

ARMY CONTRACT SPECIALISTS' LACK OF DESIRE TO BECOME CONTRACTING OFFICERS

SSCF RESEARCH REPORT



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Senior Service College Fellowship**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to explore if and why acquisition personnel serving as contract specialists express antipathy toward becoming warranted contracting officers. If the research finds that antipathy exists, the researcher desires to gain an understanding of what it will take to motivate current and future Army contract specialists to become contracting officers and thus possibly future leaders in the Army's Acquisition Workforce.

It is a well-known perception that there is a shortage of contracting officers in the U.S. Army Acquisition Corps (Senators Collins, McCaskill and Bennett introduced two bills to bolster the Federal Acquisition Workforce, see Anderson, 2009; the Army needs more contracting staff, said Brigadier General Lee Price, see Walker, 2011). This perception has had an injurious impact on numerous Commands and agencies, in terms of providing timely goods and services. These shortages are in part due to the aging workforce where numerous contracting personnel are retiring and the reduction in numbers of contracting personnel in the 1990s from the drawdown of the cold war. Also affecting this is competition with our industry partners for personnel with identical skill sets to provide support to the Services.

The results of this research will show a variety of data, since there currently are four generational groups of contract specialists in the workforce.

(AMC) in October 2008 (ACC web site, 2012). Despite such a tremendous contracting responsibility, the ACC's contracting personnel seem to be stagnant and declining in certain areas, which could be due to the shortage of personnel, thus causing a lack of enthusiasm.

The goal of this research effort is to analyze issues contributing to stagnant behavior on the part of contracting personnel, and declining career advancement opportunities. The research also will provide insight on how to make improvements for the use of senior Army leadership and others who desire to use it. The Department of Defense (DoD) indicates there is a shortage of experienced acquisition/contracting personnel in the Defense Acquisition Workforce (Walker, 2011). According to Section 1 of the Defense Acquisition Workforce Strategy (2009), the president, Congress, secretary of defense, and DoD senior leaders are committed to restoring, shaping, and improving the acquisition workforce. The department's strategy is supported by workforce initiatives that will grow, enhance, and sustain a high-quality workforce. This includes (1) recruiting and hiring, (2) retention and recognition incentives, and (3) training and workforce development initiatives.

Before the researcher reviews the DoD claim that there is a shortage of experienced acquisition/contracting personnel in the Defense Acquisition Workforce, the researcher will provide the reader pertinent background regarding contracting officers. The definition per the DoD Instruction 5000.66 and the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) Part 1.6 is that a contracting officer (CO or KO) is a person who can bind the United States government to a contract. This is limited to the scope of authority delegated to the contracting officer by the head of the agency. Second, in the DoD, the acronym KO is used, instead of CO, so as not to be confused with commanding officer. The KO enters into, administers, or terminates contracts and makes related determinations and findings.

As the researcher moves through the chapters, the information discussed will reveal that while many contracting practices and procedures have changed over time, much within the career field remains the same. There was a time when every person new to the contracting career field had a goal of becoming a contracting officer. Contracting officers to the field of contracting could be likened to everyone wanting a piece of the American Dream. The culminating event for a contracting officer is to achieve/receive a warrant, an indication of trust and intellect as a professional in a demanding profession.

Purpose of the Study

The goal of this research effort is to explore why acquisition personnel serving as contract specialists express antipathy toward becoming warranted contracting officers. The contracting officer position is the pinnacle for career progression as part of the contract specialist career path and possibly/usually a stepping stone toward future supervisory and/or management positions. In researching this matter, the author will utilize a mixed method research approach which employs both qualitative and quantitative research design. Qualitative research is “pragmatic, interpretive and grounded in lived experiences” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 2). This design effort will be beneficial in the analysis of survey data, questionnaires, and interview questions.

The study first will research, analyze, and describe data, then analyze specific reasons contract specialists hold this view and provide possible solutions that might reverse this trend. The primary focus of this research will be the ACC. However, this potential trend might not be limited to just the ACC. While the primary emphasis of this research study focuses on the Army, there also are parallel implications for the federal government’s application. The author believes the research results will yield a variety of data that will be useful to other agencies within and outside the DoD.

Significance of this Study

In order to understand why contract specialists within the ACC are experiencing antipathy toward becoming contracting officers, this research will analyze contributing factors and the impact to the Army contracting program. The research data may provide more information on how widespread this issue is throughout the ACC. If the results are reflective of a widespread issue, research data along with recommendations will be provided to senior Army and DoD leadership for execution of action to resolve this issue.

As previously stated, the ACC, AMC, is responsible for all Army contracting except for the USACE, INSCOM, National Guard, PEO-STRICOM, and the MEDCOM. As such, it is responsible for 70 percent (\$86 billion in contracts awarded for FY 2011) of the Army’s contracting. Despite such a tremendous responsibility, the Army’s contracting personnel seem averse to accepting additional authority, leaving senior Army leadership scrambling to address the issues. In that effort, many leaders believe the DoD measure to hire approximately 20,000 new workforce members will provide the critical need—more people. The Defense Acquisition

Workforce Strategy (2009) and “The Future of Acquisition Excellence: Army, Navy, and Air Force Acquisition Strategies” (Thomsen, Thompson & Shackelford, 2009) further indicate that 26 percent (approximately 5,385) of the 20,000 new workforce members will be hired for the contracting career field, thus increasing the field by 23 percent based on the FY 2008 baselines. As indicated by the *Report of the Commission on Army Acquisition and Program Management in Expeditionary Operations* (Gansler Report, 2007), the Army currently is experiencing a shortage of senior-level, seasoned civilian and military contracting officers. The Gansler Report (2007) also examined how the shortage of acquisition personnel impacts expeditionary contracting activities.

The Gansler Commission’s finding that the Army has not adopted five vital elements that contribute to responsive acquisition activity supports the overall concern that additional seasoned contracting officers would help improve the acquisition program. Along with contracting and contract management, the other four are financial management, civilian and military personnel, training and education and doctrine, and regulation and processes.

The shortage of contracting officers has adversely affected numerous Commands and agencies in terms of providing timely goods and services (BG Price’s statement as reported by Walker, 2011). The shortage of contracting officers also has been blamed for contracting problems such as selection of improper contract types, poor acquisition planning, lack of accountability and transparency, mismanagement throughout highly visible events such as Hurricane Katrina and the Iraq and Afghanistan wars on terrorism (Project on Government Oversight (POGO), 2008).

Chapter Summary

There is a concern that contract specialists with the ACC are experiencing antipathy toward becoming contracting officers. Contracting officers are an important element in the Army’s acquisition process. As previously stated, the ACC is responsible for 70 percent of the Army’s contracting; additional resources will “restore the government’s ability to manage contracts, by rebuilding our contracting officer corps.” (President Obama, 2008). Understanding why contract specialists are experiencing antipathy is the focus of the research study. This chapter provides a discussion of the research problem, purpose, and focus. Chapter 2 will explore the literature available and relevance. Chapter 3 presents the methods used to conduct the research and discusses why qualitative interviews and survey research methods helped ground

the study. Chapter 4 presents the data analysis and discussion. Chapter 5 presents recommendations and conclusion.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The intent of this literature review is to analyze previous studies, reports, journals, articles, or books to develop an understanding of the contributing factors that form the nucleus of the research problem. While scholarly research literature on this issue is very limited, the Commission on Army Acquisition and Program Management in Expeditionary Operations' report titled *Urgent Reform Required: Army Expeditionary Contracting* (Gansler Report, 2007) discussed various findings in regard to contingency contracting problems. In addition to the shortage of personnel, the report exposed problems with outdated policies and lack of personnel training and certifications required to perform their responsibilities. This shortage of personnel—namely, contracting officers (who usually are some of the Army's more experienced personnel)—may have been a contributor to the increased opportunities for misconduct that caused the Army's Criminal Investigation Command (CID) to investigate at least 83 cases relating to wartime fraud (Associated Press [AP], 2007). The AP article stated that nearly two-dozen contracting personnel and contracting officer representatives (CORs) have been prosecuted already. The information in these reports provided a solid understanding into many of the contributing factors to weaknesses in the Army's contracting program. The authors of the Gansler Report provided a critical but constructive review of the issues and reforms needed to reform the Army contracting program. The Gansler Report was long overdue. It is unfortunate that it took war, and some of the abuses of war, to provide the spark to ignite changes that were needed long ago.

Another contributing piece of literature, the *Annual Report on the Federal Acquisition Workforce*, produced by the Federal Acquisition Institute (FAI) (FAI, 2009) summarizes workforce statistics throughout the federal government to include a breakdown of the data by the agency and military departments. For more than 30 years, FAI's *Annual Report on the Federal Acquisition Workforce* has provided workforce statistics and information about federal acquisition employees (FAI, 2009). This report provided a variety of information that aids in understanding the demographics of the DoD and U.S. Army acquisition personnel. This report will be used to help analyze the number of contract specialists and contracting officers serving the Army as of the date of the report. Information from the report also will be used to look at

current trends. The FAI provides this type of report for the entire federal government acquisition workforce.

The article, *Congress to Act on Workforce Shortage*, (Weigelt, 2007), discussed the concerns senior lawmakers had that the procurement problems related to Hurricane Katrina and the Iraq war contributed to the shortage of experienced acquisition workforce personnel. “The number of contracting officers is half the number it was in 2001, while the number of contracts doubled,” said Rep. Jim Moran, Virginia Democrat. The Weigelt article details how Rep. Moran wants to increase the agency oversight of acquisition in order to increase the number of acquisition employees. The issues of the graying workforce were mentioned as part of the shortage. Another cause was the disparity in the pay between government and private industry positions.

Rep. Moran considered requiring the DoD to use General Services Administration (GSA) support as a stop-gap measure. He directed the two agencies to meet and resolve past difference in contracting processes.

DOD Acquisition Workforce Will Grow (Weigelt, 2009) also discussed the current problems and concerns with the shortage of well-trained acquisition personnel within DoD. Mr. Weigelt further discussed former Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Robert Gates’ plan to increase the work force by 20,000 by the year 2015 to ensure the acquisition workforce can sustain itself. Mr. Weigelt’s (2009) article provided information on some of the problems with the DoD acquisition community, but it emphasized the need to correct the personnel shortage that contributed to numerous problems with the DoD acquisition environment—such as fraud, waste, and mismanagement.

Another article, *Reshaping the Federal 1102 Contracting Workforce* (Nelson, 2006), discussed how federal agencies are prepared to address the problem and challenges of a diminishing cadre of trained acquisition professionals. In particular, Mr. Nelson was addressing the 1102 series contracting personnel. The Nelson article stated that federal agencies have the opportunity to reshape the contracting workforce into a more value-added entity by addressing training of acquisition professionals. Agencies are looking at improvements or changes such as mentoring and using contracting professionals as business advisers.

A number of personnel were asked to compare the present workforce to that of 5, 10, and 15 years ago. Most stated that this present workforce is not as well trained professionally as previous contracting workforces.

Another article (Krieger 2007), analyzed the professional, educational, and business requirements for the contracting occupation and asked, “Have we [the government] gone too far?” Mr. Krieger believed the DoD and lawmakers have made a mistake by requiring a bachelor’s degree and 24 hours of business-related courses as a threshold requirement for the contracting occupational series. Mr. Krieger cited the significant numbers of the graying workforce percentages that are retiring over the next 5 to 7 years, and how the requirement for a business degree is causing undue hardship. Mr. Krieger believes that considering experience to be of equal importance to education, as is done in the private sector, and considering candidates with a wider variety of educational and professional backgrounds may enhance the pool of talented candidates available for the acquisition contracting field. A noteworthy aspect of the article was the suggestion to revisit the previous hiring process, which relied on entrance exams such as the Professional and Administrative Career Examination (PACE), although the exams are unavailable under the current statutory and rule structure. Mr. Krieger also discussed the workforce personnel shortage with incoming Federal Procurement Chief, Mr. David Safavian, who said his “biggest challenge is the reshaping of the workforce and dealing with the dwindling experience level of the workforce.” The research by Mr. Krieger for this article provided a great deal of insight into why the federal government acquisition workforce is experiencing shortages, and offers ways to improve the shortage.

