

## **Three considerations for enhancing the effectiveness of Operational Planning Team Leadership in Multinational Operational Planning Teams**

By CDR Michael Hallett, USN (RC)

The primary advantage of multinational coalitions is not, as is often thought, the legitimacy a large group of nations brings to an issue, or the various platforms and capabilities that each nation brings – although these are valuable. The major strength of multinational operations is the diversity of understanding the various participants bring. The more distant and different the members of the coalition, the greater the potential energy of the value they can add to the planning and execution process, just as the further away the top of the waterfall, the more energy the flow can produce.

The activities of multinational organizations, such as those of multinational task forces and multinational coalitions, are planned by operational level planning teams (OPTs). These OPTs are charged by the Commander with creating plans to achieve objectives through appropriate utilization of the full range of capabilities the members of the multinational organization bring to the engagement space. Each member of the organization has strengths, weaknesses, restraints, constraints, and a decision-making process that extends back to their home country decision-makers. As a result, multinational OPT activity is more complex than that of an OPT within a single nation. Thus the already difficult challenge facing the OPT leader is geometrically more difficult in a multinational organization.

Discerning the signal amidst the noise emanating from multiple sources requires extensive effort from the OPT Leader. This entails that the primary function of the OPT leader can be understood as harkening to what the Greek philosopher Heraclitus referred to as the “concealed logos”. He wrote, “Sound thinking <is> a very great virtue, and <practical> wisdom <consists in our> saying what is true and acting in accordance with <the> real constitutions <of things>, <by> paying heed <to it>.”(Heraclitus, 1991, p. 65) For Heraclitus the concealed logos was the plan that rules the universe. The OPT leader is not focused at that level, but at the operational-level logos that emerges from the interaction of the multinational force, other actors in the engagement space, and the adversary.

There are three ways in which the OPT Leader of a multinational OPT can hearken to the concealed logos as a means of enhancing leadership performance. These are articulating the nature of the multinational OPT, developing the Observe, Orient, Decide and Act (OODA) loop to ensure paradigm fit, and animating the Navy Planning Process (NPP).

### **Articulating the Nature of the Multinational Team**

Extracting value from the understanding “flow” of a multinational planning team is challenging. Whereas in a single nation the flow can be visualized as entering into a single feedstock to a turbine, in a multinational organization the flow is divided and the integrative mechanisms are temporally and geographically distant. Each member of the team operates under national restraints (things they cannot do) and constraints (things they must do). The OPT leader must carefully manage the process and capture the emergent understanding, the operationally applicable concealed understanding (Heraclitus’ logos) in order to craft a plan that will achieve the objective.

Surfacing the concealed logos is both more difficult and more important in a multinational OPT. A common operational planning culture cannot be relied upon to smooth over the normal planning process frictions. Reaching understanding is easier among a group that has “grown up” in a common culture.<sup>1</sup> It is more important because it is the source of a key element of the multinational organization’s value – the enriched understanding.

Thus the approach the OPT leader takes to conceptualizing the planning team can help or hinder the value extraction and application to mission accomplishment. One way of understanding the multinational OPT is as a set of representatives from the nations involved, many of whom do not fully contribute, or “pull their weight” (due to national caveats, restrictions on sharing information, as for example the US, which often insists on using information and knowledge management computer networks and holding meetings in spaces partners are not allowed to access). From this perspective the OPT is viewed as one team, some members of which answer first to their home coach.

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<sup>1</sup> However, the ease with which a common understanding is reached is not a reliable indicator of the value of that understanding to generate the desired effects.

However, instead of conceptualizing the multinational OPT as a single somewhat deficient team, the multinational OPT is more productively understood as what General Stanley McChrystal, in his book of the same name, refers to as a “team of teams” (McChrystal, Collins, Silverman, & Fussell, 2015). From the team of teams perspective, a central OPT Leader task is to create shared sense-making through integrating inputs from across the team of teams, both those teams internal to the multinational headquarters and those external to it. Internally, the teams include the various Maritime Operations Center (MOC) cells, boards, and teams like Future Operations, Assessment, Current Operations, Future Plans, the Red Team during the war gaming process, and the staff experts in logistics, medical, and so on. Externally, it includes interagency partners, subordinates and superiors (though liaison officers) as well as the expanded set of teams access to which the members of the multinational operational planning team make possible in their home countries.

### **Energizing the OODA loop to ensure paradigm fit**

John Boyd’s observe, orient, decide and act (OODA) loop provides a framework within which to further examine the planning team, and thus the OPT Leader activities. The OPT Leader focuses on the activities of the loop that tend to be overlooked in comparison to the course of action development (decision), the plan execution (act) and the observation of the environment – orientation cultivation, feedback and feedforward.

