

# Rush hour on the freeway: Quick wins and integrated capability

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*First, be patient. It is rarely the quick fix that goes the farthest. So don't get tempted by political cycles and the lure of electoral wins. Development is an endurance exercise with incremental improvements. When done well, they are more likely to stay, benefiting today's and tomorrow's generation (Indrawati, 2014).*

'Quick wins'—once within the domain of politicians—have now become the catch cry of staff officers and are increasingly encouraged by decision makers. Quick wins are seen, and presented, as low-cost and easy to implement.

The timeframe for complex major Defence capability projects is infamously long. And Australian Defence Force (ADF) posting cycles provide a relatively short window of opportunity (two–three years) to deliver tangible outputs. This, combined with the political demand to demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness in Defence procurement means that the occasional 'quick win' can look attractive from almost every perspective. There's a risk, however, that staff officers who develop and propose quick-win solutions lack vision of the wider cost involved in these types of proposals; while a quick win can solve a particular problem, it's also likely to incur second and third-order operational, and potentially strategic, impact.

So how can Air Force and other parts of Defence ensure that they're delivering the capability required, and doing so with agility, while not creating unforeseen problems? From an air power perspective, how can innovation and drive deliver the air power that is required, while not inadvertently working against integration as part of the integrated force?

The answer comes from understanding the different stages in implementing change, and how to move through these stages while keeping an eye on the higher-level strategic intent.

Early in implementing change, commanders must use freedom and flexibility to move within the bounds of the intent, in order to understand how to be best positioned to achieve the desired outcome. The Defence Strategic Review describes this course of action as achieving an enhanced force in being.

This situation is like vehicles driving during rush hour on the freeway. At the start of the freeway, traffic is less congested and vehicles have more freedom to move, speed up, achieve gains and generally make their way forward in any manner they choose. However, as vehicles get closer to the end of the freeway, they begin to merge and integrate, moving from seven lanes to four then down to one. The traffic builds, and they can no longer travel as fast or freely as they could when they started out. All vehicles move with the traffic flow; however, some vehicles speed up and others need to slow down. Advantage comes with risk, not only to the vehicle but also to others; this requires clear concise communication about intentions, as each action affects the advance of every other vehicle.

Plan JERICH0's projects (Kitchener, 2021) illustrate how to effectively leverage freedom and opportunity to gain momentum similar to those vehicles at the start of the freeway. On the other hand, air domain capability and improvement projects are starting to converge similar to the vehicles nearing the end of the freeway. This situation brings us to the second stage of the change process. The broad scope and freedom to experiment and move at the desired pace reduces as the capability life cycle capitalises on opportunities to integrate.

The second stage of the change process requires conscious decisions about which projects need to increase in pace and which need to reduce, this is what the Defence strategic review is forcing. In this situation, quick wins will no longer be delivering isolated effects on the objective force, but will have second and third order effects that may damage the outcomes of a more-slowly progressing project or strategic outcome.

Arguably, quick wins will no longer be as rapid or as numerous. The increasing requirement to integrate is going to rely on significant and frequent concise communication of intentions. This may result in letting a previous win or opportunity sit or even accepting that it is no longer viable because of integration. This is the challenge of the ADF when enacting the Defence Strategic review recommendations.

As all projects start to move with the same speed, integration needs to occur in a coordinated and effective manner. Project managers play a direct role in the integration and impact risks assessment of decisions.

To use a medical metaphor, during this early integration phase, Defence needs to see that quick wins is akin to the application of a 'Band-Aid' to quickly stop bleeding. However, sooner or later, Defence has to look underneath to see what's healed, what's close to healing, and what's become infected and needs surgery. The project manager is like the General Practitioner (GP) in many cases: while things are working well, a routine check-up is all that's needed, and repeated visits are really only necessary if something appears wrong. The project manager provides advice on how to avoid risks. And when something goes wrong, the project manager should consolidate a team of specialists, through the Air and Space Power centres Strategic Appreciation and Options capability, and provide analysis and options on how to comprehensively rectify the problem without negatively affecting other projects in the capability life cycle domains. Similarly, GPs refer patients to a specialist who, with a team of other specialists, will provide a total healthcare solution. The goal is to conduct the surgery and repair the damage whilst trying not to affect the rest of the patient negatively. This does not mean that fixing other problems, such as providing consolidated solutions to other quick wins, shouldn't be done—just the opposite, as it would be irresponsible not to use the efficiency of a project team to provide a multi-domain integrated solution that resolves several problems.

In order to ensure the momentum and rate of change is stabilised, additional projects and initiatives will need to be included to transition concepts into reality. However, such move increases the complexity of maintenance, which in turn negatively affects the rate of change. Or, using the freeway analogy, traveling along the road has imposed and unpredictable influences, such as road rules, speed limits, traffic controls, other drivers with their own goals and diversions. These measures are put in place for safety and to ensure the smooth integration of traffic. They ensure that vehicles conform to the same initial generic paths and ultimately the specific path to integrate (merge) at certain points. These are commonly-known traffic controls; however, they are not always followed, and when they aren't, the journey can end in disaster as the worst case, or at least with a financial loss when inevitably caught by the authorities.

The outcomes of the defence strategic review are intended to construct an integrated capability life cycle and establishing a more joint and integrated ADF. The Vice Chief of the Defence Force is directing force design centrally including workforce and Headquarters Joint Operations Command is working to integrate the three services into an effective joint warfighting capability. Head Air Capability activities and the integration of air domain

management within the capability life cycle is crucial in supporting and delivering capability in each of these arenas. Force design and domain capability managers need to ensure that the enhanced force in being does not seek quick wins in saving, or new exquisite capability solutions by offsetting critical mission integration requirements or by sacrificing capabilities that will be crucial for an integrated force without a full appreciation of the risks involved.

The challenge of integration is not at the strategic level. Instead, the challenge is for each of the projects to realise their opportunities for integration with other projects, communicate their intentions, and commence the merge in a safe and controlled manner whilst not adversely affecting any of the other projects. In some cases, this will mean that what looks like a quick win is actually diametrically opposed to the direction needed to achieve integration. Whilst it could be argued that the work undertaken to deliver the quick win was in vain, the work undertaken for that quick win provides a future opportunity for the integrated system to explore, at a mutually agreeable pace, if properly assessed and managed.

Defence capabilities and outcomes need integration and focus to be successful—arguable they also require momentum. In a globalised environment, the quick win or kick-starter fails more often than not because they miss apply strategic considerations. The purpose of this discussion is not to say don't use quick wins, but to highlight the dangers of quick wins and to encourage staff officers and commanders to consider the impacts outside of their scope of influence that a quick win can incur and to identify the risks they could inadvertently generate in future or integrated capability requirements.

## References

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