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Leading Military Acquisitions: Not as Easy as It Sounds

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or position of the Department of the Air Force or the US Government**

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Introduction

No one wants to hear another story about a failed government acquisition. The stories all sound the same. Warfighters frustratingly await the delivery of an updated system necessary for victory in combat. Meanwhile, the system design and production grossly exceed original timelines and budgets. Program managers get frustrated with contractor performance while contractors push back on requirement changes forced upon them by the government. The press feeds public concerns by highlighting potential issues with use of taxpayer dollars. Congress grows antsy. They charter studies to determine root causes for acquisition issues and search for larger themes. The studies breed new policy legislation and each year authority shifts as new offices stand up and shut down. Change is constant and the cycle is brutally endless. Yet, through it all, leaders must overcome the challenges in front of them and deliver superior capabilities for the defense of the nation.

The US relies on advanced technology for a military edge; therefore, leaders must conquer acquisition challenges to stay a step ahead of adversaries. Budgets are finite; threats and ideas for new capabilities are infinite. Leadership remains paramount to charting a sensible acquisition path to support an encompassing national strategy. Citizens elect political leaders to make the tough budgetary decisions on which programs are most vital to national interests. Congress, the executive branch, and the military must unite to lead military industries in producing systems that support national ends while remaining cost effective. Navigating the Congress, military, and industry triangle requires continuous improvements through acquisition reform policies and legislation. Change is necessary as systems grow in complexity and become increasingly interdependent; however, each change brings new challenges. The 1947 Armed

Services Procurement Regulation spanned 127 pages. Today, the Federal Acquisition Regulation exceeds 2000 pages.¹ Acquisitions leaders must understand change is inevitable and tomorrow's rulebook will undoubtedly grow longer and more encompassing.

On the surface acquisition appears simple, figure out what you want and pay someone to build it. Yet, history shows multiple instances where every service fell short. In a constantly changing technological, political, and fiscal demographic, the key to military acquisition improvements rests solely on leadership's shoulders. This article presents overarching recommendations based on conquering three specific challenges: framing acquisitions, building and maintaining trust, and unrelenting negotiating at all levels. The first challenge frames the overall system of acquisitions as complex and once properly argued promotes understanding of a probe, sense, and respond strategy for acquisitions. With a complex system strategy, transitions for major systems can only succeed if leadership overcomes the challenge of building trust throughout the pentagon, Capitol Hill, industry, and their own service. The final challenge narrows the issue to the art of negotiation and offers solutions to boost a program manager's power to persist through inevitable unforeseen setbacks. For each challenge analyzed, closing recommendations provide a starting point for leaders to consider when developing a comprehensive strategy.

Leadership Challenge 1: Frame acquisitions as a complex system first

When tackling any issue an overarching strategy is paramount to generate ways and means to achieve a set of "ends" envisioned to solve the problem. In developing strategy, the joint planning framework outlines four sections that combine to improve overall understanding.² First, determine where you are, then where you want to go. Next, determine what problem

prevents you from getting there, and finally devise an operational approach that overcomes the identified problem. Acquisition strategies are no different. Begin with intelligence reports and technical market research to understand where you are. Use the Joint Capabilities Integration Development System (JCIDS) to map out requirements that illuminate where you want to go. Determine one or multiple problems standing in your way such as funding, technology, manpower, political support, etc. Then make these problems the focus of your operational approach. Explore Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership and education, Personnel, Policy and Facility (DOTMLPF) solutions.³ A noted difference from the JCIDS DOTMLPF approach is that a materiel acquisition solution must include leadership always and a robust plan that anticipates unplanned new challenges. Leaders must see the overall system beyond the physical materiel solution and consider all the intangibles. Successful large government acquisitions consider the system holistically and all the stakeholders involved. Looking beyond technology and optimism is necessary for success in a system with competing interests, information, and risk tolerance.

