

# Where Are All the Civilian 'PMs in Waiting'?

## Incentivizing the Professional Acquisition Workforce to Aspire to Program/Project/Product Manager Positions

ARTHUR "ART" SANTO-DONATO

It has been more than 10 years since Congress passed the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA) to professionalize the DoD Acquisition Workforce. This legislation, dated Nov. 5, 1990, is widely recognized as the foundation of Acquisition Career Management. A "substantial increase in the proportion of civilians...in Program Manager positions..." throughout DoD was one of the major tenets of the Act.

In this article, I will discuss existing barriers, and suggest ways to alleviate them, that will encourage the best civilian acquisition workers to aspire to key management jobs that are the crux of the weapons development business. Many of my suggestions result from my personal review of existing United States Code (U.S.C.) on incentives; interviews with senior acquisition personnel in the field and in academia; and my own experiences over the past 20 years as an acquisition professional. Hopefully, this article will demonstrate convincingly that the process can be improved so that the finest candidates *do* choose to become Product and Project Managers and ultimately, the leaders of our acquisition workforce.

### Board Process

Today, all the Services use some type of a Best Qualified process to fill select acquisition positions. Within the Army, a board process to fill key Project and Product Manager billets is open to both military and civilian candidates. Tradi-



*Santo-Donato is the Acting Project Manager, Effects and Fires Command and Control Systems, Fort Monmouth, N.J.*

tionally, the Project Manager is a colonel or GS-15; the Product Manager is a lieutenant colonel or GS-14. The board process rates candidates from “one to n,” regardless of whether they are military or civilian. The Army has tried to develop civilian records similar to the military records to improve this board process. An Army civilian’s past work record is now documented in an Acquisition Career Record Brief (ACRB) that is much like the military’s Officer Record Brief (ORB). Slating qualified individuals against available positions does

not occur in the board process. This is done separately using their order of merit list against the available jobs.

### The Numbers Tell the Story

Boards are chaired by senior military officers and include both senior civilian and military members. Since the history of common boards is quite short (from approximately 1998), it is not easy to ensure statistically relevant trend data. Yet, some glaring numbers still linger from this short history that may be causing the best acquisition civilians to refrain from responding to, and applying for the board announcements. Consider the following data provided by Bruce Dahm, Acquisition Management Branch, U.S. Army Personnel Command [PERSCOM], as of Feb. 21, 2001.

**Project Manager Board, Fiscal 2001**  
As an example, the fiscal 2001 Project Manager Board covered 28 positions, of

which 19 were designated “military only” (in accordance with DAWIA guidelines), and nine positions were open to the Best Qualified civilian or military candidates.

On the military side, 40 files were considered, with 24 military selected or a 60 percent selection rate. Forty-four civilian files were boarded, with five selected for an 11.3 percent selection rate.

**Project Manager Board, Fiscal 2000**  
Similarly, the fiscal 2000 Project Manager Board covered 33 positions, of

which 18 were designated “military only,” and 15 positions were open to the Best Qualified candidates. The results were 42 military considered, with 31 selected or a 74 percent selection rate. Thirty-nine civilian files were reviewed, with two selected for a 5 percent selection rate.

Not unexpectedly, these results discourage many of the best civilian candidates from even bothering to submit consideration packages for Project Manager. However, as I will explain later, this is only one of many barriers that discourage a significant number of civilians from applying for Board Select PM positions.

### Fiscal 2001 Product Manager Board

The fiscal 2001 Product Manager Board looked at requirements for 54 positions, with 28 designated “military only” and 26 for “Best Qualified” candidate, regardless of whether the candidates were civilian or military. Two hundred sixty military officers were considered, with 52 selected for a 20 percent selection rate. Sixty-eight civilian records were considered eligible, with only two selected for a 3 percent selection rate.

