

# Obtaining the Right Solution for a Capability Gap

## The Program Manager and the Acquisition Action Officer

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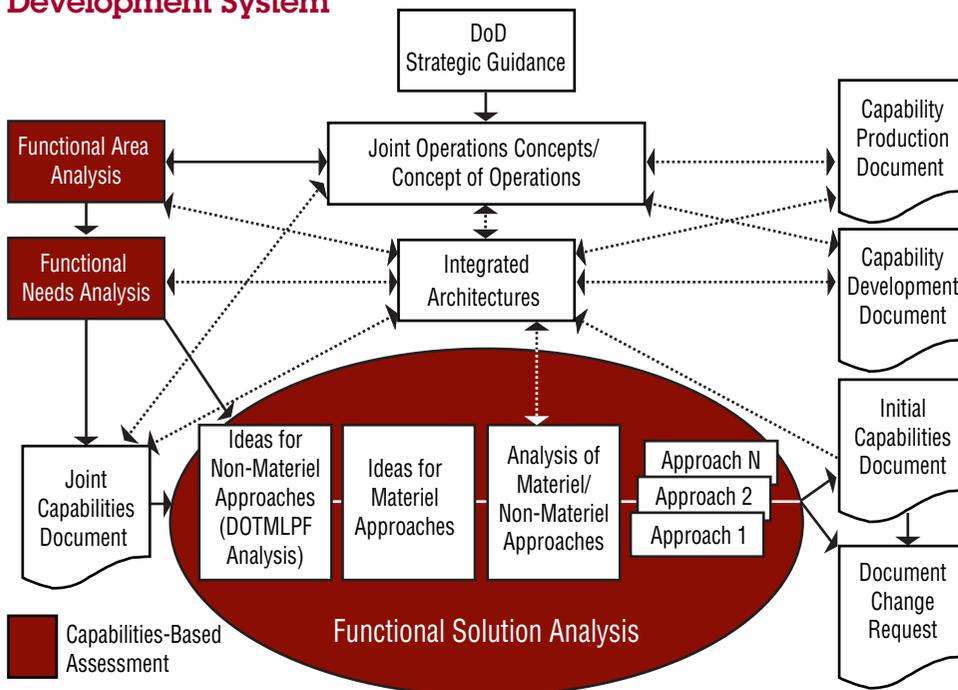
Recent authorization act language has generated a renewed interest in the relationship between the Department of Defense's Service acquisition action officers—called Department of the Army systems coordinators in the Army, requirements officers in Navy and Marine Corps, and program element monitors in the Air Force—and the requirements and acquisition communities. This article focuses on the relationship between acquisition action officers at the service level and their respective service PMs.

Since the beginning of fiscal year 2007, DoD's leadership has increasingly focused on how the training of those involved in requirements generation can be improved. In Section 801 of the fiscal year 2007 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), the Office of the Secretary of

Defense was directed to develop a training program to certify both military and civilian personnel of DoD who are assigned to positions responsible for generating requirements for major defense acquisition programs (MDAPs). The under secretary of defense for acquisition, technology and logistics, consulting with the Defense Acquisition University, will oversee the implementation of this training program. This new training curriculum became available to personnel at the end of September. The proposed outline for this training program will consist of a three-tiered approach: a basic and an intermediate online course, followed by an advanced resident course.

The goal of the language in the FY 2007 NDAA was to provide a formalized training program that will enhance the ability of requirements management personnel to trans-

Figure 1: The Joint Capabilities Integration and Development System



late the needs of the warfighter into clearly defined capabilities. The ability to achieve this translation is critical and, as with most efforts within DoD, is highly dependent upon effective communications and strong relationships, particularly between the acquisition action officers (the requirements advocate) and their respective program offices (the deliverers of capability).

The nature of the relationship between the acquisition action officers and the program office is not well understood by those within the acquisition workforce who are not directly involved in the formalized process of capabilities-based planning. Let's begin with an overview of the process, after which

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we can return to a discussion of the relationship between the two key players involved in the delivery of capabilities to the warfighter.

