

Finding the Right Planning Tools for Defense Support of Civil Authorities

When traditional Army planning tools were not robust enough for its missions, the 43rd Sustainment Brigade staff developed new tools to meet its needs.

■ By Maj. Peter T. Sinclair II and Capt. Eric R. McGinty

After returning from Afghanistan in November 2013, the 43rd Sustainment Brigade was given the mission to conduct defense support of civil authorities (DSCA) in the event of a large-scale disaster. The legal constraints, environmental variables, and unique nature of this type of mission make planning complicated. The brigade staff realized that the military decision-making process (MDMP) and Army design methodology (ADM) are not well-suited for DSCA missions.

The variety and number of unknowns of a DSCA mission drove the staff to look for another way to plan. To create new tools with a DSCA focus, the staff modified John Boyd's Observe-Orient-Decide-Act (OODA) loop and the "7 Questions" planning method used by the British army. The resulting tools were the DSCA OODA loop and DSCA 9 Questions.

The DSCA OODA loop's purpose is to help the staff quickly frame problems by identifying and recognizing stakeholders and partners that the unit does not traditionally work with. The staff can use the DSCA 9 Questions for rapid crises planning for vague and uncertain environments.

How Traditional Tools Fell Short

The 43rd Sustainment Brigade is the first sustainment brigade headquarters to focus on sustainment support to the U.S. Northern Command while simultaneously supporting daily mission requirements for Joint Task Force Carson at Fort Carson, Colorado. In order to succeed in each

mission, the staff needed to change how they synthesized and acted on information about the operational environment (OE).

When the staff began mission analysis using the MDMP, it quickly realized that countless environmental variables render the MDMP useless for DSCA missions. The variables include but are not limited to the following:

- Each state has its own plan.
- The sustainment brigade could potentially work with various Federal Emergency Management Agency elements.
- Various types of disasters could trigger the sustainment brigade's deployment.
- The roles of other interagency actors could vary.

The staff shifted to the ADM to see if the three frames of environment, problem, and solution would offer enough of a planning framework. At the end of the ADM's design iteration, the staff realized that it had more requests to higher headquarters for information than it had solutions.

The ADM was useful because it instigated further research and forced the staff to realize that it needed a way to plan and solve for a situation that would be governed by unknown factors. The information from the ADM led the staff to conclude that no matter what causes the brigade to deploy, the mission will include the rapid deployment of a self-deploying, self-sufficient quartering party that

can accept and integrate additional forces. This party was later named the early-entry sustainment assessment team. The ADM also led the staff to conclude that there would not be time to use standard planning practices, so something new would be required.

Understanding the Situation

The constraining factor in all major decisions is time. Crisis planning in joint doctrine and the Joint Strategic Planning System consists of six steps: situation development, crisis assessment, course of action (COA) development, COA selection, execution planning, and execution.

These steps culminate in an operation order, but do they actually save time? No, these steps take time to follow and develop even if there is an existing concept of operations plan that must be tailored to the specific event.

The DSCA 9 Questions method leads to a viable COA when time is of the essence. Furthermore, it provides a framework for understanding and planning with non-Department of Defense partners.

The DSCA OODA Loop

The DSCA OODA loop tries to identify all of the actors involved in the mission and to show how the decisions of one stakeholder could impact other actors. The steps include observe, orientation and expectations, decide, and act. (See figure 1.)

Observe. Numerous information feeders assist in developing an understanding of the OE. Planners will understand some information instantly,

but they will have to process other information for hours or days before they fully realize the scope and impact on the OE. The key to this portion of the DSCA OODA loop is constant situational awareness (SA).

Orientation and expectations. All of the categories within the orientation and expectations block are interconnected: demographics, socio-economic factors, cultural paradigms, social and political expectations, historical expectations, and local, state, and federal law.

Boyd conceived his orient step as a place to house biases. By including expectations, the staff accounted for the biases of other actors that the unit would interact with during a mission. If planners do not understand all of the factors within this step, errors will spread into the decide step. Once all expectations and biases are identified, they combine to feed SA.

Decide. The commander makes a decision based on his understanding

of the OE and SA. Actions then are executed to support the commander's decision. Commanders can skip every single part of the DSCA OODA loop, jump right to a decision, and then have the staff start from a decision point.