### Fiscal 2000 Product Manager Board

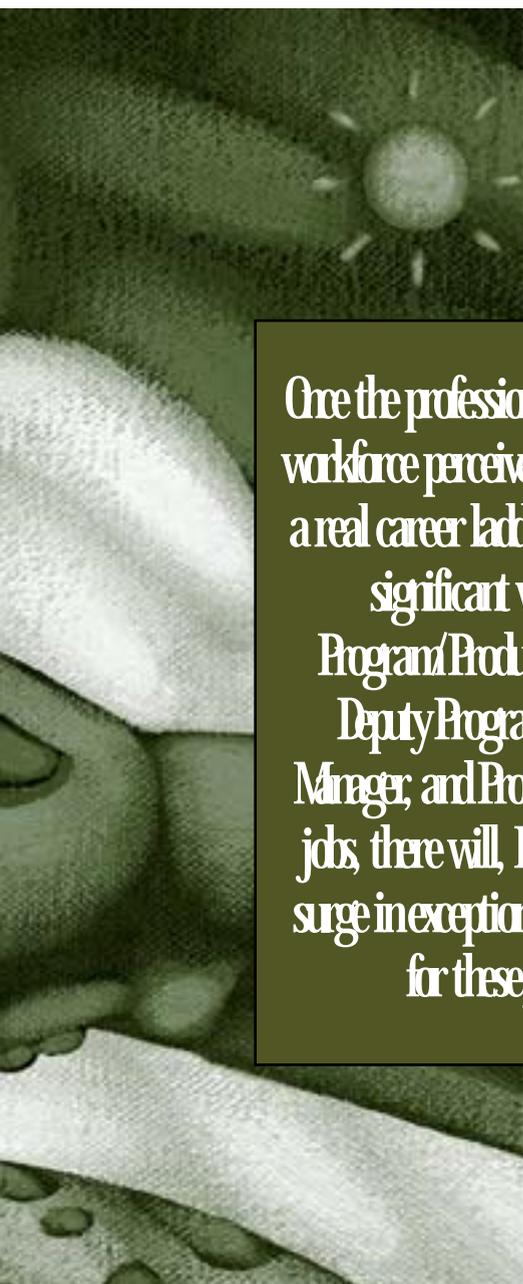
The fiscal 2000 Product Manager Board was looking to fill 55 positions—30 military and 25 Best Qualified. The results were 238 military considered, with 51 selected or a 21.5 percent selection rate; and 67 civilians considered, with four selected for a 6 percent rate.

### Background Diversity Lacking

Again, the few civilians selected do not offer great incentive for others to try. In speaking with representatives from PERSCOM, I learned that backgrounds of many of the civilian candidates were not diverse and usually did not demonstrate leadership experience; rather, their backgrounds tended to depict expertise in certain areas. The boards traditionally rank files with demonstrated strong leadership backgrounds very high. Historically, civilians move up the journeyman level chain by becoming experts in their field and may not get opportunities to develop diverse skills or act in leadership roles until the GS-14 or even GS-15 level jobs.

### Filling Other Critical Acquisition Positions

All other Army critical acquisition positions are filled outside the central acquisition process. Senior Executive Service (SES) Acquisition jobs are filled as



Once the professional acquisition workforce perceives that there is a real career ladder that places significant value on Program/Product Manager, Deputy Program/Project Manager, and Product Manager jobs, there will, I believe, be a surge in exceptional candidates for these jobs

# PROGRAM/PROJECT MANAGER NEXT-ASSIGNMENT ALTERNATIVES

1

Upon completion of PM tour, incumbent will proceed to academia for a Ph. D. or Masters Degree in an acquisition-related field. Two to three years will be allowed for completion. If a move is required, PCS or TDY will be provided at the Service or DoD DACM's discretion. After successful completion of the degree, a four-year assignment will follow as an instructor or administrator in a Defense acquisition school such as the Defense Acquisition University, Industrial College of the Armed Forces, the Naval Postgraduate School, or the Air Force Institute of Technology. After this assignment, incumbent will return to the parent PM tour organization and be placed at the organization's discretion into a GS-15 (Level IV) position in the same geographic locality as his or her PM assignment. At any time in the last year at the school, the employee may negotiate a permanent position with the school or any other organization and be free of any further commitment to the Army Acquisition Workforce.

2

Upon completion of PM tour, incumbent will proceed to a Department of Defense acquisition school and work as an instructor for three to five years. PCS or TDY will be at the DoD or Service DACM's discretion. Incumbent will return to the parent PM tour organization and be placed, at the organization's discretion, into a GS-15 (Level IV) position not requiring a geographic move. At any time in the last year at the school, the employee may negotiate a permanent position with the school or any other organization and be free of any further commitment to the Army Acquisition Workforce.

