Appendix C   Staff Work: Methods and Applications

1. STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

    a.   Every military organization has a commander who alone must accept responsibility for what the unit does or fails to do. The commander must authorize all plans, policies, and basic decisions before they are put into effect. All orders from a higher command to a subordinate unit are issued by or for the commander of the parent unit and are given to the subordinate commanders. By this means, authority and responsibility are fixed and the channels of command are established.

    b.   It should be apparent, however, that the day-to-day operation of any organization involves hundreds of details. As the size of the organization increases, the number and variety of the details increase. The commander cannot devote personal attention to all of them. **A staff is an aid to command**. It serves to ease the commander's workload by furnishing basic information and technical advice by which he or she may arrive at decisions.

    c.   A properly functioning staff extends the eyes, ears, and will of a commander by

- **learning the commander's policies** and working within them;

- **keeping the commander informed** of pertinent information;

- **developing** basic decisions into **adequate plans**;

- **anticipating future needs** and **drafting tentative plans** to meet them;

- **translating plans into orders**, and transmitting them to subordinate commands;

- **ensuring compliance** with these orders through constructive inspection and observation; and

- **supplementing the commander's efforts** to **ensure unity of effort** throughout the command.

2. PROBLEM SOLVING

a. The responsibilities of the commander it serves determine the exact nature of the work done by a military staff. The staff of a joint task force commander assigned to assault an enemy beach faces problems significantly different from those of the staff of a unified commander charged with the peacetime military security of a broad area and protection of U.S. interests from attack.

b. No matter how significantly joint staffs vary, there are, nevertheless, common features. A military commander continually faces problems that involve uncertainties and alternative possibilities in their solution. Since the purpose of a staff is to assist the commander in the exercise of command, the work of the staff revolves around the solution of problems.

c. Problem solving, in any field of endeavor, can be reduced to five logical steps:

- **recognize** the problem
- **collect** necessary information
- **develop** possible solutions
- **analyze and compare** possible solutions
- **select** the best solution

d. Over the years, military staffs have developed a number of logical and orderly processes to assist them in problem solving. As shown elsewhere in this book, the joint planning process uses a variation of the basic problem-solving method.

3. THE ROLE OF THE STAFF ACTION OFFICER

a. A staff action officer is designated at the Joint Staff, a combatant command, a Service headquarters, or a command to work on a particular action or series of related actions. It is the responsibility of the action officer (AO) to develop, coordinate, and complete the required analysis; formulate recommendations; present the action for decision; and, ultimately, prepare a message or other correspondence implementing the recommendations. The responsibility continues during the internal routing of the implementing document and ends only when that document has been dispatched or when competent authority decides that further action is not required.

b. Pride of authorship is a curse. While the AO is responsible for "working the problem," the final solution is derived from the knowledge, experience, study, and foresight of the entire staff. The AO should coordinate and consult by the quickest and most informal method available, using discussions, personal visits, e-mail, and telephone calls as much as possible. When practicable, such actions should be taken during draft stages to avoid revision of final copy.

c. A good staff officer will stand up and be counted – on issues, not on trivial matters.

d. Even when the problem has been carefully identified at the outset, the AO must be ever alert to changes and modifications as time passes.

e. A good staff action officer continually cultivates close, informal contacts with a wide range of officers with similar or related areas of interest interdepartmentally and internationally. An AO solicits ideas from everywhere.

f. The AO's Responsibilities in the Coordination Process

(1) Coordination gives interested and affected organizations an opportunity to contribute to and comment on joint actions. Early involvement of all concerned organizations is crucial.

(2) Preliminary coordination is normally sought at the AO level to gather input that strengthens the action and identifies issues. After preliminary coordination, the AO staffs the action again.

(3) Organizations that do not agree with an action as written may recommend changes to the text. The AO must indicate whether the changes were incorporated.

(4) Final coordination is a request for formal Service and agency concurrence or nonconcurrence on a proposed joint action. Requests for concurrence are sent to whomever in the receiving organization is the focal point for staffing final coordination, e.g. a division chief. Thus, during final coordination, the concurrence, nonconcurrence, or comments received on an action are considered to be the views of the head of the organization.

(5) Coordinating organizations are expected to concur or nonconcur in a timely manner. Nonconcurrence should be accompanied by specific objections and supporting rationales. Suggested changes to an action that do not form the basis for concurrence or nonconcurrence may be submitted; however, these recommendations should be clearly distinguished from issues on which nonconcurrence is based. Nonconcurrence requires the lead organization to evaluate the data and make a recommendation in consideration of the nonconcurrence.

