

Leadership and Cultural **Change:**



LONG-TERM WORKFORCE RETENTION  
Efforts and Strategies

Image designed by Harambee Dennis

# LEADERSHIP AND CULTURAL CHANGE: THE CHALLENGE TO ACQUISITION WORKFORCE RETENTION

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Too often the approaches selected to increase workforce retention are associated with short-term, tangible practices such as pay increases, physical environment improvements, and teleworking. Unfortunately, the benefits associated with these practices are fleeting. Rather, it should be long-term, intangible strategies that are pursued if changes are to last.

This article posits that two such strategies capable of increasing the probability of higher Defense Acquisition Workforce retention rates are associated with organizational culture type and leadership style. Data from a survey of 1,284 Department of Defense military and civilian employees are extrapolated to show Defense Acquisition Workforce retention will permanently benefit if efforts are targeted to strengthen a “clan” and “adhocracy” culture type and leadership style.



As our case is new, so must we think anew, and act anew.

*President Abraham Lincoln, 1862*

**A**s the 21st century begins to close in on its first decade, a management topic that is prominently discussed within all organizations trying to survive in today’s global environment is that of human capital. Despite the best efforts of innumerable organizations employing a multitude of different approaches, the ability of organizations to retain human capital talent remains elusive. According to a recent survey, companies lost nearly 30 percent of their human capital from the beginning of 2005 to the end of 2006 (Somaya & Williamson, 2008). In February 2004, a survey of senior executives reported that their “most pressing concern...was...hiring and re-

taining talent” (Branham, 2005, p. 57). A 2002 study concluded that a 33 percent rise in the demand for talent is expected over the next 15 years while, at the same time, there is expected to be a 15 percent drop in the talent supply (Earle, 2003).

Organizational success as evidenced by measured results depends more than ever on retaining the best talent (Reid & Crisp, 2007). In light of these trends, many organizational leaders “are focusing their organizations on attracting, motivating, and retaining top talent to remain competitive and innovative” (Rosemond, 2002).

The Federal Government is certainly not immune from this challenge. In February 2006, the director of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management told a gathering of government executives that “60 percent of the government’s 1.6 million white-collar employees and 90 percent of some 6,000 federal executives will be eligible for retirement in the next decade” (Trahan, 2006, p. 52). To think that these same trends do not apply within the Department of Defense (DoD) would be naive.

Within the DoD, the acquisition *workforce* has an especially daunting challenge that speaks to both national defense and taxpayer trust. According to Pursch and Garrett (2008, pp. 10–11):

[This workforce] is composed of more than 100,000 government and military business professionals, including program managers, contract specialists, contracting officers, system engineers, cost/price analysts, logistics managers, property managers, and others. Collectively, the men and women of the federal acquisition workforce are responsible for acquiring the government’s \$400 billion worth of products and services to support the needs of the American public. Unfortunately, there are far too few of these talented acquisition professionals who are essential in supporting the growing requirements of our nation.

## PURPOSE

The current statistics regarding workforce *retention* rates clearly indicate a problem among private and public organizations in their ability to retain talented workforce members. This problem has not gone unrecognized and, as a result, an entire branch within the human resources discipline has matured to address the issue of workforce retention.

Most organizations recognize this problem from a survivalist perspective in that a continued workforce talent drain is not viewed as an advantageous strategic business position. To exacerbate the retention problem, the battle for talent is “not a short-term phenomenon but the beginning of a long-term *change* in the labor force” (Jamrog, 2004, p. 26). Unfortunately, most organizations will initially seek to determine what ‘best practices’ are being implemented by organizations viewed as successful, and then have their own human resources department try to mimic what these supposedly successful companies are doing. The problem with this approach is that the practices that fit the business strategies of one organization do not necessarily fit the business strategies of another (Branham, 2005).

The common theme to resolving this problem of workforce retention is one of organizational change; that is, organizations can no longer operate in a “business as usual” manner. A virtually unanimous observation is that today’s fast-paced global environment requires organizations to strategically change as a result of analyzing their external and internal environments (Kanter, Stein, & Jick, 1992; Porter, 1980; Rainey, 2003; Senge, 1990a). There is no disagreement that organizational change is a difficult process (Sims, 2000) and one prone to failure (Beer & Nohria, 2000). Unfortunately, many attempts at organizational change either fail or do not fully meet stated goals, resulting in a variety of negative outcomes (Kotter, 1996).

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***Today’s fast-paced global environment requires organizations to strategically change as a result of analyzing their external and internal environments.***

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Some would argue that what is required is akin to a paradigm shift requiring the reconstruction of prior assumptions and re-evaluation of prior facts in order to create cataclysmic changes with past processes (Kuhn, 1996). Within the sphere of management, a “second-order change” is sought, which requires basic shifts in attitudes, beliefs, and cultural values (Bartunek & Moch, 1987, p. 484). A focus upon second-order change enables an organization to eliminate the “status quo,” a consequence that first-order change is unable to accomplish (Bartunek & Moch, 1987, p. 487).