3

Upon completion of PM tour, incumbent will proceed to a position of Assistant PEO for a minimum of three years. This option may or may not require a PCS. Permanent placement after 3 years will be into an equivalent GS-15 (Level IV) position at the parent organization's discretion. This change will not require a change in duty location.

4

Upon completion of PM tour, incumbent will proceed to a developmental assignment at the Director level within the PEO or, if available, a Director-level position within the local major subordinate command. This option requires no mobility to a new geographic location for the incumbent. Permanent placement after three years into an equivalent GS-15 (Level IV) position will be made by the parent organization.

5

Upon completion of PM tour, incumbent will proceed to a Training With Industry assignment for one year at a defense contractor facility. TDY funds will be provided, as necessary. Upon completion, incumbent will be placed in a permanent GS-15 (Level IV) position within last employing organization at that organization's discretion. No mobility required.

6

Upon completion of PM tour, incumbent will proceed to a Sabbatical. Applicable Sabbatical policies and procedures will be followed with the exception of requiring a competition with other candidates. Sabbatical effort must be approved and in place one year prior to the end of a PM tour. Incumbent will supply documentation, as required, for Sabbatical. Upon completion of Sabbatical, incumbent will be placed in a GS-15 (Level IV) position within last employing organization at that organization's discretion. No mobility from the PM tour location required.

7

After two years into PM tour, incumbent has a two-week opportunity to reselect from this list another option at his or her discretion, or agree to an additional two years in his or her existing PM job for a total of six years. Upon completion of the six-year tour, management may exercise its option to place the PM in a GS-15 (Level IV) position of management's choice.

any other SES job in the Army, using regular announcements and the Army or Army Materiel Command SES Offices to manage the selection process.

Deputy Project Manager (DPM) announcements are managed locally through normal civilian personnel merit promotion procedures; other critical acquisition positions (GS-14 and GS-15) are filled either the same way or through central career program referral lists. Therefore, the vast majority of critical jobs are filled by traditional means, with many careerists harboring the perception that selections are still tied to the "good old boy" networks (i.e., technical qualifications tailored for a specific person's background), and not necessarily given to the Best Qualified candidate. Although this is almost always not the case, this perception is still quite prevalent within the workforce.

In March 2001, the Logistics Management Institute (LMI) published *Baseline Study: Implementation of the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA)*, an Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD)-sponsored study prepared for the DoD Director of Acquisition Education, Training and Career Development. In a section of that study entitled, "Selection Processes for Key Positions, Including Civilian Consideration," LMI reported that the Air Force has established a Material Management Board (SES and general officers) that meets yearly to select "Best Qualified military and civilian candidates for its key acquisition leadership positions."

Likewise, the Navy has created "a senior board jointly chaired by the Navy Acquisition Executive and the Vice Chief of Naval Operations. It uses a Best Qualified policy to select PEOs (Program Executive Officers), DPEOs (Deputy Program Executive Officers), Acquisition Category (ACAT) I/II PMs/DPMs (Program Managers/Deputy Program Managers)."

Within the Army, their centralized Best Qualified policy is restricted to mainly ACAT I PMs and Product Managers and does not include PEOs, DPEOs, or

DPMs. Therefore, the Army's Director of Acquisition Career Management does not have a great deal of influence over the majority of many other important critical acquisition positions.

DoDD 5000.52, Defense Acquisition Education, Training, and Career Development Program, paragraph 4.9, states:

"Each Acquisition Corps shall have a centralized referral system for the selection of Acquisition Corps members to fill critical acquisition positions..."

To date, each Service is working to this end, but none is yet there. Although the proportion of civilians in key critical acquisition jobs has increased, concern remains among those running the board process that the Best Qualified civilians are not necessarily trying for the Board Select Project and Product Manager positions.

Barriers—and There Are Many Since the passage of DAWIA, DoD has undergone a significant reduction in the size of the entire Department workforce, especially in the acquisition workforce, without any commensurate reduction in the acquisition workload. Today, the acquisition workforce is asked to do more with less—and do it significantly better.

