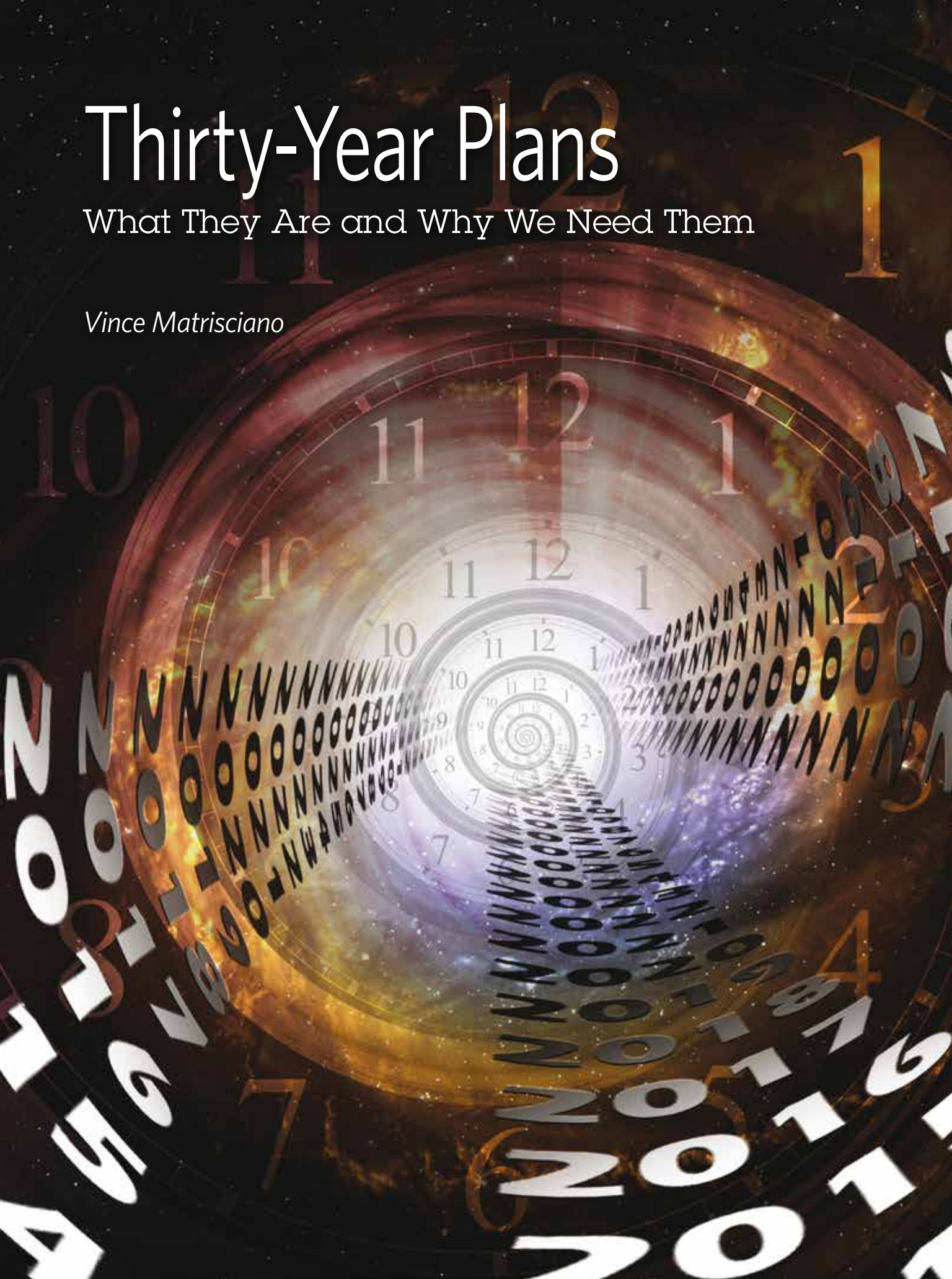
Thirty-Year Plans

What They Are and Why We Need Them

Vince Matrisciano



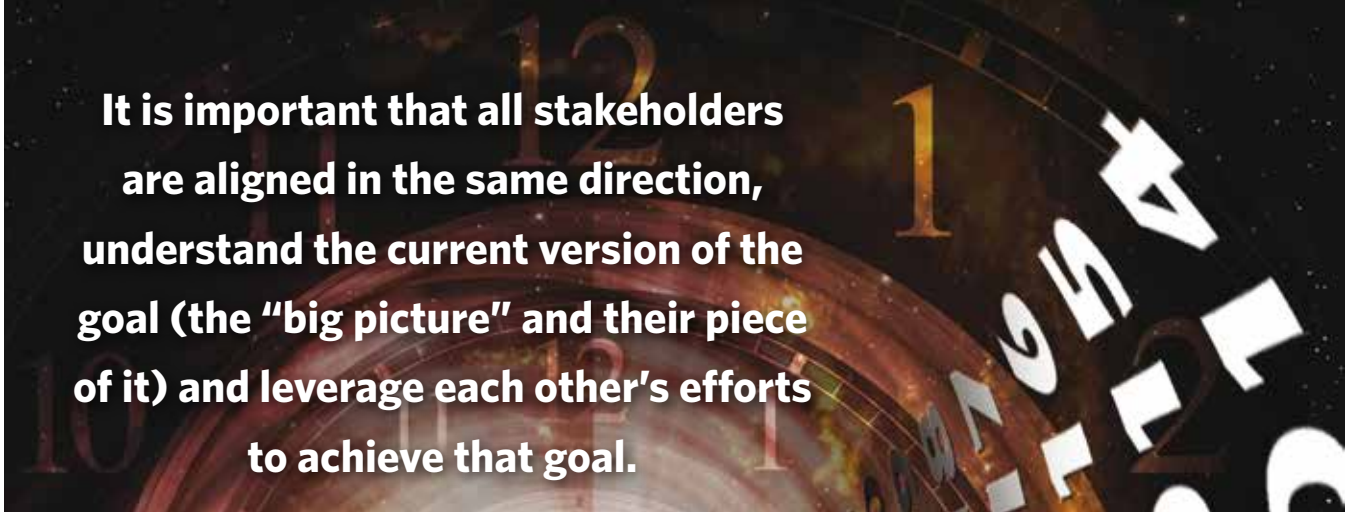
In the summer of 2012, Heidi Shyu, the recently confirmed Army Acquisition Executive, directed each Program Executive Office (PEO) to develop a 30-year strategic plan. The plan was to focus on linking science and technology (S&T) projects to programs of record, as well as modernization of existing fielded equipment. Each Army PEO developed its own plan, which mapped its programs of record to capability gaps and known S&T efforts meant to close those gaps. These plans were to address challenges leadership faced in obtaining in-depth information to support fact-based decision making.

Army leadership constantly must make decisions related to prioritizing funding, scheduling and materiel acquisition; and these decisions are becoming more complex given the current and projected fiscal challenges. Second- and third-order effects of decisions become increasingly important, and these plans were intended to provide insight into those effects.

In parallel, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Army G8 initiated development of the modernization plans for existing equipment known as LIRA, or Long-Range Investment Requirements Analysis. These plans were meant to answer the question "how much of tomorrow's dollars are we committing by spending dollars today?"

Subsequently, the Research, Development and Engineering Command (RDECOM) and its subordinate centers and laboratories, under direction of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Research and Technology, developed 30-year roadmaps linking their technology initiatives to capability gaps and known programs of record. Again, the purpose of these plans was to support fact-based decisions by providing a longer range look at the consequences and effects of those decisions.

