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Optimizing Requirements Definition and Contract Management Processed in I Marine Expeditionary Force

December 2024

Capt Gangmung Jung, USMC
Capt Hunter R. Hale, USMC
Capt Piper J. Yankowiak, USMC

Thesis Advisors: Kelley Poree, Lecturer
Dr. Robert F. Mortlock, Professor

Department of Defense Management

Naval Postgraduate School

Prepared for the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA 93943

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ABSTRACT

Contracting for services within the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) is a vital force multiplier that enhances I MEF capability to conduct garrison and deployment operations. Due to the similar and recurring nature of requirements across I MEF, there exist opportunities to optimize contracting processes to limit redundancy and achieve better contract outcomes. Current processes within I MEF limit the identification of consolidation opportunities, analysis of requirements, best-value contracts, and potential cost savings. This project evaluates existing I MEF contracting processes through semi-structured interviews with key personnel and analysis of the existing processes using process mapping, focusing on contracts exceeding the Simplified Acquisition Threshold (SAT). The findings indicate that current processes do not allow I MEF to pursue contracting optimization due to the limited authority and lack of centralized contracting structure. The authors recommend that a centralized contracting integration hub within I MEF be established to analyze requirements, identify consolidation opportunities, and develop standardized practices. The authors developed a process map using this recommendation, which would enable the contracting integration hub to pursue optimization efforts and provide oversight on all contracting matters in I MEF.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Captain Gangmung Jung (USMC) is a Ground Supply Officer. He was commissioned through the Platoon Leaders Course and graduated from the University of Maryland with a Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice. After graduating from the Naval Postgraduate School, he will be reporting to the Regional Contracting Office, Marine Corps Installation West at Camp Pendleton where he will serve as a Contracting Officer.

Captain Hunter Hale (USMC) is a Ground Supply Officer. He was commissioned through the United States Naval Academy where he received a Bachelor of Science. After graduating from the Naval Postgraduate School he will be reporting to the 2nd Expeditionary Contracting Platoon, II MEF where he will serve as a contingency contracting officer.

Capt Piper Yankowiak (USMC) is a Ground Supply Officer. She was commissioned through the United States Naval Academy where she received a Bachelor of Science. After graduating from the Naval Postgraduate School, she will be reporting to the Regional Contracting Office, Marine Corps Installation West at Camp Pendleton where she will serve as a Contracting Officer.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ARRP	acquisition ready requirements package
ASVAB	Armed Service Vocational Aptitude Battery
CCO	Chief of Contracting
COTS	commercial-off-the-shelf
DAU	Defense Acquisition University
DCI&L	Deputy Commandant Installations and Logistics
DLA	Defense Logistics Agency
ECP	Expeditionary Contracting Platoon
FLC	Fleet Logistics Center
GCPC	government charge purchase card
GSA	General Services Administration
HCA	Head of Contracting Activity
HQMC I&L	Headquarters Marine Corps, Installations and Logistics
I MEF	1st Marine Expeditionary Force
MAGTF	Marine Air-Ground Task Force
MAPP	Marine Corps Acquisition Policy and Procedures
MCDP	Marine Corps Doctrinal Publications
MCFCS	Marine Corps Field Contracting System
MCICOM	Marine Corps Installations Command
MCIWEST	Marine Corps Installations West
MLG	Marine Logistics Group
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty
MSC	Major Subordinate Command
NAVAIR	Naval Air Systems Command
NAVFAC	Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command
NAVSEA	Naval Sea Systems Command
NAVSUP	Naval Supply Systems Command
NSWCPD	Naval Surface Warfare Center, Philadelphia Division
OCONUS	Outside the Continental United States
OCS	Operational Contract Support

OJT	on-the-job training
PALT	Procurement Administrative Lead Time
PMOS	Primary Military Occupation Specialty
RCO	Regional Contracting Office
SAT	simplified acquisition threshold
SRRB	Service Requirements Review Board
TECOM	Training and Education Command
USMC CCF	United States Marine Corps Contingency Contracting Force

I. INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the problem facing 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) requirements generators and contracting personnel under the current contract management processes. The research questions, methodology, and objectives are provided and summarized to outline this research's purpose.