#### Disproportionate Reduction of the Acquisition Workforce

In the February 2001 issue of *Government Executive*, George Cahlink wrote a column on "The Defense Department's Debilitating Loss of Critical Workers," stating that "since 1989 ... Defense cut the civilian acquisition workforce by half from a peak of 310,000 workers in 1989 to about 150,000 today. By 2005, the workforce would be halved again with the expected wave of retirement."

Cahlink cites comments from Don Mancuso, the Defense Department's Acting Inspector General [at this writing].

"If the workload had been reduced proportionally," says Mancuso, "eliminating half of the acquisition positions could be regarded as positive achieve-

Acquisition professionals are quite astute at sizing up how former Project and Product Managers who through no fault of their own suffer cost, schedule, and performance problems (due to the high risk in their programs) that can be caused by program funding cuts or contract protests that were outside of their control window. Why take on the high risk?

ment. Unfortunately, this has not been the case."

Mancuso, Cahlink goes on to say, has testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee, and in a March 2001 IG Report, Mancuso specifically mentions difficulty in retaining personnel.

Cahlink also points out well-known common occurrences where "acquisition workers are being asked to move beyond narrow technical jobs and instead, perform their duties with an eye toward accomplishing their organization's overall mission."

#### Advancement Halted

Cahlink's *Government Executive* article also references remarks by Keith Charles, former Director, Acquisition, Technology and Logistics Workforce Management, who said that in most acquisition organizations the top jobs go to the military, and many civilians leave government because they see their advance-

ment halted. (Charles' remarks were made in a presentation to contracting and program management students at the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, Calif., on Feb. 22, 2001.)

Charles also expressed the view (with which Cahlink agrees) that the military are trained for these jobs with career-broadening assignments, whereas when a civilian receives a career-broadening work experience—it's usually a fluke, not a plan.

#### Need for a Plan

Why is there no plan? What is it in the system that prevents civilians from attaining diverse backgrounds and from choosing to compete for Product and Project Manager positions? Note that such a plan for civilians, however, is called for in the 912 (c) Working Group's Final Report, "Future Acquisition and Technology Workforce," written in support of the initiatives described in OSD's April 1998 and April 2000 Reports to Congress.

#### Veering "Off-Track" Career-Wise

Culturally, in the civilian world we build a career in an area that usually equates to existing career programs. In the Executive Summary of the Section 912 (c) Working Group's Final Report, the need for developing civilian generalists to become Program Managers is listed as a necessary requirement. Indeed, the Working Group's Final Report lists institutionalizing a centralized career management program as an *action* item.

Today, our business people grow in the traditional Comptroller career field with a career ladder that culminates with a position as Director of Resource Management (DRM). Yet, all PM offices have business managers who are comptroller careerists, and those careerists know they are no longer on the rung of a career ladder that leads to a DRM position.

They are now part of the acquisition workforce with their "narrow" business expertise and, regrettably, have probably "maxed out" their career promotion potential. If lucky, they may aspire to

# DEPUTY PROGRAM/PROJECT MANAGER NEXT-ASSIGNMENT ALTERNATIVES

1

Upon completion of DPM tour, incumbent will proceed to academia for a Ph.D. or Master's Degree in an acquisition-related field. Two to three years will be allowed for completion. If a move is required, PCS or TDY will be authorized at the DoD or Service DACM's discretion. After successful completion of the degree, a four-year assignment will follow as an instructor or administrator in a Defense acquisition school such as the Defense Acquisition University, Industrial College of the Armed Forces, Naval Postgraduate School, or Air Force Institute of Technology. After this assignment, incumbent will return to the parent DPM tour organization and be placed at the organization's discretion into a GS-15 (Level IV) position in the same geographic locality as his or her DPM assignment. At any time in the last year at the school, the employee may negotiate a permanent position with the school or any other organization and be free of any further commitment to the Army Acquisition Workforce.

