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Tall and Skinny, Fat and Short: A Useful Organization Chart

by

Ronald Fraser

From time to time, most military officers measure or put dimensions on their organizations. Common ways of doing this are: Counting personnel; counting the number of dollars spent by various parts of the organization; or by using any other numerical expression, such as years of training or capital investment per worker.

The same officers are also frequently seen drawing organization charts showing lines of authority among an organization's sub-units.

Both means of studying an organization—measures of relative size and organization charts—have been around for some time. But it was not until the development of what I call the quantitative organization chart that the two were combined in a manner that gives the defense manager and analyst a unique tool of inquiry.

A quantitative organization chart simply adds actual dimensions to a traditional organization chart.¹ Where the size of boxes in a traditional organization chart is irrelevant, dimensions are crucial in quantitative charts. In Figures 1 through 3, for example, the vertical length of each box represents the number of officers and the horizontal dimension, the number of enlisted persons assigned to each sub-unit. For the sake of brevity, these charts are composites of selected Army, Navy, and Air Force headquarters and operating units. Intermediate commands have been omitted.

By accentuating the unique "morphology" of each sub-unit, quantitative organization charts are potentially helpful in many types of analysis, including studies of resource allocation. If one's objective is to graphically compare and contrast the relative distribution of resource inputs within an organizational structure, quantitative charts can display the way in which resource allocations vary among sub-units within and between structures.

For example, using officer and enlisted personnel data, certain line-staff patterns are evident. In general, headquarters level sub-units have a tall and narrow shape. Operating sub-units, on the other hand, are characteristically short and wide—a reflection of their large enlisted manpower requirements.

As an organization's goals change resource shifts must follow if the new goals are to be achieved. Charts such as these, and other appropriately charted data, may be used to suggest outdated resource distributions or lagging resource reallocations among greater and lesser priority sub-units.

FIGURE 1
U. S. NAVY
1981

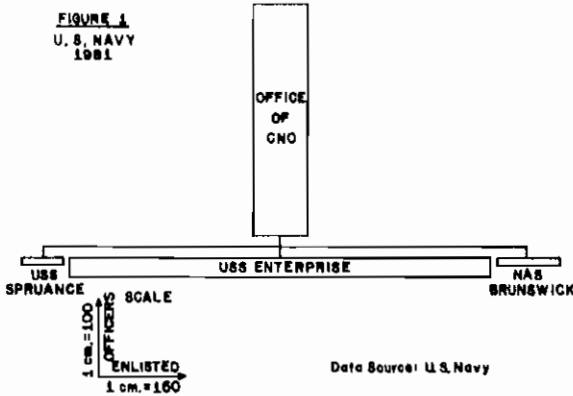


FIGURE 2
U. S. ARMY
1981

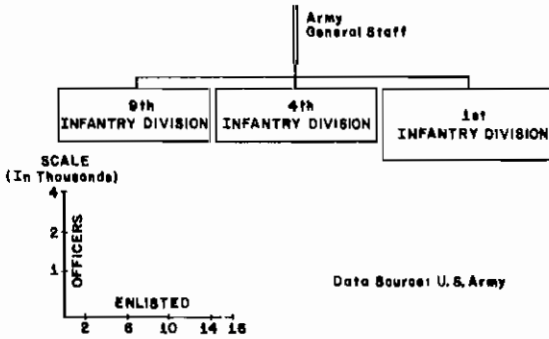
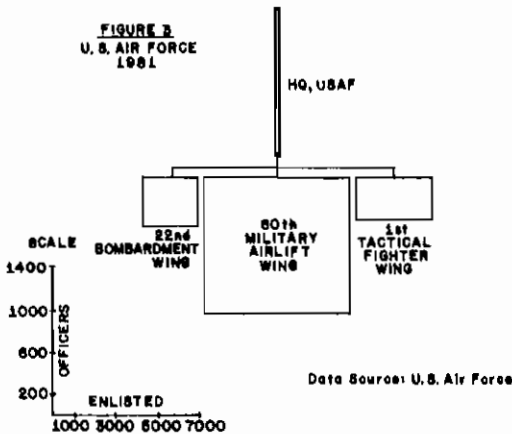


FIGURE 3
U. S. AIR FORCE
1981



An important point to remember is that these charts require no new data. Even with existing figures this technique can give a fresh perspective of the structure, size and shape of your organization.

Note

1. See my article on the same subject in the U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, February 1982, p. 98.

Ronald Fraser is a Commander in the U.S. Coast Guard Reserve.