

# The Army's true knowledge managers

By LTC Alprentice Smith

Let me introduce you to the Army's true knowledge managers.

Although the Functional Area 57 officers (modeling and simulations) market themselves as the lead for Army KM, in many cases the FA57 officers do not possess the right knowledge, skills, abilities, and experiences to adequately determine the right information, the right location and time for delivery, and the right format to meet commanders' critical information requirements.

In the end, it is Signal Regiment personnel, more specifically, the FA53 officer (information systems manager), 251A/254A warrants (information systems technician/Signal support technician), and associated 25Bs noncommissioned officers (information technology specialists), who truly understand how to integrate people, processes, and technologies in order to

provide KM products. Thus, practitioners of these specialties have become the Army's true knowledge managers.

Knowledge management facilitates the transfer of knowledge derived from experience and skill to staffs and finally to commanders. KM does this by effectively providing commanders with relevant information and knowledge for making informed, timely decisions. KM additionally enables effective collaboration by linking the various organizations and Soldiers requiring knowledge. As a result, KM reduces the uncertainties of operations and increases flexibility to rapidly react to any situation.

As stated in Field Manual 6-01.1 (Knowledge Management Section), KM is the art of creating, organizing, applying, and transferring knowledge to facilitate situational understanding and decision-making. Knowledge is information analyzed to provide

meaning and value or evaluated as to implications for the operation. Additionally, knowledge is the comprehension gained through study, experience, practice, and human interaction that provides the basis for expertise and skilled judgment. Knowledge consists of two types – explicit (documented) and tacit (in the mind).

Like most capabilities, Figure 1 depicts how KM relies on the integration of people, processes, and technologies in order to meet requirements. KM people are those inside and outside an organization that create, organize, apply, and transfer knowledge, as well as the leaders who act on that knowledge. KM processes are those methods of creating, organizing, applying, and transferring knowledge. Lastly, KM technologies are those information systems and tools used to put knowledge products and services into organized frameworks.

At the Army, corps, and division levels, commanders have access to a KM section. At BCT-level, commanders possess a single KM Soldier. Table 1 depicts the organizational structure at the operational and tactical levels:

Army leaders designed the KM section to support the commander and staff in achieving situational understanding and making informed, knowledgeable, and timely decisions. Section personnel accomplish this by managing the before mentioned people, processes, and technologies that furnish commanders and staffs with increasingly enhanced knowledge

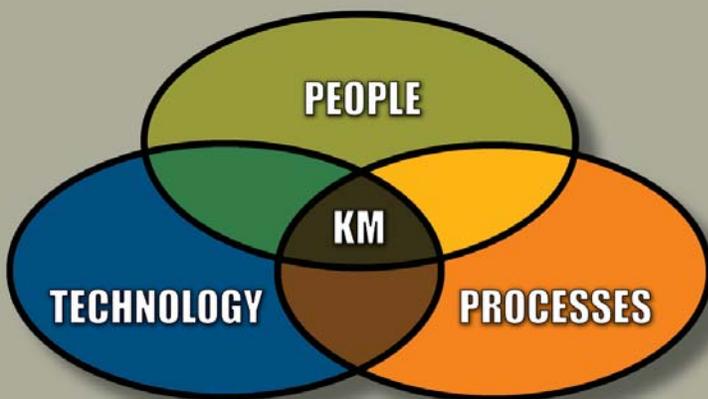


Figure 1--KM Components

and relevant information. Within the section exist four key positions: KM officer (O2A), assistant KM officer (FA53/FA57), KM NCO (25B), and content management specialist (11B/13B).

As described in FM 6-01.1, the KM officer should ensure all within the unit understand KM processes and procedures. Additionally, he or she must demonstrate how these processes and procedures can improve efficiency and common understanding. The assistant KM officer ensures section members understand KM processes and technology. Furthermore, the assistant KM officer assists the G-3/S-3 and G-6/S-6 with mapping the processes and information systems that produce the common operational picture. The KM NCO advises the KM officer on improving knowledge creation and transfer within the staff. Lastly, the Content Management Specialists serve as the unit's experts on content management and retrieval. They ensure knowledge is available to Soldiers when they need it. These are required to help the G-6/S-6 manage digital content with tools that exchange explicit knowledge, collaborate, and connect with subject matter experts across the organization.

To achieve success for the commander, as the SMEs for KM, those in the KM section must integrally understand each KM component. They must understand people are the most vital component; and therefore, it is critical to develop and implement knowledge transfer techniques that connect people and build social networks. They must understand the critical processes of analyzing the unit's knowledge requirements, designing KM products that provide critical information, and then developing those products based on the assessment – with the end goal of testing and implementing the products and integrating them into operations. Lastly, individuals must understand the applicable technologies that automate the processes in order to get the right information, to the right location, at the right time, and in the right format. Those technologies consist of information systems, along with tools for collaboration, data mining, and information search/discovery. Moreover, these technologies comprise the overall network (LandWarNet) and the ability to display the common operational picture.

