
Marine Corps Planning Process



U.S. Marine Corps

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Unless otherwise stated, whenever the masculine or feminine gender is used, both men and women are included.

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
Headquarters United States Marine Corps
Washington, D.C. 20380-1775

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CHANGE 1 to MCWP 5-1

1. This change adds new Appendix J, *Rapid Planning*.
2. This change also replaces the second page of the book's Table of Contents to include Appendix J.
3. File this transmittal sheet in the front of the publication.

BY DIRECTION OF THE COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS

/s/

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FOREWORD

1. PURPOSE

Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 5-1, *Marine Corps Planning Process*, describes a planning process that supports decisionmaking by the commander. It is also a vehicle that conveys the commander's decisions to his subordinates. It is applicable to all echelons of command and across all ranges of military operations.

The Marine Corps Planning Process (MCP) complements joint deliberate and crisis action planning and the naval planning process. It is a responsive and flexible process that can adapt to the needs of any size unit and adjust to any timetable. The Marine Corps planning process embodies our maneuver warfare doctrine with its tenets of top-down planning, single-battle concept, and integrated planning in order to generate and maintain tempo.

2. SCOPE

This publication links to higher-level Marine Corps doctrine by describing how different echelons of command can adapt the planning process to their needs and illustrating a variety of planning tools (i.e., matrices, worksheets, formats, and examples). Although the publication is written for planning at the Marine Corps component, Marine expeditionary force (MEF), and major subordinate command (MSC) levels, the planning process is easily scalable to the regiment, group, battalion, or squadron levels.

3. SUPERSESSION

MCWP 5-1 replaces the planning process and orders portions of Fleet Marine Force Manual (FMFM) 3-1, *Command and Staff Action*, dated 21 May 1979.

4. CERTIFICATION

Reviewed and approved this date.

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Chapter 1

Planning Overview

“Planning involves projecting our thoughts forward in time and space to influence events before they occur rather than merely responding to events as they occur. This means contemplating and evaluating potential decisions and actions in advance.”¹

—MCDP 5, *Planning*

The Marine Corps Planning Process (MCP) supports the Marine Corps warfighting philosophy of maneuver warfare. Since planning is an essential and significant part of command and control, the Marine Corps Planning Process recognizes the commander’s central role as the decisionmaker. It helps organize the thought processes of a commander and his staff throughout the planning and execution of military operations. The Marine Corps Planning Process focuses on the mission and the threat. It capitalizes on the principle of unity of effort and supports the establishment and maintenance of tempo. The Marine Corps Planning Process is applicable across the range of military operations and is designed for use at any echelon of command. The process can be as detailed or as abbreviated as time, staff resources, experience, and the situation permit.

Planning is the act of envisioning and determining effective ways of achieving a desired endstate. It supports the commander in making decisions in a time-constrained and uncertain environment. Whether planning is performed at the strategic, operational, or tactical level, its key functions, as identified in MCDP 5, *Planning*, are to—

- Direct and coordinate actions.
- Develop a shared situational awareness.
- Generate expectations about how actions will evolve and how they will affect the desired outcome.

- Support the exercise of initiative.
- Shape the thinking of planners.

More than anything else, the considerations of time and uncertainty dictate the approach to planning, and are its defining features. Time is most often the scarcest resource and is vital to the planning process. The commander must adjust the planning process to optimize this perishable resource. When time is critical, the commander uses intuition, judgment, and experience to guide his staff and subordinate commanders. Since planning is future-oriented, and the future is uncertain, all planning is based on imperfect knowledge and involves assumptions. This uncertainty increases with the length of the planning horizon and the rate of change in the environment. Given the fundamental uncertainty of war, planners must recognize that planning will not eliminate uncertainty, but it allows the commander to decide and act effectively in the midst of uncertainty.

The Marine Corps Planning Process is applicable across the range of military operations and is designed for command and staff actions at any echelon of command. Commanders at higher echelons tend to use a more formal and detailed approach to the Marine Corps Planning Process. Higher echelons can consist of a component, Marine expeditionary force (MEF), and major subordinate commands (MSCs) (e.g., division, wing, or force service support group). These