

# Jointness in the Acquisition World

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Over the past decades, our operational military forces have transformed themselves from Service-centric combat forces to a truly joint force, operating under unified commands, employed across Service boundaries with a healthy understanding of other Service force capabilities, and achieving synergies previously unattainable. We are far from perfect, certainly, but most would agree that there has been a culture change, with new legislation, Service-level edicts, changes in promotion and selection board precepts, and a stronger educational foundation. As a result of those efforts, our operational forces now think how best to operate and execute as a synergistic joint force, and not necessarily strictly from a Service-specific perspective. Our forces understand the strengths and weaknesses of their fellow Services and know where Service-specific capabilities can complement the overall battlefield.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of our acquisition and developmental forces. There is an appreciation of the need for joint interoperability and development coming from Department of Defense-wide efforts within forces, such as the Joint Requirements Oversight Council and the Joint Capabilities Integration Development System; however, within the trenches of the individual program offices, there is limited interaction with and understanding of other similar program efforts. For example, as a deputy program manager within the Navy's

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F/A-18 and EA-18G Office, I have little to no interaction or insight into efforts within other tactical aircraft programs, such as the Joint Strike Fighter, F-16, F-15, or F-22. There are benefits to be gained from increasing the acquisition and development communities' culture to a wider perspective that embraces other efforts across DoD.

The acquisition world should look at and emulate the efforts taken by the operational world as a way to increase efficiencies and synergies in the acquisition of our weapons systems. Three common operating precepts from DoD's Capstone Concept for Joint Operations (Version 3.0, Jan. 15, 2009) that are directly applicable to acquisition and should be embraced by our acquisition community are:

- Combine joint capabilities to maximize complementary rather than merely additive effects.
- Avoid combining capabilities when doing so adds complexity without compensating advantage.
- Drive synergy to the lowest echelon at which it can be managed effectively.

Our efforts over the past couple of decades to transform the force into a joint aware, interoperable, and synergistic total force have resided in three major areas: legislation, education, and experience.

### Legislation

The cultural change of our operational forces into a joint force did not happen on its own. Changing the culture and momentum of any large organization requires a consistent driving function from the top and over a significant period of time. For our military and DoD organizations, such change comes in the form of legislative and organizational policies, which often affect the career progression of the DoD workforce. For example, on the operational side, DoD-wide policy requires career operational officers to have a specific combination of joint education and joint experience in order to be promoted. By definition of Title 10 of the U.S. Code, the fielding of DoD's combat equipment and forces is Service-centric. Legislation and policies encourage jointness, but not always for our acquisition forces.

There are certainly unique circumstances within the acquisition workforce that make joint integration efforts challenging. The acquisition world resides within the world of appropriations and budgets, as well as competing commercial contractors, all with proprietary concerns and competitive motivations. Services and programs face the challenges of competing for limited funds. Competition is good so long as it remains balanced and does not result in counterproductive efforts.

DoD must determine and institute the means to overcome the acquisition community's competition for limited funds. Acquisition organizations and individual members must be motivated and rewarded for making joint decisions when appropriate, and discouraged from Service- or program-

specific thinking when it is counterproductive to the overall force. DoD has passed acquisition reform legislation and policies to institute various non-Service-specific oversight of acquisition and developmental programs. That certainly has aided efforts in providing a level of consistency and basic interoperability checks and balances within our programs and equipment. However, DoD legislation and policies must go beyond top-level oversight and must penetrate further into the individual program offices and acquisition workforce members to infuse a more joint culture deep within the program offices in order to truly realize synergistic benefits. Achieving that situation will require legislation and career progression policies, which in turn will require joint education and experience for acquisition workforce members who continue to advance.

### Education

The education pillar within the acquisition world is probably most on track for encouraging joint efforts. Currently, most formal education within DoD's acquisition world resides with the Defense Acquisition University. The formal curricula addressed in the system reflect acquisition policy, regulations, and processes that are uniform across the Services. Acquisition workforce members across DoD attend DAU classes and participate in online acquisition tools/information-sharing resources. They also have the opportunity to interact with their uniformed and civilian counterparts, increasing awareness and understanding, and aiding in the development of an informal network across the Services that has proved valuable within the operational communities.

We can certainly further refine the formal education processes within the acquisition communities. For example, with members joining the acquisition workforce at various levels of career progression and seniority, the education system should allow for various entry points and accelerated advancement for those members entering into higher-level management jobs within the program offices. In addition, the current curricula focus heavily on the "mechanics" of the business, and may have room for growth in the more theoretical and case study areas earlier in the education pipeline. Further developments and refinements of acquisition-specific education should continue to be centered on a joint model such as DAU.

