

Health of a Squadron

Due to the collaboration of Thomas Group and its recent client Marine Aviation Group (MAG) 24, all other Marine Type Model Series (T/M/S) teams hope to achieve full integration into the Naval Aviation Enterprise (NAE) by the end of 2008.



Talks commenced between Thomas Group and the United States Marine Corps in January 2006 when LtGen Castellaw, Deputy Commandant Aviation for the USMC, enlisted the assistance of Thomas Group to provide a 60-day assessment of Marine Aviation Readiness. Thomas Group had worked with the NAE since 2001 with remarkable outcomes, hence Marine Aviation's desire to achieve respective benefits through a similar partnership. The goal of the collaboration began with a vision to use Cycles of Learning® from the NAE, to increase Readiness and to fully integrate with the NAE using the Type Model Series (T/M/Ss) as the change vehicle.

After thorough assessments in the following months, the endeavor's focus became MAG-24, which was the first Marine Aviation T/M/S team to enter the NAE. MAG-24, led by Colonel Joaquin Malavet, is stationed at Marine Corps Base Hawaii, flying the CH-53D Sea Stallion.

MAG-24 is a unique organization within the United States Marine Corps. The structure of Marine aviation is significantly different than that of the Navy. MAG commanders are providers of Readiness with similar responsibilities of a Navy Commodore and are charged with combat capabilities similar to Carrier Air Wing Commanders. Holding the entire USMC inventory of active CH-53D Sea Stallion helicopters provides special opportunities in maintaining and operating them in support of their missions.

Thomas Group facilitated the development of a Marine Aviation governance structure that now serves as interface with the NAE. The implementation of Process Value Management (PVM) proved to make the CH-53D Sea Stallion, built in 1969, a viable assault support platform, increasing its utilization potential.

PVM is Thomas Group's methodology that precisely identifies, prioritizes and quantifies the value associated with specific business improvement opportunities. It is based upon the foundational truth that any enterprise is comprised of a set of linked processes whose interdependency is critical to lasting performance improvement. PVM methodology allows leadership to create a vision of desired performance and identify barriers in the way of achieving set goals.

Barriers in the case of MAG-24 included the lack of a single process owner, deficiency in standardization, a need for metrics to quantify targeted performance improvements, and shortcomings in Readiness. The Marine Corps exists as a goal-based organization; thus, Thomas Group successfully implemented an improvement strategy utilizing requirements and measurements to realize objectives and overcome obstacles.

The starting point in improving MAG-24 operations involved putting forth a system of metrics to quantify aircrew and maintenance core competencies and Readiness regarding training and tasking aircraft mission systems. Implementation of this structure was enhanced by PVM principles and process training.



Lt. Col. Randy Parker observed that "some Marines know naturally how to manage from past experience, but really what Thomas Group provided with its program, PVM, is a metrics-driven approach—that is not just leadership; those are management tools."

These tools gave officers the ability to remove barriers and open lines of communication while increasing visibility. Thomas Group diminished the issue of problem escalation by creating more transparency and therefore avoiding news reaching the top of the chain of command in order to encounter resolve.

“There’s a lot more transparency to what the real concerns and issues are,” Parker said, “PVM is the best solution I have seen in my 24 years in the military.”

Throughout the training process and transformation of MAG-24 culture, Thomas Group was able to streamline operations, identify trends and improve responsiveness.

2d Lt. Col. Peter Gadd noted that “this process gives you the ability to cross-functionalize.”

Thomas Group also provided templates for replication throughout MAG-24 and other MAGs. For example, Thomas Group executed the use of cockpit charts or dashboards to monitor what Gadd refers to as the “health of the squadron.” Weekly recording of people, aircraft, and maintenance provided thorough information in order to realize the best possible performance. Recognizing these key readiness components allowed for optimal asset utilization.

Gadd observed that Thomas Group’s PVM is “not a report card” but rather that it implements a learning process that any manager can execute.” He furthered that this methodology can survive turnover in authority positions.

Driving change from the top is one of the basic PVM principles that remained a barrier to obtaining rapid results. Due to the lack of training, many Marines did not realize that to achieve the return on investment, performance gaps must be addressed.

Furthermore, Thomas Group formed a Current Readiness program for MAG-24 within which the team meets on a monthly basis to assess and confront barriers to Readiness.

“The Current Readiness Program has without a doubt helped us focus on our Readiness gaps,” Malevet said, “This gives me the capability to adjust resources as required to meet operational requirements.”

Thomas Group’s approach with MAG-24 revolved around training leadership and other team members to perpetrate the skills necessary to sustain positive outcomes and continued improvements.

Gadd stated that “Current Readiness has made a positive impact on our Readiness. Through this process we have been able to work closely with the Heavy Lift Program Office (PMA-261) and FRC Cherry Point to accelerate the re-work process of two CH-53Ds we pulled out of war reserve to plus up our flight line inventory. With these two airframes it is predicted that we will be able to reduce our RFT [Ready for Tasking] gap by 30 percent.”

Thomas Group has enabled MAG-24 to have the long-term sustainability it needs to improve operations independently. By internalizing development, MAG-24 now has the capacity to delegate readiness accountability across all ranks.

“Although still new to the process, we now feel that we have a better grasp on what is really impacting the way we conduct business—so much so, that we have pushed the Current Readiness down to the squadron level,” Malavet said.



The H53D Main Rotor Head Dampener Barrier Removal Team (BRT) is a testimony to the Current Readiness Program success. The standard cost for a Main Rotor Head Dampener is \$21,500. In 2007, average failure per quarter was 19, totaling \$1,634,000 of excess costs for the year. MAG-24 had the goal of getting failure rates back to the baseline year, 2005, of 32 failures per

year. The outcome involved a reduction in failure rates to approximately 48 per year, realizing a savings of about \$600,000 in 2007. The BRT expects to see the failure rate decline to less than that of 2005 resulting in annual savings of greater than \$950,000 in following years.

BRTs are now underway in other MAGs to address their respective performance gaps. Thomas Group developed a set of requirements metrics for each T/M/S for both the training cycle and operational deployment. Including operational forces in Current Readiness was one step beyond the current NAE metrics.

Despite initial resistance to change, Gadd said “we haven’t looked back.” MAG-24 and its affiliates will continue to evolve into more productive entities due to Thomas Group’s legacy.

In fact, Gadd sees the progress as indispensable. “As an operations officer, I need this program. I need these tools to do my job,” he said.

With the new standards in place, officers find that accountability comes more automatically. Through monthly reviews, issues are handled at the source before they are allowed to escalate. Thomas Group laid the foundation for many improvements, and MAG-24 has adopted the changes as part of its culture. Because of MAG-24's success, its new operating style has penetrated other T/M/Ss as well.

Through Thomas Group training and mentoring, the most mature T/M/Ss are now achieving results. Because of standardization, BRTs, culture change, and leadership training, the fear of data transparency is fading quickly within Marine aviation and there is greater communication and openness among the Marine Forces Command.

Thomas Group implemented metrics of readiness elements such as people, aircraft and maintenance, which in turn allowed for analysis and overall progress. Since readiness exists as the top commission of MAGs, Thomas Group has significantly improved many factors contributing to the further success of these military teams as integrated members of the NAE and leading responders to the country's defense. 