

# Developing in Complex C



The military's resource pools were significantly upsized to support the overseas contingency operations of the last decade. However, the military is now facing a smaller budget and must adjust accordingly.

The transition to a new normal for resourcing and requirements will present significant challenges for commanders and planners. Organizations looking to get ahead of the

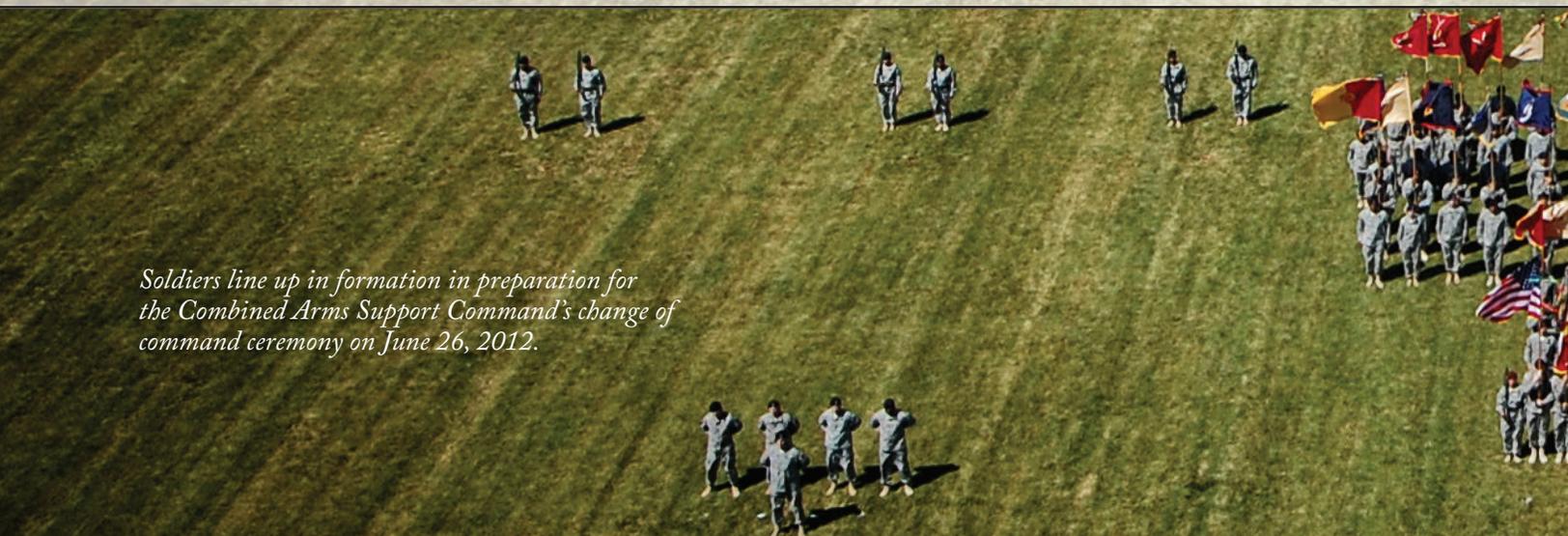
changes will need a well-developed and synchronized strategy communicated as a strategic plan, especially in organizations with multiple subordinate schools, sections, and directorates.

### Developing the Strategy

The Combined Arms Support Command (CASCOM) approved the CASCOM Strategic Plan for 2014 in October 2013. The plan was

the culmination of a yearlong strategy development and writing process. It was also the continuation of the execution phase of the plan, rather than the beginning of it.

The strategy development process starts with the commander's guidance, which drives a series of questions to create a problem statement. Developing the CASCOM strategy started with the following problem statement: How does CASCOM, as



*Soldiers line up in formation in preparation for the Combined Arms Support Command's change of command ceremony on June 26, 2012.*

# g Strategy Organizations

■ By Lt. Col. Stacey Lee



the Army's sustainment think tank and premier learning institution, develop a common operational picture across the organization that integrates and synchronizes the command's efforts to support the current force and build the future force that fully supports Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) and Army goals?

