

Signaleers share front line experiences

# Defining Knowledge Management

By CW 2 James L. Walker

A little over a year ago I had to face the question, "What is Knowledge Management?"

As a 254A, Signal systems support technician, I was trained to supervise and integrate the ABCS, LAN, radio systems, and management of COMSEC facilities into tactical non-signal units. After assignment to Korea, I was diverted to the division KM office. That's when I encountered the questions, "What is KM and why is a Signal warrant tasked for this?"

After receiving an overview on KM from my boss, I went to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to attend the Army Knowledge Management Qualification Course pilot. At the course, I learned about the components of KM, content management, and assessments. Following that course

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I also attended a civilian certified knowledge management course. Both courses gave me a general idea of what KM is all about. It was not until I deployed that I finally got to see what KM really entailed.

The components of KM are people, process and technology. As a 254A, technology was a concept of which I was most familiar. The hardest part for me to grasp was the people and process components because in the KM world you have to approach the problem or issue from an outside perspective. Some solutions can be solved by taking an

"outside the box" approach. During deployment to the RC(E)/CJTF-101 HQs, I worked in the KM section as the assessments officer.

Assessments play a vital role in the understanding of unit or section's business processes. As the assessments officer, I sat down with the RIC OIC and Deputy to develop a plan for the RIC to become the information warehouse for RC(E)/CJTF-101. The KM section worked with the newly formed regional information center in the setup and management of their portal. In order to accomplish this task, we put KM to practice by first utilizing the technology component. We wanted to create a site that was very user friendly, easy to navigate and had search ability. We adhered to a three click rule that allowed the user to access needed information within three clicks from the home page. By doing so, this allowed information to be accessible by the primary staff sections and subordinate units. We also create a customized request for information workflow that allowed users to request information not readily available. The portal was used for the posting current information, including working documents. This helped reduce the e-mailing of large files across an already limited network in terms of bandwidth usage. Once we completely established the technology framework, we moved to the people and process components of KM.

We focused on the knowers



Members of Regional Command (East)/Combined Joint Task Force 101 in Bagram, Afghanistan, LTC David West and COL John P. Johnson review the unit's knowledge management plan during operations in Afghanistan.

and the learners. Our goal was to create multiple forms of collaboration with the RIC. Inside the RIC, we decided military and civilian personnel would work in an open area, to allow them to work side by side with each other. This provided the opportunity for young Soldiers to work and learn from their civilian counterparts who were experts in their fields. We wanted to increase the amount of face-to-face interaction within the RIC and reduce the amount of collaboration being conducted over e-mail and the telephone. Face-to-face interaction is very important because you can create a more personal relationship with your co-workers. We encouraged personnel working within the RIC to physically leave their desks to talk to other sections when researching information and collecting ideas for a product. When face-to-face interaction was unable to take place, other means of collaboration such as e-mail, phone calls and VTCs (DCO and Adobe Connect) were then utilized.

With the technology information sharing portal structure established and the people collaborating and learning from each other, we turned to the process component. We began with the question, "How can we get the information to the people who need it quickly enough to make accurate and informed decisions?" Information, technology and people are critical, but if you do not have effective processes in place to provide information when needed, it quickly becomes obsolete.

We implemented several different types of daily information sharing sessions. Shift change briefs were conducted twice a day. The RIC OIC and other RIC personnel held internal RIC meetings. An RFI tracker was created, which allowed RFI's to be tracked from the time it was initiated through to completion. The RIC used the CJTF's standard for naming conventions of documents and files, increasing the ability to search information being created and stored. The RIC personnel also standardized their process when creating research papers for subordinate units and other government agencies. By implementing a few simple processes, the RIC functioned more effectively.

Working in the RC(E)/CJTF-101 KM section during this deployment added a skill set that I would not have gained anywhere else. Being a Signal Warrant Officer gave me an advantage by knowing what technology is available and its capabilities, helping me to decide if technology should be used in a solution and how to implement it. Working in the KM section also taught me the value of effective collaboration, the ability to assess processes, and most importantly, the ability to analyze a problem without being a part of the problem. These valuable skills broaden my ability to better serve in a Brigade Combat Team or Division Signal Team, where my focus will be technological application, but recognizing when a solution to the problem may be changes to process or people, not the technology.

### Components of a Knowledge Environment



Figure 1

*CW2 James L. Walker served as the chief of assessments for Regional Command (East)/Combined Joint Task Force 101 in Bagram, Afghanistan, from May 2010 – May 2011. Upon redeployment he will serve in the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). His specialty area is 254A Signal systems support technician. CW2 Walker holds an associate degree in Liberal Arts and Applied Science from Amarillo College and will complete his Bachelor of Science degree in information technology from the University of Phoenix in 2012.*

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