

Collaboration

Challenging Assumptions in the Marine Corps
Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance
Enterprise

Cohort 6: Ka-Bar Leader Development Program

Collaboration can improve the quality of analysis, but without a clear definition, goal, or intent, can result in wasted time, employee frustration, and unpredictable effects on products. Commonly understood definitions with focused and coordinated efforts; however, can deliver higher quality results than stove-piped efforts. It is also critical to identify “why” and “when” collaboration is helpful before pursuing the effort. Once the “why” and “when” are established, the “how” to improve the results using collaboration become clearer.

Several professional disciplines, such as surgical teams, provide clear evidence of how collaboration can provide outcomes are greater than the sum of their parts. The key factors are interdependence and capable employees, often with differing specialties, working together on a common problem. The intelligence community, correctly, encourages collaboration within its ranks to achieve improved results; in fact, collaboration is required through existing policies.

Two goals of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) are, “Integrate intelligence analysis and collection” and “Drive responsible and secure information-sharing.” Integrating intelligence analysis does not necessarily require collaborative efforts, but “responsible and secure information-sharing” is typically the extent of collaborative work we have observed.¹ Furthermore, the ODNI has made collaboration an enterprise goal – Intelligence Community Directives (ICD) 656 and 651 describe collaboration as a key competency for both IC employees and senior officers.

ICD 656 states: “IC senior officers are expected to responsibly and proactively provide, discover, and request information and knowledge to achieve results, and are expected to build effective networks and alliances with key peers and stakeholders across the IC, and with other US Government (USG), state, local, tribal and foreign officials, as appropriate. They should actively engage these peers and stakeholders, involve them in key decisions, and effectively leverage networks and alliances to achieve significant results. In addition, senior officers are expected to create an environment that promotes employee engagement, collaboration, integration, responsible information and knowledge sharing, and the candid, open exchange of diverse points of view. This includes ensuring compliance with EO 13526 regarding the proper handling of classified information.”²

ICD 651 states: “IC employees are expected to responsibly and proactively provide, discover, and request information and knowledge to achieve results, and in that regard are expected to recognize, value, build and leverage diverse collaborative networks of coworkers, peers, customers, stakeholders, and teams, within an organization and/or across the IC. In addition, IC supervisors are expected to create an environment that promotes engagement, collaboration, integration, and the responsible sharing of information and knowledge.”³

¹ Office of the Director of National Intelligence. Mission, Vision & Goals. <http://www.dni.gov/index.php/about/mission> (accessed on January 13, 2013).

² ICD 656, “Performance Management System Requirements for Intelligence Community Senior Civilian Officers,” 28 April 2008, and amended, 4 April 2012

³ ICD 651, “Performance Management System Requirements for the Intelligence Community Civilian Workforce,” 28 November 2007, and amended, 4 April 2012.

Both ICDs are clear in that collaboration should be pursued, but beyond collaborating to share information and “achieve significant results,” the policies provide little clarification or a desired end result of the action.

It seems that the argument for collaborative analytic efforts is: if analysts work together, share ideas and data, they will produce better intelligence because: 1) more data and reporting leads to better assessments, 2) collaborative intelligence can have more depth or scope, and 3) collaborative intelligence leads to consensus. While these assumptions appear valid, in actuality unfocused collaborative efforts pose significant risks; risks that are increased without refined guidance. One such risk, the restriction of innovative and analytic thinking, is outlined by Mark Lowenthal.

"Another concept that has been promoted—perhaps beyond all utility—is collaboration, a cousin of the information sharing fixation. Analysts need to work together, share their ideas, and, the argument holds, this will result in better analysis. But no sound intellectual basis for this view exists other than that sharing will again make it less likely to “miss something.” In fact, strong reason leads to the belief that the opposite may be true: that innovative, analytic thinking is best done by individuals, not by groups, and that groups actually hamper and water down original thinking.”⁴

A second risk of unfocused collaboration is the potential for groups to “spin their wheels” or develop group think. J. Richard Hackman outlines the risks:

