Security Assistance Management Information System (SAMIS)--Second Anniversary

By

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The 1985 summer issue of the *DISAM Journal* announced the implementation of SAMIS [Security Assistance Management Information System] as the new computer system for Air Force Logistics Command's International Logistics Center (ILC). For those readers familiar with the "before and after," SAMIS represented the proverbial quantum leap to fourth generation computer technology. The system was fast, on-line, and user-friendly. At the time, however, some users did not think the system was very friendly, and no doubt, were intimidated by the CRT waiting impatiently for more keyboard input. Classroom training, on-line experience, and time gradually raised the computer literacy level, and the subsequent demands on the system continued to grow throughout the first two years of operation.

Although SAMIS has a full range of reporting capabilities--summary level to line item details--both the user and the previous data system had focused on the details of a single MILSTRIP transaction or FMS line. Naturally, this detail management style continued in the early days of SAMIS. However, the new system with an old operating philosophy combined to produce more data (not information) than anyone ever imagined. At first the overwhelming deluge of reports and relentless notices frustrated and frightened the primary users. As is often the case with new computer systems, they are expected to save manpower but they offer so much more visibility that the first reaction is one of "give me more people to keep up." The "tip of the iceberg" is the perfect analogy. One day things are under control and the job is manageable. The next day a new system is implemented and it uncovers the whole "iceberg." There's little argument that initially the ILC worked for SAMIS instead of SAMIS working for the ILC.

Now after two years of successful operation SAMIS is continuing to evolve into an even more powerful information (not data) system to support smarter users and creative managers. Two basic enhancements are indicative of how SAMIS has changed its emphasis:

MANAGEMENT REPORTS

Early on the SAMIS project office recognized the need to get the manager "hooked" on the system. The theory was that if the first level managers became daily users of SAMIS, two positive results would occur. First, the manager could focus his work force on key success factors to improve support to the customer. Second, the managers would start the feedback/suggestion process which was vital in defining what further enhancements were needed in the system. The initial phase of this plan was an on-line product called "wake-up." The manager was encouraged to use this point-in-time snapshot of a wide range of measurements to get a general feel for the health of his programs.

One example of a wake-up interrogation is a display of the ten oldest requisitions by country, a group of countries, or all ILC programs. The range of the selection varies with the level of the manager using wake-up; i.e., the case manager may only want to survey a particular case while the higher level manager wants to see a report covering all countries in his area of responsibility. The wake-up inquiry provides a small set of data that can easily be analyzed for potential indication of larger problems. If the data seems to indicate an out of tolerance condition, SAMIS can provide through standard interrogations or special "ad hoc" inquiries more detailed reports to assist in

researching the suspected problem. In the hands of the inquisitive manager, wake-up has pointed the way to hidden problems and particularly troublesome areas that require hands-on attention to get the program back on the right track.

FIGURE 1
Sample SAMIS "Wake-Up" Menu

		Request Type
Request Type:	___	1) AFLC SA Program Review
Deputate:	___	2) Overcommitted Case Review
Directorate:	___	3) Implemented Defined Order Case Review
Country:	___	4) Supply Complete Lines with Unused Line Value
		5) Unused Active Lines Over Two Years Old
		6) Statistics for Delinquent Supply Complete
		7) Statistics for Delinquent Case Closure
		8) Oldest Programmed Requisition Review
		9) Oldest Programmed NMCS Requisition Review
		10) NMCS Requisitions Accepted Last Two Days
		11) Highest Valued Requisitions
		12) Oldest Default Priced Requisitions
		13) Shipped - Not Billed
		14) Outstanding Controlled Exceptions
		15) Oldest Nonprogrammed Requisition Review
		16) Oldest Nonprogrammed NMCS Requisitions

Phase two of wake-up was an expansion of the system to give the AFLC Air Logistics Centers (ALCs) on-line access to program measurements related to just their portion of the security assistance workload. Now, for example, San Antonio ALC managers can easily get a feel for how they are doing in ten measured areas. Again the snapshot measurements represent only a passing glance at the overall workload, but the indicators do call attention to developing problems that previously may not have been discovered until it was too late to implement corrective action and maintain program schedules. From an ILC perspective, the ALC data helps assess program performance by the primary source of support and to challenge out of balance indicators among the centers. The wake-up capability is particularly helpful in finding smarter ways to do the job by focusing on the center that seems most successful in maintaining positive measurements.