E.R. Anderson (2009) analyzed two bipartisan bills from Senators Bennett, McCaskill, and Collins to bolster the Federal Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act through training and better management. The bill is designed to stress mentoring, career development and management through creating a federal acquisition management fellows program to work with a new generation of acquisition leaders. It would combine a master’s degree level academic curriculum with on-the-job-training. Political leaders feel it is imperative to have an effective acquisition system to handle the demands of rising cost of operations and other unforeseen perils. Those demands call for an effective and vital human component that has been stagnant for too many years. This particular literature supports the element of the research on the importance of well-trained human assets and the need for more contracting officers.

Government Accountability Office (GAO) Testimony to a Defense Subcommittee (2008) discussed the increased reliance by DoD contracting organizations on contractors seemingly performing inherently government functions. The concern again focused on deficient levels of government contracting personnel (GAO-08-621T). The GAO referenced the increased spending within DoD agencies on contractor support and the lack of government personnel to perform the job or provide oversight. The GAO cited numerous examples of services and actions that were inherently governmental functions which cannot be contracted out. The GAO indicated that in some instances there were more contractors supporting the Commands than government contracting and/or acquisition personnel. The GAO provided reference to the Gansler Report regarding the increase in numbers and dollars of acquisitions, but not in the personnel supporting those increases. Last, the GAO referenced the Army's plan to increase its contracting personnel by 400 additional military officers and enlisted personnel, along with 1,000 civilians.

In testimony to congressional committees, GAO discussed the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) *Acquisition Workforce Development Strategic Plan for Civilian Agencies* (GAO-10-459R). The GAO highlighted that "capacity and capability of the federal government's acquisition workforce in managing contracts has not kept pace with the increased spending for increasingly complex procurements." The GAO further highlighted that 55 percent of the acquisition workforce will be eligible for retirement in FY 2018, which will create major skill shortages. Congress enacted the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) 2009, directing the OMB to prepare an Acquisition Workforce Development Strategic Plan for federal agencies other than the DoD to develop a specific and actionable 5-year plan to increase the size of the workforce and to operate a government-wide intern program. Finally, the plan was to examine the appropriateness of growing the acquisition workforce by 25 percent over the next 5 years. The OMB plan calls for only a 5 percent workforce increase for FY 2011, stating that each agency may be at different levels and that OMB would leave it to them to execute within the above parameters.

In additional testimony to congressional committees, the GAO discussed further actions needed to enhance the DoD civilian strategic workforce plan (GAO-10-814R). The GAO was informing the committees regarding the total number of personnel in the DoD acquisition workforce (118,000) and that approximately 30 percent were eligible for retirement by March 31, 2015. They reminded the committees that the SECDEF's plan to recruit, shape, and sustain

the force it needs through rebalancing and right-sizing the acquisition workforce calls for the DoD to add another 20,000 personnel by FY 2015. In addition, the workforce plan calls for a reduction in the funding available for service support contractors. The SECDEF further announced an initiative to reduce duplication, overhead, and excess. This initiative was aimed at instilling a culture of savings and restraint across the DoD. It calls for freezing the number of General and Flag Officers at the 2010 level and reducing the number of Senior Executive Service members by 150 over 2 years. The DoD also plans a complete assessment of the critical skills and competencies of the DoD acquisition workforce.

Research by Dr. David V. Lamm and Dr. Tim Reed (2009) on *Demographics of the Contracting Workforce within the Army Contracting Command* examined the number of supervisors eligible to retire and stated one major concern with DoD's acquisition workforce has been the percentage of workers within retirement eligibility. The authors further examined the statistics that federal workers (particularly in the acquisition workforce) tend to continue working beyond retirement eligibility. FAI surveys have shown that approximately 14 percent of the federal contracting workforce in the civilian agencies could retire immediately, while 54 percent of this workforce is retirement-eligible within the next 10 years (FAI, 2008). Comparable figures for all ACC civilians show 7 percent eligible to retire immediately, and 35 percent eligible to retire within the next 10 years. Although these figures are not quite half of the federal numbers, they nonetheless represent a large portion of the skilled and knowledgeable personnel in the acquisition workforce. Drs. Lamm and Reed also highlight how the impact of the loss of experienced personnel is worrisome; the pending departure of experienced supervisors is especially disturbing.

Table 1 depicts the number and percentage of ACC supervisors eligible to retire immediately and within 5-year increments from the present date. As such, nearly twice as many supervisors were eligible to retire compared to those eligible in the ACC general contracting workforce (35 percent). Workforce planning efforts must surely include consideration of this crucial issue (pp. 28-30).

Supervisors Years to Retirement							
	NOW FY 09	< 5 Yrs	5-10 Yrs	10-15 Yrs	15-20 Yrs	>20 Yrs	
April	86	191	160	67	33	87	624
August	77	195	160	65	32	92	621
April	13.8	30.6%	25.6%	10.7%	5.3	13.9	100%
August	12.3	31.3%	25.6%	10.7%	5.1	14.7	100%

Table 1. ACC Supervisors Years to Retirement

In addition to journal articles, news stories, and research reports, the issue of acquisition workforce personnel shortages is being discussed at the highest levels of government. In a Memorandum for Chief Acquisition Officers, Senior Procurement Executives, Daniel I. Gordon (2011), administrator of the Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP); addressed several actions to enhance the DoD civilian strategic workforce plan. The administrator, through his memo, offers numerous opportunities and hiring flexibilities for ease of hiring acquisition personnel from outside and within the federal government to assist with the execution of the DoD and Civilian Agencies Acquisition Human Capital Workforce Plan. These flexibilities provide guidance for hiring veterans and persons with disabilities, student employment as interns, and direct hire authority for acquisition positions. Mr. Gordon also stressed, “An agency’s acquisition workforce is critical to ensuring taxpayer dollars are spent wisely. Hiring the best talent for the profession is a shared responsibility that requires close collaboration among agency senior leaders.”

An article by Ed Worley (2011), Special Authority Speeds Hiring in Acquisition Career Fields, indicated that the Expedited Hiring Authority (EHA) authorized by the DoD allowed the ACC to hire qualified acquisition professionals in a limited number of days or weeks vs. the 120 days or more that the normal civilian personnel system requires. The executive director of the ACC stated that the EHA provided the ability to compete for and quickly hire qualified contract specialists from the private sector. Mr. Worley added that EHA is a wonderful tool. He said that if the tool is used the way it is intended to be used, the ACC can strengthen its acquisition workforce.

Other pertinent research that focused on the limited DoD acquisition resources was done by Karen E. Allen, James W. Doran, and Bonnie L. Westbrook (2011), which detailed the impact of recruitment efforts and the EHA. DoD implemented EHA to allow for the recruitment and

appointment of highly qualified candidates to higher acquisition positions, as opposed to hiring candidates at the entry level regardless of experience. Multiple organizations provided feedback on what could be done to improve the use of EHA. One was to establish a database of qualified applicants, which an organization could utilize on a continuous basis in conducting invitation-only job fairs as well as an ongoing expedited recruitment source. One organization worked with the Civilian Human Resources Agency (CHRA) to set up a focused recruitment team that handled only EHA for a test period. The organization stated that this team was not fully utilized and suggested reinstating the special recruitment team with better marketing for the hiring authority process. One suggestion was to educate managers and hiring officials and to use EHA when no other authority is applicable. One organization recommended lowering the grade to GS-08s and below to allow greater flexibility in using EHA. One organization stated that its Civilian Personnel Operations Center (CPOC) would only allow vacancy announcements to be open for a minimum of 5 days instead of 1 day.

Regarding EHA, the data indicate two major problems regarding use of EHA. The first problem identified in the responses is the inflexibility of this program to fill higher-level positions. This problem can be further subdivided into three fundamental elements. One is the ineffective methodology for comparing civilian job experience to similar positions in federal employment. This technique employs unique, often very specific, procurement and contracting experience requirements for a position. The unique, specific experience requirements typically eliminate all civilian commercial contracting experience as being applicable. Second, finding qualified candidates at higher-grade levels is especially challenging because candidates often fail to meet experience required to rate them highly qualified. Even when candidates have the qualifying experience, it may be very difficult to meet the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA) certification requirements for that position within the required 24 months. The third element of the problem is the tendency of the organizations to be inundated with applicants who fail to meet the basic qualifications for the solicited positions. This results in the organization expending excessive time to filter out unqualified candidates. Last is the second major problem—educating organizations to properly apply EHA in their recruiting activities (Allen, Doran & Westbrook, 2011). The fix here is twofold. The organizations must understand the EHA process and be willing to talk with CHRA, CPOC, and other sources that can assist

them with it. The human resources and senior leadership must be energetic and proactive in working the process.

In literature from the Business Executives for National Security (BENS), an article titled *Getting to the Best: Reforming the Defense Acquisition Enterprise* (BENS, 2009), provided information from a panel of experts on ways the defense acquisition industry can improve. The panel of experts was formed from the Task Force on Defense Acquisition Law and Oversight. The Business Executives for National Security formed the panel because it felt a responsibility as citizens, based on their experience from previous acquisition, logistics, and/or support roles as civil servants, to help the defense industry determine causes and produce solutions to the problem of workforce shortages. The one panel believed it was imperative that DoD receive the best results to improve the process of acquiring goods and services for the military forces. Second, the best results were seen needed to help simplify an acquisition process that has gotten into the national and political spotlight partly due to the economic slump and simply poor business acumen on the part of the government procurement system. The BENS group made a valid point, stating that the Pentagon alone was not the problem. It said the defense acquisition system is an enterprise that critically involves the private sector nationally and globally as well as several branches and agencies of the U.S. Government. The aforementioned statement added support to the president's staff not exclusively focusing on the DoD acquisition, but on the civilian agencies as well. The three entities mentioned must continue to work together to provide goods and services at the best economical prices to support our military and economic structure (Keeney, 2007).

An A. C. Obermeyer article (2010), *Addressing the Shortage of Contracting Specialists: Too Little, Too Late for Success?*, noted that our nation's political and executive leadership now recognizes the shortage of contract specialists and how the considerable graying workforce issue across the federal government in the 1102 series has been recognized too late. Mr. Obermeyer used 1990 as the foundation for the start of the decline in the acquisition workforce. During the 1990s, the government employed more than 31,000 contracting personnel. More than 22,700 were in the DoD, with approximately 8,000 spread throughout the civilian agencies. The DoD employed more than 73 percent of the federal contracting workforce, compared to 27 percent for all other departments combined. Mr. Obermeyer mentioned that in 2001, the contracting total dropped by almost 5,000 to 26,600 personnel. More than 18,500 were in DoD and more than

8,000 in civilian agencies, respectively. The DoD employed only 69 percent of the federal contracting workforce, compared with 31 percent for other departments combined. During 2001, approximately 116,000 contract actions were greater than \$100,000 and obligated more than \$145 billion combined. He stated that, between FY 2000 and FY 2008, acquisition spending by civilian agencies increased by 56 percent from \$80 billion to \$156 billion. He added that by 2008 the number of specialists in the DoD increased by 10 percent, and in civilian agencies by 6.5 percent. He discussed the GAO Committee briefs on the imbalances in the skills and experience of the remaining workforce and the potential loss of highly specialized knowledge if many of the specialists retire. The article addressed the initiative former SECDEF Gates created to increase the workforce by 20,000 acquisition professionals through hiring and in-sourcing. Though Mr. Obermeyer believes it was a great initiative, he also thinks it will be a hiring challenge and a significant learning curve for a force that is expected to continue its mission of procuring our country's goods and services, regardless the circumstances.

