

PACOM Key Leader Engagement Process

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Abstract: The United States Indo-Pacific Command (PACOM) is one of six geographic combatant commands created to protect and defend the United States, its people, and its interests. This paper examines the key leader engagement (KLE) process and method of assessment for PACOM. PACOM has a pre-KLE process established to meet information requirements; however, the organization lacks a formal assessment method. KLEs are an instrumental tool to build relationships with partner nations and maintain command and control in PACOM’s area of responsibility. A structured and standardized KLE assessment system provides meaning to the data and is instrumental to evaluate each engagement and shape future KLEs. The KLE assessment – recording trip information, interpreting the data, and performing data visualization – was designed through benchmarking and performance measurement. Performance measures were developed to determine the success of each KLE by generating quantitative data from qualitative information. The development of a performance measurement-based assessment system promotes continuity and meaningful information to shape future engagements.

Keywords: PACOM, Key Leader Engagement, Performance Measurement

1. Introduction

The United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM), also known as PACOM, has an area of responsibility (AOR) that is approximately half of the earth’s surface. PACOM is one of six geographic combatant commands (COCOMs) of the United States Armed Forces and is comprised of 36 nations (U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, n.d.). The commander, Admiral Philip S. Davidson, addressed the Senate Armed Services Committee on the Indo-Pacific Command Posture on 12 February 2019. Within that statement, he declared the four focus areas of PACOM – Joint Force Lethality; Design & Posture; Exercises, Experimentation, & Innovation; and Allies & Partners. As a part of its assigned mission, PACOM conducts key leader engagements (KLEs) aligned with its focus areas and to support a free and open Indo-Pacific Region (Davidson, 2019). These engagements are essential to building relationships and progressing policy, ultimately advancing the commander’s objectives. A properly synchronized and documented KLE process in conjunction with a thorough after-action review (AAR) method promotes continuity, increases transparency, and aligns efforts across the PACOM staff. Currently redesigning their KLE process, PACOM faces challenges with the creation of a method to log KLE information, process and visualize KLE data, and to better conduct data analysis enabling and informing decision makers. A solution would provide PACOM with an improved KLE process and a better understanding of the complex AOR to shape future operations. This paper answers the question of how to develop a platform that consolidates KLE data and facilitates synchronization across PACOM staff and command.

1.1 Background and Need

The United States Armed Forces conducts KLEs at varying levels. KLEs are “bilateral talks of senior leaders with military and civilian counterparts at their level of influence” (Granasen & Lindoff, 2011). Along with bilateral conversations, specific KLE activities include speeches, conferences, and featured interviews (Granasen & Lindoff, 2011). Currently, PACOM lacks an organized method to capture and aggregate information gained from each KLE. Through a stakeholder engagement at PACOM headquarters, we were informed that the organization is currently developing a standardized system for the KLE

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approval process. However, there is no formal process regarding the assessment of each KLE (Krueger, 2020). PACOM requires a system that continually assesses the KLEs, their success – achieving the purpose of the KLE, and the value of their information. The collection of this information is only useful if it is processed, analyzed, and given meaning for the staff and high-level decision makers.

An effective method of interpreting data is through performance measurement. Performance measurement is defined as the process of quantifying the efficiency and effectiveness of action, where efficiency refers to how economically the organization's resources are utilized and effectiveness is the extent to which customer requirements are met (Neely et al., 1995). Likewise, Farris et al. define performance measurement as “the act of using a set of predefined indicators to track the way the organization functions over time in one or more key areas related to strategic goals” (2013). Ultimately, the performance measurement system is composed of the procedures and infrastructural elements used to collect and report performance measurement information (Farris et al., 2013). PACOM will benefit from a deliberate system that captures information as a result of KLEs and successfully visualizes recent, ongoing, and planned KLEs. Designing and implementing a performance measurement system that consolidates KLE information, thoroughly evaluates each engagement, and effectively visualizes the information gained from past and future KLEs will enable better-informed decisions and the success of PACOM's KLE efforts.