A. PROBLEM STATEMENT

I MEF faces challenges in optimizing its contracting processes within the Marine Corps Field Contracting System (MCFCS). The MCFCS is defined as a system that "collectively includes all Marine Corps contracting activities exercising contracting authority derived from the Headquarters Marine Corps, Installations and Logistics (HQMC I&L) Head of Contracting Activity (HCA)" (Head of Marine Corps, Installations & Logistics [HQMC I&L], 2023, p. 33). The issue facing I MEF is the lack of a centralized contract integration hub able to conduct data analysis on recurring requirements, which hinders the identification of consolidation opportunities and potential for best-value contracts. The absence of a centralized hub within I MEF limits visibility into overall contracting activities, hindering the exploration of alternative procurement methods and potential cost savings (Major, USMC, email to authors, April 22, 2024) Additionally, the potential for independent fulfillment of similar requirements by subordinate units without coordination may lead to missed opportunities for consolidation and achieving economies of scale.

This research focuses on processes within I MEF contracting, with an emphasis on contracts above the Simplified Acquisition Threshold (SAT). This research aims to investigate the current state of I MEF contracting to identify potential solutions to address the organization's challenges. By examining the existing processes, data collection methods, and organizational structures, this research seeks to uncover opportunities for improvement in contract integration, contract management, data analysis, and collaboration among contracting agencies. Ultimately, the goal of this research is to provide actionable recommendations to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness, and overall

performance of I MEF contracting, leading to cost savings, better contract outcomes, and improved procurement practices within I MEF.

B. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary research question is "How does I MEF reconcile contract requirements?" The secondary question is "What is the current process for contract consolidation and life-cycle management within I MEF, and where can efficiencies be gained?"

C. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this research consists of the following:

- review of Marine Corps orders, doctrine, and policy regarding Marine Corps contracting
- review of I MEF orders and policy regarding contracting within I MEF
- review of I MEF after-action reports submitted to the Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned regarding contract life-cycle management and contracting within I MEF
- collection of data from I MEF contracting activities, to include organizational structures, personnel, policies, procedures, duties, and responsibilities of each activity
- collection of data on current and previous Service Requirements Review Boards (SRRBs) for contracts above the SAT
- collection of data on current contracts below the SAT and analysis of how these contracts are managed without the SRRB process involvement
- analysis of current processes and development of process mapping to inform inefficiencies within I MEF contracting practices

D. OBJECTIVES

The authors conducted a qualitative approach to meet the study's objectives. The research objectives are as follows: Identify inefficiencies and areas of improvement within I MEF contracting and provide recommendations to improve I MEF contracting processes and practices; determine the effectiveness of I MEF SRRB process and how these requirements are sourced and fulfilled by I MEF contracting activities; and identify the criteria for and potential benefits of the consolidation of requirements within I MEF contracting activities.

E. SUMMARY

This chapter introduces the research questions, which are focused on optimizing the processes used in the MCFCS, specifically within I MEF. This research uses process mapping to evaluate the MCFCS's effectiveness in handling contract requirements in I MEF. The following chapters provide a review of Marine Corps and I MEF policies, an overview of current literature pertaining to contracting within the DoD and an analysis of existing contracting data to identify inefficiencies that currently exist in I MEF's MCFCS.

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II. BACKGROUND

This chapter provides an overview and structure of the MCFCS and provides an understanding of all stakeholders involved in contracting in the Marine Corps. In addition, this chapter identifies the current procedures and policies utilized in contracting, with an emphasis on the role of the SRRB in validating all service type requirements above the SAT in I MEF.

A. CURRENT STRUCTURE OF MCFCS

All policies and procedures pertaining to Marine Corps contracting come from the December 2023 edition of Marine Corps Acquisition Policy & Procedures (MAPP). The MAPP provides standardized internal policies and procedures for all activities that have contracting authority in the Marine Corps (HQMC I&L, 2023). The head contracting authority for the MCFCS is the deputy commandant, Installations & Logistics (DCI&L). HQMC I&L (Contracts) is the contracting division that reports directly to DC I&L; that contracting authority delegates chief of contracting (CCO) authority to the MCFCS contracting offices with certain dollar thresholds, as seen in Figure 1.

