



From Our Readers

“Doing Less” Grabs Attention

Dan Ward’s article “Doing Less with More” (Defense AT&L, November-December 2004) rang true for many readers, and we received a record amount of correspondence. A selection follows.

High-dollars Can Hurt Innovation

Hopefully, senior leadership in the acquisition community will take the points that Dan Ward makes to heart. Since we both work in the research lab, we understand the innovation that occurs in a low-cost environment and the struggle to project our current contributions to the Air Force (in the form of officer performance reports) when we who work with only thousands of dollars are compared to officers in the program offices who are managing millions of dollars. In fact, I’m planning a permanent change of assignment to the system program office in April 2005, and that is one of the reasons. Although working in the lab as an engineer is very rewarding, I believe that many young officers feel the need to move away from innovation to management early in their careers to be competitive for promotions later on. Just another thought on how the Air Force focus on high-dollar programs may be hurting innovation by taking more experienced engineers away from developmental engineering jobs where the real innovation occurs.

Lt. Kenneth C. Bradley, USAF
Air Force Research Laboratory/Munitions Directorate

Satisfying a Political Agenda

Good article about overfunding. I also think the political and fiscal culture is a big cost growth driver. It seems sometimes large weapons programs exist to satisfy a political agenda rather than to efficiently meet a military need in the field. (Now there’s a controversial article topic!)

Archie B. Clark III
Air Force Operational Test and Evaluation Center

Heavy Financing, Diminishing Returns

Dan Ward’s article directly applies to software development efforts as well. Currently I am the technical lead for a software development effort that involves a very small team of bright people. As the software has been embraced by the community, I am noticing an unpleasant trend—managers who want to “grow the team” and heavily finance development to the point of diminishing returns.

Our team recently looked at another piece of software that in some ways resembles our own but is already in this heavily financed state. It has a budget of several million dollars and 60 full-time developers. Sadly, their result is less impressive than what our small team of three to four people has achieved. Why? Because the top technical lead no longer develops software. His full-time job is to run around and see what every other team is doing. He manages other “teams” with more “technical leads” whose members have meetings all the time to coordinate development activity. It goes on and on. The law of diminishing returns is in full force.

I don’t think our managers understand that too big of a budget can really hurt development. They seem to be enamored with the idea of getting more money for development. It’s almost like some kind of strange reward system where what’s to be proud of is not what we are doing and producing but how much more money we can get for doing it.

Name withheld by request

Money for Problems not Leadership

Dan Ward’s article is, quite simply, brilliant. That said, a counterpoint of innovation during peacetime is the Bunker Buster from Gulf War I. Although we were not fighting the battle just yet, it was developed prior to the kick-off of ops. It went from concept to reality in something like 90 days and was devastating to the enemy. I call it throwing money at problems rather than leadership. The most with the least—that is the Marine Corps mode of operations.

The command I’m with would support Ward’s assertion that operators who define their requirements and push the limits of technology are more successful. Conversely, whenever we in the military “blindly” deal with vendors and their concepts, we find more often than not that they try to write our requirements for us and it just does not work. A robust market surveillance program and exchange of information, coupled with well-thought-out, validated requirements by our end-users, does in fact work. By the way, I would definitely consider my unit a low dollar figure “program” that has a high return on its “people-power” investment.

Capt. Brian T. Grana, USMC
Chemical Biological Incident Response Force



Acquisition & Logistics Excellence

An Internet Listing Tailored to the Professional Acquisition Workforce

Surfing the Net

Acquisition Community Connection (ACC)

<http://acc.dau.mil>

Policies, procedures, tools, references, publications, Web links, and lessons learned for risk management, contracting, system engineering, total ownership cost (TOC).

Acquisition Reform Network (AcqNet)

<http://www.arnet.gov/>

Virtual library; federal acquisition and procurement opportunities; best practices; electronic forums; business opportunities; acquisition training; excluded parties list.

Advanced Concept Technology Demonstrations (ACTDs)

<http://www.acq.osd.mil/actd/>

ACTD's accomplishments, articles, speeches, guidelines, and points of contact.

Aging Systems Sustainment and Enabling Technologies (ASSET)

<http://catt.bus.okstate.edu/asset/index.html>

A government-academic-industry partnership. Technologies and processes developed in the ASSET program increase the DoD supply base, reduce time and cost associated with parts procurement, and enhance military readiness.

Air Force (Acquisition)

<http://www.safaq.hq.af.mil/>

Policy; career development and training opportunities; reducing TOC; library; links.

Air Force Materiel Command (AFMC) Contracting Laboratory's FAR Site

<http://farsite.hill.af.mil/>

FAR search tool; Commerce Business Daily announcements (CBDNet); Federal Register; electronic forms library.

Army Acquisition Support Center

<http://asc.army.mil>

News; policy; Army AL&T Magazine; programs; career information; events; training opportunities.

