

Spc. Arisleindy Valdez-Gomez, a supply specialist assigned to the 21st Theater Sustainment Command trains with the Global Combat Support System-Army at the 240th Quartermaster Company Supply Support Activity at Smith Barracks in Baumholder, Germany. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Alexander Burnett)



Global Combat Support System–Army: A Dynamic Readiness Tool for Mission Command

■ By Capt. Mei-Ling T. Guarino

As the Global Combat Support System–Army (GCSS–Army) continues to be implemented throughout the force, discussions and articles about its benefits and challenges are increasing across the sustainment community. The fielding of GCSS–Army is ongoing across Army Reserve, Army National Guard, and Active Army units.

The GCSS–Army Product Manager office has been developing the system with civilian enterprise resource planning (ERP) implementation guidelines in mind, using commercial off-the-shelf Systems, Applications, and Products in Data Processing (SAP) software. The fielding strategy and supporting programs have been developed so that they adapt to the military environment and mitigate many ERP implementation challenges. Leaders now must take their role in implementing the system as its fielding continues.

This article looks at the challenges of commercial versus military ERP implementation strategies and offers recommendations for leaders on

successfully implementing GCSS–Army. In addition, the article examines how to manage organizational change and enable leaders to employ GCSS–Army to apply mission command as they support operations.

GCSS–Army as an ERP System

GCSS–Army will replace existing decentralized Army logistics information systems with an integrated web-based solution. This dynamic system has major impacts on processes and operations in all command groups, supply support activities, organizational and field maintenance activities, supply rooms, and resource management offices across the Active Army, Army National Guard, and Army Reserve. Major long-term benefits include near-real-time property visibility, integration of processes, transaction traceability and transparency, and enhanced stewardship.

GCSS–Army does more than replace the functionality of current systems; it also eliminates some unnecessary processes. New processes are introduced, which can lead to

substantial benefits across Army sustainment to improve Army readiness. None of these benefits can be realized if leaders fail to overcome implementation challenges.

ERP Challenges and Lessons

The GCSS–Army Product Management Office developed Army-tailored organizational change management programs to enable GCSS–Army implementation. These programs include lessons learned, policy updates, and education programs, which provide sustainment leaders with measures to avoid common ERP business implementation shortfalls.

However, they do not decrease the complexities of implementing commercial ERP software in a noncommercial military environment. Educating sustainment leaders on the challenges that organizations face in adopting ERP will aid in mitigating the challenges of instituting this major change.

The *Harvard Business Review* article, “Putting the Enterprise into the Enterprise System,” by Thomas H.

Davenport, defines key guidelines for civilian ERP initiative success. Guidelines such as changing business practices to match ERP, putting the right people in place, and installing the system gradually were found to enable ERP adoption. Adapting those concepts to the military environment will further enable GCSS-

Army's success. Initial implementation efforts have resulted in exposing several application problems, negative perceptions of GCSS-Army are slowly growing. All of these negative responses are common even in successful ERP implementation initiatives.

To alleviate these challenges, GCSS-Army product managers

positive change. Commanders can overcome resistance to change by addressing organizational behavior challenges early while training system users.

GCSS-Army's training strategy contains six training components: early education, web-based training, the lead user program, new equipment training, over-the-shoulder support, and sustainment support (end user manuals and smart books). These training resources are provided to units being fielded GCSS-Army 120 days before the system is expected to start operating. The GCSS-Army Product Manager office also educates strategic and operational leaders through site visits and briefings.

Sustainment personnel should expect some degree of discomfort during the GCSS-Army implementation process. This is a normal reaction during an ERP implementation of this complexity.

Army's success.

Key challenges in Army sustainment for ERP adoption are organizational resistance to change, challenges in educating the force, developing and communicating a comprehensive implementation strategy, and understanding the changes in sustainment operations. Army sustainment leaders would benefit from learning how to overcome these challenges in order to improve Army sustainment capabilities.

Resistance to change. ERP systems have their own logic for processing transactions within an organization. This forces organizations to conduct business practices that match the ERP system logic. For a business to successfully implement ERP, it must agree to change its internal processes to match ERP functionality. This becomes a challenge when the organization uses internal processes to drive their competitive advantage.

In the commercial environment, adapting to an ERP system leads to overall resistance to change. The same hesitance is expected in Army sustainment activities. The change will be even more challenged by personnel who do not consider Army sustainment operations comparable to private sector businesses.

Some may argue that the Army does not fit similar commercial procedures because it is not driven by similar goals. Additionally, since ini-

evaluated SAP's ERP functionalities while working with programmers to develop GCSS-Army and ensure processes would fit Army sustainment purposes. Significant changes in terminology and processes are unavoidable when making the change to an ERP system.

The considerable process changes in GCSS-Army will make it difficult for experienced logistics information system users to accept the new system as beneficial in the near term. It may not be until after units have implemented GCSS-Army and built confidence and competency in the system that they fully realize the benefits.