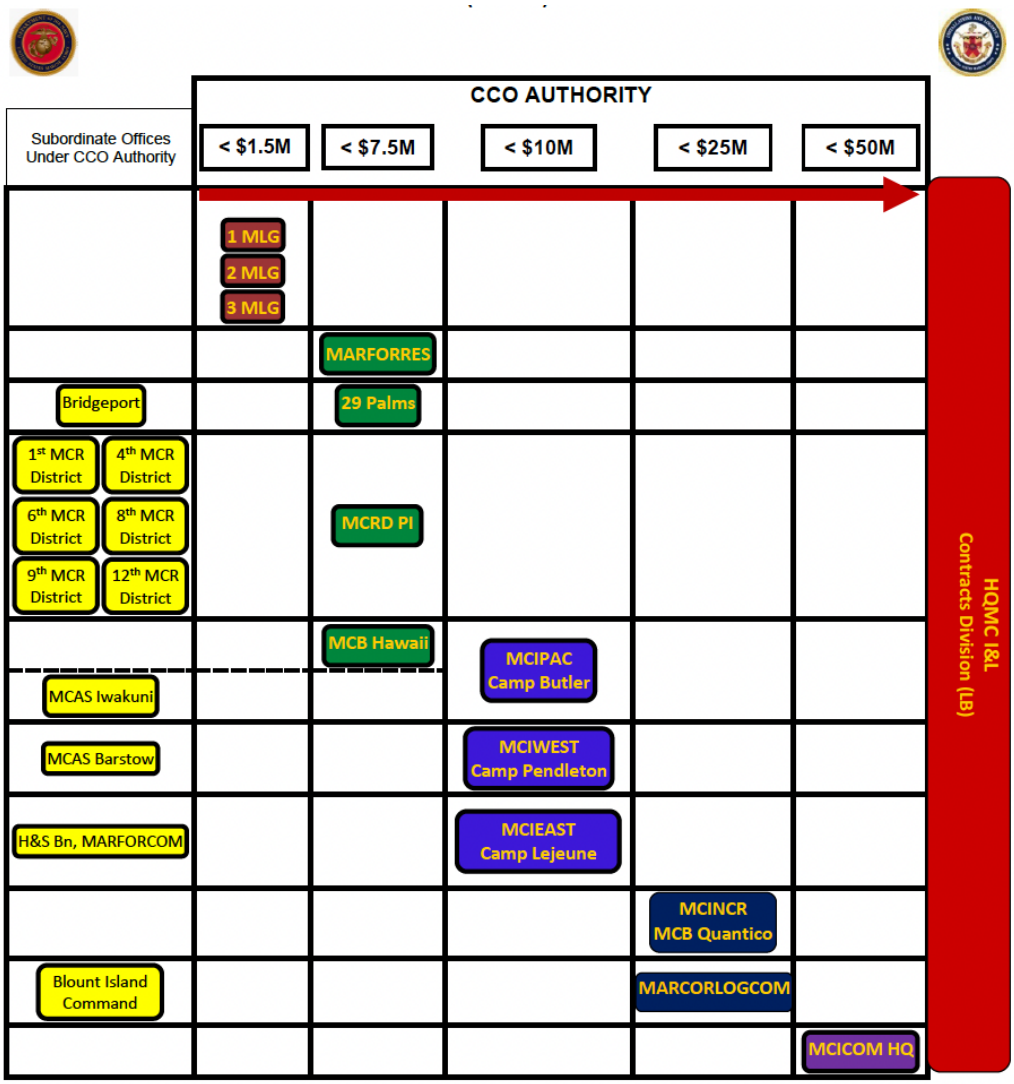

Figure 1. MCFCS CCO Authority. Source: HQMC I&L (2023).

It is important to note that HQMC I&L (Contracts) does not have command authority over any of the MCFCS offices and that each MCFCS office reports directly to its respective commander. Although contracting authority is delegated by DC I&L to each contracting cell in MCFCS (see Figures 2 and 3), HQMC I&L is not in these offices' operational chain of command.