Boone and Snowden developed the Cynefin model as a sense-making tool to assist leaders in developing strategies based on systems' characteristics. The tool helps leaders understand systems and their tendencies prior to developing strategies. The goal of the model is to avoid system disorder by first evaluating the level of order within the system. The model contains four system representations and two encompassing traits. The two traits are ordered and disordered while the four representations are simple, complicated, complex, and chaotic. One should not force systems to fit strictly within one of the four representations; instead, a real life system can span multiple areas and reveal characteristics from multiple representations. Simple and complicated systems have traits where cause and effect relationships are discernable and

present opportunities for ordered strategies. Simple systems have clear linkages to cause and effect and thrive on best practice solutions. Complicated systems rely on expert knowledge and good practices to avoid disorder.⁴ On the other side of the model, unordered systems conceal cause and effect relationships. Complex systems reveal cause and effect ties only in hindsight, and chaotic systems present no relationship at all. The Cynefin tool increases situational understanding of the system by forcing leaders to evaluate all of the systems characteristics. The Cynefin tool presents an effective sense-making exercise to develop an acquisition strategy because the ultimate goal is to avoid disorder, and the exercise forces leaders to consider the acquisition in light of all the stakeholders and cause-effect relationships.

The abundance of governance and structure that surrounds the Defense Acquisition System (DAS) presents an illusion that acquisitions are a straightforward process. The DAS, JCIDS, and the Planning, Programming, Budgeting, and Execution (PPBE) System are all detailed processes with instructions, rules, and laws that govern their execution. The abundance of structure and governance combined with pre-identified stakeholders and decision makers can lure some acquisition leaders to believe the overall system is simple within the Cynefin model. The Bradley fighting vehicle presents a counterpoint for placing acquisition as a simple representation within the model. As detailed in the book and the movie “The Pentagon Wars,” the acquisition team develops a simple fighting vehicle that meets requirements but fails to complete the project based on conflicting interests at senior levels for additional capabilities.⁵ The acquisition community developed the term requirements creep to describe when an acquisition tacks on more requirements than planned which changes costs, increases schedules, and presents new unforeseen problems. Viewed in another light, requirements creep surfaces when unplanned cause and effect relationships reveal themselves within the system. Leadership

must either fight to avoid capturing these creeping concerns as part of the system, or adjust the strategy to absorb additional stakeholder requirements. The example highlights that while the acquisition may seem as simple as purchasing a commodity, the underlying cause and effect relations are far from simple. Acquisitions at all levels involve costs, risks, and uncertainty, and most of the time this prevents considerations of acquisitions as a simple system. Best practices can provide information on how to approach an acquisitions problem but they are not a one-size fits all step-by-step checklist for success.

Similar to simple systems, a complicated system representation possesses discoverable cause and effect relationships but requires expertise for discovery.⁶ Donald Rumsfeld commented that 128 government backed studies addressing acquisition issues occurred between 1975 and 2003.⁷ Through all these studies, experts were unable to identify an exact root cause and remedy for acquisitions failures. Nor should the experts burden themselves with seeking to unveil a perfect solution for acquisition woes. There is not a way to establish an effective policy that corrects all the problems of the past and future. It is impossible to establish an acquisition policy and process that accounts for problems we have yet to think of or experience. Historians are excellent at drawing conclusions and understanding from the past, but we cannot expect them to predict exactly how a future war might play out. No past battle nor acquisition will play out exactly the same way because future conditions are never an exact replica of the past. Therefore, acquisitions do not fit within the model's complicated system representation. If the system itself is not complicated, continual analysis can spawn stalemates, analysis paralysis, and conflicting solutions. As acquisition policies morph and issues persist or reappear, do not seek a universal solution through expert analysis. Instead, learn from the past, stop misclassifying acquisition

into the complicated representation, and understand how to apply knowledge through leadership to new undiscovered problems.

Agreeing that acquisitions are not simple nor complicated, leadership can view military acquisitions processes as primarily a complex system. Complex systems consist of a large number of elements, non-linear behaviors, and a rich history whose past is responsible for the current behavior.⁸ Acquisition programs not only consist of technology complexities with parts and software, but also social complexities surrounding political, civilian, and industry senior leaders. In complex systems, emergent solutions and additional problems arise almost unexpectedly. These systems must constantly adapt to overcome perturbations. Program managers employ risk management to handle cost, schedule, or performance issues, but history shows small problems can have large non-linear effects. Problems can arise from all directions: technical, political, and financial. When leaders fail to see a system as complex, they grow frustrated with a lack of results, find failure intolerable, and resort to micromanagement. The steady increase of policies, laws, and oversight favor an inability to see acquisitions in the right light. Only by embracing that acquisitions lie largely in the complex domain can leaders develop approaches to treat underlying problems not symptoms.

