



The Weapons Operating Centre responds to resourcing challenges



Background

The Weapons Operating Centre (WOC) is part of the Ministry of Defence's Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S) organisation, with responsibility for providing weapons capabilities to the UK Armed Forces. DE&S as a whole has a £14 billion annual budget to buy and support equipment and services, and employs approximately 16,500 people.

The Challenge

In the context of the Strategic Defence and Security Review the need to prioritise activities and focus resources on key areas has never been greater. The WOC Management Board recognised the need to do things differently.

“Until we can understand what our priorities are and allocate our skills and resources in an agile way to deliver these priorities, how can we see ourselves as a professional project delivery organisation?” Laurence Bryant, Director Weapons.

An agile process and tool was required that would enable the WOC to compare activities and build a balanced portfolio; managing business risks, meeting the diverse and changing needs of the Front Line Commands and Heads of Capability, whilst continuing to address the requirements of the Defence Materiel Strategy.

The Response

The Director Weapons engaged Catalyze to design and help embed a methodology and toolset for prioritising the WOC's diverse portfolio of activities.

Catalyze worked closely with the Team Leads and Board to define the requirements for an Activity Prioritisation (AP) process. The process provides a framework for reviewing and

We have helped the Weapons OC:

- Prioritise their activities
- Reassign resources to de-risk their portfolio
- Respond to the Defence Materiel Strategy

“For the first time in my 18 months as Director Weapons I can now see what activities my teams are delivering, the benefit of those activities to Defence and the investment in terms of manpower to deliver. We can now build on this to develop a real ‘industry standard’ resource planning system.”

Laurence Bryant,
Director Weapons,
DE&S Weapons OC

“This systematic approach is providing a common and objective language to discuss and agree priorities with our diverse range of customers and stakeholders.”

Elizabeth Wombwell,
Chief of Staff,
DE&S Weapons OC

agreeing the relative benefits delivered by each activity. Coupled with resource plans for each activity, the outputs and analysis inform the WOC’s priorities, and enable the move to demand led resourcing. The newly formed Weapons Resource Board (WRB) now have the information and visibility to make strategic resourcing decisions, high level ‘course corrections’ and to confidently communicate priorities to the customer.

The AP process is underpinned by a ‘one-page’ activity data template which was piloted and tested with a subset of teams before being rolled out throughout the WOC. The template supports the collection of consistent data about each activity including high-level resource plans. Each Team Lead manages their activity templates with the aid of an easy to use Microsoft Excel based Activity Collection Tool. The data collection approach is designed to avoid creating a significant ongoing overhead for the Teams.

The prioritisation process and toolset are based on the principles of Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA), an accredited approach widely used across industry and government. The WOC Portfolio Management Office (PO) use a customised tool to analyse the portfolio in advance of each scheduled WRB meeting and produce high level management information.

The PO can model the impacts of high level resourcing decisions in real-time. New requests are assessed and the required trade-offs are determined. With this evidence at their finger tips the WRB can make strategic resourcing decisions and balance WOC priorities whilst meeting the competing resourcing demands. The process provides the mechanism for quickly and clearly communicating decisions back to the teams and facilitating an evidence-based dialogue with customers.

The process roll-out included a series of workshops, facilitated by Catalyze, where the baseline portfolio was agreed. The WOC PO supported all stages of the roll-out, becoming self-sufficient process owners.

Enabling Effective Decisions

The Weapons Operating Centre have successfully implemented and embedded a Strategic Prioritisation process. The process is enabling the Weapons Resource Board to:

- Meet the resource requirements of the Defence Materiel Strategy
- Objectively and continuously compare across different domains
- Strike the right balance between diverse customer demands and WOC objectives
- Facilitate evidence-based dialogue with customers about strategic priorities
- Rebalance resources to de-risk the portfolio
- Ensure the highest priority activities are fully resourced by slowing down or pausing lower priority activities
- Deliver medium and long term objectives, not just short term priorities.

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At Catalyze we help organisations create and execute decision-making processes which focus on the best possible outcome; engaging people, breaking down barriers, creating understanding of different perspectives, and making best use of resources.

Catalyze was founded in 2001 in conjunction with the London School of Economics and Political Science, applying techniques built on robust and validated decision theory. We support global clients from offices in the UK, USA and New Zealand.