4. MEETINGS

a. To have productive meetings, the AO must understand what goes into planning and conducting such meetings. The AO will prepare an agenda that is well organized, logical, and deals with the important issues in a timely manner, and does not get side-tracked.

b. The calling of a meeting in itself will not insure the development of a productive group. The following are steps in conducting effective meetings:

(1) Ensure that there is a comfortable and conducive physical setting for the meeting. If possible, arrange chairs so that people can see each other face to face.

(2) Prepare an agenda and stick to it. Deal with the most important things first. Get the agenda out as soon as possible. Under each agenda item indicate the specific questions to be discussed so that participants will have time to think about them before-hand.

(3) Start the meeting by clearly stating, and reaching agreement on the meeting purpose. Start out with a statement such as, "The purpose of this meeting is to…"

(4) Be well organized. Structure your meetings. Unstructured, free-for-all dis-cussions are rarely productive. Use the first few minutes to review and finalize the agenda, and agree on how the group will accomplish its task. When members are directly involved in setting the agenda and rules on how the meeting is to be conducted, they tend to assume more responsibility for what happens.

(5) Be prepared. Identify and coordinate with all knowledgeable individuals be-forehand. Gather all information, both pro and con, the group will need to consider in making a decision.

(6) Keep the discussion going by asking pertinent questions.

(7) Periodically summarize. Summarizing during the meetings clarifies for the group where it is and where it needs to go.

(8) End the meeting with a review of what was accomplished, and what still needs to be done or decided. Review what each person has agreed to do in carrying out the activity or in preparing for the next meeting.

(9) Keep in touch with members between meetings to get feedback as to pro-gress being made.

5.   MILITARY BRIEFINGS

a.   The military briefing is concise, usually limited to bare, unglossed facts – the minimum needed for comprehension. There are no "attention-getters"; the essentials are delivered in a purely objective manner. The military briefing is often a one-time-only presentation of facts, with reference to enough familiar material to establish a basis for understanding by the listeners. Briefers often will be required to discuss a very broad subject in a very limited time.

b.   There are four recognizable types of military briefings: information briefing, decision briefing, staff briefing, and mission briefing. Although there are elements common to all, each type is distinct, and the briefer must understand precisely what is required in each situation. Each type of briefing is designed to accomplish a specific purpose: to impart information, to obtain a decision, to exchange information, or to review important details. The objective common to every briefing is to facilitate a rapid, coordinated response.

(1) **The information briefing**. The purpose is to present facts to the listeners-- to keep them abreast of the current situation or to supply specific requested information. It does not require a decision; the desired response is comprehension.

(2) **The decision briefing**. This briefing contains the elements of the information briefing, but it is usually more comprehensive in scope, and it is presented for an entirely different purpose. The specific response to the decision briefing is an answer to a question or a decision about possible courses of action to be taken.

(3) **The staff briefing**. The staff briefing is, perhaps, the most widely used form of military briefing. It is designed for the rapid oral exchange of information within a group of people and is, in this sense, similar to the information briefing. It is also similar to the decision briefing whenever it leads to a command decision. It is known and used at every military echelon to keep a commander and staff mutually informed of the current situation. The anticipated response is a coordinated effort.

(4) **The mission briefing**. This briefing is designed especially for combat operations. It is also used to brief training missions that simulate combat conditions. Its purpose can be a combination of any or all of the following: to impart last-minute information, to give specific instructions, or to instill an appreciation of the overall mission. The desired response is a thorough and up-to-date understanding of operational conditions that could affect the successful execution of the mission. It, too, is closely related to the information briefing.

c.   An AO must remember the five step process required in preparing a briefing; **research** your subject, **plan**, prepare a **draft**, **revise** your work, and finally **proofread**.

    d.   An AO must remember a couple of things while briefing.

    (1) Be prepared psychologically and mentally to cope with any audience reaction, which can range from passive acceptance to strong objection and heated discussion. The AO must remain objective, answer questions without emotion, and promise and deliver, a quick response if additional information must be gathered.

    (2) Successful briefing ability comes from mastery of fundamental speaking skills and briefing techniques, from practice and study, from good judgment, and from being aware of the audience's feedback.

6.   STAFF ACTIONS: THE TOOLS OF THE TRADE. Action officers create staff action papers. The joint environment, whether it is at a combatant command or the Joint Staff, demands consistency and uniformity in written communications to be efficient. It is essential that AOs master whatever forms their command uses. Each form represents a preferred method that the organization uses to operate in the staff environment and is the vehicle by which most of the communication travels. Typical staff action papers are shown in the following paragraphs.

    a.   **INFORMATION PAPERS**. These papers normally are used to pass information to the boss (combatant commander, deputy combatant commander, and chief of staff of a combatant command), to pass information between staff offices when no reply is expected, and to issue directives from the boss to directors and chiefs of special staff offices.

