

7th Signal Command showcases its successful KM platforms

By Gerald King

Leaders of 7th Signal Command are using technology to provide essential links throughout all levels of modern organizations.

Today leaders have very little management time to devote to sharing their reflection and contemplation about the mission and the organization. Geography and the pressures of internal and external meetings mean face time with the senior leaders does not come easily to the average Soldier or employee. And yet it is direct communication that best inculcates loyalty and a personal grasp of the leader's intent. Technology enables today's senior leaders to communicate their philosophy and priorities directly to the rank and file. This concept is exemplified in the ACOM Warfighter Forums

(https://www.us.army.mil/suite/portal/index.jsp;sessionid=7A966132E1F58B932DD9D4CDB45F80BB.appd03_3) and StrykerNet (<https://strykernet.army.mil/default.aspx>).

At 7th Signal Command we use four primary KM platforms. None by itself can meet all of our requirements. There is some capability overlap between platforms, and one could argue that one or the other would be better for a particular function. However, we would rather get on with the task at hand than suffer analysis paralysis.

For our unclassified intranet needs, we have a site collection on the 9th Signal Command (Army) Microsoft Office SharePoint Server (MOSS) (<https://idm.netcom.army.mil/Pages/9thSignal.aspx>). In the Quick Launch box of the portal page are links to features and content of general interest to all members of the command. The top menu has drop-down menu links to staff element and subordinate unit sites and pages (<https://idm.netcom.army.mil/sites/7thsignal/Pages/Home.aspx>). These pages are customized for the internal use of the directorate, brigade or Theater Network Operations Support Center. Information and content accessed from here is managed by the

- MOSS
- AKO
- BCKS
- milSuite

subordinate organization's content manager with advice and support from the KM Cell. This concept is mirrored on SIPRnet on the Warfighter Forum MOSS server provided by the Combined Arms Center and BCKS.

Our extranet service is hosted on Army Knowledge Online to enable access to users across DoD including family members (<https://www.us.army.mil/suite/page/599678>). Access to content varies on subordinate pages and channels. Again, this concept is mirrored on SIPRnet.

To provide facilitated discussion forums we only had to look to BCKS (Battle Command Knowledge System) for a mature and stable platform. Tucked neatly in the Signal Link forum are two groups for Network Enterprise Centers (<https://forums.bcks.army.mil/secure/CommunityBrowser.aspx?id=519541&lang=en-US>) and NEC directors (<https://forums.bcks.army.mil/secure/CommunityBrowser.aspx?id=530676&lang=en-US>) to asynchronously contribute, refine and reuse content. This feature is slowly gaining traction within the command as more people hear about it through their brigade additional duty KMOs or by attending the Signal Center of Excellence NEC Course. Signal Link uses AKO SSO authentication, making it accessible

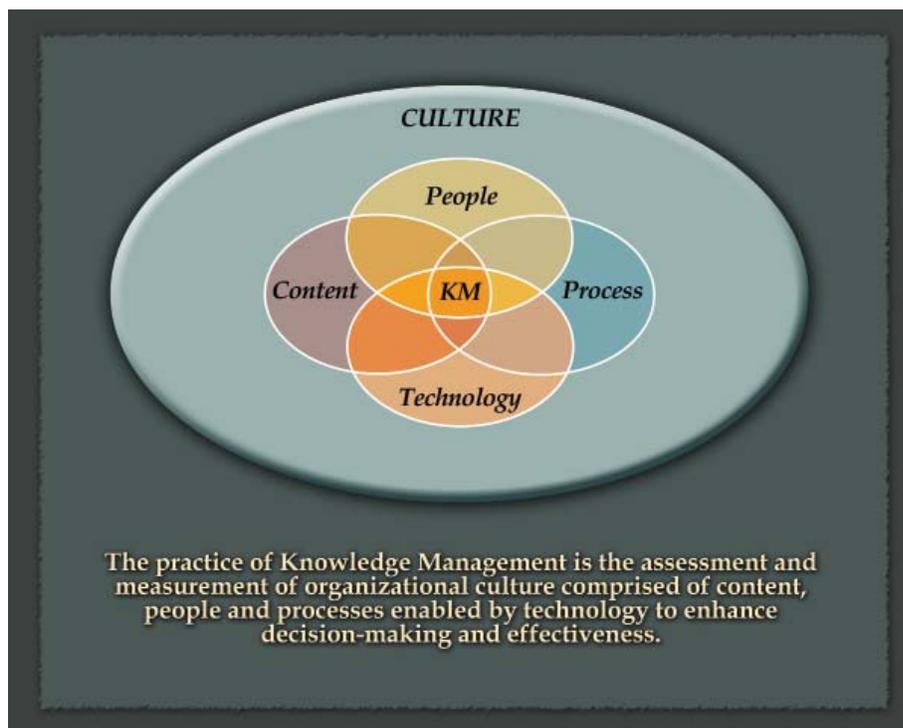
worldwide to all theater signal commands.

The most recent addition to our KM ammo box is milSuite. Here we can learn from the experience of and share with subject matter experts with DKO/AKO access. For example, staff personnel can search milWiki for SOP templates and information. In milBook we have created groups for project team and functional collaboration.

Part of the challenge is how to encourage a culture of collaboration. Collaboration is not the same as donating your work to others. It is working with colleagues who help flesh out skeletal ideas. This allows the team to build and innovate together from knowledge context unavailable to each individually. In KM circles we often hear this described succinctly in the phrase, "all of us are smarter than any of us." Colleagues share the nucleus of an idea with others who refine the idea and then share it with their entire community who reuse and continue to refine the knowledge product.

