



ACQUISITION RESEARCH PROGRAM SPONSORED REPORT SERIES

Marine Corps Contracting Officer Career Pathway: Restructure Mos Designation System to Support and Improve the Service's Acquisition Workforce

June 2022

Lt Col Pamela Unger, USMC

Thesis Advisors: Jeffrey R. Dunlap, Lecturer
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Department of Defense Management

Naval Postgraduate School

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Prepared for the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA 93943

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The research presented in this report was supported by the Acquisition Research Program of the Department of Defense Management at the Naval Postgraduate School.

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzed the Marine Corps' selection and development processes regarding contracting officers. It further examined when contracting officers become eligible for advancement into the acquisition workforce (AW). The analysis scrutinized when in an officer's career and at what paygrade they are qualified to apply for the contracting Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). Additionally, the following were reviewed: current structure and geographical location for contracting officer billets, fiscal year 2023 field grade promotion board results, and government and non-government reviews on improving the Department of Defense Contracting and AW. Challenges and inconsistencies were found with the Marine Corps' management of the contracting workforce as a secondary MOS, especially when compared and contrasted to primary MOSs. It exposed a lack of incentive for interested officers to join the contracting field, making it less desirable for well-qualified officers. With worthy officers not interested, the challenge to manage and sustain this critical MOS, which simultaneously provides capability to Fleet Marine Forces training operations and combatant commanders, is genuine and problematic. The research revealed a lackadaisical and uninformed view regarding contingency contracting and its role in the Commandant's Force Design 2030 planning initiative, which directs futuristic planning.



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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACSA	Acquisition Cross Service Agreement
AE	Acquisition Excellence
AFRICOM	Africa Command
AMOS	Alternate Military Occupational Specialty
AO	Area of Operation
AR	Acquisition Reform
AW	Acquisition Workforce
CE	Command Element
CENTCOM	Central Command
COCOM	Combatant Command
CRF	Contingency Response Force
DAU	Defense Acquisition University
DAWIA	Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act
DOD	Department of Defense
DOS	Department of State
DTIC	Defense Technical Information Center
ECP	Expeditionary Contracting Platoon
FY	Fiscal Year
HQTRS	Headquarters
INDOPACOM	Indo-Pacific Command
INSS	Institute for National Strategic Studies
IRF	Immediate Response Force
JTF	Joint Task Force
MARADMIN	Marine Administrative Message
MARCORLOGCOM	Marine Corps Logistics Command
MARFOR	Marine Forces
MARFORCOM	Marine Forces Command
MARFORPAC	Marine Forces Pacific
MARFORSOC	Marine Forces Special Operations Command
MCCSSS	Marine Corps Combat Service Support Schools



MCSC	Marine Corps Systems Command
MEF	Marine Expeditionary Force
MEU	Marine Expeditionary Unit
MLG	Marine Logistics Group
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty
NCR	National Capital Region
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
NPS	Naval Postgraduate School
O-1	Second Lieutenant
O-2	First Lieutenant
O-3	Captain
O-4	Major
O-5	Lieutenant Colonel
O-6	Colonel
OCC	Occupation
OCONUS	Outside the Continental United
OJT	States On the Job Training
RCO	Regional Contracting Office
SOUTHCOM	Southern Command
TEEP	Training Exercise Employment Plan
UDP	Unit Deployment Program
US	United States
USMC	United States Marine Corps



I. INTRODUCTION

Acquisitions management was established within the Department of Defense (DOD) in 1947. It has since evolved and adapted from an unregulated environment to the Federal Acquisition Regulation, codified in 1984 under Title 48 of the Code of Federal Regulations. The DOD has been challenged in past decades to develop better processes and well-defined training for an efficient and effective acquisition workforce (AW). Specifically, in the past five years, DOD has been under pressure and high scrutiny with respect to its training programs and organizational structure. DOD and Defense Acquisition University defines acquisition as “the conceptualization, initiation, design, development, test, contracting, production, deployment, integrated product support, modification, and disposal of weapons and other systems, supplies, or services (including construction) to satisfy Department of Defense needs, intended for use in, or in support of, military missions” (Department of Defense [DOD], 2020). The development of a well-educated and experienced AW means recruiting the best qualified personnel for acquisitions early, to ensure that long-term benefits and opportunities are obtainable.

To support the warfighter and National Security, DOD has been tasked to review and improve the training, development, and sustainment of an adequate AW. By doing this, DOD will conform and adapt to future demands, threats, and challenges. A question, though, remains: “Has the Marine Corps addressed the need to improve for the future and to be successful in acquisitions development and management?”



