MASTERING CHAOS…
THE ACQUIRER AS OPERATOR

USCG PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SEMINAR

15 June 2016

John Higbee
Director, DAU Performance Learning

DAU
Defense Acquisition University

OUTLINE

- Bottom Line up Front…
- "Why is Acquisition So Complex?"
- Operational Acquisition – Why Consider It?
- Operational Acquisition – Essential Behaviors and Skills
- Looking to the Future

BOTTOM LINE UP FRONT

Acquisition is Executed in an Operational Environment…

…and requires an Operational Perspective to be Executed Well

"WHY IS ACQUISITION SO COMPLEX?"

(Group Discussion to Get Individual Inputs on What Causes the Complexity)

PROBLEM STATEMENT

- The Federal acquisition environment is inherently chaotic
  - Multiple organizations operate without coordination in the same space, with different processes, schedules and goals
  - Each organization's operations have tangible effects on the other organizations in the space
  - Major gaps exist between these organizations, resulting in significant difficulty executing organizational missions

PROBLEM STATEMENT (CONT'D)

Other "Environmental Complicators":

- Dysfunctional Relationship between the Legislative and Executive Branches
  - *Funding Instability; Management Inefficiency*
- Frequent Leadership Changes
  - *Leadership Instability (Military and Civilian)*
- Technology Development Inefficiency
  - *Technology "Low Level Alarms"*
- Departure of the "Boomers"
  - *Experience Hemorrhage*
- GeoPolitical Situation - Significant Churn
  - *Requirements Instability*

WHAT OTHER CHAOTIC ENVIRONMENTS ARE WE FAMILIAR WITH?

(Group Discussion to Get Individual Inputs on Chaotic Environments They Have Experienced)

SO, HOW DO WE HANDLE THIS SITUATION?

Look to other organizations who have to work (and succeed) in chaotic environments…

As Service operators, we train to:

- work in chaotic environments, and

- consistently achieve mission success

How applicable are operational techniques to acquisition challenges?

8

OPERATIONAL ACQUISITION

Do we have an operational goal in acquisition?

Yes.

We can define acquisition success operationally:

Acquisition Success:

Consistently Deliver Defined Warfighting Capability

within Allocated Resources

OPERATIONAL ACQUISITION (CONT'D)

How have we succeeded operationally in warfighting?

We train our warfighters to:

- Master Individual Specialties (Officers and Enlisted)

- Be Effective Team Members (in a variety of operational/battle situations – in standing/temporary teams)

- Use Intelligence / Situational Awareness (to intelligently adapt tactics to the environment encountered)

Exploit the Opportunities Offered by Chaos, rather than being Daunted by It

OPERATIONAL ACQUISITION (CONT'D)

Can this adapt to Acquisition?

It can adapt directly:

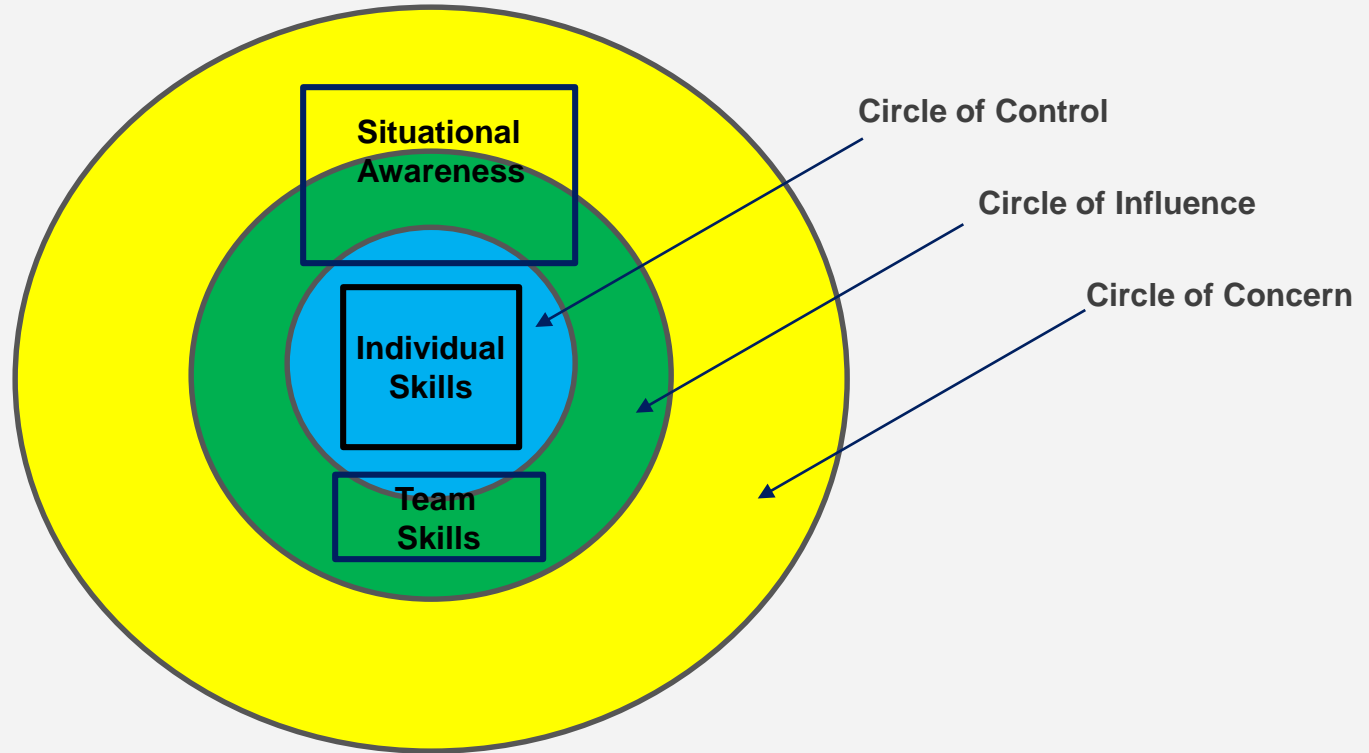|	Operations	Acquisition
Master Individual Specialties:	Enlisted/Officer Specialties	Career Fields
Be Effective Team Members:	Operational/ Battle Teams	IPTs/Pgms/PEOs
Use Intel / Sit Awareness:	⟵ Environmental Awareness ⟶	