The article by Mr. Obermeyer has support in the 2003 Pegnato article, *Federal workforce downsizing during the 1990s: a human capital disaster; how downsizing has led to significant skill imbalances, a loss of institutional memory, and other adverse consequences at specific federal agencies and within the government-wide procurement workforce*. Mr. Pegnato's article discussed how downsizing has led to significant skill imbalances, a loss of institutional memory, and other adverse consequences at specific federal agencies and within the government-wide procurement workforce "from 1989 to 1999." The author examined how DoD procurement workforce was reduced by 50 percent at the same time that the workload increased by about 12 percent. "Some of the adverse impacts associated with the workload imbalance included more time to award contracts, increased program costs, insufficient staff to manage requirements, increased backlog of contracts to close out, and personnel retention difficulty." The article further pointed out that, while the acquisition workforce shrank, contracting for services jumped 24 percent during the 1990s.

Molly Bernhart Walker (2011) captured the comments of BG Lee Price accurately when she wrote, "the Army needs more contracting staff." During an event Ms. Walker was covering for the *Government IT News* magazine, where BG Price spoke, the issue of challenges within the defense acquisition community was discussed. Ms. Walker's article provided coverage on what actions BG Price stated were being taken to address the acquisition workforce shortage. BG

Price said, “With the criticism that a lot of people have about contracting, the issue is not the government lacks sufficient personnel but, government does not have enough experienced contracting personnel.” BG Price further stated “the government cannot push people through; they need to ensure that qualified, well-trained personnel are pushed forward” explained BG Price. PEO-C3T has resorted to using some General Services Administration contracts, even though the office prefers to keep things “close to home,” BG Price added. She further stated that contracting staff can be hard to recruit, since acquisition workers are overworked almost constantly and often under pressure from program offices to act quicker than would be allowed by a measured process of market research coupled with fair and open competition or a thorough fair opportunity. The challenge in recruiting contracting staff is one of the primary contributing factors to the personnel shortage and why some contract requirements are not completed. This article was helpful in understanding how far-reaching the acquisition personnel shortage is throughout the Army and DoD.

Mark Lumer is a retired (2011) Army Procurement Executive. In an interview with the researcher (April 2012), Lumer stated that, “While auditing contracts for the Army Acquisition Executive in Iraq in 2004, a \$450 million contract award by two Air Force officers was made to a Polish firm.” Mr. Lumer visited the address during his audit of the firm to discover there was no company. “It was an empty parking lot.” He said there are other examples such as this throughout the war showing that contracting officers were not doing their jobs. “A pre-award survey would have identified that before contract award.” Mr. Lumer further mentioned that other evidence of KOs not doing their jobs, or lack of experience, is found through reviews of the increased protests rates and the percentage of GAO sustained protests over the past 10 years. We use to be below 10 percent protest sustainment rates, but the last 10 years reflect a low of 16 percent (more than 1,200 cases filed) and the high of 29 percent (more than 1,300 cases filed) (Personal communications, April 18, 2012). See the link in the references for the Comptroller General (COMP GEN) Protest Statistics for FY 1997 through 2011.

The article, “A Call to Restructure the Acquisition Workforce” (Litman, 2009), highlights concerns about the use of in-sourcing to create federal jobs and addresses the workforce shortage. Mr. Litman states that since acquisition is one of the target fields for in-sourcing, the question of the health of the current acquisition environment becomes paramount. He suggests the move to in-source should proceed with caution. The article further discusses the health of the

acquisition environment and what factors would contribute to an unhealthy acquisition environment. Mr. Litman proposed that the government create a single acquisition series, consisting of program management, contracting, and a new function called requirements management. Mr. Litman's opinion is that fixing the acquisition workforce is not just a replacement of losses; it involves implementing changes that will prevent the government from addressing the same issue 10 years down the road.

Summary

The literature indicates there is a personnel shortage of acquisition workforce professionals throughout our entire federal government. Leaders from the Army, to the DoD, our legislative branch and the president, are aware of this problem. All our leaders are involved and are trying to implement plans, policies, and guidance to support and correct this deficiency across the board.

The literature identified the DoD problem as starting in the 1990s drawdown from the Cold War. The contracting career field was stripped too deep (having offered too many retirement incentives), but the losses of experienced personnel wasn't acknowledged until issues became apparent during the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and Hurricane Katrina. These three significant occurrences awakened the need to act quickly to prevent further misuse and procurement abuses that, in part, were due to the shortage (in numbers) of an experienced workforce.

The Army commissioned Dr. Jacques Gansler to head a panel to review Army Acquisition in September 2007. As a result, the Army directed structural changes by approving the changes recommended by the commission. One of the most noteworthy recommendations of the Gansler Commission was for creation of a Contracting Command under the auspices of the Army Materiel Command, headed by a major general. Since the commission's findings in 2007, several articles have been written regarding the critical shortage of the Army, DoD, and civilian agency contracting workforce.

The FAI was created by the Office of Management and Budget to work with the Defense Acquisition University (DAU), and handles workforce statistics for the federal agencies. The FAI workforce statistics showed the graying problem. Some of the statistics ranged from 18 percent to 30 percent retiring in 2012. Other statistics even showed 51 percent of the federal contracting workforce is eligible for retirement by 2018. These staggering numbers received

attention from the media, GAO, congressional committees, the Services, DoD, OMB, just to name a few. The ACC statistic for 2012-2013 was about 35 percent as reported earlier, with 13 percent being supervisors.

As part of the plan to solve the shortage, the OMB tasked the OFPP administrator to coordinate the strategic plan of the civilian agencies. The DoD formed its own Defense Acquisition Workforce Strategy. Some of the initiatives derived were for new hires such as college graduates for interns. Others included programs for veterans and an EHA policy. This policy was for experienced acquisition personnel outside of the government. The EHA policy was to be in place for a limited time to monitor and control possible personnel abuse. Historically, the DoD is the federal government's largest source of contracting and acquisition positions and therefore is expected to have the greatest need in the future. Then SECDEF Robert Gates announced before his departure that DoD would hire 20,000 new acquisition workforce members by 2015. He stated there would be 10,000 new hires and another 10,000 would be through in-sourcing. Close to 1,900 of those would be ACC 1102 contracting positions. Mr. Worley (2011) referenced the ACC's use of the EHA and how that process allowed a significant amount of hiring in a short time. The ACC and other agencies must be granted continued access to EHA to achieve the above goals.

D.J. Litman (2009) questioned whether the government was taking the smartest approach to addressing the problem shortage in acquisition personnel. He thought the government should take a step back and think about what is required. His concern was that perhaps this problem is more widespread than just a people shortage. He said adding 20,000 personnel to the acquisition workforce is significant and suggested government must make sure the so-called people shortage is the only problem.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodology

Leadership scholars seeking to answer questions about culture and meaning have found experimental and quantitative methods insufficient on their own in explaining the phenomenon they wish to study (Ospina, 2004). This research study will utilize a qualitative method with roots in traditional ethnographic research, in helping to achieve the objective of understanding why contract specialists have antipathy toward becoming contracting officers. The study utilized participants currently working in the GS-1102 Contract Specialist career field and military personnel (51A/C/Z) performing the duties as a contract specialist at the enlisted and officer levels in the U.S. Army. Different agencies within the ACC, including MICC, ECC, and CECOM will provide participants for this research.

The research information was obtained through face-to-face interviews, participant surveys, and questionnaires. Employing a qualitative approach to this research provided flexibility to manage possible unexpected ideas or situations during the interview or survey process. The face-to-face interviews with senior leadership were conducted using a group of four interview questions that were the same for all participants.

Each participating Command was asked to provide 10 contract specialists to participate in interviews for the study, for a sampling of 50 contract specialists. In addition to the interviews, the researcher requested the Commands and Centers provide support by allowing random selections of contract specialists for a total of more than 500 surveys circulated for the research study.

The researcher looked for a minimum of 300 completed surveys, broken out as 150 and 75, respectively, from each location surveyed. The survey consisted of 10 multiple choice questions that were analyzed using the SurveyMonkey online tool for data analysis. The interview questions were open-ended and were analyzed to determine consistent themes that help answer this study's research questions and provide insight for potential solutions. All research material was collected by the researcher and reviewed and stored as needed.

Research Questions

The use of a qualitative research approach, supported by quantitative data, will make it possible to answer the following primary research questions: (1) What actions can be taken that are likely to enhance the number of contract specialists transitioning to contracting officers? The following secondary research questions also will be addressed: (A) Why are acquisition contract specialists averse to accepting the responsibilities of a warranted position? (B) What will encourage current contract specialists to take on additional responsibilities, which will lead them to become qualified for warranted positions? The researcher believes the answers to these questions will prepare the Command for the impending retirement surge indicated in the research problem statement by thus identifying individuals for warranted contracting officer positions and, future management and leadership positions.

Limitations of the Study

This research project is a result of a request from the executive director of the ACC. The ACC leadership acknowledged some problems in the Command but desired to know specific details as to what extent and if the personnel view this as problematic. The researcher is not sure how robust the problem may be, or if present conditions will allow the survey of all needed candidates. If some of the subordinate Commands and Centers decide not to participate, the study's validity and reliability could be questionable. It also could affect the survey's confidence as well as the accuracy of the results.

Sample

The logic and power or purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Utilizing a purposeful sampling method, this is defined as an information-rich case from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry (p. 230). The sample size will vary depending upon the size of the Command or Center. Smaller organizations with 700 or fewer personnel will be asked to provide 75 contract specialists to participate in the study. The researcher will request up to 150 participants for each Command having more than 700 personnel. The ACC 1102 population that the research is pulled from contains more than 5,000 personnel. The sample number is to ensure that an adequate number of surveys are returned to allow for obtaining enough information to perform a complete analysis of the results. According to Margarete Sandelowski (1995), a common misconception about sampling in qualitative research is that numbers are unimportant

in ensuring the adequacy of a sampling strategy. The author will ensure the reliability and validity of the data, by carefully analyzing the sample size and understanding that trying to process large amounts of data in a short time can overwhelm the study results, if not properly analyzed and managed. Face-to-face interviews were conducted during the third and fourth week of January from January 18 through January 30, 2012. The surveys were released during the third week of January 17-30, 2012, in order to have the completed surveys returned by February 15, 2012. After all information was gathered and reviewed, the author analyzed data using qualitative and quantitative methods as applicable.

CHAPTER 4

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Quantitative Results

This chapter presents the findings and results of the research study. The researcher used both the quantitative and qualitative methods to acquire the data, and thus the data will be organized according to the above methods respectively. The purpose of this section is to analyze and interpret the data to make recommendations for the ACC and others who may have similar issues with inadequate numbers of contracting personnel and/or prospective warranted contracting officer nominees. These results will validate or nullify the researcher's thesis and answer the primary research question of: (1) What actions can be taken that are likely to enhance the number of contract specialists transitioning to contracting officers? The following secondary research questions also will be addressed: (A) Why are acquisition contract specialists averse to accepting the responsibilities of a warranted position? (B) What will encourage current contract specialists to take on additional responsibilities that will lead them to become qualified for warranted positions?

Survey Data Results

First, the researcher will provide the reader a summary of the quantitative data revealed by the survey research. The survey population consisted of 525 participants, which returned 429 completed surveys, for 82 percent participation. More than 99.5 percent of the data collected were from the civilian contracting specialist population, which skews the military perspective of the situation (see Figure 2). The researcher was informed by the ECC's leadership that it did not wish to participate in the research. The ECC is responsible for the Army's primary contingency operations mission that is performed by the military and mission-essential civilians assigned to the subordinate Commands of the ECC. The participation of the ECC would have provided a greater number of military participants. However, participant response in general provided an overwhelming amount of data to address the research questions.

