



KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT ORGANISATIONS IN ARMED FORCES: A STATUS REPORT ON SELECT ARMIES OF THE WORLD

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Abstract:

The fourth dimension of the war is information superiority and this will have a decisive contribution to battlefield outcome. Sharing of information data within the armed forces has thus assumed tremendous importance for military environments. Rapid change in military technology constantly affects and changes the resultant doctrines and organisations. In order to achieve the above objectives Knowledge Management and systems are required to be adopted by Army world over. The paper brings out the state of Knowledge Management activities of select Armies of the world to understand the present status.

Key Words: Knowledge Management, Military Knowledge Management & Organisation

1. Introduction

Armed Forces are one such organisation that is extremely complex and has a huge dependency on its knowledge base. Being the national security instrument, there is very little scope for error in this capital-intensive organisation. Within these parameters, it also has to keep pace with the peers. The challenges faced by the Armed Forces in the current scenario can be broadly the threat of globalisation and the advancements in ICT (Information and Communication Technology). The requirement of manpower demands soldiers who are technologically sound, innovative and adept with digital warfare. These competencies are required for future wars if any. Operational strategies and concepts will back up the high-tech weapons and to man these, there will be a need of competent professionals. Developing these competent professionals is crucial for the future of the Army which will be tending towards the Fourth Dimension encompassing Joint Force, Information Superiority and Multi-Dimensional operational capabilities. This increase in Information Management (IM) has led the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) and subsequently the need for modern warfare. This information must always be readily available and easy to compile and assess at any given point of time. To achieve this, there is a need for massive improvement in IM that has to enable safe sharing of knowledge.

Army Knowledge Management: Knowledge management is not only relevant for the IPO-driven dot.com e-businesses, but also equally relevant for non-profit and public sector organizations as well as national and regional governments of the world (Yogesh Malhotra, 2000). The army knowledge management as a study transforms the military force into a centric knowledge force. The strategy includes robust and affirmative goals that have a positive bearing on decision making. The battlefield scenario will often be knowledge based than present information based. The Army Knowledge Management provides an integral approach to identify, retrieve, evaluate, discriminate and store tactical knowledge to meet military aims. In military issues, systematic and scientific progress is a constant procedure and at never in history, barring the industrial revolution, has the technical progress been so striking. This has created separate playing fields globally which are that knowledge economy has found a fervent companion in Indian economic and industrial fields. This handling of the economic and industrial giant as led to a fresher pasture call it military knowledge management. Army needs thinking soldiers who are innovative and can fight a digital/ computerised war. Battle space management will only be effective by information superiority. Application of knowledge management (KM) is the key to achieving this superiority. This is an inevitable means and can be achieved through the creation of knowledge enhancing processes and managing the knowledge assets judiciously. In the context of military organisations, the transition to a knowledge and information medium from an industrial medium is the need of the hour (Muzumdar, 1997). Military KM is the strategic push that is needed for realisation of the defence objectives. The KM cycle will enable leveraging of existing knowledge and its conversion to new action based knowledge (McIntyre, Gauvin, and Waruszynski, 2003). This will then be the central point of the information revolution in the military operations and this is what will enable knowledge generation, information delivery and technology innovation (Browning, 2002).

2. Review of Literature:

Although research about knowledge management is growing at a fast pace, very few have focused exclusively on efforts in the military. More and more anecdotal information about military knowledge management is appearing in the popular press and on-line (e.g., Anthes, Frizzell, @brint.com), but formal

research is still non-existent. The most significant reason for the lack of this research is that the military services are just now beginning their KM efforts in earnest. Many such projects, however, have been limited in scope and in benefit. In the wake of budget cuts, personnel drawdown, and increased mission tasking, the services are now realizing the necessity of enterprise-wide knowledge management programs for both their business and war fighting processes.

3. The Army Requirement of KM:

The military organization is similar to any other large public and private sector organization, but it also differs in many aspects. Key differences include: culture, mission, governance, and environment. As for culture, a Center for Strategic and International Studies report stated, while our civil culture appropriately emphasizes liberty and individuality, military culture downplays them and emphasizes values such as discipline and self-sacrifice that stem from the imperative of military effectiveness and success on the battlefield. The mission of the military is unique as well. No other organization is expected to “respond quickly and operate effectively, cohesively, economically, and decisively across the entire spectrum of military operations from full-scale major theater war to humanitarian relief operations to peacetime engagement (Babb, 2001). The civilian control of the military, the influence of government entities, and the command-and-control structure of the military also make organization governance issues and actions unique. Finally, the military must operate in an unusually complex environment. Similar to the civilian sector, the military environment includes the state of technology and the condition of the worldwide economy. What is unique, however, is that the military environment also includes all other organizations including those of our own government as well as all foreign governments, international organizations (IOs), terrorist organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the relationships with each of them (Babb, 2001). All the advanced nations of the newly globalized world will be threatened by state and non-state actors with the means and will carry out their threats. In light of these unique characteristics, it is important to acknowledge the organizational differences of the military.

