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Army coa evaluation criteria examples

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MEMORANDUM FOR SUBJECT: Briefly describe the study's contents. Be specific. Do not just say Staff Study. 1. Problem. Write a concise statement of the problem, stated as a task, in the infinitive or question form; for example, To determine... or How to... Normally include the who, what, when, and where if pertinent. 2. Recommendation. Recommend a specific course of action (who, what, when, and where). The recommendation must solve the problem. If necessary or directed, place an implementing document at Annex A. 3. Background. Provide a lead-in to the study, briefly stating why the problem exists. 4. Facts. State facts that influence the problem or its solution. Make sure the facts are stated and attributed correctly. The data must stand-alone; either it is a clear fact or is attributed to a source that asserts it true. There is no limit to the number of facts. Provide all the facts relevant to the problem (not just the facts used to support the study). State any guidance given by the authority directing the study. Refer to annexes necessary for amplification, references, mathematical formulas, or tabular data. 5. Assumptions. Identify any assumptions necessary for a logical discussion of the problem. If deleting the assumption has no effect on the problem, you do not need the assumption. 6. Courses of Action. List all possible suitable, feasible, acceptable, distinguishable, and complete courses of action. If a course of action (COA) is not self-explanatory, include a brief explanation of what the COA consists of to ensure the reader understands. If the COA is complex, refer to an annex for a complete description (including pertinent COA facts). a. COA 1. List specifically by name, for example, Route A. b. COA 2. Same as above. c. COA 3. Same as above. 7. Criteria. List the criteria used to judge COAs. Criteria serve as yardsticks or benchmarks against which to measure each COA. Define criteria to ensure the reader understands them. Be specific. For example, if using cost as a criterion, talk about that measurement in dollars. Use criteria that relate the facts and assumptions. There should be a fact or an assumption listed in paragraph 4 or 5, respectively, that supports each of the criteria. Consider criteria in three related but distinct areas, as indicated below. a. Screening Criteria. Define screening criteria that a COA must meet to be suitable, feasible, acceptable, distinguishable, and complete.

Suitable	If the COA were successfully executed, would the unit accomplish the mission consistent with the battalion commander's concept and intent?
Feasible	The platoon must have the technical and tactical skill and resources to successfully accomplish the COA. In short, given the enemy situation and terrain, the unit must have the training, equipment, leadership, and rehearsal time necessary to successfully execute the mission.
Distinguishable	If more than one COA is developed, each COA must be sufficiently different from the others to justify full development and consideration. At platoon level, this is very difficult to accomplish, particularly if the platoon has limited freedom of action.
Complete	The COA must include the operational factors of who, what, when, where, and how. The COA must address the doctrinal aspects of the operation. For example, in the attack against a defending enemy, the COA must cover movement to, deployment against, assault of, and consolidation upon the objective.

Accept or reject a COA based solely on these criteria. Define each criterion and state the required standard in absolute terms. For example, using cost as a screening criterion, define cost as "dollars" and specify the maximum (or minimum) cost you can pay. In subsequent subparagraphs, describe failed COAs and state why they failed. b. Evaluation Criteria. This is criteria used to measure, evaluate, and rank-order each COA during analysis and comparison paragraphs. Use issues that will determine the quality of each COA and define how to measure each COA against each criterion and specify the preferred state for each. For example, define cost as total cost including research, development, production, and distribution in dollars. less is better; or cost is manufacturer's suggested retail price less is better.

Comparison of COAs	
Evaluation Criteria (Advantage/Disadvantage)	Criteria of Action (None/Yes)
1. Size	Mark COA001 (None/Yes) Mark COA002 (None/Yes) Mark COA003 (None/Yes) Mark COA004 (None/Yes)
Yield	Mark COA001 (None/Yes) Mark COA002 (None/Yes) Mark COA003 (None/Yes) Mark COA004 (None/Yes)
Firing Rate	Mark COA001 (None/Yes) Mark COA002 (None/Yes) Mark COA003 (None/Yes) Mark COA004 (None/Yes)
Range	Mark COA001 (None/Yes) Mark COA002 (None/Yes) Mark COA003 (None/Yes) Mark COA004 (None/Yes)
Scouting Rate	Mark COA001 (None/Yes) Mark COA002 (None/Yes) Mark COA003 (None/Yes) Mark COA004 (None/Yes)
Memory	Mark COA001 (None/Yes) Mark COA002 (None/Yes) Mark COA003 (None/Yes) Mark COA004 (None/Yes)

Establish a dividing line that separates advantages and disadvantages for a criterion. An evaluation criterion must rank-order COAs to be valid.