The first core leadership challenge requires a perception change across the political and military spectrum. Policymakers, military leaders, and acquisition professionals need to embrace complexity and develop strategies that are resilient to perturbations. It is safe to assume that every couple of years the political environment will change, the operational environment will hold new and different threats, and emergent solutions that solved problems in the past will not necessarily solve future problems. Empiricist Nassim Talib warns that unpredictable non-linear “black swan” changes are inevitable.⁹ They decimate cost and schedule predictions. These non-

linear changes are unavoidable in the complex system of acquisitions and the only way to survive them is to remain flexible enough to endure their setbacks.

The Cynefin framework recommends a probe, sense, respond leadership approach for problem solving in complex systems and this approach can prove effective in acquisition leadership.¹⁰ Probing permits creativity to try new acquisition methods. The adaptive acquisition framework provides nonstandard approaches to include tailored 5000 series, emergent operational needs, middle tier acquisitions, and others. Probing should also encompass varied contract methods using other transaction authorities, marketplace competitions, open government standards, and more. Leaders should probe new processes by exploring different forms of competition, prototyping, parallel path schedule risk reduction, warfighter led contractor teams, and more. In addition, leaders can probe new relationships such as assigning the program manager to serve as the program element monitor (Rapid Capabilities Office construct), revealing pre-decisional budget information to Congress and the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), inviting the media into the decision cycle, placing a prime contractor on the program management budget team, and more. Another idea is for leaders to probe new organization structures by eliminating middle tier management and reporting, empower program managers and program executive officers (PEOs), incorporate requirements developers into the program office for design decisions, allow the program office to champion requirements development based on affordability, and more. Additionally, leaders can probe new partnerships by briefing Congress as a contractor lobbyist and government program office team, hold regular meetings with the Government Accountability Office to document the program from its earliest inception, permit the inspector general to vote on stakeholder requirements and acquisition baseline decisions, allow OSD/Cost Assessment and Program

Evaluation (CAPE) the role to develop the baseline program schedule from inception, and more. Finally, leaders can probe new transitions by delivering prototype products to the warfighter early for experimentation prior to low rate production, allow Government labs to continue production without transition to industry, allow Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency to continue an acquisition and lead the transition to operations and production, etc. Probing is critical for success in a complex system. Leaders must accept failure; fail fast and recover. Continued efforts to probe are necessary to prevent static solutions and resist the notion to treat all situations with the same approach. Probing also encourages adaptability, resiliency, and creativity to persist through nonlinear changes and unknown unknowns.

Following probing, the most difficult step in a complex system approach is the sense phase. After probing with a variety of different actions, sensing provides the crucial feedback necessary for actions, decisions, and strategies. The challenge resides in transforming probing results into a military wide sensor network able to draw conclusions. Sensing requires a statistically significant sample size and variance prior to the respond step. Multiple probe and sense cycles improve situational awareness while revealing potential solutions for response. Sensing requires inputs from all stakeholders beyond the program office team to include OSD, joint staff requirements developers, Congress, media, and more. Leadership is required to encourage critical feedback from all stakeholders. Additionally, leadership is necessary to assimilate the feedback information and separate the signal from the noise. There is no shortage of opinions in large Government acquisitions; however, the sensing must lead to effective decision-making or the probing was in vain. Finally, sensing must remain freeform to preserve its pure intent. Developing formalized policy and calendar driven decisions inhibit sensing at the lowest action level and dilute critical feedback as decisions rise to risk adverse bureaucracy

levels. Herein lies the largest leadership challenge. Convincing all stakeholders to allow failure, remain patient, and avoid derailing an approach until the sensing phase has run its course. Sensing times and approaches will vary dependent upon the probe phase. Leadership must consistently work to preserve stakeholder relationships and block attempts to smother the sense phase prematurely. If the probe and sense phases are successful, the final phase is rather straightforward.

