Getting Back to Basics in the Acquisition Workforce

Leadership • Motivation • Delegation • Communication

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In the Jan-Feb 96 issue of *Program Manager* Magazine, Berwyn Jones expressed his belief that government is experiencing "alarmingly low success rates for reinvention, reengineering, and quality improvement processes.[1]" He cited "the lack of top or middle management support and the lack of strategic planning" as the reasons for the low success rates in the latest innovations in acquisition management. If Berwyn Jones' assertions are correct, I believe the reason for the apparent lack of top or middle management support may be the dissonance generated in the workplace by the overuse or misuse of the terms *reinvention*, *reengineering*, and *quality improvement processes*.

I am a strong advocate for revolutionizing the way we do work. I believe we need to do things "faster, better, and cheaper" to survive budget constraints and still carry out our mission. Further, I believe the proper implementation of the latest and greatest buzz words —*reinvention*, *reengineering*, *total quality management*, *strategic planning*, and *empowerment* — can result in faster, better and cheaper. However, I also believe cramming those buzz words down a naysayer's throat can result in total disaster. Therefore, I intend to describe ways program offices can do things faster, better, and cheaper for the individual who cannot stomach words like *reinvention* and *reengineering*. I will do this by going back to basics and emphasizing fundamental principles of leadership such as: *motivation*, *delegation*, *communication*, *vision*, and *inspiring trust*.

Problem — Acquisition's Seven Cardinal Sins

First, I will highlight seven generic acquisition problems which I frequently observed among program offices, users, and contractors. These common problems often prevented the government from doing things faster, better, and cheaper. Then I will discuss how visionary leaders can avoid these common problems by *motivating*, *delegating*, *communicating*, *providing vision*, and *inspiring trust*. I will refer to the seven common acquisition problems as "Acquisition's Seven Cardinal Sins."

Sin No. 1: Not *satisfying user* requirements.

Sin No. 2: Common goals, but *uncommon* objectives (different motivating factors).

Sin No. 3: *Adversarial relationships* among government, contractor, and user, which destroy trust.

Sin No. 4: *Low morale* among program office personnel.

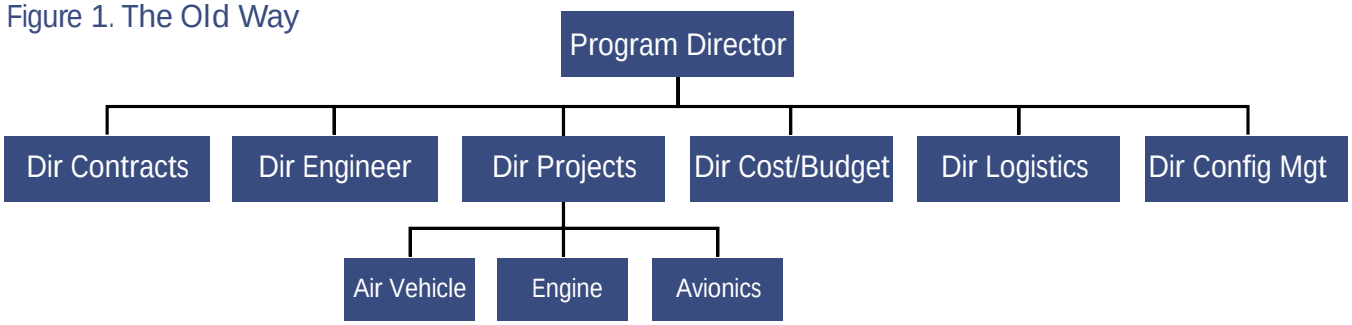
Sin No. 5: No clear lines of *communication*.

Sin No. 6: Lack of *understanding of big picture*.

Sin No. 7: *Inefficient* processes, *duplication* of efforts, and lack of understanding of *roles and relationships*, resulting in *overworked* and *underutilized* employees.

Not satisfying the user/customer requirements (**Sin No. 1**) is by far the worst acquisition cardinal sin and most likely a result of the other six sins. It is unlikely the program office and contractor will satisfy the user if they do not clearly understand what the user wants. Therefore, it is crucial the program office and contractors clearly understand the warfighters' goals and objectives. In addition, it is imperative the program office and contractor understand each others' goals and objectives.

