

# A View from the Top: Ops Director Discusses the Future of Knowledge Management



Interview with Mr. Robert W. (Bob) Schmitt, Executive Director, Contract Management Operations, DCMA Headquarters by Dr. Moonja Kim, Knowledge Management Center, DCMA Headquarters

*Knowledge Management (KM) recently aligned with the Contract Management Operations Directorate in what was a strategic decision to gain additional leverage for fulfilling performance management objectives. Dr. Moonja Kim of the*

*Knowledge Management Center at DCMA Headquarters sat down with colleague Mr. Robert Schmitt, executive director, Contract Management Operations, to discuss the realignment and other initiatives taking place regarding KM.*



Knowledge Management experts Mr. Robert Schmitt and Dr. Moonja Kim. (DCMA staff photo)

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Over the last several months, the level of energy put into KM and Communities of Practice (CoPs) within DCMA has increased as more employees recognize the impact CoP can have within their areas of specialization. Between October 2003 and October 2004 the total number of CoP members grew threefold, from 5,624 to 16,633. Due to this increased interest in KM initiatives and DCMA Director Maj. Gen. Darryl A. Scott’s strong support, the Knowledge Management Center (KMC) is currently providing instruction on the roles of KM training. KM training updates can be found at *Konnexions*, the KM e-Newsletter at [http://home.dcma.mil/cntr-dcmac-q/Konnexions/KM\\_training.htm](http://home.dcma.mil/cntr-dcmac-q/Konnexions/KM_training.htm).

***MK: Is Knowledge Management Center (KMC) going to work differently after moving to OC?***

RWS: I view the move as a strategic decision to take KM and put it in Operations as an effort to really gain leverage and alignment with where we are going related to performance management. Will KMC operate differently on a day-to-day basis? Probably not, but within a strategic context, it will be different. I actually viewed it as an opportunity to help me transform Operations and the view of Headquarters Operations as knowledge managers.

***MK: In your opinion, what is the key to making KM successful in DCMA?***

RWS: If we can demonstrate that KM is a valuable tool and that it is a strategy that will really benefit people, then KM will be successful. People look for better ways of doing business, so it’s more like a self-selecting approach. You will use something if it’s helpful to you. If someone else expects you to use it but you cannot understand where it’s going to make you successful, it becomes an activity without direction and purpose, and most people will

think it’s a waste of time. We will know we have achieved success by the types of activities that are exhibited. In other words, are our Communities of Practice (CoPs) vibrant? Are there good after-action reports being written and acted upon? Are there good closed feedback loops being established that change behavior? Success will be when we see these activities as the normal course of business, not as special events.

***MK: What do you see as the role of CoPs at DCMA? Do you have some suggestions for energizing CoPs?***

RWS: The role of CoPs is to enable people with common interests, challenges and responsibilities to communicate with one another — to become a virtual network. Virtual communities are online, automated groups that are facilitated through the use of tools, such as video teleconferencing and other lines of communication. Their roles are to communicate, learn and provide feedback, solutions, alternatives and guidance. CoPs become energized when the people engaged in them start to see value.

***MK: Current CoPs do not physically get together. Do you think face-to-face meetings would energize the communities?***

RWS: Face-to-face meetings are great. However, we can only have a few conferences and workshops due to budgetary constraints. But I think in the long run what you want to create is a CoP that is with you each day and becomes an immediate resource for you. That resource becomes a sounding board and a place to get additional guidance. Ultimately, we can have some face-to-face events with communities, but what we are really trying to do with CoPs is let people know that someplace within the Agency there is someone doing a job very similar to theirs, and

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there is something they can learn from others today without waiting for the next conference.

**MK: What is your expectation of the Virtual Workspace Portal, which will be deployed sometime in FY05?**

RWS: When you want to support someone based on what he or she needs to do on a daily basis, the more you can tailor your support to that individual, the better off you are. My objective is to have the ability to maintain an enterprise portal that we can customize to the individual. In fact, when we submitted the KM requirements to the Information Technology personnel, our objective was to provide the right information to the right person at the right time — when you need it, nothing before and nothing after. The current Web strategy, how we organize our information, is critical. Let me use an analogy. It is the difference between having a person standing in front of a library and you telling that person that the information he or she needs is somewhere in that building versus presenting that person with the specific information he or she needs in a manner that does not create information overload.

There are two aspects of KM: presentation and capture. Up until the present, we spent a lot of time presenting and organizing information, probably because of our background as a highly centralized organization. But we need to start capturing and sharing information that is occurring on a daily basis at the point of execution. CoPs provide ways to capture and share the information, and our electronic librarian can help in organizing the information. The library function will be really helpful in effectiveness and efficiency. Right now we have lots of information spread over many different

locations, and we don't have the ability to get the information where and when we need it because of the configuration and maintenance.