COA Criteria

- **F** easibility
 - Does the COA accomplish the mission within the available time, space, and resources?
- **A** cceptability
 - Does the COA achieve an advantage that justifies the cost in resources?
- **S** uitability
 - Does the COA accomplish the purpose and tasks?
 - Does it comply with Commander's Guidance?
- **D** istinguishability
 - Does the COA differ significantly from other COAs?
- **C** ompleteness
 - Does the COA include all tasks to be accomplished?
 - Does it describe a complete mission?

Some criteria may be both screening and evaluation criteria, such as, cost. You may use one definition of cost; however, the required or benchmark value cannot be the same for both screening and evaluation criteria. If the value is the same, the criteria will not distinguish between advantages and disadvantages for remaining COAs. (1) Define Evaluation Criteria. Each evaluation criterion is defined by five elements written in paragraph or narrative form. A short title, ("Cost," for example) Definition. (The amount of money to buy...) Unit of measure. (For example, US dollars, miles, acres.) Dividing line or benchmark. (The point at which a criterion becomes an advantage. Ideally the benchmark should result in gaining a tangible benefit. Be able to justify how you came up with the value through reasoning, historical data, current allocation, averaging.) Formula. (Stated in two different ways. That "more or less is better" (\$400 is an advantage, >\$400 is a disadvantage, less is better) or subjectively in terms such as "a night movement is better than a daylight movement.") (2) Evaluation Criterion #2. Again define and write the criterion in one coherent paragraph. To curtail length, do not use multiple subparagraphs. (3) Evaluation Criterion #3, and so on. c. Weighting of Criteria. Establish the relative importance of one criterion over the others. Explain how each criterion compares to each of the other criteria (equal, favored, slightly favored), or provide the values from the decision matrix and explain why you measured the criterion as such. NOTE: Screening criteria are not weighted. They are required, absolute standards that each COA must meet or the COA is rejected. 8. Analysis. For each COA, list the advantages and disadvantages that result from testing the COAs against the stated evaluation criteria.

Table A-2. Engineer battlefield assessment

Component	Description
Terrain analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze the terrain's impact on the battle using the OCOKA framework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Orientation and fields of fire – Cover and concealment – Obstacles – Key terrain – AAs. • Analyze the advantages/disadvantages the terrain offers to both enemy and friendly forces. • Decide what impact the terrain has on mission accomplishment.
Enemy mission and M/S capabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anticipate enemy engineer operations and their impact on the battle. • Consider the enemy's mission and the doctrinal employment of engineers in battle. • Estimate enemy engineer capability based on— <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Size order of battle – Threat engineer organizations – Manpower/equipment capabilities – Recent activities • Plot enemy engineer effort based on— <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – S2's situational template – Doctrinal enemy engineer employment
Friendly mission and M/S capabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate friendly engineer capability and its impact on accomplishing the mission. • Consider the friendly mission. • Estimate the engineer assets available based on task organization of— <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Maneuver forces – Engineer forces – Higher engineer HQ – Adjacent engineer units • Consider the availability of critical resources. • Estimate the total engineer capability based on engineer planning factors.

Include the payoff value for each COA as tested. Do not compare one COA with the others (that is the next step). Do not introduce new criterion. If there are six criteria, there must be six advantages or disadvantages (as appropriate) for each COA. If there are many "neutral" payoffs, examine the criteria to ensure they are specific and examine the application of the criteria to ensure it is logical and objective. Neutral should rarely be used. a. The first subparagraph of the analysis should state the results of applying the screening criterion if not already listed in paragraph 7b(2). List screened COAs as part of paragraph 7b for clarity and unity. b. COA 1. (List the COA by name.) (1) Advantage(s). List the advantages in narrative form in a single clear, concise paragraph. Explain why it is an advantage and provide the payoff value for the COA measured against the criteria. Do not use bullets; remember, the paper must stand-alone. (2) Disadvantage(s). List the disadvantages for each COA and explain why they are disadvantages. Include the payoff values or how the COA measured out. c. COA 2. (1) Advantage. If there is only one advantage or disadvantage, list it as shown here.

COA Analysis (Eval. Criteria)

- Determine evaluation criteria:
 - What criteria will you use to analyze and compare each COA?
 - How will you quantify each criteria?
 - Criteria typically include:
 - Does COA facilitate flexibility?
 - Once we reach a given point, do we have any options remaining?
 - Does COA allow us to mass our combat power on objective area?
 - How many squads / platoons can we mass on the objective / engagement area?
 - Does COA facilitate good Command / Control?
 - How many / what types of units is each subordinate commander responsible for?
 - Simplicity?
 - How simple / complex is our plan?
 - Surprise?
 - At what point can we realistically expect the enemy to realize what we are doing?

