

DAU Consulting Might Be the Right Enabler

To Improve Your Acquisition Outcomes

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What is DAU Consulting? Consulting comes in hundreds of forms and there are just as many insightful books on the subject, but consulting has one common purpose: to help organizations achieve their intended objectives by identifying any barriers that could be creating any interference. Understanding the Defense Acquisition University's consulting process requires a basic understanding of DAU's consulting origins, which started more than 20 years ago. It took root during DAU's major transformation with the creation of the Performance Learning Model (PLM).

After benchmarking other corporate universities that offered a wide variety of learning options for its practitioner workforce, DAU explored similar learning opportunities for its workforce as well. DAU already had the expertise and capacity to offer specialized support to the Defense Acquisition Workforce (DAW) outside the classroom where its faculty and staff had primarily dwelt, and the PLM was born. With the advent of the PLM, training was still a central imperative, but additional learning methods such as Knowledge Sharing, Continuous Learning, and Performance Support were added to the core model. These additional learning methods were intended to address other vital learning needs across the DAW, and further strengthen acquisition knowledge and abilities in the workplace.

Mission Assistance (MA), previously called Performance Support, addressed more narrowly focused workplace specific needs. DAU found that many Department of Defense (DoD) customer teams were looking for customized training solutions for cohort groups. For example, they were about to embark on a source selection, or were facing several foreboding programmatic risks, or were challenged by recent

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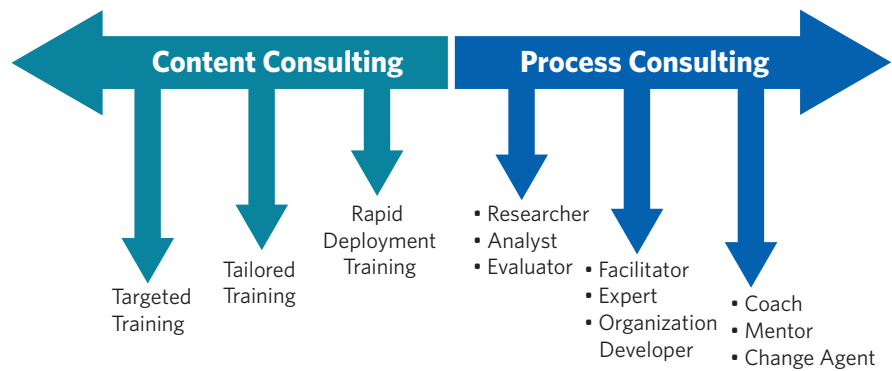
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latest policy changes affecting their day-to-day actions. These “Content Consulting” needs could be met through targeted training, tailored training or rapid deployment training (Figure 1) to satisfy time-urgent “know-how’s” and “how to’s” right away.

Figure 1. Mission Assistance



In other cases, workforce teams needed:

- A deeper understanding of the obstacles inhibiting their progress or even their success.
- Help evaluating their readiness before their Major Defense Acquisition Program headed into a Milestone Decision Review.
- Facilitation from an organization steeped in strategic planning as they started to craft a strategic plan with specific goals.
- A team of experts to critique their acquisition roadmap and assess the associated documentation as they developed their acquisition strategy.

In all these cases, this form of assistance took the form of “Process Consulting,” and anchored the right side of the MA continuum.

Over the last decade, the DAU enterprise has produced numerous other learning products that span the MA continuum, and trained its faculty and staff with the companion competencies to serve a wide range of customer needs. Each of the DAU business units has also produced several unique products and services to satisfy regional customers’ requests. In

all cases, DAU has relied on its faculty’s and staff’s functional pedigrees and experiences as it added new product lines to its MA arsenal.

Does DAU follow any definitive “process consulting” model? Yes, it does. When DAU formulated its consulting program, it first looked outside the marketplace environment and eventually developed a hybrid process consulting model after reviewing existing models such as Peter Block’s five-phase, Judith Hale’s seven-phase, and Carnegie Mellon’s six-phase models (Figure 2).

Today, DAU’s model looks more like Carnegie Mellon’s six phases, but with a few minor tweaks. To make sure its enterprise-wide faculty was prepared for a wide variety of consulting engagements, DAU instituted a training Faculty Performance Development program for its future consultants that leveraged the virtues of all three models. Each model offered a more detailed view of consulting as well as a thorough discussion on key consulting behaviors and intervention strategies.

Figure 2. Process Consulting Models

Peter Block, “Flawless Consulting”	Judith Hale, “The Performance Consultant’s Field Book”	Carnegie Mellon SEI Training	DAU Consulting
Phase 1: Entry and Contracting	Phase 1: Defining the Request	Phase 1: Entry, Sensing, and Relationship Building	Phase 1: Entry, Sensing, and Relationship Building
Phase 2: Discovery and Dialogue	Phase 2: Fact Finding	Phase 2: Contracting	Phase 2: Defining Opportunity/Contracting
Phase 3: Analysis and the Decision to Act	Phase 3: Analyzing the Findings	Phase 3: Data Gathering, Diagnosis, and Feedback	Phase 3: Data Gathering, Diagnosis, and Feedback
Phase 4: Engagement and Implementation	Phase 4: Designing the Solution	Phase 4: Planning, Execution, and Monitoring	Phase 4: Planning, Implementation, and Monitoring
Phase 5: Extension, Recycle, or Termination	Phase 5: Developing the Solution	Phase 5: Evaluation and Consultant Feedback	Phase 5: Evaluation and Consultant Feedback
	Phase 6: Implementing the Solution	Phase 6: Termination	Phase 6: Closure and Follow-up
	Phase 7: Measuring the Results		



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Throughout the DAU consulting process, a consultant wears many hats and should always be on the look-out for discoveries. As an Objective Observer, a consultant should raise questions for reflection, keep an open mind and understand the customer's problem-solving process. As a Fact Finder, a consultant should gather enough data to stimulate customers' deeper thinking, especially since they may not be fully cognizant of the warning signs that could be impeding organizational performance. As an Identifier of Alternatives/Linker of Resources, a consultant should identify alternatives and resources for customers to classify consequences. As a Joint Problem Solver a consultant should offer alternatives and participate in the overall assessment and decision equation.