The CASCOM commanding general added the following initial

guidance, or minimum conditions:

- The plan must account for the operational environment to allow the organization to anticipate the requirements of the warfighter.
- The plan must be tied to the budget and prioritization processes in order to achieve maximum resource efficiency.
- The plan must have a governance process that is synchronized with

the TRADOC, Army, and Joint timelines to give the commander maximum decision-making time.

The commanding general also directed that the strategic plan capture relevant day-to-day functions that support and enable the long-term strategy. The guiding document for CASCOM that details the command's daily activities is TRADOC Regulation 10-5-5, Organization



and Functions: U.S. Army Combined Arms Support Command and Sustainment Center of Excellence.

### The Purpose

Why do you need a strategic plan? The easy response in any military organization is to say “because the commander directed us to write a plan.” But that diminishes the power that the staff and subordinates bring to developing the commander’s understanding.

A strategic plan is a communication tool that captures the commander’s vision for the organization in a clear and consolidated form that is available to every member of the organization.

The decision to write a strategic plan generally comes from a desire to understand and respond to uncertainty in a manner that aligns resources with accomplishing critical goals, such as communicating direction, providing a framework for decision-making, detailing measures for accountability, and stimulating and driving change.

**Communicate direction.** Strategic plans are, first and foremost, strategic communications tools. A strategic plan that is tailored to the audience—internal or external—allows leaders to set the long-term direction of the organization.

**Provide a framework for decision-making.** Once the long-term vision is established and communicated, it is critical to establish a governance structure that allows the organization to monitor, assess, and adjust plans, disseminate shaping guidance, and consolidate data into information that can be used to make timely decisions.

**Detail measures for accountability.** Executing the strategy is directly tied to assigning responsibility for specific goals and objectives (or key tasks). If the focus is on the factors that are critical to success as detailed in the commander’s priorities, then each objective needs to be assigned to a critical asset.

**Stimulate and drive change.** Once

the governance structure is in place and key assets are focused on the goal, the last critical step is stimulating or driving change, which is about providing key resources to the right effort at the right time and working to keep the team focused on the vision.

### Accounting for the Environment

Environmental understanding is about evaluating the possible effects—internal and external—of forces and stressors on the organization. Effects can be positive or negative; understanding and acting accordingly are critical to the strategy. Understanding the environment is about answering these types of questions:

- What is the current state of the organization?
- What assets do I have at my disposal, and how will the assets change during the period covered by the strategic plan?
- Who or what are the key drivers in the environment that can influence the organization?
- Who or what is the primary focus (customers or priorities), and how does the organization monitor progress in meeting their demands?
- What mechanisms are needed to monitor and assess changes in the environment over time?
- How do I communicate changes to the plan as it evolves?

The answers drive organizational dialogue and set conditions for further assessment of the current and desired states. The answers also highlight what challenges lie on the path between the two.

### Determining Progress

Assessing progress during plan implementation is about establishing key performance measures, performance targets, and timelines that correspond to goals and objectives. Incorporating feedback is also critical to assessing performance, and progress is determined by developing and monitoring quantifiable indicators.

Three key components are detailed milestones and metrics, a supporting and active governance structure, and a method to capture and present information clearly and concisely.

Determining what you need to measure is the driver that translates actions into results through your governance process. It is also one of the most daunting and confusing tasks. It is helpful to use these practical steps in the effort:

- Start building metrics with the strategic objectives as the defined objective; tie the goals and objectives to quantitative measures.
- Identify key drivers, and stay ruthlessly focused on enabling their success.
- Integrate the perspective of your key drivers and influencers.
- Develop a clear, concise set of metrics. Keep score using the strategic objective definitions.
- Continually refine and reassess. Let feedback and environment drive your actions.

Successfully determining progress is an iterative process that involves the entire organization and does not end with the publication of the strategy. Once the strategy is developed and the frame of the strategic plan is completed, the next step is to capture the strategy in the guiding document.

### Writing the Strategic Plan

The strategy development process refines the organization’s understanding of the mission, vision, and end state. That process is then communicated both internally and externally in a written plan.

