

Taking Theory to Practice

A "How to" in Self Development

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The Defense Systems Management College Advanced Program Management Course (APMC), the College's premier course offering since its beginnings as the 20-week Program Management Course in 1971, is aimed at providing the student a balanced curriculum that places emphasis on students' ability to take theory and put it into practice. As such, the curriculum not only takes into account needs of students in terms of technical learning in a multifunctional workplace, but also needs of individuals in terms of self-development and how to use limited manpower resources effectively in today's acquisition environment.

Two Useful Instruments That Have Proven Their Worth

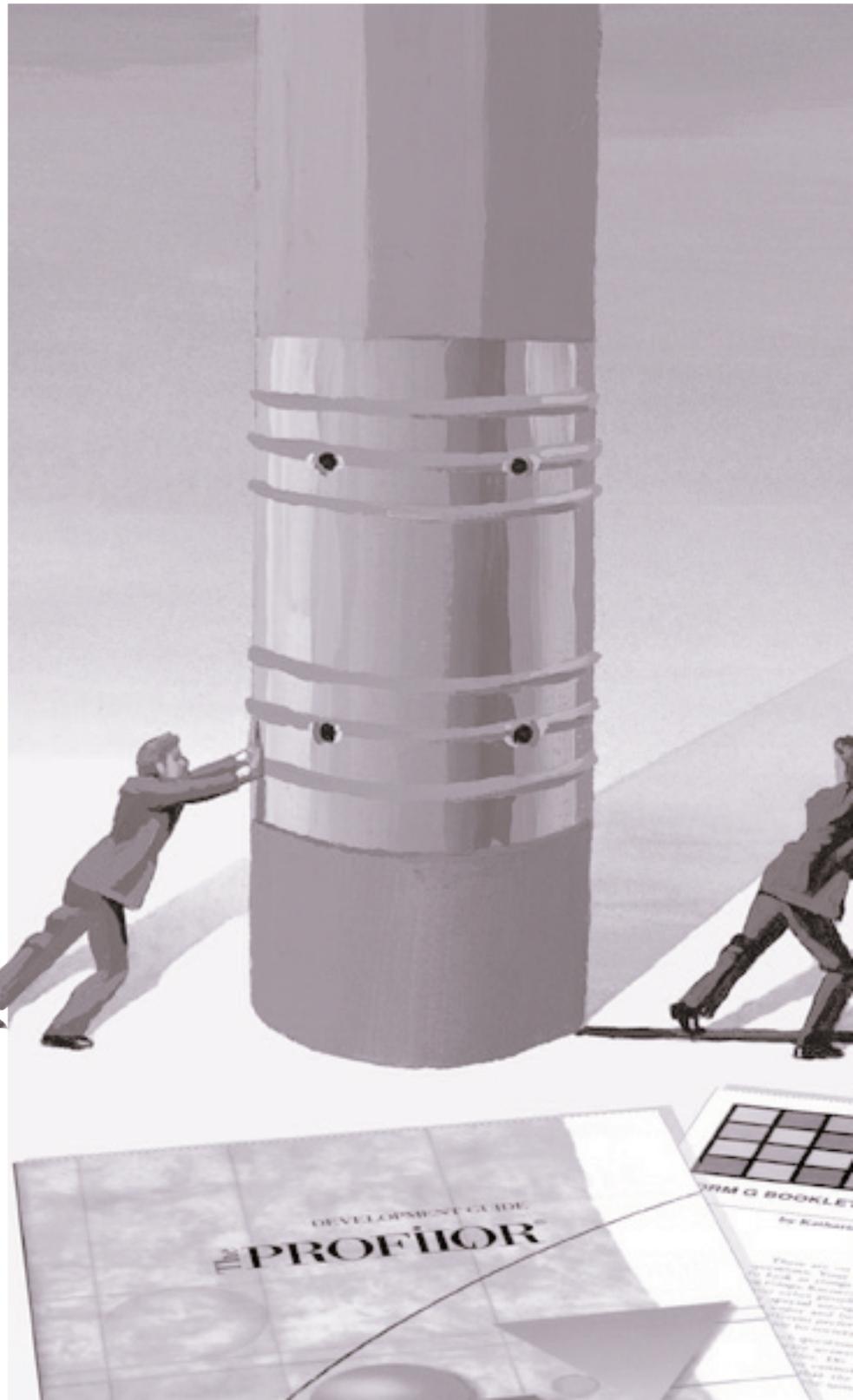
To this end, students attending the course are administered two useful instruments, not only to increase their own self-understanding but also to assist their colleagues in understanding them.