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II. BACKGROUND

Acquisitions is defined by The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2022) as the act of acquiring, such as property or knowledge. The business processes of acquisitions in any organization, corporations, or the federal government, requires experienced personnel to be successful. Experience is also defined as having direct observation of or participation in events as a basis of knowledge. The acquisition life cycle has steps involving teams of experienced people making informed decisions to meet goals and objectives. To be effective and efficient in the procurement of goods or services, organizations need the right people making the right decisions at the right time. Effective decision making requires knowledge and experience.



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III. STUDIES AND REPORTS

The DOD's acquisition development and workforce have received multiple reviews and studies and the resultant reports have identified several issues. The reports address the imbalance between the existing acquisition workforce and the increased number of contracts (Sanders et al., 2022). The overall analyses identify that the DOD lacks a progressive career development program for the AW. They also highlight the need to right-size and optimize the force to appropriately manage and outsource government requirements. The following summarizes each report and review analyzed while conducting this research.

A. PRESIDENT'S BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION OF DEFENSE MANAGEMENT

In June 1985, Executive Order 12526, *President's Blue Ribbon Commission of Defense Management*, was issued by former President Ronald Reagan. Also known as the Packard Commission, the Order instructed the department to study the policies and procedures of multiple functional areas within the department. Two of these areas were the procurement system and organizational arrangements, specifically acquisition procedures and structure reform. Reform would balance the workforce to improve program and contract management within DOD, resulting in costs savings and streamlining the acquisition process.

B. ACQUIRING DEFENSE SYSTEMS, A QUEST FOR THE BEST

In 1993, Professor David D. Acker at Defense Systems Management College published the book *Acquiring Defense Systems, A Quest for the Best*. He examined the history of defense acquisitions and the direction the DOD AW needed to go in the 21st century. In addition, he wrote about the need to improve staff personal and professional development and the challenges commercial contractors have when working with DOD programmers.



C. DEVELOPING BATTLEFIELD TECHNOLOGIES IN THE 1990S

In 1993, the Institute for National Strategic Studies published the short paper *Developing Battlefield Technologies in the 1990s*. It identified the need for a better AW. Programs are successful when led by experienced and effective leaders. Knowledge-based decisions influence program outcomes. The paper states that “The ability to evolve requirements, manage program risks, and define an executable program is a direct function of manpower and funding resources ... Experienced military officers—users with an operations research background and acquisition professionals with developed expertise—are the critical manpower resources that must be made available at program initiative” (Chedister et al., 1993, p. 22).

D. REEXAMINING MILITARY ACQUISITION REFORM: ARE WE THERE YET?

In 2005, RAND Corporation conducted a study called *Reexamining Military Acquisition Reform, Are We There Yet?* It looked at acquisition reform (AR) and acquisition excellence (AE) initiatives undertaken in the DOD. The study reflected the need to expand and improve training for the entire acquisition workforce—including contracting officers. It also identified the need for a more experienced and educated workforce.

E. WHERE DEFENSE ACQUISITION IS TODAY: A CLOSE EXAMINATION OF STRUCTURES AND CAPABILITIES

In 2008, Defense Technical Information Center (DTIC) published an article, *Where Defense Acquisition Is Today: A Close Examination of Structures and Capabilities*, assessing DOD’s acquisition structure and capabilities. The article addressed the size and quality of the acquisition workforce, specifically examining whether if the workforce was the right size and properly trained. The analysis showed “more attention needs to be paid to acquisition workforce quantity and quality” (Lumb, 2008, p. 20).



F. SHINING A SPOTLIGHT ON THE DEFENSE ACQUISITION WORKFORCE—AGAIN

In 2009, RAND published another report, *Shining a Spotlight on the Defense Acquisition Workforce—Again*, stating that more attention needs to be paid to acquisition workforce quantity and quality” (p. 1).

G. DEFENSE ACQUISITION REFORM 1960–2009: AN ELUSIVE GOAL

In 2011, The Center of Military History, United States Army published *Defense Acquisition Reform 1960–2009, An Elusive Goal*. This study addressed many of the earlier reported findings with an important difference: rather than simply stating a change was needed, it highlighted that a cultural shift was needed, stating, “a number of built-in, even cultural, aspects ... resist change” (p. xiii).

H. FINDING ENDER: EXPLORING THE INTERSECTIONS OF CREATIVITY, INNOVATION, AND TALENT MANAGEMENT IN THE U.S. ARMED FORCES

In 2018, the Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS) published *Finding Ender: Exploring the Intersections of Creativity, Innovation, and Talent Management in the U.S. Armed Forces*, stating DOD needs to improve its ability to work with and collaborate with industry leaders because technologies will continue to innovate and DOD must communicate and adapt, or risk being cut out of the development process. This includes changing how the military members think about the future and “retooling” talent management.



