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Traditional calls for reform of the acquisition system have focused on the need to update the policy used to govern the acquisition process. However, by improving the methods of identifying, recruiting, developing, managing, and retaining high-potential personnel within the acquisition system, the Navy can build an acquisition workforce which can adapt and evolving to facilitate the innovation and agility necessary to meet service needs in the future.

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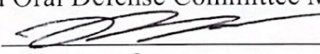
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Executive Summary

Title: Improving the Acquisition System Through the Implementation of Talent Management Initiatives for the Acquisition Workforce

Author: Lieutenant Commander Matthew J. Atwood, United States Navy

Thesis: Through the implementation of changes to the current methods of identifying, developing, and managing the personnel within the acquisition workforce, increasing the responsibility and accountability of program managers, and the adoption of agile acquisition strategies, the Navy can build an acquisition workforce that is capable of quickly delivering urgently needed capabilities to the fleet.

Discussion: From the creation of the Department of Defense to the present day, acquisition reform initiatives have focused on the implementation of policy to manage the cost, performance, and schedule of acquisition programs. Reform efforts have vacillated between centralized control of acquisition decisions at the Office of the Secretary of Defense and decentralization of decision-making authorities to those more familiar with the day to day operation of acquisition programs. However, in the present day, mismanagement of the identification and cultivation of potential members of the acquisition community have led to program managers with eroded authority and an aversion to risk. Through the institution of talent management reforms, the Navy can recruit, develop, mentor, and manage the acquisition workforce to build a cadre of program managers capable of delivering necessary capabilities to the fleet.

Conclusion: Traditional calls for reform of the acquisition system have focused on the need to update the policy used to govern the acquisition process. However, by improving the methods of identifying, recruiting, developing, managing, and retaining high-potential personnel within the acquisition system, the Navy can build an acquisition workforce which can adapt and evolving to facilitate the innovation and agility necessary to meet service needs in the future.

Preface

Throughout my 12 years of service in the Navy, I have had the absolute pleasure of working with some of the most motivated, intelligent people on the planet. My time working within the Navy's Acquisition Workforce was no different. However, I, like many of my peers, was stymied by the limited offering of talent management initiatives for acquisition professionals. Outside of individual initiative and word of mouth, there were limited options to seek out career development and mentorship opportunities. The present day offers many challenges to the Navy, from peer level competition to retention of highly capable personnel and acceptance of status quo methods of managing these problems may no longer be acceptable. Through the adoption of several of the initiatives spearheaded by the Army, Air Force, and the commercial sector, the Navy can improve the development and retention of the high-potential personnel who will help lead the way in the future.

Table of Contents

Disclaimer	ii
Executive Summary	iii
Preface.....	iv
Table of Contents	v
I. Introduction.....	1
II. The Problems	2
III. Review of Literature	7
IV. Background	9
A. 1950s	9
B. 1960s.....	10
C. 1970s.....	11
D. 1980s.....	12
E. Present.....	13
V. Solutions	16
VI. Resistance to Change	21
VII. Conclusion	23
Bibliography	27
Appendix.....	30

I. Introduction

Following World War II, America has been able to depend on the Navy for persistent forward presence, both in peacetime and at war, and the preservation of the freedom of navigation that has proved to be beneficial for American interests. As America transitions from two decades of land conflict in the Middle East to a mindset of great power competition, the Navy will need to rapidly adapt to peer level competition in the maritime environment. This competition will require the Navy to successfully acquire new capabilities in a timely manner, a task the Navy has struggled with historically, and as Bryan Mcgrath and Mark Vandroff note, “in order for a coherent vision of modern American sea power to move forward in providing the lion’s share of this nation’s peacetime presence, shaping, deterrence and assurance needs, the Department of the Navy must become more efficient in its acquisition processes.”¹

The state of naval acquisitions is the result of decades of vacillation between the centralization of acquisition authorities to the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and decentralization of those powers back to service level decisions, where acquisition authorities have been diffused among multiple decision-makers and accountability for those decisions has been removed through layers of bureaucracy.² Curing this absence of accountability, however, does not require the creation of new positions or the drafting of additional legislation. The role of the program manager is to act as that single decision-maker, someone who is legally responsible for the execution of their program and who can set the conditions for success or failure. While these program managers operate within a system composed of bureaucracy, short tenures, and shifting regulations, they also suffer from a career path that is often unclear and prefers generalization over specialization. By pursuing a course of changing the current methods

of identifying, developing, managing, and retaining high-potential personnel within the acquisition workforce, empowering program managers, choosing to utilize alternative acquisition pathways, and developing incremental updates to existing systems, the Navy can adapt and evolve its acquisition system to facilitate the innovation and agility necessary to meet service needs in the future.

