

*The Political Officer
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But there is also profound unhappiness with the system, for several reasons:

- There has been an “explosion” of communications traffic with no accompanying effort to impose disciplines on how the traffic is generated or managed. The problem is not illusionary. Departmental e-mail traffic, essentially zero in the mid-1990s, exceeded 30 million messages in 1998. The result is a situation many describe as “chaotic”. Officers complain that their daily e-mail traffic is enormous, ranging from 40 to 100 messages per day. Managers are so overwhelmed by the volume that some who expect to be away from their offices for even a few days instruct staff to delete all messages and advise them on return of any that require action. The alternative is a time-consuming and mind-numbing exercise of scrolling through several hundred e-mail messages.
- Nor is any distinction being made between formal and informal communications. Any officer at any level can generate a message on virtually any subject and, if so inclined, copy it to the most senior levels of the department. Recipients themselves must discern how much authority attaches to a message, whether or not it constitutes policy or instructions. As one individual observed, “This might look like democracy, but it’s not. It’s anarchy”.
- Compounding the problem is the absence of department-wide disciplines for numbering and recording messages, no small deficiency for an organization whose stock in trade is information. In the words of one participant, “A filing system no longer exists. Copies of all messages used to go to a central filing system. You knew everything would be there, classified or unclassified, so there was no need for your own filing system. Now, classified and unclassified are totally separate, they don’t talk to each other. To file a classified message electronically, you have to proactively instruct it to go to CATS, but people forget or they shut it down because of unclassified traffic.”
- Corporate memory is a victim. One workshop participant claimed that, “We can’t find files more than three weeks old”. In the words of another individual, “Theoretically, everything’s available, but we’re swamped by such huge directories it’s easier to rely on word of mouth”. In response, many officers had resorted to setting up their own files. “The attitude is that information is for yourself, not for others”. But when an individual is out of the office, the information is almost impossible to access since it is protected by a personal access code; and when the individual changes jobs, the personal files are deleted.