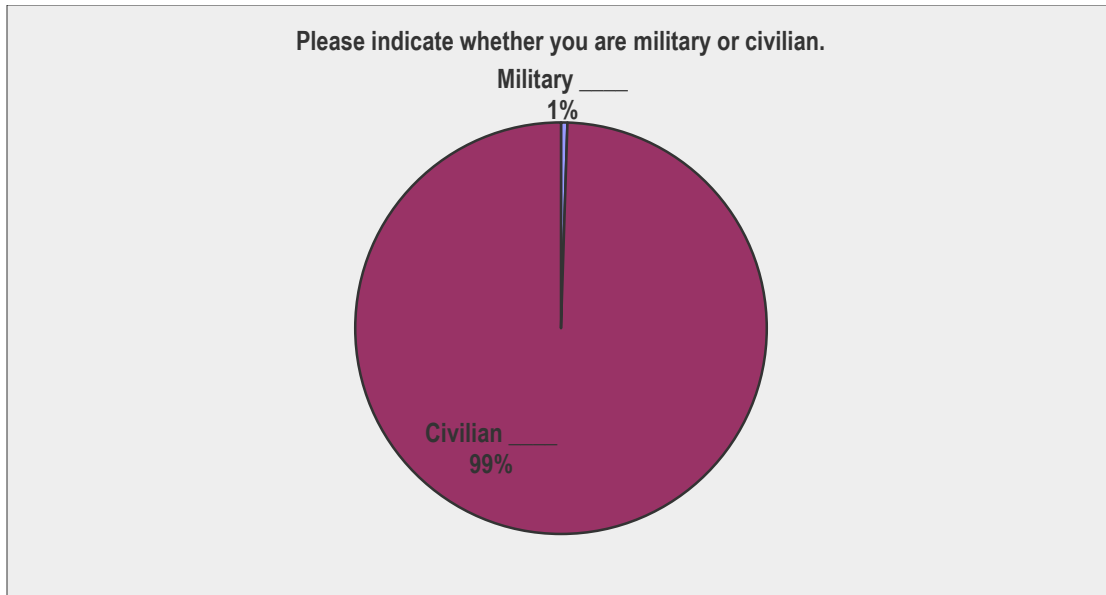


Figure 2. Military versus Civilian Respondents

The demographics for the survey (see Figure 3) highlighted a very interesting fact regarding to the 40- to 49-year-old age group, which represented 29 percent of the survey participants. This group represented the largest number of survey respondents. Other demographic data are as follows: 15 percent of the respondents were 21 to 29 years of age; 26 percent were 30-39 years of age; and 25 percent were 50-59 years of age. It also was interesting to learn that 5 percent were 60 or older. Although the trend to remain working past age 60 started in the 1990s, the current economic recession may be an important reason that it continues (Shattuck, 2010). Looking at the demographics provides insight into whether the ACC will have to address the issue of retirement among civilian acquisition personnel in the near future.

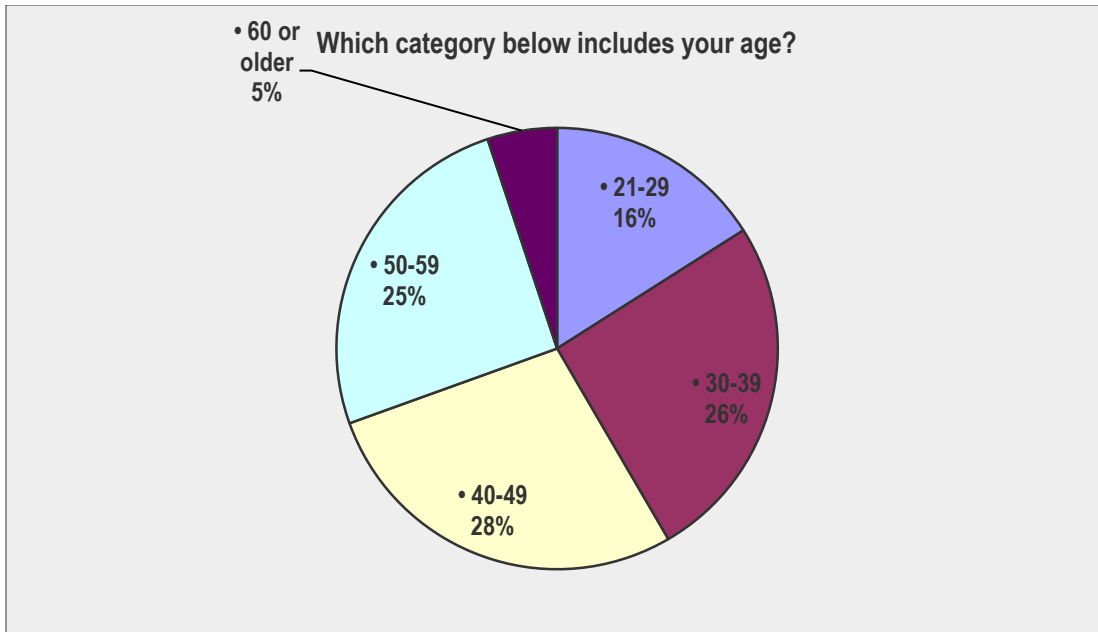


Figure 3. Demographics—Respondent’s Age

Survey Organization

The survey included 13 questions (Appendix A). The survey questions were designed to elicit responses that would convey the reasons, based on the proposed questions, that contract specialists do not desire the role of contracting officers. Questions 2 through 5 required choosing among multiple choice answers. Questions 6 and 7 required a yes or no response while Questions 8 through 10 permitted the respondents an opportunity to elaborate on Questions 3, 4, and 5. Question 11 asked for which ACC and/or Contracting Center the respondent worked. Question 12 gathered the demographics regarding the age of the respondents. The respondents were able to provide any additional comments at Question 13. Ninety-seven percent of the survey participants responded to Question 2, which asked them to indicate their interest in becoming a contracting officer. Twelve percent of the 429 respondents selected no desire, with 13 percent responding with little desire but 22 percent responding they strongly desired and thought it would help promotion potential. See Figure 4 to review the percentages and range of responses within the nine “desire categories.” Question 3 served as follow-on for Question 2, by allowing those without desire to become contracting officers to highlight the reason(s). Only 32 percent responded to the question, of 32 percent of respondents; 51 percent provided the reasoning that “becoming a contracting officer requires more time at work.” Forty-eight percent listed other

reasons (see Figure 5). Question 4 asked the respondents to select one factor that “most” motivated them. More than 400 responded, with 46 percent choosing promotion opportunities as the primary selection, followed by 24 percent stating respect for the position and responsibilities. The third choice, with 20 percent, consisted of other reasons not listed (see Figure 6).