Matrisciano *has more than 20 years of research and development program experience within the Army and is currently the Research & Development Program Coordinator at the Program Executive Office for Ammunition, Picatinny Arsenal, N.J. He is responsible for defining the PEO's near-, mid- and far-term research and development priorities, including the 30-year strategy. He is collaborating with counterparts in other PEOs and R&D organizations in developing an integrated strategy.*



Although diligent and fervent work went into each of the plans, they were all developed semi-independently. Limited coordination among plan authors provided some synergy among the plans, but they remained largely independent. And currently there is no clear path to integrate these plans.

During the development of these plans, the predominant questions from participants were, "Why are we doing this, especially given current funding limitations?" and "How can we know what life will be like 30 years from now?"

Both are valid questions. After all, who 30 years ago could have imagined all the products we use today? Regardless, there are significant benefits to developing a 30-year strategic plan, even if we cannot accurately forecast life in 2044. It all begins with the value of planning.

Benefits of Planning

As acquisition professionals, we all are taught that a good plan (or any plan for that matter) is a valuable tool. It provides a barometer from which to measure our progress and success, helping us maintain control of our activity. Project managers typically plan their programs before they start to execute them. As most of us have experienced, however, forecasting the next few years of a program is difficult, and some programs fail or do not meet their goals fully despite a well-thought-out plan.