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IV. LEADERSHIP MANAGEMENT AND THE NEED FOR CHANGE

Top senior military and civilian leadership are not blind to these problems. They see them and have acknowledged the need for change within the acquisition field. As Kendall (2016, p. 39) noted, “Even more important, we need to help the people who work for us to grow in their own professional capacities...that all aspects of acquisitions, including program management, engineering, contracting, testing, manufacturing, and logistics require qualified professional to achieve success.” As a result, both the Executive and the Legislative branches have ordered the DOD to review internal controls and oversight of the acquisition process.

Finally, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of 2016, section 845 (Implementation of Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Efforts), required a contracted independent review of DOD’s management of the acquisition workforce. It specifically targeted how the DOD recruits, develops, and retains the acquisition workforce and the effectiveness of professional military education programs. NDAA 2016 Section 842 states, “A dual-track career path that attracts the highest quality officers and enlisted personnel and allows them to gain experience in and receive credit for a primary career in combat arms and a functional secondary career in the acquisition field in order to more closely align the military operational, requirements, and acquisition workforce of each armed force” (p. 129 STAT. 914).

More than 20 years of reviews and analyses concerning the DOD’s management of its acquisition workforce were considered when looking at how the Marine Corps manages its workforce. Each review expresses concerns on the lagging attention the acquisition workforce is receiving. For example, does the Marine Corps encourage and incentivize its contracting and acquisition workforce? Is the existing workforce large enough for the future, and is it able to work in an environment that empowers Marine Corps officers to make decisions that lead to positive outcomes for the entirety of the Corps?



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V. WHY THIS RESEARCH IS IMPORTANT

Better Buying Power is partly defined as improving a more professional acquisition workforce, per Defense Acquisition University (2022). DOD leadership acknowledges there are issues and room for improvement. Investing time and experience into contracting and acquisition personnel can have long-term benefits for the warfighter, tactical commander, combatant commander, and the service. As the 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps stated on the March 20, 2020, Force Design update, “we need transformational capabilities that will provide naval fleets and joint force commanders with a competitive advantage in the gray zone and during contingency.” Providing the DOD with a competent contracting and acquisition workforce can help with readiness at the tactical level, such as worldwide contingency operations. Readiness also includes having adequately trained and experienced Acquisition Cross Service Agreement (ACSA) managers in operational commands. After years of reports, reviews, and recommendations, the question has to be asked: Has the Marine Corps made the appropriate changes internally to improve its contracting and acquisition capability? Another question that must be asked, can the Marine Corps do more to encourage Marine officers to become part of the contracting and acquisition field?

Sharing and building experience between the Marine Corps can keep the service relevant to the industry. Whether contracts are for commercial products or services, the professional relationships between DOD and industry encourage growth and innovation while influencing local economies and experience with personnel. The increase in contractual agreements requires a workforce that can responsibly manage people, expectations, and legal requirements.

This research is essential in addressing how the Marine Corps can improve its relevance globally and its ability to go anywhere at any time. Increasing the contracting military workforce helps tactical commanders support the 11 geographical combatant commands (COCOM) and invests in the Better Buying Power concept. This research addresses the recommendations by multiple government and non-government agencies



and Congressional directives that looked at the problem areas with acquisitions within DOD. The research confronts the following question: How is the Marine Corps addressing these issues and knowledge gaps?



VI. PROBLEM

The Marine Corps' Contracting and Acquisitions career pathway lacks the appropriate career progression to provide experience in the operational environment early in the individual Marine Corps Contracting Officer's career. "The short, one-time assignments and lack of successive job roles to provide professional growth and experience prevent incumbents from gaining the proficiency necessary to understand the complex environment and effectively capture and shape system requirements" (Aherm, 2018, p. 1) The current contracting field does not support the aforementioned reviews, reports, and commissions that spotlight the training, education, and growth needed in the AW.

A professional workforce is developed by providing the needed tools and resources through training and experience. The Service risks poor management of procurement processes if Marine Corps contracting and acquisitions technical capacity and capability are not balanced with outsourced requirements. Having an inappropriate sized or inexperienced workforce can lead to poor performance by the Marine Corps AW and the services and products received by using units (Farland, 2017). Has the Marine Corps acknowledged the reviews and recommendations to improve its AW? The Marine Corps' can improve its current workforce to support the high demand to outsource government goods and services and enhance deployment readiness.

The Marine Corps manages its force structure by assigning specific capabilities and fields to an individual Marine, whether enlisted or commissioned. This specialty is their primary Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). Once assigned a MOS, each Marine serves a billet within a command, contributing the skillset the Marine is trained to do. While most Marines remain in their MOS for the entirety of their careers, some Marines will have an opportunity to request a lateral move to another MOSs. Marines can also request selection to obtain an alternate MOS (AMOS) in addition to their primary MOS. These opportunities are typically available to Marines after a few years of service.