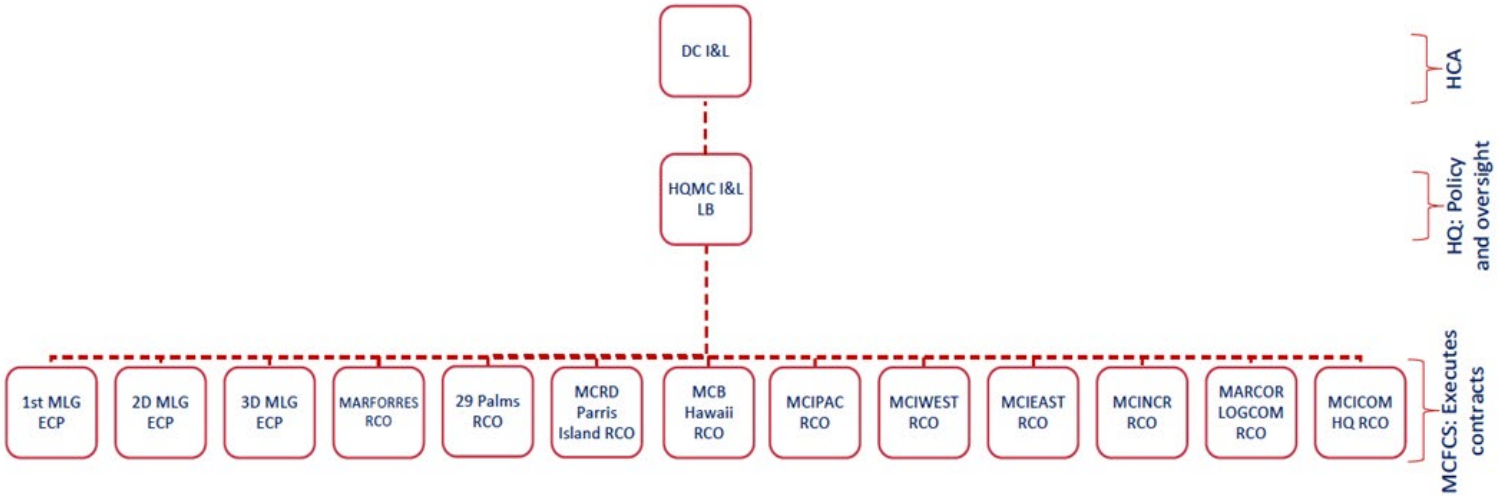

Figure 2. HQMC I&L HCA Contracting Authority Organization Chart. Source: HQMC I&L (2024).