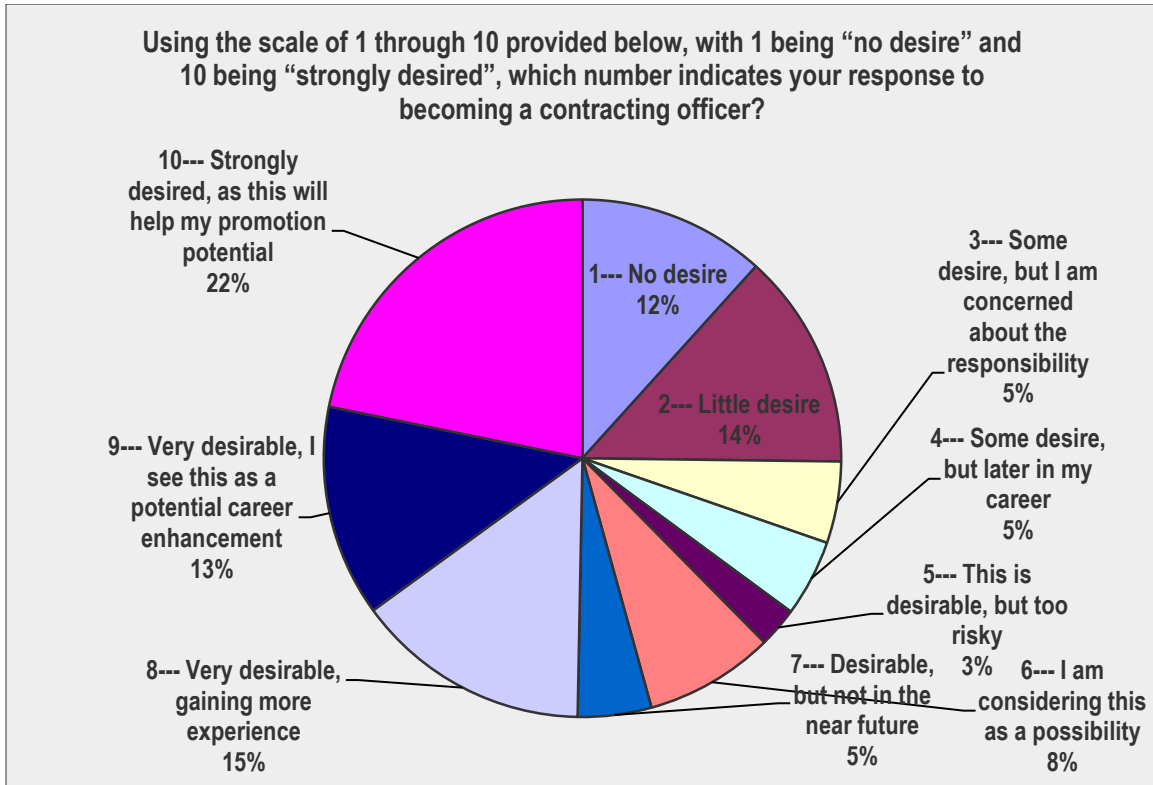


Figure 4. Eligible Contract Specialists with Desire to be Contracting Officer

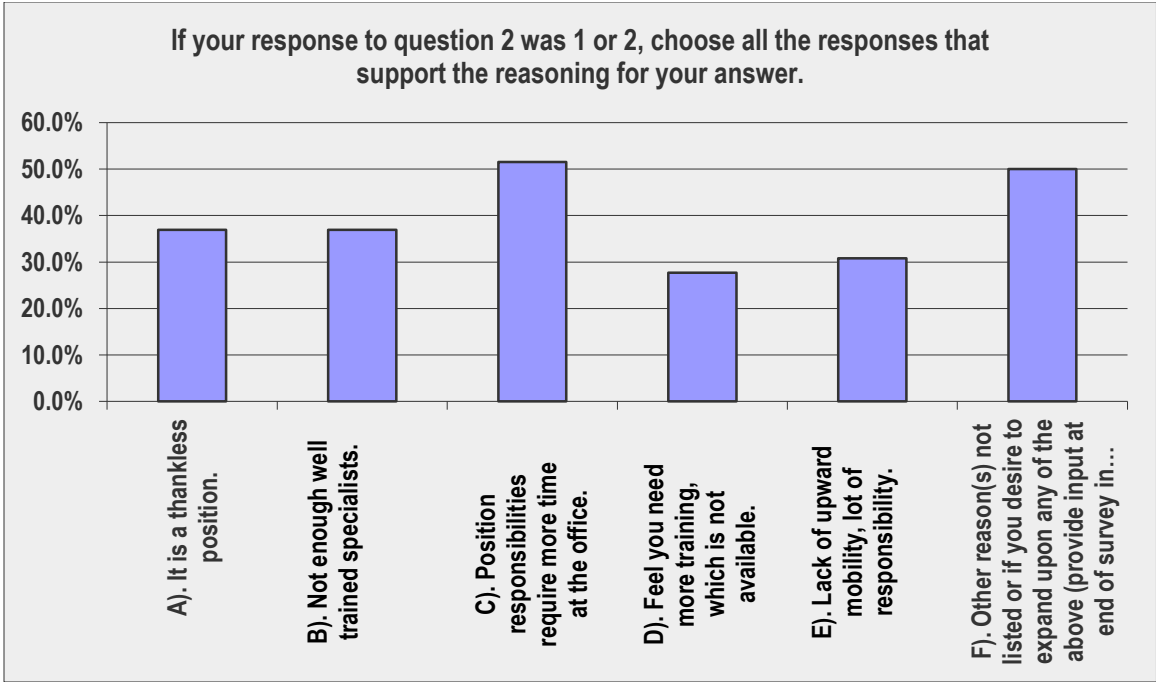


Figure 5. Reasons Contract Specialists do not Desire to be Contracting Officer

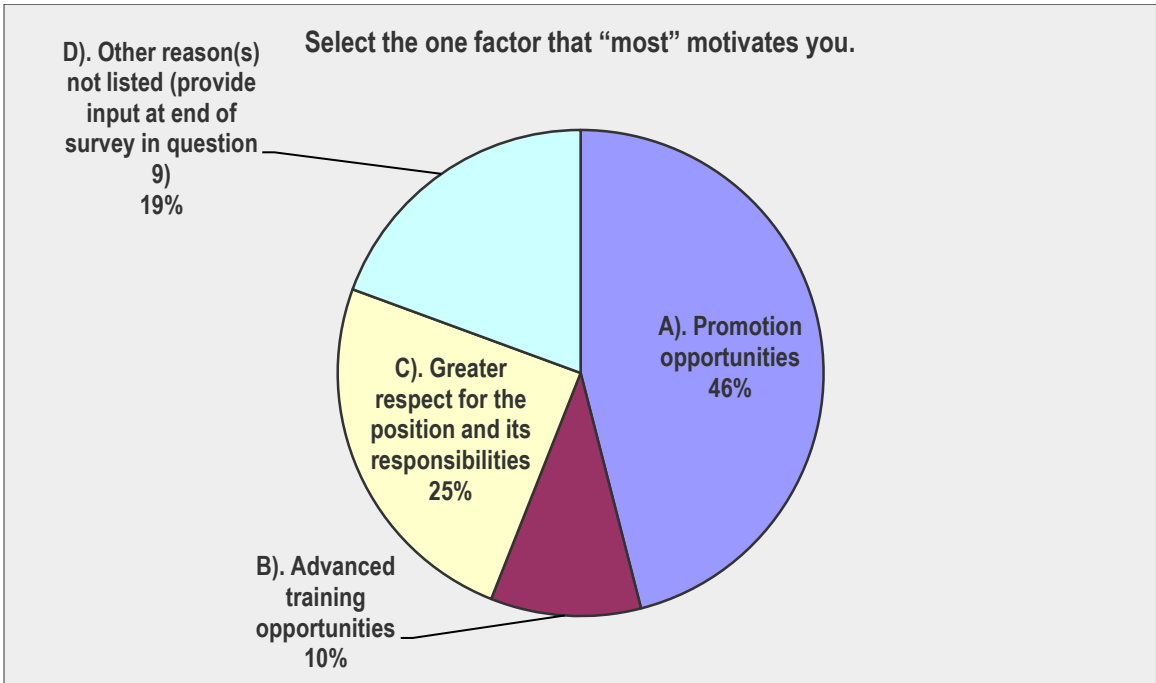


Figure 6. Reasons Eligible Contract Specialists Desire to be Contracting Officer

In an effort to determine factors contributing to the contracting officer shortage, one survey question looked at the respondents overall career goals (see Figure 7). All but one of the 429 respondents addressed the question, with 41 percent stating the desire is to go as high as the pay scale with allow. The second-highest at 22 percent was to reach the pay grade GS-14 and/or military equivalent level without becoming a contracting officer. This was followed by the desire to reach the pay grade GS-13 Contract Specialist or Procurement Analyst level, with more than 18 percent. The survey also asked respondents to disclose if they were qualified for the contracting officer position (see Figure 8). As many as 53 percent thought they were qualified, while 47 percent stated they were not. Question 7 asked the respondents if management or senior leadership played a role in their desire to become a contracting officer (see Figure 9). Participants were instructed to answer yes or no, with 45 percent of participants selecting yes, followed by 52 percent responding no to Question 7. Three percent chose not to respond. In reviewing the yes responses, three comments concerning management stood out. The first and most common was the desire to trust management and to feel that management will assist the contracting personnel and “have their backs.” The second comment was that management sets the example and should motivate individuals. The last comment was that senior leaders and management are contract savvy and provide great mentorship.

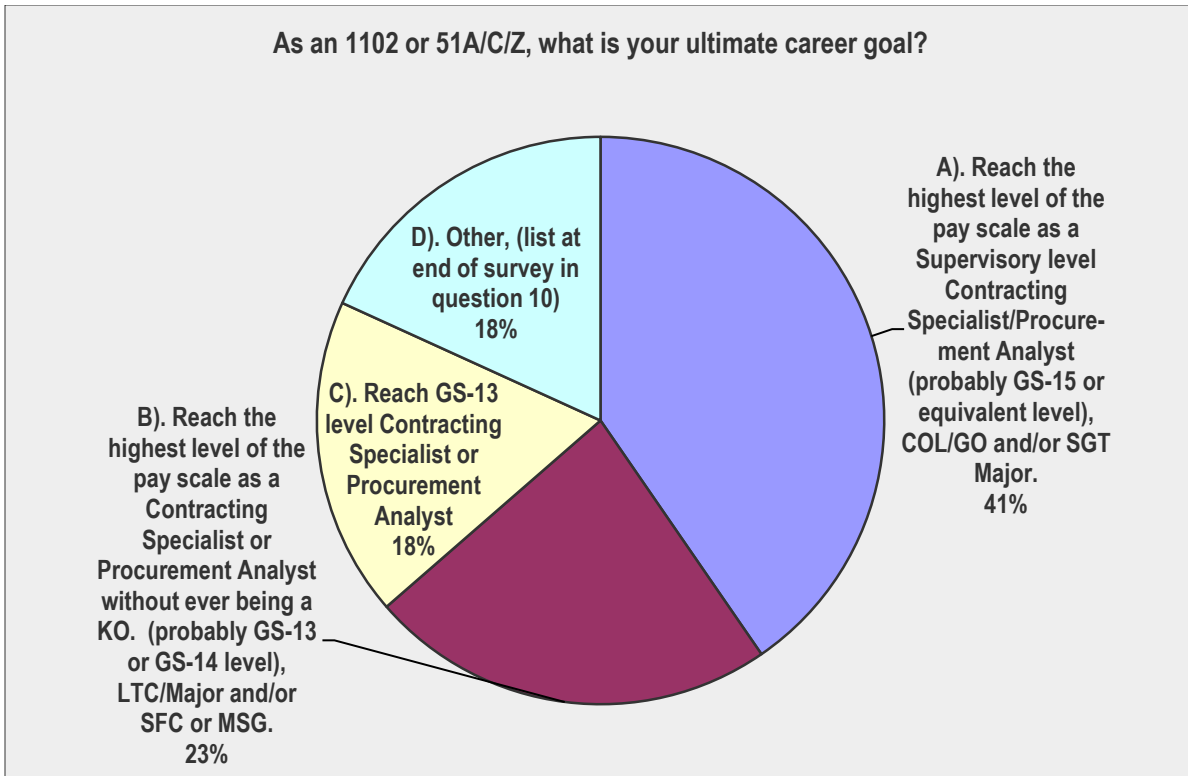


Figure 7. Career and Goals

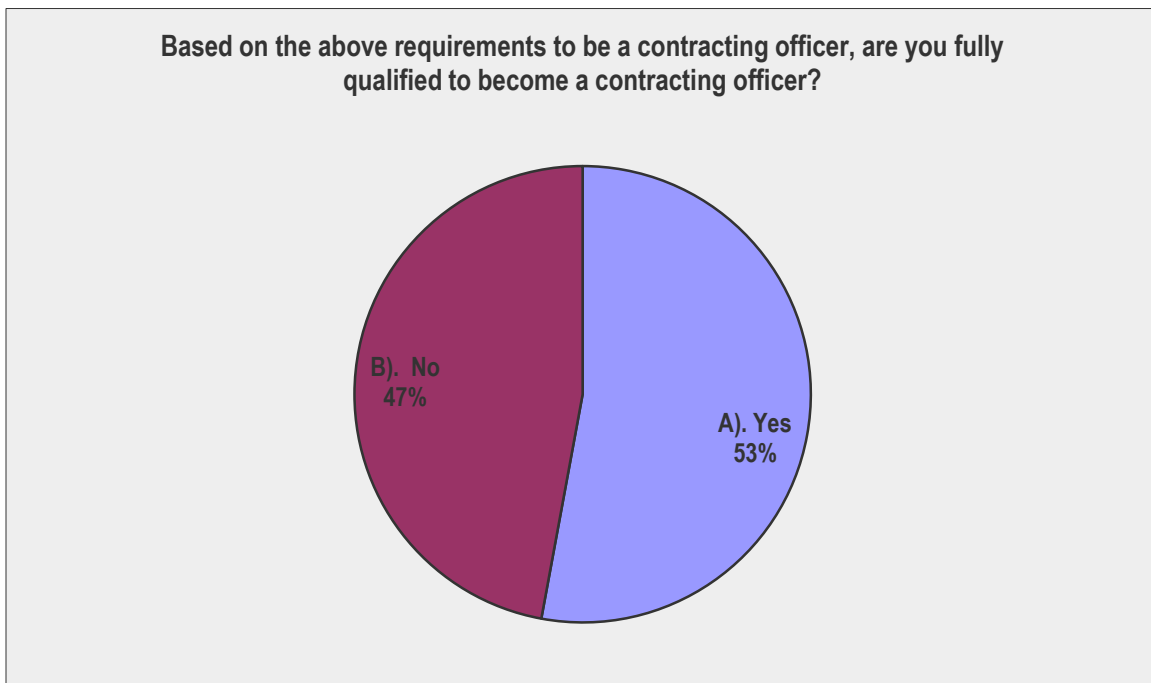


Figure 8. Contract Specialists Qualified to be Contracting Officer

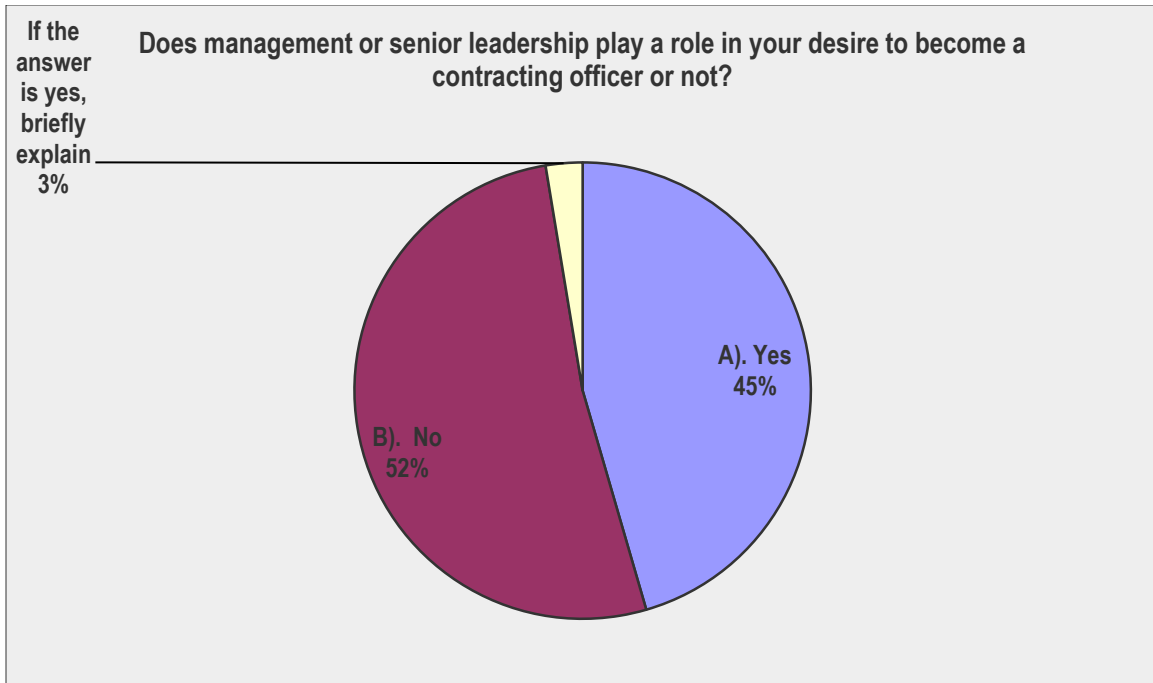


Figure 9. Role of Senior Leadership in Desire to be Contracting Officer

Question 8 corresponds to Question 3, which asks respondents who chose other reasons (selection F), to briefly explain. The following list details recurring responses: (1) a lack of training for contracting personnel in general except for interns; (2) contracting officers are under-resourced and over-tasked, causing much stress; (3) contracting officers have more responsibilities and the same pay as specialists and analysts who have fewer responsibilities; (4) contracting officers work extremely long hours daily (12 to 14) and weekends, and, last, (5) the contracting officers are not supported by leadership. Question 9 corresponds to Question 4 and asks respondents who chose other reasons (selection D), to briefly explain. The following are some of the recurring responses: (1) the majority responses in this area were doing a good job and thus making a difference which tied for (2) the challenge of more complex work and appreciation/respect from both customers and management. Question 10 corresponds to Question 5 and asks respondents who chose other reasons (selection D), to list here. The following were the recurring responses: Those respondents chose nonsupervisory contracting officer positions in the GS-13-15 grade levels. Some elected supervisory at the GS-13-14 pay grades. Question 11 asked where they worked (see Figure 10). For the sake of ease of data population, the researcher decided on three groups (ACC Centers, the MICC and the ECC, which elected not to

participate). The ACC Centers led with 77 percent of the respondents, followed by the MICC with 21 percent. As previously discussed, demographics in regard to age were collected at Question 12. Question 13 provided respondents the opportunity for additional comments if desired.