The Marine Corps can do more to improve its distinct competencies within the AW. Once the 3006 Contracting Officer MOS is obtained, the officer has no incentive to remain in the 3006 field. Marines compete within their primary MOS (Supply, for example) when on promotion and command selection boards. They do not compete as a Contracting Officer; therefore, staying in the field is detrimental to career enhancement. There is no motivation or encouragement to remain in the field. Selection boards look for experience, performance, and growth in a Marine's primary MOS. As a result, selection board members view the 3006 AMOS negatively, directly impacting an officer's competitiveness with his/her peers. Tables 1 and 2 display the FY23 promotion selection results for Major and Lieutenant Colonel based on the officers' primary MOS. Because of this cultural criteria, most officers will only serve a single tour as a 3006 for two to three years before returning to their primary MOS. Because of this, the perception likely deters qualified and interested officers from considering joining the 3006 field, challenging the service to sustain an experienced AW (Hanks et al, 200,5 p. xvii). Skill sets are comprised of acquired experience, knowledge, and abilities, while mindsets are comprised of personality preferences, ideas, and attitudes (Byrant et al., 2019). Decision makers are overlooking the Marine Corps' AW talent management.



Table 1. Fiscal Year 2023 Major Selections by Primary MOS.
 Source: U. S. Marine Corps Manpower Management (2022).

FY 2023 USMC MAJOR PROMOTION SELECTION BOARD									
PRIMARY MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALITY									
	ABOVE ZONE			IN ZONE			BELOW ZONE		
	ELIG	SEL	%SEL	ELIG	SEL	%SEL	ELIG	SEL	%SEL
0102	5	2	40.0	22	17	77.3	20	0	0.0
0201	0	0	0.0	2	1	50.0	4	0	0.0
0202	7	2	28.6	50	45	90.0	64	0	0.0
0207	0	0	0.0	1	1	100.0	0	0	0.0
0302	17	1	5.9	70	54	77.1	92	0	0.0
0370	0	0	0.0	8	8	100.0	14	0	0.0
0401	0	0	0.0	3	2	66.7	1	0	0.0
0402	15	5	33.3	80	71	88.8	80	0	0.0
0602	12	3	25.0	48	39	81.3	67	0	0.0
0802	14	2	14.3	33	27	81.8	29	0	0.0
1302	4	2	50.0	39	33	84.6	32	0	0.0
1701	0	0	0.0	3	3	100.0	3	0	0.0
1702	1	0	0.0	11	11	100.0	11	0	0.0
1802	0	0	0.0	3	3	100.0	5	0	0.0
1803	0	0	0.0	11	10	90.9	4	0	0.0
3001	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	1	0	0.0
3002	6	0	0.0	14	6	42.9	31	0	0.0
3404	2	1	50.0	20	18	90.0	11	0	0.0
4402	2	2	100.0	12	12	100.0	37	0	0.0
4501	0	0	0.0	3	2	66.7	2	0	0.0
4502	5	2	40.0	13	8	61.5	8	0	0.0
5803	1	0	0.0	14	11	78.6	12	0	0.0
6002	3	0	0.0	12	10	83.3	21	0	0.0
6602	5	2	40.0	15	11	73.3	16	0	0.0
7204	2	0	0.0	6	5	83.3	2	0	0.0
7208	2	1	50.0	11	6	54.5	15	0	0.0
7210	2	0	0.0	10	9	90.0	4	0	0.0
7220	3	0	0.0	7	6	85.7	4	0	0.0
7301	0	0	0.0	2	1	50.0	0	0	0.0
7315	4	1	25.0	7	6	85.7	8	0	0.0
7318	0	0	0.0	4	4	100.0	5	0	0.0
7509	9	0	0.0	20	13	65.0	21	0	0.0
7518	0	0	0.0	11	10	90.9	12	0	0.0
7521	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	1	0	0.0
7523	7	1	14.3	25	22	88.0	37	0	0.0
7525	12	0	0.0	9	6	66.7	10	0	0.0
7532	36	5	13.9	74	36	48.6	77	0	0.0
7556	3	0	0.0	2	1	50.0	2	0	0.0
7557	19	0	0.0	19	10	52.6	14	0	0.0
7562	1	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0
7563	19	2	10.5	29	18	62.1	29	0	0.0
7565	30	2	6.7	31	17	54.8	30	0	0.0
7566	40	1	2.5	36	21	58.3	36	0	0.0
7588	6	1	16.7	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0
7599	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	1	0	0.0
TOTAL	294	38		790	594		873	0	



Table 2. Fiscal Year 2023 Lieutenant Colonel Selections by Primary MOS.
 Source: U.S. Marine Corps Manpower Management (2022).