(2) Disadvantage. If there is no advantage or disadvantage, state "none." 9. Comparison of the COAs. a. After testing each COA against the stated criteria, compare the COAs to each other. Determine which COA best satisfies the criteria. Develop for the reader, in a logical, orderly manner, the rationale you use to reach the conclusion in paragraph 10 below.

For example, Cost: COA 1 cost less than COA 2, which is equal to the cost of COA 4. COA 3 has the greatest cost. b. You can use quantitative techniques (such as decision matrixes, select weights, and sensitivity analyses) to support your comparisons. Summarize the results of these quantitative techniques clearly so that the reader does not have to refer to an annex.

Do not explain the quantitative technique, simply 10. Conclusion.

Address the conclusion drawn from analyzing and comparing all the relevant factors (for example, COA 2 is the best COA because). The conclusion must answer the problem statement. If it does not, then either the conclusion or the problem statement is incorrect. Encl NAME RANK, BRANCH Duty Position NOTE: Address supporting enclosures in the body of the study. The enclosures you produce (implementing document, decision matrixes, and so on) must comply with common format requirements (AR 25-50). Concurrences/Nonconcurrences: (List directores/agencies/persons with whom you must coordinate.) Section/Agency Concur/Nonconcur _____ Date

NOTE: Each officer must initial his/her concurrence or nonconcurrence, followed by his rank, name, position and/or title, telephone number, and E-mail address, and briefly state the reason for his nonconcurrence. This statement normally is on a separate page that will become an annex to the study. Consideration of Nonconcurrence: The author of the study states the results of the consideration of any nonconcurrence. He either briefly states the results or attaches them as another annex. If consideration shows he cannot support the concurrence he must state the reasons. The author signs or initials the consideration of nonconcurrence(s). Capt.

Robert Reynolds, an observer-coach/trainer in the 1st Brigade, Great Lakes Training Division, 75th Training Brigade, explains the course of action development step of the military decision-making process to members of the 419th Combat Service S... (Photo Credit: U.S. Army) VIEW ORIGINAL While spending two years as an observer-coach/trainer with Operations Group Sierra at the Mission Command Training Program and one year as an instructor in the Department of Logistics and Resource Operations at the Army Command and General Staff College, I noticed an alarming trend among sustainment planners. Many sustainment planners are unable to develop multiple sustainment courses of action (COAs) when planning to support a single concept of the operation developed by maneuver planners. All too often, sustainment planners find them-selves presenting a single sustainment COA, thereby failing to provide sustainment commanders with options during the military decision-making process (MDMP). Even when sustainment units

deliberately create two or more COA teams to force the creation of multiple COAs, those teams often come up with the same plan or plans that do not distinguish themselves enough from others to force a commander into an important decision. USING THE MDMP TO DEVELOP A COA The most common method sustainment planners use to develop sustainment COAs is the MDMP. The MDMP is one of the Army's three planning methodologies. According to Army Doctrine Publication 5-0, The Operations Process, the MDMP is "an iterative planning methodology to understand the situation and mission, develop a COA, and produce an operation plan or order." Furthermore, Field Manual (FM) 6-0, Commander and Staff Organization and Operations, says that the purpose of MDMP is to help leaders apply "thoroughness, clarity, sound judgment, logic, and professional knowledge to understand situations, develop options to solve problems, and reach decisions." COA development is step 3 of the 7-step MDMP. It follows mission analysis and precedes wargaming.

FM 6-0 defines a COA as a "broad potential solution to an identified problem." In addition, FM 6-0 states that COA development generates "options for subsequent analysis and comparison." THE COA CRITERIA The main idea behind COA development is that planners will develop multiple COAs by combining different elements of operational art, such as line of effort, basing, and tempo. By developing multiple COAs, the planners provide commanders with options to choose from or combine when determining how to best support a maneuver plan. FM 6-0 also states that planners should develop multiple COAs and examine their validity by using certain screening criteria. The criteria of a COA includes the following:

- Feasibility: A feasible COA can accomplish the mission within the given time, space, and resource limitations.
- Acceptability: An acceptable COA must have the right balance among cost, risk, and the potential advantage gained.
- Suitability: A suitable COA can be executed within the commander's intent and planning guidance.
- Distinguishability: A distinguishable COA must differ significantly enough from other possible COAs.
- Completeness: A complete COA incorporates the key elements of decisive, shaping, and sustaining operations and accounts for tasks to be performed and conditions achieved in offense, defense, stability, or defense support to civil authorities. Of course, there are times when multiple COAs simply is not possible. For instance, in time-constrained environments, commanders have the authority to alter the steps of the MDMP to facilitate the creation of a satisfactory plan in a timely manner. One situation commanders can take is this situation is directing the staff to focus on only one COA. In addition to save time, the commander and the staff to a certain number of COAs or specify which COAs should not be explored. Nevertheless, there are exceptions to the rule. In the best-case scenario, sustainment planners would have ample time and develop two or more COAs that are feasible, suitable, distinguishable, and complete.