    (1) Fact Sheets convey information to an informed principal. They are used to update the combatant commander returning from trips, to furnish material for a Congressional hearing, to submit material for briefing books for a trip, or to answer a query. There is no established format; the only mandatory information is writer's name, rank, division, directorate, phone number, and date of presentation. They should be limited to one page and normally are used to provide a rapid update on a specific topic with which the user is familiar. Brevity is the keynote in preparation.

    (2) Memorandums for Record are used to record an event or action taken that would not otherwise be recorded, and are normally limited to one page. For example, they may be used to record the minutes of a meeting, a telephone conversation, or information from a one-time source.

    (3) Memorandums normally are limited to one page. When necessary, enclosures such as itineraries and schedules may be attached. Memorandums are often informal notes to individual staff members in the daily conduct of routine business.

b.   **DISCUSSION OR POSITION PAPERS**. The purpose of these papers is to give the user a short outline guide for discussions during consultations, meetings, and command visits. They may contain substantiation of the command position, opposition to other command views, questions, or any other material that would be useful in discussions.

(1) On the **Joint Staff**, three types of papers are used. The **Position Paper** is used to summarize an issue, including its status and any recommendations. The paper is written in simple narrative style using direct, active voice sentences and is no more than two pages in length. Level of detail is determined by knowledge level of the intended user. A **Talking Paper** is prepared in "bullet" format and is intended to be used in oral discussions for an audience that is intimately familiar with the subject. An **Information Paper** is used to convey information in preparation for a meeting or briefing. Facts should be presented in clear, concise wording using "tick" and "bullet" format. For officers assigned to the Joint Staff, additional guidance is found in the Joint Staff Joint Administrative Instruction 5711.06M, *Action Processing*. Other joint staffs normally have their own staff guides for reference.

(2) **Point Papers** are often used to guide the user in discussions outside the command. They should not exceed two pages. An abbreviated sentence structure is desirable, but clarity must be maintained. Point papers are often compiled into books for use during trips, command visits, discussion with visitors, and conferences. Typical point paper format is shown below:

Outline:
- background   - essential events or actions
- discussion   - be brief, consider reader's position, be specific
- important points   - one page, may include enclosures, respond on time
- staff comment   - you are the expert, be positive in tone, state critic's position

(3) **Position Papers** present the command position on unresolved issues, with necessary background information to justify that position and to refute contrary views. They may include a talking paper as an enclosure, if a discussion is anticipated and it would assist the user in covering the subject.

Outline:
- **purpose**   - reason for the paper, e.g., paper was requested by . . ., paper required for a meeting, etc.
- **discussion**   - tailor to level of reader's knowledge, identify key points, avoid telegraphic messages and technical or military jargon, etc.
- **recommendation** - logical recommendation that flows from purpose and discussion

(4) **Discussion Papers** are often prepared for subjects on which discussion could be initiated, to obtain views or decisions, extend a commendation, emphasize a command position, or other appropriate reasons. A good discussion summary advises the CINC about the discussion objectives, subjects to avoid, and the recommended position to take.

(5) **Background Papers** give chronological background data, the current status, and actions to be accomplished for a particular problem or subject. Frequently they are used as backup and background material for members of the command group and staff at meetings and conferences, and during visits. If practical, they should be limited to one page. A condensed outline style, rather than complete sentences and paragraphs, should be used to achieve brevity and clarity. Additional details may be in enclosures or tabs to the basic paper.

c. **COORDINATION PAPERS**. These are used to coordinate routine actions within the staff.

(1) **Summary Sheets** are informal means of communicating with the various elements of the Joint Staff. Their format is self-explanatory. The Joint Staff uses Form 136, a specialized summary sheet indicating the level of staff and Service coordination that has taken place on the accompanying action paper.

(2) **Staff Summary Routing Sheets** are standard multipurpose forms that serve as referral slips, memorandums, summaries of action, and permanent records of the internal coordination on an action. Action papers are often forwarded under such sheets, as are copies of routine correspondence submitted for information.

d. **DECISION PAPERS**. These are papers used to present staff recommendations for decision and/or formal approval.