II. The Problems

Through the release of the most recent Navigation Plan on January 11, 2021, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) delivered the current approach for the pursuit of the Tri-Service Maritime Strategy. The priority of this policy is the development of a Navy Operational Architecture (NOA), which is described as “a collection of networks, infrastructure, data, and analytical tools that connects our distributed forces... as a warfighting platform.”³ The NOA must act as an interface between new and legacy naval platforms, weapons, and sensors, and is required to integrate with the Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2) system.⁴ The NOA is central to the concept of Distributed Maritime Operations (DMO) and Naval Integrated Fire Control-Counter Air (NIFC-CA), and represents the most credible attempt to date to remove many of the hurdles to interoperability, both internal to the Navy and external in the joint and international environment. The plan also calls for the rapid fielding of a resilient command and control, communications, computers, cyber, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and targeting (C5ISRT) architecture, development of robust counter-C5ISRT capabilities, and the deployment of new long range weapons.⁵ Recognizing the threat created by Anti-Access and Area Denial (A2/AD) strategies pursued by adversary nations, the Navigation Plan also advocates for the improvement of defensive systems in the Navy, through the incremental upgrade of electronic warfare systems and the development and deployment of directed energy

systems.⁶ The goal of this new blueprint for the fleet is ambitious, calling for the delivery and deployment of these emerging capabilities no later than 2025.⁷

While impressive, the Navigation Plan requires the Department of the Navy (DON) to acquire these new capabilities while operating within a tight schedule and decreasing budget. Historically, the Navy has struggled to deliver fully capable systems on time and within budget, especially when fielding new or unique platforms and technologies, as Senators Jim Inhofe and Jack Reed note when describing the procurement of the last eight new classes of vessels, “each lead ship experienced cost growth of at least ten percent and was delivered to the fleet at least six months late.”⁸ However, the Navigation Plan emphasizes that the Navy must simultaneously increase the size of the fleet, field advanced systems rapidly, and create a more heterogeneous fleet composed of multiple unique platforms, while also engaging in the mandated, expensive replacement of the *Ohio*-class of ballistic missile submarines, conquering the schedule and cost problems which have previously hobbled the development and fielding of new capabilities. While pathways have been developed to speed up the acquisition process, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) argues that the Navy and Department of Defense (DOD) have failed to adequately account for the mitigation of the risks of rapidly acquiring these systems, stating that:

DOD has taken steps to accelerate weapon system development, and decision-making authority has been delegated to the military services. In an environment emphasizing speed, without senior leadership focus on a broader range of key reliability practices, DOD runs the risk of delivering less reliable systems than promised to the warfighter and spending more than anticipated on rework and maintenance of major weapon systems.⁹

The Navy must also acquire these capabilities in the face of growing oversight by Congress and the OSD while confronting increased inter-service competition for funding. After the 2018 National Defense Strategy shifted DOD priorities from stabilization and counterinsurgency

operations in the Middle East to great power competition, leaders from both the Army and Navy began justifying the need for increased funding for their respective services.¹⁰ While reforms to the acquisition system can help deliver some of the speed required to accomplish the goals of the Navigation Plan, the short timeframe to execute this policy will require the Navy to work within the existing acquisition framework before the effects of reform can take effect, leveraging small benefits wherever possible. This will require the Navy to learn from the mistakes it has experienced in the past, where a GAO analysis of programs including the DDG-1000 and Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) concluded that factors that negatively influenced program stability, like changes to design requirements, contributed to a threefold increase in costs and doubled the length of the schedule.¹¹ As Senators Inhofe and Reed stated, “the Navy needs to stop repeating the same process while expecting a different result.”¹²

Military program managers are charged with managing the cost, schedule, and performance of their assigned programs and deliver the capabilities needed in the fleet. Traditionally, Navy program managers report to and are governed by their respective Milestone Decision Authority (MDA) within the OSD, although the introduction of the adaptive acquisition framework has begun a policy shift towards pushing these decisions to the service and program manager level.¹³ The role of the program manager is stipulated in the DOD Directive 5000.01 as being “the designated individual with responsibility for and authority to accomplish program objectives for development, production, and sustainment to meet the user’s operational needs.”¹⁴ As reported by the GAO in *Defense Acquisition Workforce*, on a day to day basis program managers, “coordinate with a broad array of military service and DOD officials, outside suppliers, and internal and external oversight entities.”¹⁵ However, when surveyed by the Defense Business Board (DBB), active program managers described their role as “managing the

politics and process within the DOD rather than managing their programs.”¹⁶ The DBB report also indicated that DOD program managers often rotated out of their assignments early to fulfill service needs and suffered from an, “erosion of authority and increase in bureaucracy.”¹⁷

Members of the defense industry noted that the short tenure and reduced authority of military program manager increased the complexity of relations with the DOD and favored the creation of exchange programs between industry and the military.¹⁸ Furthermore, the shortened tour length of program managers led to a tendency towards short-term decision making and risk avoidance, often causing long term problems for their programs.¹⁹ To improve relations with the defense industry, the Navy engaged in two such exchanges, through the Secretary of Defense Executive Fellows and the Secretary of the Navy Tours With Industry programs, but selection for these programs was open to all service members and members of the acquisition workforce participated on a limited basis, with between two and five personnel taking part in the program each year.²⁰ Both exchange programs are also targeted towards field grade officers, limiting the opportunity for more junior officers to develop experience and relationships with their counterparts in industry.²¹