### **Cultivates Orientation**

First, the OPT leader is in charge of cultivating the orientation, the foundational component of the OODA loop. As Boyd explains, “Orientation is the *Schwerpunkt*. It shapes the way we interact with the environment—hence orientation shapes the way we **observe**, the way we **decide**, the way we **act**.” (Boyd, 2005) The OPT Leader cultivates the shared orientation by integrating the orientation of the members of the operational planning team. In a team from a single nation, this process occurs more or less unconsciously – the warfare specializations and interagency partners possess slightly different orientations, based on their tactical level expertise, but they have still emerged from a similar culture – in other words, they share a basic

orientation. In the multinational team the orientations emerge from different cultures. This is a major strength of the multinational OPT, but can also generate frictions, just as different personality tendencies affect the interpersonal interaction. The OPT leader's task is to manage the contributions from the various orientations in an effective way. This may mean tolerating, for a time, high degrees of conflict as the different members of the team of teams may have difficulty understanding one another because of the different lenses (their orientations) with which they are examining the issues. The OPT leader must be able to examine the interaction from a higher level allowing for an inclusive view of the whole in which the different orientations can be integrated and directed to accomplishing the objective.

### **Energizes feedback and feedforward to ensure paradigm fit**

Second, the OPT leader energizes the feedback and feedforward of the OODA loop, framing and reframing in order to check the fit between the emergent conceptual framework within which the planners are working (created by the inputs they are receiving from their own teams and integrating into the OPT, staff estimates, national injects, etc.) and the conditions in the engagement space - the environment in which the multinational force is attempting to generate effects. The OPT Leader is thus engaged in an explicit process of paradigm effectiveness monitoring, constantly checking for reframing indicators or in other words, harkening to the unfolding concealed logos. (*Planner's Handbook for Operational Design*, 2011)

While the planning team executes what Thomas Kuhn in his *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* referred to as "normal science" articulating the phenomena the paradigm considers important, the OPT leader, while ensuring this normal work proceeds efficiently, is also checking the fit between the emerging conditions and the expectations generated by the paradigm. (Kuhn, 1970, p. 24) As Kuhn describes the process of scientific paradigm change, within normal science such a checking does not generally occur. According to Kuhn, it is only after the anomalies the practitioners of the discipline previously were able to ignore become force themselves to the forefront of attention that they are compelled to initiate the process of paradigm change that leads either to a scientific revolution or a failure to grapple with the key challenges facing them. Applied to the operational level planning process, the OPT leader,

taking advantage of the assessment team's work, monitors the fit between expectations based on the paradigm with which the planning team is operating and how conditions actually unfold. In this way, the OPT leader makes the tacit process of paradigm monitoring into an explicit one. This accelerates adjustment of the planning process to conditions, so that the organization responds with agility to changes in the operational environment. The multinational force is thus less likely to find itself forced into a massive reframing after the operational failures have accumulated to a point that the necessity for change has become manifested in own force causalities and mission failures. (Kuhn, 1970, pp. 76-77)

### **Animates the NPP**

Third, the OPT Leader animates the performance of the Navy Planning Process. The Navy Planning Process, as articulated in Naval Warfare Publication 5-01, is a structured method for developing plans to manage complex challenges. Fully scalable, the process can be applied to simple decisions like choosing a place to eat lunch as well as planning for complex operations involving the full range of diplomatic, informational, military and economic national power tools. The Navy Planning Process consists of six major steps, further divided into multiple sub steps. Reflecting the conditions in which it is used to generate effects, the process is itself not just complicated, but complex, with many interrelated parts, interacting recursively and cumulatively. The OPT Leader is responsible for integrating the multiple contributions of the various teams of teams, ensuring that the planning products fulfil the commander's intent in pursuit of the objective.

This integration requires that the OPT Leader ensure that each step of the process is completed appropriately. This means not only that each step is accomplished (which is often difficult due to the time constraints under which the planning teams operate) but that it is accomplished to the appropriate degree. This entails that the OPT Leader often has to direct the team to "move on" when they have satisfied the step of the process, even if they have not developed an optimal product. The decision to move on, since the process is cumulative, (with products produced in Step 1, Mission Analysis, required throughout, including in Step 5, Plan or Order development) requires OPT Leader judgement. The OPT Leader must often make these

judgements on her own recognizance, since the Commander is relying on the OPT Leader to make those decisions and provide him or her with planning process productions upon which the Commander can decide before directing movement onto the next step. Courses like the Maritime Staff Operators Course (MSOC) the International Maritime Staff Operators Course (IMSOC), Maritime Operational Planners Course (MOPC), and Maritime Advanced Warfighting (MAWS) all provide extremely useful experience, but cannot fully prepare the OPT leader - developing competency in NPP process requires apprenticeship and practice under pressure. Harkening to the concealed logos helps illuminate these decisions.

### **Conclusion**

Harkening to the concealed logos can help OPT Leaders extract maximum value from the team of teams they serve in three ways. Listening to the signals emerging from the noise associated with multidimensional, multinational interaction enables the OPT Leader to clearly communicate, and back up with evidence, that the members are part of a team of teams, not limited members of a single team. Discerning the concealed logos informs the OPT Leader's consistent monitoring of the fit between the paradigm within which the team is operating and the conditions in the environment they are attempting to affect, enabling proactive reframing before a crisis demands change. The comprehension of the concealed logos enables the OPT leader to make the subtle judgements concerning the appropriate degree of completion of each planning process step, (since there is never enough time) thus enabling the team to accomplish its task and thus the overall organization achieve its objective.

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