Myers Briggs Type Indicator

The first instrument is the Myers Briggs Type Indicator, which assists students in understanding their personal preferences and helps them recognize how other people perceive them. This instrument has been the subject of considerable research and will not be addressed further in this article.

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PROFILOR

The second instrument is the PROFILOR and the focus of this article. Developed by Personnel Decisions International, it affords students the opportunity to receive 360-degree feedback from their supervisors and peers, and direct reports on 24 critical skills that a Program Manager (PM) needs to per-

form successfully. The PROFILOR asks raters to evaluate the extent to which the target manager performs each of 135 different behaviors using a 5-point scale. The ratings from several behaviors are then combined to generate a rating for each skill. Students are then encouraged to review and assess the feedback with a view to identifying their strengths and selecting areas for potential improvement. They are also encouraged to devise ways in which to leverage these strengths as a means to develop new skills in areas of possible improvement. These ideas are subsequently incorporated into an improvement plan to be initially implemented during APMC and then continued, hopefully, upon return to the workplace.

Analysis

Analysis of the PROFILOR skills assists a Deputy PM (DPM) in identifying, developing, and performing more effectively the significantly different roles and responsibilities required of a successful PM. PROFILOR's primary value is, however, that it allows students to focus and target some of their learning on those interpersonal, relationship-type activities that can have enormous benefit back in the workplace. As one student noted:

"I looked at the major functions and the relative time I spend on the functions I perform as a DPM and then did the same for the PM position. This chart [Figure 1] incorporates the functions I perform and outlines my time allocation estimates.

"This process really drove the point home that as the PM I would need to transition from performing skills requiring

technical knowledge to performing leader and manager functions. Several of the primary managerial functions such as negotiating, supervising, and coaching are areas I don't do at all as the DPM. Therefore, these are the skills I decided to focus on developing at APMC. The improvement plan is one of the primary tools that can be used to develop these skills."

By focusing on the perceptions of others, students build a clear picture of how they are perceived as managers and as leaders. From these perceptions, students can build a personal self-development plan to use in creating the image they desire.

APMC Tools

In addition to the improvement plan, based on PROFILOR feedback students have the opportunity to develop and participate in an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) and a Program Management and Leadership (PML) project. These two activities allow students to focus their learning and practice new skills in a non-attribution environment while attending APMC. The ILP is a minimum of 40 hours that APMC students spend tailoring their learning objectives. As the basis for this student-tailored learning, it combines elective classes and research (Internet, books, tapes, or videos for example). The PML project requires that students develop their primary goal while at APMC and prepare a plan of action for achieving it. As another student noted:

"I focused much of my ILP effort on supervising, negotiating, and developing the skills to be a better team leader/mem-