### Overview of the Requirements Process

DoD uses a capabilities-based assessment (CBA) approach to identify gaps in capabilities within its military forces. A capability gap is the inability to perform a task because of a lack of equipment, training, doctrine, or support. Examples of common capabilities gaps are:

- Being unable to determine enemy presence and intent
- Being unable to launch or to task a reconnaissance platform

- Being unable to download or apply reconnaissance information.

The Joint Capabilities Integration and Development System is used to identify and validate these capability gaps, as shown in Figure 1. This approach encourages the innovation, flexibility, and teamwork that are the essence of successful joint warfare in today's threat environment. CBA begins with identification of capability gaps. Instead of focusing on hardware, JCIDS focuses on interoperable solutions for the joint warfighter.

In a CBA, all involved are focused on ensuring warfighters have required capabilities by supporting three processes:

- Validation of capability gaps based on potential future missions with associated threats (JCIDS)
- Acquisition of capabilities the warfighters need (defense acquisition system)
- Budgeting for the necessary capabilities under appropriate resource constraints (planning, programming, budgeting, and execution).

To expand further, let's explore who is involved in those activities from a program office perspective.

### External to the Program Office

As mentioned previously, acquisition action officers have different titles depending on the Service. No matter the Service, in nearly all cases, acquisition action officers are military members assigned to service staffs as part of their career progression. Their job is to facilitate the transition of capability gaps into the acquisition process. They must call upon their military expertise, balance the immediate needs with future capabilities, and fight the budget wars. Acquisition action officers must work closely with their Service requirements community to understand the warfighter's problems, needs, or gaps in capabilities. Their role is to translate those needs and problems into specific outcomes for the PMs so they can then move through the acquisition process.

For the acquisition action officer, the output of the functional solution analysis adjudicates whether a non-materiel or materiel solution will be pursued. Key to this process is answering the DOTMLPF question—that no changes to **D**octrine, **O**rganization, **T**raining, **M**aterial, **L**eadership and education, **P**ersonnel, or **F**acilities can provide a solution for the capability gap. Once these capabilities are identified as requiring a materiel solution, the acquisition action officer works with the acquisition community (program office) to identify the technologies needed to fulfill the needed capability.

### Internal to the Program Office

The default solution to a capability gap is a non-materiel solution such as a change in doctrine. When a non-mate-

## Obtaining the right solution to the capability gap for the warfighter is a team sport.

riel solution cannot be identified, the acquisition community becomes involved and a program office (or integrated product team within an existing program office) is chartered to develop a plan to deliver a technologically viable and affordable solution to resolve the capability gap.

Obtaining the right solution to the capability gap for the warfighter is a team sport. Neither the acquisition action officer nor the program office can deliver the solution without the trusted engagement of the other party working with the requirements community. The process of delivering a materiel solution is complex and is greatly dependent upon accurate communications and collaboration among these entities for the common good of the end users. With the direction provided in the FY 2007 NDAA, it would seem that DoD's acquisition action officers are struggling with their role or their relationship with their assigned program offices. To better understand how well typical acquisition action officers support the JCIDS process with their program offices, we structured a short survey and solicited inputs from a sample of acquisition programs across the various Services.

The questions we asked of the Service acquisition programs and their respective acquisition action officers focused around the interaction they had with each other when collaborating on providing the capability gap solution.

After receiving the inputs from the various PMs and acquisition action officers, we compiled the responses and identified the common themes and lessons learned. The results indicated a wide range of responses among both groups. This could be attributed to differences in services or, as the FY 2007 NDAA identified, that there is a true need for a formalized training program for those involved in the generation of requirements for major acquisition programs.

### Program Office Perspective

The questions we asked the program offices focused on expectations from both sides and the mutual challenges to be overcome. In summary the program office perspective highlighted the following:

- Effective communication with the key program stakeholders is essential.
- The acquisition action officer must be a constant and accurate program advocate.

- The acquisition action officer needs to provide understandable (unambiguous), consistent (verifiable, traceable), buildable (feasible), testable requirements.
- The learning curves are steep for an acquisition action officer to understand his or her job and the roles of the acquisition community and the PM.

