

Editors Note: This is the first of a three-part series by the MAGTF Staff Training Program (MSTP) on the subject of information management (IM). This first article focuses on the Information Management Officer's (IMO) role within a unit's IM program. The second article examines trends observed in IM and discusses tools available to assist MAGTF's meeting the challenges presented by "information overload." The final article will focus on battle rhythm.

Although the technological capability to produce and disseminate information has greatly improved, today's MAGTF commander's basic information requirements remain similar to those of his predecessors. Every commander needs quality information to make sound and timely decisions. Therefore, getting the "right" information, to the "right" people, at the "right" time, is the fundamental goal of information management (IM).

The Role of Information Management

Effective IM begins by clearly defining the role of the command's information management officer (IMO), a relatively new title for a special staff officer that performs many of the functions traditionally under the cognizance of the chief of staff. The proliferation of technology to share information has created the requirement for a dedicated special staff officer specializing in information management. The IMO serves to coordinate processes between staff sections ensuring accurate and focused information is delivered in a timely manner. The IMO uses commander's critical information requirements, report matrices, request for information procedures, along with collaborative planning tools (such as internet/intranet web sites, web applications, exchange folders, and tactical data systems) to ensure information is translated into focused knowledge that facilitates decisionmaking.

Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 6, *Command and Control*, provides a framework for planning and executing Marine Corps IM. MCDP 6 states that information serves two primary purposes: 1) to help create situational awareness as the basis for decisions, and 2) to direct and coordinate actions in the execution of decisions. With the signing of Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-40.2, *Information Management*, in January 2002, the Marine Corps now has its first doctrinal publication that addresses IM.

Essentially two basic questions must be answered to effectively conduct IM. The first is, "What information does the organization need?" and the second is, "What technology is used to manage this information?" Unfortunately, both in the corporate world and in the military, the tendency is to focus on the second question while ignoring the first question altogether. Technological solutions are often developed and fielded without a clear understanding of the actual "problem" they are supposed to solve.

A recent survey by the firm Ernst and Young of over 400 U.S. and European firms concerning perspectives on knowledge in the organization found—not surprisingly—that 87 percent saw knowledge as critical to their ability to compete. What was surprising was that 44 percent of these organizations felt they were poor or very poor at managing information. The top three reasons stated for this frank assessment were the failure of top leadership to emphasize the importance of information in the organization, a lack of understanding of the organization's information management strategy and the organization's structure creating an institutional bias against freely sharing information. Military organizations are plagued by many of these same problems.

Implementing Effective Procedures

Observations by the MAGTF Staff Training Program (MSTP) indicate that most Marine Corps commanders face challenges in implementing effective IM procedures. Implementing effective IM procedures is not a simple task. This task requires a high-level of command support. It requires a commander and an IMO who understand the unit's information requirements and the capabilities and

limitation of the tools available to implement those procedures. The commander's support to the IMO is critical as he must interact with subordinate commanders and staff officers throughout the command and across all the warfighting functions (command and control, maneuver, fires, intelligence, logistics, and force protection). Selecting the right officer as the IMO and assigning him where he has ready access to the commander or chief of staff is critical to a unit's IM success.

There are table of organization (T/O) billets for IMOs at the Marine Corps component, Marine expeditionary force (MEF), and major subordinate command (MSC) headquarters. The billets identify officers of appropriate rank (majors at Marine Corps component/MEF, captains at MSCs) but otherwise does not specify any requisite skill sets or qualifications. How are officers trained for this assignment? No formal policy currently exists for the training of these officers.

Training and Assignment of IMOs

There are some training options available that can enhance the Marine Corps' ability to operate in an information-rich environment. The most promising option would assign officers who have completed the Special Education Program (SEP) to fill IMO billets at the Marine Corps component, MEF, and MSC headquarters as utilization (payback) tours. The SEP program allows eligible captains and majors to attend the Naval Postgraduate School to earn Masters of Science degrees in various disciplines, among them information technology management (ITM) and computer science (CS). The Marine Corps sends officers to SEP to fill billets that have a valid and verified need for officers with graduate level degrees. Currently, 100% of the ITM and CS billets are in the supporting establishment, with a heavy concentration at HQMC, Quantico and Marine Corps Tactical Systems Support Activity. Changing this practice will provide officers with this advanced training to commanders of the operating forces.

Ideally, two SEP officers would be assigned at each Marine Corps component/MEF/MSC headquarters. The IMO should be an officer with a degree in ITM. Their assignment should be commensurate with their functional expertise; for example, a pilot for the Marine aircraft wing, a logistician for the force service support group, a ground combat officer for the division. The second officer, with either an ITM or CS degree, should be a communications officer (0602) assigned to the G-6 (communications and information systems).

This solution, along with the assignment of graduates of the newly-formed Expeditionary Warfare School and staff noncommissioned officers (SNCOs) on degree-completion program utilization tours, could provide the Marine Corps component/MEF/MSCs with Marines possessing the balanced operational and technical skill sets necessary to successfully implement IM. In time there could be keen competition by officers and SNCOs for these operationally-oriented utilization tours.

The Location of the Information Management Officer within the Staff

Another important issue is the placement of the IMO billet within the staff organization. By the T/O, the billet resides in the G-3 (operations and training). There are several reasons why the MSTP recommends that-the IMO be co-located within the command group, under the cognizance of the chief of staff:

- **Interaction with the Staff.** The IMO must be viewed as an honest broker among all the staff sections. If the IMO is part of the G-3, it could create the perception that he is more focused on the interests of the operations section instead of the entire MAGTF's IM needs.
- **Function of the IMO.** Once placed in the G-3, the IMO is typically positioned within current operations and assigned roles such as the unit "track manager." Rather than limit the IMO to only fighting the close battle, he should focus on the processes and information flows across all MEF functions and throughout the entire planning and execution continuum.

Conclusion

This article has focused on the role of the IMO and how this critical staff position factors into the command's organizational structure as a special staff officer under the chief of staff. Although a commander's basic information requirements have essentially remained the same through time, the proliferation of technology and the rapid dissemination of information have created an overwhelming problem that cannot be solved by technology alone. The IMO must understand the demands and procedures of their organizations in addition to the capabilities of the technological tools. Officers who possess the requisite skills to balance technological and managerial expertise already exist and the number of qualified officer could easily be increased. The SEP and the Expeditionary Warfare School educates officers who are capable of filling the billets in the operating forces, but the effective assignment and use of the IMO is ultimately up to the commander.