CIRCLES OF CONTROL, INFLUENCE, AND CONCERN

OPERATIONAL ACQUISITION…
ESSENTIAL BEHAVIORS AND SKILLS

- <u>Create a Strong Alliance with your Boss</u>
    - Provides valuable "top cover", and a "senior partner" to strategize with
    - Your Boss can open doors and reach key stakeholders that you can't
    - Strong, two-way comms are essential to creating and sustaining this

OPERATIONAL ACQUISITION… ESSENTIAL BEHAVIORS AND SKILLS

- Stop Evaluating…Start Doing!
  - If you've got a workable solution/course of action, and it lies within your authority, move out on it
    - "Best is the enemy of good enough"
  - You can always execute a course change after you move out, if needed
  - Remaining at "all stop" can result in your losing opportunities that you will not get back
  - And, a moving target is harder to hit/run over…

OPERATIONAL ACQUISITION…
ESSENTIAL BEHAVIORS AND SKILLS

- You are the Bridge Builder between Your Stakeholders
  - You need to be a player in the discussions / workarounds bridging the process / knowledge gaps between your many stakeholders
    - If you're not a participant, you may not like what you get from those discussions
    - You have the best knowledge (and in many cases, the most experience) as to what your program needs – so, your input is critical
    - There is no "single unified process" in acquisition… your program moves forward over the bridges that you build with your stakeholders!

OPERATIONAL ACQUISITION…
ESSENTIAL BEHAVIORS AND SKILLS

- Build and Maintain Strong Alliances
  - More people working towards the same end provide
    - A richer "brain trust" with broad strategic/tactical perspective
    - Stronger/deeper "situational awareness"
    - Increased ability to reach key senior leaders and prospective partners

OPERATIONAL ACQUISITION…
ESSENTIAL BEHAVIORS AND SKILLS

- Develop and Use Your Personal "Situational Awareness" Network
  - Our acquisition environment is too dynamic to tolerate operations "in the blind"
    - Operations without intelligence usually end badly
    - Waiting for higher authority to provide you intel can result in time-late notification and reactive, not proactive situations
  - Do a daily scan of online resources (both inside and outside .mil) – early in the day is best
  - Let your team, chain of command and allies know what you find; meld the intel into your day-to-day ops

OPERATIONAL ACQUISITION…
ESSENTIAL BEHAVIORS AND SKILLS

- Get Comfortable with "Getting out of the Box"
  - Today's environment is changing simultaneously in multiple ways
    - This increases the chance that traditional solutions will not work "as is" – significant modification or replacement may be necessary
  - Ensure that you create an environment in your org that is open to new ideas and methods – inputs from your team and partners need to get to you!
  - Create an informal "brain trust" of advisors that know the rules, and the interpretation/ "white space" surrounding them – your "ways ahead" may lie in the "white spaces"

OPERATIONAL ACQUISITION…
ESSENTIAL BEHAVIORS AND SKILLS

- Understand your Program's Unique Environment – and Exploit It
  - Map your key stakeholders, partners and customers
    - Identify each key "player" and his/her perspective on your program
  - Review your program's history and how it has shaped these perspectives. Areas to consider include:
    - Budget history and issues
    - Testing results
    - Congressional language (both towards your program, in program-related areas)
    - State of programs which depend on you, or on which you depend
    - Industry relationships
  - Take actions as warranted by what you discover