DAU's consulting process, using its faculty and staff in the aforementioned roles, has served DAU consultants and its customers well. Understanding a customer's needs and leveraging experience in the consulting process have proved pivotal in achieving any successful outcome.

From Where Does the Demand Emanate?

Requests for MA come into DAU through many different sources. Often, organizations will call or e-mail the Associate Dean, Outreach and Mission Assistance (ADOMA) of their respective regions to see if support is available. Support requests also come from senior Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD)/DoD leadership to the Executive Director, DAU Mission Assistance. Students may call former professors for help. In other cases, organizations may have been encouraged by OSD or their higher headquarters (e.g. Services Acquisition Workshops/Program Transition Workshops) to seek DAU assistance.

Until recently, many requests DAU received from program offices were reactive in nature (solving real-time problems). However, recent trends indicate a noticeable change. Lately, organizations are becoming more proactive and seeking assistance to solve acquisition workplace challenges before they become problems. Reasons for this shift may include:

- Turnover within the workforce, leaving the DAW with less experienced personnel who might be more willing to seek assistance.
- DAU conducting more effective MA outreach.
- OSD/higher headquarters directing and/or encouraging DAU support.
- Increased customer confidence in DAU resulting in repeat requests.
- Word-of-mouth referrals are strengthening DAU's reputation.

DAU is seeing more requests for mission assistance and more opportunities to participate in workplace learning. Mission assistance has been shown to be mutually beneficial to both parties. It not only provides crucial support for the requesting organization but also helps keep the faculty current on products,

services, and best practices for use in future consulting efforts as well as throughout the other DAU mission areas.

DAU's statutory mission is to provide training in acquisition policy (regulatory and statutory) to the members of the DAW. To that end, DAU faculty and staff alike pride themselves in their ability to keep the DAW current in policy and best business practices. However, the wide array of programs found throughout the DoD has created the need for specialized assistance. Through MA, DAU can provide support that goes well beyond policy updates and best practices. Mission assistance helps customers overcome real challenges in real time and enables the DAU facilitators to experience the project management offices' challenges in working jointly toward better solutions.

Why is Consulting an Important Aspect of DAU's Mission?

Consulting is considered one of the most important DAU missions, strongly synergized with its traditional teaching mission. DAU faculty's scope and deep experience base provide tremendous opportunities for program office teams and acquisition executives to leverage. DAU has the ability to be the "outsider looking in"—the "honest broker"—without any inherent program bias. As a result, the DAU consultant can see programmatic issues as well as potential solutions from an independent standpoint. DAU's consulting capability can serve as a major enabler to help create "breakthroughs" for customers, by drawing on the DAU enterprise's diverse and extensive experience base, along with the ability to tap into OSD resources.



AH-1 Cobras at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Dwyer well protected by Aircraft Survivability Equipment, including Missile Warning Sensors and Countermeasure Dispensers visible here. *Naval Air Systems staff photo*

DAU also is involved with joint government and industry team consulting efforts, such as Program Transition Workshops. DAU provides the neutral environment that acquisition programs sometimes require to cultivate strong and enduring relationships throughout execution. This joint team consulting effort enables open communications and enables development of well-defined expectations and outcomes that result in smoother acquisition execution.

Where Does DAU Consulting Expect to Be in the Years Ahead?

In the face of an ever-changing acquisition environment, DAU's faculty are constantly looking for ways to improve and transform themselves to advance workplace learning. The DAU enterprise continually looks for ways to help the DAW do more with less in this environment (made even more challenging by the current austere budgets). Strengthening its processes through rigorous proficiency training and follow-up surveys that validate consulting effectiveness months after the consulting has ended will help DAU become even more efficient.

Aside from DAU's strategic goals, there are two other operating imperatives for the DAU consulting mission: (1) to stay engaged and make a difference for the DAW by providing effective and timely consulting support and (2) to know what it means to walk in the shoes of those we consult. These two "must do's" keep DAU consultants current, credible and reliable to meet its customer's challenges head on.


Senior leadership at DAU and OSD acquisition have recognized Mission Assistance's importance as well:

over the last 4 years, and we pride ourselves on the fact that we consistently provide valued support to acquirers and their organization."

Katharina McFarland, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Acquisition: "I view Consulting and Mission Assistance as fundamental functions of the Defense Acquisition University. The seasoned experience and diversity of the DAU faculty provides a unique capability to leverage for our acquisition professionals and program office teams. Each event is a learning opportunity not only for the Defense Acquisition Workforce, but also, for the assisting DAU facilitators in maintaining currency and relevance. Program office teams that have used these services consistently consider these events as 'value added,' contributing to their ability to manage successful acquisition outcomes."

Summary

DAU consulting is a core element of DAU's PLM and provides the DAW with collaborative assistance in resolving problems and seizing opportunities. DAU uses a wide variety of tools to provide this assistance, ranging from personal coaching/mentoring to exclusive consulting for program office teams (in some cases including their industry counterparts). The depth of experience and broadly diverse backgrounds of DAU's faculty enable DAU to bring the right talent to bear on an acquisition organization's most difficult challenges, helping DAW members to deliver the desired warfighting capability within their allocated resources.

Can DAU consulting serve as a success enabler for your acquisition program office? Contact us to learn more about the possibilities. 

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