectiveness of the program or project. This includes a deliberate step to understand what underlying bias could be effecting measurements (a double learning loop). Note that not only are there provisions to improve the plan through amending it, but also to cancel it if it is no longer relevant.

#### Question 10: Is the plan still working?

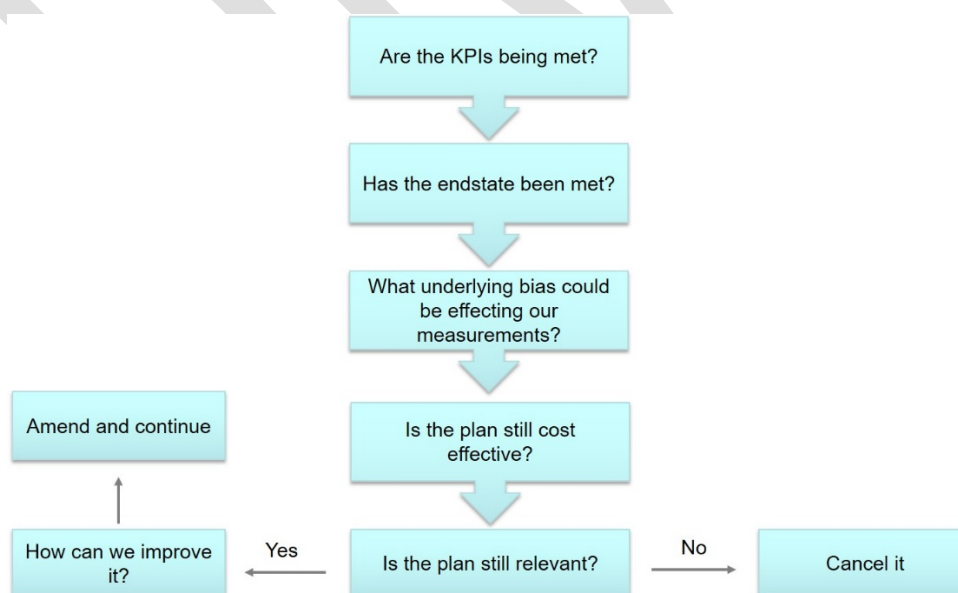


Fig 12. Monitoring through a double learning loop



26. Successfully measuring the effectiveness of the plan provides the decision maker with assurance that the desired endstate is being met, that the plan remains within the superior commander's intent, that resources are not being wasted and that the plan remains cost effective, and that it remains relevant.

## Conclusion

27. Current decision making tools in the Australian Defence Force are largely based on official versions of the Military Appreciation Process. While these have some utility in supporting decision making, they are unashamedly focused on operational planning. As a result, they can be unwieldy and difficult to adapt for non-operational decision making, despite the latter forming the vast majority of the decisions that are made every day in the Department of Defence.

28. The Military Staff Decision Process provides a standardised military non-operational decision making tool that seeks to aid planners support decision makers. It makes efficient use of time through incorporating STOP mechanisms throughout to minimise the risk of nugatory planning. It also supports the constant improvement of Defence through the deliberate consideration of measures of effectiveness and inclusion of a double learning loop. Most importantly, it continually emphasises ensuring that plans are developed that are nested within the higher commander's intent, thus resulting in plans that are genuinely both effective and efficient.

## Disclaimer

*This is a draft discussion paper and IS NOT endorsed by the Department of Defence, Australian Defence Force or Australian Army.*

*Feedback and/or comments are most welcome and should be submitted to:*

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