	FY 2023 USMC LIEUTENANT COLONEL PROMOTION SELECTION BOARD								
	PRIMARY MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALITY								
	ABOVE ZONE			IN ZONE			BELOW ZONE		
	ELIG	SEL	%SEL	ELIG	SEL	%SEL	ELIG	SEL	%SEL
0102	3	0	0.0	13	9	69.2	15	0	0.0
0201	0	0	0.0	1	0	0.0	1	0	0.0
0202	23	1	4.3	45	30	66.7	35	0	0.0
0302	43	3	7.0	58	41	70.7	58	0	0.0
0370	1	0	0.0	8	5	62.5	7	0	0.0
0402	15	0	0.0	49	32	65.3	51	0	0.0
0602	17	1	5.9	27	15	55.6	38	0	0.0
0802	18	2	11.1	28	22	78.6	23	0	0.0
1302	11	2	18.2	18	12	66.7	19	0	0.0
1701	1	1	100.0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0
1702	3	0	0.0	4	4	100.0	2	0	0.0
1802	4	0	0.0	2	1	50.0	2	0	0.0
1803	5	0	0.0	4	2	50.0	5	0	0.0
3002	13	1	7.7	9	6	66.7	13	0	0.0
3404	3	0	0.0	11	7	63.6	6	0	0.0
4402	21	0	0.0	16	13	81.3	19	0	0.0
4502	0	0	0.0	4	3	75.0	5	0	0.0
5803	3	0	0.0	5	4	80.0	8	0	0.0
6002	10	0	0.0	10	9	90.0	7	0	0.0
6602	3	0	0.0	4	3	75.0	6	0	0.0
7202	11	2	18.2	10	4	40.0	9	0	0.0
7315	7	0	0.0	4	3	75.0	8	0	0.0
7318	0	0	0.0	1	1	100.0	0	0	0.0
7509	7	1	14.3	4	2	50.0	7	0	0.0
7518	1	1	100.0	10	9	90.0	10	0	0.0
7523	21	2	9.5	9	5	55.6	14	0	0.0
7525	6	0	0.0	6	3	50.0	2	0	0.0
7532	21	1	4.8	17	8	47.1	14	0	0.0
7543	2	1	50.0	0	0	0.0	1	0	0.0
7557	17	1	5.9	5	4	80.0	4	0	0.0
7562	8	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0
7563	24	0	0.0	15	6	40.0	8	0	0.0
7565	32	2	6.3	23	11	47.8	20	0	0.0
7566	27	0	0.0	24	14	58.3	15	0	0.0
7588	8	1	12.5	1	0	0.0	2	0	0.0
8059	1	0	0.0	5	4	80.0	0	0	0.0
8061	1	0	0.0	4	3	75.0	1	0	0.0
TOTAL	393	23		454	295		433	0	

Implementing the prescribed change to make the 3006 MOS a primary specialty requires senior leadership first to recognize and embrace the need to change the AW and then implement a plan to incentivize the individual Marine Corps Officer to remain in the field. Embracing a structural change to a new career roadmap for Contracting Officers (3006 MOS) and Acquisition Officers (MOS 8061) should be considered and invested in, in order to develop a better Marine Corps AW (Bailey, 2020). However, change can be difficult and cumbersome to implement in large organizations. Actual change takes people first to understand and accept the issue; then, they must decide to change. As



noted, leadership may be slow to address the need to change. Alternatively, leadership may never recognize the need to change or improve. A force of friction can also exist in the phenomenon of individual, organizational, and bureaucratic inertia. As a large bureaucratic organization, the Marine Corps is prone to unknowingly fall under the phenomenon of resistance to change, due to political and cultural push-back (Fox, 2012).

The Marine Corps certainly has the ability to enact the changes that would improve the services' shortcomings regarding the AW. It has demonstrated a propensity for rapid change with its Force Design 2030 plan. Investing in the correct number and quality of Contracting and Acquisition officers for the Service builds on its current capabilities and competitive advantage in the operational environment. Like Force Design 2030, the Service should look at the current structure and consider making the force, in all support roles, more agile, deployable, flexible, adaptable, and resilient to any operational environment (Bailey, 2020). The existing AW structure currently does not support this concept. Force Design 2030's April 2021 report identifies the need to be organized to enable and sustain the Stand-in Force and to have resilient sustainment capabilities that enable units to operate for extended periods (United States Marine Corps [USMC], 2021). Training and equipping for quick and rapid deployments require an operational contracting capacity for forward-deployed units. The concept also includes having a well-developed and educated AW that executes well-defined programs, avoids poor planning, canceled programs, and wasted funds and resources. Without changing, 'the problem of slippages, cost growth, and shortfalls in technical performance on defense acquisition programs have remained much the same throughout' (Fox, 2012).

