
EFFECTIVENESS, EMPOWERMENT,
OPEN COMMUNICATIONS

Acquisition Reform and the Integrated Product Team Approach

Fundamental to the Success of Acquisition Reform

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INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVES OFTEN PARTICIPATE AS MEMBERS OF IPTs. SUPPORT CONTRACTORS SERVE ALONGSIDE GOVERNMENT PROFESSIONALS ON STAFF WORKING-LEVEL IPTs; PRIME AND SUBCONTRACTORS SERVE IN AN EQUALLY IMPORTANT ROLE ON PROGRAM OFFICE IPTs.



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As Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Technology (USD[A&T]), R. Noel Longuemare departed government service in November 1997, he voiced his pride in the acquisition reforms achieved in the last few years and identified teaming and the institutionalization of the Integrated Product Team (IPT) process as the reform initiative most fundamental to the success we have achieved.

To monitor our progress in achieving institutionalization, the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition Reform (DUSD[AR]), with support from the Defense Systems Management College (DSMC), conducted three major surveys that focused on customer satisfaction with the IPT process. Together, they designed the first survey, conducted in March 1996, as a baseline assessment of problems and progress in implementing

Overarching Integrated Product Teams/Working Integrated Product Teams (OIPT/WIPT) in Acquisition Category I (ACAT I) programs. The second survey, a follow-on survey of the same programs, conducted in April 1997, tracked year-to-year changes and progress in implementation. The third and final survey, an additional community-wide survey conducted in March 1997, in conjunction with our Acquisition Reform Week activities, assessed progress on IPTs and other acquisition reform initiatives across the Acquisition Workforce. This article provides feedback to the acquisition community on key results from those surveys.

IPT Effectiveness

All three surveys highlighted IPT effectiveness. The DUSD(AR) wanted to determine whether IPTs facilitate effective decision making, whether IPTs improve the effectiveness of milestone docu-

mentation, and whether IPTs contribute to producing better and more affordable products in a shorter period of time.

A comparison of the 1996 and 1997 ACAT I IPT survey results (Figure 1) shows a positive trend – more community members than ever before believe that IPTs add to our effectiveness in all three areas.

Respondents to the Acquisition Reform Week survey expressed similar views on IPT effectiveness. Of the 26,000 respondents, 79 percent agreed that their OIPTs and WIPTs were working effectively, a view reinforced by their selection of IPTs from a list of 14 acquisition reforms as the initiative that most significantly improved the acquisition processes owned by their teams.

