

Crossing the functional borders

Written by Veiko Palm
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Headquarters Multinational Corps Northeast (HQ MNC NE) is moving ahead in discovering the essence of Cross-Functional Team concept.

Cross-Functional Teams are NATO's response to the demanding operational environment in Afghanistan. In such complex surroundings, the military are expected not only to perform well, but also to cooperate and coordinate their activities with myriad of actors. International organisations, governmental and non-governmental organisations are all trying to make Afghanistan a better place. Unfortunately even the best intentions do not mean much if most of the other organisations do not support each other or just are not aware about each other's efforts.

In Afghanistan, the military, as usually happens in crisis response operations, have realised that they do not concentrate on fighting, but on supporting. Supporting international community to help Afghanistan and, more importantly, supporting the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to gain the confidence of people in order to create a self-sustainable Afghanistan.

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Cross-Functional Teams were formed in Headquarters ISAF Joint Command (HQ IJC), where most of the HQ MNC NE members were deployed in 2010, to create a holistic situational understanding, enable combined planning in a framework of the Comprehensive Approach, and conduct partnered comprehensive counter insurgency operations. A traditional headquarters structure did not allow to be fast, flexible, and agile enough and to seamlessly cooperate with local authorities and international community.

HQ MNC NE has decided to test how a Cross-Functional Team concept works for the Corps during the exercise Bold Eagle 2011 at the end of May. There were two planning conferences conducted, one in February and one in the beginning of April, and now the exercise itself takes more and more clear shape. The exercise itself will share the same scenario and frameworks with the recently conducted exercise Little Eagle I 2011 so that HQ MNC NE members could see themselves how Cross-Functional Team concept may change their workload and obligations. There is still some work to be done, though as always, but from now on people will continue their activities in specific small working groups.

The implementation of Cross-Functional Team concept also requires a change of everybody's mindset. Even though the basic military planning, execution and analysing principles remain untouched, there are new requirements for information sharing, intensity of social interaction and team work.

In order to get step-by-step introduction to Cross-Functional Team concept there was a series of lectures conducted from the end of March till the middle of April. In three sessions a basic concept of Cross-Functional Teams, a detailed description of HQ IJC Cross-Functional Teams, HQ IJC battle-rhythm, the method of orienting and coordinating all Cross-Functional Teams into the same directions as well as the expected experimental HQ MNC NE structure during the Bold Eagle 2011 exercise were discussed. It was a good sign to see different "teachers" in front of the audience, which shows the enlargement of knowledge base inside HQ MNC NE. In addition to those lectures all Cross-Functional Teams are planning to conduct their internal training just prior to the exercise.