

# Why Army Signal Brigades Need a Data Office

## *The unconventional CDO*

**Nathan Slack**

*2nd Theater Signal Brigade*

I am often asked, “Why does an Army signal brigade need a chief data officer?”

While the Army officially designates this as a chief data and analytics officer role, I prefer the industry-standard CDO title. However, the title is secondary to the critical mission at hand: fostering a data-driven culture. This effort doesn’t begin at the top of the hierarchy, but at its foundation — with the Soldier and technician.

My role extends beyond delivering command briefings. It’s about empowering individuals at every level to leverage data’s potential fully. This drives informed decision-making and cultivates a culture in which insights translate into action and fuel innovation.

In a mission-critical environment, the CDO role is not just a title; it is a crucial bridge that translates the high-level vision into actionable, accurate data flows. This role empowers the entire organization, making it more than just a job, but a mission of utmost importance. To understand the function of this office, we need to break down the critical elements of our strategy.

### **1. Data-Driven Culture Must Start at the Edge**

For a culture of data to truly take hold, the insight must drive decisions at the operator level. This commitment to transparency ensures our strategic analysis rests on solid ground.

- **Employee Empowerment:** We design our data products to be useful for individuals, not just the commander. By enabling employees to view their own data profiles and those of their office or organization, they gain full context. This transparency empowers employees to take ownership and promptly correct any data disparities.
- **The Upward Flow and Accuracy:** We intentionally design our data products to be mergeable and re-analyzable at higher levels. This ensures that the focused insight a team leader uses immediately contributes to the brigade’s strategic analysis. Crucially, when employees use the data daily at lower levels, they are inherently motivated to ensure its accuracy, thereby guaranteeing higher-quality data for strategic decisions at the command level.

### **2. The CDO is a Dedicated Bridge, Not an Expert in Everything**

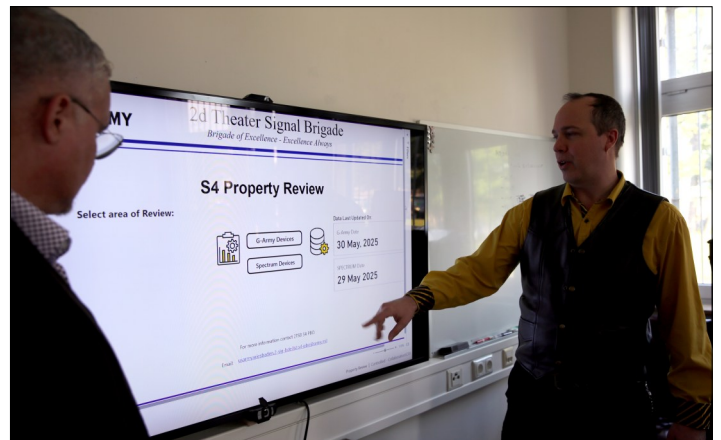
My primary mission is to understand the leadership

vision and then work diligently at the lower levels—with Soldiers and Technicians—to pull that data up, sifting through the noise to find the critical signals. Leaders in Finance, Personnel, and Operations are experts in their specific fields. The CDO’s role is to bridge those fields to show how every silo impacts the entire Brigade as a single entity. It’s about coherence, not command.

### **3. Sifting Signal from Noise Requires SMEs**

You cannot do this alone. Every organization is drowning in data, and the CDO must work with subject matter experts (SMEs) to define what the data *means*. In our brigade, we formalized this partnership by establishing data council officers (DCOs). These DCOs act as our indispensable experts, reviewing and identifying the data fields that truly matter. We learned this hard lesson firsthand with our NEC Scorecard. In our V1 release, we had a focused set of fields, but by V2, we expanded the model to over 150 fields, believing that more data was better. It was a frustrating noise. We worked with our DCOs to prune the model, removing highly correlated variables (multicollinearity), leading to faster, more accurate results for V3.5. This experience taught us that getting solid data flows and identifying the precise fields required is non-negotiable. Commanders need someone dedicated to translating data into action. The CDO ensures that the entire organization is viewing the same, correct map, driving coherent strategy from the bottom up.

Does your organization empower employees with data transparency across their teams, or is insight still limited to individual performance?



*Nathan Slack, CDO, 2nd TSB, explains new features of the 2nd TSB S4 Property Accountability Report and Tool to William Bravo, a supervisory logistics management specialist with 2nd TSB. (Photo by Candy Knight, 2nd TSB)*