(1) **Summary Sheets** (generic) must include the substantive points necessary to reach a logical decision without excessive recourse to enclosures or the study they summarize. They must clearly state the problem or action requiring decision, the limitations that will affect the solution, the logical courses of action that could be followed, the effects of the various courses of action, and the recommended action to be taken.

(2) **Action Summaries** are memorandums, preferably no more than one single-spaced page, that accompany correspondence or messages to be signed or released. Summaries contain the problem, facts, discussion, and conclusions. A recommendation drawn from the attached correspondence or message is clearly stated as the last element of a summary.

e. **THE STAFF STUDY**

(1) The staff study is one of the more flexible problem-solving procedures available to a staff. Mainly used for administrative and managerial problems where operational considerations are not immediately involved, the staff study lists conclusions and recommendations on a specific, clearly stated problem. Many organizations use staff studies--some more than others. Their broad outline is illustrated in **Figure C-1**, where it is compared with the rational steps of the problem-solving process.

A Comparison:

Staff Study	Action Required
• Problem	• Recognize the problem
• Assumptions • Facts bearing on the problem	• Collect necessary information
• Discussion	• Develop possible solutions • Analyze and compare possible solutions
• Conclusions • Recommendations	• Select the best solution

Figure C-1

(2) The staff study is a formal paper that follows a prescribed format. It is flexible in content and can be applied to a variety of problems. Although mainly confined to use within the staff, the staff study is not merely a dressed-up staff memorandum.

(3) The successive paragraphs of a staff study logically develop an analysis of a problem, leading to recommendations for its solution.

(a) **The problem**. Stating the problem concisely and accurately is one of the more difficult tasks in any problem-solving process. A correct statement is the foundation for all that follows. The problem may be stated as a question, a statement of need, or an infinitive phrase.

(b) **Assumptions** (Include this paragraph only when it is needed.)

(1) Assumptions are important, but they can be dangerous in military staff work. They constitute the reasonable suppositions that must be made to work out a problem logically. In effect, they are artificial devices to fill gaps in actual knowledge. One should ensure that the assumptions are valid and necessary. The validity of a staff study is tied directly to the validity of the assumptions.

(2) Do not make assumptions that are essentially self-evident.

(c) **Facts bearing on the problem**

(1) A list of every fact related to the study is, in most cases, too lengthy and involved. Select those that need to be highlighted and list them in logical sequence (preferably the order in which they will be used in the discussion to follow).

(2) Facts also may be introduced in the discussion paragraph itself. Whether they are singled out for listing in this paragraph or introduced in the course of the discussion, they must be authenticated. Practice varies in this detail. The annexes are the appropriate place to expand on facts, if detailed explanations are necessary.

(d) **Discussion**

(1) The discussion is the heart of the staff study; it is where the problem is analyzed and the options are considered. One method is to describe the advantages and disadvantages of possible solutions, introducing facts and reasoning sequences as necessary. Another technique is to list criteria and test each possible solution against each criterion.

(2) If a full discussion requires more than two or three typed pages, include it as an annex. However, an annex should not be used merely to avoid the labor of making the discussion concise and logical. The purpose of a staff study is to save the commander's time by doing a careful job of writing; referring to a long, rambling discussion annex will not accomplish this purpose.

(e) **Conclusions**

(1) This paragraph is where the best solution to the problem is selected. The conclusions must follow logically from the discussion and should contain a brief restatement of the best solution.

(2) The writer must be careful not to include new material or new viewpoints in the conclusion paragraph.

(f) **Recommendations**. This paragraph explains how the conclusions can be implemented.

(1) If a letter, memorandum, or message is needed to implement the conclusions, it is customarily attached as enclosure "A." All that should remain for the commander to do is to approve and, if necessary, sign the enclosure.

(2) The basic question that must be answered is, "If the commander approves the recommendation, will the problem be solved?"

f. **LETTERS**. Frequently, a letter is the recommended action and is attached to a decision paper for approval, signature, and dispatch. Commands are free to choose the style of letter for their use.

g. **MESSAGES**

Reference: **MIL STD 6040,** *U.S. Message Text Formatting Program*

(1) Some actions may recommend dispatching a message. Messages may be transmitted electronically, or they may be sent by mail or courier, depending on requirements for speed of delivery and security. Precedence categories indicate the relative order in which a message is processed in the telecommunications system and the speed with which it must be handled during internal headquarters processing. The time objective established as a general guide is as follows:

Precedence	Code	Time Objective
Flash	ZZ	As fast as possible (less than 10 minutes)
Immediate	OO	30 minutes
Priority	PP	3 hours
Routine	RR	6 hours

(2) Whenever a message is prepared that includes the word "not" – where the accidental omission of the "not" would produce the opposite or other action than that desired – add the words, "repeat not," e.g., "Execution will not repeat not be made pending receipt of further orders."