Navy program managers are made up of a combination of military officers and civilian personnel. Generally, when a program is led by a military officer, the deputy program manager will be a civilian and vice versa. Civilian program managers often provide a level of continuity within a program, as they are not subject to the frequency of rotations a military officer can expect. However, while civilian program managers are familiar with process, they often lack the military operational experience that a military officer can bring to a program. While civilian program managers are a great benefit to the acquisition workforce, as of 2018, 78% of major

defense acquisition programs had a military program manager and this paper will focus on the role of military program managers.²²

Military program managers are board-selected from within the service Acquisition Corps, which is predominantly made up of members of the Engineering Duty Officer (EDO) and Aerospace Engineering Duty Officer (AEDO) communities who meet specific education, certification, rank, and experience criteria. EDOs and AEDOs are accessed from warfare qualified members of the Unrestricted Line community who are academically qualified to pursue a technical Master's Degree.²³ However, there is no stipulation that an officer seeking transfer into these communities have any business or management experience or education other than what would be required to complete a successful tour in their warfare community. Officers are generally eligible to transfer into the EDO and AEDO communities at the rank of Lieutenant or Lieutenant Commander, providing at least one tour of experience in the officer's respective warfare community.²⁴ The only advertisement for an opportunity to join the EDO or AEDO community is a biannual call for applications released through official message traffic, other than that, there is no targeted development or identification of personnel with potential to be successful in the acquisition community.²⁵

Once active in the EDO and AEDO communities, officer fitness reports provide the only means of evaluating performance. Additionally, mentorship by senior Navy EDO and AEDO leaders was provided on a strictly voluntary basis, community leadership provides no formal career roadmap describing the necessary skills for advancement, and the majority of training is conducted on the job and is supplemented by Defense Acquisition University (DAU) classes.²⁶ These behaviors clash with industry leading practices for successful development and retention of program managers, characterized by the establishment of mentoring relationships,

development of program management career paths, identification of high-potential talent, and alignment of personnel with program needs.²⁷ When compared to industry practices for program management, as well as current practices utilized by the Army and Air Force, the GAO provided an overall negative review, noting, “the Navy as having practices that do not extensively align with leading practices in each of the areas of training, mentoring, retaining, and selecting program managers.”²⁸

III. Review of Literature

This review includes a background study of the growth and history of the Defense Acquisition System (DAS), including the many attempts at program management reform, from the birth of the DOD to the modern day. While not specific to the DON, the policies, initiatives, and methods described by the literature have controlled the processes through which the DON acquires ships, aircraft, and technology. This analysis was facilitated by reviewing John Ronald Fox’s *Defense Acquisition Reform 1960-2009: An Elusive Goal*, the Blue Ribbon Defense Panel’s *Report to the President and the Secretary of Defense on the Department of Defense*, DOD Instruction 5000.80, *Operation of the Middle Tier of Acquisition*, the DOD report *Restructuring the Department of Defense Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics Organization and Chief Management Officer Organization*, and the Government GAO report *DOD Acquisition Reform*.

Written by John Ronald Fox in 2011, *Defense Acquisition Reform 1960-2009: An Elusive Goal*, provides a review of 49 years of DOD successes and failures concerning weapons systems acquisitions. Fox, a Harvard Business School faculty member, is a former assistant secretary of the Army for procurement and deputy assistant secretary of the Air Force. As a DOD insider, Fox identifies the recurring cycles of centralization and decentralization, analyzes the many

attempts at reform, covers the constant problems of cost overruns and schedule delays. Many of the observations made by Fox about previous reform attempts are still valid and can be applied towards today's attempts by Congress and the DOD to reform the Defense Acquisitions System (DAS) and create a culture of innovation.

The Blue-Ribbon Defense Panel's *Report to the President and the Secretary of Defense on the Department of Defense*, was written in 1971 after being commissioned to make recommendations about the structure and organization of the DOD. While not solely tied to the acquisition arm of the DOD, the panel's report represents the first major attempt at reform after the consolidation of power under Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. The panel identified persistent trends in acquisition, including duplication of effort, inadequate test and evaluation of weapons systems, and insufficient capacity for training and experience in the program manager corps. Many of the recommendations generated by the panel are still as relevant today as they were when the report was written.

DOD Instruction 5000.80 (DODI 5000.80), *Operation of the Middle Tier of Acquisition*, was released on December 30, 2019 and provides guidance for the execution of rapid acquisitions programs in the DOD. This instruction covers the acquisition and funding strategies for the rapid prototyping and fielding of new capabilities and provides a means of procurement outside of the traditional processes. While still relatively new, DODI 5000.80 represents the first attempt to speed up the acquisition process in the modern era.

