

On Acquisition Training: An Important Next Step

Stan Soloway

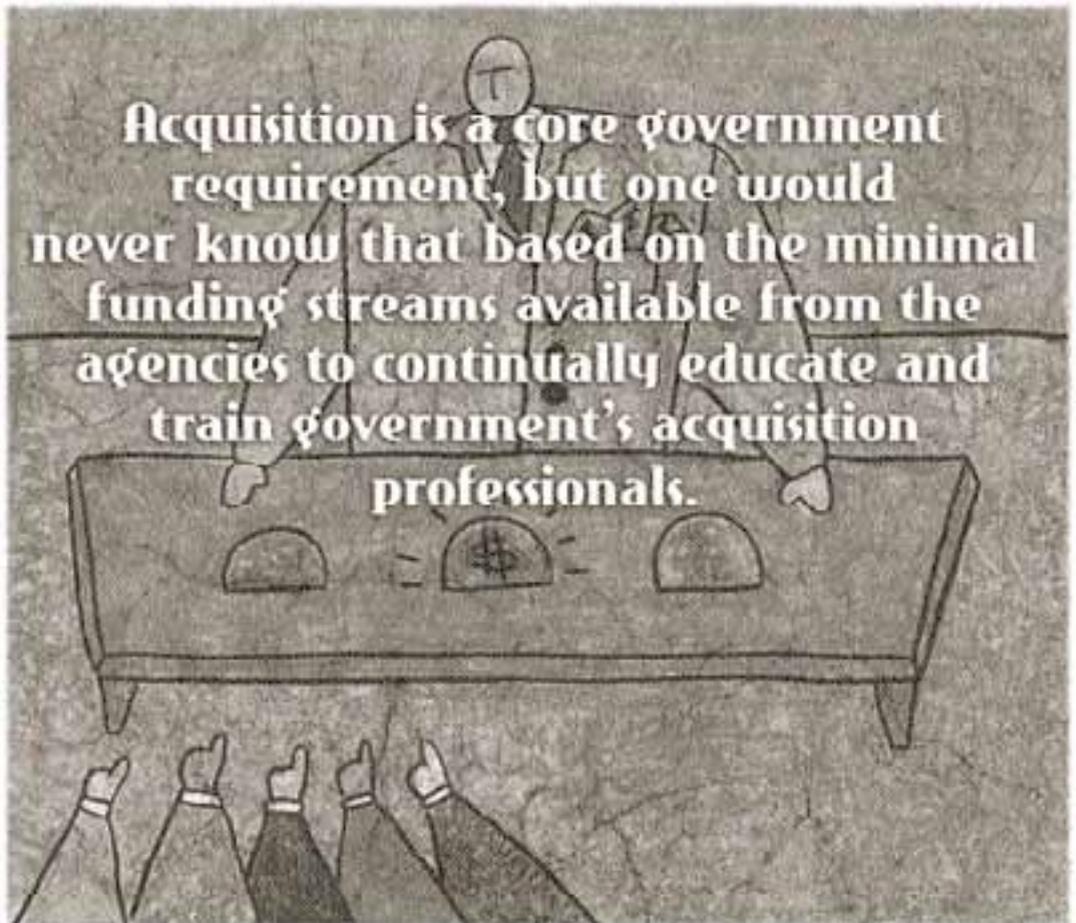
Over the last decade, we have seen a gradual elevation of the acquisition profession's stature in civilian agencies. The latest development is an important new policy memo from Federal Procurement Policy Administrator David Safavian that, among other things, directs the establishment of education and certification requirements for civilian agency acquisition professionals. Safavian's initiative is probably the most significant and challenging step yet taken in this process.

Not surprisingly, there is something of a caste system in federal procurement. Defense

Department acquisition professionals are subject to statutorily required training and certifications and benefit from the relatively well-funded Defense Acquisition University.

On the other hand, civilian agency acquisition professionals have never had the requisite resources, let alone a statutory mandate that recognizes their centrality to the functioning of government.

The Federal Acquisition Institute has tried valiantly to bridge the gap, and some civilian agencies, such as the Treasury Department, have attempted their own internal organizations. But overall, acquisition workforce development and training is not a budget priority.



That's why Rep. Tom Davis (R-Va.) created the Federal Acquisition Workforce Training Fund in the 2003 Services Acquisition Reform Act. That small fund is slowly growing and is devoted solely to supplementing funding for civilian agency acquisition workforce training, which Safavian's new policy mandates.

However, the training fund is only one part of what should be a broader commitment throughout government to training the acquisition workforce. Acquisition is a core government requirement, but one would never know that based on the minimal funding streams available from the agencies to continually educate and train government's acquisition professionals.

Soloway is president of the Professional Services Council and former deputy under secretary of defense (acquisition reform).

Wynne Bids Farewell to Defense Acquisition Workforce

June 3, 2005

I have been relieved by Mr. Ken Krieg as the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics. Ken joins us, as many of you know, from his position as Director, Program Analysis and Evaluation for the Office of the Secretary of Defense.



I want to thank each and every one of you for your steadfast support. I know that you will provide that same support to Ken. Our accomplishments in each of the AT&L Goals and Objectives have advanced the interests of both the Warfighter and the Taxpayer. You should be proud of the work you have done.

Whether in the immediate AT&L family, including our direct support agencies, or in the larger Defense Acquisition Workforce, your efforts are known worldwide as professional to a fault and very much appreciated.

Barbara and I wish all of you the best of success in your future endeavors.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'M. Wynne'.

Michael W. Wynne

Given the limited potential of the new workforce training fund, the Office of Management and Budget should take the next step by requiring agencies to fence off more funding to train acquisition professionals. How else can agencies effectively deliver the results demanded of them?

Safavian's decision to literally and figuratively align FAI and DAU is also a significant step in the process, but it is only a step. DAU does not have the seat space or financial capacity to provide training to the civilian agency acquisition community. Some Defense components today are already experiencing training shortfalls because of DAU's capacity limitations.

Even as DAU and FAI align their requirements and curricula, other sources of high quality training—including highly capable, experienced companies and professional organizations such as the National Contract Management Association—must be more actively brought into the partnership.

Only through a careful, robust effort by DAU to grant certification equivalencies to courses taught by non-DAU providers can the full training needs of civilian agencies and many Pentagon activities, be met.

DAU President Frank Anderson has done remarkable work in putting DAU on a transformational path. Now is the time to step up the pace of external partnering to ensure that those who need training can get it.

Finally, Safavian faces a formidable challenge in establishing the training and certification requirements for the civilian agency acquisition workforce. Aligning the plethora of disciplines—from contracting to program management and more—with the appropriate educational and certification requirements may be among his greatest, and most important, challenges.

With the ineffable, continued growth in the public-private partnership, development of an increasingly skilled, trusted and innovative government acquisition workforce is absolutely essential. Acquisition is a core government requirement. It's about time that the resources and other support available to the acquisition community reflect that reality.

The author welcomes questions and comments and can be contacted at soloway@pscouncil.org.

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