

Command-Post Layout and Service-Design Thinking

by MAJ Richard Z. Groen

The physical layout of a maneuver brigade combat team (BCT)'s command post (CP) can enhance or hinder its staff's productivity. This article suggests a CP layout using service-design thinking.

A CP is a unit's brain or nucleus. It constantly receives, distributes and analyzes information; integrates and synchronizes systems; plans future operations; issues orders; and makes recommendations to the commander to facilitate decision-making. Essentially, a CP is a learning environment for organizations.

Service-design thinking

In a 2011 study of learning-space service design, Elliot Felix,¹ the director of Brightspot Strategy, used historical data to prove that learning-environment design should focus more on outputs and services and less on furniture, technology and physical space. He advocates designing learning environments around student-directed services, not a physical building or "container." He calls this process "service-design thinking" and recommends identifying needed student services or functions and then designing the physical environment around requirements.

Felix believes his service-design planning builds knowledge, skills and community while providing for all learning styles in an updated age of technology. Learners are in an interaction age, where collaboration occurs between students and teachers over community and Web-based forums.

Felix also notes that successful service-design identification depends on three major considerations: personas, journey maps and service blueprints. *Personas* identify the learning audience and their learning styles by assessing the intended students. *Service blueprints* and *journey maps* identify their required specific services vs. output at specific timeframes.

After services are identified and physical space is designed, departments must assess

usage, level of satisfaction and impact through various instruments. These assessments facilitate service-design adaptation with learners, technology and community needs.

Army application

Learning or thinking organizations such as the U.S. Army could use Felix's same principles for establishing their CPs or containers. All too often, organizations receive a series of tents with a preplanned layout of where the warfighting functions² (WfF) involving current operations (CUOPS) or plans are located.

To apply service-design thinking, organizations must first identify their personas, journey maps and service blueprints. For instance, a maneuver BCT first identifies its key personnel and the level of interaction these people need with each other daily. Next, the BCT lays out its requirements for functionality to conduct battle drills for CUOPS, planning sessions, staff meetings, Soldier leadership engagements (SLEs), desk spaces, chairs, connectivity requirements, projectors, etc. Lastly, developing a battle rhythm before designing a CP identifies if more spaces are required or if a single space can be deconflicted and used repeatedly.

Key personnel in the CP are the command group. Army Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (ATTP) publication 5-0.1, **Command and Staff Officer Guide**, dated September 2011, identifies the command group as "the commander and selected staff members who assist the command in controlling operations away from a CP." These individuals make decisions or directly assist decision-making. As Felix noted, they are key personnel or personas who facilitate decisions as well as creative and collaborative thinking, and they influence most of the organization.

As the command group can be seen as key personas, the CP's service blueprint can be split between CUOPS and plans. ATTP 5-0.1

defines CUOPS as the “focal point for the execution of operations. This involves assessing the current situation while regulating forces and Wffs in accordance with the mission, commander’s intent and concept of operations.” CUOPS is an organization comprised of all Wffs. It executes the missions generated by plans, the cell “responsible for the long-range planning horizons. It prepares for operations beyond the scope

of the current order by developing plans and orders, including branch plans and sequels.” The plans cell ideally consists of and receives input from all Wffs. Both CUOPS and plans require a considerable amount of workspace and areas to facilitate collaborative planning and meetings.

The balance of all these activities are laid out on a journey map or BCT-produced