1.2 Comparing Processes

KLE processes from like organizations were studied to gain a deeper understanding of the high-level processes that drive the decision to conduct KLEs. The military has exercised and refined its high-level KLE processes particularly throughout the War on Terror and across COCOMs. In one case, the 25th Infantry Division reorganized its staff to better promote synchronization between brigade combat teams and the division commander. After considering three courses of action, the division decided to organize the staff by the “enduring effects” from their campaign plan. Four work groups were created, each focused on one of the four enduring effects, with a fusion cell meant to synchronize the efforts of all four groups. As the work groups performed analysis, the fusion cell synthesized and synchronized the analyses to produce takeaways and recommendations to the commander. The fusion cell and the commander conducted weekly meetings for the purpose of exchanging ideas, shaping future operations, and gaining approval for completed plans. Ultimately, the reorganized staff supported the continuous prosecution of their objectives and streamlined the knowledge networks up, down, and laterally. The fusion cell provided the means to synchronize planning efforts across time and space to ensure that plans were integrated and mutually supporting (Caslen et al., 2010). Within the battle rhythm of these working groups, there were deliberate mechanisms to capture KLE data and communicate their results higher.

Another case of an improved KLE process is the 34th Infantry Division during operations in Iraq. This division is an Army National Guard unit that assumed command of the Multi-National Division-South (MND-S) in Iraq in 2009. The commander focused on linking KLEs to division priorities as well as influencing other leaders through successive engagements. The division developed a KLE process cycle used to synchronize and nest the engagements with the commander's objectives and lines of operation. The utilization of working groups and previous engagement history was compiled and codified in a centralized location to improve efficiency and promote synchronization within the process. After the KLE was completed, the battlefield circulation notes, engagement notes, any critical pieces of information, as well as an assessment were posted to the unit's SharePoint website. This promoted the widest dissemination of information and facilitated the use of previous KLE data to frame future objectives. Supporting data provides a framework to ask the right questions and build off previous relationships (Nash & Magistad, 2010). This internal transparency promotes consistency and legitimacy when talking to a key leader in a subsequent meeting. One of the greatest takeaways from the 34th ID KLE cycle is its aspect of continuity. The storage of KLE data and consolidating AARs on SharePoint enabled a more unified understanding of the operational environment, promoted the continuation of partnerships, and helped shape future operations.

Other COCOMs have developed similar standardized KLE processes and assessment methods. Army researchers assisted AFRICOM in the assessment of their KLEs and provided the COCOM with a method to visualize their data. Several findings and recommendations occurred through the research. For example, using a year's worth of KLE data, researchers plotted all executed KLEs graphically, generating a heatmap. This heatmap clearly illustrated the number of engagements in each country for that year. Using the data to visualize a history of KLEs provides insight and informs decision makers. The map visualization is an objective tool that can spark discussion on why the organization executes so many (or so few) KLEs with strategic partners. Using this map, the researchers concluded that a single engagement does little to advance a relationship but can significantly damage it. Additionally, they developed a relationship score including five metrics of the partner nation. These are the partner's influence in their operating environment, their capacity regarding security and peacekeeping, willingness to improve their capacity, alignment with U.S. objectives, and strategic location (Krueger, 2019). PACOM can utilize similar indicators for partner nations and it must ensure that KLEs are occurring in accordance with strategic value.

2. Methodology

2.1 Pre-KLE Process

PACOM currently has a pre-KLE process that outlines the information and planning requirements. The process is depicted in Figure 1 (Krueger, 2020). The top of the figure shows the timeline of the process from when the need is generated to the completion of the AAR. The Regional Joint Plan Group (JPG) receives all KLE proposals. The JPG eliminates the uncertainty between different staff groups who are planning KLEs without collaboration. As a result, synchronization leads to the efficient use of resources – time, money, and manpower. The Joint Plans and Engagement Board (JPEB) is the stage that the J5, strategic planning and policy staff, reviews the engagement. Following the JPEB, the KLE proposal goes through the Joint Executive Steering Board (JESB) which is headed by the deputy commander. He or she makes any final changes or recommendations to the KLE before the request goes to the commander at the PACOM Update Brief (PUB). The commander gives the final approval no less than two weeks before the KLE. Finally, the trip assessment (AAR) is conducted no later than seven days after the completion of the KLE (Krueger, 2020).