In terms of this article, one needs to think beyond the more sterile aspects of describing organizational change from a process perspective to a world view that considers the human factor. According to Linstone and Mitroff (1994), three factors should be considered when implementing change: technical, organization, and personal perspectives. Research dealing with organizational change “has mainly focused on organizational factors” while “neglecting the person-oriented issues” (Vakola, Tsaousis, & Nikolaou, 2004, p. 88). While people are the most important factor when it comes to implementing change, they are also the most difficult factor with which to deal (Linstone & Mitroff, 1994). For any organizational change to be effective, challenging people’s beliefs, assumptions, and attitudes is critical, as the most influential leverage point for meaningful change resides within the human system (Juechter, Fisher, & Alford, 1998).

Academic literature is rife with changes that an organization can undertake to increase workforce retention. Such change approaches include salary, benefits package, job flexibility, vacation time, physical workspace, opportunities for career advancement, major work challenges and intellectual stimulation, teleworking, and job satisfaction (Branham, 2005; Cohen, 2006; Earle, 2003; Jamrog, 2004; Jenkins, 2008; Nelson, 2006; Reid & Crisp, 2007; Rosemond, 2002; Rosenberg, 2008; Rowan, 2000; Somaya & Williamson, 2008; Trahan, 2006).

Unfortunately, these traditional approaches reflect a short-term, tangible solution that fails to address the root cause. The shortfalls of such approaches are addressed within the concept of systems thinking (Senge, 1990a), which includes the key aspect of avoiding symptomatic solutions typified by the “shifting the burden” archetype where the “quick fix” solution is sought to a problem—“well-intentioned, easy fixes which seem efficient” but actually leave the underlying problem unaffected to only get worse” (Senge, 1990a, pp. 106–107). Approaches taken to provide symptomatic solutions address only the symptoms and not the foundational issues associated with the problem, thereby offering short-term solutions at best. Avoiding symptomatic solutions is especially difficult for organizational *leadership* who tend to intervene with popular quick fixes when, in fact, they should “keep the pressure on everyone to identify more enduring solutions” (Senge, 1990b, p. 15).

The usual solutions used to increase workforce retention rates are symptomatic in nature addressing short-term tangible (base pay, yearly incentives, health insurance) and long-term intangible (work-life benefits, hiring practices, and new hire engagement) practices. The problem is that “it is more tempting to select short-term, tangible practices over long-term, intangible ones” since human nature is to gravitate towards the short-term, instant gratification solution (Branham, 2005, p. 58). What is required is implementation of long-term intangible strategies dominated by cultural or leadership practices that have a much bigger impact (Branham, 2005; Reid & Crisp, 2007). There is mounting evidence “to support the conclusion that the greatest drivers of employee engagement and retention are intangible” (Branham, 2005, p. 58).

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to examine the following research question: since leadership and *culture* are posited by human capital managers as key organizational change tenets necessary to create an improved retention rate among the Defense Acquisition Workforce, are leadership and culture attributes seen as important factors when viewed through an organizational change prism?

## METHOD

This article relies upon a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies based on the notion that “qualitative and quantitative methods should be viewed as complementary rather than rival camps” (Jick, 1979, p. 602).

### QUANTITATIVE APPROACH

This article’s research question involves the exploration of individual value orientation, which “is more appropriate for social analysis because it provides information that is more central to the individual” (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998, p. 353). Researchers in human behavior generally believe that individual behavior data required for collection are best collected using a survey instrument methodology (Denzin, 1989) as it provides the advantage of “identifying attributes of a large population from a small group of individuals” (Creswell, 2003, p. 154).

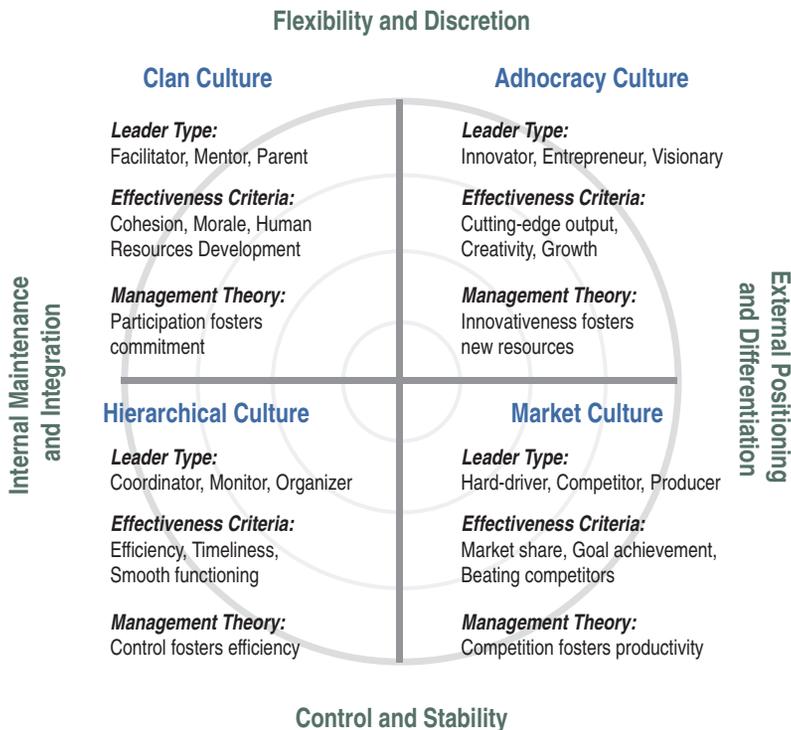
The survey population is military and civilian senior leaders, managers, or professionals associated with the DoD—not limited to the Defense Acquisition Workforce

but thought to be a representative cross-section applicable, in general, to the Defense Acquisition Workforce. Senior leaders are defined as rank structure O-6 and above for military members, and GS-15 (or equivalent) and above for civilian members. Managers are defined as rank structure O-4 and O-5 for military members, and GS-14 and GS-13 (or equivalent) for the civilian members. Professionals are defined as rank structure O-1 through O-3 and noncommissioned officers for military members, and GS-11 and GS-12 for civilian members.

