

**Defense Acquisition University Board of Visitors Meeting
DAU Headquarters, Fort Belvoir, VA
September 16, 2015**

BoV members and candidates present: David Venlet, Caroline Avey, Michael Brogan, Gene Fraser, Erwin Lessel, Walter Massenburg, William Phillips, Anne Reed, Allison Rosset, Charlie Williams

Welcome and introduction from BoV Chair Dave Venlet

Venlet welcomed members and attendees. He spoke of the importance of supporting the Defense Acquisition Workforce and the impact workplace culture has on how they work and ultimately, how successful the acquisition system is.

Venlet pointed to three persistent criticisms of the workforce that the board should explore to see if there are things DAU can do to help the workforce overcome them. The criticisms are: not enough critical thinking, too risk averse, and do not understand industry.

DAU Update presented by DAU Acting Vice President Roy Wood

Wood began by recognizing Claude Bolton's passing and his contributions to DAU and the workforce. He presented the Board with a brief update of events since the May BoV meeting and outlined plans for fiscal year 2016. He informed them that DAU is preparing for the possibility of a government shutdown and/or a continuing resolution at the end of the month, that the FY16 budget will be tighter and that FY17 may be tighter still. He assured them that Pentagon leaders have acknowledged that DAU has already done much to reduce expenses. He explained that the mandated 25% headquarters workforce reductions will affect the university, but that reductions already made over the last few years will be counted toward the total amount reduced. The implementation timeline is through 2020.

The Defense Acquisition Workforce Development Fund (DAWDF) continues to be a valuable funding source. DAU has used this funding to expand classroom capacity and ensure compliance with accessibility standards. It was noted that DAU has to remain mindful that whatever is built-up using DAWDF, must be sustainable through Operating and Maintenance funds.

We are watching the McCain amendment for acquisition reform. A board member suggested that there may be an opportunity to provide the Service chiefs with some highly specialized acquisition training. Others pointed out that the Service chiefs have always played a role in the acquisition process and that no program can go forward without the concurrence of the Service chiefs. Policy can only affect execution when DoD and the Services are aligned.

Wood announced some organizational changes within DAU that will better align the organization with the Acquisition Learning Model. In doing so, there will be more focus and expansion on the Workflow and Performance Learning areas. This includes a new department dedicated to managing Workflow Learning and an Acquisition Services directorate.

A board member asked about industry access to DAU courses. The Chief of Staff explained how the Army registration system, ATRSS was hacked and subsequently shut down. It has been reopened for access using DoD credentials. ATRSS lock down in accessibility has been impactful for industry. We have found a way for industry members to be able to audit the course and gain the knowledge. They cannot get credit for taking the course.

This has really impacted industry because it is training they need and we are trying to foster the relationships with them. Now closet providers are coming out of the woodwork and charging large amounts for the same training they were getting through DAU. (DAU can pull the numbers of how many industry are impacted; BoV create "so what" statement.) DAU averaged about 140K industry completions before the hack. The advantages of DAU courses are that they are accredited, offered at no cost and provide the added benefit of the government perspective. As a result, industry members are either not certified or the companies are having to put money into a budget line that they have already reduced because it has not been needed.

DAU understands the impact to industry and is actively seeking a solution. At the same time, we must be responsible in our approach with regard to network security. DAU is hopeful that there is a solution that will be able to both meet security measures as well as allow customers access to the tools, information and resources they need.

The university is actively looking ahead at new technologies and learning theories in the future environment and technological restrictions that could be imposed. The organization constantly looks outward for best practices, most recently with Deloitte. DAU enters competitions and sends personnel to conferences to learn and mirror best practices. A few people recently visited Qualcomm and looked at their use of Pathgater. They've moved from content "creation" to content "curation." A takeaway is that there is value in investing in the curation. This approach is very learner-friendly and organizes the information based on the user. It has replaced their learning management system.

