



Transformation Cells: An Innovative Way to Institutionalize Collaboration

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June 2009

This article appeared in "Collaboration in the National Security Arena: Myths and Reality - What Science and Experience Can Contribute to its Success" in June 2009. The article is part of a collection that was published by the Topical Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA), Multi-Agency/Multi-Disciplinary White Papers in Support of Counter-Terrorism and Counter-WMD in the Office of Secretary of Defense/DDR&E/RTTO.

Introduction

Instituting a robust culture of collaboration across multiple organizational boundaries is a daunting task requiring far more than merely improving information technology and enabling information sharing systems. While these will help, the challenge runs much deeper. Fundamental cultural, structural, and managerial changes are required that go to the heart of how the military and civilian communities have traditionally conducted their affairs. The government imposes explicit penalties for sharing information too broadly—including the loss of employment—but imposes no comparable penalties for sharing information and insights too narrowly. If analysts, collectors, and operators will be expected to engage in more collaborative behavior, they will need help both in establishing collaborative mechanisms that are most appropriate to their work environment and in interpreting the rules of the road.

Such help must have a human face to be effective. The success or failure of efforts to promote cultural change usually depends on how effectively the transforming vision is articulated to lower level managers and the workforce at large. This is best accomplished by forming a small group of interpreters and facilitators who can function as a "help desk" for managers and officers by providing tailored guidance on how to implement collaborative practices within their work environment in the most effective and efficient manner possible. Such Transformation Cells can provide the human infrastructure needed to interpret the leader's vision (his or her Command Intent) and help officers apply it effectively in their workspace.

Origins of the Concept

In the wake of 9/11 and the faulty analysis on the Iraq WMD programs, the CIA's Directorate of Intelligence launched a major effort to instill more imagination and rigor into the analytic process. A major training program familiarized both analysts and managers with an array of Structured Analytic Techniques that could be used to improve the quality of analysis. As more analysts, and then managers, became exposed to the variety of techniques, it soon became apparent that a human infrastructure was needed to facilitate the use of these techniques. Many of the offices in the Directorate formed small analytic tradecraft cells of three to five analysts to work hand-in-hand with line analysts. Their job was to help the line analyst define his or her problem, decide which techniques were most appropriate for the issue at hand, and facilitate the use of the technique or techniques. Over time, the creation of these support cells proved highly effective, instilling structured analytic techniques into the analyst's daily routine. Analysts now had someone to turn to who understood the analytic process, had developed special expertise on the utility of various analytic techniques, and was sitting nearby ready to assist them as the need arose.

The CIA's use of tradecraft cells is only one example of the use of internal consultants to propagate collaborative work practices across the government.

- The DDNI for Analysis/AT&T established the ODNI's Collaboration Consulting Team (CCT) as a community service to enhance and integrate collaboration efforts across the community. The CCT generates technical and business process solutions tailored to the specific needs of a group, helps people and organizations exchange best practices, and gathers feedback from users and customers to evolve a more effective community collaboration strategy.
- The Analytic Collaboration Exercise course (ACE), supported by DoD, FBI, DHS, and the ODNI, is designed to improve the effectiveness of interagency teams while helping integrate scientific and technical knowledge into their analysis.
- The Global Futures Forum, now sponsored by State/INR, has brought collaboration to the world stage with foreign governments and non-governmental bodies to reconceptualize the profession of intelligence as a globalizing phenomenon. In recent years, it has facilitated collaborative behavior across well-entrenched organizational boundaries involving about a dozen countries.

The increasing number of requests for help and assistance coming to these units indicates the growing enthusiasm for collaboration and pent-up demand for such consulting services. The CCT, for example, started as a small team of two, quickly doubled in size, and was increased to 10 members within 18 months of start up to provide a broader support portfolio and handle a steady volume of requests. A Collaborators' Caucus, hosted by the CCT in June 2007 to share best practices in

collaboration, was quickly oversubscribed, reflecting growing interest in fostering collaboration within the Intelligence Community.