Act. In the act step, a response is initiated based on the decision made by the commander.

Feedback. Once the decide step is complete, the staff analyzes how the decision and response affected the OE and SA so that it can consider additional actions.

Orientation and Expectations

Several factors affect incident awareness and assessment within the orientation and expectations step of the DSCA OODA loop.

Demographics. In the DSCA OODA loop, demographics refers to population density and where the people are located. The demographics feed the requirements embedded in

any decision cycle. Knowing the demographics allows the unit to provide the right response in the correct area.

Social and economic factors. Different locations have different social and economic factors that will complicate a problem. Many social and economic factors will also fall into the local, state, and federal law section.

Cultural paradigm. Put simply, neighborhoods, towns, cities, states, and regions have different cultural models based upon social and economic factors.

Social and political expectations. The culture of the region can generate expectations at the social and political levels. Many regions expect immediate assistance during a disaster, but there are also many that will try to manage the problem themselves before asking for outside assistance.

Local, state, and federal laws. Understanding the law goes a long way in crisis planning and response. People responding to disasters can be

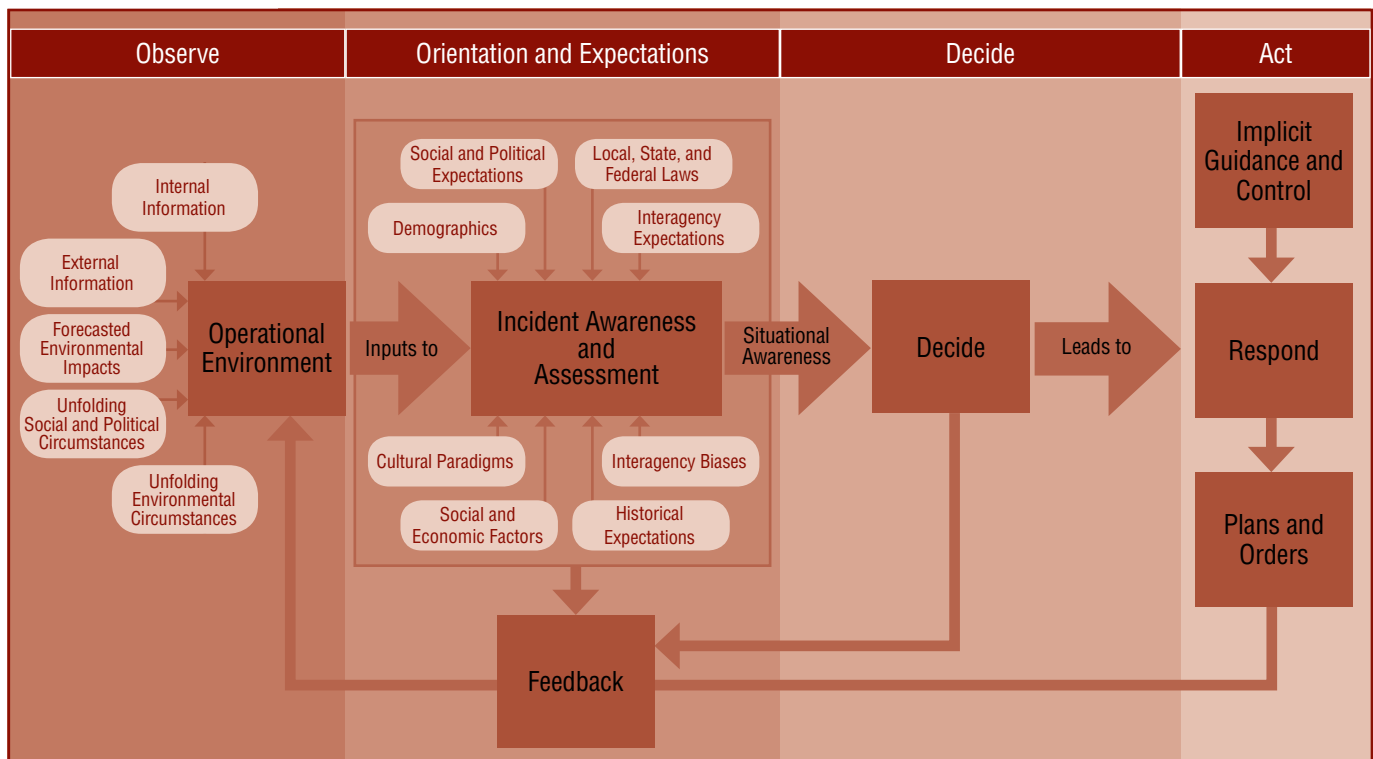


Figure 1. The 43rd Sustainment Brigade staff developed this model to capture information needed to maintain situational awareness for defense support of civil authorities missions. The arrows to feedback represent points in the process where the commander may opt to provide feedback. These points are opportunities to look again at the inputs affecting the process and to improve situational awareness for decision-making.

outsiders who are not familiar with applicable laws.

Historical expectations. Experiencing responses firsthand or studying historical information about past emergency responses can shape a person's expectations. This will be the most ambiguous part of the DSCA OODA loop and will vary from person to person.

All of these biases feed incident awareness and assessment in the decide step. Interagency expectations and interagency biases also affect SA and the decision. Expectations among key partners and stakeholders will also drive decisions on a personal level. The biases will affect what is done or not done in response to current friction with outside partners.

DSCA 9 Questions

The DSCA OODA loop can only take the brigade's planning effort so far. The staff had to look elsewhere for a rapid planning process. It looked to the British Commander's Estimate, known as the British 7 Questions. Using this tool, the 43rd Sustainment Brigade staff came up with the DSCA 9 Questions.

- What are the ongoing and forecasted natural and manmade disasters?
- What (specified tasks) have I been told to do and why?
- What (implied tasks) have I not been told to do?
- What authorities do I have, what authorities do I need, and what can I (legally) do?