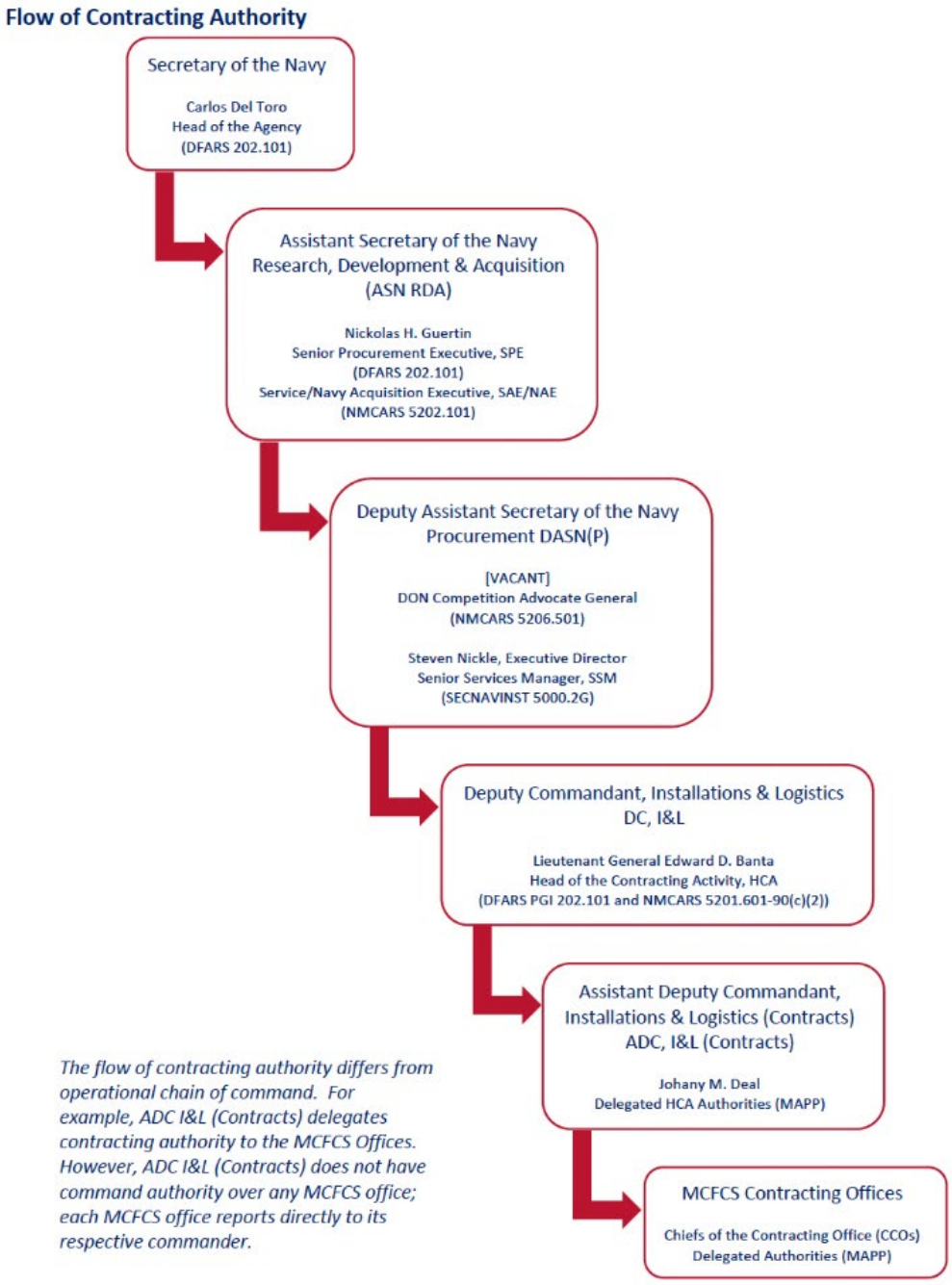

Figure 3. HQMC I&L HCA Flow of Contracting Authority.
Source: HQMC I&L (2024).

This research team conducted a deep analysis of the MCFCS specifically in I MEF. In I MEF, contracting authority is delegated by HQMC I&L (Contracts) to the Expeditionary Contracting Platoon (ECP) of I Marine Logistics Group (MLG) and

Marine Corps Installations West (MCIWEST) Camp Pendleton. The CCO then delegates contracting authority to all the contracting officers and personnel who execute contracts for I MEF daily. The next section gives an overview of all stakeholders involved in I MEF's contracting system.

B. STAKEHOLDERS OF I MEF CONTRACTING FORCE

The key stakeholders in I MEF's contracting system are the warranted contracting officers and contracting professional, the units that they support (i.e., the customers), and the other contracting agencies that do not fall under HQMC I&L's contracting authority. I MEF units, at the tactical level, generate certain requirements that need to be executed by a contracting authority. Those requirements, depending on the dollar value thresholds, are executed by either a Marine Corps contracting agency or an agency outside of HQMC I&L's contracting authority. The following is an explanation of the roles and background of each key stakeholder.

1. Contracting Officers and Personnel

The mission of the U.S. Marine Corps Contingency Contracting Force (USMC CCF) provides support to all Marine Corps forces through "planning and obtaining supplies and services from non-organic sources" (HQMC, 2016, p. 7). The focus of USMC CCF revolves around three main areas of interest, including "contract support integration, contracting support, and contractor management functions" (HQMC, 2016, p. 7), The focus of this section revolves around contracting support, specifically the training pipeline for personnel in the contracting force and the processes to obtain contract support. The contracting workforce is a small portion of the Marine Corps, and the training pipeline for officers and enlisted personnel varies greatly and is vital for understanding the proficiency and skill development of those in the contracting Military Occupational Specialty (MOS).