2

Upon completion of DPM tour, incumbent will proceed to a Department of Defense acquisition-affiliated school and work as an instructor for three to five years. PCS or TDY will be authorized at the DoD or Service DACM's discretion. Incumbent will return to the parent PM tour organization and be placed at the organization's discretion into a GS-15 (Level IV) position not requiring a geographic move. At any time in the last year at the school, the employee may negotiate a permanent position with the school or any other organization and be free of any further commitment to the Army Acquisition Workforce.

3

Upon completion of DPM tour, incumbent will proceed to a developmental

assignment at the Director level within the PEO or, if available, a Director-level position within the local major subordinate command. This option requires no mobility to a new geographic location for the incumbent. Permanent placement after three years into an equivalent GS-15 (Level IV) position will be made by the parent organization.

4

Upon completion of DPM tour, incumbent will proceed to a Training With Industry assignment for one year at a defense contractor facility. TDY funds will be provided, as necessary. Upon completion, incumbent will be placed in a GS-15 (Level IV) position within last employing organization or into a position at that organization's discretion. No mobility required.

5

Upon completion of DPM tour, incumbent will proceed to a Sabbatical. Applicable Sabbatical policies and procedures will be followed with the exception of requiring a competition with other candidates. Sabbatical effort must be approved and in place one year prior to the end of a PM tour. Incumbent will supply documentation, as required, for a Sabbatical. Upon completion of Sabbatical, incumbent will be placed in a GS-15 (Level IV) position within last employing organization at that organization's discretion. No mobility from the DPM tour location required.

6

After two years into a DPM tour, incumbent has a two-week opportunity to reselect from this list another option at his or her discretion, or agree to an additional two years for a total of six years. Upon completion of the six-year tour, management may exercise its option to place the incumbent in a GS-15 (Level IV) position of management's choice.

the position of Deputy PM in their local PM shop. (Because it is a local recruit, and if the PM likes what they have accomplished as business managers, they may be selected as Deputy PMs through local merit promotion procedures.) The chance to ever reach SES, however, is almost non-existent.

Since they are no longer in the DRM chain and their backgrounds are neither diverse nor technical, they are no longer competitive in their career fields. In reality, they are precluded from being selected for an acquisition SES position that will be filled through the "good old boy" network rather than through centralized acquisition community channels where past work experience would have very high value. They are also witnesses to a selection process for civilian PEO and DPEO SES jobs that does not seem to follow a career ladder from a PM and DPM position.

Similar career tracks beget the logistician and the engineer who move into the Project Manager office environment. What has evolved is a cultural barrier that seems to tell civilians that they do not have the diverse backgrounds needed to become PMs; consequently, they believe that there is no road to SES. The top acquisition folks perceive that a tour as PM or Product Manager will not aid them in progression to SES—so why bother? They may as well stay in their traditional fields where the pay and benefits are the same as Board Select positions.

## TDY

Our critical acquisition personnel working in PM shops realize that most Project and Product Managers spend over 75 percent of their PM tours traveling to Temporary Duty (TDY) sites. Most civilians are unwilling to take jobs that take them away from their families so often.

## Multiple Reporting Levels

Further, they realize that PMs must answer to more than one chief. Typically, PMs must meet all the demands of Pentagon-level general officers, plus all the demands from general officers that sur-

face from the user end of the acquisition business. This is unlike regular civilian jobs where success requires only that they satisfy their immediate supervisors.

#### Compensation Inequities

In addition, these civilian PMs/Product Managers do not receive any more compensation than they would in other GS-14/15 positions. Prior to the beginning of the five-year trial period for the DoD Civilian Acquisition Workforce Personnel Demonstration Project in 1999, which created a Pay Band that includes GS-14s and GS-15s, most PMs and division chiefs were GS-14 or GS-15. The deputy PM and technical management chief were usually GS-15s. Now, under Pay Band Level IV all these jobs are equal, and the incumbents can receive compensation ranging from \$67,675 to \$103,623—plus locality pay.

For example, in the Washington D.C. area, the range—including locality pay—is \$78,265–\$119,682. Since Product and Project Managers are typically GS-14s and GS-15s respectively, both fall under Pay Band Level IV. Therefore, all the division chiefs and deputies would not receive any promotion to move to either PM or Product Manager positions. To be promoted, one must move from Pay Band Level III, and acquisition workers at this level are usually not the seasoned acquisition veterans to be found in other critical acquisition positions. Hence, a side effect of Pay Banding was to remove many seasoned GS-14s from bidding on GS-15 PM jobs since a promotion is no longer associated with the increased responsibilities.