“Teams have great potential for solving hard problems in challenging contexts. They obviously bring more knowledge, skill, and experience to the work than any single individual could. They provide flexibility in how members are deployed. They offer members nonstop opportunities for real-time learning. And they have at least the potential of integrating members’ diverse contributions into a creative product that is just what is needed. Yet, as an extensive body of research has documented, teams also can go badly wrong, spinning their wheels and not even finishing their work or, perhaps, falling into a syndrome known as “groupthink,” which results in a true fiasco. A team is akin to an audio amplifier: whatever comes in, be it Mozart or ear-grating static, comes out louder.”⁵

A third risk of collaboration is the reduction of the group’s combined Intelligence Quotient (IQ). There is likely a general collective intelligence factor in groups; that is, a single factor for groups that functions similarly to an individual’s IQ. Research suggests that collective intelligence “is not strongly correlated with the average or maximum individual intelligence of group members but is correlated with the

⁴ Mark M. Lowenthal (2013): A Disputation on Intelligence Reform and Analysis: My 18 Theses, International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence, 26:1, 31-37

⁵ Hackman, J. Richard. 2011. *Collaborative Intelligence : Using Teams to Solve Hard Problems*. n.p.: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2011. *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*, EBSCOhost (accessed January 3, 2013).

average social sensitivity of group members, the equality in distribution of conversational turn-taking, and the proportion of females in the group.”⁶

These risks, while of concern, can be managed if appropriate actions are taken. The following recommendations are divided into actions focused on the Marine Corps Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance Enterprise (MCISRE), Marine Corps intelligence supervisors, and Marine Corps intelligence analysts.

FOR THE ENTERPRISE:

1. MCISRE guiding documents that imply or task collaboration should include a description of the expected action and outcome of collaborative efforts. For example, if document required MCIA to increase collaborative intelligence analysis, it should include something similar to, “The goal of increasing collaborative intelligence analysis at the Service Intelligence Center is to increase the depth of analysis available to the customer.”

- By increasing the regularity of analytic outreach, MCIA will be better positioned to answer intelligence questions with greater depth and in less time. This requirement does not necessitate collaborative production, but it does require regular and rich communication at the analyst level about baseline/historical knowledge, new developments, and information sources.
- An increase in analytic collaboration will require valuable resources and likely decrease the amount of intelligence production. MCIA should expect to gain more depth to their analysis and production that takes advantage of a larger knowledge base.
- The anticipated results of collaborative efforts should be explicitly detailed, and we should design our protocols to meet that end-state.

2. Establish baseline information locations that allow MCIA and all IC members to begin engagement, collaboration, and coordination from a common baseline of knowledge. Ensure all members of the IC understand what organization, and who at those organizations have specialized information or focus on the potential collaborative topic.

3. Identify current automated efforts to enhance collaboration among MCIA employees, I-Department, the Fleet Marine Force, and other IC elements/Service Production Centers, and explore additional automated systems efforts to further the collaboration effort.

⁶ Woolley, Anita Williams, Christopher F. Chabris, Alex Pentland, Nada Hashmi, and Thomas W. Malone. 2010. "Evidence for a Collective Intelligence Factor in the Performance of Human Groups." *Science* 330, no. 6004: 686-688. *Education Research Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed January 3, 2013).

4. Conduct cross-organizational training, and enable MCISRE members to conduct short interchanges with analysts across various IC elements and among Service Intel Production Centers to gain insights into their respective areas of expertise.

- This recommendation will enhance the opportunities for analyst interchange and network building above and beyond the usual IC Joint Duty rotation program. We recommend IC interchange with analysts across various IC elements and also among Service Intel Production Centers.
- Recommend a robust analyst “swap” program between the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI), National Ground Intelligence Center (NGIC) and National Air and Space Intelligence Center (NASIC) to enable the cross-flow of MCISRE personnel with those of the other Service Intel Production Centers. Additionally, we encourage the interchange of analysts between MCISRE and other IC elements—especially DIA, NSA, NGA, and NRO. Also consider FBI, State, and DEA for rotational possibilities.
 - While the IC Civilian Joint Duty Program recommends joint tours of 1-3 years, we recommend shorter exchange tours from 3-6 months in length. This will enable those network bonds to be formed, but also bring the MCISRE member back to the organization in a reasonable amount of time and allow additional analysts to pursue a rotational assignment.
 - On the uniformed military side, we could pursue a similar exchange program with 3-6 month rotations between IC elements, as part of a normal 3-year assignment, enhancing inter-service networking, and providing MCISRE analysts those critical collaboration opportunities.
 - Although there may be some temporary duty costs to this program, a one-to-one analyst swap would help alleviate some of those costs and the relative proximity and geographic area of the Washington DC Beltway would enhance the ability of analysts to commute to another IC element location.
 - Recommend a 1-2 person team from MCIA Human Resources be the overall POCs for a collaboration effort laydown, with individual POCs from MCIA and I-Department as well as Fleet elements.
 - This team would scope out rotation and exchange opportunities across the Enterprise as well as the IC, advertise those opportunities, and provide the HR services (MOAs, T&A support, etc.) for deploying across the IC and reintegration into the MCISRE. The team would also maintain a roster of available backfills from the Enterprise to fill out those 3-6 month rotational assignments.

