Managing Risk To Operate:
Making ORM Part of Navy Culture

While service-wide initiatives come and go, ORM has been around for more than a decade. Why? Because its simple, common-sense approach is a uniquely useful tool for achieving excellence while preventing mishaps.

So why is it that the highest-ranking leaders in the Navy continue to espouse the virtues of ORM, and yet the youngest of our Sailors and our junior leaders have trouble rattling off the basic steps of the process?

This special issue is a navigation aid to help us change course and make ORM an integral part of Navy and Marine Corps culture. It is a guide to changing our perceptions of what ORM is and what it is not.

ORM is not about avoiding or eliminating all risk in what we do. We face risk every time we get into our cars, man an aircraft or take in lines from a pier. These risks don't keep us from doing our jobs. When Admiral John Nathman coined the phrase "Managing Risk to Operate," he made it clear that ORM is about getting the job done while keeping our people and equipment capable of doing it again tomorrow. But this phrase is more of a goal than a sitrep, because the ORM effort fleet-wide needs to be reinvigorated and standardized.

Where We Want To Be

We want everyone to understand risk management. We want them to know how to apply the principles and the process at the right level in their specific tasks and activities, on and off duty. We need every Sailor and Marine to understand that every death on the highway robs us of a vital part of our team every bit as much as a loss in combat.

A critical step is changing people's perceptions of ORM:

• ORM is a tactic, not a safety program. It is a way to deal with the threats (hazards) we face every day. These threats are almost always under our control, and the deadliest ones are our own human errors.

• We use ORM all the time, we just don't recognize it. The article on page 30 uses driving to work as an example. By taking advantage of the ingenuity of others, by following procedures, and by using the tools provided for us, we are managing risk.

• We all must learn to ask, "What's different today?" as a way to anticipate changes in "routine" tasks. In ORM terms, this question transitions us from planning (deliberate ORM) to action (time-critical ORM). It allows us to alter our plans and deal with unexpected hazards.
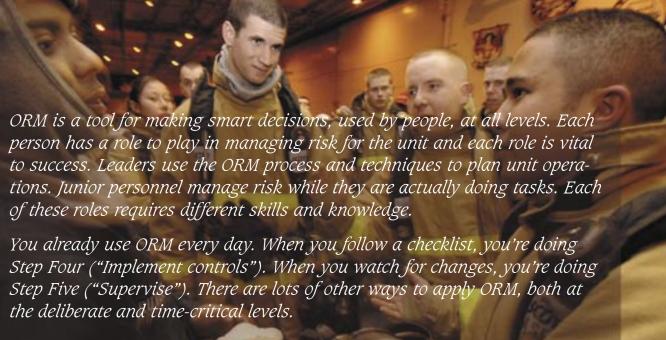
The Way Ahead

Ingraining ORM into our culture will require leaders to think and plan with the principles and concepts of ORM fully integrated. Leaders must teach ORM techniques to our newest service members. Junior personnel must understand that they need to master a simple set of skills to effectively play their positions on the team, watch for changes, and communicate what they see to their teammates. All hands must know and use ORM terms so everyone knows the process is in action.

Through this ORM issue, we give you a guide to understanding and applying ORM, and a road map to shaping Navy and Marine Corps culture—a culture where managing risk is key to operating… and winning. ∎

By Capt. Ken Neubauer
Aviation Safety Programs, Naval Safety Center

ORM is a tool for making smart decisions, used by people, at all levels. Each person has a role to play in managing risk for the unit and each role is vital to success. Leaders use the ORM process and techniques to plan unit operations. Junior personnel manage risk while they are actually doing tasks. Each of these roles requires different skills and knowledge.

You already use ORM every day. When you follow a checklist, you're doing Step Four ("Implement controls"). When you watch for changes, you're doing Step Five ("Supervise"). There are lots of other ways to apply ORM, both at the deliberate and time-critical levels.

What ORM Is

- A mindset and methodology that applies to any activity
- Accomplishing the mission with acceptable risk
- Planning using a standard, five-step process
- A continuous process
- Based on people's experiences
- Following procedures (controls)
- Watching for change (supervising)
- Flexible
- Best when applied as a team
- Asking "What's different today?"
- A process that depends on skill and knowledge
- Sharing experiences and lessons learned
- Using available tools and resources
- Applied, standardized common sense
- "Looking before you leap"
- As in-depth as you have time for

What ORM Isn't

- A way to avoid risk
- A safety-only program
- Limited to complex, high-risk evolutions
- A program rather than a process
- Only for on-duty
- Just for your boss
- Just a planning tool
- Automatic
- Static
- Difficult
- Someone else's job
- A fail-safe process
- A bunch of checklists
- A bullet in a briefing guide
- TQL