"Tools for Deciphering Best Value" by William Sims Curry in the May-June 2017 issue of Defense AT&L magazine is an example of how, given enough time, viewpoints swing back to those held long before. A little more than 12 years ago, Defense AT&L published an article (in two parts) in the September-October and November-December 2004 issues on Best Value or Trade-off source selection methodology. In 2004, this form of source selection was not commonly used across the acquisition community; instead, the very quantitative scoring system propounded by Mr. Curry was much more the norm.

What is described now as a weakness was, in 2004, described as a strength. It is best understood that no one single process will be the best for all situations. But that is what we all too often try to do. I will state that there are source selections where the quantitative methods of source selection may be the best, and the particular case cited by the article appears (as presented) to be one of those scenarios. But, for a very complicated technical evaluation, I would suggest that quantitative methods are not going to be the best solution. Several things involved lend credibility to my statement.

One is that—even just talking about a weapon system’s technical side—if everything is going to add up to 100 percent for total weighting, one of two things will be the case: Either no technical requirement will have a very high weight or some of the technical requirements will have such little weighting as to make us ask why we should bother to evaluate this. And that only increases when you add the nontechnical areas of management, risk, cost and past performance.

The second thing is that requirements interrelationships are not necessarily static. By itself, the technical requirement may have a relative importance of A, B and C. However, if you are able to achieve objective values of all three, there may be a synergistic effect and the total overall impact of all three proves to be greater than A+B+C.

Now, let’s consider that some performance values may be worth a higher cost. That sort of messes with the value accorded to cost and price. So, there was a reason we started switching in the early 2000s to the greater use of non-quantitative best value, “squishy” as it may seem.

One last point. Let’s look at a sentence from the article’s conclusion: “DoD would benefit from use of the TWS [Total Weighted Score] contractor selection process that distinctly identifies the contractor offering the best value proposal, simplifies the technical/cost trade-off decision, and inhibits procurement corruption.” Let’s particularly look at the last part: “... and inhibits procurement corruption.” Let’s face it: If we have a real problem with procurement corruption, we have some fundamental issues that no single source selection method will cure. There is a way around any single system. It’s just a matter of having enough motivation to find it.

Respectfully,

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(The letter writer is a retired Air Force civilian, with more than 30 years of experience supporting acquisition in a number of different capacities [project manager, test, engineering, research scientist, and acquisition facilitator]. He previously worked for the Brooks Air Force Base Center for Acquisition Excellence in San Antonio, Texas.)

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR
Defense AT&L magazine encourages its readers to comment and contribute to the ongoing discussion in these pages of defense acquisition.

MDAP/MAIS Program Manager Changes

With the assistance of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Defense AT&L magazine publishes the names of incoming and outgoing program managers for major defense acquisition programs (MDAPs) and major automated information system (MAIS) programs. Below are listed the leadership changes reported for both civilian and military program managers in March and April 2017.

**Navy/Marine Corps**

- **CAPT John Dougherty** relieved **CAPT Jaime Engdahl** as program manager for Precision Strike Weapons (PMA 201) on March 23.
- **CAPT Paul Mitchell** relieved **CAPT Ralph Lee** as program manager for the Strike Planning and Execution Systems Program Office (PMA 281) on March 3.
- **Dr. Regan Campbell** relieved **CAPT Daniel Brintzinghoffer** as program manager for the Frigate Program Office (PMS 515) on April 7.