

# From zero to full immersion

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As I prepared to write this article, I found myself faced with a very interesting dilemma. Do I write an informative article, or do I invoke a knowledge-based essay and expound on the merits of transforming information into knowledge? How do I differentiate between the two: information versus knowledge? I further challenged myself by considering the following: if the article is purely informative, does it defeat the purpose of the article and its value to the readers? And if it is to be focused on the management of knowledge, how do I pinpoint the informational requirements of the reader? My dilemma became more convoluted as I continued to add more information. Then I realized that I was replicating and exacerbating the exact problem that Knowledge Management (KM) was intended to solve. I decided to focus on the merits of turning information into knowledge.

Arriving at Fort Hood in August of 2009, I was immediately immersed into the Corps' preparation for an upcoming rotation to support Operation Iraqi Freedom, which would eventually transform to Operation New Dawn. As a FA 53, Information Systems Manager, I was assigned to the Corps KM section. I had no previous experience, nor exposure,

to KM principles as a recognized discipline, although I had practiced the concepts throughout my career.

As a very young Field Artillery lieutenant, I can recall being charged with running my first M16 qualification range. I had to coordinate with range control to acquire the use of the range, and also get the necessary briefings, standard operating procedures and documentation needed to execute the range safely, properly and, most importantly, effectively. My leadership instructed me to write the OPORD for the range, gather resources and rehearse, rehearse, rehearse.

The mission of executing a successful M16 qualification range required the utmost attention to detail and meticulous planning. I was inundated with information. The S3 provided maps, routes, equipment needed, safety considerations, TTPs and a list of objectives. The S4 chimed in with the logistical requirements: medics, fuel, mechanics, extra parts, targets, flags, food and, of course, ammunition. Several sections within the battalion anted up their particular section's unique informational resources and/or support.

My mission was to ingest the information and bring everything together coherently to present it to the leaders, the range support personnel and qualifiers of the unit. No one needed to know how I staffed the requirement, collected the assets or resourced the mission; they had little to no concern for what range control briefed me on the days prior to

setting up the range for execution. The concerns were mainly, "When do we leave? How do we get there? What's the firing order? How will my scores be tracked and reported?" Leaders and Soldiers required the critical information that would allow them to execute their decision-making process.

The information I provided in the OPORD had to be understandable and executable.

Fast forward 20 years later, and I am still doing the same thing. The difference is the level at which I operate, the mission being executed, and my role as a facilitator to the mission executor(s). Staff sections within the Corps still perform stovepiped operations to a degree. Commanders are still in dire need of knowledge extracted from staff products to make precise and timely decisions. Although staff sections operate independently of one another when building products for mission analysis, there is the need to ensure that the products reach across boundaries to other sections to support collaborative and unified resolution at the end state.

At any point in time, the S-3 shop should be fully aware, or have the ability to access the progress of the S-2 shop. KM is the solution. People, processes, and technology are tools used by KM personnel to flatten the informational stove pipes. A flattened data structure provides visibility across the command and staff, and it guides efforts and activities toward a common

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operational picture. The drivers of that COP are the requirements identified by the commander in the form of, but not limited to, critical informational requirements, commanders intent and commanders guidance. From these, we can extract the knowledge from the information produced by the individual staff sections and begin the process of knowledge presentation to the commander.

The KM officer's tools of the trade--people, processes and technology--are thoroughly examined for the best means of presenting the harvested knowledge in such a manner that the commander has reliable, accurate and timely data accessible within a single click of a mouse button, dashboard view, CPOF/CIDNE feed or phone call. It's strictly based on how the commander prefers to receive and process the knowledge presented.

The SharePoint portal was the tool I employed most. The deputy commanding general, advising and training extracted knowledge and information mainly from this tool. The staff collaborated within the portal to meet the DCG's CIR. Calendars were synchronized on the portal, meetings were scheduled, tasks were tracked and documents were shared. I placed heavy emphasis on training for all sections, and moved a large population of shared drive users to portal operations. SP training was the window of opportunity to showcase the many advantages of collaborative processes.

The benefits of using SharePoint versus the use of shared drives became evident during the training session. In response to the CIR, the staff knew where to place certain information, mainly in the "watering hole" as it was called. This was a single-click location for knowledge used by the DCG. Staff sections were given workspace within the portal to perform analytical work. At any time, one staff section could see the working progress of another section, as products were maintained in shared document folders for collaborative purposes.

KM success relies on command emphasis, training and effective results. If a KM solution happens to be the portal, the command has to emphasize its use for it to be effective. To gain the trust of users, they must be trained, retrained and eagerly supported. The system employed must prove better than the one being replaced and the delta gained has to be large. Happy to glad changes will not gain favor over a staff section that's efficient with an outdated mode of staffing.

I learned many lessons during my tour. The KM field has many branches, and one could write

endlessly on people, processes and technological solutions for the many different commanders and command types that exist. No two things are the same, and there is no one-over-the-world solution that applies to every situation. Each change in mission, personnel, or technology requires a new look at how we can best support the commander.

As my tour winds down and we prepare to transfer our KM TTPs to the incoming unit, I am once again feeling the urge to have the internal argument. Am I delivering the typical, left seat-right seat informational dump, or am I providing my successors with knowledgeable data that will support their KM efforts, or both? As KM practitioners, we may support the efforts of the lieutenant charged with running the M16 qualification range or the General who is in charge of advising and training a country to provide for its own security. Regardless of the mission, KM provides the smarts to present the knowledge used to make the critical decisions accurately, timely and precisely. The commander executes more proficiently when he receives knowledge versus information. Therefore, transforming information into knowledge is essential for supporting commanders at all levels in order to achieve mission success. KM enables that requirement.

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## ACRONYM QuickScan

**A&T** - Advising and Training  
**CIDNE** - Combined Information Data Network Exchange  
**CIR** - Commander's Information Requirements  
**COP** - Common Operational Picture  
**CPOF** - Command Post of the Future  
**DCG** - Deputy Commanding General  
**KM** - Knowledge Management  
**OPORD** - Operations Order