IPT Empowerment

Critical to IPT effectiveness is the empowerment of those who participate –

FIGURE 1. IPT Effectiveness

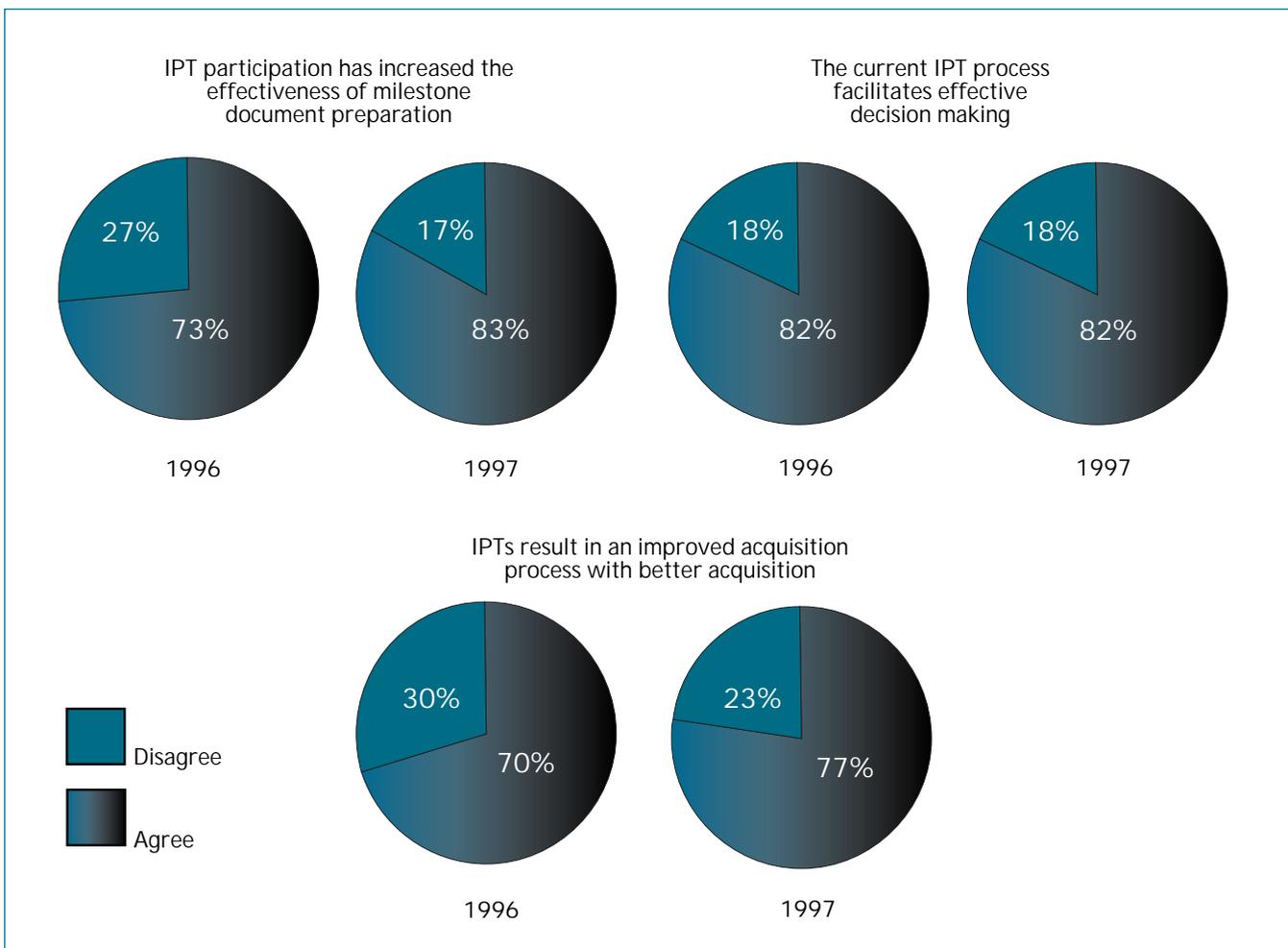
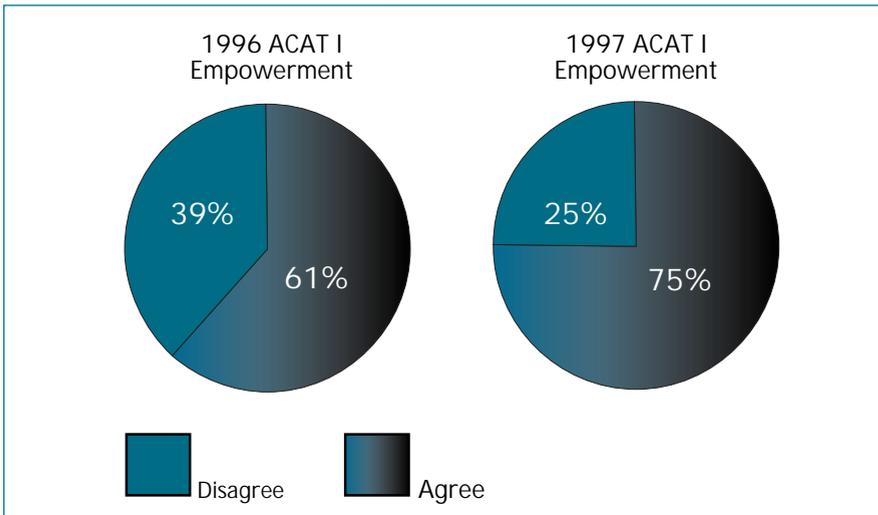


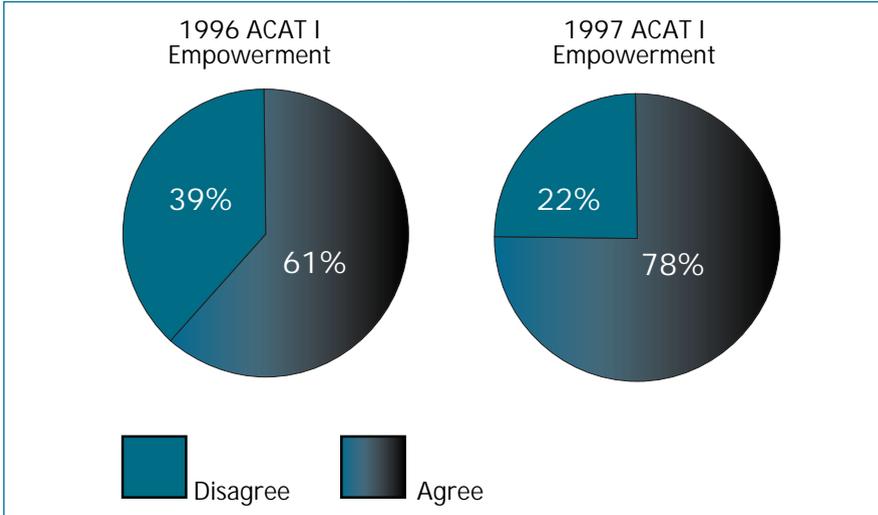
FIGURE 2. Comparison of WIPT Members Expressing Empowerment to Speak for Their Organizations — 1996 vs. 1997



their ability to represent the views of their superiors during IPT deliberations. To determine whether this important IPT characteristic was working effectively, the ACAT I IPT survey asked whether IPT members felt empowered to speak for their organizations and whether their OIPT principals later overturned the positions they took on behalf of their organizations.

