# NEWS FROM THE CTC

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# Where Did I Put That? Knowledge Management at Company and Battalion

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# Knowledge Management at Company and Battalion

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**Executive Summary**

This article is intended for all units conducting home station training to prepare themselves for a combat training center (CTC) rotation. The author discusses a recurring trend at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) that one of the more significant debates during JRTC rotations seems to be the challenge of analog versus digital products. While each method has its own merits, each presents its own challenges as it relates to KM. Thus, each method should have associated techniques for ensuring effective knowledge flow to higher, subordinate, and adjacent headquarters.

# Where Did I Put That?
## Knowledge Management at Company and Battalion
### CPT Matthew Longar Task Force 2

At best, a poor knowledge management (KM) plan consumes unnecessary time and effort looking for, updating, and disseminating products. At worst, poor KM can lead to tactical errors and lost lives as outdated and irrelevant products are disseminated and acted upon. Army Doctrinal Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0 *Mission Command* defines KM as "…the process of enabling knowledge flow to enhance shared understanding, learning, and decision making." While the concept is relatively simple, get the right information to the right people by the right time, staffs and commanders struggle to achieve shared understanding through effective KM.

Field Manual (FM) 6-0 *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations* asserts that the components of KM are people, processes, tools, and organizations. Using this schema, this article will recommend some best practices and tools to help both commanders and staffs make timely, accurate decisions. While written primarily for the battalion staff and company leadership, these practices may be extrapolated for application at the brigade and above.

**People**

To avoid the problems associated with poor KM, FM 6-0 states that special staff should contain a KM officer (KMO). Few battalion staffs, and no company commanders, have the luxury or necessity, of assigning a dedicated KMO. Instead, these duties are often either neglected entirely or relegated, by means of mutual understanding, to either the S6 or some unsuspecting lieutenant in the Staff section. The importance of KM, however, necessitates a deliberate process for execution of KMO duties.

Using FM 6-0, ADRP 6-0, and lessons learned, the duties of the KMO could be developed into a battalion or company main command post (Main CP) standard operating procedure (MCPSOP). Given clear guidance, these duties could then be assigned to a capable specialist or junior non-commissioned officer (NCO) who is currently working within the S3 or S6 and is directly under the purview of the executive officer (XO). At the company level, the XO may assume many of these duties and ensure that platoon leadership receives the necessary information in a timely manner.

Inevitably, the S6 will play a significant role in execution of the KM plan. However, given his or her significant involvement in the military decision-making process (MDMP) as a primary staff officer, it is recommended that their role be minimal as it relates to KM. This should not, however, preclude the involvement of the S6 section in the KM process.

The most important aspect of KM as it relates to people is that the decision on who determines and executes the KM plan is a deliberate dialogue to be had with the commander. While all staff bear some responsibility in execution of these duties, it need not necessarily fall directly on staff primaries or the XO.

**Processes**
One of the more significant debates during JRTC rotations seems to be the challenge of analog versus digital products. While each method has its own merits, each presents its own challenges as it relates to KM. Thus, each method should have associated techniques for ensuring effective knowledge flow to higher, subordinate, and adjacent headquarters.

While the ability to fight using analog products is critical, it presents some unique challenges. Namely, geographically disparate units have difficulty planning operations using solely analog techniques. During such operations, company trains and runners must be utilized as the primary means of enabling information flow between headquarters. Additionally, significant changes to planned operations can be difficult to effectively communicate over radio traffic thereby reducing adaptability of the unit.

Digital communications, while enabling greater shared understanding, also present some unique challenges. In a decisive action training environment (DATE), every digital signal emitted from a battalion main CP or company CP becomes a means by which the enemy can target that location. Furthermore, units are severely constrained by the ability to power digital systems whether through batteries or generators.

To mitigate these effects, we recommended that battalions and companies conduct their initial planning using primarily analog products and, having established a foothold during the Joint Forcible Entry (JFE), begin to incorporate more digital products. While company trains provide a critical means by which to disseminate analog imagery, overlays, and orders, this dissemination must be rehearsed and fully developed. Similarly, the process of digital KM should be developed and rehearsed to ensure common language, network familiarity, and understanding of the processes used for KM.

**Tools**

One of the most important tools used for KM is an effective, rehearsed, battalion, and company main CPSOP. Ideally, this main CPSOP addresses common problems like who generates what products, where the finished products get placed, and naming convention. All of these aspects of the main CPSOP should be custom designed for ease of use. Lengthy titles, excessive layers of files, and variability in execution across staff sections should be avoided.

Furthermore, staffs and companies should make every effort to train and use as many Digital Master Gunners as is feasible. The three-week Mission Command Digital Master Gunner Course (MCDMGC), held at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, is designed to help maximize mission command through the use of digital systems. Should a unit be unable to send Soldiers pre-rotation to the full course, a 40-hour course is available at most post Mission Training Centers (MTCs). An online course is also available from https://lwn.army.mil. Having these knowledgeable, trained, Soldiers available to assist with mission command greatly enhances information flow laterally and vertically.

Lastly, commanders should view the battle rhythm as a tool for KM. Four, well planned, battle rhythm events a day can accomplish all seven steps of the MDMP. An example of this rhythm can be seen below:

| Battle Rhythm Event | MDMP Step Completed |
|---|---|
| 0800: Battle Update Brief | Receipt of mission |
| 1100: Plans Synch | COA Development |
| 1500: Calendar Synch | COA Analysis<br>COA Comparison |
| 1730: Commander's Update Brief | COA Approval |

**Table 1: Battle rhythm nested with MDMP (Note: Orders production is on-going)**

By nesting battle rhythm events and MDMP, commanders can preserve organizational energy and improve efficiency thereby promoting knowledge flow.

**Organization**

While seemingly nebulous, FM 6-0 states that, "An organization is the matrix in which people, processes, and tools function to integrate individual learning and organizational learning strategies." Put simply, organization is the sum and interaction of everything discussed thus far. While this aspect of KM falls primarily to the commander, all staff primaries as well as the XO play a critical role in setting these conditions.

The most important factor in this organization is the physical layout of the battalion main CP and company CP. Having become accustomed to main CP layouts over the conflicts of the 21st century, many battalions struggle to find the right balance of size, ease of knowledge flow, and ability to be mobile. While no two organizations will likely have the same answer, here are some considerations when planning the physical layout of the main CP or company CP:

- While easily relocated, a small main CP is not as conducive to achieving shared understanding amongst staff sections and subordinate commanders.

- Most units will relocate their main CPs three to four times during a rotation for any number of reasons. The highest frequency of CP relocations in recent history has been nine.

- The most important capability of the main CP is the ability to generate a digital and analog common operating picture (COP). Plan functional and integrated cells accordingly.

Rehearsing main CP relocation is key. Ideally, a battalion can establish a main CP within three hours. This should take minutes for a company CP.

**Summary**

While by no means exhaustive, this article hopefully provides a tool for generating dialogue amongst commanders at both the battalion and company echelons on ways to improve KM. This often-overlooked aspect of operations is all encompassing and critical to successful execution of mission command. FM 6-0 *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations* as well as the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) can provide valuable insights into this important aspect of the operations process.