The Chief of Staff, Air Force (CSAF) concluded that the Air Force needed a mechanism to strengthen its corporate planning capabilities. The corporate planning function had to provide strong linkages to important Department of Defense (DoD) resource allocation and management processes, in addition to complementing and enhancing existing Air Force planning and programming processes. In 1997, a formal organization was established—the Air Force Strategic Planning Directorate (AF/XP)—with the purpose of linking Air Force planning and programming.

AF/XPX determined that the first step in improving corporate planning capabilities was to develop a common planning framework. A single planning framework could enable Air Force planners to identify corporate requirements; ensure their eventual resourcing; and justify Air Force near-, middle-, and long-term requirements to the external community—the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), the Joint Staff (JS), and the other services.

CURRENT AIR FORCE PLANNING

The current Air Force planning mechanism is highly decentralized. Each Major Command (MAJCOM) uses a different planning framework. Although each of these is built upon a strategy-to-tasks (STT) concept, no single common planning framework exists within the Air Force. These individual frameworks are based upon missions for which the MAJCOMs provide Air Force capabilities.
Many of the MAJCOM planning frameworks are redundant, and they operate at varying levels of aggregation. Additionally, the individual frameworks focus primarily upon program planning, with an emphasis on modernization, often ignoring critical institutional functions. The MAJCOMs’ frameworks mediate requirements and resourcing strategies within their assigned resourcing stovepipes, which are aligned primarily along core competencies. This stovepiped approach hinders the development of corporate Air Force options and affects total Air Force resourcing because there is no horizontal integration. Finally, the current process fails to link to the external environment, such as OSD, JS, and the other services because it is developed from an institutional rather than a joint perspective.

**Creating a Common Planning Framework**

Developing a common planning framework that could extend across the Air Force, allow the corporate Air Force to develop and adjudicate requirements and resourcing options, and link to the external environment required the creation of design criteria. The client asked that the framework incorporate the Air Force vision and capture nonoperational demands, and that the STT methodology provide the foundation for the framework. A working group composed of representatives from each of the MAJCOMs and the functional organizations worked with RAND to generate seven design criteria. According to the criteria, a common planning framework should

1. Display the elements that contribute to attaining a military capability
2. Be based on a hierarchy that links programs to national goals
3. Help identify intertemporal issues
4. Provide a basis for identifying and evaluating ways of attaining capabilities
5. Assist Air Force analysis and decisionmaking
6. Accommodate all data required for Air Force planning and programming\(^1\)

7. Be understood by and be persuasive to all participants in the planning and programming processes, including the OSD, JS, unified commands, other services, and Congress.

**The Planning Framework**

The proposed common planning framework (Figure S.1) consists of eight planning areas (two service planning areas and six operational planning areas). The planning areas encompass demands that originate both inside and outside the Air Force. They are linked to the Air Force vision and the core competencies, the basic building blocks of the common planning framework. The shaded areas in the figure represent the two critical demands that the Air Force must meet: Air Force service functions and the missions of the unified commanders.

The proposed planning areas were derived primarily from Global Engagement: A Vision for the 21st Century Air Force (Department of the Air Force, 1997) and are designed to realize the vision of the Secretary of the Air Force (SAF) and the CSAF. This vision includes the core competencies, as well as other functions that extend across the Air Force. “Foster high-quality people” and “Evolve through innovation” are the two service planning areas that underlie and are intertwined with Air Force efforts in all operational planning areas.

The operational planning areas are related to the requirements of unified commanders and reflect the perspective that the Air Force is uniquely able to provide global reach and global power. The six operational planning areas are “Dominate air and space operations,”

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\(^1\)These data proceed from national military strategy, program guidance, Commander-in-Chief (CINC) requirements, acquisition programs, and PPBS (budgeting) inputs and outputs. In addition, there are unstructured data requests that concern revised fiscal guidance, modernization initiatives, changes in acquisition programs, and consideration of cost alternatives.
"Attack anywhere on the globe," "Provide global mobility," "Achieve global awareness and control of forces," "Provide combat support," and "Shape international behavior."

**IMPLEMENTATION**

Implementation is an integral part of the development and acceptance of the Air Force common planning framework. AF/XPX wanted the framework to be iteratively implemented over several planning periods. XPX leadership determined that the initial framework should be used in the development of the Air Force Long-Range Plan (LRP), which it was responsible for writing.

Prior to writing the LRP, XPX leadership shared the framework with its Board of Directors (BoD), which oversees and provides guidance to XPX on Air Force long-range planning issues. During the June 21, 1997, BoD meeting, the membership conceded the importance of
using a common framework for planning and resourcing both operational and Title 10 responsibilities, but concluded that the proposed planning areas were confusing. The BoD determined that all Air Force planning and programming should be based on Air Force core competencies. This determination recreated the very problem that the common planning framework was attempting to solve: the predominance of the stovepipes that prohibited the Air Force leadership from identifying critical cross-cutting planning and resourcing issues. The Air Force leadership responded by creating thrust areas—issues that affect several core competencies for both planning and resourcing.

By early October 1997, the BoD was arguing that the thrust areas were not of sufficient depth to provide the necessary horizontal integration and should be abandoned. The Air Force leadership decided to terminate thrust areas at the January 20, 1999, Board of Directors meeting. The leadership has now decided to strengthen other existing processes, such as the programming panels and the BoD, to ensure that cross-cutting issues are raised and that the horizontal integration across MAJCOMs takes place. To attain a common integrating mechanism, the MAJCOMs have developed individual task lists that will link to the core competencies.

Although the Air Force chose not to implement the proposed common planning framework, the authors decided to document the effort nonetheless. The research raised some interesting issues and perspectives on planning, and we thought that this report would contribute to the literature and knowledge of defense planning and programming.