In the Marine Corps, unlike other military branches, contracting is not an entry-level MOS for either enlisted personnel or officers. Enlisted personnel can enter the contracting workforce from any MOS but must go through a rigorous selection process that includes interviews and applications. To be eligible for selection, enlisted personnel

must be a sergeant with less than 1 year of service in grade and possess a score of 110 or higher on the Armed Service Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) test, no negative paperwork, as well as endorsement letters from within their current chain of command; they must also interview with and receive endorsement from the senior 3006 in the nearest MCFCS office (HQMC, 2016). The lateral move process is lengthy, and if Marines meet the prerequisites and receive all necessary endorsements, they will continue the screening process by submitting their package to the Operational Contract Support (OCS) Screening Board.

Once selected for a lateral move to MOS 3044, contracting specialist, enlisted personnel then report to the nearest RCO to begin on-the-job (OJT) training and complete the certification process. During OJT, enlisted personnel work to achieve contracting certification. DAU has since updated its certification process to keep pace with the transforming acquisition workforce. As of February 2022, DAU has fully implemented its updated certification process (Woolsey, 2021). All acquisition professionals now use the DAU "Back-to-Basics" curriculum which limits each certification to a smaller core set of classes tailored to specific career fields (Woolsey, 2021). This update allows acquisition professionals to tailor their training to relevant areas and then continue education when necessary. Additional training can be accessed at any time and can be found in packages that DAU is calling credentials. Currently these credentials cover 24 subjects including industrial property contract management and data analytics, with more packages in the making (Woolsey, 2021). However, once enlisted personnel have completed the core training offered in the "Back-to-Basics" curriculum and the two years of OJT, they can support all missions assigned to the Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) (HQMC, 2016). Once enlisted Marines lateral-move into the contracting specialist training pipeline and accomplish all required training, they stay in the contracting workforce for future billet assignments and quickly become experts in the field.

Although enlisted Marines may lateral move from any MOS into contracting, officers typically may only lateral move into contracting from primary MOSs (PMOSs) like ground supply and logistics. Originally, contracting was only available for officers with the ground supply MOS (HQMC, 2016). Officers must get selected by the

Commandant's Career Level Education Board and report to the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) for an 18-month master's program (HQMC, 2016). Officers must also complete "at least 24 semester hours in accounting, law, business, finance, contracts, purchasing, economics, industrial management, marketing, quantitative methods, or organization and management" (HQMC, 2016, p. 23). Once officers graduate, they receive the billet MOS (BMOS) of 3006 and typically receive orders to the ECP. Once officers report to the ECP, they typically get sent to the RCO for 1 year of on-the-job training, and must also complete the "Back-to-Basics" certification process, before returning to the ECP, and officially earning their contracting warrant.

The Marine Corps Order for Contingency Contracting Force Program states a need for in-depth Individual Development Plans and unit training to maintain core competencies and knowledge in the workforce. This is essential in the contracting officer workforce because contracting is not a PMOS, so officers will complete a tour in a contracting officer billet followed by a tour in their PMOS. This balance between the primary and the contracting workforce requires contracting officers to have both a supportive unit and a strong individual training plan for when they return to contracting after being out of the workforce for potentially 3 years.

Although the training pipelines for officers and enlisted personnel in the contracting workforce may differ, they both rely heavily on unit training programs and OJT. Enlisted Marines require numerous prerequisites and a lengthy OJT period but quickly gain expertise by staying in the workforce for the remainder of their enlisted careers and continuously building on their knowledge. Officers receive a more formal education while transitioning into the contracting MOS but must follow individual training plans to sustain their effectiveness. Understanding the workforce provides a comprehensive background of the Contracting MOS competency and a grasp on one player within the defense acquisition system.

In I MEF, contracting officers report to the Regional Contracting Office at MCIWEST for OJT upon receiving their degrees from NPS. After they complete 1 year of OJT and meet all the requirements to get warranted, they are sent to the ECP under 1st

MLG. Contracting officers in the 1st ECP are then attached to any I MEF unit for deployments or exercises to provide contractual support.

2. I MEF Contracting Customers

The next set of key stakeholders in I MEF's contracting system are the customers it supports. The customers of I MEF's contracting agencies are all the units that fall under I MEF that require contractual support. This includes all of the units that are in Camp Pendleton, MCAS Miramar, Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, MCAS Yuma, and Marine Corps Logistics Base Barstow. This accounts for a customer base of around 53,000 Marines and Sailors that is supported by two CCOs (1st ECP and MCIWEST) and their respective teams.