Assistant Secretary of the Army (Acquisition, Logistics & Technology)

<https://webportal.saalt.army.mil/>

ACAT Listing; ASA(ALT) Bulletin; digital documents library; ASA(ALT) organization; links to other Army acquisition sites.

Association of Old Crows (AOC)

<http://www.crows.org>

Association news; conventions, conferences, courses; Journal of Electronic Defense.

Commerce Business Daily

<http://cbdnet.gpo.gov>

Access to current and back issues with search capabilities; business opportunities; interactive yellow pages.

Committee for Purchase from People Who are Blind or Severely Disabled

<http://www.jwod.gov>

Information and guidance to federal customers on the requirements of the Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Act.

Defense Acquisition University (DAU)

<http://www.dau.mil>

DAU Course Catalog; Defense AT&L magazine and Defense Acquisition Review journal; course schedule; policy documents; guidebooks; and training and education news for the Defense Acquisition Workforce.

DAU Alumni Association

<http://www.dauaa.org>

Acquisition tools and resources; government and related links; career opportunities; member forums.

DAU Distance Learning Courses

<http://www.dau.mil/registrar/apply.asp>

Take DAU courses online at your desk, at home, at your convenience.

Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA)

<http://www.darpa.mil>

News releases; current solicitations; "Doing Business with DARPA."

Defense Electronic Business Program Office (DEBPO)

<http://www.acq.osd.mil/dpap/ebiz>

Policy; newsletters; Central Contractor Registration (CCR); assistance centers; DoD EC partners.

Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA)

<http://www.disa.mil>

Structure and mission of DISA; Defense Information System Network; Defense Message System; Global Command and Control System.

Defense Modeling and Simulation Office (DMSO)

<http://www.dmsomil>

DoD Modeling and Simulation Master Plan; document library; events; services.

Defense Systems Management College (DSMC)

<http://www.dau.mil>

DSMC educational products and services; course schedules; job opportunities.

Defense Technical Information Center (DTIC)

<http://www.dtic.mil/>

DTIC's scientific and technical information network (STINET) is one of DoD's largest available repositories of scientific, research, and engineering information. Hosts over 100 DoD Web sites. Register for services.

Deputy Director, Systems Engineering, USD(AT&L/IO/SE)

<http://www.acq.osd.mil/io/se/index.htm>

Systems engineering mission; Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act information, training, and related sites; information on key areas of systems engineering responsibility.

Director, Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy (DPAP)

<http://www.acq.osd.mil/dpap>

Procurement and acquisition policy news and events; reference library; DPAP organizational breakout; acquisition education and training policy and guidance.

DoD Defense Standardization Program

<http://www.dsp.dla.mil>

All about DoD standardization; key Points of Contact; FAQs; Military Specifications and Standards Reform; newsletters; training; nongovernment standards; links to related sites.

DoD Enterprise Software Initiative (ESI)

<http://www.donimit.navy.mil/esi>

Joint project to implement true software enterprise management process within DoD.

DoD Inspector General Publications

<http://www.dodig.osd.mil/pubs/index.html>

Audit and evaluation reports; IG testimony; planned and ongoing audit projects of interest to the acquisition community.

DoD Office of Technology Transition

<http://www.dtic.mil/ott/>

Information about and links to OTT's programs.

Dual Use Science & Technology (DUS&T) Program

<http://www.dtic.mil/dust>

Fact sheet; project information, guidance, and success stories.

Earned Value Management

<http://www.acq.osd.mil/pm>

Implementation of Earned Value Management; latest policy changes; standards; international developments; active notebook.

Electronic Industries Alliance (EIA)

<http://www.eia.org>

Government relations department; includes links to issue councils; market research assistance.

Federal Acquisition Institute (FAI)

<http://www.faionline.com>

Virtual campus for learning opportunities; information access and performance support.

Federal Acquisition Jump Station

<http://prod.nais.nasa.gov/pub/fed-proc/home.html>

Procurement and acquisition servers by contracting activity; CBDNet; reference library.

Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

<http://www.asu.faa.gov>

Online policy and guidance for all aspects of the acquisition process.

Federal Government Technology Transfer Links

<http://dtica.dtic.mil/t2/orgt2.html>

Manpower and Training Research Information System (MATRIS) project offers links to federal government tech transfer programs.

Federal R&D Project Summaries

<http://www.osti.gov/fedrnd/about.html>

Portal to information on federal research projects; search databases at different agencies.

Federal Research in Progress (FEDRIP)

<http://grc.ntis.gov/fedrip.htm>

Information on federally funded projects in the physical sciences, engineering, and life sciences.

Fedworld Information

<http://www.fedworld.gov>

Comprehensive central access point for searching, locating, ordering, and acquiring government and business information.

General Accounting Office (GAO)

<http://www.gao.gov>

GAO reports; policy and guidance; FAQs.

General Services Administration (GSA)

<http://www.gsa.gov>

Online shopping for commercial items to support government interests.