With a variety of probing approaches and a wide and deep sensing network, the final phase is simply for leaders to do what they do best, make decisions. The response phase is nothing more than assimilating the information from sensors and making decisions. Each decision is different for each system approach. Responses occur when the timing is right and it is up to the leaders to understand the system well enough to determine when the best time is to make a call. Leaders should not jump to respond with a rigid approach or objective methodology. Instead, leaders must approach each decisions separately and rely on stakeholder sensing feedback to respond subjectively to stimulus. During a house testimony, Lambert embraced system complexity and supported leaders empowered to respond. He stated, “Acquisition reform should focus less on individual “silver bullets” and focus more on creating and sustaining a silver mine.”¹¹ The probe-sense-respond mentality will reveal a plethora of emergent silver mine solutions vice a one size fits all silver bullet policy. Ultimately, the approach must remain empirical. Treating individual symptoms through silver bullets will not cure a system level disease. Successful acquisition approaches are fleeting and often not directly applicable to a future approach in a complex system. Leadership is essential to success and implementing probe-sense-respond approaches improves performance within a complex system.

Recommendation 1: Leaders must enable and sustain probe, sense, and respond strategies through empirical trial and error approaches to acquisition that vary across sizes, types, and missions of system acquired.

Leadership Challenge 2: Trust, the key to accountability vs. autonomy

A leader wastes time arguing the specifics of complex system strategies if he or she is not trusted. The acquisition community as a whole experiences peak and valleys of trust from appointed civil leaders. A valley of trust occurred when Congress developed the Nunn-McCurdy amendment to mandate notifications when programs vastly exceed initial cost estimates.¹² The law resulted from poor performance and a loss of trust. Maxwell's law of solid ground reveals that leaders lose the ability to influence without trust.¹³ Doctrine for the Armed Forces Joint Publication 1 highlights that trust among commanders and staffs expands options and enhances flexibility, agility, and the freedom to take the initiative.¹⁴ Trust amongst military acquisition professionals is no different. Trust comprises the leadership challenge between the desires of acquisition leaders, autonomy, and the desires of Congress, accountability for failures. Acquisition leaders can regain trust once lost by overcoming personnel turnover, admitting failure, and publicizing successes.

Acquisition leaders must overcome the challenge of personnel turnover to set the conditions for consistency and trust. In 1962, a study concluded that one of six major factors in acquisitions failure stemmed from frequent turnover of personnel.¹⁵ Today, the issue persists. Not only do program managers change, but also Congress and other leaders with decision authority rotate in and out.¹⁶ Overcoming turnover requires new leaders to immerse themselves in a program's history and delay judgment until understanding the political, technical, and

economic situation. Leaders must avoid strategies that impart radical changes during times of high turnover. Rigid approaches that worked in the past fail unless tailored to the probe-sense-respond approach. Leaders should focus on long-term trends, personal relationships, and detailed questions when deciding a way forward. Succeeding through turnover requires new leaders to assess the current culture with fresh eyes and reinforce best practices, but only after fully understanding the situation. Another method to reduce the challenge of overcoming personnel turnover is to minimize turnover. Creating promotion opportunities within military careers for those that sustain roles in specific programs can greatly reduce turnover impacts. If pilots can receive retention bonuses, why not provide monetary rewards for successful management over a sustained acquisition.

Accountability for failures is essential for trust building and requires key members of the organization, both government and contractor, to accept responsibility across turnovers. Complex systems comprise a web of civil government, contractor, and military leadership actions making accountability a nightmare. The F-35 has a lifetime cost of 1.5 trillion, employs 32,000 people from 46 states, and its procurement will span 1997 through 2037.¹⁷ Holding a single individual accountable for F-35 issues misses the point; instead, a group of leaders involved throughout different organizations must accept accountability. Rebuilding trust requires accepting failure with integrity, and the moral courage to punish the accountable organization at fault. Pfeffer posits that many are overconfident in their abilities to detect trust violations and often overlook or cover up trust failures. In an environment without consequences, leaders break constraining commitments and sacrifice trust for greater profit or power.¹⁸ To stress the importance of trust, honest brokers need to penalize poor performing companies, government programs, and leaders by reducing autonomy and funding. The Government

