

Doing the Same, Expecting Better

Consider the development of weapon systems for the U.S. military: Chuck Spinney made the cover of *Time* magazine back in 1983—that's 25 years ago—for documenting to Congress that the acquisition system was getting worse at an increasing rate.

Reality has not escaped the people who work in the system. What we have, in other words, is a stupid system composed of bright people, lots of bright, well-educated, and often experienced folks working diligently to try to solve the wrong problems. This fact isn't lost on the project development community, which, from time to time, produces some brilliant insights on itself.

Dan Ward, Gabe Mounce, and the other members of the group that call themselves "rogue project leaders," for example, have been writing about the absurdity of the system for years. Dan's latest article, "Call Me Sisyphus," is well worth a read. Although Dan didn't point it out, it took the F-22 22 years to go from the initial studies to initial operating capability. The next fighter in the pipeline, by the way, is the F-35.

What's the solution? Dan is right that more control mechanisms (mandated reports, plans, procedures, reviews, etc.), more "reform," more tinkering is just going to produce longer delays, higher costs, and even greater mismatches with the world situation when its products finally appear in the field. As he points out, though, we used to be pretty good at developing weapons, and some organizations can still imagine and create products that meet the needs of their customers. Toyota, as he notes, is not only good at this, they're getting better. Going in the opposite direction from DoD, as it were.

It's also worth pointing out that Toyota operates in a highly competitive work environment. It may take a while, as GM and Chrysler are now demonstrating, but let competition work and the result is inevitable. Of course, competition is exactly what we don't have in DoD program development. After source selection, which for the F-22 was in 1991, the program became a monopoly, which leads to an observation that I made years ago in *Neither Shall the Sword* (p. 68): "If you can't afford two sources for a system, you certainly can't afford one."

Chet Richards
Author, *Certain to Win*

Political Reasoning Perspective

This is in response to Maj. Dan Ward's article, "Call Me Sisyphus," published in the March-April 2009 edition of *Defense AT&L* magazine. I have my students read extracts from Deborah Stone's seminal book, *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making*. She provides a wonderful comparison between what she terms the "rationality project" and the world associated with the "polity" (in short, she compares economic rationality with political reasoning).

As a result, I reframe the issue of acquisition reform... not arguing that we lack rationality, but acknowledging that many of these "calls for reform" are really framing the situation (incorrectly) as a problem of economic rationality. That is, we cringe because of the "inefficiencies" of the system—our criteria are rationalized around economic decision-making.

From a political reasoning perspective, the rise and fall and rise and so on of acquisitions tend to make better sense. A political reasoning perspective may also provide explanation as to why we seem to continue to muddle through rather than be as efficient as we were in the 50s. My small understanding of history aside, I think one explanation might be that the idea of creating ballistic missiles was near apolitical in that first decade of the Cold War. The less debate in the political arena

Never Too Busy to Learn

I liked Lon Roberts' article, "Too Busy to Think," in the September-October 2008 issue of *Defense AT&L* magazine. It gave us readers a good perspective about the pitfalls of using the all-too-common technique of multi-tasking in today's environment. I liked the author's point about the multi-tasker thinking—that he/she is doing an effective job of multi-tasking when the opinion that really matters is the one of the person who the multi-tasker interacts with. The author also made a good point about multi-tasking involving rote tasks versus more complex cognitive tasks. The eight points Mr. Roberts made in his article were all very valuable.

Bravo to Wayne Turk for his article "An Uncommon Attribute," in the November-December issue of *Defense AT&L*. I would add one recommendation to that excellent list: Read *Defense AT&L* magazine! Actually, that is

(the less ambiguous and more certain the answers are), the more likely we can resort to economic criteria for decision-making. Systems engineering could prevail over multiple, political interpretations.

With a high VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) environment, the more arguments take on a political form, with more interpretations of “the problem” and “the solution” possible. Hence, political reasoning is essentially an “unstructurable” decision-making process fraught with “organized anarchy,” as some have described it.

So, I would reframe the situation—around trying NOT to use economic rationality (or philosophically structural functionalism) as the paradigm to judge how we acquire defense systems. The more VUCA, the more that political reasoning (with divergent causal stories, solutions-looking-for-problems, and guile) provides more explanatory power. Perhaps our larger scale acquisition program managers should study political reasoning. I’d say reading Machiavelli (and Deborah Stone) might serve us better than reading John Locke (or the PPBE process as intended).

Dr. Christopher Parapone
U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command

really a subset of look at lessons learned. I save all my back issues of the magazine, but they are all out there on defense acquisition Web sites as well just waiting for people to read them.

I am reading a book called *CrazyBusy: Overstretched, Overbooked, and About to Snap! Strategies for Coping in a World Gone ADD* by Edward M. Hallowell. It makes the point that too many people are on overload to the point where they don’t have time to read and learn. Another point in the book is that people mistake speed for knowledge/wisdom. Taking the time to research, study, and learn should be regarded with patience and respect, not disdain for being slow. It’s easy to do the first thing that comes into one’s mind.

Al Kaniss
Naval Air Systems Command

sis of its contracting acquisition process for the third block procurement of submarines. In October 2007, Drakeley initiated a three-day Lean event held to improve performance and identify, analyze, and eliminate redundancy and waste as the program office moves toward another eight-ship multi-year procurement contract in fiscal year 2009.

“We looked from end-to-end at the entire contracting process,” said Johnson. “We looked at the processes for the procurement request, the request for proposal, and the bid and the negotiations process. We looked at lessons learned from the last procurement process and what was useful and what was not. In the end, a more detailed and specific contract was created. I now wonder how we ever did a contract without holding such an event.”

The contract for the third block of submarines was expected to be awarded by the end of fiscal year 2008.

“We’re not waiting for the Block III contract to make process improvement changes,” said Johnson. “As we go through and learn how to do things better, we are implementing them where it makes sense. And we are seeing real savings in the price of the ships, and I expect that to continue in the future.”

Since that first event held some 24 months ago, Lean has become ingrained as part of the process within the VIRGINIA Class Program Office. Some 35 Lean events involving the program office have been held. Weekly teleconferences on Lean initiatives are held, and as improvements to the processes are made, they are implemented. *USS NORTH CAROLINA* and *USS NEW HAMPSHIRE* have already benefited from some of those process improvements.

Last December, the VIRGINIA Class Program Office held its second EPS. During the session, some 41 new Lean initiatives were identified and prioritized. In each case, the opportunity costs, objective status, and responsible office were recognized to establish a baseline metric.

“Lean creates a better sense of expectation and communication between everyone who is involved,” said Johnson. “It is a vehicle or tool that lays everything out using a common language and methodology that allows you to see what is being done, who is doing it and what is being done to whom.”

NOTE: The Navy signed the VIRGINIA Class Block III contract—a five-year, \$14 billion multi-year procurement contract for eight VIRGINIA Class submarines—on Dec. 22, 2008. The contract also meets the VIRGINIA Class Program’s mandate to reduce acquisition costs by approximately 20 percent for the fiscal year 2012 ships.

To learn more about Lean Six Sigma and its methodology, contact the Team Submarine Lean Office at 202-781-1737.