#### Location, Location, Location

Another barrier that precludes some civilians from applying is the remote chance that they would be selected for a position at a different location. To try to alleviate this concern, the Army instituted a regional area of consideration. For example, if you work at Picatinny Arsenal, you are in the Northeast Region; therefore, not only can you apply to the open board announcement, but you can also narrow the area in which you are willing to accept a Board Select

position within the Northeast Region. However, you still may have to move. If you apply from the Picatinny area, you may be selected for a position at Fort Monmouth, which may turn out to be 100 miles away from your residence but is still in the Northeast Region. For this reason, some candidates opt not to apply.

#### No Control Over Next Job

Civilians elect to not pursue Board Select positions for many reasons. They realize that, in most cases, these board jobs are for four years, or they may last until the next nearest major milestone in their program's life cycle is completed. This means that they will not have any control over their next job or where it might be located. Civilians are not accustomed to having such little control over their future positions or locality.

#### No Longer in Charge

Candidates for PM positions do not know if following a PM position will bring the same level of job satisfaction as their previous employment. For example, would an individual who was the undisputed boss move to a deputy or division chief position after being the man in charge? Unlike the military, high-level civilian positions are not constantly rotating, and finding challenging, career-enhancing jobs after being a PM may prove difficult. And finding a suitable position located where the incumbent desires to reside significantly adds to the challenge.

#### High-Risk

These unknowns, along with the many other barriers discussed in this article, make the decision not to apply fairly easy for sharp acquisition workers. They are content to remain in their career field tracks where they are recognized experts, and by continuing their traditionally exceptional efforts in their fields of expertise, are fairly certain they will be well rewarded in pay and bonuses under the pay demo.

Why take on the high-risk job of Project Manager or Product Manager and jeopardize the rewards that can be expected for known results in their tradi-

tional work areas? As a body, they are quite astute at sizing up how former Project and Product Managers who—through no fault of their own—suffer cost, schedule, and performance problems (due to the high risk in their programs) that can be caused by program funding cuts or contract protests that were outside of their control window.

#### Lack of Substantive Bonuses to Reward Risktaking

Further, members of the civilian acquisition workforce have witnessed for themselves that the bonuses to successful Project and Product Managers are fairly indistinguishable from those they are already receiving; even more troubling, the not-so-successful PMs and Product Managers are way below what they normally receive. Clearly, if civilians do “screw up” in these Board Select positions with their high visibility, their advancement is over, their bonuses gone or curtailed, and their careers forever blemished.

As a system, we do not reward risktaking gone bad, even though the most successful people in private industry usually fail a few, or even many times before success. A few mistakes in a Board Select job may be remembered by pay panels, future SES selection panels, and by general officers for years to come.

#### It All Adds Up

Knowing that no increase in pay accompanies these difficult jobs, no guaranteed bonus, unknown follow-on jobs, and little chance that such jobs will lead to SES appointments—all of these factors make it readily apparent why so few of the eligible acquisition professionals try for these positions. Unlike a military PM, who in almost every case will be retirement-eligible after a tour as a Project Manager, the civilian PM will probably still have eight to 10 years of work before he or she is retirement-eligible.

Is it therefore impossible to attract the best civilians to these jobs? Can we not fulfill the intent of DAWIA to increase the proportion of civilians in Program Manager positions?

## Incentivizing Civilians

In spite of all the existing barriers that inhibit many civilians from seeking the Project and Product Manager positions, these jobs are the lifeblood of successful future Army—and all of DoD—weapon system acquisition; and it behooves the acquisition community to change the existing civilian mindset that sees little reason to compete for these jobs.

## Centralized Board Referral System

First and foremost, we need to develop a centralized board referral system for all acquisition SES positions such as PEO, DPEO, and RDEC (Research, Development and Engineering Center) Directors. There must be in place a clear career progression that includes either or both Project and Product Manager positions. The DoD DACM and PERSCOM need to have control over the critical acquisition SES jobs, and they should not continue to fill positions under the traditional Army/Army Materiel Command SES hiring process. Also, the DPM positions for major programs should be Board Select and considered to be equal to a PM for purposes of career progression.