As required by Section 901 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2017, the DOD released a report to Congress titled, *Restructuring the Department of Defense Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics Organization and Chief Management Officer Organization*. The report provides an analysis of DOD efforts to review and restructure its

acquisition management to enable the pursuit of the goals of “technological superiority, affordable systems, and well managed business operations.”²⁹ This report provides a frank assessment of the current structure of the DOD acquisition organization and proposes the framework for DOD acquisition management in the future.

The GAO Report *DOD Acquisition Reform* was written in 2019 and provides a review of the DOD’s progress at implementing the reforms authorized by the 2016 and 2017 NDAA. The report covers the implementation problems the DOD has encountered in its most recent attempt at reform and provides recommendations for establishing oversight and reporting responsibilities for the DOD as it begins its most recent attempt at acquisition reform. The report specifically highlights the limited use of rapid acquisitions by the Navy and makes note of the insufficient guidance of the roles and responsibilities for program oversight.

IV. Background

A. 1950s

In the era immediately following World War II, each service was permitted to exercise autonomy when making purchase decisions as there was no established policy by the DOD concerning acquisitions. This was largely based on the original design of the DOD, where the services retained much of their independence and the power of the Secretary of Defense was limited to provision of oversight and non-interference with service decisions.³⁰ Upon assuming the role of Secretary of Defense, James Forrestal identified this deficiency and recommended that, “the statutory authority of the Secretary of Defense should be materially strengthened . . . by making it clear that the Secretary of Defense has the responsibility for exercising direction, authority and control over the departments of the National Military Establishment.”³¹ As the budget grew and the efficient management of the defense industry became a topic of concern, the

DOD began the long process of centralizing its control over service acquisition decisions, leading to the formation of program management offices to coordinate the design, development, production, and fielding of major weapons systems.³² At the end of the decade, the Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1958 continued the process of strengthening the authority of the OSD over service acquisition decisions and enabled the OSD the capability to, “to assign the development, production, and operational use of weapon systems to any military department or service.”³³ The OSD, however, would not exercise this authority until the Kennedy administration.

B. 1960s

The role of the OSD would change in the 1960s, as Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara sought to take a more dynamic role in the management of DOD programs and processes. The most enduring change would be the introduction of the Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System (PPBS), which would eventually become the Planning, Programming, Budgeting, and Execution (PPBE) process.³⁴ The PPBS eliminated the independence the services previously had in determining their respective budget submissions and empowered the OSD exercise comprehensive control over the defense budget and programs.³⁵

Additional reforms aimed to provide program managers with more capability to prevent cost and schedule overruns through the improvement of cost estimation and analysis techniques.³⁶ Formal training for prospective program managers was established, however, the capacity was inadequate to meet personnel requirements, meaning officers in program manager positions often did not have the required training and experience to effectively execute their jobs.³⁷ While the analysis tools aided the developments of schedules and cost estimates, program management was still inefficient and during government hearings a member of the OSD testified

that, “about 90% of the major weapon systems that the Defense Department procures end up costing at least twice as much as was originally estimated.”³⁸

C. 1970s

As the Nixon administration desired to distance itself from the Vietnam War, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird and Deputy Secretary of Defense David Packard joined the OSD with the goal of quickly adopting acquisition reforms to end the cost overruns and high-profile procurement failures of the 1960s. With a goal of improving the DOD’s practices, Laird organized the independent Blue-Ribbon Defense Panel which observed in its final report that current policies had “contributed to serious cost overruns, schedule slippages and technical performance deficiencies,” and that reform would “require many interrelated changes in organization and procedures.”³⁹ Specific acquisition reforms recommended by the panel included reducing the use of concurrent development and expanding the role of the OSD in the evaluation of procurement activities.⁴⁰ The panel also gave insights into developing a more professional corps of program managers and recommended the creation of a program management career specialty for officers, increasing the quality of program management training, adoption of the use of civilian personnel with sufficient experience as program managers, and granting more authority to program managers to administer their programs.⁴¹

Based on the results of the panel and their desire to standardize DOD acquisition processes, Laird and Packard established the Defense System Acquisition Review Council (DSARC) and drafted DOD Directive 5000.1, which sought to standardize OSD oversight over major acquisition programs, while giving the services and program managers more responsibility to accomplish their goals.⁴² While the initiatives that Laird and Packard put into motion would relieve some of the administrative burden on program managers and provide standardized

guidance for the services, the progress made in decentralizing procurement authority would stall, sidelining any further reforms as the OSD would again begin to centralize its power over service decisions in the face of soaring costs and shrinking budgets.

D. 1980s

As the Reagan administration began an ambitious plan to strengthen and expand the military, public scrutiny regarding the military's capability to effectively oversee its acquisition programs was heightened and Congress began to take a more active role in the oversight of weapons procurement.⁴³ Fearing further budget instability as Congress began auditing programs, the OSD introduced the Acquisition Improvement Program (AIP) which, as Fox explains, sought to, "streamline acquisition management and oversight by the military services and OSD."⁴⁴ Bucking the trend of top-down management instituted by McNamara and the policies of the late seventies, the Reagan administration sought to use the AIP to consolidate policy formation under the OSD while pushing decision authority back to the services.