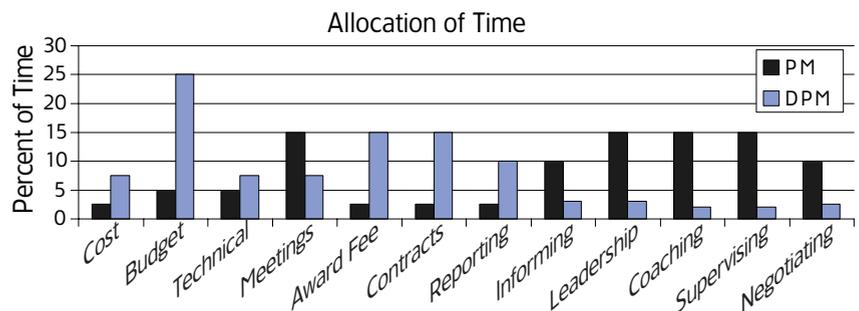


FIGURE 1. Functions and Estimated Time Allocation

IPT Co-chair	Government Team Lead
2 Consider people's feelings in decisions.	1 Influence upper management decisions.
3 Know which battles to fight.	2 Consider people's feelings in decisions.
4 Compromise to build relationships.	3 Know which battles to fight.
5 Be tactful.	5 Be tactful.
6 Be patient.	6 Be patient.
7 Analyze problems from different viewpoints.	10 Convey trust in people to do the job.
8 Promote "we" thinking in groups.	11 Address and work to resolve conflict.
9 Work toward win/win.	12 Let people know when they are performing well.
11 Address and work to resolve conflict.	

FIGURE 2. Allocation of Improvement Areas to Primary Roles

ber. My primary PML goal was to develop conflict/anger management skills to create win/win situations at home and work. The combination of the improvement plan (using the PROFILOR feedback), the ILP, and the PML project gave me an excellent opportunity to identify and address areas in my skill set that need improvement."

PROFILER Feedback

With a better understanding of the skills critical to a PM as identified by the PROFILOR, students can determine how they rate against other PMs in the acquisition environment. The "norm" base that students analyze themselves against is built from the inputs of prior anticipatory PMs; by comparing themselves to the "norm," students can see how they match up to the profile of their potential peers. For instance, the following 12 areas (not in any priority) could be used as a basis of improvement. Each area would have received a rating from the supervisor, peers, direct reports, and the individual being rated so that the level of agreement or disagreement could also be tallied:

- 1** Influence upper management decisions.
- 2** Consider people's feelings in decisions.
- 3** Know which battles to fight.
- 4** Compromise to build relationships.
- 5** Be tactful.
- 6** Be patient.

- 7** Analyze problems from different viewpoints
- 8** Promote "we" thinking in groups.
- 9** Work toward win/win.
- 10** Convey trust in people to do the job.
- 11** Address and work to resolve conflict.
- 12** Let people know when they are performing well.

When students first receive this type of information, they are either surprised or feel that the information reinforces what they already know. Therefore, the first nine items on this list could come as absolutely no surprise, while the last three areas, in which the individual felt competent, could come as a complete surprise. Students then must decide whether this feedback indicates a need for personal improvement in their chosen career fields.

Application of Feedback

In today's acquisition environment of constrained resources and ever-changing requirements, PMs must master two primary roles:

- Co-chair or chair a program's Integrated Product Team (IPT) with prime contractor participation.
- Lead a government team.

By applying a systems approach for allocating the 12 areas for improvement to these two primary roles, students can ascertain where their personal develop-

ment needs should be focused. Moreover, applying the systems approach allows students to create a picture of their learning needs and provides a way in which they can determine which activities should be focused on first. Figure 2 shows a potential breakout of this allocation.

Within these two roles, the primary skills that need to be developed are *team member*, *leader*, and *manager*. For example, looking at the primary skills within each one of the two roles and how the specific 12 areas fit within them, leads to the following assessment in terms of development needs:

TEAM MEMBER

Effective Negotiation Skills (4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9) and Conflict/Anger Management Skills (2, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11)

LEADER

Develop Vision/Goals (1, 3, 10) and Support Leadership's Vision/Goals (1, 3)

MANAGER

Coaching (2, 9, 10, 12) and Supervising (10, 12)

Once assessed, students have the ability to allocate these specific skills to the specific lesson(s)/electives, and learning media that would support that skill, and then plan their time accordingly (Figure 3).

Application of Lessons

The last step in this process is to develop lessons learned for each major skill practiced during students' time at APMC for use when they return to the workplace. Since each area is different, students need to develop some method or "model" to assist in the memorization process. Alternately, students can develop an overarching strategy for implementation or a list of questions that can be used as a sanity check for handling certain issues.