## Annual Boards for SES Positions

A system of annual boards for SES positions needs to be established. All eligible acquisition professionals interested in SES positions could submit the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) SES Managerial Qualifications. Other critical acquisition professionals chosen by the DoD DACM or the Deputy DACM must man these boards. For those already in critical acquisition positions, there should be no need for further Technical Qualifications—their past records should suffice. If they are managerially qualified for SES, their profession should be enough to satisfy any additional special technical qualifications. Job diversity and special skills would be considered by the board in developing their “1 to n” list.

Once their managerial skills have been evaluated and approved by OPM, they should not have to rewrite them every year. Similar efforts already exist in other

agencies. Outside candidates can submit annually to the board for consideration. This would improve the system we have now, where after candidates are selected, they get to rewrite their managerial qualifications to ensure they meet OPM standards. We would have a pool of qualified acquisition professionals ready to serve in the senior acquisition billets.

## Pay Band Distinction

Next, we need to develop ways to distinguish a Project Manager and Product Manager from the array of other Pay Band Level IV and GS-14/GS-15 critical acquisition jobs. Doing so requires looking at the way we compensate individuals. Selection to Project Manager and Product Manager positions should nearly always be considered promotions.

Anyone moving from a position in Pay Band Level IV to a PM should receive a 6 percent pay increase; if that person is already at the maximum level in the band, he or she should get an annual bonus at the start of each year equating to 6 percent of the Pay Band maximum.

If moving from a GS-14 to a GS-15 PM position or Level IV PM position, he or she should get an additional 6 percent above the normal promotion amount. If close to the top, an increase and bonus equating to 6 percent should be set. Likewise, a PM moving from Level III to a Level IV PM position should receive the standard 6 percent, plus an additional 6 percent for accepting the Board Select PM position. This additional 6 percent stipend would disappear after completion of their tours if they did not accept another PM assignment. However, if they are promoted to SES, their PM salary should be the point of demarcation for establishing the SES promotion salary.

## After the PM/DPM Tour

After completion of a tour as PM or DPM of a major acquisition program, these professionals should be considered to have fulfilled all the OPM Managerial Qualifications, and should be required to submit only the very minimum amount of paperwork to the SES Annual Board. The board and the DoD

DACM staff should ensure the OPM Qualifications Statements are in the proper formats acceptable to OPM.

Currently, this review by the board and DoD DACM staff is conducted only for the person selected to fill the open SES position, *after* the recruitment and interview process. This would remove a practice that appears unfair to almost all those who apply for Army SES jobs and are not selected. Many applicants walk away from the process with the distinct perception that only the job-specific Technical Qualifications matter; and that after candidates are chosen, the system lets them rewrite their OPM Managerial Qualifications. The candidates' rewritten Managerial Qualifications are then reviewed by people in the Army SES offices until they are rewritten in a manner deemed capable of meeting OPM standards. This board system will make the managerial skills and leadership skills the most important, and the ACRBs and resumes will show the technical skills of the acquisition professional candidates.

## Retention/Recruitment Bonuses

Current policies on retention and recruitment bonuses are available, but they are not used frequently and are not always applicable, especially when the positions are coming from a board that can slate military or civilians into these positions. Recruitment bonuses usually are used to bring in someone from outside the government, and retention bonuses are used when civilians have a bona fide offer from private industry. Clearly needed is a family of incentives that are readily available, well known, and used to market interest in Board Select jobs.

Once the professional acquisition workforce perceives, as covered earlier in this article, that there is a real career ladder that places significant value on Project/Deputy Project and Product Managers, there will, I believe, be a surge in exceptional candidates for these jobs. However, the barriers of not knowing what job will come after a Board Select tour and not knowing if mobility will be required for that next job, must also be addressed.

### Leeway In Next Assignment

As part of the PM Board process for civilians, there should be included a step that lays out what assignment that person will have upon completion of his or her PM tour. Three sidebars in this article list my proposals for next-assignment possible job alternatives for the positions of Program/Project Manager (p. 70), Deputy Program/Project Manager (p. 72), and Product Manager (shown below). These should be posted to the Army Acquisition Workforce and PERSCOM Web sites as part of the application process.