Every unit at the tactical level has a supply officer (MOS 3002) and team (MOS 3043 and 3051) that is responsible for the unit's basic procurement requirements. A requirement is usually generated at the tactical unit level and is brought to the supply officer and personnel to purchase. Those procurement requirements are typically achieved through two means. The first avenue for the supply officer to utilize is HQMC's existing contracts and partnerships. For example, the Marine Corps Garrison Retail Supply Chain Office provides oversight of the Marine Corp's partnership with the General Services Administration (GSA) through its utilization of Servmart stores. Supply officers can directly buy readily available supplies and services from Servmart's array of companies that the GSA is partnered with to support their unit's needs at a reasonable price. Another example is the Marine Corp's Supply Management Unit. The Supply Management Unit serves as an intermediate supply point "that provides requisitioning support between the wholesale and consumer levels of supply within the already established Marine Corps Supply System" (Abercrombie et al., 2016, p. 1).

The other avenue of approach is to purchase commercial-off-the-shelf (COTS) products. Every supply officer and team have a government charge purchase card (GCPC) they can use to purchase commercial supplies and services if the dollar amount falls below their purchasing threshold. Figure 4 shows the micro-purchase threshold and capability that each unit has with its GCPC program. When the requirement cannot be met by either of the two avenues mentioned previously, it is then pushed up to a

contracting agency that can fulfill it. These contracting agencies include not only the CCOs that are delegated by HQMC I&L, but other contracting entities that are non-organic to the Marine Corps, as well.

GPC Micro-Purchases			
	Function	Threshold	Authority
1	Federal-Wide Open Market	$10,000	FAR 2.101, FAR 13.2
2	Construction subject to 40 U.S.C. chapter 31, subchapter IV, Wage Rate Requirements (Construction)	$2,000	FAR 2.101, FAR 13.2
3	Services subject to 41 U.S.C. chapter 67, Service Contract Labor Standards	$2,500	FAR 2.101, FAR 13.2
4	GPC Contingency (Inside U.S.)	$20,000	FAR 2.101, DFARS 213.270(c)(3), DFARS PGI 213.201
5	GPC Contingency (Outside U.S.)	$30,000	FAR 2.101, DFARS 213.270(c)(3), DFARS PGI 213.201
6	Federal-Wide Higher Education Open Market	$10,000 or greater	Class Deviation 2018-O0018
7	GPC Convenience Checks (General – *Unrelated* to Contingency and Other Emergency Uses)	$5,000	P.L. 115-91, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018, Sec. 806(b)
8	GPC Convenience Checks for Contingency and Other Emergency Uses (Inside U.S.)	$10,000	P.L. 115-91, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018, Sec. 806(b)
9	GPC Convenience Checks for Contingency and Other Emergency Uses (outside U.S.)	$15,000	P.L. 115-91, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018, Sec. 806(b)

Figure 4. GPC Micro-Purchase Thresholds. Source: MCIWEST (2023).

A contracting requirement is generated when the dollar amount is above the organic supply officer's purchase threshold and the requirement cannot be fulfilled by a mandatory source. If the requirement is below the $1 million threshold, it can be executed by any contracting cell that has jurisdiction over that unit. If it falls above the $1 million threshold, it will be sent to a SRRB, as explained in the next section.

C. I MEF CONTRACTING SERVICE REQUIREMENT REVIEW BOARD PROCESS

The SRRB is a process that all branches utilize when validating and prioritizing service requirements. This section covers the board members and the process background and provides insight from previous years' board guidance and results. The USMC utilizes the SRRB process to prioritize requirements and ensure they are aligned with strategic

goals (USMC, 2024). With the strategic objectives in mind, the stakeholders must come together and deliberate mission necessities.