Prior to 2014, officers with the following MOSs were eligible to apply for the 3006 AMOS—Contingency Contracting Officer (MARADMIN 584/11, 2011):

- 3002 (Ground Supply)
- 0402 (Logistics)
- 3404 (Financial Management)
- 6602 (Aviation Supply)

Selected officers attended the Contingency Contracting Officer course at Marine Corps Combat Service Support Schools (MCCSSS) for 14 weeks. Graduating officers served at a Marine Logistics Group (MLG) for a tour in the Expeditionary Contracting Platoon



(ECP). However, in 2014 the Marine Corps discontinued this pathway. In its place, the Marine Corps selected junior field grade officers (Majors) to receive on-the-job training (OJT) at a regional contracting office while taking distant learning classes through Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) (MARADMIN 283/14, 2014). As a result, new Contracting Officers were entering the field as young field grade officers with no operational experience in the Contracting field, at precisely the time they needed primary MOS evaluations for promotion to Lieutenant Colonel.

Acquisition officers (8061 MOS) are an integral part of the acquisition process. Marine Corps Officers that compete for selection come from various primary MOSs. Contracting Officers have an essential role in the acquisition processes due to their skillset in planning and working with commercial vendors. The current grade and education requirements to be eligible for the 8061 MOS ground acquisition MOS are (MARADMIN 527/21, 2021):

- Officers must be a Major, Lieutenant Colonel, or Lieutenant Colonel (selected)
- Certified DAWIA Level II in a primary acquisition career field on 1 - December 2021. (Level I for Business Financial Management or Business Cost Estimating).
- Have 36 months of acquisition experience by 31 December 2022.

Because of this, the officer joining acquisitions attended their entry-level MOS school and service years earlier in their primary MOS. After 10-15 years in a primary MOS, the officer now joins the acquisition workforce without the years of training and education needed for a skilled and competent workforce. This pathway prevents developing strong core competencies in the AW. “No one should expect an amateur without acquisition experience to be able to exercise professional judgements in acquisition without the years of training and experience it takes to learn the field.” (Kendell, 2016, p. 41). The career track lacks a dedicated pathway with the building blocks to create a successful and high-quality workforce. Officers are not developing skills and experience and eventually mastering the various situations, workload conditions, and decision-making skills (Gates, 2019, p. 14).



VII. RECOMMENDATION

The research conducted in this paper evaluates the Marine Corps' contracting and acquisition MOS structure, specifically officer career development. It identified challenges and inconsistencies, and finally, makes recommendations for improvements that the Service can incorporate to enhance its readiness. Though Force Design 2030 focuses on changing and adapting the force, it may be lacking innovative thought by not considering all service support capabilities in a deployed environment. "Talent management models must incorporate diversity of both skillset and mindset into their calculus" (Bryant et al, 2019). This research provides recommendations the Marine Corps can implement to encourage Marine Corps Officers to join and stay in the Contracting MOS. This results in not only improving talent management, but it also builds a capable, educated, and high-quality acquisition workforce.

Most importantly, the Marine Corps needs to be prepared to answer the call to rapidly deploy when the nation needs its 911 force (Athey, 2022). Force Design 2030 calls for a quick, rapid, and ready force to support combatant commanders who need to support and sustain deployed forces. The Marine Corps can do more to have the best AW supporting the warfighter. The Marine Corps needs officers with years of life cycle contracting experience.

How does the Marine Corps optimize a highly capable and small-scaled structured MOS in a forward-deployed environment, while developing and investing in a robust and seasoned acquisition workforce? It starts by training a well-experienced force for certification of DAWIA requirements. These requirements involve certification training for contracting and life cycle logistics, by "prioritizing limited training resources for the Defense Acquisition Workforce who develop, acquire, and sustain operational capability" (DAU, 2022). Transforming to a more responsive force in 2030–2040 will require a unique contracting capability, one that can react quickly and deploy globally when needed. Deploying forces supporting a geographical command requires a specific contracting authority to acquire goods and services in a contingent environment.



Expeditionary contracting satisfies this need. The following recommendations help support the multiple reviews and studies of DOD’s acquisition workforce.

The Marine Corps currently has 30 contracting officer billets (Captain – Lieutenant Colonel) supporting both garrison and operational commands. Table 3 shows the Marine Corps’ current structure for Captains, Majors, and Lieutenant Colonels and which commands they are located at.

Table 3. Current Contracting Billets and Command for Captains.
Adapted from U.S. Marine Corps Manpower Management (2022).

