



In previous columns I discussed how the Army needs Soldiers and Civilians who are self learners and self aware and why it is important to read and stay up-to-date on doctrine. This month's column will focus on the Army's newest field manual, FM 5-0 The Operations Process, released last month.

The new manual replaces the old FM 5-0, Army Planning and Orders Production, and entails more than just a title change; it provides a new approach to how commanders and their staffs work through complex and ill-defined challenges. Two changes readers will notice in the updated field manual include the importance of creative and critical thinking among commanders, staffs, and other partners throughout planning process. After more than eight years of persistent conflict against a very adaptive enemy, we have learned it is vital that our Soldiers and Civilians are versatile in their actions by being creative in their planning.

The new FM 5-0 expounds on the roles of the commander and staff explaining that conceptual planning is the purview of the commander and involves the art of war – creative thinking. The manual reminds the reader that commanders must be able to “see” the battlefield or problem and then visualize the outcome.

However, as important as visualization is to leaders, it is up to staffs to translate concepts into complete and workable plans. Detailed planning involves the science of war – critical thinking – and includes specifics on how to accomplish each phase of a mission or program. “Critical thinking is a deliberate process of thought whose purpose is to discern truth in situations where direct observation is insufficient, impossible, or impractical.”

This is an area I believe cannot be overlooked. Whether an organization is in Afghanistan or here at SMDC/ARSTRAT, critical thinking involves conducting the analyses and developing the data in order to make informed decisions. Additionally, detailed planning takes the “Why” and transforms it into the “How”. That requires that staffs ‘do their homework.’

Additionally, if we have learned anything these last eight years, it is that successful staffs cannot afford to operate in a linear fashion; quite the opposite – staffs must be able to operate in a continuous cycle of input/output. In order for Warfighters to successfully operate in a non-contiguous environment, planners must address each possible course of action while adjusting to new information.

Helping staffs achieve success are two new chapters in FM 5-0: Chapter 3, Design and Chapter 6, Assessment.

The chapter on Design is probably one of the newest changes one may notice from the old field manual. The Design doctrine builds on an Army team that is self aware and self learning and helps commanders and staffs to approach problems in new ways. Design provides an excellent way of addressing complex situations and as FM 5-0 aptly puts it, “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.”

The chapter on Assessment provides the framework for monitoring progress and evaluating outcomes and I believe it is long overdue. There is a section in Chapter 6 that discusses measures of effectiveness and measures of performance that when used properly may help answer the questions: “Are we doing the right things” and “Are we doing things right?”

Bottom line: the new FM 5-0 provides a fresh way to look at how we plan, prep, execute and assess our operations and processes. There is a lot of good usable information that if understood and executed properly can have an immediate and positive impact on a unit.

I believe the new FM 5-0 is an excellent progression to its predecessor and highly recommend making time to read it, understand it, and use it.

SECURE THE HIGH GROUND

¹ U.S. Army, *FM 5-0, The Operations Process*, Feb. 25, 2010, p.1-6

² Ibid, p.3-1

³ Ibid, p.6-2 to 6-3