The survey's sampling frame is comprised of individuals attending one of DoD's professional military education (PME) academic institutions, which is meant to provide a representative cross-section of the three population hierarchies (i.e., senior leaders, management, and professional) from which DoD identifies future leaders, managers, and professionals.

The chosen survey instrument is the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI), which is based on the Competing Values Framework (CVF). The CVF was developed by Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983), which graphically categorized organizational effectiveness into four quadrants (Figure 1). Each of the four quadrants is labeled to distinguish its most notable characteristics—clan, adhocracy, market, and

**FIGURE 1.** COMPETING VALUES FRAMEWORK\*



\*The competing values framework lists the leadership roles, the effectiveness criteria, and the core management theories most closely associated with each of the four culture quadrants. Source: Cameron & Quinn, 1999, p. 41. Used by permission.

and hierarchy. The clan culture is named because of its similarity to a family-type organization. The adhocracy culture places a great deal of emphasis on flexibility and external focus. The market culture refers to the type of organization that is mainly focused on external constituencies such as suppliers, customers, contractors, regulators, etc. The hierarchy culture can be viewed as the traditional bureaucracy (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). Each quadrant within Figure 1 notes the leader type, effectiveness criteria, and management theory governing each culture type.

The survey instrument has been academically reviewed and proven for reliability and validity. A pre-test of the survey was conducted with some faculty and students at a prominent PME academic institution. Slight word changes were made to some of the survey questions based on pre-test feedback in order to make the survey more "DoD-centric." The formal survey instrument was distributed via electronic mail.

The OCAI uses a response scale in which respondents divide 100 possible points among four options across six initial questions. The compilation of "A" options correlates to the clan culture; the compilation of "B" options correlates to the adhocracy culture; the compilation of "C" options correlates to the market culture; and the compilation of "D" options correlates to the hierarchy culture (Cameron & Quinn, 1999). The summation of points within each quadrant is then plotted to form a four-sided profile that graphically illustrates the strength of each culture. Respondents answer the six questions two times: initially to provide responses regarding how respondents perceive the organization as it currently is "now" followed by responses as to how they would like to see the organization in 5 years "preferred."

Each question must sum to exactly 100 points across the four options. This approach is known as an ipsative ranking scale, which results in a "fixed choice" where measures are perfectly correlated to one another (Quinn & Spreitzer, 1991, p. 117). While the ipsative rating scale provides differentiation, it also forces respondents to conduct trade-offs among the four options by forcing respondents to make trade-offs, just as individuals within societal situations where "several values rather than one value may come in competition with one another, requiring a weighing of one value against another" (Rokeach, 1973, p. 6).

## QUALITATIVE APPROACH

Attempting to interpret the actions of humans is very much a non-linear endeavor. Qualitative research is best used to understand the complexities associated with social phenomena (Tucker, Powell, & Meyer, 1995) as it ensures "a commitment to seeing the social world from the point of view of the actor" (Bryman, 1984, p. 77).

To obtain qualitative responses to supplement each respondent's required quantitative responses (i.e., the 12 questions), researchers placed an open-ended question at the end of the OCAI survey tool. Any qualitative responses were completely voluntary on the part of each respondent and could address any aspect that the respondent wished to discuss.

Open-ended questions allow researchers to obtain answers that were unanticipated, may better describe the real views of the respondents, and allow for a response that is phrased in the respondent's own words (Fowler, 2002). While self-administered open-ended questions may not be comparable across all respondents, the re-

sponses can be evaluated for patterns that may repeat over many different respondents in order to make generalized observations (Salkind, 2003).

## RESULTS

### QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

This article's quantitative data analysis was derived from received OCAI survey responses to the 12 questions, each with four options. The overall response rate is not available due to the inaccuracy of information provided by the various DoD PME institutions participating in the distribution of the OCAI survey tool. The majority of responses was collected from one specific DoD PME. The only distribution numbers provided by this institution were that approximately 5,000 students would be eligible to participate in the voluntary survey request. Therefore, this researcher would estimate an overall response rate of 24 percent based on information from all of the participating DoD PME institutions. Of the 1,550 OCAI surveys received, 312 (19.5 percent) were unusable due to incomplete data fields. This meant that 1,284 (80.5 percent) OCAI survey results were used as the quantitative basis of this article. Table 1 provides an overview of selected demographic respondent data.