Figure 1. The Old Way



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Adverse situations often result from this lack of understanding of goals and objectives. For example, the user may have a goal to improve their system capability and an objective to be under cost and ahead of schedule. The program office may simply adopt the user's goal and objective. The contractor, however, may have the same goal, but a completely different objective (maximizing return on investment to the stockholders). If the program office, user, and contractor are not aware of each others' goals and uncommon objectives (**Sin No. 2**), there may be substantial risk involved in meeting the user's requirements. In addition, ignorance of each others' goals and objectives may cause adversarial relationships among government, contractor, and customer/user organizations, which would increase program risk and decrease the likelihood of satisfying the customer (**Sin No. 3**).

Figure 1 illustrates the traditional Matrix or Functional organizational management approach. Under this traditional approach, experts from various "functional" acquisition disciplines were "matrixed" or collocated to acquisition projects where they worked with project managers under the Director of Projects. Since most project managers had engineering backgrounds, their program knowledge was often limited to engineering aspects of the program.

Although program directors often placed project managers in charge because of their technical expertise, project managers rarely played key roles in major program office decisions because they were two or three levels below the program director in the organizational structure. Program directors generally relied on "functional" support staff to provide specific areas of expertise to the projects such as contracts, logistics, cost, budget, and test. However, program directors rarely placed "functionals" in charge of projects. Consequently, some program office personnel perceived the word "functional" (sometimes referred to as the *"F"* word) to have a slightly negative connotation. As a result, morale among those "functionals" was low (**Sin No. 4**). Specifically, there was rarely a strong feeling of belonging or commitment to the organization and overall mission.

The IPT approach, a variant of the matrix or functional management structure, is centered around teamwork, synergy, and cooperation.

Many problems resulted from the matrix organization described above. First, there were no clear lines of communication (**Sin No. 5**). Program directors often asked the same questions to various functional members of the same project and received different answers. Further, the answers were often filtered by various tiers of middle management. These multiple lines of communications hindered relations with users/customers and contractors, especially if the customer and contractor also received different program office positions from various functional representatives.

Another problem created by the matrix management structure was the lack of understanding of the big picture and how things tied together (**Sin No. 6**). The reason for the lack of synthesis was because employees were only expected to understand and address issues in their own respective disciplines; therefore, employees rarely knew or understood what other functional support personnel were doing. This lack of "big picture" understanding frequently led to inefficient processes and duplication of efforts in program offices, which resulted in excessive workloads in the busiest work areas and underutilized employees in the slowest work areas (**Sin No. 7**).

Solution — Effective Leadership Through Integrated Product Teams

Figure 2 shows the new Integrated Product Team (IPT) organizational management approach. This approach, a variant of the matrix or functional management structure, is centered around teamwork, synergy, and cooperation. Effective implementation of IPTs will help program offices build successful high-performance teams that can overcome Acquisition's Seven Cardinal Sins. Specifically, IPTs enhance program office *leadership* by making it much easier for program directors to motivate, delegate, communicate, provide vision, and inspire trust among program office personnel.

Motivation

By eliminating the use of the *"F"* word (functionals), IPTs improve program office morale. Under the IPT structure, representatives from each acquisition discipline are equal participating members of the team. For example, the Avionics IPT in Figure 2 is comprised of team members from each program office discipline. Although IPT members contribute mostly in their area of expertise, all IPT members are apprised of all IPT issues and encouraged to generate solutions to all problems. This free flow of ideas provides each IPT member a clear understanding of the big picture and how different program office issues tie together (**solution to Sin No. 6**). The open communication also provides professional development for IPT members and enhances productivity through synergy and maximized participation. In addition, the team approach eliminates duplication of efforts, conflicting program office positions, and program office dissension caused by "turf battles" and "rice bowl" arguments (**solution to Sin No. 7**). *By inspiring trust and strengthening feelings of belonging and commitment to the organization and overall mission, IPTs significantly improve employee morale* (**solution to Sin No. 4**).

Each IPT has a team captain or IPT Chief/IPT Leader who provides team leadership and champions the team's activities. Since program managers have a general understanding of all acquisition disciplines, IPT chiefs are usually program managers. However, other team members can be the IPT chiefs if the IPT mission involves a specialty area such as contracts (contracting expertise would probably be most critical to a Contract Close-out IPT). Further, every member of an effective IPT should have the program understanding and wherewithal to assume the role of team captain. The most critical qualification and prerequisite for the team leader position is the mastery of interpersonal leadership skills such as team building, facilitating, coaching, counseling, and communicating, which are necessary to coordinate and synthesize differing ideas of IPT members.

Although the IPT Chief champions the IPT efforts, the entire IPT is directly responsible for the success of the IPT. Therefore, the entire IPT should be rewarded for IPT successes. Program offices can reward the entire IPT by instituting team recognition programs. Team recognition enhances program office morale and inspires esprit de corps among teams by creating "Win-Win" situations in which every member of the team receives recognition for the team's success.