We also asked the PMs, "If you were to provide a key quote about the 'care and feeding' of your acquisition action officer, what would it be?" Their responses were as follows:

- Educate and communicate.
- The acquisition action officer is your friend.
- Trust your acquisition action officer with the good and bad of your program.

### Acquisition Action Officer Perspective

The questions we asked the acquisition action officers focused on expectations from both PM and the acquisition action officer, training, and job responsibilities. In summary the acquisition action officer perspective highlighted the following:

- Have the program keep the acquisition action officer informed and connected with the program office.
- Foster accurate communications both ways and be proactive about it.
- It is more a question of what we can do to help each other and collaborate.
- Properly identify requirements and coordinate funding of the solutions.
- Training is available, but it is a constant struggle to keep up with new personnel.
- Excellent training is available for the acquisition action officer role and for acquisition processes (through DAU).
- Mentoring is mandatory.
- It takes one to 1.5 years for an acquisition action officer to become proficient.
- Training is available, but on-the-job training is the rule for coming up to speed.

One response stated, "The department is missing the boat in this respect; the greatest risk-reduction effort you can make is to produce good clean unambiguous requirements." Another said, "I don't know of a certification level for requirements folks. Big hole in the system here."

### Key Points to Learn

After reviewing the responses from both a PM and an acquisition action officer perspective, several key themes emerge. The first is that accurate, timely, two-way communications are fundamental to the success in identification and avocation of any program. Along those same lines, the PM and the acquisition action officer must maintain good situational awareness of how the program appears from the others' vantage point. For this working relationship to truly be effective, there must be trust and the de-

## Defense AT&L Executive Editor Retires



Judith M. Greig, managing editor and most recently executive editor of *Defense AT&L*, retired Sept. 30 after a career of more than 35 years in communications and publications management, 20 of those years as a self-employed writer-editor.

Greig became managing editor of the Defense Acquisition University's flagship publication in September 2003 and oversaw the extensive redesign and repositioning of the magazine as it changed from *Program Manager* to *Defense AT&L*. She brought a keen sense of wit and humor to the magazine that has gained the attention and approval of several senior Department of Defense officials. In January 2008, Greig became the executive editor of the magazine and the senior editor for the DAU Press.

Before coming to DAU, Greig served as an independent promotional writer and marketing consultant, with a wide array of clients in the telecommunications and technology industries. She was recognized with 16 awards for her promotional writing for the high technology marketplace. Until recently, she also served as an adjunct faculty member in the Department of English at Northern Virginia Community College. Greig has a bachelor's degree in Italian language and literature from the University of London in the United Kingdom and a master's degree in English literature from Wayne State University in Detroit, Mich., where she also taught.

In her retirement, Greig plans to travel in Europe, especially Italy. *Defense AT&L* will continue to benefit from her talents in between her travels, as Greig will support the magazine as a contributing editor.

There must be trust and the desire for open and honest engagement in the partnership.

sire for open and honest engagement in the partnership. What is good for the program is good for the warfighter.

The last point to draw from these responses is that while some acquisition action officers obtain access to the training resources they need, it isn't consistent across the spectrum. Some acquisition action officers have to rely upon mentoring and on-the-job training as their primary means of coming up to speed in their role. Also, even in the best of circumstances, it is still a one to 1.5 years maturation period until they are comfortable and proficient in their role.

These PM and acquisition action officer responses are well aligned with the thoughts of Army Maj. Gen. William Troy, vice director J-8, Joint Staff. "By ensuring that everyone involved has a common understanding of the process," Troy says, "we can avoid misinterpretation of requirements and ensure we deliver warfighting systems that perform to the level required by the warfighter, are affordable, and are available when required." Furthermore, the acquisition action officer and the PM need to devote energy to fostering a good working relationship with the requirements manager, he notes.

The general's comments relate directly to the guidance provided DoD under the FY 2007 NDAA and why the under secretary of defense for acquisition, technology and logistics, along with DAU, is pursuing the establishment of the Requirements Management Certification Program. To better understand how the RMCP will support the requirements-generation community as well as benefit the acquisition and resourcing community, let's examine the structure of the training further.

