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Since there are a number of military operations running in parallel and a large number of bases around the world; accurate and timely information is required to inform, logistics 'situational understanding

Information Architecture: the business value

How can the concept of Information Architecture (IA) bring value to a supply chain? Here, Jason Hill, Associate Partner with specialist consultancy Glue Reply, tells MOD DCB how IA can help optimise an organisation's productivity.

It is often said that the information managers have readily available is not what they need and the information they need is not readily available.

However, by implementing Information Architecture (IA) not only can the above problems be eradicated; by having improved information, more value can also be realised. IA is concerned with making the information an organisation needs available when necessary. It provides a framework for organising the information needed to reach the organisation's stated goals and objectives. IA describes specialised skills, techniques and methods that relate to the management of information and involve articulating the objectives of information, understanding the intended audiences and their information requirements.

It is imperative to understand who needs what information and when and why they need it, so that the information can be used for better decision making and to improve the way that businesses operate by providing contextual links between process, organisation, systems applications and users.

IA defines an enterprise's current and future-state information value chains, information entities and their meanings. It models the entities' state descriptions, their relationships and flows, and establishes the principles and guidelines governing their evolution and design over time. It mirrors the business activities and focuses on the future target state, the gaps in the current situation and the changes required to move forward.

> *"For the flow of material through the supply and asset chains to function well, information is key"*

As part of the Log NEC programme, Glue Reply is working with the MOD and its partners to create the Logistics Network-Enabled Capability Architecture (Log NEC A).

The main information driver here is logistics decision support, since there are a number of military operations running in parallel and a large number of bases around the world; accurate and timely information is required to inform, logistics 'situational understanding'. For the flow of material through the supply and asset chains to function well, information is key. An operational planner needs to make decisions based on what capabilities they have and what effect they are trying to achieve; without visibility of that information this task becomes extremely difficult.

What Glue Reply has been trying to do is identify the sources of data and information and then apply that in context. For instance, why is this information important, and to what end? In simple terms, we are able to extract the essence of the information from the processes or applications. It becomes more important in the Log NEC programme because the supply chain is actually an extended supply chain; it is not always feasible for organisations to have end-to-end business processes and/or transactions under full configuration management. In this Log NEC context, the organisation is dealing with eight million codified items and assets, from telephones to Tornados. This is a truly complex supply chain.

The way we look at this is to ask ourselves – what categories do we need from a domain perspective? In the case of Log NEC, we have demand information, support information, distribution information and also decision and command information. We have also used the IA method and tooling to organise and categorise information in those ways and make it useful for people in the decision support environment.

In most major projects and programmes there is not only a lot of data but often also much data replication; we are trying to avoid this redundancy of information, as well as duplicating information that could be conflicting.

If more of the right information is available to the right people at the right time, one can achieve desirable business outcomes such as reduced stockholding, more accurate procurement cycles, more efficient supply chains, and lower cost asset management. Information users can then have confidence that what they have requested, demanded or needed is going to be available when they need it. Ultimately, it will reduce total cost of ownership, and also deliver the return investment for the way the supply and asset chains operate.

Jason Hill
Associate Partner, Glue Reply