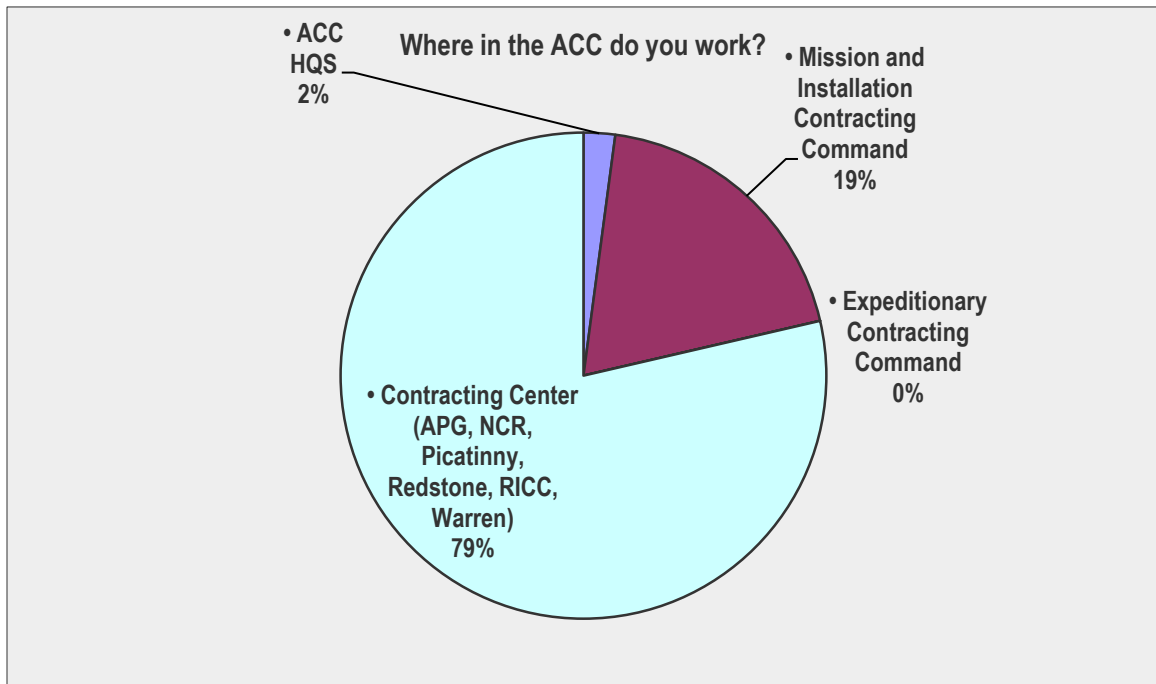


Figure 10. Distribution of Respondents Across ACC Commands

Qualitative Data Analysis Results

Next the researcher will provide a summary of the qualitative data of the research. The researcher developed two sets of open-ended questions for the interviewees. The population consisted of three distinct control groups. Group 1 consisted of the senior leaders (executives). Group 2 included the mid-level managers; pay grade GS-14-15s (most are or were contracting officers in their careers). The last group, were the contract specialists. The researcher was somewhat surprised by the reluctance of many individuals who chose not to participate in the research even though informed the results would not be shared and their identities would remain anonymous. Understanding executives' demanding schedules, the research provided an option for those with tight schedules to receive the interview via e-mail. Forty-five to 60 days were allowed, depending upon when initial contact made. A total of 37 participated and were

interviewed. The numbers for each group were 3 individuals comprising Group 1; 7 comprising Group 2; and 27 comprising Group 3. In an effort to ensure consistency, all participants were asked identical questions except Groups 2 and 3 had similar but different questions. See Appendix B and C for the complete list of questions.

In Group 1, the executive responses to the first question regarding the reasons why contract specialists lack desire to become contracting officers, patterns were identified such as attrition through promotions and departure from the agency; lack of desire for the additional responsibility; retirements; and reassignments for developmental purposes. One did not agree that this was an issue. One of the executives and several pay grade GS-15s said there is a lack of experienced specialists in the Command and others are not accepting the contracting officer positions, even though those positions provide promotion opportunities.

Question 2 was “as a senior member of the acquisition community, what perceived challenges are preventing contract specialists from assuming the role of contracting officers?” Here are the patterns identified: Every respondent confirmed that the operational tempo (OPTEMPO) resulting from the recent wars has had devastating impacts on the workforce, with significant increases in workload and hours. They thought the above attrition and increased workloads have left numerous employees lacking a desire to take on these workloads. The last is faster promotion rates resulting in less-qualified people moving into positions of responsibility sooner than they normally would. “Most supervisors know that the younger workforce employees lack the breadth required but are often willing to risk putting them in positions of greater responsibility which they wouldn’t have contemplated 5 years ago.”

Question 3 was “If you could implement four actions to help address Question 1 above, what actions would you implement?” The following patterns emerged: The first was to reduce the size of contracting officer teams, which should allow for reductions in workload. They believe this could have a corresponding impact of reducing higher levels of supervisory responsibility to free up group and division chiefs for tasks such as coaching and mentoring subordinates.

Question 4 was “Former Defense Secretary Gates stated that about 20,000 (10,000 from in-sourcing) more new acquisition personnel would be added to the acquisition workforce.” Of that 20,000, about 1,885 contracting positions would belong to the Army. Knowing what you know regarding the shortage of your workforce personnel, what are your concerns about the

contracting officer issue over the next 5 years? The career progression pattern that is believed by some is that every 1102 series (contracting specialist) hired by the Army should set the goal to become a Contracting Officer. The researcher certainly should have made that one of the research questions. All felt that in 5 years there probably will not be an issue regarding the quantity of contracting officers since budgets are shrinking and the war on terrorism is ending, which could have an overall positive impact on the concerns raised and might reduce the need for additional contracting officers. The executives' responses represent a small percentage of the population.

In Group 2, the middle managers were asked a series of questions to help the researcher understand the impact of the shortage of contracting officers on their respective organizations. There were seven participants from the ACC Centers and one of the subordinate Commands. Analyzing the first question, "As a member of this command, how has the shortage of contracting professionals impacted you in performing your job," the group's patterns were as follows: Managers have to perform as contracting officers. Increased workloads caused poor quality, increased stress, and lots of pre-selection of work to the best/most qualified specialist. Finally, contracting officers have to perform contracting specialist functions.

Question 2 asks, "How has the specialist lacking a desire to become a contracting officer impacted your organization?" The pattern is added responsibility on the current contracting officers. Those who don't desire the position are accepting less stressful jobs available both within and outside of the contracting community. Due to the increased workloads, there is a lack of organizational training and mentorship.

Question 3 asks, "What are the personal roadblocks preventing you, and those preventing others, from becoming a contracting officer?" The first was the increased stress caused by customers, regulations, policies, and procedures. The next most chosen was working with an inexperienced workforce and, last, additional responsibilities that interfere with the regulatory functions of the contracting officer duties.

Question 4 asks, "If you could be the senior executive for a day, what two or three actions would you implement to help address the lack of desire issue?" The pattern reflected first was to develop an internal culture of respect, empathy, and support from nonoperational contracting personnel. Demonstrate support at the highest level to address issues. This could include things such as minimizing tasks and minimizing change and being transparent when

making changes. Rewarding contracting officers through possible larger performance awards was seen as one possible answer, since the pay grades are the same for positions with less responsibility.

Question 5 observed that, “Former Defense Secretary Gates stated that about 20,000 (10,000 from in-sourcing) more new acquisition personnel would be added to the acquisition workforce.” Of that 20,000, about 1,885 contracting positions would belong to the Army. Knowing what you know regarding the shortage in your workforce personnel, what are your concerns about the contracting officer issue over the next 5 years? The pattern that emerged here is that managers are able to recruit, attract, and retain the right candidates with the proper skill set for success. The Army managers must figure out how to get experience, how to train better, and how to get work off the contracting officer’s desk. Last, the DoD and congressional leaders must look hard to ensure contracting does not experience cuts similar to the 1990s, causing the “bathtub effect” (see next paragraph) trend that is a current concern.

In an article in the *Federal Computer Week* (March 2012) titled, Fix DoD’s regulatory complexities, Matthew Weigelt said the bathtub problem within DoD occurred when “the workforce took a hit in the 1990s with a major reduction in its numbers.” Presently, DoD officials are attempting to address the problem by rebuilding the workforce and hiring a large number of new employees. “These parallel bulges constitute a ‘bathtub effect’ as midcareer personnel are not abundant enough to adequately replace the retirement bulge, nor provide for enough on-hands mentorship to the new-hire bulge,” the panel wrote. DoD’s training now is very important, the panel added. Maturity in the job and higher education are keys to a strong workforce. It’s more than numbers.

In Control Group 3, the contract specialists were asked the same series of questions as Control Group 2 to help the researcher understand the impact the lack of contracting officers has on their respective organizations. There were 27 participants from the ACC Centers and one of the subordinate Commands. Analyzing the first question, “As a member of this Command, how has the shortage of contracting professionals’ impacted you in performing your job?,” patterns that emerged were that it has caused a significantly heavier workload. However, having excellent contracting officers has helped minimize the impact. Last, the organizations lack experienced personnel, causing them to miss out on receiving training and other pertinent information required to perform their duties.

The second question was, “How has contracting specialists lacking a desire impacted your organization?” The most common response was that it has added a tremendous burden on the contracting officers available. Those respondents desiring to become contracting officers did not see the lack of contracting officers as a problem, since it opens possibilities for their progression. These responses caused what the researcher calls the snowball effect. Several respondents stated that experienced senior contract specialists are leaving the organizations, causing apprehension internally and externally, and creating considerable delays. Some identified low motivation/morale, and, finally, several mentioned the problem of having to go to different contracting officers for the same requirement that other contracting officers previously reviewed.

On the third question, “As a member of this organization, what are the personal roadblocks preventing you and others from becoming a contracting officer?,” the consensus response was that primary roadblocks were lack of experience, training, and management’s reluctance to properly assess candidate’s skills. Finally, numerous respondents felt there were no roadblocks for them personally, and that training and lack of experience were roadblocks for others.

The fourth question was, “If respondents could be the senior executive for a day, what two or three actions would they implement to help address the lack of desire issue?” The pattern reflected the need for monthly training for all 1102 series personnel, as well as supervisory training. They suggested providing a workforce survey, similar to the climate-type surveys, developing and implementing a mentorship program to develop and share knowledge and a similar one for shadowing contracting officers and managers. The last suggestion was to incentivize the contracting officer position.

Question 5 stated: Before “Former Defense Secretary Gates stated that about 20,000 (10,000 from in-sourcing) more new acquisition personnel would be added to the acquisition workforce. Of that 20,000 number, about 1,885 contracting positions would belong to the Army. Knowing what you know regarding the shortage of your workforce personnel, what are your concerns about the contracting officer issue over the next 5 years?” The pattern that emerged most was an inexperienced workforce and contracting officers. The next was no concern, followed closely by people are departing and probably will continue doing so. The last was training.

