MANAGING CURRENT ENGINEERING OPERATIONAL CAPABILITY

BY

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> 'Once there was a Four Star HQ at *Northwood*, two star type commanders and seven submarine, destroyer and frigate squadrons. Then came Fleet First. We now operate on one level with the three Waterfront Organizations (Portsmouth, Devonport and Faslane) not as another layer, but more like bulges onto the framework of HQ.'

The Waterfront Organizations will provide front line support to RN units afloat and operate in conjunction with the RFA Bureau, the Director Royal Marines and the Type Air Stations who provide similar support for their respective areas. They will act independently to facilitate support for 'their' units when they are both alongside and deployed and, effectively, become the conscience of the Fleet HQ. They are the first point of contact for ships and are crucial in supporting the OC of the Fleet.

Engineering OC is based upon four inter-dependent 'pillars':

- Equipment.
- People.
- Administration.
- Engineering standards.

The high level of OC demanded can only be achieved if each pillar works in conjunction with the others. The questions are:

- Can we consider them together?
- If not, can the problems be sorted?
- How can we apply engineering standards to the first pillars?

It is actually easier to explain if we look at each pillar in turn.

Equipment

Fleet time and upkeep time, though applied to the same platform, have different emphases. In Fleet time we are absorbed with the problems of maintaining our current capability and the issues, therefore, tend to be close to home and very near term. Problems can immediately have a high impact upon the mission or the ship's programme. Upkeep time, on the other hand, is focused on optimizing or improving a platform's capability and the emphasis is then on achieving high standards within programme constraints and time scales. Upkeep naturally focuses on the longer-term view and majors on sustainability.

People

Developing people and their skills is a definite key OC multiplier (which means that, invariably, good manpower equals high OC). This involves the development of individual skills as the basis for achieving high engineering standards in

operational capability. It also needs core and continuation operational sea training where the emphasis is on policy and best engineering practices that must then be developed.

Administration

The administration provides the foundation of high effectiveness and sustainability. But to achieve a high standard we must look at the policy issues involved and establish a common engineering standard. We must also monitor and guide it and ensure a 'best practise' ethos is maintained.

Engineering Standards

From the IPT to the Health and Safety Executive, engineering standards should apply to everything we touch as without them we are dead in the water. They underpin delivery, development and the sustainability of OC. They are centrally set but locally implemented and require much attention to detail (monitoring and guidance) if they are to be maintained.

Instructions and guidance in this area often appear to be contradictory, and whilst it is expected that all engineering personnel should use their training experience to make professional decisions, there is room for further guidance from the Fleet Waterfront staff.

Planned delivery

The FWO is part of the single Fleet HQ and is subject to single staffing with one voice on Fleet issues. This provides commonality of approach in the crucial relationships with Fleet HQ, Flag Officer Sea Training, the Fleet Operational Maintenance Officer and the WSA. The three FWOs, representing the ships, interface with four organizations (not counting the Base Supply Officer) in order to provide guidance and leadership. These are FOMO, FHQ, WSA and FOST (FIG.5).

FWO interface with the ship

FWO provides the command structure and monitors equipment, personnel and administration in order to build a close working relationship. FWO will offer advice and guidance at all levels and spread 'best practice' ethos that will create a commonality of engineering approach.

FHQ interface to ship

The Fleet HQ provides a rich stream of information as the eyes and ears of the organization able to underwrite the quantity and quality of the support. Having the one HQ will improve the consistency of feedback and provide the single point of contact that will make life simpler and less complicated to the ships that have enough other issues to worry about.

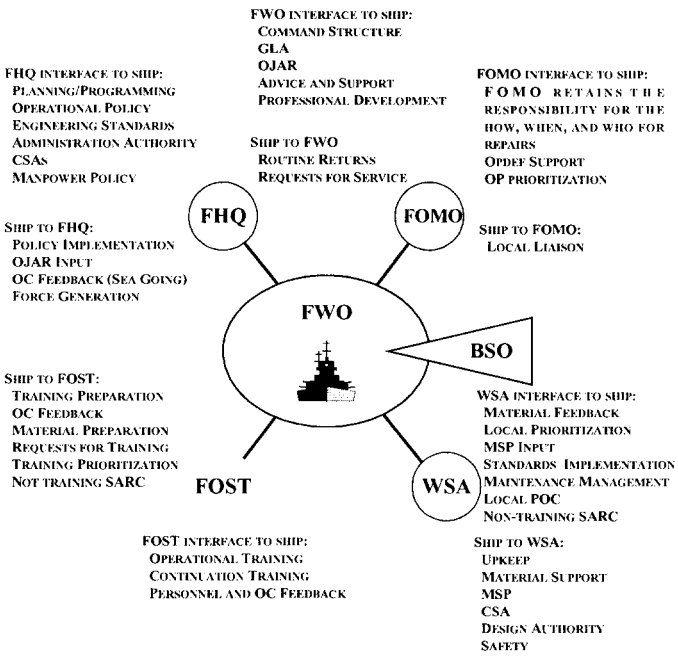

Fig.5 – Interfaces with ship

Developing engineering OC

Seeking to launch from a firm pad the FWO is looking at the established practices and current targets to ensure they are realistic and reflect the requirement. They will then, as a stakeholder for the WSA, FOST and the Naval Manning Agency, consider whether these can be improved. They will also ensure that their relationship with the providers is healthy and that they can represent the ships' concerns wherever they fall. Considering the importance of manpower issues, they want to attract the appropriate personnel and then see them properly developed so that they fully contribute to OC. To achieve this they are committed to monitoring training delivery and providing feedback to close the loop.

With the new regime evolving, the final round of this particular initiative is to look at the sustainability of its engineering and administration and ask:

- Is logistic performance good enough?
- Are the ships and the WSA performing better?
- Is the FWO interaction with the Base and the Royal Naval Supply organization effective?
- Is the equipment well designed and its reliability sound?
- Are there any maintenance management issues that need resolving?
- Are the administrative processes right?

If all these questions are asked against the baseline of operational capability, things can only get better.

They have a mission:

> 'To maximize the operational capability, availability and sustainability of Force Elements through the provision of timely support and expert leadership and guidance.'