



What about DOTMLPFI?

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A few months after my arrival in this HQ, a colleague initiated a project to define DOTMLPFI. Imagine my surprise to discover that such an undertaking was necessary. Was this not common knowledge? Even more surprising was the fact that some of the provided information, certainly in regard to the 'L', was misleading. A few months ago, a Swedish correspondent suggested explaining the acronym as an improvement for a directive. So, I thought this might be a good time to revisit this strange acronym.

DOTMLPF was invented by the United States Department of Defense. In its effort to be transformational, the Joint Capabilities Integration Development System process - you don't have to memorise this - considered solutions involving any combination of doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, personnel and facilities (hence the word DOTMLPF). Because combatant commanders defined requirements in consultation with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, they were able to consider gaps in the context of strategic direction for the total US military force and influence the direction of requirements early in the acquisition process. This approach was readily adopted by other nations in the transformation wave that swept over the world.

Since its introduction some 10 years ago, the acronym also serves as a mnemonic aid for planners to consider certain issues prior to undertake a new effort. Doing this, opens the mind for non-material focused solutions to capabilities gaps and promotes thinking outside the box. This interdisciplinary approach forces connections over the organisational silos and leads to a multitude of innovative options to fill the considered capability gap.

The letters - maybe we should make a song from them like in the family movie 'The Sound of Music'- and their meaning, in short:

D - Doctrine represents a common way of thinking about or a good - I'm not a fan of 'best' practises - practise in a particular issue or problem. Doctrine encompasses tactics, and the specific procedures for conducting tasks.

O - Organisation defines the structures and groupings that are used by formations and units.

T - Education and Training includes the full training spectrum of education, individual and collective training, and exercises.

M - Materiel includes specific equipment, weapon systems, stores and technology. In the 'old days' this component was the focus of the capabilities. Tanks were replaced by better tanks, airplanes by better ones, etc. There was not much consideration on the impact of the other components. Material was leading the way, but the DOTMLPF approach wants to change this.

L - Leadership, I skip this one for the moment.

P - Personnel represents the type of servicemen or women that are needed. This includes identifying specialists and/or specific skills that are needed.

F - Facilities is a generic heading for all infrastructure needed to accommodate, train - this is not the training itself - and prepare any military forces.

In adopting this approach, NATO uses the same acronym with the same meaning. However, the Alliance added the 'I' to the acronym to make it 'DOTMLPFI'. This small adaption makes the acronym more sound like a real word - try it - but that was not the reason. This added 'I' stands for 'Interoperability'. Interoperability is the ability to work with other - pay attention to 'other' - capabilities throughout NATO. A purely national capability may be fine, but is nearly useless in a coalition. The introduction of the second vowel was done for the obvious reason that being able to work together is key for successful operations by our very diverse organisation. And cooperation doesn't come natural, it requires work. And attention.

You could rightfully add other letters to it. Why not 'R' for 'Resources'? No problem. Just keep in mind that the more you add, the more you complicate things. So, try not to exaggerate. Keep it simple.

Until here, no problem. Trouble - if one can call it so - starts when we go into the details of the 'L'. But before doing this, let's explore the 'why' a little bit further. Our acronym is a transformational tool - transformation is basically simple but hard work - because every workable combination of the DOTMLPFI - we're NATO so I stick to the extra 'I' - gives a capability (the discussion on the use of capabilities is not the focus of this article). Some of the numerous combinations result in the same or comparable capabilities, but others are quite unique. Every combination comes with its own strengths and weaknesses. Thinking along those lines broadens one's perspective and opens previously not considered solutions to a problem. This renders it possible to discuss capabilities instead of equipment only.

It also means that altering one component (that is a 'letter' of the acronym) may create a different capability. And also, neglecting one letter leads to no capability at all. Try it: pick a capability, describe it by its letters, pick a letter, change something and discover what you get. Surprised? How should a Close Air Support capability look like without trained Forward Air Controllers? What about artillery support without guns?

Furthermore, by using DOTMLPFI as a framework, each component for a specific capability can be examined, first individually and then in relation to others. This methodology not only ensures that a wide range of potential solutions for improving or developing a capability is examined, but it also recognises the interrelationship - or to say it differently, the internal interoperability - of every component of DOTMLPFI. So, not only the individual components are important, also their relationship. They should not be looked at in isolation as each has the potential to influence the other. For example the introduction of new material may require changes in doctrine, training and organisation. A doctrine for a squad of 9 makes no sense if your vehicle can only transport 5 soldiers. However, in an attempt to identify the broadest range of potential solutions for a particular capability, each component of DOTMLPFI should be examined without initial considerations to its impact on other DOTMLPFI components. This results in a number of potential solutions being identified to realise or improve a particular capability.

Back to the letter 'L'. What about Leadership? Here it goes wrong, I think. Remember, we want to keep it a simple analytical tool!

Initially this component was defined as specific training for leadership. This referred to the development of leaders, primarily through further education. The problem with this definition is that it makes an artificial distinction between the component Training and Leadership training, without really explaining the 'what' or the 'why'. It also enforces the creep towards 'Leadership development', omitting the core of 'leadership'.

The L stands for 'Leadership'. Period. Drop the training or development because that's part of the (Education and) Training component. Hands off!

'Leadership' tries to answer the question on how (military) leaders have to use the considered capability. Imagine developing a Special Forces Capability. You develop and connect all the components, but forget to define how your leaders - who are not part of this capability - should use this. If they use it just as regular infantry -

who shouldn't they as nobody told them differently? -, do you have accomplished your mission? I don't think so. You just created some well-trained soldiers. Nothing more. Remember, forget one component and you have nothing.

From a different perspective you may create a new capability by applying an existing capability in an innovative way without changing the other components too much. Leaders may really make a difference.

Could you achieve this with just 'leadership development'? No way. Of course we have to develop leaders, but that is part of the Training component of the capability called 'defence'.

Together with interoperability, the leadership component is externally focused. It considers the capability as a package and looks how the external environment should use it. Interoperability - not of the internal components because that what DOTMLPFI is all about, but with other capabilities - looks how the capability can plug into the outer world and interact with other capabilities.

Developing new capabilities is a matter of considering all components equally important. Not just 1, like we did before. Changing one component and considering the effects on the others is an interesting, creative activity that leads to surprising combinations. It frees the mind of the chains of the services and functions. Combinations never thought off surface. And that is the real power of this approach. Capability development is a continuous search for the optimal combination in a changing world. It is a work of trial and error. More errors than successes, but that is how it goes with creativity.

Once a possible winning combination is found, the further development still needs to be checked with the DOTMLPFI framework, but that is another story. Food for a follow-on article?