Leaders who reward all three aspects of collaboration (contribution, refinement and reuse) will achieve maximum benefits of the enabling tool.

The practice of Knowledge Management is the assessment and measurement of culture, people, processes and technologies within organizations to enhance decision making and effectiveness. KM considerations in the People domain include vocational training, adult learning, organizational structure, ranks, age ranges, and education levels. In the Army, analysis of the organization's mission objectives to determine the skill sets needed to reach those goals is essential in the absence of



established doctrinal structures that exist for tactical units.

Mission objectives need to be broken down to functions, functions into supporting tasks. The required skills and training needed to accomplish institutional Army mission tasks lead to identification of military occupational specialties and civilian job series. Tasks have characteristics of frequency and duration which provide manpower data inputs. Adding the manhours for all the tasks required for each specialty considering the size and scope of the mission yields the required number of people needed in that specialty.

A major people goal of KM practice is expertise location. The account profiles inherent to our KM tools allow us to search for others who have certification, education or training in an area of interest. A majority of this information is voluntarily entered but a number

of fields in AKO and milSuite are drawn directly from Army authoritative databases.

The next domain, Process, involves all the ways the organization conducts its business, supports the Army or is supported by other organizations. Everything from ordering pencils to justification and hiring new personnel involves a process. Obviously not all of the processes will be developed, controlled or even coordinated by the KM Cell. The more people and echelons are involved in the process, the more likely it has devolved into an undocumented and informal way of getting the job done. Such informal processes can be very efficient when all the usual people are present. The usual people have the process knowledge in their heads and easily accomplish the task. But when one or more of these people is absent or transfers, the process breaks.

Informal processes can reign supreme in longstanding organizations with many long-term employees possessing the tacit knowledge of how things work.

(Continued on page 60)

Task frequency* duration = manhours per task

Manhours per task/2086 hours per year = 1 required employee

(Continued from page 59)

Trouble arises in these organizations when decisions are made or the unit is reorganized based on the formal process documentation that inaccurately describes reality.

When there is a great difference between the formal process and organization and the informal way things are done, new personnel are going to be frustrated and ineffective. Such an organization is inefficient and often dysfunctional. In 7th Signal Command we have a different challenge in that neither the organization nor the mission preexisted. Initial stand up of a new theater Signal command required extensive creative mission analysis and historical research. Definition of the personnel structure needed and the processes to "operate and defend" the Army's portion of the Global Information Grid was incredibly difficult but accomplished ahead of schedule. Ongoing efforts to standardize process across the command have to consider variations in tenant activities, BRAC and the changing missions and organizations of cyber warfare.

Of these four domains of knowledge management, technology is the most frequently resourced but can be the least efficiently and effectively used. Mission media technology tools are no magic wand.

Without the proper application of the tool to the job, nothing is accomplished. A carpenter's tool box builds nothing. But the proper tools applied by a skilled craftsman with a plan and good purpose rapidly produce a superior structure. Technology exists to enable information and knowledge collaboration, collection, contemplation, connection, community and culture. In this model, content is separated from technology to highlight functions beyond data storage. In particular

we describe content in terms of the elements of metadata, (data about the data), taxonomy, (relations between data), and ontology (the context of data).

A comprehensive content management plan requires skills from records management, database management and subject matter expertise. Well managed content facilitates the high priority goals of knowledge managers to make content easy to contribute and recall through relevant search results.

More often than not, the latest content is stored on a local drive where it is more vulnerable to loss instead of a shared network drive that is professionally backed up. Network file shares are a crude form of content management especially crude, when there is no organizationally enforced naming convention for directories, folders or files.

Left to their own methods, computer users develop ad hoc methods of naming and storing content. Usually this is a hierarchy of categories that suit their work habits using a combination of topics and chronological criteria. At 7th SC (T) directorates and brigades manage their own content to suit their missions and processes. The recent appointment of a command records manager will bring additional expertise to the organization of our data.

At the dynamic intersection of these four domains is Knowledge Management. Not wholly responsible for any of the domains, the KMO is nonetheless involved in all and sometimes accountable for project or process results. Success depends heavily on executive sponsorship of the KM program. This reflects the Army AOKM proponent's admonition that the KM cell report directly to the unit's chief of staff or executive officer, as is the case in 7th Signal Command. Field Manual 6-01.1, Knowledge

Management Section, prescribes this structure for tactical combat formations.

The future of knowledge management in 7th Signal Command (Theater) is bright. The KM Cell has great support from the senior leadership. Our technical staff is expanding and acquiring better tools. All of which will permit more time to train the directorate and brigade KM practitioners. And more time to dedicate to deeper assessment of the knowledge gaps and research the best ways to close those gaps.

Gerald King is the knowledge management officer for 7th Signal Command at Fort Gordon, Ga., The command's KM cell is part of its strategic communication special staff section, which is responsible for managing the command's strategic communications planning and operations. The section includes staff members who perform the functions of strategic communication, public affairs, as well as knowledge management.

ACRONYM QuickScan

7th SC (T) - 7th Signal Command (Theater)

ACOM - Army Command

AKO - Army Knowledge Online

AOKM - Army Operational Knowledge Management

BCKS - Battle Command Knowledge System

DKO - Defense Knowledge Online

KM Knowledge Management

KMOs - Knowledge Management Officers

MOSS - Microsoft Office SharePoint Server

NEC - Network Enterprise Centers

SIPRnet - Secret Internet Protocol Routed Network

SOP - Standard Operating Procedures

SSO - Single Sign On

WfF - Warfighter Forums