For leaders, this means personally accepting and championing the change throughout the organization. Soldiers will be more accepting when leaders advocate change and support the project initiatives. When leaders set GCSS-Army training efforts as a priority, Soldiers become more aware of GCSS-Army as a significant effort. This is certainly happening at the highest Army levels, and it must continue to be driven down to leaders at all levels.

Training strategy. Civilian organizations that did not include an education strategy early in their ERP implementation experienced immense hardship and even failure. In addition to early education, managing trained personnel is essential to perpetuating

The Army Logistics University (ALU) and the Combined Arms Support Command have been gradually refining GCSS-Army institutional education for all logistics students. Wave 1 training has been implemented in advanced individual training at the Quartermaster and Ordnance Schools and in leader training at ALU. Wave 1 training includes the functions of finance and warehouse operations. Wave 2, which is currently under development, will include the functions of maintenance and property book management.

GCSS-Army leader familiarization training has been piloted in the Combined Logistics Captains Career Course, Quartermaster Basic Officer Leader Course, and Quartermaster Warrant Officer Basic and Advanced Courses since the beginning of fiscal year 2014. The purpose is to expose leaders to the system's functionality, impacts, and training resources. It also covers the roles leaders will play in implementing the system.

Students are required to complete web-based training modules and become familiar with training videos and resources on the GCSS-Army website. ALU has also partnered with Virginia State University to offer SAP certification to interested leaders and is integrating the program into logistics intern education.

Educated leaders can have a significant effect on their organizations when they are being fielded GCSS-Army. Lieutenants, captains, and battalion commanders are exposed to ERP fundamentals and implementation complexity, allowing them to be more prepared for challenges during fielding.

Implementation. Changing too much at once can put a business in an operational nosedive because of the massive shift in how information is processed. To avoid this, GCSS-Army's functionality is being released gradually. This strategy allows for early identification of organization or application issues.

The problems encountered in the first fielding allowed the fielding teams to identify SAP process logic faults and formulate short-term fixes to better prepare for future supply support activity conversions. Gradual fielding also gives fielding teams the opportunity to build competency in the Wave 1 implementation program and lessen extended failures and downtime.

To address the initial implementation problems, the GCSS-Army product managers established a help desk process to address functionality concerns. Trouble ticket submissions resulted in local fixes, corrections in programming, and updated policies issued through all Army activities (ALARACT) messages. As the fielding projects continue, improvements are applied to each subsequent implementation. As more lessons learned are generated and shared, units can be better prepared for the upcoming fielding.

As noted earlier, adopting ERP leads to changing business processes. For an organization to adapt to those changes, policies must change to match new logistics processes. The reason for using ALARACT messages is to track policy changes during implementation, which will result in updated sustainment doctrine.

Leaders contribute in this effort by staying informed of policy updates and enforcing them in their organi-

zations. All ERP ALARACT messages are posted on the GCSS-Army website.

Sustainment benefits. If the Army can overcome the above implementation challenges, it can realize the benefits of ERP. For the Army, one of those benefits would be enhanced mission command.

While users focus on how to process transactions, leaders need to focus on how to leverage GCSS-Army and improve the application of information for mission command purposes. In order to accomplish globally responsive sustainment goals and enhance mission command functions, leaders should anticipate implementation challenges by deliberately setting the pace for change to enable sustainment process improvements.

GCSS-Army provides data and reports for leaders to translate into useful information for mission command warfighting function tasks, such as the operations process, knowledge management, and information management. Leaders must learn how to process, integrate, and manage the information provided through GCSS-Army into relevant knowledge for planning operations and influencing unit activities.

A proposed "commander's dashboard" capability for GCSS-Army would enable leaders to assess future operational environment challenges through improved life cycle cost visibility, demand forecasting, and readiness visibility. If the Army can overcome the implementation challenges, the system has the potential to support the globally responsive sustainment goals of leveraging game-changing capabilities, preserving the readiness of the force, and being responsible stewards of the nation's financial resources.

The Way Ahead

As the Army continues to field GCSS-Army, sustainment leaders must increase their awareness of ERP challenges and ways to mitigate them. Resources have been developed to support the sharing of les-

sons learned through the milSuite Sustainment Knowledge Network GCSS-Army site and the GCSS-Army website.

Key leaders must be identified as champions for positive change during implementation in order to advocate the necessary behavioral and process changes that will allow GCSS-Army to be a success. If issues surface, they should be due to system functionalities, not lack of support or effort.

Policies and institutional training are continually updated throughout the implementation process. In a culture driven by policies, having regulations that coincide with new process change is a method of driving change across a large organization. Updated doctrine and tailored institutional training can drive implementation success and potentially lead the logistics force to meet the globally responsive sustainment initiatives through more efficient application of data within mission command functions.

Sustainment personnel should expect some degree of discomfort during the GCSS-Army implementation process. This is a normal reaction during an ERP implementation of this complexity.

Using change management, education, lessons learned, and help desk programs may be arduous now, but it would be unrealistic to expect the new system to be a seamlessly adopted and perfect product from the beginning. Realizing benefits will come with time as users and leaders gain competency with the new processes and apply GCSS-Army's functionality to mission command functions.

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