Functions of a Transformation Cell

Organizations establishing Transformation Cells would tailor the structure and functions of the cells to leverage the skills and expertise of its members while also supporting internal mission needs and fostering collaboration with the rest of the Intelligence Community. Each cell would be unique—but would be based on the principle of collaborative work processes. It would encompass one or more of the following support functions:

- *Collaboration.* Cell members can provide advice on which collaboration tools (e.g., Intellipedia, SharePoint, A-Space, blogs, etc.) are most appropriate for a group's business needs, help them design an effective collaborative architecture, and provide timely training. A key element of this support is that officers, and particularly those not comfortable with using new collaborative software, can get immediate assistance virtually "on demand" to help them connect and interact most efficiently to other members of their collaborative network.
- *Structured Analytic Techniques.* Cell members can help analysts and managers define the intelligence question, decide which techniques are most appropriate for the issue or problem, and facilitate the use of the technique. For most analysts, just having someone "look over their shoulder" as they get started is sufficient to overcome the challenge of using a new technique. Cell members can also support the collaborative use of structured techniques by small groups. All structured analytic techniques work better when done in small groups, and such groups often span several organizational boundaries. Having a Transformation Cell member available to assist both in the use of the tool and in creating a small collaborative group or interagency team would bring far more synergy to the process.
- *Advanced Computer Applications.* Cell members can also be used as a resource should help be needed in applying more sophisticated computer applications, such as link analysis or geospatial and other data visualizations tools. As with structured analytic techniques, cell members would work with analysts to understand the problem and then use their specialized skills to derive new insights from the available information. They would work as adjunct team members collaborating on challenging problems.
- *Information Brokers.* Cell members would be responsible for monitoring ongoing activities relevant to the organization's mission and stepping in to quickly pass information to both internal and external customers, tipping and cueing across organizational boundaries to facilitate effective mission activities. As part of these functions, members would solicit and draw out information and insights from colleagues.

- *Networks and Outreach.* In addition to building networks within the IC, the cell could facilitate contacts with specialized experts on a broad range of topics. Often, officers are not sure of their agencies' "rules of engagement" with outside experts and thus refrain from engaging them. A longstanding frustration has been the problem of connecting analysts, collectors, and operators with their counter parts in the scientific and academic community. Each bureaucracy has its own regulations for how such contacts should be made and for many the task quickly becomes "too hard" to perform. Cell members can help mitigate this problem by learning the relevant rules of engagement and then appropriately building networks of "approved" external contacts.

Creating the Right Incentives

The military services, and more recently the ODNI, require joint service for advancement in the ranks. Traditionally, joint service consists of a tour in another agency or time spent in a joint service billet outside one's home agency. Such a system has proven highly effective in exposing officers to other cultures and helping them build networks that can be leveraged upon returning to their home agency or office. A downside is that home agencies lose the services of promising officers while they are on rotation elsewhere and generally seek to limit the number of such rotations.

One approach that would make service in a Transformation Cell attractive would be to give employees "points" for joint service in a Transformation Cell or if they worked on an interagency project sponsored by the Transformation Cell. Each Cell would have a "budget" for outreach and networking functions; that budget would include "service points" as well as fiscal resources. Service in a Transformation Cell would actually offer more opportunities for networking than an assignment with a single agency. Moreover, the home office would benefit directly from assigning an officer to the Transformation Cell because he or she would be building collaborative networks both within and outside the home organization.

Implementation Strategies

The challenge is to establish a sufficient number of Transformation Cells to ensure an adequate and responsive **human** support infrastructure that would be viewed as an essential organizational element. One approach that would jumpstart this process would be for the senior leaders to allocate a small number of billets to each of their subsidiary organizations on the condition that each organization match their contribution with the same number of billets. For example, the ODNI would provide four or more billets to each of the 16 IC agencies to use in establishing Transformation Cells with the stipulation that each agency must identify an equal number of internal billets to help populate the cells. Each agency could decide how

to allocate the billets most efficiently within their organization, for example, by creating a fairly large centralized “help desk” unit or by forming small teams within each major organizational unit. Cells should be linked together in a network, allowing cells to collaborate with and leverage the expertise of counterpart groups across the Intelligence Community.

Conclusion

Transformation Cells can serve as engines of change, empowering the workforce to instill collaborative practices into its daily routines. Managers can use the cells to better connect analysts, collectors, and operators with state-of-the-art collaborative tools and techniques. The cells can also help improve the rigor and quality of analysis as well as assist officers in reaching out to experts outside their offices. In building such a human infrastructure, senior management must also establish appropriate incentives to join a Transformation Cell and ensure that working in a cell will enhance careers.