Accountability Office and the DoD Inspector General hold the authority to conduct independent evaluations of government and contractor organizations. Increasing the power of these organizations to enforce accountability creates a path to reestablish trust as long as Congress and the media remain in the loop. Leaders of organizations must accept failures of their predecessors to preserve trust; likewise, consequences are necessary for those accountable to preserve the value of trust.

While procurement blunders generate memorable stories, acquisition triumphs make few waves. Turning the tide requires acquisition leaders to echo success stories continually. Maxwell equates trust to a pocket full of change; failure steals money away, but success refills the bank.¹⁹ The F117 and the RQ-1A demonstrate success stories yet lack publicity or detailed analysis.²⁰ The F117 program office transitioned a revolutionary technical capability from skunk works into a successful acquisition that provided a decided advantage in the Gulf War. Similarly, the RQ-1A broke ground on operational drone capabilities and provided critical surveillance data throughout the global war on terrorism. The M1 Abrams Tank program delivered 18,000 tanks over two decades, and nearly reached initial design to cost figures of \$500k per tank (in 1972 dollars).²¹ Many remember tank battle stories, but few remember the procurement. Furthermore, leaders need to develop creative ways to highlight successful acquisition stories while avoiding complexities with classified capabilities. The National Reconnaissance Office, an acquisition entity with a classified budget, scored its ninth consecutive clean financial audit in 2017.²² Stories of this nature require increased publicity to refill the trust change pocket. By transcending turnover, embracing accountability, and preaching successes leaders can rebuild necessary trust to gain desired autonomy.

Establishing trust is a prerequisite for autonomy, and a solid record of performance expedites trust building and authority delegation. Autonomy for leadership permits authorities to make program decisions at lower levels and improves the speed at which programs adapt to change. In 2017, Strategic Command Commander, General Hyten, voiced what kept him awake at night was our adversaries ability to build capabilities faster.²³ In 1986, the Packard Commission saw the same issue with acquisitions and reported it was possible to reduce acquisition cycle times by 50 percent.²⁴ At a peak in trust, Congress established Middle Tier Acquisitions in the 2016 National Defense Authorization Act Section 804 to encourage rapid prototyping and fielding. This 804 authority permits leaders and Service Acquisition Executives the freedom to design unique acquisition plans without the burden of the traditional 5000 series rules. The adaptive acquisition framework also includes ways to tailor the 5000 series and rapidly acquire system for urgent or emergent operational needs. These tailorable authorities' present opportunities to go faster; however, leaders must remain focused on preserving stakeholders trust. The leadership challenge to maintain trust while going fast requires modifying optimistic tendencies, adapting through change, and delegating authority.

Generating successful programs begins with improving culture, and the responsibility rests on leadership. The Department of Defense acquisitions culture is unfailingly optimistic.²⁵ The law of magnetism posits that leaders attract a similar quality of followers, which multiplies contagious optimism.²⁶ In addition to turnover, poor cost estimating issues repeat throughout 50 years of acquisition studies.²⁷ Overconfidence and inaccurate estimating drives a gap between predictions and performance inviting unwanted attention. Tempering optimism requires openly communicating to contractors, leadership, and subordinates risk-based assessments of cost and performance. Leaders should consider placing a larger burden on demonstrated past

performance and stringent requirements on technology maturity evaluations to assist in trading contractor and government optimism for realism. Independent technical readiness assessments must drive cost goals, schedule estimates, and temper both the contractor and Governments' projections. While cost estimates seem objective, there is a significant amount of subjective expertise required to update historical cost data and predict the amount of heritage and technical maturity of a new system. Acquisition leadership is required to sustain trust with the CAPE office within OSD especially when the contractor, program office, and service cost estimators all disagree. Maintaining trust requires open candid conversations as early as possible within a program to build a budget to meet an acceptable program risk profile. Developing personal relationships between the risk tolerant and the risk adverse will lead to reducing historical cost optimism.