As a result, many of us have learned that the plan is not the panacea, not the end-all and be-all, but only the first step in the program management process. Strict diligence in monitoring performance and risk, and adjusting as necessary, are keys to success. And so it is with our 30-year strategic plans. They are a best guess based on what we know today, but probably are not very accurate. Nevertheless, they provide an orientation from which to proceed, and a rationale for why we are going that way. This allows all stakeholders to "be on the same page" and work toward a common goal.

When completed and integrated, the 30-year plan should show the "big picture," linking all capability gaps to S&T activity, all S&T activity to fielding of materiel, and every fielding to operations, support and eventual disposal and/or replacement. An important benefit is minimization of the Army's demilitarization stockpile through greater emphasis on strategic planning at the materiel level. The finished product not only shows what needs to be done throughout the life cycle, but how much it will cost and when it should happen. Any breaks in the linkage are highlighted and addressed by informed leadership decisions, either by strengthening the links or eliminating them altogether.

Integrated Planning

To be effective, these 30-year strategic plans must be integrated and include the same diligent monitoring that is applied to acquisition programs. To achieve integration, the individual PEO and RDECOM plans must be combined to become the cohesive 30-year strategic plan. This will ensure that all interfaces and relationships among systems and programs are considered. Integration of the individual plans is currently evolving at the "grass roots" level. PEOs and Research Development and Engineering Centers (RDECs) are coordinating with each other on mutual touch points to ensure that their efforts are useful and efficient. However, this process is not fully effective. While there is some integration in some areas, other areas are being missed. In other words, integration is "ad hoc." To streamline this process, the standard acquisition Integrated Product Team, or IPT, model should be used. As applied here, the members of the IPT represent each of the PEOs, RDECOM, TRADOC, and Army headquarters staff (and others as appropriate). An IPT Lead would manage the integrated planning effort to ensure that roles and responsibilities are defined and the common goal of an integrated plan is achieved.

Maintaining the Integrated Plan

Once the plan is completed and baselined, adequate monitoring is vital to avoid having it become "shelf ware." The process for monitoring the plans also should mirror the IPT model described above, with the IPT Lead running regularly scheduled formal discussions (i.e., quarterly, semi-annually, etc.) to ensure the entire team remains aligned, manages risk, communicates status and updates the plan as needed. When assumptions become reality, the plan is updated. When "near term" planned activities come to fruition, "out years" are added

so it is a rolling 30-year plan. It is important that all stakeholders are aligned in the same direction, understand the current version of the goal (the "big picture" and their piece of it) and leverage each other's efforts to achieve that goal.

Maintenance of the plan also includes regular interaction with senior leadership to communicate plan contents and status, as well as obtain feedback on any required adjustments based on changing priorities and/or updated strategy. Since its overall purpose is to inform leadership decisions, the plan must become a standard "front and center" fixture in the decision-making process. For the plan to be useful, senior leaders must routinely consider the information it provides.

Why Now?

Another common question is, "The Army has been around a long time and we've never had a 30-year plan, so why do we need one now?"

One could also ask why—though the Army continues to field some of the best equipment in the world—programs still encounter roadblocks or dead ends. How many of those fielded items could have been fielded sooner and at a lower life-cycle cost? How many overlapping capabilities exist? How many technologies did not get fielded even though they achieved technical success? Why are there so many items in our demilitarization account? Now more than ever, the answers to these questions have strategic relevance, but they remain elusive without an integrated long-term plan from which to acquire this knowledge.

No doubt we can collectively work more efficiently while remaining effective, and the integrated long-term plan—and ongoing maintenance of the plan—is essential for that to happen. It provides a mechanism to ensure that our efforts are complementary and neither duplicative nor wasted by showing how they fit into the long-term strategy while highlighting second- and third-order effects. In other words, it provides more and better information to feed fact-based leadership decisions.

Although long-term plans like this 30-year strategic plan are far from perfect, they provide the required baseline from which to operate and support informed decisions. In the current climate of fiscal uncertainties, long-term planning will help provide more "bang for the buck" by guiding informed investment decisions and identifying the second- and third-order effects. The key to effective and efficient fielding of equipment to the warfighter is active leadership in developing, monitoring and maintaining the collective plan. With budgets declining, and no sign of recovering, we owe our ultimate customers—the warfighter and the taxpayer—the best we can deliver in the most efficient manner possible.

The author can be reached at **vincent.r.matrisciano.civ@mail.mil**.