In reviewing the keys to success, and mapping those to authorized personnel in the KM section, one has to question the inclusion of the O2A, FA57, 11B, and 13B. KM skills, like any other unique capability, are perishable. For an individual to be a KM SME, he or

she needs to receive the right training and gain experience through repetitive assignments. For combat arms officers filling the O2A position for the first time, a two and a half day KM Officer Course will not suffice. Likewise, for the 11B/13B, a two and a half day Content Management Course cannot possibly make them the unit's experts on content management. Even the FA57, with KM Officer as one of its roles and responsibilities, is not postured for success after attending a KM qualification course that is only four weeks long. All this doesn't even factor the reality that most combat arms officers, FA57s, 11Bs, and 13Bs filling these positions will not fill another KM position during the remainder of their career.

Although probably blasphemous to state, KM is nothing more than information management repackaged. Army Regulation 25-1 (Army Knowledge Management and Information Technology), which falls under the IM series of regulations by the way, states IM consists of the planning, budgeting, manipulating, and controlling of information throughout its life cycle. Moreover, AR 25-1 discusses how individuals perform IM activities to organize, direct, train, promote, control, and manage activities associated with the collection, creation, maintenance, utilization, dissemination, and disposition of information. Ultimately, IM is no different from the management of explicit knowledge as discussed in FM 6-01.1. Subsequently, the only real distinction between IM and KM is the idea of managing "tacit (in the mind)" knowledge. Yet, the inherent cognitive aspect of tacit knowledge creates a challenge for any so-called KM person to manage it (how do you manage knowledge in someone's mind?).

The similarities between IM and KM have been a driving force behind the reason why commanders continually look to their FA53s, 251A/254A warrants, and 25Bs to lead the unit's execution of KM. Names like COL Howard Lim (FA53 XVIII AB Corps KM Officer) and CW4 (R) Wes Postal (254A 2BCT/4ID) are just a few within the Signal Regiment that set the KM bar. Much of this has to do with the fact FA53s, 251A/254A warrants, and 25B NCOs receive weeks of classroom instruction on how to map processes and

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technologies to meet commanders' information requirements (on average 20 weeks of training or more). Additionally, these Signal Regiment personnel continually fill positions in which they integrate technology to facilitate individuals' performance of KM-like processes. Both training and experience posture FA53s, 251As/254As, and 25B NCOs for success in achieving KM requirements; and thus, these specialties are in essence the Army's true knowledge managers.

The Signal Regiment plans to do even more in the future in order to take its rightful place in leading KM for the Army. A recent FA53 tiger team identified the need to develop a separate area of concentration specifically for KM. The Army will access those FA53As into the new AOC who have a desire to specialize in KM and who have proven themselves in more general information systems management positions. Additionally, the U.S. Army Signal Center of Excellence Office Chief of Signal has worked diligently to fill the O2A position with highly qualified FA53s to ensure commanders' have the right individual with the right skill sets. Moreover, the Signal Regiment realigned its warrant officer specialties in order to create an expert in information services (255A - information services technician). The 255A will possess even more skills than the 251A/254A warrants related to KM people, processes, and technologies. Furthermore, the SigCoE conducted analysis to realign Signal enlisted MOSs, one recommendation being the creation of an enlisted specialty focused specifically on content management

tasks. To support the development of these new specialties, the Signal Regiment will leverage its existing partnerships with academia and industry, as well as utilize existing courses (e.g. the Digital Master Gunner Course). All this should compel the Army to go back and review the KM section structure and change the O2A position (and FA57 position in the BCT) to an FA53A (future FA53B), the FA57 position (except for the one in the BCT) to a 255A, and the 11B/13B positions to 25B (possible future new Signal MOS).

KM through the integration of people, processes, and technologies provides commanders with relevant information and knowledge for making informed, timely decisions. To achieve this objective, Army, corps, division, and BCT commanders possess KM sections/positions filled with various combat arms and technical specialties. However, does the application of an O2A, FA57, 11B, and 13B in the sections provide the commander with the right people possessing the right skill sets? The answer is a resounding "no," because training and experience are so critical to developing the right knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Army leaders did the right thing by including an FA53 at the ASCC, corps, and division levels, as well as a 25B NCO in the corps. The FA53 and 25B NCO are postured well to give the commander the KM capabilities he requires - not to mention the skills possessed by 251A/254A warrants. Based on the current and future effort of the Signal Regiment, these specialties will only become more skilled in achieving KM for the Army. The Army needs to

ASCC 5.3	MCP	
	1xO5 02A	Ch, KM Off
	1xO4 57A	Battle Cmd Sys Off
	1xO4 53A	Battle Cmd Sys Off
	1xE7 13B40	Content Mgmt Spec
Corps 4.0	MA IN CP	
	1xO5 02A	Corps KM Off
	1xO4 57A	Battle Cmd Sys Off
	1xO4 53A	Battle Cmd Sys Off
	1xE8 25B50	Sr Battle Cmd NCO
Div 9.0	MA IN CP	
	1xO5 02A	Ch, KM/Battle Cmd Off
	1xO4 57A	Battle Cmd Sys Off
BCT Holistic Review	1xO3 57A	Battle Cmd Sys Off

Figure 2--KM Personnel

take notice of all this and make the appropriate organizational structure changes, for if KM is important to Army leaders, organizations must possess the Army's true knowledge managers.

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### ACRONYM QuickScan

- AOC - Area of Concentration
- ASCC - Army Service Component Command
- BCT - Brigade Combat Team
- FA - Functional Area
- KM - Knowledge Management
- MOS - Military Occupational Speciality
- NCO - Noncommissioned Officer
- SigCoE - Signal Center of Excellence
- SME - Subject Matter Expert

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