Facing increased public pressure over the rising costs of acquisitions programs, the Reagan administration formed its own Blue Ribbon Commission, this time focusing on the management of weapons procurement.⁴⁵ In this case, the commission recommended increasing the role of service oversight by the OSD through granting the Joint Chief of Staff greater authority over service requirements generation, creating the position Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics (USD(AT&L)), and creating Senior Acquisition Executives (SAE) who would report to USD(AT&L) and service secretaries.⁴⁶ Congress would later enact these recommendations through subsequent defense authorizations and would also institute additional training, qualification, and experience requirements for program managers, although they are frequently waived for program manager candidates to this day.⁴⁷ The reforms

instituted during the Reagan administration would, with minor changes, govern the acquisitions process for almost thirty years.

E. Present

Beginning in 2016, Congress began the most extensive series of acquisition reforms since the Blue Ribbon Commission, aiming to reorganize the oversight roles of the OSD, create streamlined processes to enable rapid fielding of systems, and push decision making authority to service specific SAE.⁴⁸ The result was the Adaptive Acquisition Framework (AAF), which was formalized with the release of its governing instruction, *Operation of the Adaptive Acquisition Framework*, released on January 23, 2020. The AAF supports the DAS through the establishment of acquisition pathways for the MDA and program managers to develop and execute acquisition strategies that align with the capability being acquired.⁴⁹ The AAF also sets the roles and responsibilities for the MDA, SAE, and program managers, emphasizing pursuit of acquisition strategies at the service and program manager level vice that of the OSD.⁵⁰

The acquisition pathways, displayed in figure 1, provide multiple options to develop an acquisition strategy depending on the cost, schedule, and user need of the specific program.⁵¹ Two pathways of interest for accelerated fielding of capabilities are the Urgent Capability Acquisition (UCA) and the Middle Tier of Acquisition (MTA). These methods allow the services to bypass the acquisition procedures dictated by the Joint Capabilities Integration and Development System (JCIDS) and the Defense Acquisition System.⁵² The UCA pathway was designed to provide for fulfillment of “urgent existing and/or emerging operational needs or quick reactions in less than two years.”⁵³ While not appropriate for a major acquisitions program, the MTA provides a pathway to rapidly field or prototype emerging technologies,

requiring MTA programs complete fielding or transition to traditional acquisition processes within two to five years of starting.⁵⁴

Both pathways are subject to funding restrictions, with UCA programs required to be under \$3.065 billion in total procurement costs and MTA programs required to be funded through a rapid prototyping fund, designed to exist outside of the traditional PPBE process.⁵⁵ After the services selected several systems for rapid prototyping without plans for testing and sustainment, the House Armed Services Committee began to fear the potential abuse of the MTA pathway, and began several efforts to develop DOD accountability.⁵⁶ When those efforts stalled, Congress eliminated the rapid prototyping fund in the 2020 NDAA, subjecting MTA programs to the two to three year budgeting process associated with PPBE.⁵⁷ Although the DOD was quick to embrace the new OSD oversight roles and SAE decision authority, adoption of the MTA processes have been somewhat more restrained and there was no DOD policy governing its use until December 30, 2019.⁵⁸ The Navy has been the slowest service to adopt this pathway, with only three of the 35 active MTA programs belonging to the Navy as of March 2019.⁵⁹

In 2017, the DOD released *Restructuring the Department of Defense Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics Organization and Chief Management Officer Organization* to Congress to establish the actions taken by the DOD in accordance with the 2017 NDAA. This report identified DOD efforts to comply with the Congressional mandate to streamline its acquisition organization and delegate authority and responsibility for procurement decisions back to the Services. In accordance with the guidance instituted in the 2017 NDAA, the DOD split the responsibilities and powers of the USD(AT&L) into two new positions, creating the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering (USD(R&E)) and the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment (USD(A&S)).⁶⁰ With the goal of improving the

capability to ensure technological superiority and adequately leverage and manage risk, the DOD granted USD(R&E) with the authority to, “set the technology strategy for the DOD, solve the critical technical warfighting challenges, and deliver technology solutions faster.”⁶¹ The USD(A&S), on the other hand, was charged with “acquisition oversight on major joint programs, as appropriate, while advising and assisting the Services on other Major Defense Acquisition Programs (MDAP).”⁶² The restructuring described in the report provided the means to achieve greater authority and responsibility for acquisition by the individual services, while maintaining OSD oversight, and established distinct roles and responsibilities for acquisition and technology development within the DOD.