In looking at best practices for classroom environments, Wood expressed a belief that DAU is on the right track in creating agile spaces that allow us to change configurations. DAU recently benchmarked Deloitte. They are focusing a significant amount of effort on teaching to millennials. While there is always more DAU can do, based on current trends, they are on track with what the industry expects will be needed going forward.

One of the important thing in making these classrooms successful is ensuring the faculty understands the intent of the space and what flexibilities it builds into the teaching environment. Teaching with old methods will not be effective in these new spaces. DAU is taking into consideration what the instructors need as well. It takes a different mindset to teach in this space. If instructors do not change their teaching methods and their perceptions as an instructor, it will not be successful. This has to be done in a coherent, holistic approach.

A board member asked of DAU leadership: What kind of investment are you making in teaching the instructors on how to use these new spaces and help them modify their teaching techniques? Wood responded that DAU has a robust faculty professional development program. It is in the FY16 Performance Plan to develop courses that will address this specifically. Periodic lunch and learn type events also occur, but the intent is to create a more systemic approach.

Venlet said he would like board members to be exposed to the Faculty Professional Development Program so they can see what is currently being done and provide feedback.

The current level of effort based on the ALM continues to be roughly 85% Foundational, 10% Workflow and 5% Performance Learning. DAU recognizes the need to shift the amount of effort and resources in the different areas to place more focus on the Workflow and Performance Learning areas. The first

three goals of the FY16 Strategic Plan target this. It is also reflected in the performance tasks for FY16-18. At the board's suggestion, DAU will include the envisioned future state in the Strategic Plan.

“What are they thinking?” Strategies for Critical Thinking presented by Allison Rossett

Rossett began by discussing the common desire for critical thinkers in companies, without a common understanding for what that really means. She posited that critical thinkers strive to diminish the power of their biases, and that the term itself implies the development of discerning judgment based on standards. Rossett stated that in the classroom, cases, problems and conversations should replace solely teaching standards.

The need for critical thinking is an issue well beyond DAU and DoD. Studies have proven that it can be taught and learned, but first, it is important to understand what it looks like, when to do it and how to move people toward systematic critical thinking.

When teaching critical thinking, one needs to be clear about both what it looks like and when it should happen. One should consider what critical thinking looks like in the workplace and define the behaviors of critical thinkers. High quality questioning is an important behavior of good critical thinkers. It is important to understand when it is needed – situations that warrant critical thinking should be identified.

Culture influences the success of critical thinking in the workplace. When there is an expectation to just “check the box” and critical thinkers are not rewarded or are even punished, then critical thinking is not as likely to be successful regardless of teaching. Anecdotes from senior executives indicate that when millenials are faced with this type of working environment, they tend to leave.

There is wide consensus that the skills are important. The question remains: how do you create the culture and environment to encourage it? Suggestions include using better assessments and greater accountability. At DAU, critical thinking needs to be encouraged in all elements of the ALM and at all stages of an acquisition professional's career. One suggestion is to use more current events and scenarios to encourage discussion.

DAU must also take a look at the faculty. Are they applying critical thinking themselves? Are they creating opportunities for students to do in the classroom? Perhaps DAU could explore whether there could be a critical thinking job aid.

Discussion followed and included the following comments:

Two of the biggest barriers to successful critical thinking in the workplace are: the culture and lack of clarity about what it is.

Perhaps critical thinking should be included in performance reviews.

It isn't always clear what workforce members are supposed to tailor.

Sometimes challenging the status quo and questioning the standards is misconstrued as challenging authority or disrespectful.

Leaders have to allow change and support the tools available.

Sometimes even policies need to be challenged when they no longer make sense.

The Inspector General (IG) role in the acquisition process impacts critical thinking and drives people toward a checklist mentality. Because the IG has a difficult time training their own people in acquisition, they must rely more heavily on checklists. Is it possible to provide training to the IG to help break them from those habits and help them more fully understand the roles?

