



Delivering the Power of Information



The late Edward R. Murrow once said that *television is only lights and wires in a box unless we enable the technology with value-added information*. In the world of cyberspace, our culture must move beyond form and format to embrace change. Culture change is the only way to enable information collaboration that adds true value to the lights and wires of our systems. It is the basic price of admission to fully use, share, and capitalize on information and make the best decisions in a global environment. We can no longer operate in a traditional military mode where information is locked down to the point it cannot be accessed by those who are authorized and who legitimately need it. We must register databases and metadata so authorized users can find, use, and distribute required data rapidly and effectively.

The theme of this CROSSTALK issue focuses on the technologies that enable information sharing and that are guided by four critical goals of net-centricity: to effectively build, populate, operate, and protect the net. Building the net ensures the latest, most sophisticated equipment and technology to do what is needed in a speed-of-light information world. Populating the net ensures everyone who has information crucial to someone else can make it available quickly. Operating the net means access to existing data, and protecting the net is a continual challenge to make sure we maintain the edge over any adversary who would determine to use cyberspace against the interests of the United States.

All of these elements are crucial to successfully build an information culture that shares knowledge, flattens organizations, eliminates stovepipe mentalities, and empowers a younger generation at all ranks who are becoming the hardest working and most effective information movers. When they all come together, these elements allow more effective operations at the speed demanded in today's global information environment.

Cyberspace is one of the most dynamic and challenging environments for military operations. We must consider it in the same way as the sea, space, air, and terrestrial environments. That means assuring continuous access and finding a competitive edge to ensure we maintain a free and open environment.

The information realm is enabled by technologies we have at our fingertips. Success is often measured by the speed at which we move information and our ability to use technology to share and capitalize on information. That's why we must continue to expand a collaborative culture among people who know best how to use the technology.

In a transformational culture, the military mindset must be about breaking down information stovepipes, and we should no longer hold the belief that information is the protected ground of only one group. Maintaining a controlled-access mentality can be hazardous in a world where the need for instantaneous situational awareness and rapid response may be crucial. Breaking traditions associated with stovepiped and protected information requires us to understand that every member of the team must have access. A participant's value comes from the information supplied rather than the rank held. Every value-added participant must be able to contribute to the success of our missions and objectives. We have worked very hard to operate within the necessary chain of command structure while mining the equally necessary chain of information.

Flattening information activities helps create an environment of fostering easier access and availability as we collaborate and increase decision-making speed. Decision speed and execution is what we strive for in tackling some of the toughest challenges our nation has ever faced. Waiting for perfect information places a commander behind the power curve. In fact, perfect information after the fact is useless. To increase speed, collaborative tools must become the norm. Every team member, from airman to admiral, inputs information that becomes accessible to everyone with access to authorized systems.

It's not easy to break traditional thinking and habits. Sergeants and junior officers were accustomed to clearing information through a chain of command before providing it to the upper echelon. Meeting challenges, however, is why we are in business. That includes challenges within our own systems. This is why we must continue pushing a responsive information environment, rapidly providing our nation's senior leaders with the knowledge they need to make tough decisions. The alternative is lights and wires in a box.

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