Suggested Example Approaches

The following discussion provides suggestions on ways in which the time allocation (Figure 3) could be used to provide improvement and some thoughts

on how you can take that information and use it back in the workplace.

Negotiator (Questions)

The negotiations tape entitled *Negotiating Skills in the Workplace*,¹ provides two major strategies that could be used to address areas of self-improvement. The first strategy is to "Start with the end in mind." Simply put, this means to look ahead to where the negotiations need to finish and from this perspective, define the objectives and bottom line.

The second is to focus on the long-term relationship that PMs will have with their prime counterparts and try to understand what is needed to succeed. The goal is to work with prime counterparts (not against them) to translate their needs and PMs' objectives into a solution. To help this process, several questions need to be addressed.

- 1 What is my bottom line?
- 2 What is my top priority, and what can I trade off?
- 3 How can we work to make this a "team" win?
- 4 Is someone involved threatened (their job, bonus, resources) by this process?
- 5 Have I let my emotions take over, and if so why?
- 6 What is our time frame for the process, and who is constrained by this?
- 7 What do "they" need to win in this process, and can I provide it?
- 8 Are there creative ways to resolve this other than positional bargaining?
- 9 Who has most/least power and why?

Through the use of these questions, PMs can focus on the interests of the parties involved and not the individual in reaching an acceptable solution that will facilitate a long-term relationship.

Anger/Conflict Management (Model)

The PROFILOR instrument indicates that anger/conflict management is an important area for improvement. This area can be significantly improved

through understanding how to deal with situations, and this is an area where students can reap benefits from the ILP process. Many tapes are available on the subject; e.g., Miller's tape entitled *Self Discipline and Emotional Control*,² that help students understand the roots of conflict. This means listening to others, acknowledging their position, accepting their perspective, stating a position without emotion, using compromise (negotiation), and following up on actions. When conflict is a result of a difference in knowledge, skills, or abilities, experts tell us to focus on closing the "knowledge" gap and thus reducing the conflict rather than focusing on the conflict itself.

In addition, Ebiar's *How to Manage Conflict, Anger, and Emotion*,³ tells us to focus on assertive behavior that allows for a win/win solution rather than a passive/aggressive behavior that allows for someone to lose. He also focuses on a need to re-think (positive self-talk before the conflict), repeat (practice), and re-frame (look for the positive after conflict) before taking action.

Since much of the conflict in IPTs is a result of dealing with prime team counterparts, one way to handle the situation is to develop a specific model for handling the conflict. Students need to begin with the idea of creating a win/win situation. Since this still implies an us/them situation rather than the team, it should be addressed as a big win resulting in: **WWIINN**. The student can then approach the situation by removing the idea of what "I Need" leaving us with

WWIN and replacing the "I Need" idea with **The Team**. This translates to **WTINTW: What The IPT Needs To Win**.

With this type of anagram the student can remember to:

- 1 Take out personal interest.
- 2 Use empathy for others.
- 3 Start with the end in mind.
- 4 Look for the team answer, not the right answer.

Leadership (Strategy)

The next phase of a DPM's career (progressing to a PM), will emphasize leadership in lieu of technical and managerial skills. This means when transitioning from DPM to PM, an individual will go from being "Mr. Inside" who keeps the program running on a daily basis to "Mr. Outside" who looks at the big picture and interfaces with the customer, contractor, headquarters, and inspectors for example. The DPM role often lends itself to playing the "bad cop" routine with both the contractor and with upper management, or playing the "devil's advocate" on occasion to get the job accomplished. However, PMs need to re-focus their energy and do a better job of understanding and implementing the organization's vision and goals. To do this, they need to analyze what the organizational vision and goals really mean and how they should go about the task of implementing them.