The results shown in Figures 2 and 3 indicate a significant improvement in empowerment from 1996 to 1997 — a 14-percent improvement in member sense of empowerment, and a 17-percent increase in the view that WIPT member positions will not be overturned by their OIPT principals.

FIGURE 3. Comparison of WIPT Members Expressing Positions Taken Seldom Overturned by OIPT Members — 1996 vs. 1997

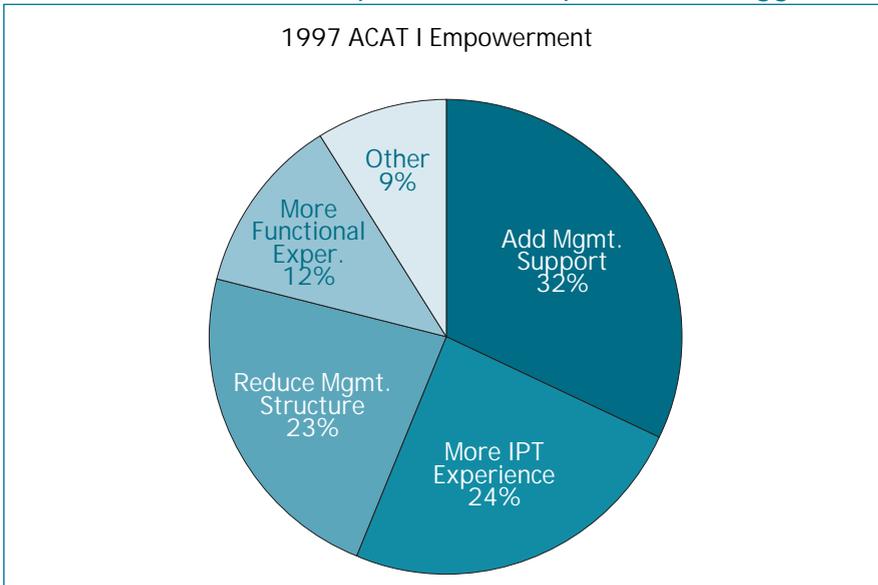


While this represents a major improvement, more can be done. Figure 4 shows that community members regard increasing management support for the IPT process, gaining more experience with IPTs, and reducing management structure as the most important factors in improving member empowerment.

Contractor Participation in IPTs

Industry representatives often participate as members of IPTs. Support contractors serve alongside government professionals on staff working-level IPTs; prime and subcontractors serve in an equally important role on program office IPTs. To assess the effectiveness of their participation, the 1997 ACAT I survey asked respondents to comment on statements related to effectiveness, motives for involvement, and open communications.