The third aspect of SAMIS management reporting has been on-line for just three months. Trend data was discussed almost from the first day SAMIS went on the air. Many users kept their own statistics and predictably no two users wanted the same data. The result was little or no long range comparison capability across a standard set of program measurements. By building on the wake-up initiatives and suggestions from an in-house work group, SAMIS now has a full range trend product that measures selected critical success factors. Like wake-up, the product is tailored to the level of interest of the user. The same factors can be viewed for an individual country, for an ILC division or directorate, and for each of the ALCs. The product is still being refined and user training must be expanded, but already the standardized trend concept appears to be the forerunner of further changes in how SAMIS is evolving to a fault isolation system instead of paper data dump. As the ILC gains more experience in this area, further articles will be written to share the lessons learned.

COUNTRY VS PROCESS EMPHASIS

The ILC is organized to provide logistics support to over 60 international customers. A key element of quality support is having a dedicated country team that provides personalized attention

to the health of the customer's program. SAMIS was designed to support the individual country team and each customer as if they were the only user of the system. Program data is rigidly segregated by country, and by far the vast majority of reports produced by SAMIS are designed for one country or a subset of that country's program. Obviously this design provides a good deal of "privacy" protection for a customer's logistics plans and gives the case/line manager superior visibility of all aspects of the program. It also leads to an isolated and very narrow view of the overall logistics process that supports the security assistance programs. By contrast, the AFLC structure is organized around a weapon system or item manager and not around a particular country (there are exceptions when major sales warrant a dedicated country team at the ALCs). An item manager may be simultaneously working requirements for several DOD customers plus 10-15 security assistance customers. The problem occurs when each of those 10-15 ILC country teams review their specific SAMIS product, identify (for example) a delayed shipping date, and decide to individually call or write to the same item manager. It's fairly easy to imagine how this process can actually serve as an impediment to customer support instead of the positive proactive intentions of a case/line manager.

The SAMIS functional analyst recognized that the system must serve two very distinct sets of user needs. The front end of the system must be totally country-oriented, but the AFLC interface must be process oriented. SAMIS does this transformation by rolling up multiple country inputs to get a process view of how well the logistics system is working. Thus far, this concept has been tried primarily with the accounting functions. One area of constant concern is the delay between shipping material and insuring that a bill is processed. Problems in this area were previously worked individually by line managers. Now, SAMIS periodically produces a rolled-up, "shipped-not-billed" report, sorted for the responsible accounting office, and forwards the report under a single cover letter to the base accounting office. The procedure has raised the attention level for clearing this particular problem and allows more time to work the process in lieu of spending time writing and answering multiple country oriented letters on the same issue. This change to emphasize process management is being tried in several other areas. The short term successes are very encouraging for rapid expansion of this SAMIS capability. Under no circumstances will this concept take over the role of the case/line manager. However, it should free the manager from inefficiently working process problems in isolation, and instead, provide time to concentrate on major program issues. Striking the right balance between country management and process management will be a key objective for the ILC in the coming months.

CONCLUSION

SAMIS has been busy and successful during the past two years. No one was naive enough to think that the system would be a static model, pushing out the same products daily. But likewise, it's doubtful that anyone could have imagined how quickly SAMIS would become the most important factor in overseeing AFLC's $26.7 billion security assistance program. The system has weathered changing management philosophies, slashing budget cuts, and several reorganizations while continuing to meet the ILC's objective of "providing the best support possible." In an environment of "doing things differently with less," SAMIS has answered the call many times. SAMIS is a shining example of a professionally developed and maintained information system that is returning full dividends on the money and manpower invested.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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