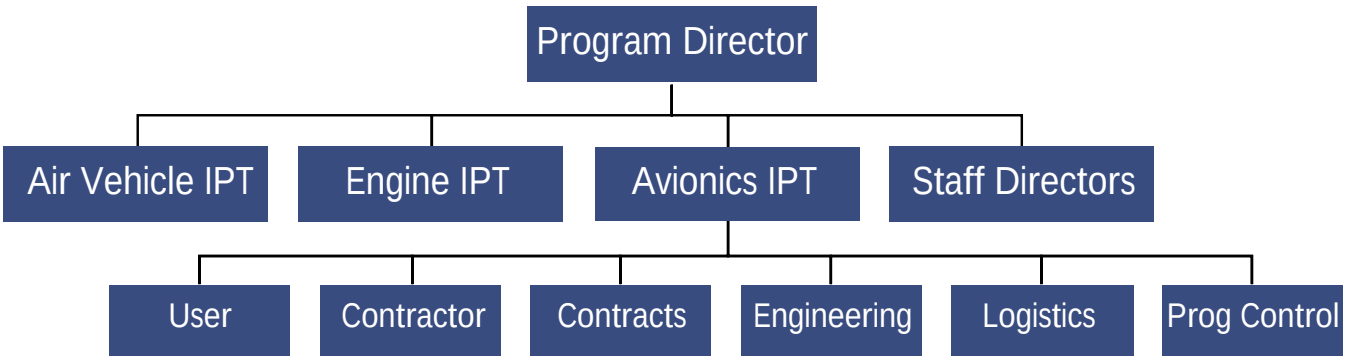
This is in sharp contrast to the "Win-Lose" situation which may be inadvertently created by an individual recognition program when only one award nominee wins, and the remaining award nominees lose. Although individual awards are an excellent means to motivate program office personnel and reward top performers, they may not be as optimal if an individual award winner receives all of the credit for the work performed by many people or if two members of the same IPT are pitted against each other for the lone spot in the winner's circle. In summary, team awards foster teamwork by rewarding teamwork, and they instill pride in the entire IPT.

Since the "functional" support staff members from the old matrix organization are now team members on IPTs, the program office no longer needs a directorate chief for each functional discipline. Instead, all of the functional directorates from the old matrix organization are consolidated into one program office staff directorate. Although the program director's staff directorate is small, it performs three functions which are paramount to program office success: (1) helps the program director develop and institute the program office vision; (2) trains and equips the IPT members to carry out their IPT mission; and (3) runs interference and removes obstacles/barriers so IPT members can focus on their IPT mission.

Delegation

Effective program office implementation of IPTs helps program directors *delegate* major program office decision authority to the IPTs. The IPT structure facilitates delegation of decision authority because the IPTs report directly to the program director. By establishing the boundaries of their IPT's authority with the program director, IPTs can receive major program office decision authority. These boundaries are called a *Baseline* or *Charter*. The IPT's Charter should include, but is not limited to, the IPT's goals, objectives, and a near-term action plan for carrying out their mission (vision, goals, and objec-

Figure 2. The New Way



tives are further described in the section entitled "Vision"). The IPT Charter should also include external customer/supplier interfaces and the IPT budget. The Charter helps the IPT receive decision authority because the IPT's reward for meeting the Charter is the program director's "Keys to the Kingdom." These keys to the kingdom give the IPT "free rein" and "free reign" to make all program decisions within the boundaries defined in the IPT Charter.

Communication

The streamlined reporting from the IPT to the program director facilitates clear lines of *communication* in the program office (**solution to Sin No. 5**). Unlike the old matrix management approach, if program directors have questions regarding cost, schedule, or key performance parameters, they only need to ask one group, the IPT. Further, they can ask any member of the IPT, and can reasonably expect to receive the identical (and correct) answer. These direct and clear lines of communication further increase morale by providing all IPT members access to the program director, and more importantly, a chance to help out the "Boss." My final point regarding program office communication is that IPTs should sit together. At a minimum, team members who are dedicated full-time to the IPT should sit together. Although sitting together does not automatically make a group a team, effective teams do function much more efficiently if they sit together.