Captains - 13
Command
MARFORCOM
CE III MEF
MARCORLOGCOM ALBANY GA
Parris Island, SC
RCO Hawaii
RCO NCR / Quamico
RCO- 29 Palms
RESERVE BASE SUPPORT New Orleans
I MEF
I MEF
II MEF
II MEF
III MEF
III MEF

Table 4. Current Contracting Billets and Command for Majors.
Adapted from U.S. Marine Corps Manpower Management (2022).

Majors - 10
Command
HQTRS MARFORPAC
MARFOR CENTCOM
MARFOR SOUTHCOM
MARFOR AFRICOM
RCO Pacific
RCO Hawaii
CE I MEF
CE III MEF
CE II MEF
II MEF



Table 5. Current Contracting Billets and Command for Lieutenant Colonels. Adapted from U.S. Marine Corps Manpower Management (2022).

Lieutenant Colonels - 6
Command
HQTRS MARFORSOC
Installations and Logisitics
RCO West
RCO East
I MEF
III MEF

The Marine Corps should focus on improving the career pathway for Marine Corps Contracting and Acquisition Officers. This is the first step in improving the AW. The Service needs to make the 3006 Contracting Officer a primary MOS, providing officers the experiences and fundamental opportunities to be successful, while building an AW with strong competencies. The evolutionary change for the contracting community will reap long term benefits for the Marine Corps in the future operational environment.

Figure 1 displays the recommended arrangement for additional contracting officers. The Marine Corps should increase each MEF’s contracting structure (Table of Organization) to four Contracting Officers (Major and below). These officers would reside in the MEF G4s as Expeditionary Contracting Support, totaling (12) Marines service wide. Regional Contracting Offices (RCO) supporting FMF major commands should have five contracting officers (Lieutenant Colonel and below). These would include RCO-East (Camp Lejeune), RCO-West (Camp Pendleton), and RCO-Pacific (Okinawa, Japan), totaling (15) Marines service wide. The added structure will support the local Regional Contracting Office, where junior contracting officers can receive experience with the entire commercial contracting process. These officers would be available to the FMF command as need for operational requirements through a formal agreement such as a memorandum of understanding.

The additional capacity balances outsourcing and AW requirements to responsibly manage workloads (Pegnato, 2011). The additional structure also supports



the future force, which will be smaller, lighter, more mobile, and widely dispersed (Athey, 2022). These additional contracting officers will be ready for Contingency Response Force (CRF), Immediate Response Forces (IRF), Joint Task Forces (JTF), and other requirements such as Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster and Disaster Relief operations. Additionally, this structure would support the Unit Deployment Program (UDP) supporting outside the continental United States (OCONUS) commands. Innovative planning includes adding 1–2 contracting officers to each UDP cycle to Marine Forces Pacific. The additional contracting authority improves readiness in the largest Combatant Command Area of Operation (AO), Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM).