The above review of the qualitative results of the three control groups demonstrate that, although there were 37 participants, there were sufficient data to provide an idea of the perspectives of each control group. There seems to be an abundance of consistencies to the responses observed between each of the groups. Individual responses were mixed, with some reflecting concerns and others stating they have no concerns the thesis of this research. The researcher received both positive and negative feedback. During the following discussion section, the researcher will provide a more detail review of the information gathered.

Discussion

The following is the primary research questions: (1) What actions can be taken that are likely to enhance the number of contract specialists transitioning to contracting officers? First, the question assumes there is angst amongst contract specialists desiring to become contracting officers. Figure 2, Question 2, of the workforce survey found only 11.5 percent of those contract specialists surveyed indicated they have no desire to become contracting officers, which leaves more than 88.5 percent having some level of desire. Twenty-five percent of those surveyed have little to no desire (finding the change perhaps too risky). Fifty-six percent of the respondents indicated the position is desirable or strongly desirable. Last, more than 7 percent stated it is a possibility. Based upon the numbers surveyed, only 32 percent responded to Question 3, asking them to support their lack of desire to become contracting officers. The researcher also performed interviews on 37 respondents who provided results to open-ended questions concerning the subject. The results of those interviewed provided further information that some individuals had a desire and others did not.

In the survey, the respondents answering Question 2 with little or no desire stated the following reasons for their responses: “It is a thankless position, not enough well-trained contract specialists, position responsibilities require more time at the office, more training is needed that is not readily available; lack of upward mobility; a lot of responsibility but limited promotion opportunity.” Reviewing the qualitative responses in the results above, one notes numerous parallel responses to these throughout the three control groups. In Question 6 of the workforce surveys, the respondents were asked if they thought they were fully qualified to become contracting officers based upon the criteria provided. Fifty-three percent thought themselves qualified and 47 percent felt unqualified. Question 7 asked if management or senior leadership played a role in their desire; 45 percent stated it did, with 52 percent stating neither management

nor senior leadership played a role in the decision. Question 11 asked the respondents where they work. More than 76 percent worked in one of the ACC Centers, which means they could be at locations supporting commodity command, program offices, depots, or other activities. See Chapter 1 for the list of ACC subordinate Commands and Centers and their functions. Twenty-one percent of the respondents were from the MICC supporting Army installations throughout the United States. Question 12 asked respondents for their age category. It was a bit surprising that only 5 percent were 60 years or older, with 16 percent between 21 and 29 years of age. Twenty-five percent were between 50 and 59 years of age. Although the researcher understands this is a sampling of the ACC, an assumption was that more respondents would be over age 60 since numerous sources mention the “graying workforce” within the DoD. The other thought was that there could be more in the youngest age category, due to some of the initiatives of the current administration regarding the Presidential Fellows Program as well as intern programs to attract more acquisition workforce recipients. A large number of the recipients in Group 3 appeared to be in that age group, and most had between 3 to 5 years’ experience, and others were senior. The researcher did not ask the age of the interview recipients.

The discussion of the open-ended questions from the survey and interviews will answer the researcher’s hypothesis and secondary questions which are: (A) Why are acquisition contract specialists averse to accepting the responsibilities of a warranted position? (B) What will encourage current contract specialists to take on additional responsibilities, which will lead them to become qualified for warranted positions? The senior executives’ response regarding the reasons contract specialists lack the desire to become contracting officers, and how the shortage has affected them shows a correlation, and follows: There is a lack of experienced specialists in the Commands. Group 3 went further by saying this was the reason they missed out on the training and professional development pertinent to the performance of their duties. One senior executive said he does not subscribe to the idea that this was an issue. There were some within Control Group 3 who thought this was not a problem. There was no pattern within Question 2 between Control Groups 2 and 3. Members within Control Group 3 said they didn’t see this as a problem. Question 3 for Group 1 were similar in a couple of ways. Both Groups 1 and 3 (Question 4) mentioned the need for mentoring and, Groups 2 and 3 mentioned the need for rewarding or incentivizing the contracting officer positions. Question 3 for Groups 2 and 3 had the following pattern: working with an inexperienced workforce. There were some in Group 3

who said there were no roadblocks. The second part of the question concerning roadblocks for others was the same, but in the following order. The first was that there were no roadblocks, followed by training and experience. The pattern that emerged for Question 5 for Groups 2 and 3 was the need for training.

Although there were numerous patterns among the individual groups, when compared with the whole, there were few. The researcher received a wealth of individual feedback both from the qualitative data from the survey as well as the interview questions. The researcher will provide recommendations based upon the information received as well as what the researcher sees as the answers to the secondary questions of this research.

Reviewing the results to answer the secondary questions, the researcher returned to the individual group's results to see where patterns and correlations exist. The data show that, after more than 10 years of war and the resulting OPTEMPO, the contracting workforce's workload has increased ominously to the point of mission failure in certain areas. In some cases, the specialists reported working as many hours as the contracting officers, just to get the requirements awarded, without logging extra hours or the alternate work schedule days off.

Earlier in the literature review, the literature specified that, after the cold war in the 1990s, our government determined that the acquisition workforce was too large and decided to implement freezes and offer buyouts to downsize. As a result, the remainder of that workforce is now eligible to retire, and our government recognized this in the mid-2000s. This recognition in part is why our government is trying to increase the acquisition workforce to manage the demands of the workload. The problem is that it takes time to grow contracting personnel into the contracting officers who are greatly needed. Other research indicated it may be little, too late. The effect described is called "the bathtub effect," which is supposed to show that the Army and possibly the DoD will be in serious jeopardy relying upon an inexperienced workforce to accomplish our mission of procuring the goods and services for our Armed Services and our nation. There are many "ifs." If the numbers of "baby boomers" who are eligible to retire do so and current senior journeymen groups behind them don't step up, there will be a major concern. The success or failure of this critical mission "rests" in the faith of the inexperienced interns and those recently completing an intern or developmental program. Eventually, the desire is for the interns to gain experience and be capable of working in more senior roles. Currently, they possess neither the qualifications nor the experience to assume such an awesome responsibility.

The support for the thesis and supplemental questions of this research discussed earlier in the study indicated in the results that more than 88 percent of the respondents show some desire to become contracting officers. The results from the survey questions regarding their motivations follow: Question 4 of the survey asked the respondents to select one factor that “most” motivated them. More than 400 responded, with 46 percent choosing promotion opportunities as the primary selection, followed by 24 percent stating respect for the position and responsibilities. The third choice, with 20 percent, was other reasons not listed. Question 9 related to Question 4 and asked respondents if they chose selection D (other reasons), to briefly explain. The following are some of the recurring responses: (1) the majority responses in this area were doing a good job and thus making a difference; tied for (2) the challenge of more complex work and appreciation/respect from both customers and management. The results from the open-ended survey questions sufficiently answered the researcher’s questions, but the researcher would be remiss if he didn’t note that, though the majority of the recipients say they have a desire to become contracting officers, most individuals as well as management expressed many concerns regarding inexperience, heavy workload, incentivizing the contracting officer position, training, mentoring, and other issues that are very relevant to the current and future success of Army contracting and those individuals comprising it.

CHAPTER 5 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Recommendations

The researcher suggests that future research consider the question “should every 1102, contract specialists have the goal of becoming a contracting officer?” If so, what would the contracting profession look like? What would be the impact on the workload? Recommend that ACC consider this question for future study. Below is a list other areas that may also be of interest for future action.

Issue	Recommendation	Responsible Action
1 Healing process after war	Remind the DoD of the Lessons Learned regarding downsizing the contracting workforce during the Cold War.	ACC to ASAALT to OSD (ATL)
2 Too many regulatory changes	ACC must discuss concern with ASAALT.	ACC/ASAALT/ATL
3 Certification vs. qualification	Ensure that the ACC workforce understands the two and the criteria for qualification.	Commands & Centers
4 Employee Survey at least yearly	Develop a standard Command climate survey to provide leadership an idea of the organizational climate.	ACC
5 Employee incentives such as degree programs	Consider offering a program within the Command to, at a minimum, incentivize deserving employees desiring to enhance chances of being contracting officers.	ACC
6 Training programs (other than for DAU) for managers and employees	Ensure training programs with standard topics are developed for the Command.	ACC
7 DAU needs to review scheduling of classes for interns to ensure no sites are limited to “local students only”	Coordinate with the DAU to see why restricted training locations exist if Commands are willing to pay travel.	ACC/DAU
8 Professional and consistent basic foundation for intern program	Create an intern Academy similar to the VA Acquisition Academy for learning	ACC

9	Leadership Program	consistency in developing the future contracting workforce. Create a leadership program for mentoring and coaching the workforce.	ACC
10	Develop a standard Contracting Officer (KO) Board with actual test and interview questions	Provide a standard contracting officer board (consisting of tests and interviews). Board to convene at the ACC or subordinate Command and/or agency level.	ACC
11	Need for warrant training	Develop Warrant Training classes to target potential candidates to calm the fears of those individuals with low desires of becoming KOs as well as prepare others who feel ready.	ACC
12	Wounded Warriors	Discuss with the ASAALT and the Army leadership the possibility of bringing qualified wounded warriors into the contracting series. This could enhance new workforce members desiring the KO position and provide new perspective for nonmilitary personnel.	ACC/Army
13	More military within the Centers	Add more military into the Centers to provide more diverse training and add discipline to the ACC workforce.	ACC
14	Rewards and provide an incentive system for contracting officers	ACC implement a rewards and incentive program for contracting officers.	ACC
15	Hiring of 1102 Journeymen	ACC develop an HR hiring plan for 1102 series Journeymen and advertise Command goals to the workforce.	ACC
17	Work Programs	Develop an on-the-job-training program for the Command.	ACC
18	Lack of motivation	Develop social programs to motivate the workforce to have fun and desire to do more	Commanders and Directors

		diverse things within the Command.	
19	Survey the workforce	Recommend ACC survey workforce the following question: Should every Army contracting specialist set the goal of becoming a contracting officer?	ACC
20	Contracting officer burnout	Consider contracting officer rotations every 2 to 3 years and sooner as required.	ACC
21	DAU Training	Coordinate with DAU to ascertain whether it can offer electives for the various contract types (Service, Systems, Installation level).	DAU

Based upon the results of the research, the researcher recommends that the ACC leadership initiate actions that will likely enhance the number of contract specialists becoming contracting officers. Leadership must provide workforce personnel an indication of their commitment to support the workforce with unit and individual training, counseling, coaching, mentoring, and other areas—such as incentives. This will demonstrate leadership’s sincerity toward helping and preparing contract specialists for the contracting officer positions and ultimately their future success in the contracting series. This paragraph relates to the 2009 Defense Acquisition Workforce Strategy and the two bills mentioned in the literature review that discussed incentives and the need for mentoring and career development.

Leadership must be honest brokers. They must inform contract specialists desiring to become contracting officers of their potential and assist in preparing them for the position. If after the training, the individuals still do not fulfill the requirement, leadership must be honest regarding their judgment to these individuals. Leadership must be transparent in dealing with the workforce, so there is no misinformation and everyone is well informed. The ACC leaders must ensure there are no perceptions of favoritism toward any members of the workforce.

ACC leadership needs to decide if every contract specialist coming into the Command should have a goal of being a contracting officer. If they find this plausible, an ACC-directed survey for each incoming member of the contracting field should be required. This survey would

provide insight into the future goals of the incoming specialists and how they fit with the Command.

Many contract specialists feel that contracting officer is a thankless position, and not worth the headache. In some instances, they feel undercompensated as specialists with the number of hours worked, which would worsen with the extra responsibilities of a contracting officer, compared to other positions of similar grades within the Contracting series. Specialists and contracting officers just want management to show their appreciation and say “thank you” and/or “well done.”

The following are areas the researcher thinks will encourage contract specialists to take on additional responsibilities and possibly help qualify them to become warranted.

Provide specialists with more diversity in their workloads. They want opportunities for large dollar and high-visibility rewards.

Specialists want more guidance with the work they are provided. They would like to see processes in place so there is consistency among divisions and branches within the organizations. This will limit conflicting information by contracting officers within the same teams.