5. Conduct iterative surveys to identify additional barriers to collaboration, as well as measure progress of other, previously implemented measures.

- For example, are there personal issues or are there personnel issues? Is there a systematic collaboration effort across the Enterprise, or is it left up to each individual analyst to form the networks and teams for effective collaboration?

FOR MCISRE SUPERVISORS:

6. Design common MCISR-E rewards systems to encourage collaboration. Encourage critical thought by identifying assumptions, checking assumptions, and providing alternative perspectives

- DCIPS Performance Objective that provides expectations of collaborative efforts separate from production efforts. This objective must provide an expectation of effort, time, and resources that the reviewer expects. It should provide this expectation in comparison to other efforts (production, training, administration). Evaluation would consider the breadth, depth, and results of analytic collaboration.
- Critical thinking requires a significant effort to identify and check assumptions. Intelligence analysts typically try to do this independently from the confines of their cubicle. Research shows that critical thinking is best “developed in small groups where peers serve as critical mirrors shedding light on assumptions that have never been checked and introducing new perspectives that have not been previously considered.”⁷ Not only will collaborative approaches to assumption checks improve intelligence analysis, it will make analysts better thinkers.

FOR MCISRE ANALYSTS:

7. Focus collaborative efforts on two of the four areas to benefit intelligence analysis: subject knowledge (primarily historical) and enabling critical thought. With this in mind, collaborative initiatives should aggregate a subject's content grammar: “No matter what critical thinking skills and dispositions one might have, wide and deep knowledge of a discipline is essential for critical thought in that domain.”⁸
8. How does the MCISRE help an analyst develop the required subject matter knowledge to think critically about a new analytic account? Currently our efforts are inadequate, but this is the perfect place for collaborative goals. We should provide a tool that helps analysts quickly increase their subject matter knowledge to benefit their critical

⁷ Brookfield, Stephen D. (2011-10-18). Teaching for Critical Thinking: Tools and Techniques to Help Students Question Their Assumptions (Kindle Locations 1180-1182). Wiley Publishing. Kindle Edition.

⁸ Mason, Mark. Critical Thinking and Learning. Hoboken, NJ, USA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. p 3.

<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/apus/Doc?id=10300958&pgg=15> Copyright 2009. Wiley-Blackwell. All rights reserved.

thinking: MCISR-E will collaborate with coalition, academic, and local sources of information to aggregate and disseminate content required for subject matter knowledge by geographic and functional areas. This collaborative effort will be to ensure there is a depth of accessible and relevant information to help an analyst learn a new problem set before meeting analytic production requirements.

- Aggregating, evaluating, and filtering data sources are essential functions for intelligence analysis. In today's Open Source environment, new and relevant data can be published in the academic, commercial, government, or non-governmental organizations without ever being exposed to the intelligence community. More critical than an individual piece of data, is the exposure to and evaluation of sources. Making an NGO report available on a single or iterative basis is only part of the requirement. It takes collaborative efforts to determine the reliability and access of those data sources. Collaborative efforts to share information are essential, but sharing, evaluating, and filtering data sources are likely more critical than sharing specific information.

Collaboration, without clear guidance and common goals, can result in counter-productive results. However, we believe if focused attention and refined guidance will ensure collaboration in MCISR-E will expand beyond basic information sharing.