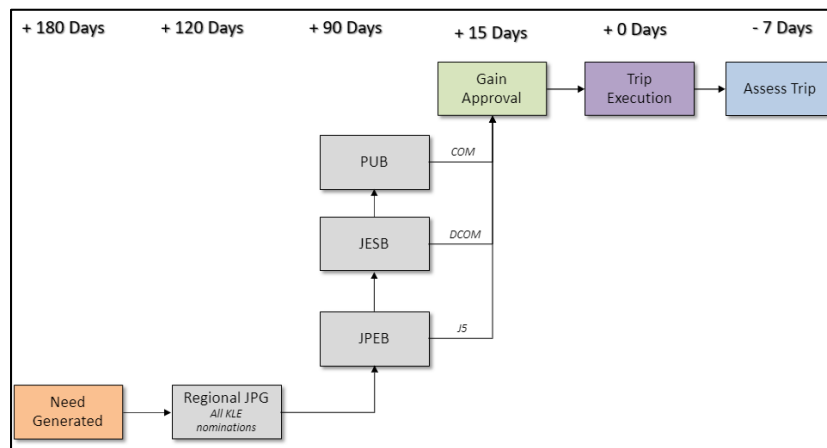


Figure 1. Pre-KLE Information Requirements (Krueger, 2020)

2.2 Performance Measurement

Developing a performance measurement system is a practical approach to resolving PACOM’s challenges regarding KLEs. Figure 2 illustrates a six-step process for creating and implementing a performance measurement system. A brief application of this 6-step performance measurement development process follows. Step 1: Measurement need – there is a need to organize PACOM’s KLE data and measure certain factors that will better inform the staff and the commander. Currently, there is no deliberate post-KLE data consolidation and no standardized assessment of each executed KLE. The deliberate assessment and synchronization of KLE data across PACOM will generate a more accurate understanding of the AOR and evaluation of its partner forces. Step 2: Organizational goals – within the PACOM mission statement is the implementation of a “credible deterrence strategy capable of denying our adversaries sustained air and sea dominance” (U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, n.d.). The AOR consists of nearly half of the earth’s surface. (U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, n.d.). In order to achieve the mission and maintain command and control, PACOM must conduct effective engagements with its partner nations. Step 3: Key performance areas (KPA) – PACOM has established four focus areas that are its key performance areas. As previously stated, these areas include - Joint Force Lethality; Design & Posture; Exercises, Experimentation, & Innovation; and Allies & Partners. Step 4: Key performance indicators (KPI) – the subjective performance measures include: how well the purpose was achieved during the KLE, partner alignment with U.S. objectives, the strategic location and importance of the partner nation, and the potential need for follow-on engagements. Some of the objective performance measures are the number of engagements in each country per year and the actual costs per trip compared to the allocated budget. Step 5: Implementation and Step 6: Utilization – following the design and approval of the performance measurement system, the infrastructure to support the system must be established, and the process must be piloted and ultimately adopted. There then must be a deliberate process by which the outputs from the performance measurement system are reviewed and leveraged for future decisions. Assessments

and the reported performance measures will be evaluated, and exchanging ideas is crucial to establishing new performance measures useful to influencing decisions and future KLEs.

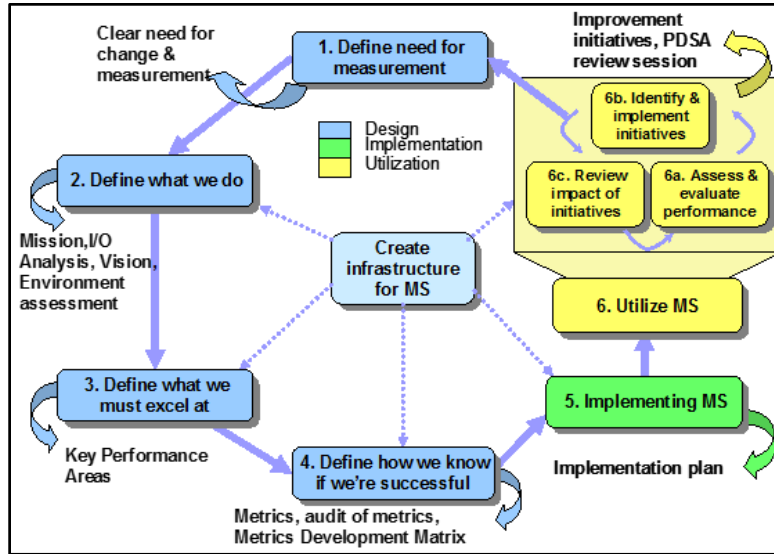


Figure 2. Measurement System Development Process
 (Adapted from Rentes et al., 2002)