The application instructions should include the applicable options (as spelled out in the three sidebars), and state that the candidates must elect one of the options; that at the start of the third year they will get one opportunity to affirm their choice or change to one of the other options; and that this choice will be final so that the system has two years to accommodate that option.

### Risktaking Deserves Compensation

After establishing a valued career progression, salary incentives, and recognition that these positions are considered promotions—even though grade and Demonstration Pay Band levels might remain the same—DoD still needs to incentivize and recognize the inherent risk in these positions.

I propose that an Annual Performance Bonus or CCAS (Contribution-Based Compensation Appraisal System) bonus floor be established. For each year incumbents occupy these Board Select positions, I suggest that the starting bonus for a PM should be \$6000, for a DPM \$4000, and for the Product Manager \$2000. Again, these are floors and, depending on success, can rise to the limits of the existing bonus system each year.

### Human Capital Management

Today, throughout government we keep hearing of the need to address Human Capital Management issues. Congress has also asked agencies to develop human capital strategies in light of the impending huge numbers of retirement-eligible civilians. They want agencies to

have formal plans on how they will meet future personnel needs.

A 2001 General Accounting Office Report (GAO-01-326), entitled “Managing for Results: Human Capital Management Discussions in Fiscal Year 2001 Performance Plans,” stated that “Some agencies identified ... unique human capital challenges ... but they did not include specific strategies or goals for resolving those challenges.” Senior acquisition officials need to formalize a strategy to ensure that the best civilians compete for, and successfully attain positions as Project and Product Managers.

### Senior Leadership Involvement

This issue requires significant involvement of DoD’s senior leadership or we will continue to have an acquisition workforce that does not recognize PM and Product Manager positions as key to a successful career. We need to address the barriers and, where possible, remove them. More importantly, we need to establish *incentives* where some of the inherent barriers in these jobs—

such as high risk, travel, and serving many masters—are ameliorated by attractive incentives and opportunities for career advancement. In this way, we can ensure DoD gets the best candidates vying for the strategic positions as weapon system managers that are the key to successful products in the hands of our military.

Also, we will ensure a career path that will bring DoD’s future acquisition leaders to the highest standards possible. Through a centralized referral system that includes not only Project Managers and Product Managers, but also Deputy PMs, Deputy PEOs, PEOs, and all critical acquisition SES positions, we can achieve this goal. Also, by introducing follow-on assignment choices and bonus floors on training opportunities, we can stimulate civilian interest in aspiring to be Project and Product Managers.

**Editor’s Note:** Santo-Donato welcomes questions or comments on this article. Contact him at [as-donato@c3smail.monmouth.army.mil](mailto:as-donato@c3smail.monmouth.army.mil).

## PRODUCT MANAGER NEXT-ASSIGNMENT ALTERNATIVES

1

Upon completion of Product Manager tour, incumbent will proceed to academia for a Master’s Degree in an acquisition-related field. Up to 18 months will be allowed for completion. If a move is required, PCS or TDY will be authorized at the DoD or Service DACM’s discretion. After completion of the degree, employee will return to parent organization and be placed into a GS-14 (Level IV) position at organization’s discretion.

2

Upon completion of Product Manager tour, incumbent will proceed to a Training With Industry assignment for one year at a defense contractor facility. TDY funds will be authorized by the DoD or Service DACM, as necessary. Upon completion, incumbent will be placed in a GS-14 (Level IV) position within last employing organization or into a position at that organization’s discretion. No mobility required.

3

Upon completion of Product Manager tour, incumbent will proceed to a Sabbatical. Applicable Sabbatical policies and procedures will be followed with the exception of requiring a competition with other candidates. Sabbatical effort must be approved and in place one year prior to end of PM tour. Incumbent will supply documentation, as required, for Sabbatical. Upon completion of Sabbatical, incumbent will be placed in a GS-14 (Level IV) position within last employing organization at that organization’s discretion. No mobility from the product manager tour location required.

4

Incumbent will be placed in a supervisory GS-14 (Level IV) position by the Product Manager employee’s organization that does not require a geographic move.