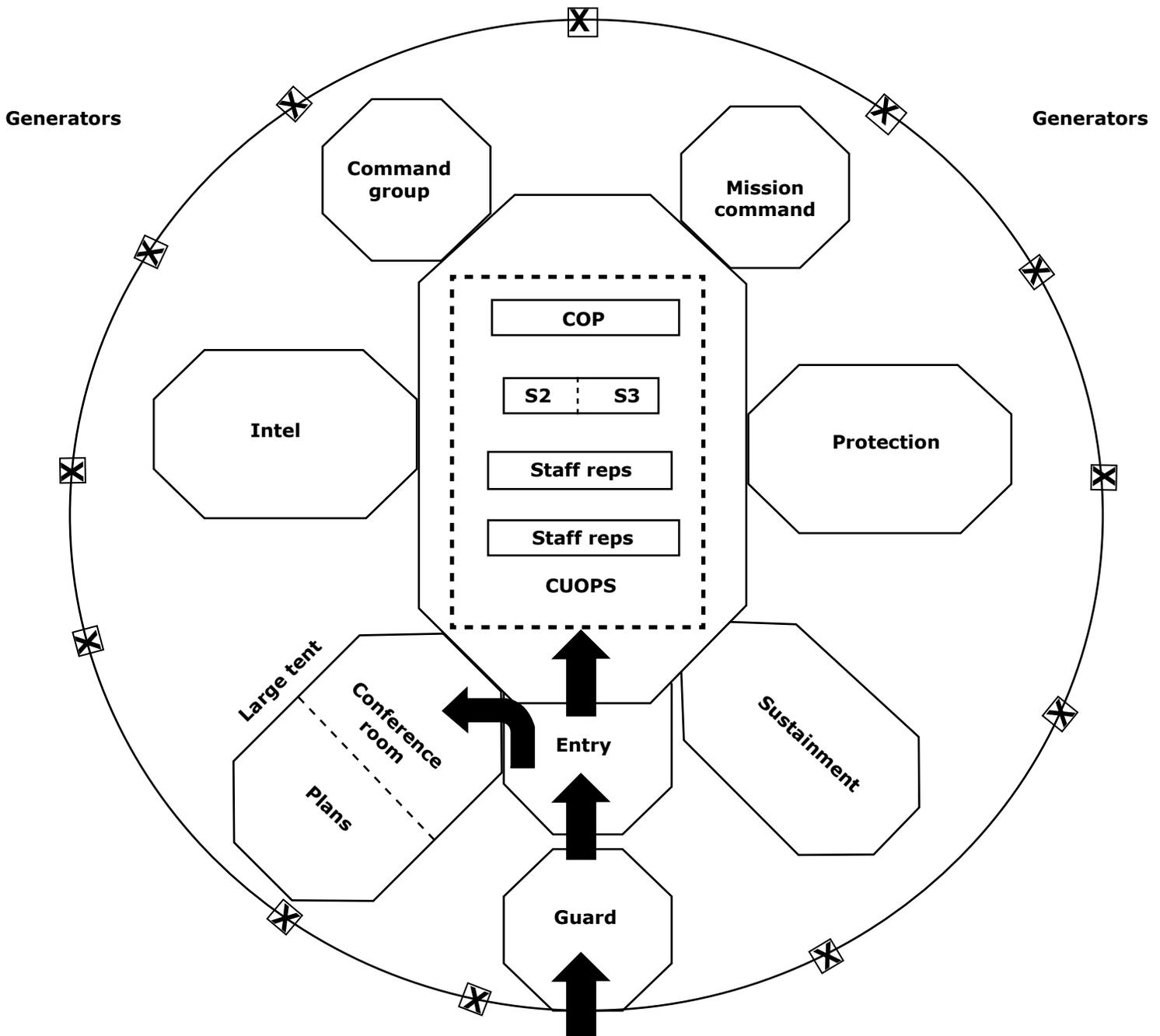


Figure 1. Command-post setup.

calendar and battle rhythm, “a deliberate daily cycle of command, staff and unit activities intended to synchronize current and future operations (plans)” as outlined in ATTP 5-0.1. The battle rhythm’s key point is the synchronization of space and time within the CP because multiple events, meetings and planning sessions must occur, but space may not be available. The battle rhythm – in concert with the calendar – can synchronize events, use space properly and account for unforeseen events like SLEs, impromptu meetings and unexpected planning sessions.

CP layout

Figure 1 provides a possible solution in designing the CP around functionality, and not a predetermined container, while using Felix’s service-design thinking. CUOPS is the CP’s center, with representation of the WfFs by cells who assist in immediately receiving, distributing and analyzing information; integrating and synchronizing assets; and assisting the commander in immediate decisions. Personnel would enter the CP from the guard area. Those who need to attend meetings in the conference room would enter without disturbing CUOPS and the execution of operations.

Plans personnel are colocated with the conference area. Other WfFs have their own areas that branch from CUOPS to facilitate operations but are separate to limit traffic and overcrowding. The command group also has its own area external to CUOPS, preferably with the ability to digitally visualize the battlefield and communicate to subordinate units. The commander should possess the same connectivity as CUOPS for any sort of meeting or needed communication without hindering possible ongoing battle drills and events.

Though this example is a recommended layout based on Felix’s service-design thinking, it may not be applicable to units who are issued a set grouping of tents or containers. However, a BCT can tailor its containers to facilitate functionality. Identifying that a CP is another form of a learning environment, BCTs can conceptualize Felix’s methods of service-design thinking.

To increase overall functionality and productivity, and facilitate the learning environment, BCTs first need to identify personas and its command group; develop the service blueprint by ensuring the CP has areas for CUOPS and plans; and complete a journey map through synchronization of the battle rhythm and calendar.



MAJ Rich Groen is Operations Group Bravo’s chief movement and maneuver WfF observer/coach/trainer in the Mission Command Training Program, Fort Leavenworth, KS. His previous assignments include troop commander, Crazy Horse Troop, 1-40th Cavalry (Airborne), 4th Infantry BCT, 25th Infantry Division, Fort Richardson, AK, and Paktya, Afghanistan; scout platoon leader and executive officer, D Troop, 9th Cavalry, 2nd Armored BCT, 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, TX, and Baghdad, Iraq; executive officer; C Company, 2-12th Cavalry, 2nd ABCT, 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood; and tank platoon leader, B Company, 2-12th Cavalry. His military schooling includes the Infantry Captain’s Career Course, Scout Platoon Leader’s Course and Armor Officer Basic Course. MAJ Groen holds a bachelor’s of science degree from Virginia Military Institute in civil engineering and a master’s of science degree from Kansas State University in adult education.

Notes

¹ Felix, Elliot, “Learning Space Service Design,” *Journal of Learning Spaces*, Vol. 1 No. 1, 2011; retrieved Feb. 10, 2012, from <http://libjournal.uncg.edu/ojs/index.php/jls/article/view/284/162>.

² The warfighting functions (movement and maneuver, intelligence, fires, sustainment, mission command and protection) are a group of tasks and systems (people, organizations, information and processes) united by a common purpose commanders use to accomplish missions and training objectives. Retrieved Sept. 27, 2013, from Center for Army Lessons Learned Website, <http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/call/thesaurus/toc.asp?id=33276>.

ACRONYM QUICK-SCAN

ATTP – Army tactics, techniques and procedures
BCT – brigade combat team
CP – command post
CUOPS – current operations
SLE – Soldier leadership engagement
WfF – warfighting function