

Mitigating the Risk of Acquisition Knowledge Loss Due to Workforce Attrition

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Definitions

- **Attrition:** Change in the numbers, skills, and competencies in the workforce due to retirement, promotion, transfer, career change of leadership and workforce
- **Critical Acquisition Knowledge:** Knowledge that is fundamental to successful acquisition outcomes including organizational or technical knowledge related to key processes or competencies
- **Knowledge Loss:** Failure to capture, adapt transfer and reuse (retention) what you know about what you do

Why Is Knowledge Loss A Key Workforce Challenge We Are Facing?

- **Loss of knowledge -- and people with the knowledge -- between agencies and those leaving government is increasing**
- **Within government agencies, no integrated process or framework to capture and reuse the workforce's relevant information, experience, and insight on a consistent and disciplined basis**
- **Complicating factors:**
 - (1) increasing size and complexity of acquisition workload
 - (2) decline in number of professionals in acquisition workforce
 - (3) not a training issue, a learning issue
- **It exists at the leadership level and at the workforce level – complicated by generational gaps that impact how people work and collaborate with each other**
- **Knowledge loss and time to competency challenges – Acquisition Workforce is facing steeper, longer learning curves**

The 5000.02 Acquisition Environment

Challenging and Unique

- **Programs are diverse and organizationally dispersed**
 - One USAF product center has 28 ACAT I programs within 6 independent Missions Areas and several Direct Reporting Groups
- **Acquisition reform marginalized the training and continued growth of the core skills necessary for program planning and execution within the acquisition workforce.**
 - Has been a gradual decrease in functional expertise and program management discipline resulting in greater difficulty in controlling the desired acquisition outcome
- **Much training available focuses on concept and theory and could be better tailored to real application in a practical acquisition context**

The 5000.02 Acquisition Environment

Challenging and Unique

- **Learning lessons focused on the execution of core acquisition processes across organizations could significantly improve mission outcomes**
 - Lack of a collective ability to “learn lessons” and reinvest these learning into acquisition planning, program planning and program execution.
 - Real and urgent need to create a consistent, disciplined, and sustainable process for capturing, adapting, transferring, and reusing critical acquisition knowledge across acquisition programs.
- **Learning from the execution of core processes is not consistently leveraged so that improvement in a core process also simultaneously changes training on the process**
 - Change in process requires that the training reflect how the process, once improved or changed, is being executed so that the next graduates will be trained based on the most current field experience.

Some Basics to Set the Stage for Success In Addressing This Challenge

- Understand there is **long term value in capturing and reusing knowledge** and how and where it can be applied
 - it's about performance!
- Requires desire to **make this part of the way you operate** and work -- look for a place to start where it will have a significant impact on performance
- **Focus on the people and the processes** necessary to move knowledge across the workforce — not the technology
 - it's about changing behavior!

Some Basics to Set the Stage for Success In Addressing This Challenge

- Recognize that **it is a long term commitment** to maintain and sustain a knowledge enabled organization – not a FY project
- Understanding the **multi-generational nature** of the acquisition workforce
- Create awareness by articulating and communicating the **knowledge loss problem as a “burning platform”**

All Source Acquisition*

...a concept for performing and learning

“The integration of a highly skilled acquisition workforce that understands and executes their core processes using the right tools, methods, and leading practices to deliver superior acquisition outcomes.

Through a systematic and disciplined process of performing and learning, the workforce creates new knowledge comprising a continuously evolving base of information and functional experience that is leveraged across the mission areas to improve the probability of system development, deployment, and operational success.”

All Source Acquisition

- **How:** through disciplined adoption of a systematic framework** to capture, transfer, and reuse information and experience to measurably improve acquisition outcomes

** [Learning Processes/Communities of Practice/Knowledge Repositories/Enabling Technology]

- **Value:** enable an acquisition workforce to:
 - Leverage their knowledge in ongoing operations to immediately improve mission performance
 - Improve the workforce's ability to learn from past challenges and successes in program decision making and system delivery
 - Align process, execution, and training so that the most current experience and expertise is immediately integrated into core processes and their training
 - Create long term performance improvement from knowledge held by the acquisition workforce

Tools And Techniques You Can Use Without an Established Framework For Capturing And Reusing Knowledge

- **Teaching/Master Class:** Presentation of fundamental and operational knowledge; review and discussion of a learner's specific problem or results in a group.
- **Community of Practice:** Groups of practitioners in a discipline that connect to seek/share experiences, develop/adopt practices or tools and develop/support a learning agenda.
- **Technical Mentoring:** Interaction between expert and learner to help the learner do a job more effectively and/or to progress in their career.
- **Job Shadowing:** Opportunities for a learner to observe the expert interacting with others or doing more complex work. Includes setup and debriefing discussions.
- **Guided Experience / Development Assignments:** Carefully selected projects or work assignments that fill gaps in experience or broaden/deepen targeted skills. "Guided" includes expert observation and feedback.
- **Knowledge Coaching:** Combines mentoring, shadowing and observation to assess learner competency gaps, and guide development with timely performance feedback. Expert enables learner to work on projects above current skill level to accelerate learning while cost-effectively assuring that project is successful.
- **Knowledge Elicitation:** Interview-based approach with expert to articulate big picture, mental models and detailed "how to" and "when to" guidance.
- **Peer Assist:** Experts share experiences and knowledge in a facilitated meeting with a person or team who is looking for advice on a challenge, problem or project.
- **Knowledge Repositories (Knowledge Assets)** to store the "know how and know why" of processes or methods
- **Leadership transition workshops**

Source: Jeff Stemke /Bill Kaplan

Questions or Comments

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