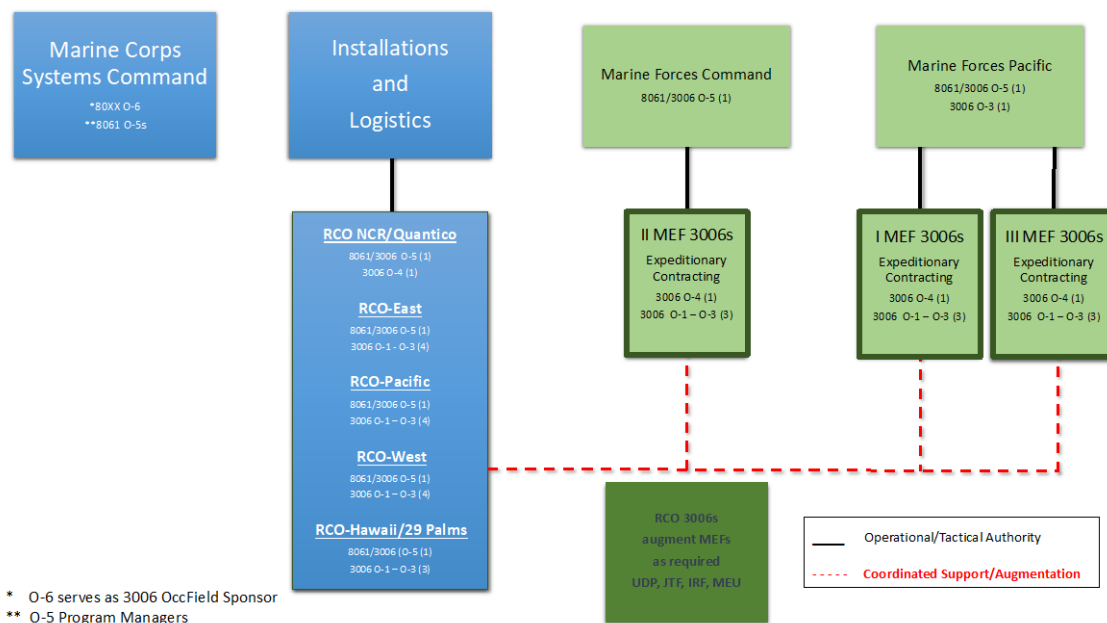


Figure 1. Recommended Contracting Support Structure

In addition to supporting III Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) with their Training Exercise and Employment Plan (TEEP), contracting support can help augment the urgent responses this AO has historically conducted, to typhoons, earthquakes, and tsunamis. These natural events have only increased in recent years (see Figure 2).



Deployments and operations to some countries require using ACSA. These Department of State (DOS) and Department of Defense (DOD) formal agreements with allied partners establish military to military (mil-to-mil) support by the host nation (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction, 2015). Contracting officers should have this additional authority. With the required training and certification, they are able to work with commercial vendors and host nation support, for things like supplies, services, subsistence management, and transportation. Adding this additional authority to Contracting Officers increases the agility of Marine Corps responses to urgent requirements and support to emergent crises or contingency operations.

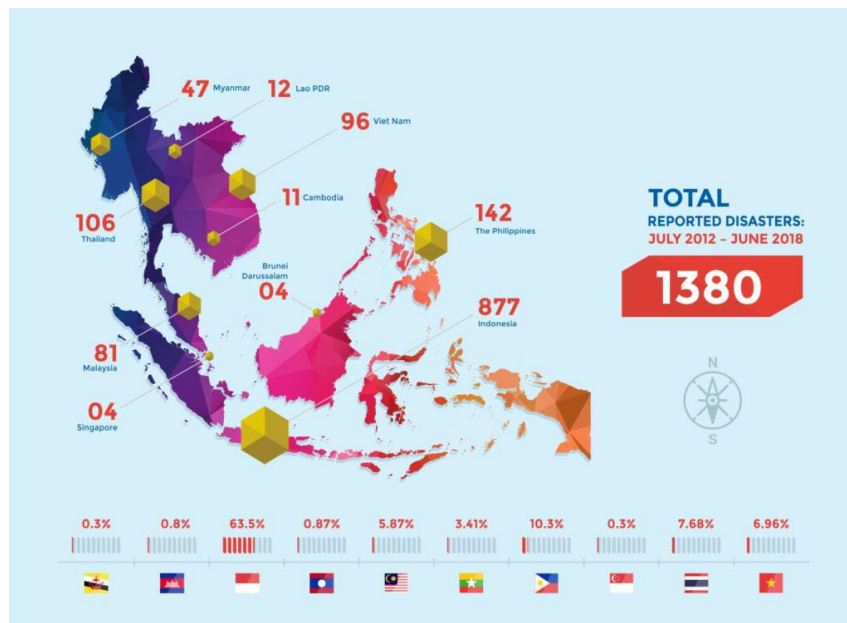


Figure 2. Reported Natural Disasters within INDOPACOM AO.
Source: Kurniawan et al. (2022).

This research recommends that career-designated senior company-grade officers move to the 8061 acquisition MOS. These officers will have spent at least one tour supporting the RCO and an ECP in the field, bringing the best experience and operational knowledge to acquisitions. Once an officer receives the 8061 MOS, the acquisition officer will receive orders to an RCO and assume responsibility as the Director of Contracting, followed by orders to support Marine Corps Systems Command (MCSC).

While assigned to MCSC, the officer will remain in place to be part of a program throughout the acquisition life cycle. These assignments align with the industry market and their program managers. Lack of continuity in program management and strategy has proven to be unsuccessful. Field grade officers that remain with a program and portfolio can help shape requirements and keep the program team on track enabling the acquisition life cycle to remain on schedule.

These changes would demonstrate the Marine Corps' is fully invested in improving the AW. As Marine Corps leaders, we need to understand operational requirements will transform over time. We should consider all facets of what will be required to be successful in future operations. The Marine Corps' contracting and acquisition workforce has opportunities to improve and be a part of Force Design 2030, and beyond. "Well-disciplined organizations can thrive for a while, they start to crumble quickly when conditions on the ground change. That's because they haven't created organizational cultures that reward flexibility or adaptation...Ender Wiggin plays to win, and he does that by always orienting towards his goals, keeping his skills sharp, empowering his subordinates, and creating a culture where innovation, creativity, and adaptation are the rules of the day" (Knapp, 2013). The Marine Corps needs to be prepared as new challenges surface, react quickly and decisively, and evolve as necessary.



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