(3) References should be listed in messages. All references should be briefly summarized in the first part of the message so that the message stands alone and can be completely understood without reading the other documents.

h.   **ESTIMATES**

References: Joint Pub 3-0, Appendix B, FM 101-5

(1)   Most discussions of the staff study imply that for every problem, there is a neat and tidy solution. Experienced action officers will suggest that, in reality, this simply not the case. The best staff studies may have to conclude that there is no feasible solution to the stated problem and that, at least for the time being, the best "course of action" is to do nothing. Normally, however, operational military situations do not permit doing nothing. Although the commander often is faced with so many uncertainties and so wide a variety of alternative courses of action that the overall problem seems unsolvable, postponing decisions or deferring action until the situation clears is usually impossible. For better or for worse, the operational commander must have the best available estimate of how to proceed – and often must have it in a short time.

(2)   A device that has evolved over years of military experience is the **estimate of the situation**. This is the operational counterpart to the staff study and, although it has several forms, there are two distinct categories:

(a) **the Commander's Estimate (of the Situation)**

(b) **the Staff Estimate**

Staff Estimates are discussed with deliberate planning, Chapter 4; Commander's Estimates are discussed in both deliberate planning and crisis action planning, Chapters 4 and 5 of this book.

7.   **NONQUANTIFIABLE FACTORS IN STAFF WORK**

a.   Staff officers must remain objective in their work. It is easy to conduct a study to find the best solution when the "right answer" is known even before the study begins. Unfortunately, people are often blind to their own prejudices and parochialisms, so the obvious solution may be a poor one, indeed.

b.   If experience is the best teacher, then experience must be considered an important resource that can be used to help solve problems. Experience is more than just knowing facts and figures. It includes that all-important human factor: a "feel for the problem." Even though science cannot explain how the human-experience factor works, a planner should appreciate its value, actively seek out a source of experience, and consider (but not blindly follow) advice based on experience.

c. "Gut feeling" is not a formally recognized part of the problem-solving method, but it, too, can be helpful in staff work. Even when action officers have done their work according to the book, quantified the process, and come up with the optimal solution, an inside alarm can go off and say, "Wait a minute, something's not quite right yet." If that happens, the planner should review all the data one more time, see if all important factors have been identified and considered, and determine whether the recommended solution really makes sense. This "gut feeling" can be especially helpful if the planner has attempted to use a purely analytical method. Automated systems, used carefully and correctly, can be helpful in analyzing data, but they must not be allowed to make decisions. Human beings are responsible for their decisions; a computer is not.

d. Staff officers must look beyond all the traditional factors that may favor a particular course of action, and call the attention of the commander to several other considerations that cannot be quantified. This is true because, when the time comes for commanders to make final decisions on a piece of completed staff work, they must wrestle with these issues that are not easily measured or defined. They must consider the questions of law, morals, ethics, aesthetics, politics, culture, and history, any or all of which may play an important role in the final decision.

8. EFFECTIVENESS AS AN AO

a. The ability to express ones thoughts clearly, both orally and in writing, will most often determine the effectiveness as a staff officer. Many commanders have said during Staff College interviews that their action officers need to learn how to communicate more effectively. There are many fine Service publications, as well as civilian sources, available to assist you in improving in these areas. For instance, there is Army Pamphlet 600-67, *Effective Writing for Army Leaders*, *Guide to Naval Writing* by Robert Shenk (Naval Institute Press), Air Force Pamphlet 4-19 *Tongue and Quill,* or *Revising Business Prose* by Richard Lanham (Scribner's) among many others. Use them! **Figure C-2** summarizes some key rules from the Army reference.

b. Effective speaking or writing does not mean using long, infrequently used words that require listeners or readers to break out their dictionaries; on the contrary, the most effective communication contains the everyday words that best express your meaning.

c. Your role as an effective action officer is to give senior officers accurate and adequate information to make a decision and to implement a plan or program. In effect, your job is to do the "leg work" so that the senior officer can merely approve or "sign off" on the project.

Style Rules

**Put the recommendation, conclusion, or reason
for writing in the first or second sentence**

Use the active voice

Use short sentences (15 words or less)

Use short words (three syllables or fewer)

Write paragraphs no more than 1 inch deep

Use correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation

Use "I," "you," and "we" as subjects of sentences

Reference: Department of Army Pamphlet 600-67   Figure C-2