### Cross-Program and Joint Experience

Cross-program and joint experience within the acquisition community is probably the area needing the most attention, and the area in which the quickest gains can be made with some very simple efforts. Acquisition professionals, both uniformed and civilian, can serve their entire career within the walls of a single program office and have little to no interaction with another Service. The technical competence, complexity, and long developmental timelines of DoD's major programs require a level of stability that is not as imperative as it actually is within many of our operational forces, lessening the likelihood that an acquisition profes-

sional will gain diverse experience across several different program offices and technical competencies throughout a career. Also, when you're involved in a program, it is very easy to keep your head down and develop minimal understanding or awareness of other related program efforts. There are few functions that motivate program office personnel to spend any of their extremely valuable time on matters outside their specific program efforts.

### **Liaison Officers**

There are some simple efforts that could be implemented to help increase overall awareness. For example, within the combatant commands, there are liaison officers (LNOs) resident from the other combatant commands. U.S. Pacific Command will have a U.S. Strategic Command and a U.S. Northern Command LNO who is stationed within the PACOM headquarters and is responsible for maintaining communications between the commands. A similar effort could be introduced for related acquisition developmental efforts within Services.

There could be LNO representatives between the Joint Strike Fighter Program Office and the Hornet/Growler Program Office, as an example. It would be extremely valuable to the two program offices to have a person residing within their headquarters whose entire responsibility is to aid in understanding efforts within each program, specifically where developmental and operational synergies can be identified. Differing industry partners may not see this as a benefit, for they are in business and, by definition, in competition; however, from the government point of view, DoD must minimize the cross-program competitiveness to productive levels and respect commercial proprietary rights while integrating efforts in order to provide the best overall value to the taxpayer.

I have found throughout my operational experience that the productivity of one well-placed LNO far exceeds the commitment of a billet, and the officer provides benefits to both organizations. Manpower restrictions should not be a deterrent to considering the use of an LNO. With such a system established, studies and technical developmental efforts already conducted, and other vital information that has already been done by one program could be shared with the other, avoiding duplication of effort and funding. Could that prevent divergent developmental tracks between systems and identify solutions to maintain parallel and interoperable courses throughout the developmental and sustainment phases?

### **Exchange Officers**

Another effort that could be implemented relatively easily with potential significant benefits is the use of exchange officers. DoD has used military exchange officer positions throughout the operational forces and test pilot communities for decades. Much like the LNOs, exchange officers have improved perspective, cooperation, and understanding

across Service lines and have benefited DoD's overall joint warfighting abilities. What if, for example, the Navy had an acquisition exchange officer within the Air Force F-16 program office and vice versa? Would we not gain the same benefits that have been realized within other communities? There are a small number of civilian acquisition professionals who may cross Service lines over a career; however, most stay within their own Service, and those who do cross over generally remain with the new Service for many years, and consequently do not bring their experience and perspective back to the original Service organization. There is room for growth in this area to better cross-pollinate our acquisition workforce across Service boundaries so that we better understand and, ultimately, more efficiently acquire critical military products.

Regardless of what efforts it undertakes, DoD should guard carefully against any impact or erosion of individual program manager autonomy and authority. DoD's major program managers are in command for a reason. Accountability, ownership, pride, and the right amount of competition are all proven motivators for successful organizations. Efforts in improving jointness and interoperability across programs can and should be made while maintaining the stature and authority of the program manager. Joint efforts and processes within the operational world have not impeded the role of unit commanding officers—nor should efforts within the acquisition and developmental world erode the authority of DoD's program managers.

### **The Benefits are Out There**

There are some real benefits to be realized within DoD's acquisition and development worlds if the department applies already-established parallel joint efforts—that have proven successful within its operational forces—to its acquisition practices. Some can be implemented simply, inexpensively, and within the near-term. Others will take continued efforts at the highest levels. There are specific challenges and variables within DoD acquisition that renders some operational joint efforts irrelative; however, there is much that could be applied.

The efforts discussed in this article are meant to be infused within the culture, bringing awareness to professionals, encouraging them to ask questions throughout the program offices about interoperable development, and establishing ways for them to talk across program and Service lines. Previous acquisition reform efforts have concentrated on oversight, and that has its place. However, the next step should be to change the culture and provide the tools and motivations to bring jointness to DoD. Such change will not happen overnight or with one precipitating event. It will take years, but change will come about. We should begin our efforts today.

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