### New Learning Resources

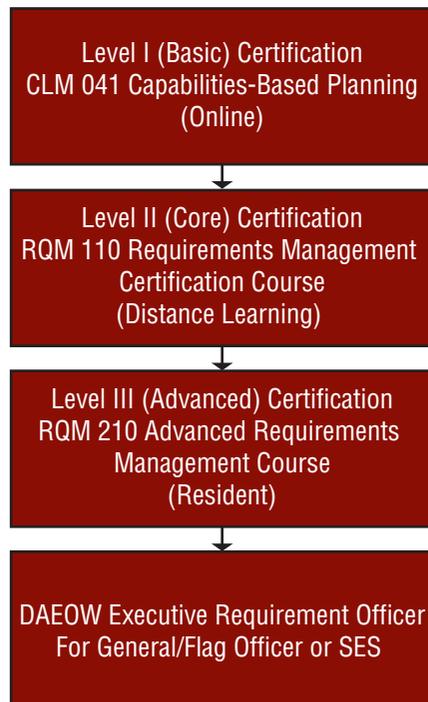
The first significant step in developing the training was to bring the requirements, acquisition, and resourcing communities together to establish the competencies associated with the requirements officer/requirements managers. To consider and leverage existing learning assets during the curriculum development methodology, DAU worked closely with the Services, components, and agencies to crosswalk these assets with the requirements management officer competencies. The goal was to target the action officer level in preparation for the development of the learning assets.

DAU created and developed a three-phased methodology (Figure 2) for deploying learning assets. The first phase, completed in October 2007, was the fielding of a continuous learning module titled Capabilities-Based Planning (CLM 041). To date, more than 2,400 requirements professionals have completed the course. A requirements community conference/workshop was held in August 2007. More than 60 requirements community members from the Joint Staff, combatant commands, Services, agencies, and the intelligence community attended the three-day session.

Phase 2 is the Core Concepts for Requirements (CCRM) Management Certification Training distance learning module, which went online in July. It will provide a robust treatment of acquisition and requirements lessons targeted for the requirements professionals. The course will address the full set of competencies that have been defined for requirements management personnel. As a distance learning course, instruction is self-paced. DAU instructors will be available to clarify course materials and concepts, if required

The basic and core requirements management training certification courses will be the foundation to meet the minimum statutory requirements set by Section 801 of the FY 2007 NDAA. Section 801 requires “the under secretary of defense for acquisition, technology and logistics, in consultation with the Defense Acquisition University, to establish competency requirements and a certification training program to improve the ability of civilian and military personnel of the Department of Defense to generate requirements that are added to Major Defense

**Figure 2: Requirements Training and Certification Concept**



Acquisition Programs (MDAPs).” The next step, phase 3, will consist of the development of both an advanced resident training course and an executive course.

The advanced requirements management course will be classroom training for requirements writing team supervisors, team leaders, and other key requirements process owners within DoD. It is not required for certification. It will use case studies and exercises to strengthen analysis, evaluation, and decision making associated with defining, managing, and resourcing capabilities for service members. DAU will develop the course in 2009.

The executive course will provide an alternative certification for flag and general officers and senior civilian officials. This course is offered either at DAU or at other locations, depending on need, and began in September 2008.

### A Common Understanding

Successful outcomes within DoD’s acquisition system begin with the requirements community identifying, validating, and prioritizing well-defined and well-understood capability needs. This necessitates continual engagement with the acquisition and resourcing communities throughout the acquisition life cycle. Therefore, as DoD stands up this training program for requirements professionals, it is essential that the participants within “Big A” acquisition understand the process for translating requirements into all of the required acquisition for delivery of capabilities to DoD’s Service members. This will continue to be a key challenge to all of the requirements-generation team because future requirements development will occur in a fiscally constrained environment.

Our hope is that this article helps improve the dialogue and efficiency between the PM and the acquisition action officer members of the process and that the comments provided aid in the development of a true team sport approach.

**Acquisition action officers must work closely with their Service requirements community to understand the warfighter’s problems, needs, or gaps in capabilities.**

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