Many DAU courses have been evaluated by the American Council of Education. Several have been specifically cited as having strong critical thinking in the curriculum. Critical thinking is a topic in the Faculty Development Program. The DAU model is to hire practitioners and teach them to be teachers. In doing so, DAU is focusing less on using presentations on more on using case-based scenarios.

It seems that DAU is doing well teaching and encouraging critical thinking, but the leadership and environment is not supportive of critical thinking in the workplace.

Is there a way to get policymakers into the field to see the results of their policies and give them a better understanding of the environment and what is really needed? Perhaps industry people could be part of that as well.

The board recognizes that 300- and 400-level courses specifically incorporate critical thinking and that lower-level courses must teach the fundamentals and the policy that guide Defense acquisition. Is an effort being made throughout the lower-level courses to help students understand where the flexibilities are and to ask questions when things don't make sense?

Challenge to DAU: find current examples of critical thinking and how it was rewarded. Make examples of the successful applications. This can be faculty members who do it themselves and teach it in the classroom and/or members of the Defense Acquisition Workforce. Critically thinking does not mean setting aside checklist thinking, it means being mindful of it and considering each block carefully.

Dr. Wood agreed that the critical thinking examples were definitely something DAU can take on. He told the board about the three program managers DAU brought in to speak at the last Acquisition Training Symposium about how they applied critical thinking on the job. He agreed to find examples within the faculty that could be commended as well.

The discussion moved to the relationship DAU has with the leadership of the major acquisition commands. Thanks to the regional structure, DAU is able to maintain close ties with the commands in their communities. There is regular dialogue, training and interaction between them. Some three- and four-star commanders come into the classrooms and speak directly with the students. As they are strongly encouraging critical thinking, they are hearing directly from students who are being stifled when they try to do just that.

Instructional Design Approach for Critical Thinking and Systemic Skill Development presented by Caroline Avey

The desire for more critical thinking in the workplace is not unique to DAU or DoD. Companies and organizations worldwide strive to help their people do it better.

Organizations tend to tell people what to think rather well. Traditionally, this accounts for 95% of our teaching.

As people progress in their careers, there is a need to focus more on how to think. What happens is a gap between what to think and how to think. Most organizations tend to focus at the task level and on business results. Instructional design tends to focus on what skills are needed.

Not just looking at employees based on mastery of their required skills, but what are the relevant critical thinking skills needed? An understanding of the bigger picture—the strategic perspective, allows employees to think critically more effectively than if they are only aware of and focused on their particular task.

Organizations should consider the user persona when creating the instructional design. A one-size fits all approach to course design is often less effective.

A mental model shift that changes the approach to learning from both the instructional design perspective as well as the learner's can make training more effective. An example is shifting from "My role is to complete as task accurately. I am told what to do" to "I understand the big picture of the project and I own the work and can anticipate what needs to be done."

When negative core beliefs underlie the relationship between government and industry, a shift in belief must take place for the relationship to be successful. There is also a "maturity model" where one must shift their mindset from being taught or coached, to having a responsibility for teaching and coaching others.

It is important to understand the learner ecosystem because it impacts the design of the course. It appears that DAU already has a well-defined ecosystem. When designing a course, one must be mindful of the user outcome.

There was discussion around the need to build relationships and alignment. This coincides with shifting to more positive and constructive mental models. It isn't enough to have regular program reviews—those are baseline. Including the softskills related to managing a relationship is just as important as the hard skills in program management.

The critical thinking skills includes understanding the intent of the task and how it fits in to the bigger picture and desired outcome. It is more effective to start introducing critical thinking skills early, but on a smaller scale. Then as people progress in their careers, they can become more skilled at it and they will be more comfortable doing it.

For consideration: look at mental models that we can weave throughout DAU courses.

Industry Understanding for the Acquisition Workforce presented by Erv Lessel, Gene Fraser, Bill Phillips, Wally Massenburg, Charlie Williams

The discussion conveyed many perspectives and experiences in addressing the challenging relationship between government and industry. It also sought to identify the real impacts of risk aversion.