In the same way that the operations process results in an operation order or fragmentary order, the strategy development process results in a strategic plan. The strategic plan is the story of how the command plans to get from the current organization to the future desired organization.

Strategic plans can range from a few pages of highly compressed information to exhaustive tomes with

countless appendices for further information. At minimum, effective strategies cover the following:

- The current state, which answers what the organization is, what it does, what it does well, its challenges, and its primary customers.
- The desired future state, including where the organization is going, what it wants to achieve, and its time frame for measuring success.
- A path or plan to get from the current state to the desired state, which describes how the organization will leverage assets to drive it toward the desired future.
- A set of goals or metrics to monitor and assess the plan's progress.

The current state is the current mission with any contributing history, trends, or cycles that are relevant. It clearly defines the most urgent and important issues as they relate to the current situation and the purpose of the plan. Key issues are usually those strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, capability gaps, and barriers that affect the organization's performance.

The desired state is the organization's vision in narrative form. It is a clear and concise description of how the organization will look at some future point that is listed as set of goals and objectives delineated in a timeline.

The following components, at a minimum, are normally included in the desired state:

- A narrative description of the aspirations of the organization.
- Goals or objectives defined in relation to time—the mid-term or long-term future.
- Scenarios or courses of action that serve to guide milestones and decisions to be made.
- Key points for leaders to share the vision and make decisions in line with common objectives.

The path between the current and desired states is the core of the strategic plan and generally consists of a sequence of steps or activities that must be achieved for a strategy to succeed. The path can contain some of the elements of day-to-day activities but is framed at the organizational level, not the individual level. It is frequently revisited to ensure it fits.

The plan's progress must be continually assessed. Ultimately, any plan is graded against whether or not the stated outcomes are achieved within the time stated and within established constraints.

The results of the assessment are revisited constantly so that the path between current and desired remains relevant and up-to-date. The feedback loop also allows decision-makers to provide course correction guidance as needed.

### Ensuring Realism

For the Army and the sustainment community in general, the transition to a resource-lean era makes a coordinated strategy critical to getting ahead and staying ahead of changes in the environment.

The plan has to be realistic. It must focus on determining how to hurdle barriers, measuring the adequacy of available and projected resources, having and keeping the right people, maintaining a fiscally sound organization, and establishing realistic timelines.

Assessing realism is about answering the following questions:

- Is the language clear, concise, and tailored to the target audience?
- Is assessment a written and iterative part of the governance process?
- Are priorities concise, balanced, logical, and quantitative rather than qualitative?
- Is redundancy built into the information gathering and validating processes?
- Are assumptions and the underlying logic revisited on a frequent and public basis?
- Has the entire organization bought in to the strategy?

- Is the language in the plan being used daily and in performance evaluations?

Developing a strategy for complex organizations can be daunting. Picking the right development approach is simply the opening move. Effective strategy answers four questions: where are we now, where are we going, how will we get there, and how will we measure our progress?

An organization that is flush with resources may be stymied by an "if it isn't broken, don't fix it" mentality, but even in good times, organizations should have a conversation about the importance of a strategy to achieve efficiency.

A strategic plan is the strategic communication tool for sharing the organization's vision both externally and internally. From a culture standpoint, everyone will know that the leaders are serious about executing the plan when the organization as a whole starts to use the language in the plan and periodic evaluations are tied to that language.

When asked in an interview about his strategy and planning for the boxing ring, Mike Tyson said, "Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face." His point was that every plan has to be flexible, and flexibility has to be forethought and not afterthought.

An internalized strategy has flexibility built in that accounts for changes in the environment. The first test or major challenge to the strategy will determine whether the organization has bought in or if the desired resiliency is simply an illusion.

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Lt. Col. Stacey Lee is assigned to the Combined Arms Support Command as the Deputy Director of the G-3/5 Operations, Plans, and Strategy Directorate. He holds a bachelor's degree in biochemistry from Clemson University, an MBA from Norwich University, and a master's degree from the School of Advanced Military Studies.