**TABLE 1.** SELECTED DEMOGRAPHICS FOR THE 1,284 USABLE OCAI SURVEY RESPONSES

		Military		Civilian		Total	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,048</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>1,284</b>	<b>100%</b>
	Male	891	85%	165	70%	1,056	82%
	Female	157	15%	71	30%	228	18%
<b>Position</b>	Senior Leader	29	3%	51	22%	80	6%
	Manager	891	85%	174	74%	1,065	83%
	Professional	128	12%	11	5%	139	11%
<b>Years in Service</b>	0 to 5	64	6%	28	12%	92	7%
	6 to 10	12	1%	20	9%	32	3%
	11 to 15	264	25%	24	10%	288	22%
	16 to 20	425	41%	33	14%	458	36%
	21 to 25	201	19%	71	30%	272	21%
	25+	82	8%	60	25%	142	11%
<b>Level of Education</b>	High School	48	5%	2	1%	50	4%
	Associate	24	2%	1	1%	25	2%
	Bachelor's	172	16%	39	17%	211	16%
	Master's	704	67%	153	65%	857	67%
	Doctorate	100	10%	41	17%	141	11%

**TABLE 2.** MEAN AVERAGE SCORES & STANDARD DEVIATIONS—TOTAL SAMPLE POPULATION BY CULTURE QUADRANT\*

Total Sample Population (n = 1,284)	Culture Dimension			
	Clan	Adhocracy	Market	Hierarchy
<b>Military - Now</b>				
Mean	29.0	19.7	26.1	25.2
(Standard Deviation)	(21.1)	(13.8)	(20.6)	(21.4)
<b>Civilian - Now</b>				
Mean	33.6	21.0	21.2	23.6
(Standard Deviation)	(21.0)	(16.5)	(19.0)	(23.2)
<b>Military - Preferred</b>				
Mean	36.4	22.7	23.0	17.8
(Standard Deviation)	(19.5)	(14.0)	(16.1)	(14.4)
<b>Civilian - Preferred</b>				
Mean	39.3	26.1	20.1	14.4
(Standard Deviation)	(19.8)	(15.3)	(14.9)	(13.3)

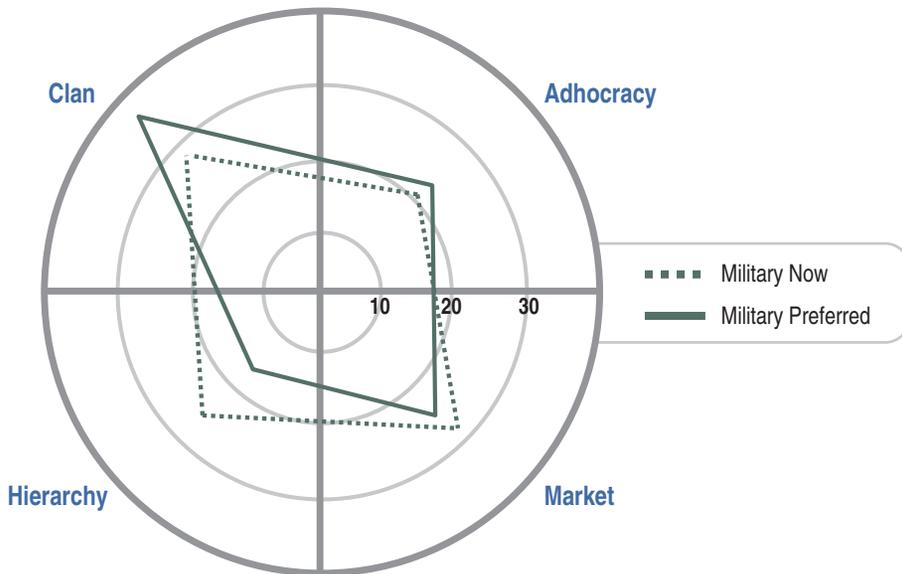
\*Shown in terms of “now” culture and “preferred” culture.

Two sets of organizational profiles are derived from the respondent’s data. The first data set examines the difference in cultural values as compared between the overall military and civilian cultures. Table 2 provides a summary of all 1,284 usable OCAI surveys for mean average and standard deviation based on a comparison between the military and civilian sample populations across the four culture quadrants.

In terms of the “now” organizational profile data, both the military and civilian sample populations view the clan cultural type as dominant (29.0 and 33.6, respectively). Thereafter, the military sample population interprets the current organizational profile as a cluster of market (26.1) and hierarchy (25.2) cultural types followed by adhocracy (19.7). In contrast, the civilian sample population views the remaining three cultural types as an equal distribution between hierarchy (23.6), market (21.2), and adhocracy (21.0).

In terms of the “preferred” organizational profile, both the military and civilian sample populations continue to view the clan cultural type as dominant (36.4 and 39.3, respectively). In addition, both the military and civilian sample populations view the hierarchical cultural type as the least desirable by a large margin (17.8 and 14.4, respectively). The military sample population equated the market (23.0) and adhocracy (22.7) cultural types while the civilian sample population favored the adhocracy culture type (26.1) over the market culture type (20.1).

Figure 2 provides a four-sided plot of the overall military sample population mean averages across the four cultural quadrants. Figure 3 provides a four-sided

**FIGURE 2.** CULTURE PROFILE—OVERALL MILITARY SAMPLE POPULATION\*

\*Shown in terms of “now” culture (dotted line) and “preferred” culture (solid line).