3. Application

Leveraging tools currently available to PACOM and its staff, a Microsoft Forms based survey, currently serves as the starting point for the new system. The survey is to be conducted by a subordinate leader or staff member every time a new KLE requirement is generated. The outputs from this survey are then used to generate a database of all planned KLEs within PACOM’s AOR. Storing planned KLEs in a common place will allow for the required resources to be monitored as well as identify potential opportunities for efficiencies to be gained. This database can be leveraged throughout the refinement and approval process of the KLE. Following the KLE, leaders and staff enter their AAR data straight into the database, using an additional survey, which allows for the analysis and visualization of KLE performance. All planned KLEs will be well-documented prior to their execution allowing for maximum transparency across the PACOM staff. This centralized system assists the staff in deconflicting trips, synchronizing resources, and maximizing effects. The consolidation of information prior to each engagement will lead to a more efficient AAR process.

The collection of information will rely significantly on the leader conducting the trip and their staff. PACOM leaders, taking descriptive notes throughout the engagement, focusing on talking points from both sides, any agreements made, and areas where the two sides did not align, will enter pertinent information into a standardized AAR form. Submitting the AAR form within seven days of returning to PACOM headquarters is essential to ensure an accurate report of data and to inform the commander expeditiously. The AAR form was developed using Microsoft Forms and consists of several questions regarding the engagement. The leader is also prompted to upload all additional supporting information from the trip. All information is automatically inputted into the KLE database with each submission. A prototype dashboard, shown in Figure 3, was created using artificial KLE data from 2019. The report is based on 88 KLE entries from the AAR form and was created using Microsoft Power BI. The form includes two subjective key performance indicators – “How well was the purpose met?” and “Should there be a follow on KLE?”. Additionally, the report is interactive. For example, the user can click Japan in the “2019 KLEs by Country” chart, which will filter data unique to the KLEs in Japan for all of the other visualizations. These performance measures are scoped to provide the commander with a holistic view of the success of the engagements and to ultimately determine future KLEs. Complete implementation of a performance measurement system within PACOM’s KLE process will include further developing key performance indicators, visualization of past information, and adding additional automation to the system.