Vision

Program success is largely dependent upon leadership and the leader's ability to provide a clear *vision* for the future. Specifically, program office, user, and contractor leaders should establish a program *vision* (a picture of where the team is going and what it will look like when the team gets there); *goals* (intermediate stops toward getting there); and *objectives* (top priorities and motivating factors). Program directors should avoid vision statements that are long and complex (four or five sentence paragraphs) because they are difficult to: (1) read quickly; (2) understand thoroughly; and (3) internalize willingly. Vision

...the IPT's reward for meeting the Charter is the program director's "Keys to the Kingdom." These keys to the kingdom give the IPT "free rein" and "free reign" to make all program decisions within the boundaries defined in the IPT Charter.

IPT Solutions To Acquisition's Seven Cardinal Sins

Sin No. 1
Not *satisfying user* requirements
Solution to Sin No. 1
Many effective IPTs track the timely completion of customer actions to ensure they are honoring customer commitments and satisfying their customer/user requirements.

Sin No. 2
Common goals, but *uncommon objectives* (different motivating factors)
Solution to Sin No. 2
Trust will be maximized if IPTs (program office, user, and contractor) adopt a "Win-Win" or "No Deal" approach and strive to help each other meet their common goals as well as their uncommon *objectives*.

Sin No. 3
Adversarial relationships among government, contractor, and user that destroy trust
Solution to Sin No. 3
Weapon system programs have the highest probability of success when the program office, user, and contractors trust each other and work together in non-adversarial partnerships.

Sin No. 4
Low morale for program office personnel
Solution to Sin No. 4
IPTs significantly improve employee morale by inspiring trust and strengthening feelings of belonging and commitment to the organization and overall mission.

Sin No. 5
No clear lines of *communication*
Solution to Sin No. 5
The streamlined reporting from the IPT to the program director facilitates clear lines of *communication* in the program office.

Sin No. 6
Lack of *understanding of big picture*
Solution to Sin No. 6
Although IPT members contribute mostly in their area of expertise, all IPT members are apprised of all IPT issues and encouraged to generate solutions to all problems. This free flow of ideas provides each IPT member a clear understanding of the big picture and how different program office issues tie together.

Sin No. 7
Inefficient processes; *duplication* of efforts; and lack of understanding of *roles and relationships* — resulting in *overworked* and *underutilized* employees
Solution to Sin No. 7
The team (IPT) approach eliminates duplication of efforts, conflicting program office positions, and program office dissension caused by "turf battles" and "rice bowl" arguments.

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statements are usually most effective if they are short, passionate, and memorable. An example of a short memorable vision statement is "Proliferate Link 16."

Integrated product teams track their progress against their established goals to ensure they are progressing toward the program office vision. These measures of progress and effectiveness or "metrics" are simply methods to reinforce that the team is accomplishing what it set out to accomplish. Many effective IPTs track the timely completion of customer actions to ensure they are honoring customer commitments and satisfying their customer/user requirements (**solution to Sin No. 1**). As mentioned previously, IPTs should include their goals and objectives in their Charter with the program director.

Inspiring Trust

Lastly, IPTs inspire trust among program office, user, and contractor personnel. Program offices will *inspire trust* with their customer and supplier by including the user and the contractor in their IPT. Trust will be maximized if IPTs (program office, user, and contractor) adopt a "Win-Win" or "No Deal" approach and strive to help each other meet their common goals as well as their uncommon objectives (**solution to Sin No. 2**). Weapon system programs have the highest probability of success when the program office, user, and contractors trust each other and work together in non-adversarial partnerships (**solution to Sin No. 3**).

Conclusion

Acquisition's Seven Cardinal Sins can be avoided if the user, contractor, and program office work together to coordinate user requirements; generate acquisition plans; develop streamlined "performance-based" contract requirements; and design, build, test, and maintain warfighters' weapon systems. Since the user owns the requirements process, the contractor builds and integrates the weapon systems, and the program office synthesizes the acquisition and sustainment processes, it is imperative the user, contractor, and program office work hand-in-hand throughout the entire life cycle of the weapon system. Therefore, to meet current and future budget challenges and avoid Acquisition's Seven Cardinal Sins, I highly recommend program offices discard the old matrix management way of doing business and embrace the new IPT way of doing business. I also highly recommend program managers don't shun the IPT way of doing business simply because they are turned off by the misuse or overuse of words such as *reinvention*, *reengineering*, and *total quality management.* Instead, I encourage program offices to go back to basics and build high-performance teams through good old fashioned *leadership principles such as: motivation, delegation, communication, providing vision, and inspiring trust*!

REFERENCE

Jones, Berwyn, "Strategic Planning in Government – The Key to Reinventing Ourselves," *Program Manager*, Vol. XXV No. 1, DSMC 130 (January-February 1996).