OPERATIONAL ACQUISITION…
ESSENTIAL BEHAVIORS AND SKILLS

- Use the "Big Waves" Passing Through the Environment
  - Significant initiatives take place on a continuous basis
    - In the past: COTS, distributed architecture, modular shipbuilding
    - Today: Cyber, Knowledge Sharing, Commercial spaceflight
  - Latching on to one or more of these initiatives can help you insert innovation into your product or service, at the same time that it provides you high-level credibility
    - Example: VIRGINIA Class SSN Program

OPERATIONAL ACQUISITION…
ESSENTIAL BEHAVIORS AND SKILLS

- Use the "Five No's" Whenever Necessary
  - When pursuing innovative approaches, you will occasionally receive unequivocal "no's" from working level functional individuals (e.g. budget, legal, contracting, testing)
    - This can be due to a lack of experience as to the "white space" surrounding the regulations/statutes in question
  - You have the right to "go up the line" to the senior civilian/ military in charge of that area to get a readout on the viability of your approach
    - Senior people often have a good idea of the "margins" (e.g. case law), and can give you an experienced judgement

OPERATIONAL ACQUISITION…
ESSENTIAL BEHAVIORS AND SKILLS

- "Gut Feelings" - Use Them Early and Often!
  - Gut feelings are the result of your cumulative experience, education and training
  - They should always be explored – the earlier, the better
    - One way – get the leaders involved in the situation provoking the "gut feeling" together and explore it
  - Encourage your team and your partners to do the same when they get a gut feeling, and to let you know what they find

OPERATIONAL ACQUISITION…
ESSENTIAL BEHAVIORS AND SKILLS

- Surface Bad News Quickly – and Do It Yourself
  - Two things are "givens":
    - "S**t Happens"
    - Your Chain of Command will find out about it
  - Surface bad news with your CoC yourself, preferably in parallel with what you intend to do about it
    - Improves the chance of you retaining control of the situation
    - Preserves the CoC's confidence in your leadership abilities

OPERATIONAL ACQUISITION…
ESSENTIAL BEHAVIORS AND SKILLS

- Be a "Junkyard Dog" in Looking for Resources
  - "Other Peoples' Money" (OPM) is a great source of funds – examples include:
    - Small Business Innovative Research (SBIR) – a great way to fund innovation for your program
    - Science and Technology (S&T) funding – owned by the labs, but can be leveraged by programs who collaborate with the S&T owners

OPERATIONAL ACQUISITION…
ESSENTIAL BEHAVIORS AND SKILLS

- Widely Advertise What You're Doing
  - Market your product across Component and Department boundaries
    - "Somebody you don't know needs what you're doing"
    - Shrinking Federal funds motivate orgs to avoid development costs by using someone else's products
  - Use Articles and Interviews to get the word out
  - Investigate the potential for Foreign Military Sales

OPERATIONAL ACQUISITION…
ESSENTIAL BEHAVIORS AND SKILLS

- Call "I Don't Have it" in Time for Someone Else to Make the Catch
  - Recognize that if you and the program can't solve a problem, you need to let senior leadership know early enough for reinforcements to help out
    - Don't let misplaced confidence result in a bigger problem that can only be triaged, not avoided
  - Ultimately, your program belongs to the PEO/SAE/DAE…and he/she will appreciate being brought in with time enough to meaningfully assist you

OPERATIONAL ACQUISITION… ESSENTIAL BEHAVIORS AND SKILLS

- Read History – Profit from Someone's Else's Successes and Failures
  - History is full of examples of people facing the same types of problems and opportunities
    - <u>Revolutionary Tech Insertion</u>: Rickover, Raborn, and Nuclear Submarines
    - <u>Recapitalizing Warfighting Capability</u>: Adm. "Jacky" Fisher and the Royal Navy (1904-1910)
    - <u>Asymmetric Warfare</u>: CONSTITUTION-Class Frigates and the War of 1812
  - Look at failures as well as successes; "bad guys" as well as "good guys"

OPERATIONAL ACQUISITION… ESSENTIAL BEHAVIORS AND SKILLS

- <u>Find a Mentor</u>
  - Long-term mentoring relationships have succeeded in creating "masters of professions" for thousands of years
    - Conveys the mentor's experience and tacit knowledge in ways that no other learning method can match
  - If you are not offered one (unfortunately, this doesn't always happen), then seek one via your network or via referral from your current boss

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE…

- Challenges of today's chaotic Federal Acquisition Environment demand that:
  - We depart from "rote process execution", and
  - Adopt innovative, out-of-the box thinking
- This chaos can provide us opportunities to move programs ahead if we exploit it, rather than be cowed by it
- As acquisition "operators", we:
  - Developing high-performing teams, and
  - Leveraging situational awareness,

  can enhance our support for our warfighters (as well as improve our/our team's job satisfaction!)

BACKUP

"CHAOTIC"

cha·ot·ic [kāˈädik]

ADJECTIVE

1. in a state of complete confusion and disorder

synonyms: <u>disorderly</u> · <u>disordered</u> · <u>disorganized</u> · <u>topsy-turvy</u> · <u>anarchic</u> · <u>lawless</u>

2. (physics)

of or relating to systems that exhibit chaos