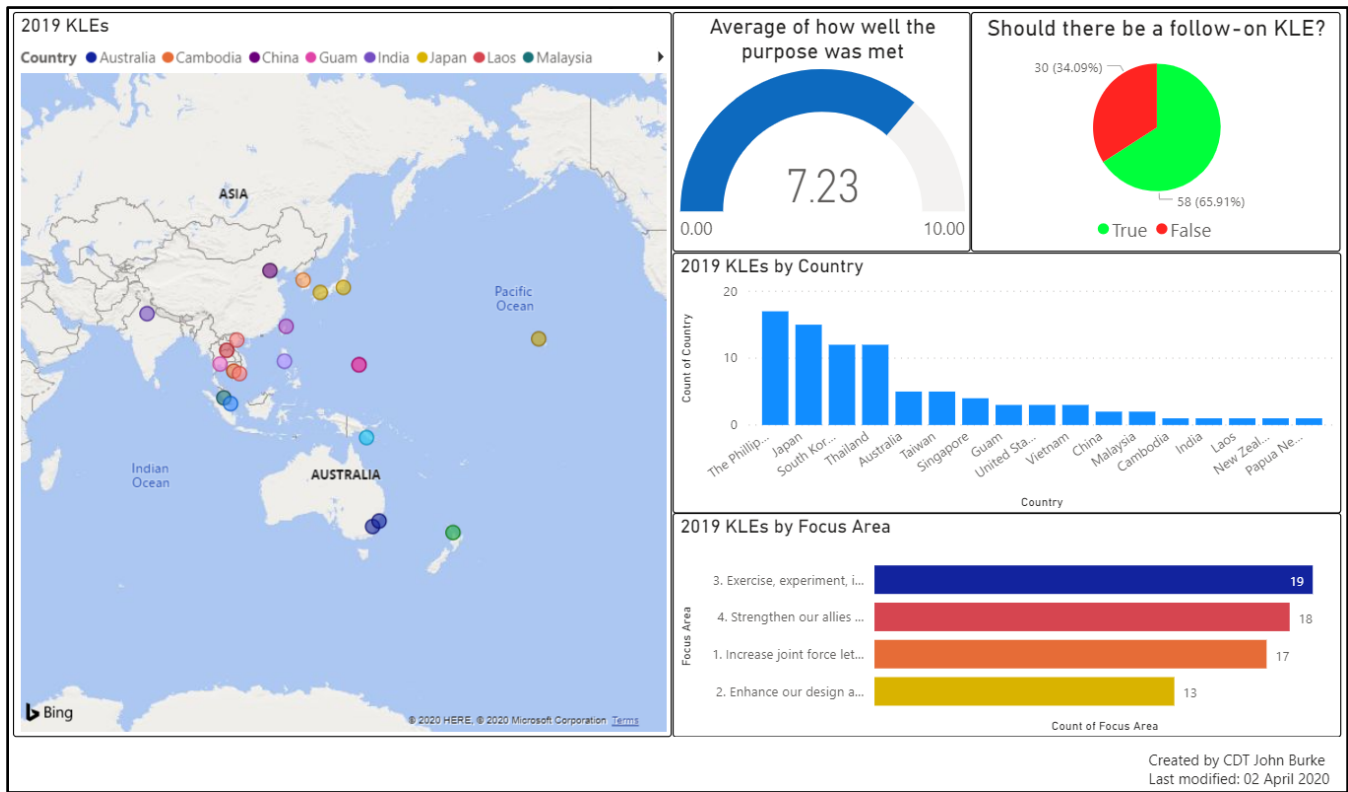


Figure 3. PACOM 2019 KLE Report

4. Recommendation

Building and maintaining a system that tracks KLEs, their performance, and their alignment towards the PACOM focus areas will improve the PACOM KLE process. The effective use of the AARs will drive further data analysis. The PACOM staff, in a fusion cell, can interpret the data and performance measurement results to provide recommendations to the commander and staff. This fusion cell can utilize the survey forms, KLE database, and the report dashboard to provide up-to-date data visualizations, adapting and or adopting the current report in Figure 3. Routine meetings between the commander and the fusion cell should continue to occur while leveraging the new tools. With the AAR dataset, the fusion cell can review individual KLEs and investigate underperforming KLEs identifying potential issues. The fusion cell can communicate its understanding of the data, specifically through data visualization, and provide recommendations to the commander and JPG if necessary. As a result, continuity in the KLE cycle leads to well-informed decisions for future engagements.

5. Future Work

The next step to improving the PACOM’s KLE process is validation from PACOM of the assessment process and further KPI refinement with PACOM involvement. Additional KPIs need to be developed and approved by the PACOM staff, such as partner alignment with U.S. objectives and strategic location of each nation. These indicators will weigh heavily to determine future engagements. A pilot of the performance measurement system will need to be run to test its effectiveness, and further, the KPAs and KPIs need validating. Following system validation, PACOM will be able to implement the process and use actual KLE data to generate reports or dashboards. For example, PACOM can track proposed, approved, and completed KLEs and use the database and dashboard to visualize these different phases of a KLE on a map. The intent is that the assessment fusion cell will have access to the database, where it can pull raw data for interpretation and visualization. Currently, the database connection between the database and dashboard is not dynamic. The dashboard must be manually refreshed to

display underlying changes to the database. In the future, leveraging other Microsoft tools in conjunction with the dashboard can provide automated real-time reports. The assessment fusion cell and the commander should frequently review the performance measures, asking the question of whether a certain measure is providing valuable information to make decisions. Finally, feedback from the key leaders conducting the trips is important regarding the assessment method. The AAR form's robustness and usability are important for providing beneficial data.

6. Conclusion

The goal of developing an organized KLE assessment system is to shape the data into valuable information for decision makers. This cycle is continuous – evaluating an engagement which influences successive trips. KLEs are an essential method to strengthen relations with partner forces and to advance the commander's objectives. Simple benchmarking is useful in developing the KLE assessment process; however, the implementation of a performance measurement system will provide quantitative data to qualitative information. As PACOM operates in a complex region with numerous actors, the recommended assessment method will support meaningful engagements and better inform decision makers.

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