Many sources during the APMC course emphasize that the leader's primary responsibility is to provide a vision for the organization. Therefore, the IPT must

Skills	ILP	ILP	ILP	PML
	Tape	Video	Elective	Lesson
Negotiating	4 hrs			
Conflict/Anger Management	6 hrs	4hr		2 hrs
Develop/Support Vision/Goals				3 hrs
Coaching		1 hr		2.5 hrs
Supervising			4 hrs	

FIGURE 3. Time Allocation to Skill Improvement

focus as a team, and the PM's primary job will be to provide that focus. A way in which to do this is to spend time with the co-chair of the IPT to lay out the vision. The next step is to engage all IPT members in deliberate discussions to set goals and objectives, followed by development of a detailed implementation plan to support the goals and objectives. Suggested ideas that could be included and implemented in a team strategy follow.

- 1 Invite suppliers to IPT.
- 2 Ensure customer is involved in weekly IPTs via teleconference or attends a meeting at least once a quarter.
- 3 Create vision, goals, and measures for the IPT; monitor the team's success in supporting them.
- 4 Increase trust by opening up budgets, Award Fee process, and upper management meetings.
- 5 Improve Award Fee process by taking it out of IPT meetings.
- 6 Develop and live by rules within IPT.
 - Meeting rules: agenda, minutes, time.
 - Coordination rules: verbal, written, E-mail.
- 7 Visit with Defense Contract Management Agency, subcontractors, vendors, and customers to get their input to IPT.

Once the team plans a viable strategy, the PM must take the time necessary to implement it back in the workplace.

Coaching

To form an effective team, PMs must let go of many activities that they currently perform as the DPM. One of these activities is to transition from a directive mode of leadership to a coaching mode. In order to get the most from team members, PMs should empower and coach them to operate autonomously. Cleese's tape, *The Helping Hand Coaching Skills*,⁴ recommends that the following issues be addressed in the coaching sessions:

- 1 Agree on the topic (its scope and content).

- 2 Identify the goals (ensure subordinates do this with guidance).
- 3 Promote discovery (don't give detailed instructions and let subordinates make mistakes).
- 4 Set the parameters (supervisors must assess learning vs. mission need and set parameters that support both. In addition, subordinates must feel they have enough latitude to operate within the parameters and that their skills support operating within them).
- 5 Authorize and empower (take steps to let others know subordinates are empowered).
- 6 Recap (make sure you are on the same page).

Although the activities named here provide a good structure to follow during the coaching sessions, the process of listening actively, asking questions, giving feedback, and making suggestions is where the *real* work will come in.

Dr. Covey in his discussion on *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*,⁵ highlights different levels of listening— from ignoring to empathetic listening. Another area that takes significant concentration is giving feedback. The type of feedback being delivered should be based on the needs of the individual being coached. This should include both positive (focusing on the strengths) and negative (focusing on areas of improvement) feedback. Care should be taken to provide honest feedback, but also consider the feelings of the individual so that “buy-in” is achieved. The bottom line is that coaching is necessary to build a strong and autonomous team and is the only way to ensure success given the limited personnel assigned to the program.

Supervising

Most DPMs have many of the skills necessary to supervise military members but may not have the necessary skills required to supervise civilians. A way in which to correct this problem is to take a short elective course on the civilian personnel system or the military system if the reverse is true. This provides a top-level understanding of what a DPM

needs to know. The Civilian Personnel Operations Center has the expertise and is a great resource for learning to supervise civilian employees.

In addition, students may need to plan additional training back at their workplace. It may also mean relying on someone with the necessary expertise to provide guidance until the additional training and experience is acquired. A benefit of attending APMC at DSMC is the network of resources available for students to augment the knowledge they already possess or obtain answers to current or future questions that may arise.

Self-Improvement — Students Are Best Judges

The DSMC curriculum provides the opportunity for students to acquire information and devise methods for self-improvement. This article discusses a methodology by which this may be accomplished. However, it is up to the individual student to determine their own needs and how best to use the resources available. The important thing to remember is that DSMC provides the opportunity. It is up to the student to take advantage of what is offered.

Editor's Note: The authors welcome questions or comments on this article. Contact them at ToddJohnston@hill.af.mil or harman_beryl@dsmc.dsm.mil.

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