COA DEVELOPMENT The prevailing trend is that sustainment planners are unable to develop multiple sustainment COAs when planning to support a single concept of the operation developed by maneuver planners. However, during my observations of expeditionary sustainment commands and sustainment brigades planning for warfighter exercises and of students during Command and General Staff College planning repetitions, I saw some excellent tactics, techniques, and procedures for overcoming this hurdle and producing multiple sustainment COAs that meet all of the required criteria and provide the commander with more options. The first way in which sustainment planners can develop different COAs is to take a hard look at the task organization of allocated forces provided in annex A of an operation order. In most cases, depending on the defined command relationships, sustainment planners have the ability to recommend changes to the task organization to facilitate mission accomplishment. It may be appropriate for sustainment planners to task organize again in order to ensure the sup-porting force is properly equipped to sustain the supported force. That could be as simple as taking one composite supply company from one combat sustainment support battalion (CSSB) and moving it to another CSSB. Alternatively, the new task organization may involve multiple units from company level down to platoons or squads. Sustainment planners may also want to re-task organize their forces to ensure support is weighted toward the main effort of an operation. I have seen a planning team completely re-task organize its CSSBs into one with a heavy distribution mission and one with a heavy storage and holding mission. Planners are not stuck with the same task organization in phase III that they had in phase I. The task organization can change from phase to phase—it does not have to stay the same throughout every phase of the operation. Another way to develop different sustainment COAs is to vary the location of key sustainment nodes within the area of operations. Some locations may be dictated by a higher command's order, but in most cases sustainment planners have the ability to determine where key sustainment nodes will be located. This is especially true for the latter phases of an operation and at the tactical level. Sustainment planners should consider varying the location of logistics support areas, forward logistics elements, potential air-land or air drop sites, and refuel on the move sites in order to develop different sustainment COAs. It is likely that planners and commanders will find both pros and cons to each potential location, but I think providing options is the key to COA development. In many operations, sustainment forces must echelon forward to keep up with their maneuver customers and help them maintain operational reach and endurance. That being said, yet another way sustainment planners can develop different COAs is to look at how they are echeloning sustainment forces forward to support their maneuver customers. They must consider not only where they will echelon forces but also when they will echelon forces.

This can be done by shifting the triggers or decision points used to determine when to echelon forces forward in support of the maneuver plan. Those triggers or decision points may be tied to phase lines, objectives, or specific actions accomplished by the maneuver force. Whatever the case may be, there are several ways that sustainment planners can use the echeloning of forces to differentiate COAs and give a commander more options. Finally, the last method for developing different sustainment COAs is the use of fixed sustainment assets versus the use of more mobile sustainment assets.

Sustainment planners can use one or a combination of all methods to differentiate COAs and give a commander more options. For instance, in some cases it may be best to rely on the use of the fuel system supply point, which can store a significant amount of fuel at a fixed location. Alternatively, certain instances may call for storing fuel in a distribution platform such as a heavy expanded-mobility tactical truck, which provides greater mobility and flexibility. The same logic can also be applied to other classes of supply. Is it appropriate to set up a fixed class I (subsistence) yard or ammunition transfer and holding point, or would it be more beneficial to put those commodities on flatbed or palletized load system trucks to maintain mobility and increase reaction time? Those are the types of questions sustainment planners have to continually ask and are yet another way to ensure they present multiple COAs to their commanders. One of the keys to successful sustainment planning is providing the commander options for how a particular operation can be supported. Planners create those options during step 3 of the MDMP (course of action development). In order to avoid the common pitfall of providing only one sustainment COA, planners must make a conscious effort to differentiate their COAs whenever possible.

There are a number of ways to differentiate COAs, several of which I have described above. Those examples are by no means the only options, but they can help get the creative juices flowing. Providing multiple sustainment COAs will improve not only the chances for sustainment success but also the chances for success in the operation over-all. -----

----- Lt. Col. Aaron M. Cornett is an instructor at the Baltic Defence College in Tartu, Estonia. He formerly served as an instructor in the Mission Command Training Program at the Army Command and General Staff College. He has bachelor's and master's degrees in journalism from the University of Kansas. ----- This article is an Army Sustainment magazine product. Related Links: Army Sustainment Magazine Archives Browse Army Sustainment Magazine Sustainer News