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# Enabling the CBRN Force Through Knowledge Management: *One Learns—Everyone Knows*

By Ms. Beverley P. Finley

*“If you have an apple and I have an apple and we exchange apples, then you and I will still each have one apple. But if you have an idea and I have an idea and we exchange these ideas, then each of us will have two ideas.”*

— George Bernard Shaw<sup>1</sup>

How many times have you taken a new job—only to discover a lack of guidance regarding what you are supposed to be doing and how you are supposed to be doing it? You then spend countless hours tediously learning your job from scratch, making contacts, and establishing and meeting timelines. A lot of extra work could be avoided, and a lot of precious time could be saved—if only your predecessors understood the dynamics of knowledge management (KM) and how KM can enhance an organization.

According to Field Manual (FM) 6-01.1, *Knowledge Management Section*, KM is the “art of creating, organizing, applying, and transferring knowledge to facilitate situational understanding and decisionmaking.”<sup>2</sup> In layman’s terms, it is the practical collection of connections between people, technology, and processes that allows for the best decisions and the best outcomes within a given context.

KM is not a new concept; as Soldiers and civilians, we have practiced it for years. But somewhere along the way, we became obsessed with the idea that “knowledge is power” and that hoarding knowledge is the key to greater success. However, we have learned from recent world events (the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City, New York, and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and the 11 March 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami in Japan) that we do not have time to “reinvent the wheel,” but that we may need to enhance or alter it slightly.

Data is nothing more than a collection of isolated facts or unprocessed signals. Information is created—and further meaning or value imparted—when those facts or signals are placed into some sort of context, relationships are formed, and patterns emerge. Knowledge refers to the realization or understanding of the meaning and value of these relationships and patterns and their implications on an operation. There are two types of knowledge—*explicit knowledge*, which refers to knowledge that is documented with digital or nondigital media (computer files or paper files) and *tacit knowledge*, which refers to comprehension gained through study, practice, experience, and human interaction.

The major components of KM are people, technology, and processes. Together, these components are used to address the questions of: Who does what? With what? And how? The most important of these three components is people. Knowledge is only meaningful, and its benefits are only applicable, to people. Processes—or specific, continuous actions, operations, or series of changes that lead people to an end product—are the next most important component of KM. Technology, the remaining component, encompasses industrial arts, applied science, and engineering. Technological tools can be used to achieve the desired end product or to share information and knowledge.

Regardless of the mission, there are certain things that must be understood and acted upon. There are people with needs, and there are people who have the information or knowledge necessary to fill those needs. Effective communication is required to connect the two. The key to KM is to gather information that is already available and to apply it to the current



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need—maybe in a new way that involves new learning methods or stimulates new understanding. According to Colonel Vance P. Visser, commandant of the U.S. Army Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear School (USACBRNS), our outlining mission is to “. . . support the defense of our Nation and interests at home and/or abroad.” To successfully complete our mission, we must have information and knowledge at our fingertips.

We have been using KM since the inception of the Chemical Corps; and it is a critical element in the chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) world. For example, we have done an excellent job of integrating the CBRN Warning and Reporting System into our daily operations. We need to do the same with a few other technologies and processes. 

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup>*Phi Kappa Phi Journal*, Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi, March 1952, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup>FM 6-01.1, *Knowledge Management Section*, 29 August 2008.

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