- What actions and effects do I want to have on the OE?
- What resources do I need in order to accomplish each action and effect (for example, a request for forces or an operational needs statement)?
- When do I want to take action? (This information is used to create a deployment timeline.)
- Where do I want to take action?
- What control measures do I need to impose, and what control measures have been placed on me?

The intent of the DSCA 9 Questions was to clearly capture the decision-making process and allow the staff to complete a hasty mission analysis that would guide the commander toward a decision for action or response. The questions also served as a bridge to explain to state and local authorities what the unit would need in order to act during a crisis.

While the DSCA 9 Questions can help the commander reach a decision and make a plan during a crisis, it requires continual staff estimates and updates to maintain a common SA that is shared between the commander and the staff.

The DSCA 9 Questions can be answered by one person; the whole staff does not necessarily have to answer them. However, the true speed of the process is only realized by a collaborative effort from a group.

A "driver" is required to keep the questions moving forward in a group session. The driver can be the commander, deputy commander, or a trusted agent with enough rank to move the process forward. Without command emphasis there is a good chance that the staff will become lost in the ambiguity and try to solve unanswerable questions that will be answerable at a later date as the crisis develops and SA increases.

Combining the Tools

The DSCA OODA loop and DSCA 9 Questions greatly decrease the amount of time involved in mission analysis and COA development. This allows the commander to make a decision based on the current situation.

Crises require quick reaction times. Decisions must be reached quickly and efficiently, sometimes with just a 60-percent solution. Commanders armed with the critical information gathered through the DSCA OODA loop and the plans facilitated by the DSCA 9 Questions can make the best decisions when the need is the greatest.

The 43rd Sustainment Brigade has completed multiple iterations of staff training with the DSCA 9 Questions. A key lesson learned is that all parties

must be comfortable with ambiguity and willing to move on with a lack of information. Missing data points will be revisited as the picture of the OE matures.

The staff will begin to use running estimates as the situation develops and decisions are revisited to ensure accuracy. Using the DSCA tools together leads the commander to make correct and timely decisions in an ambiguous, emotionally charged environment.

The DSCA OODA loop and the DSCA 9 Questions are an attempt to be broadly right versus precisely wrong in order to help the 43rd Sustainment Brigade be ready to meet the needs of the public and higher headquarters in a time of crisis. The brigade commander gave his staff the flexibility to develop a method to solve unprecedented problems. The desire is that a disaster will never occur, but in the event that the worst comes to pass, this is the best way to be ready.

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