On January 19, 2018 Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis released the Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS), establishing the priorities and objectives for the DOD over the next four years. The NDS described the need to establish a culture of performance and accountability, calling for further reform of the processes used in the DAS which it characterized as, “the current bureaucratic approach, centered on exacting thoroughness and minimizing risk above all else, is proving to be increasingly unresponsive.”⁶³ Describing the current system as outdated and onerous, it challenged the DOD to “shed outdated management practices and structures while integrating insights from business innovation.”⁶⁴ The NDS also established the need to accelerate procurement efforts, proposing a commitment to, “prioritize speed of delivery, continuous adaptation, and frequent modular upgrades” while eliminating “cumbersome approval chains, wasteful applications of resources in uncompetitive space, or overly risk-averse thinking that impedes change.”⁶⁵ To further drive this organizational change, the NDS also called for the DOD to “organize for innovation, drive budget discipline and affordability to achieve solvency, streamline rapid, iterative approaches from deployment to fielding, and

harness and protect the National Security Innovation Base.”⁶⁶ The NDS repeatedly emphasized leveraging the advantages of the commercial and industrial sector to help implement a long-term strategy to move away from the cumbersome, bureaucratic past and to drive a change within the DOD to create a culture of agility, performance, and accountability.

The historical view of acquisition reform in the DOD can be represented by a pendulum, undulating between the creation of more rules and processes to address failures on one end and the removal and streamlining processes to deliver capabilities faster on the other. However, little attention has been given to how the Navy can better identify, train, and retain its cadre of program managers. Instead of finding and developing the right people and putting them in the right positions, legislation is drafted, implemented, and then removed as necessary. Through improving its talent management processes of the acquisition workforce, the Navy can develop a cadre of experienced, educated program managers, fully capable of leading their programs to success and accepting and managing the risks inherent with development of new capabilities.

V. Solutions

While the AAF and the changes to the acquisitions systems detailed in the 2016 and 2017 NDAA provide the framework to enable rapid acquisitions by the Navy, OSD and DON leadership are not adequately poised to successfully implement these policies. The delays in releasing internal policy and guidance concerning the implementation of these regulations by the DOD and the Navy are indicative of the precarious role of program managers, where expectations are to cut costs and deliver systems quickly, but policies made to enable those demands are delivered late. Coupled with inadequate experience in business and industry, an ambiguous career path, and meager talent management efforts, program managers are not being given the tools necessary to successfully deliver the capabilities the fleet needs. Instead of

creating more policy, however, the Navy can build an effective cadre of program managers through improving the way program managers are recruited, developed, managed, and retained. Through the solutions identified in this paper, the Navy can improve the quality of its acquisition workforce to aid in the rapid development of advanced capabilities.

1. *Empower program managers.*

Program managers are theoretically entrusted to set the conditions for the long-term success of their projects. However, due to bureaucratic demands and shortened tenure in their positions, program managers focus on short term strategies and goals while avoiding risk. Through the pursuit of rapid acquisition pathways and keeping program managers in their positions for the full duration of their planned rotations, the potential exists to have a single program manager oversee acquisition from design to fielding. Instead of “passing the buck” to their successor or pursuing short term gains at the expense the programs future prospects, this would force the pursuit of longer-term planning and risk management, enabling a program manager to become the “champion” of their program. The Navy should also seek to delegate control of acquisition decisions to the lowest suitable level, a strategy the Air Force has adopted to compress the acquisition timeline by “pushing authorities down even further so general officers make fewer decisions in favor of managers who actually run the day to day of the program, and for smaller programs down even further.”⁶⁷ Unfortunately, the Navy has cultivated a leadership culture which has emphasized micromanaging, risk avoidance, and a fixation on careerism that promotes a zero-defect mentality.⁶⁸ By trusting their program managers to lead their programs and accept and properly manage risk, DON and OSD leadership can reverse this trend and foster a culture of responsible leadership within the acquisition community. The

increase in authority should also come with an increase in accountability, however, requiring the removal of program managers who cannot deliver capabilities on time and on budget.

2. Establish an Acquisition Corps-specific defense-to-industry exchange.

The establishment of a formal, dedicated exchange program between members of the acquisition community and industry would provide a method of rewarding top performers within the community, enable the building of relationships between future program managers and industry, and establish the foundation of program management skills within the acquisition workforce through exposure to commercial and industrial practices. The program would not need to be limited to senior or field grade officers, opening this opportunity to more junior personnel could act as a means of identifying top performers earlier, provide incentive for joining or remaining in the acquisition community, provide exposure to program management skills that would not normally be available in the military. Personnel who participate in this exchange would meet the call for adaptation, agility, and innovation from the NDS, with direct exposure to business innovation and competitive environments, creating the opportunity to bring this knowledge and experience back with them.

3. Increase breadth and depth of program manager education and experience requirements.

Members of the acquisition community deal with highly technical issues and, as such, experience and education in technical fields is beneficial. However, many of the facets of day to day program management are more akin to business management. Current requirements for acceptance into the EDO and AEDO community call for an academic background that qualifies an officer for completion of a technical Master's Degree. However, completion of business education should be considered when screening of candidates for these fields. Expanding the acquisition corps to include personnel with undergraduate business education would increase the

diversity of thought in the field beyond that which comes with a technical degree and could help build the personnel base to address any manpower shortfalls. Once selected for the acquisition community, personnel complete an online curriculum through the DAU to meet competency requirements specific to the program management field. While all major program manager positions met the minimum certification requirements for their positions, the Navy should develop training to address the service specific acquisition issues of cost growth and schedule delays.