FIGURE 4. IPT Member Empowerment Improvement Suggestions

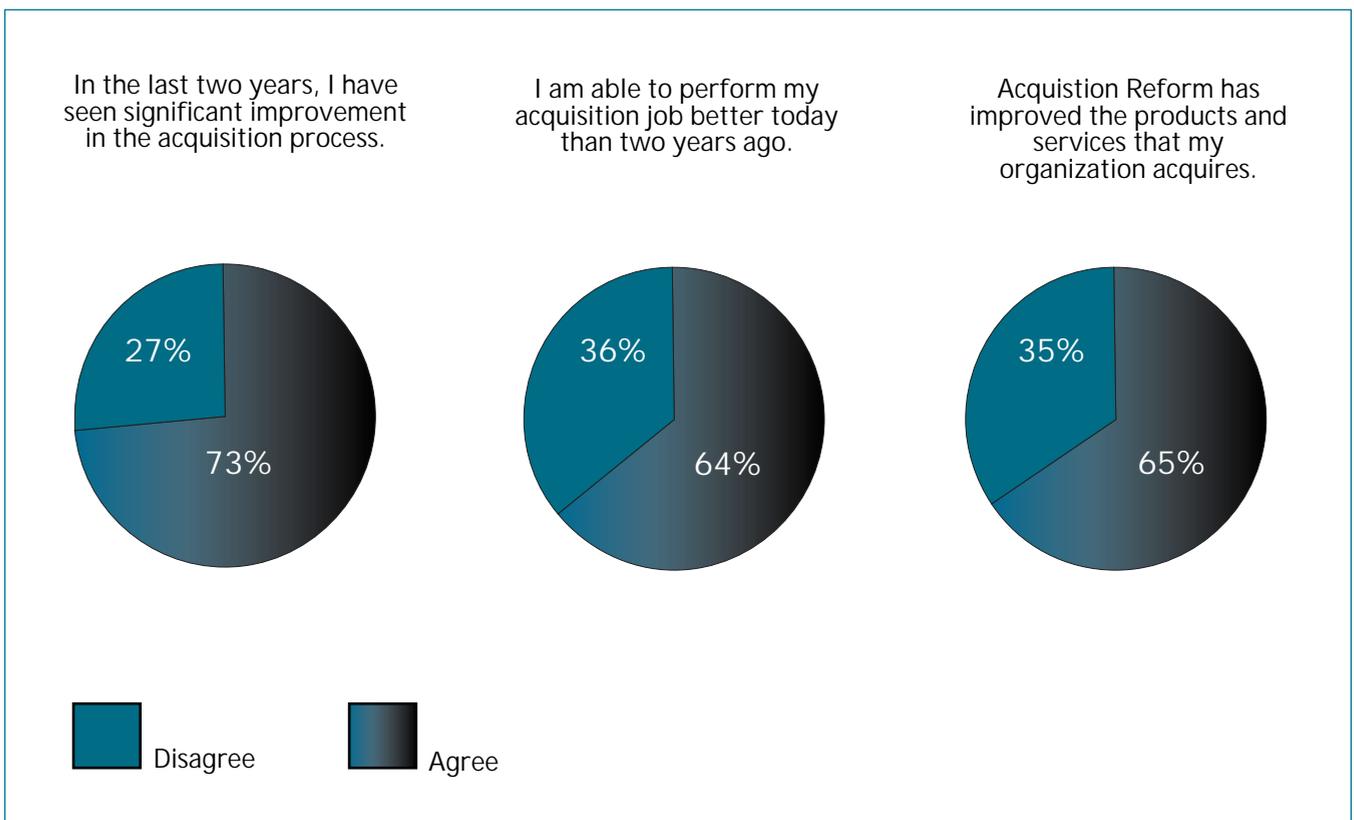


The survey results indicate that contractors are adding value. Nearly 80 percent agreed that support contractors generally enhance their teams' effectiveness, and over 70 percent agreed that the contractors were not using their involvement to generate "billable" hours for themselves. Respondent views on prime-subcontractor participation were similar. Most agreed that their participation added effectiveness without hindering team communications.

Is Acquisition Reform Making a Difference?

Since the Acquisition Reform Week survey reached out to a larger segment of

FIGURE 5. Is Acquisition Reform Making a Difference?



the acquisition community than ever before, DUSD(AR) and DSMC used it as a means to evaluate progress since initiation of the Department’s first acquisition reform efforts.

Responses to a series of questions (Figure 5) indicate that the majority of community members express agreement in three key areas:

- They see significant improvement in reforming the Department’s acquisition processes and practices over the last two years.
- They feel better able to perform their jobs.
- The reforms initiated thus far improved the products and services they provide.

Acquisition Reform Special Events

To focus community attention on and expand knowledge of ongoing reform initiatives, the Secretary of Defense and USD(A&T) designated two significant

events – Acquisition Reform Acceleration Day (May 31, 1996)¹ and Acquisition Reform Week (March 17-21, 1997)² – be set aside solely for that purpose.

The Acquisition Reform Week II survey assessed community response to these events, and asked how frequently they should be scheduled. Most respondents agreed that Acquisition Reform Week II was an effective method of team training, and that similar acquisition reform events should be conducted every year, or at most, every other year.

Making a Difference

The survey results indicate we are making steady progress in the institutionalization of IPTs and that, overall, our acquisition reform initiatives are making a difference in our professional lives. However, it will require continued management emphasis, education, and training to ensure that these initiatives remain effective.

We must continue to widely publicize policy changes and ensure that staff

members benefit from new and innovative training opportunities, particularly technology-based education and training. Acquisition community members at all levels should provide feedback and fresh ideas to ensure that our senior acquisition leaders continue to refine ongoing initiatives as they are institutionalized, and that we continue to improve our business processes.

Together, as team members, we will continue to reap the benefits of the energy, dedication, and commitment to acquisition reform that every member of the Department’s Acquisition Workforce has so capably demonstrated.

ENDNOTES

1. See “Acquisition Reform Acceleration Day,” *Program Manager*, September-October 1996, p. 28.

2. See “SECDEF and DAE Jump Start Acquisition Reform Week at Pentagon Press Conference,” *Program Manager*, May-June 1997, p. 14; and “Department of Defense Acquisition Reform Week,” *Program Manager*, July-August 1997, p. 34.