**MK: Maj. Gen. Scott said that a part of what he wants KM to do is to help people understand the wealth of knowledge that we've got in this organization and organize that knowledge to serve the customer and deliver on the customers' outcomes. Do you have some suggestions for how to go about doing this?**

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RWS: Maj. Gen. Scott talked about the untapped knowledge of the organization. One of the strategies for making the knowledge known is understanding the various dimensions of our knowledge and organizing information based on these various dimensions. For instance, one dimension may be commodity, which could get the people who deal with electronics or avionics together. Another dimension could be a particular corporation, such as a contract management office working with Boeing or Lockheed Martin. As we start viewing our business along these dimensions there may be hints as to where we have natural interests and natural communities with resident information that is being locally generated but has applicability to other parts of the organization. It's really about how we create the understanding that KM is an ideal way for answering day-to-day issues. For example, we want to answer the person who says, “Here is my problem — is there anyone who has confronted the same problem? Is there any solution?” I think if we strategically focus on how to tap into what the Agency knows — and act as an enterprise-wide organization — the quality of employees' performances should dramatically improve. So the important issue is, “How do I create this organizational understanding and

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## Knowledge Management Center’s (KMC’s) Objectives for FY05

**A**fter the KMC moved to the Operations Directorate, KMC personnel developed an FY05 KM implementation plan. This plan includes the following four objectives and required activities for each objective:

- Provide the ability to use Communities of Practice (CoPs) on functional challenges that drive performance and customer outcomes
- Review and revise KM documents into a single source for CoPs information
- Deploy training to KM advocates and supervisors
- Open program CoPs (for example, the FA/22 Raptor program) to explore performance improvements to program-specific customer challenges
- Support the use of Blackboard and Masterfile, the establishment of new CoPs and the sustainment of existing CoPs
- Establish an environment that generates and uses lessons learned and successful practices
- Establish standard CoP content areas to permit easy submission and access to information
- Establish a within-community award for submission of performance innovations, which will be awarded by the CoPs KM advocate
- Conduct an annual Knowledge Sharing Conference
- Provide access to general references and job-related information, including connections to “Ask an Expert” and e-library
- Establish a standard CoP template to simplify navigation and reduce search time
- Establish standard small and medium enterprise (SME) contact information format within each CoP
- Develop taxonomies for the digital library that will include functional aspects of the DCMA mission and customer support
- Establish META tag guidelines for posting of information to the digital library
- Set up digital library and assure access by all
- Provide for knowledge retention — the capability to capture, store and retrieve the right information, at the right time and in the right amount
- Develop an approach and interview questions to capture retiring employees’ job knowledge and make the results available to junior employees
- Establish methodologies and guidelines for archiving and cataloging functional collaboration information for use by all community members, especially new employees

The KMC’s Information Technology Center is continuing its effort to purchase an advanced KM tool, and expected deployment is late FY05. The KMC hopes to establish a pilot project when the new tool is available, complete with user and administrative training. Additional information will be provided as it becomes known.

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presence, and how do I tap into it enterprise-wide?” Even though we are a decentralized organization with activities all over the world, we are not truly alone. What we need is to create the understanding and the ability to reach out and touch the enterprise. When you can start creating the culture that encourages that and start creating tools that enable people to reach out to others, then you make the individuals as smart as the Agency. That is what we should strive for.

**MK: Maj. Gen. Scott mentioned a simple way that Peterson Air Force Base implemented KM. Do you have more ideas on how to implement KM at DCMA?**

**RWS:** I think we should consider the broader base of the total learning organization. In some cases, ‘KM’ and ‘learning organization’ can be synonymous. With an understanding that we are in the knowledge business and knowledge resides in all parts of an organization, our strategy should be to look at creative ways to extract the knowledge from those individuals or from experiences and share it. Fundamentals of KM are really about collecting the knowledge, validating it by evaluating whether it is applicable or not and then distributing it.

#### Mr. Robert W. Schmitt

Mr. Schmitt is the executive director, Contract Management Operations. He is responsible for developing and implementing operational policies and procedures for the Agency that span the acquisition life cycle. His responsibilities extend from supporting major programs to improving operational readiness functions. Key areas under Mr. Schmitt’s responsibility include Supplier Risk Management, Engineering, Earned Value Management System, Quality Assurance, Production, Business and Financial Systems and Critical Infrastructure Protection.

#### Dr. Moonja Kim

Dr. Kim is a member of the KMC staff and publishes *Konnexions*, the KM e-Newsletter, located at <http://home.dcma.mil/cntr-dcmac-q/Konnexions/index.htm>. She also supports *Communicator* articles related to KM at DCMA and performs other duties for KMC, such as supporting various CoPs providing KM training, etc.

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