4. *Identify officers with potential for program management earlier in their careers and establish clear career paths for them.*

The GAO report *Defense Acquisition Workforce* noted an inconsistent approach to talent identification in the Navy acquisition community, “the Navy only identifies high-potential military talent on an informal basis, which varies across the service.”⁶⁹ The report disclosed that the Army, on the other hand, “regularly and systematically involves senior management in identifying high-potential program management talent among civilian and military personnel.”⁷⁰ It would be a benefit to the Navy to initiate standardization with respect to talent identification and management. High potential personnel should be identified through their education, performance in demanding and milestone tours, and desire to pursue a career in the acquisition field. This could be accomplished through a simple screening of college transcripts and officer fitness reports, followed by an annotation of potential for program management on the officer’s record. The Navy should also improve its talent management of personnel in the acquisition community. Navy personnel management should consider incorporating the strategies of continuous talent assessment, marketing, and recruitment considered by the Army Talent Management Strategy, with the goal to acquire and develop more acquisition workforce

members.⁷¹ While mentorship is available on an informal basis, a formal mentor program should be developed and acquisition leadership should be expected to act as mentors in this program. The acquisition community should also publish guidance and a career roadmap that explains the skills, qualifications, education, and experience expectations for advancement.

5. Reestablish the rapid prototyping fund.

Through the cancellation of the rapid prototyping fund, the ability to use the MTA process for accelerated acquisitions of new and previously unfunded capabilities was undermined. While the lack of long-term consideration for testing and sustainment in several programs brought the elimination of the fund, with enough safeguards in place the potential exists to reimplement the fund. Instead of using the fund, now the services must budget for MTA procurements through the PPBE process, causing a two to three-year gap between the request for funds and their delivery once approved. This also delays the initiation of programs, as projects cannot start until funding is budgeted. As the MTA process was designed to field new capabilities within two to five years, elimination of the rapid prototyping fund and the use of the PPBE process effectively doubles the time required to field new capabilities. With educated and experienced program managers in place who fully understand their responsibilities and with enough oversight, the prototyping fund could be reinstated to enable rapid fielding of new capabilities. Oversight concerns can be mitigated through limitations on the size of the fund and the amount available to programs, funding requirements more than those limits should be subject to appropriations requests through existing processes.

6. Increase efforts to pursue alternative acquisition strategies for incremental updates to existing systems.

The Navy can, however, use the MTA process for the rapid fielding of incremental updates to programs that have already been initiated and been funded through the PPBE process. In this case, the MTA provides the opportunity to bypass reporting and documentation requirements inherent in the legacy acquisitions system and instead gives program managers and decision authorities the opportunity to tailor their programs. Instead of taking a one size fits all approach to acquisition, the tailored approach allows program managers to structure an ideal acquisition strategy for their specific program. While a rapid acquisition strategy may be riskier than traditional methods, the pursuit of incremental updates to existing programs can mitigate some of these concerns. This approach, however, requires a program manager who is willing to manage that risk and develop an acquisition strategy that, while authorized by legislation, differs from the standard methods and practices that have previously been utilized by the acquisition community. The fostering of a program management culture that identifies the high-potential talent and has the education and experience necessary to manage such strategies could aid the use of these frameworks to speed up the acquisition process. Although the Navy has struggled to adopt the MTA and AAF, the use of these methods for incremental improvements represents a realistic means of achieving the goals of the Navigation Plan and the NDS.

VI. Resistance to Change

These recommendations require changes to the current methods of identifying, developing, managing, and retaining the personnel within the acquisition workforce. The expansion of current defense-to-industry exchanges and the expansion of education and experience requirements require changes to the way the Navy currently manages its talent. Identification of personnel with an affinity for program management requires an adaptation to the way talent is recognized and recruited. Empowering current program managers requires a

change in the way Navy leadership mentors and manages their personnel. The implementation of these changes can be reduced to the two primary problems of manpower and funding, both of which require a dedicated commitment by the Navy to overcome. While talent management initiatives are nothing new, the Navy often lacks the follow through to implement them and is guilty of, what CDR Alex Campbell and LT Nicholas Stoner's article describes as, "killing its most promising talent management initiatives through inaction, bureaucracy, and a nonexistent implementation strategy."⁷²

For this context, the manpower argument can be broken down into personnel management and timing. The need to cycle officers through necessary tours for experience and promotion opportunity limits the time available for a program management tour. A longer tour as a program manager may limit the follow-on career opportunities for an officer, potentially causing career minded officers to avoid this field. There also exists the possibility of "stove piping" these officers into the acquisition workforce, reducing their exposure to the operational world once identified and brought into such a career path. The avoidance of "stove piping" reinforces the use of generalists identified earlier. Within a career timeline, there is also limited time available to devote towards educating and developing a prospective program manager, while also achieving all the other requirements necessary to continue a career track.