4. Knowledge Management Status in Military:

Though KM is still a relatively new concept for the military services, it is approached independently by each Army (OASD/C3I, 2000c). If we understand the situational analysis through a preliminary investigation on countries like US, UK, Canada and France, we realize that these countries are thriving on the knowledge management framework that they have already created in their respective armies (Department of Air Force, 2003). The countries who have a smaller military force like Malaysia and Australia have also started working and implementing the knowledge management framework and have aligned their management and troops to this regard. Envisaging a future battlefield which will be Network Centric, there will be predominance of technology based weapon systems and equipment and in this scenario; the one who has the knowledge edge in the battlefield will reign superior over the others (SG McIntyre et.al, 2003). Therefore, there is no choice, but to move towards a knowledge-based system for realisation of future goals and for a future ready Armed Forces.

5. Status of KM organisation in Army's World Over:

United States of America: The American Army's KM practice started in the mid 1980's and was later expanded into the regular army in the 1990's through its knowledge management initiative, enterprise – level KM strategies (Bower, 2001). Its basic information website *Army Knowledge Online (AKO)*, started in 1995 was recently redesigned as a one stop knowledge portal, business platform to manage operations for the entire army. Being an integral part of the transformation of the army, AKO not only crosses the war fighting business but also helps in the intelligence mission areas that support the present and the future force (Lord 2010). So as to transform itself into a network centric knowledge- based force, the Army produced the Army Knowledge Management (AKM) (Santamaria 2002). Similarly the U.S. Air Force has developed the Air Force Knowledge Now (AFKN) and the navy with their the Navy Knowledge Online (NKO) foster worldwide communication among their staff.

Canada: The Department of National Defence (DND), after substantial research came up with The Knowledge Management System (KMS) for the Canadian defence forces. The KM system was devised in 2004 for the Land Force Command and Control Information System (LFC2IS) to support different systems and integrate them into one common system (Cantin, 2004). The Army Lessons Learned Knowledge Warehouse (ALLKW) (Champoux, 2003) and the Electronic Task Support Framework (ETSF) were integrated as one system to generate knowledge specific activity for individuals and the organisation. The main purpose of the KM system was to provide the Canadian forces a tool to manage knowledge and process. It also produced and managed information from various sources. The Knowledge Management Process of the forces is assisted by The KM System to manage several (Pierrette, 2010) knowledge domains such as the Doctrine, Lessons Learned and System Help domains. Their knowledge within organizations is managed by a Specific group of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs).

Germany: To counter the world political situation and the latest challenges the German Armed forces commenced CD&E (Concept Development & Experimentation) projects with a dedicated team of specialists called as the core team which consists of personnel delegated by the army, navy and air force on part time basis called as 'Boundary Spanners' to develop innovative solutions to the problems faced, and give a face lift to the

organisation by implementing these technologies (BMV Struck, 2004). This in turn equips the German army to conduct difficult and complex operations with ease.

Australia: Understanding the importance of knowledge management to meet the challenges of the knowledge era, the Australian army created a post of Chief Knowledge Officer. The AKM group manages Army's knowledge through the management of army assessment and the integration of delivery of lessons, doctrine and technology based learning products using an army knowledge domain. The Airforce and the navy are still in nascent stage of implementation of knowledge management initiatives.

Malaysia: Doctrines, policies and procedures, operations and training manuals, information systems, work flow and databases are the forms in which knowledge exists in the Malaysian army. The army failed to manage this rich treasure of knowledge because of lack of KM practices and the lack of awareness and understanding and exposure about KM in the organisational context. Though the Malaysian Forces have their websites to access basic information, KM practice is still in an underdeveloped stage.

India: Various studies have been initiated by the three Arms (Army, Airforce and Navy), however a robust system as that in the United States or the Canadian army is yet to fructify. Defense experts in India are unanimous about the need of KM system for the forces and have been sharing their views and experiences from time to time.

6. Conclusion:

The paper brings out the importance of Knowledge Management with particular reference to Armed Forces. Western countries have understood the importance of Knowledge Management and have imbibed the KM system with full force. The United States of America and Canada are in the forefront with highly developed Knowledge Management architecture in place. Even smaller countries like Malaysia are in the process of developing their own system. In order to harness the potential benefits of knowledge, Indian Armed Forces are required to develop an indigenous Knowledge Management solution at the earliest.

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