Maintaining trust also requires leaders adapt under a constantly changing system of rules, regulations, and policies. Speed requires establishing a sense of urgency organizationally.²⁸ Rooting acquisitions in warfighter operations motivates and inspires urgency. Once urgency is established, a successful acquisition necessitates a willing coalition with members from military leadership, contracting offices, budget teams, contractors, and congressional staffs. Together, the coalition can champion necessary changes. Investing in relationships across organizations permits leaders to influence priorities in their favor and power through change. Better buying power and adaptive acquisition frameworks empower the coalition to tailor program development reviews and documentation to best suit program requirements while maintaining speed.²⁹ Only with a coalition of the willing, can leaders establish and communicate a vision of speed and excellence.³⁰ Modifying a program to move fast through a complex set of rules and

regulations requires trust first, strong leadership, adapting through change, and a staff committed to achieving excellence within the system.

Adapting through change and maintaining speed also rely on delegating authority, the ultimate sign of trust. Commanders can delegate authority but not accountability.³¹ Leaders should withhold delegation until subordinates can display competence, technical expertise, and commitment. After which, properly delegating tasks and authorities frees up time for leaders to focus on challenges at their level. Giving up control allows leaders to move authority to where the information is resulting in faster accurate decisions.³² Empowered followers enrich trusting relationships and multiply progress in a learning culture by determining better innovative ways to achieve success while promoting a culture of efficiency. Military leaders that embrace acquisitions as complex systems try experimental tactics, step back and allow patterns to develop, and perceive failures as learning opportunities. Many leaders discuss failing fast but few encourage and allow it early in careers or programs.³³ The Air Force Space and Missile Systems Center 2.0 initiative is a great example of delegation. The organizational change pushes program executive officer authorities down from the three star general level to Colonel and one star equivalents. Trust was the perquisite for the change, and the benefit is both speed and decisions made by those closer to the information. It is only through cultivating trust that a leader can adapt organizations to secure short-term wins and continue to invest in sustaining trust.³⁴

Recommendation 2: Develop a track for military or government leaders to persist long enough to remain accountable. Reward success; reprimand failure.

Recommendation 3: Once trust is established, empower decision makers by delegating authority to where the information is.

Leadership Challenge 3: Negotiating beyond the chain of command

After securing trust, acquisition leaders must then increase their power and autonomy through negotiations. Gaining increased responsibility, funding, and authority relies on convincing others you need it. Leadership is the process of influencing people, and great leaders extend influence beyond their chain of command.³⁵ Program managers are delegated the responsibility but often lack authority over budget and team members.³⁶ Therefore, leaders should rely on personal power and negotiation strategies to gain favor from those with authority. Improving the current trends in acquisition requires leaders make gains through negotiations with contractors, within the program office, and with Congress.

Improving military programmatic issues requires leaders' negotiate openly, early, and often with contractors. Informally, program managers facilitate standards of excellence daily by focusing negotiations on interests. Perceptive military leaders view both sides of issues and consider contractors' interests. Contractors seek to deliver products they are proud of while growing their company through profits and improving competitive edges in the market. Often conversely, the government seeks to acquire new complicated systems while minimizing costs, reducing schedules, and maximizing performance. Meeting both parties' interests requires open communication and a prioritization of needs to drive mutually beneficial commitments. During source selection and formal contract awards, the government and contractor must focus negotiations on legitimacy and fairness.³⁷ Program managers should consider legitimacy during evaluation of data rights claims, assertions of contractor propriety, and bids for profit percentages. In business, data claims are necessary to secure a company's position over the competition. Acquisition leaders should understand the true cost of proprietary information and

address these concerns as early as possible with specific contract clauses and adequate funding. Simultaneously, the government seeks fairness in negotiations through a contractor's commitment to a consistent price and a realistic schedule that meets military operational needs. Contractors must consider fairness and integrity when negotiating price points and schedule milestones. Successful negotiations improve the government's role as a customer while strengthening the contractor's supplier role. Strong acquisition leaders weigh in on formal negotiations with the contracts team while using informal negotiations as a day-to-day tool to mediate challenges. Acquisition leaders must set the conditions for future programmatic success through effective negotiations with contractors.