Fraser – Better communication between government and industry and more collaboration would likely cut down on requirements changes. Disruptive personnel changes with ineffective turnover of information can be harmful. It is especially noticeable in contracting.

Information request: Is it possible to find out the turnover rate of people brought in under DAWDF?

Concerns were articulated regarding the tendency to stop communicating with the contractors as soon as the initial Request for Proposal goes out instead of the final. Is guidance being put out to that effect? Is there something DAU can do to reinforce open dialogue?

There was consensus that people in the government need to have a much better understanding of how the money flows and what the non-starters are for industry. This is especially important for those in contracting and program management.

Additional advice of how the government could make smarter business decisions included not dictating a particular vehicle or action without regard for best value. Recognizing that competition does not always lead to reduced costs and analyzing actions for unintended consequences were also offered.

Phillips – Industry does not have a clear understanding of what Defense Contract Management Agency and Defense Contract Audit Agency do. There seems to be more adversarial oversight today from audits and DoD IG. This drives risk averse behaviors. Timelines and milestones also drive behaviors on both sides. Industry cannot effectively plan when they cannot count on a reliable timeline from the government.

Other observations included: the velocity of information is critically important to the velocity of innovation and communication on both sides is critical.

An example of successful critical thinking is the JLTV program. It was saved although three of four committees killed it, due to an O6 taking a risk and thinking outside the box.

Massenburg – There is still risk aversion to doing something different, using a different contracting mechanism—even if it is a widely excepted and proven method. Unconstrained data requests are very costly to industry.

Government incentivizes industry to design, produce, and abandon. Lifecycle only asks about cost; it does not ask about the sustainment model.

Williams – It comes down to basic lack of trust and lack of communication. Having a separate DCMA for oversight perpetuates this. DoD acquisition officials often do not have much depth of knowledge of what they are acquiring or the industry they are working with. There is an opportunity for a more comprehensive training solution that addresses this.

DAU responded that in addition to the Understanding Industry Course and having industry participants in classes like PMT 401, more should be done to bring industry into the classroom. It was discussed that workshops may be a more realistic solution for now, especially given the difficulties for industry to take and get credit for online courses.

Reed – Category management could be valuable in more efficiently moving the process along. Government tends to focus on being able to acquire anything versus having a greater understanding of a particular industry. More focus on deepening the knowledge of the particular industry personnel are working in would position them to make better decisions.

Getting alignment around the desired outcome should be paramount. Everything else can occur much more effectively if this is accomplished. A lack of agreement around what the desired outcome is, is not uncommon. Understanding of everyone's role in governance is also not always understood among the players. The most successful programs have a foundation of a relationship built on trust.

Lesel – Understanding business and what incentives are most meaningful to industry is necessary to get to better agreements for all parties. It is difficult to determine the real cost of acquisition when you include all the factors that go into it. Government often doesn't understand the real costs to industry that they impose (e.g. unconstrained information requests).

We should be asking "Are you teaching people how to succeed? Or are you teaching them how not to fail?" There are resources that are not always considered; consultants are often overlooked. Government doesn't know how or when to use their services.

There is still discussion around how to create a more professional workforce. A major barrier is the environmental factor: complexity of the system (how do you maintain agility with increasing regulations?).

Is the acquisition workforce being held accountable by their government customers? (Should they be?)

Summary

- Cyberblocking industry access has been impactful on them. The risk/return should be closely considered.
- In digging into the criticisms of the Defense Acquisition Workforce, specifically with regard to critical thinking, the board discovered serious misalignment within the department which has serious costs an unintended consequences.
- There may be value in having greater accountability of the acquisition workforce to the user community.
- The chairman will explore establishing a connection with the Defense Business Board.
- The chairman encouraged BoV members to visit regional campuses in FY16.
- Several board members can offer insight into the faculty development process; DAU should consider them as a resource for this.
- The chairman challenged DAU to find current examples of successful critical thinking.
- For the next meeting: Industry knowledge course content review. Show what content is in ACQ315 and some backstory of how it was developed and who vetted it.

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