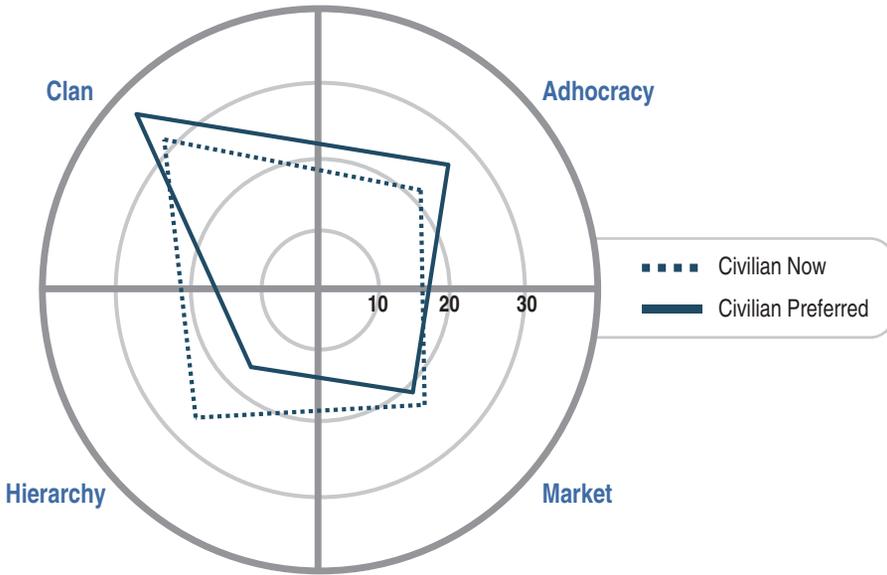
plot of the overall civilian sample population mean averages across the four cultural quadrants. Figure 4 provides a comparison overlay of Figures 2 and 3 to illustrate commonalities and differences between the overall military and civilian sample populations in terms of overall culture types.

The second data set examines the difference in cultural values as compared between the overall military and civilian culture quadrants in terms of leadership. Table 3 provides a summary of all 1,284 usable OCAI surveys for mean average and standard deviation based on a comparison between the military and civilian sample populations across the four culture quadrants.

In terms of the “now” organizational profile data for the leadership dimension, both the military and civilian sample populations view the market leadership style as dominant (28.5 and 27.7, respectively). In addition, both the military and civilian sample populations view the remaining leadership styles in the same order: hierarchy leadership style (25.2 and 26.0, respectively), followed by the clan leadership style (25.1 and 24.1, respectively), and concluding with the adhocracy leadership style (21.2 and 22.3, respectively).

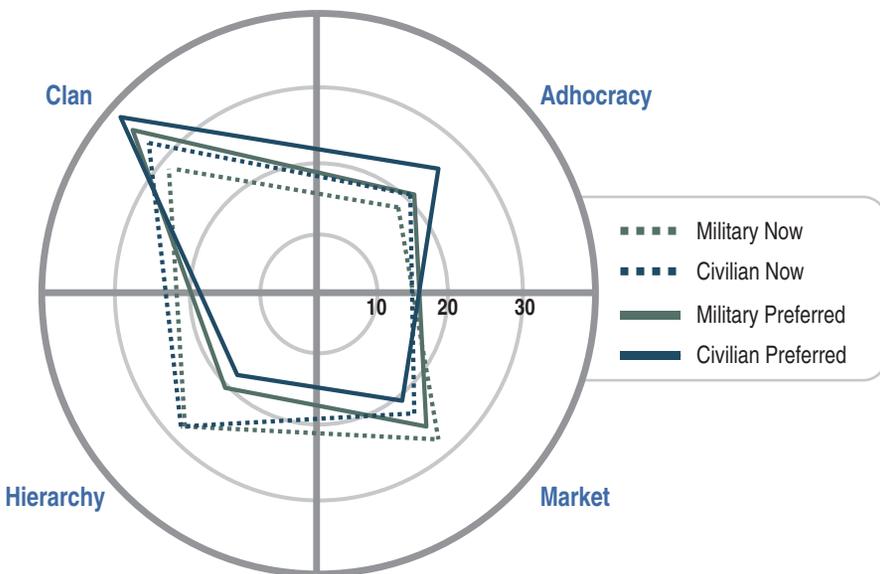
In terms of the “preferred” organizational profile for the leadership dimension, both the military and civilian sample populations preferred the clan leadership style as dominant (32.7 and 32.4, respectively). In addition, both the military and civilian sample populations view the adhocracy leadership style as the next most desirable (27.3 and 31.1, respectively). The military sample population concludes with the hierarchy (20.4) and market (19.6) leadership styles, respectively. Meanwhile, the

**FIGURE 3.** CULTURE PROFILE—OVERALL CIVILIAN SAMPLE POPULATION\*



\*Shown in terms of “now” culture (dotted line) and “preferred” culture (solid line).

**FIGURE 4.** OVERLAY OF CULTURE PROFILES—OVERALL MILITARY & CIVILIAN SAMPLE POPULATIONS\*



\*Shown in terms of the overall military “now” culture (green dotted line) and “preferred” culture (green solid line) compared to the overall civilian “now” culture (blue dotted line) and “preferred” culture (blue solid line).