After improving contractor negotiations, acquisitions leaders can look internally for even more progress. The speed of proposal releases and contract awards depends on both the program management and contracting teams. Outside their chain of command, acquisition leaders must negotiate and influence the contracting team to move at a desired speed. The relationship element of negotiations proves critical during program manager and contracting debates.³⁸ A trusting relationship enables peaceful negotiations that support a climate of understanding and commitment to a shared vision. Holding a warrant to sign contracts for the government, contracting professionals interpret and uphold acquisition laws. Contracting officers can halt contract awards or modifications with an objection. Program managers who negotiate focusing on relationships encourage a coaching approach from contracting. Instead of simply saying "No," the contracts team says "No, but..." offering options and a compromise to push an acquisition forward. Although in different reporting chains, program managers and contracts chiefs who focus on relationships during negotiations enable successful procurements.

In addition to negotiating with contractors and internally, senior acquisition leaders must master congressional negotiations. Congress yields large amounts of power for the fate of defense programs. Acquisition leaders must willing compromise with Congress while continually justifying vital program requirements for mission success.³⁹ Power mirrors leadership in its ability to influence others, and the centrality or criticality of members within congressional organizations reveals their power.⁴⁰ Understanding power positions within negotiations, leaders can improve their influence through either a central or peripheral communications approach. For congressional members with a rich history and understanding of the system acquisition, Lewicki recommends leaders use a central approach and focus negotiations on message content, message structure, and persuasive styles to generate influence. When negotiating with congressional leaders unfamiliar with the message or program, acquisition professionals can utilize the peripheral path by adapting the message characteristics, the source characteristics, and contextual effects to influence negotiations compliance.⁴¹ Lewicki's scholarly analysis provides a solid negotiations approach to increase influence, but all is lost if the military leader does not truly understand the interests of the congressional staff on the other side of the table. Congress expects that the stories behind the status of military acquisitions remain consistent and defensible. Large acquisitions often span long periods, and Congress has a great memory. Strong acquisition leaders negotiate with fact-based historical evidence and focus on repeatable messages that remain unaltered across engagement audiences. Furthermore, acquisition leaders need to develop a sixth sense for timing. Understanding when to negotiate for increased autonomy and when to delay bolsters the acquisition leader's power and initial position. Experience and relationships strengthen an acquisition officer's ability to sense the right times to double-down. Through negotiations with contractors, contracting, and

Congress, acquisition leaders can cement gains made through trust and secure increased autonomy.

Recommendation 4: Negotiate with historical facts and a story that is consistent and defensible

Conclusion

Breaking the cycle of acquisition failures requires abandoning the search for a silver bullet. Instead, strong leaders are required who understand the complex nature of acquisitions. By developing trust, acquisition leaders can overcome turnover and succeed in negotiating for increased power and autonomy. The law of momentum comes into play and leaders should strike at the right time to build upon initial success and consolidate gains.⁴² After trust is reestablished, leaders can implement probe and sense approaches that encourage innovation. New ideas such as incentive based contracts for government program managers, long-term government program managers that span the life of procurements, nonmilitary leadership for military systems, and open source challenge competitions can build a research base for new acquisition strategies. These tests should not occur as part of an overarching policy change, but instead through careful negotiations that foster a commitment to accept risk. Emergent solutions are temporary and situation dependent in complex systems. However, empowered followers delegated authority to decide in the best interest of the program can provide universal timeless benefits. Instead of rinsing and repeating a cycle of failure and frustrations, leaders can change acquisition case studies to rinse and repeat stories of empowered junior leaders exercising autonomy in successful programs. It is the hope of all acquisition leaders to read about capable

affordable new systems acquired by a strong military team, a not-so-fictional glimpse of the future if we can conquer a few difficult leadership challenges.

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¹⁵ J. Ronald Fox, *Defense Acquisition Reform, 1960-2009 An Elusive Goal* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History United States Army, 2011).

¹⁶ Ibid.

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