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Chapter VII

Challenges in Developing a Knowledge Management Strategy for the Air Force Material Command*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is widely acknowledged that an organizational knowledge management strategy is a desired precursor to the development of specific knowledge management (KM) initiatives. The development of such a strategy is often difficult in the face of a lack of organizational understanding about KM and other organizational constraints. This case study describes the issues involved in developing a new KM strategy for the Air Force Material Command (AFMC). It centers around the AFMC KM program manager, Randy Adkins, and his challenges in developing the future KM strategy direction for the AFMC enterprise. The case study begins with a description of the history of the AFMC KM program and the existing KM system, but then focuses primarily on issues to be considered in future strategy development, such as maintaining top leadership support and understanding, conflict with the IT organization, funding cuts, future KM system configuration needs, and outsourcing of KM. The intent of this case study is to demonstrate, using Randy Adkins and AFMC as an example, many common issues that can be encountered as leaders struggle to develop viable KM strategies.

BACKGROUND

The Air Force Material Command

The Air Force Material Command (AFMC) is one of the Air Force's nine major commands (Figure 1). It is headquartered at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, and employs 85,000 military and civilian employees across the globe. The primary mission of AFMC is to "develop, acquire, and sustain the aerospace power needed to defend the United States and its interests . . . today and tomorrow" (HQ AFMC PA, 2001a). As such, it has cradle-to-grave oversight for the Air Force's aircraft, missiles, and munitions (HQ AFMC PA, 2001a). Key mission essential tasks supported by AFMC include product support, supply management, and depot maintenance (see Appendix 1 for a further breakdown).

According to the AFMC Public Affairs Fact Sheet (HQ AFMC PA, 2001), AFMC fulfills its responsibilities through organizations that serve as product centers, research laboratories, test centers, air logistic centers for maintenance, and specialized centers (Figure 2). Weapon systems, such as aircraft and missiles, are developed and acquired through four product centers, using science and technology from the research laboratories. These weapon systems are then tested at AFMC's two test centers and are serviced and repaired at its three air logistics maintenance depots. The command's specialized centers perform various other development and logistics functions. Eventually, aircraft and missiles are "retired" to its Aircraft Maintenance and Regeneration Center in Tucson, Arizona.

AFMC's central governing organization, Headquarters (HQ) AFMC (Figure 3), consists of all the functional areas that provide support for command organizations. The Directorate of Requirements (DR)—the focus of this case study—is the command's focal point for policies, processes, and resources that support the product and information services mission (HQ AFMC PA, 2001b) and is the home of AFMC's Knowledge Management program which has the official name, Air Force Knowledge Management (AFKM).

SETTING THE STAGE

Evolution of KM in AFMC

In the early 1990s, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) recognized the need to streamline its acquisition process. As a result, the Air Force (AF) created a System Program Office (SPO) to develop technology solutions to help achieve that end. One such technology solution was called the AF Acquisition Model. Initially, this information system included an online repository of all acquisition regulations, step-by-step processes for conducting acquisitions, and miscellaneous help information such as points of contact and lessons learned. Although the technology used was immature, this digital repository was a first of its kind in the military and an idea quickly copied by the other services.

After its initial success, the SPO proposed the same idea to the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition Technology for possible implementation across the

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