Funding also presents another potential road block towards the implementation of these policies. Developing a new syllabus to educate program managers and implement a defense to industry exchange requires funding, that must come from somewhere. While these initiatives can offer value and could potentially yield savings in the future, they represent an unrealized cost to the Navy during their introduction. Initiating these programs also requires the institution to

accept the cost of paying for an officer to be in an exchange or education tour instead of an acquisition tour.

VII. Conclusion

Traditional criticism of the acquisition system has focused on legislation and policy and has called for either the creation of additional protocol or the removal of the onerous policies that have previously been enacted. Instead of focusing on policy, the problems identified by proponents of acquisition reform can be overcome by concentrating on the betterment of the people within the system. Effective identification, recruitment, management, and retainment of talented personnel by the acquisition system can remedy many of the ills present today, without being forced to enact any major legislative action. By enabling and empowering its program managers, the Navy can effect downstream change to streamline processes and build efficiency in the system.

The recommendations offered in this paper require a change to the current methods of officer talent management utilized by the Navy. Current management processes apply the centralized control of active duty officer career paths by the Bureau of Personnel, resulting in reduced transparency to the individual officer.⁷³ However, both reserve officer and enlisted personnel utilize a career marketplace, comparable to the Army talent management initiatives, that allows personnel to apply for available billets, providing for career transparency and a level of agency over an individual's career.⁷⁴ The Navy also offers the Sailor 2025 talent management initiatives which are primarily targeted at retention of enlisted personnel.⁷⁵ There are limited offerings for officer retention and management, which are comprised of the previously mentioned Secretary of the Navy Tours With Industry program and a career intermission program.⁷⁶

The pursuit of alternative acquisition pathways and incremental updates to existing systems by the program managers who have benefitted from the proposals listed in this paper can enable efficient, rapid procurement of new capabilities. As legislation and guidance shifts between centralized control under the OSD and decentralization of acquisition decisions to the services, pursuit of these strategies can enable the acquisition system to continue to adapt and thrive, instead of stagnating.

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Appendix

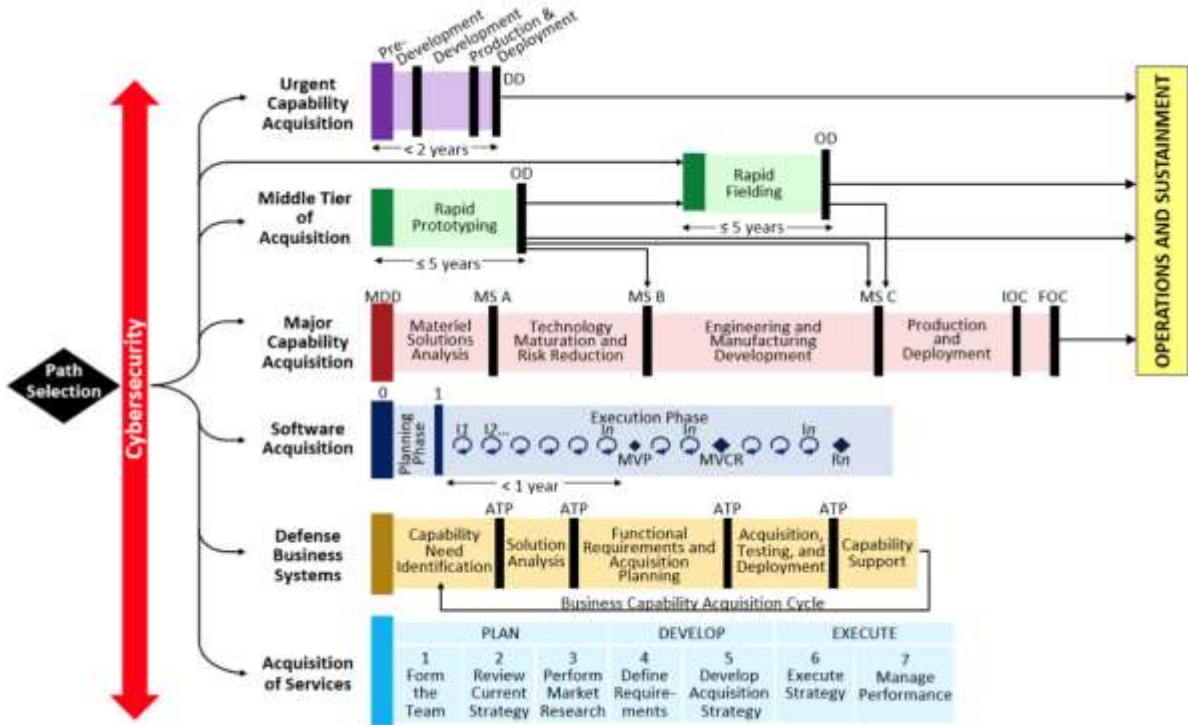


Figure 1: Adaptive Acquisition Framework