**TABLE 3.** MEAN AVERAGE SCORES & STANDARD DEVIATIONS—TOTAL SAMPLE POPULATION BY CULTURE QUADRANT\*

Total Sample Population (n = 1,284)	Leadership Dimension			
	Clan	Adhocracy	Market	Hierarchy
<b>Military - Now</b>				
Mean	25.1	21.2	28.5	25.2
(Standard Deviation)	(17.7)	(13.6)	(21.0)	(17.5)
<b>Civilian - Now</b>				
Mean	24.1	22.3	27.7	26.0
(Standard Deviation)	(19.0)	(14.8)	(20.5)	(19.7)
<b>Military - Preferred</b>				
Mean	32.7	27.3	19.6	20.4
(Standard Deviation)	(17.7)	(13.9)	(13.7)	(14.0)
<b>Civilian - Preferred</b>				
Mean	32.4	31.1	19.1	17.3
(Standard Deviation)	(18.3)	(15.3)	(14.2)	(12.4)

\*Shown in terms of “now” culture and “preferred” leadership dimension.

civilian sample population reverses that order by preferring the market (19.1) and then hierarchy (17.3) leadership styles, respectively.

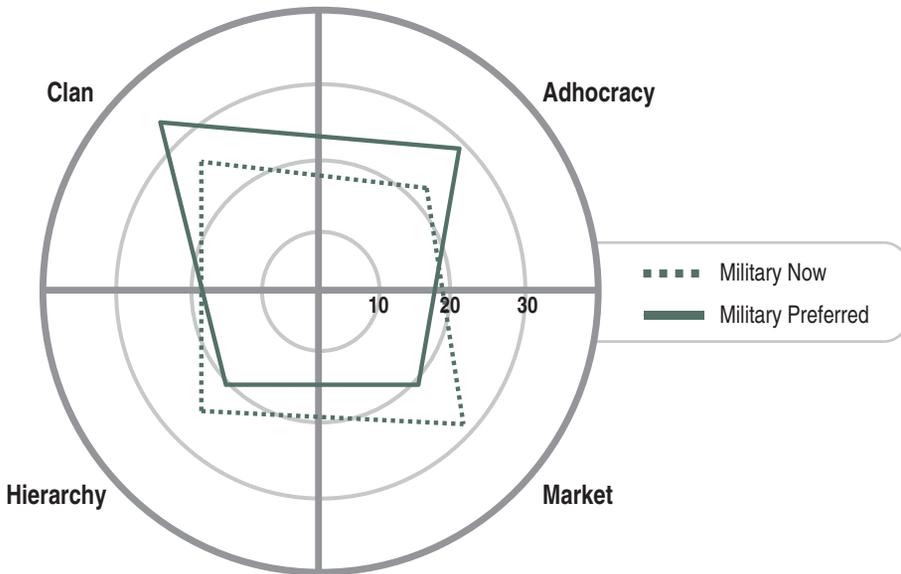
Figure 5 provides a four-sided plot of the overall military sample population mean averages across the leadership dimension. Figure 6 provides a four-sided plot of the overall civilian sample population mean averages across the leadership dimension. Figure 7 provides a comparison overlay of Figures 5 and 6 to illustrate commonalities and differences between the overall military and civilian sample populations across the leadership dimension.

### QUALITATIVE OBSERVATIONS

Of the 1,284 usable OCAI surveys received, 292 respondents (23 percent) provided usable comments. Overall, the basic tone of the comments was more negative than positive, which may be a function of respondents being given the opportunity to vent their viewpoints without fear of reprisal. Whether a qualitative comment was positive or negative, the comment’s gist remained steady: leadership and culture are intertwined and critical to the success of any organization. The frequency and fervor of qualitative comments regarding these two topics left no doubt regarding their relative importance.

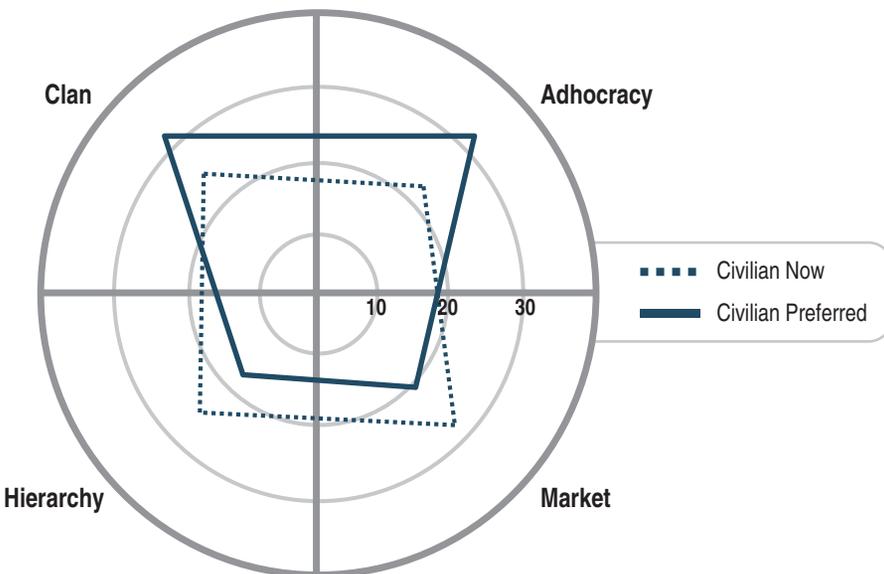
One of the more direct leadership definitions came from a military manager: “piles of paperwork and layers of bureaucracy do not equate to leadership. Smart people do not always make good generals! I would rather have someone that knows leadership