The researcher thinks that, based upon the responses from the interviews and surveys, the contract specialists will be motivated to take on the contracting officer positions if these recommendations are considered and implemented.

Conclusion

The research has shown that the majority of the participants surveyed (75 percent) and interviewed have a desire to become contracting officers, with only 25 percent having little or no desire to assume greater responsibility. Although they have a desire, there are still some concerns that contracting officers should be paid more or incentivized for the increased responsibilities and workload that accompany the position. The pay, incentives, and promotions are the key motivators discussed by the vast majority of respondents. Most stated they did not have a problem becoming a contracting officer but said they were not ready for the supervisory roles that accompanied some of those positions.

The researcher stated in the introduction that there was a time when every person new to contracting had a goal of becoming a warranted contracting officer. Well more than 88 percent of respondents surveyed have some desire to become contracting officers. Most of the executives and GS-15 pay grade personnel interviewed thought that every contract specialist entering the

Army should have a goal of becoming a contracting officer. As the researcher recommended, this topic should be considered by the ACC for further study.

Numerous persons interviewed were aware that former SECDEF Gates wanted to increase the acquisition workforce, but many asked “when will it happen” or “that yes, we have seen a handful of cost and price (CP) analyst or quality assurance specialist hired but not contract specialists.” When asked the about the allocation of the additional 1102 series personnel, the majority stated the need were contract specialists, contracting officers, procurement analysts, followed by CP analysts. As mentioned in the introduction, most respondents were concerned now that the war is winding down and the federal budgets already are dwindling whether the bathtub effect resulting from the Cold War would happen again. They stated that if the bathtub materializes, the Army and the DoD did not capitalize on any of the lessons learned resulting from the transition of the contracting field from the Cold War. As mentioned by BG Price in the literature review reference, the researcher discovered there is a contracting officer shortage in the ACC but the findings show it’s more prevalent in the Centers than in the subordinate Command (MICC but not sure of the ECC). The contracting profession must be monitored during peace and times of war or crisis because it takes a long time to “grow” contracting professionals, and, if not done correctly, it’s questionable whether the United States could depend upon them.

The findings here can be used by contracting professions in the federal government, industry, and other markets for contracting personnel. The researcher’s recommendations list some issues that came from the participants and must be addressed by the ACC leadership to implement such a model.

One shortcoming in this study was that the researcher initially started out with an e-mailed survey to the first group’s leadership and received the results of the survey via e-mail. While the survey was out, the researcher placed the survey on SurveyMonkey but opted not to request the initial 10 people who responded by e-mail to redo the survey in the SurveyMonkey. This cost the researcher an additional 10 surveys that would have provided more results and data, which could have possibly helped to further validate research study results. The survey would have been improved by waiting until the data were completely uploaded within the SurveyMonkey system.

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GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND TERMS

1102	Contracting Job Series
ACC	Army Contracting Command
AMC	Army Materiel Command
AP	Associated Press
APG	Aberdeen Proving Ground
ASA ALT	Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics, and Technology
AT&L	Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics
BENS	Business Executives for National Security
BG	Brigadier General (U.S. Army)
CECOM	Communications-Electronics Command
CHRA	Civilian Human Resources Agency
CID	Criminal Investigation Command
CPOC	Civilian Personnel Operations Center
CO	Commanding Officer
COMP GEN	Comptroller General
COR	Contracting Officer Representative
CP	Cost Price Analyst
DAU	Defense Acquisition University
DAWIA	Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act
DoD	Department of Defense
ECC	Expeditionary Contracting Command
EHA	Expedited Hiring Authority
FAI	Federal Acquisition Institute
FAR	Federal Acquisition Regulation
FY	Fiscal Year
GAO	General Accounting Office (now known as the Government Accountability Office)
GO	General Officer
GSA	General Services Administration

HQS	Headquarters
INSCOM	Intelligence and Security Command
KO	Contracting Officer
MEDCOM	Medical Command
MICC	Mission and Installation Contracting Command
NCR	National Capital Region
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
OFPP	Office of Federal Procurement Policy
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
OPTEMPO	Operational Tempo
PACE	Professional and Administrative Career Examination
PEO-STRICOM	Program Executive Office-Simulation, Training and Instrumentation Command
POGO	Project on Government Oversight
RICC	Rock Island Contracting Center
SECDEF	Secretary of Defense
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

APPENDIX A

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The intent of this survey is to gather information that will help the ACC understand if eligible contract specialists do not desire to become contracting officers. If the replies to the survey indicate that eligible contract specialists do not desire to become contracting officers, the intent will be to determine the reasons why this is the case. Your response to this survey will be anonymous. Your identity will not be revealed to any outside parties. Your support in taking this survey could influence the future Selection Process of the ACC contracting officers. Please answer the questions as honestly as possible.

1. Please indicate whether you are military or civilian.

Military _____

Civilian _____

2. Using the scale of 1 through 10 provided below, with 1 being “no desire” and 10 being “strongly desired”, which number indicates your response to becoming a contracting officer? Please circle one answer only.

1--- No desire

2--- Little desire

3--- Some desire, but I am concerned about the responsibility

4--- Some desire, but later in my career

5--- This is desirable, but too risky

6--- I am considering this as a possibility

7--- Desirable, but not in the near future

8--- Very desirable, after gaining more experience

9--- Very desirable, I see this as a potential career enhancement

10--- Strongly desired, as this will help my promotion potential

3. If your response to question 2 was 1 or 2, choose all the responses that support the reasoning for your answer.

A. It is a thankless position.

B. Not enough well trained contract specialists.

C. Position responsibilities require more time at the office.

D. Feel you need more training, which is not readily available.

E. Lack of upward mobility, lot of responsibility but, limited “promotion opportunity.”

F. Other reason(s) not listed or if you desire to expand upon any of the above (provide input at end of survey in question 8).

4. Select the one factor that “most” motivates you.

A. Promotion opportunities.

B. Advanced training opportunities.

C. Greater respect for the position and its responsibilities.

D. Other reason(s) not listed (provide input at end of survey in question 9).

- 5. As an 1102 or /51A/C/Z, what is your ultimate career goal?**
- A. Reach the highest level of the pay scale as a Supervisory level Contracting Specialist/Procurement Analyst (probably GS-15 or equivalent level), COL/GO and/or SGT Major.
 - B. Reach the highest level of the pay scale as a Contracting Specialist or Procurement Analyst without ever being a KO (probably achieve the GS-13 or GS-14 level), Major/LTC and/or SFC or MSG.
 - C. Reach GS-13 level Contracting Specialist or Procurement Analyst.
 - D. Other, (list at end of survey in question 10).
- Below is a general list of attributes (related to question 6) you need to know as contracting officers but agencies may slightly differ:
 - Some Technical Core (1102) competencies, Pre-Award and Award, Advanced Cost and/or Price Analysis, Develop and/or Negotiate Positions, Contract Administration, Contract Termination, Small Business/Socio-Economic Programs, Negotiate Forward Pricing Rates Agreements & Administer Cost Accounting Standards, Procurement Policy
 - Education requirements for grade level
 - Training (continuous learning) 80 hours of training every 2 years, required
 - Experience required will vary by agency and for the level of warrant requested
 - DAWIA certification for appropriate grade level
 - Agency-specific warranting policy
- 6. Based on the above requirements to be a contracting officer, are you fully qualified to become a contracting officer?**
- A. Yes
 - B. No
- 7. Does management or senior leadership play a role in your desire to become a contracting officer or not?**
- A. Yes
 - B. No
- If the answer is yes, briefly explain.
- 8. If you chose the answer F for question 3, please briefly explain here.**
- 9. If you chose answer D for question 4, please briefly explain here.**
- 10. If you chose answer D for question 5, please list other(s) here.**
- 11. Where in the ACC do you work?**
- ACC HQS
 - Mission and Installation Command
 - Expeditionary Contracting Command
 - Contracting Center (APG, NCR, Picatinny, Redstone, RICC, Warren)

12. Which category below includes your age?

- 21-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 or older

13. List any additional comments here.

APPENDIX B

GROUP 2 INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

I am working on a research project for the Defense Acquisition University's Senior Service College Fellowship Program. The focus of this research project is to determine a workforce perspective on "why contracting specialists lack desire to move forward toward becoming warranted contracting officers."

Please know that in order to really address the issue of "why contracting specialists lack desire to move forward toward becoming warranted contracting officers," it is crucial to obtain as much candid information and insight as possible. This matter is a serious challenge for the Army Acquisition community and we must use every available tool to analyze the problem and develop appropriate responses.

I would like to thank you for taking the time for this interview. Your participation in this project is really important to this study. It will provide feedback to senior Department of Army leaders of contracting operations on what are concerns/reservations and understand more about how to improve the progression of contracting specialists to become contracting officers.

I will be interviewing you and other Contracting Specialists in the ACC, in order to gather views of the workforce concerning what may be contributing to the issue of "why contracting specialists lack desire to move forward toward becoming warranted contracting officers."

Before I start the interview, please be advised that this study may be published. If so, we will not use your name. The interview should take about 30 minutes. May I tape record your interview? This will aid me as I go through my notes to insure no misinterpretation of anything you stated.

Date:

Place:

Time:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Interview Questions:

1. As a member of this Command, how has the shortage of contracting professionals impacted you? If you recently came to the organization, from a previous Army agency, how did it impact you in that organization?
2. How has contracting specialists lacking a desire to move forward toward becoming warranted contracting officers impacted your organization?
3. As a member of this organization, what are the personal roadblocks preventing you from becoming a contracting officer? What roadblocks have you observed that might be preventing others?

4. If you could be the senior executive for a day, what two to three actions would you implement to help address “why contracting specialists lack desire to move forward toward becoming warranted contracting officers?”

5. Before he left office, former Defense Secretary Gates addressed the Defense Acquisition Workforce shortage issue. The Army will be getting approximately 1,885 contracting positions. Where do you think the Army should allocate resources with the 1102 series? What are your concerns about the contracting officer issue over the next 5 years?

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview and the vital information you have provided. Again, I assure you of the confidentiality of your responses. Would you like to be provided a copy of the study results?

APPENDIX C

SENIOR LEADERSHIP QUESTIONNAIRE

I am working on a research project for the Defense Acquisition University's Senior Service College Fellowship Program. The focus of this research project is to determine a senior leader perspective on "why contracting specialists lack desire to move forward toward becoming warranted contracting officers."

Please know that in order to really address the issue of "why contracting specialists lack desire to move forward toward becoming warranted contracting officers," it is crucial to obtain as much candid information and insight as possible. This matter is a serious challenge for the Army Acquisition community and we must use every available tool to analyze the problem and develop appropriate responses.

I would like to thank you for taking the time for this interview. Your participation in this project is really important to this study. It will provide feedback to senior Department of Army leaders of contracting operations on what are concerns/reservations and understand more about how to improve the progression of contracting specialists to become contracting officers.

I will be interviewing you and other Senior Executives in the ACC, in order to gather views of senior leadership concerning what may be contributing to the issue of "why contracting specialists lack desire to move forward toward becoming warranted contracting officers."

Before I start the interview, please be advised that this study may be published. If so, we will not use your name. The interview should take about 30 minutes. May I tape record your interview? This will aid me as I go through my notes to insure no misinterpretation of anything you stated.

Date:

Place:

Time:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Interview Questions:

1. How has contracting specialists lacking a desire to move forward toward becoming warranted contracting officers impacted your organization?
2. As a senior member of the acquisition community, are there some challenges encountered preventing contracting specialists from being willing to assume the role of contracting officers?
3. If you could implement four actions to help address "why contracting specialists lack desire to move forward toward becoming warranted contracting officers," what actions would you implement?

4. Before he left office, former Defense Secretary Gates, stated that about 20,000 (10,000 from in-sourcing) more new acquisition personnel would be added to the Defense Acquisition Workforce. Of that number, approximately 5,400 personnel will be for contracting (1,885 for Army). Knowing what you know regarding the shortage of workforce personnel, what are your concerns about the contracting officer issue over the next 5 years?

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview and the vital information you have provided. Again, I assure you of the confidentiality of your responses. Would you like to be provided a copy of the study results?