

AFMC Staff Tackles Major Move Toward Less Paper

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WRIGHT-PATTERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Ohio (AFPN) – The opportunity to leverage technology to reduce the amount of paper circulating through the staff is a major initiative taking off at Air Force Materiel Command headquarters here.

AFMC's command information management section, along with the directorates of operations and communications and information, are participating in a program to pilot a commercial-off-the-shelf software, or COTS, package at AFMC.

E-mail and electronic commerce have helped reduce the amount of paper, but a big opportunity lies in cradle-to-grave movement of documents electronically. The electronic office environment requires a complete cultural change in the way the command views document management.

The new environment calls for one process with three basic steps. Step one is the basic action item and tracking mechanism; step two is the associated workflow; and three is the records management element.

Prior initiatives to implement an electronic office environment weren't successful because of inconsistent computer system architecture and the limitations of existing software. Now, technology has alleviated these problems, and the time is right for a "less paper" headquarters.

"We continually waste numerous manhours as well as resources suspending, tracking, reproducing, and quality-controlling documents," said Col. Mark Johnson, executive officer to Gen. George Babbitt, AFMC commander. "To become more efficient, we must move into the electronic office environment."

Reengineering and manpower reductions in the headquarters relied heavily on technology to keep pace with the mission. With fewer people to work projects, it is more important than ever that technology is used to fill the space and make passing information more efficient.

The biggest hurdle to implementing an electronic solution is the culture change, according to Master Sgt. Delmer Smith, chief of the director's staff office in AFMC's operations directorate.

"We have become so accustomed to holding paper, and to take that away is very unsettling to a large per-

centage of our people," Smith said. "The key to transitioning to a 'less paper' environment is securing support from the highest level in the organization. Without that support, a change to this degree is doomed to fail. We are discovering more benefits every day, but if people aren't willing to change, they'll miss out on a great opportunity."

The pilot program is in its early stages, but Smith is confident it will improve work processes.

"This program is no different than any others when it comes to the learning curve," Smith said. "Once you're over that threshold of understanding the program, the light comes on and the willingness to be open-minded and learn more becomes automatic."

A key feature of the COTS package is the complete mobility via a Web-based environment. This feature allows users to access work from any location with a desktop personal computer or a laptop.

"No matter where you are, the electronic office system lets you work through the process the same way you would work sitting at your desktop," Smith said.

"In our personal lives, technology made it possible for us to have more free time – microwave dinners are ready in half the time, leaving us time that has been filled with even more activities. The same principle affects office work," he said. "The use of the computer has allowed us to become more efficient, thus raising expectations from higher authorities for us to do more, quicker."

With already-programmed manpower reductions a stark reality, the need to exploit technology to its fullest extent is critical, Smith said.

"The electronic office will enable us to meet these demands and hopefully leave time to start working other issues," Smith said.

"We must embrace technology to work smarter, not harder."

Editor's Note: Meyer works for AFMC Public Affairs. This information is in the public domain at <http://www.af.mil/news> on the Internet.