**FIGURE 5.** OVERALL MILITARY SAMPLE POPULATION—MEAN AVERAGES ACROSS LEADERSHIP DIMENSION\*



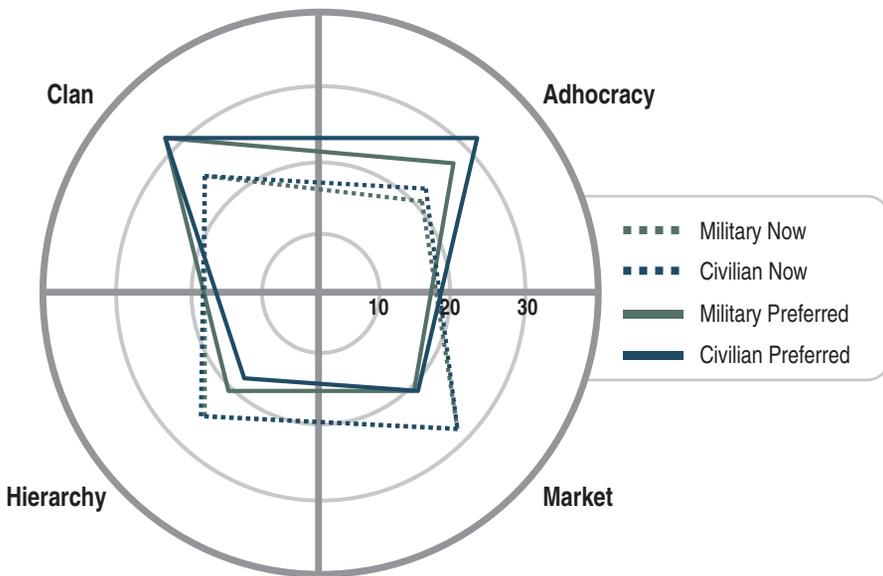
\*Shown in terms of “now” leadership dimension (dotted line) and “preferred” leadership dimension (solid line).

**FIGURE 6.** OVERALL CIVILIAN SAMPLE POPULATION—MEAN AVERAGES ACROSS LEADERSHIP DIMENSION\*



\*Shown in terms of “now” leadership dimension (dotted line) and “preferred” leadership dimension (solid line).

**FIGURE 7.** OVERLAY OF CULTURE PROFILES—OVERALL MILITARY & CIVILIAN SAMPLE POPULATIONS ACROSS LEADERSHIP DIMENSION\*



*\*Overall military sample population shown in terms of “now” leadership dimension (green dotted line) and “preferred” leadership dimension (green solid line) compared to the overall civilian sample population shown in terms of “now” leadership dimension (blue dotted line) and “preferred” leadership dimension (blue solid line).*

than [someone who] scored 1600 on his/her SATs!” [respondent’s exclamations]

Another military manager remarked about leadership: “I believe that growing and developing people ... removing road blocks to let them without fear suggest or take risks to improve our organization, is what leadership is about.” A common observation was summed up by a military manager who said that “... leadership MUST [respondent’s emphasis] lead by example. Credibility is critical.”

There was consensus across both the military and civilian cultures regarding a deep concern with how leadership is failing members and their entrusted organizations. One military manager wondered “... are these the best leaders we have to do the job?” while another military manager observed that “senior leadership needs to abandon stovepipe thinking.” One civilian manager coined a new term to describe his organizational leadership:

BYOL – bring your own leadership. Our formal leadership has been routinely bad. In the absence of effective formal leadership, actual leadership has become pretty egalitarian. We are successful because enough reasonable men and women decide that they will somehow succeed—often despite rather than because of—the formal organization. It isn’t that we don’t respond to effective formal leadership—we do. It just isn’t required.

This consensus was very dramatic in how leadership was viewed in terms of risk taking. Comments such as the following from two military managers illustrate skepticism on how far the concept of risk taking has been accepted by senior leadership:

WOW, you really missed on the normal ... environment. Leadership is so busy NOT making a decision and ensuring that they are covered for any mistakes that they or their subordinates may make that nothing really gets accomplished, no innovation is EVER taken—risk taking is frowned upon as it is getting away from the ‘mediocre at best’ pack. Rank and position is attained through interpersonal relationships and rarely through capabilities. [respondent’s capitalization]

We need to develop cultures that allow innovation and risk taking in areas that are not specifically ‘life and death’ battle decisions. As senior leaders, we must accept and promote risk taking or we will continue to grow ‘yes people’ and our innovativeness and ability to improve quickly will suffer.

An additional thread within the leadership and culture pairing was the seemingly unfairness of how leadership got promoted or progressed through the ranks. There were several direct comments that made it clear both military and civilian managers and professionals were disillusioned in how individuals ascended to their promoted leadership heights. One civilian manager remarked, “leadership ... seems to involve a considerable degree of politics—leaders are chosen by who they know, how they dress, and sometimes who they ‘are’ rather than by actual technical skills, accomplishments, and expected contribution.” A military manager remarked, “I have been with leadership whose main concern is [his] own career and making only himself look important. I think the plan is quite effective.”

There were also more direct remarks about the importance of developing future leaders. One civilian manager stated, “the development of future leaders through a systematic, not flow-as-you-go method of mentoring middle-level managers is the MOST [respondent’s emphasis] important task an organization can do for its future.” However, a more common remark was a lack of future leader development such as the military manager who commented, “... investing in senior leader development way too late. If you want to build better senior leadership ... then begin educating them sooner and younger.”

Culture was typically addressed in conjunction with leadership, but culture was also addressed as a single entity and typically in a negative connotation. A common theme was that the existing DoD culture prevented the initiation of any substantive risk taking or innovation as evidenced by a military manager’s following comment:

We have a culture that stifles change and innovation and uses employees like cattle. Once their usefulness is over ... push them out the door. ... Typically, any individual that strays from the status quo and

identifies problems or attempts to make change is generally affected negatively in the long term, either from direct confrontation or more often passed over and ignored. The culture has made subordinates [who] have no faith that leadership will come to their aid. Morale is generally low but people remain because they want to serve in the military, not because of the organization. ... Leaders and subordinates have no defined criteria or expectations on how to act.

One civilian manager blamed the Department of Defense's unswerving culture as a reason for initiative failures:

Initiatives are failing because they are left to staffs who are stuck in old paradigms or have no understanding of uniqueness within the organization. Transformations that are intended to revolutionize thus become more convoluted and hinder real improvement. Real leadership must bridge the gap between vision and implementation more effectively.

## DISCUSSION

To create a meaningful increase to an organization's workforce retention rate, this research posits that long-term, intangible strategies are required. Otherwise, organizations will be in a continuous do-loop attempting to solve their workforce retention problem by using short-term tangible practices that do not provide lasting improvements.

This article posits that leadership and culture are *the* key organizational change tenets necessary to create a lasting improved retention rate among a typical workforce—including the Defense Acquisition Workforce. Since these two key tenets are so critical, this research leveraged the OCAI survey tool to capture the DoD's workforce alignment in terms of what they perceive as the current DoD organizational culture and leadership as well as how they would prefer to see the DoD organizational culture and leadership tenets within the next 5 years. This research posits that any disconnects between the "now" and "preferred" timeframe for either of these key tenets must be addressed if an improved workforce retention strategy has any chance of lasting success.

Since the OCAI survey responses were generated from a representative cross-sectional population from within the DoD, a reasonable assumption was that the resultant analysis would be applicable to the overall Defense Acquisition Workforce as well.

The OCAI overlays in Figure 4 and Figure 7 provide an organizational profile indicating that the military and civilian sample populations strongly favor an increase in the upper portions of the Competing Values Framework for culture type and leadership style—the clan and adhocracy quadrants. From a clan culture perspective, both the military and civilian sample populations are seeking a humane environment best managed through teamwork and employee development; and the major task of management is to empower the workforce and facilitate their participation, commit-

ment, and loyalty. The organization places a premium on teamwork, participation, and consensus. From an adhocracy culture perspective, innovation and pioneering initiatives are what lead to success, and that the major task of management is to foster entrepreneurship, creativity, and activity on the cutting edge. The emphasis is on being at the leading edge of new knowledge and being ready for change. The respondents' qualitative responses tended to support these quantitative results.

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***DoD's acquisition leadership needs to better embrace organizational change initiatives that emphasize those attributes associated with the clan and adhocracy quadrants.***

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From a leadership perspective, the favored clan quadrant indicates a people-oriented approach whereby influence is based on getting people involved in the decision-making and problem-solving process. Participation and openness are actively pursued. When considering the adhocracy quadrant, the leadership style is based on the premise of change influenced by the anticipation of a better future and generating hope. Innovation and adaptation are actively pursued. As with the culture quadrants, the respondent's qualitative responses tended to support these leadership quantitative results—especially in terms of innovation and risk taking.

So what do these findings mean to the issue of workforce retention from the perspective of the Defense Acquisition Workforce? Simply that DoD's acquisition leadership needs to better embrace organizational change initiatives that emphasize those attributes associated with the clan and adhocracy quadrants. Attempting to head off or resolve a Defense Acquisition Workforce retention issue without paying attention to what is deemed important by this uniquely talented membership essentially equates to attacking a problem with no real idea on how to make meaningful changes. Ignoring these two key tenets of organizational change equates to a strategy of hope versus meaningful change. Paying attention to what truly matters from the perspective of the Defense Acquisition Workforce—in this case, those attributes associated with the clan and adhocracy quadrants—represents a strategy that at least has some chance of meaningful and lasting success.

## CONCLUSION

Any real or potential acquisition workforce retention problems can not be solved by what this article has identified as short-term, tangible incentives such as pay, benefits, physical workspace, teleworking, etc. Contrary to popular opinion, a Defense Acquisition Workforce potential retention problem can only be permanently

resolved by using organizational change initiatives to better align culture types and leadership styles to those sought by workforce members. Without such an alignment, the acquisition community will continue a never-ending cycle of wasting resources by advocating short-term solutions that will never fully resolve the serious issue of finding a meaningful way to improve the Defense Acquisition Workforce retention rate—before it's too late.

**Keywords:**

leadership, culture, change, workforce, retention



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