Stakeholders must meet to ensure that necessary requirements are voiced and understood and that resources are being utilized effectively (USMC, 2024). The board is chaired by the first general officer (GO) in the chain of command, and the members of the board include representatives of all the Major Subordinate Commands (MSCs) and the MEF staff groups, or "G-shops" (Major, USMC, email to authors, April 23, 2024). Contracting officers from the Regional Contracting Office (RCO) are also present, but they are not voting members. The board assesses the submitted requirements and prioritizes them based on mission impact, urgency, and resource availability. The board's approval or prioritization of the submitted requirements does not constitute a contractual action, but the contracting officers present will then take the prioritized list and begin acting on them. The members of the board will also use the prioritized list for operational planning needs.

As stated, the board's goal is to review and validate service requirements that align with strategic objectives and are expected to exceed $1 million, with the contract total including all option years (Major, USMC, email to authors, April 23, 2024). Perhaps the most critical function of the SRRB is the assessment of the need in relation to potential contracted service versus the use of organic capabilities. SRRBs provide "active management of services to ensure cost-effective, efficient application of resources to meet mission requirements" (DAU, n.d.-a). This board function ensures fiscal responsibility of the taxpayer's dollar and assesses any non-value services prior to spending funds. SRRBs should be conducted at least annually to forecast service contracts (DAU, n.d.-b). The SRRB process aids in identifying redundancies, potential cost savings, and potential sourcing opportunities.

In the guidance released by HQMC for fiscal year 2025, an initial SRRB was conducted in August 2024 to "assess the initial requirements for acquisition of contract services planned for execution within the FY [fiscal year]" and is scheduled to meet again in February 2025 to "validate previously approved requirements, remove any forgone requirements no longer necessary, and add any new requirements" (USMC, 2024, p. 2).

Service contracts that meet the SRRB threshold must still be assessed by a board if they are not reviewed during one of the two boards mentioned previously. The board must also submit a summary explaining how it identified cost savings, efficiencies, or process improvements during the assessment (USMC, 2024). Overall, the fiscal year 2025 SRRB guidance instructs the force on how to conduct the board and what must be reported for audit purposes. The board's role is to ensure that the USMC conducts good business practices, seeks efficiencies, eliminates duplication of contracting efforts, and aids in determining when service-level sourcing can be achieved (USMC, 2024).

D. SUMMARY

This chapter outlined the Marine Corps Field Contracting System (MCFCS), detailing the involved stakeholders and the current requirement validation processes, thus setting the stage for identifying the issues discussed in Chapter I and guiding the subsequent literature review focused on personnel, processes, and process mapping in contracting. The research questions were also introduced. The following chapter provides a further discussion of each MCFCS phase, identification of inefficiencies and ineffectiveness, and potential solutions.

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III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The previous chapter examines the current structure of the MCFCS, the stakeholders involved, and the processes used. This research now looks to examine previous studies on the personnel and processes of contracting in a wide variety of DoD organizations. This chapter also includes an examination of previous research on process mapping of organizations to solidify the methodology that is used later in capstone.

This literature review focuses on previous studies with the goal of defining key personnel or offices in contracting and the processes utilized. This framework is derived from previous research by Yoder et al. (2012) in their report, Phase Zero Contracting Operations (PZCO)—Strategic and Integrative Planning for Contingency and Expeditionary Operations. The authors introduce three pillars for successfully integrating contracting into military operations. These pillars include personnel, protocol, and platforms, and this framework is widely utilized in operational planning across the contracting workforce. This chapter follows this same framework to dissect previous research into USMC personnel, recommended processes, and the use of process mapping to increase efficiencies.

A. PERSONNEL

The first phase of the literature review examines previous research on MCFCS personnel, much of which has been centered on competency. As mentioned in Chapter II (Background), the contracting MOS (3006) is not a primary MOS in the Marine Corps. Upon completion of their utilization tour, officers must go back to their primary MOS to stay competitive for promotion amongst their peers. The research covered in this phase of the literature review examines how the current career structure for the contracting MOS limits the Marine Corps' contracting capabilities as a service.

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

Pamela Unger (2022) identified significant gaps in the Marine Corps' management of its contracting personnel, specifically its contracting officers. Her research emphasized

how the contracting community's current MOS designation affected career progression, retention, and recruitment of the Marine Corps' contracting officers. This research provided a comprehensive analysis of the current obstacles faced by the Marine Corps contracting community and offered actionable recommendations in restructuring the MOS into a primary MOS.

There were three key findings in this research. One key finding was that the contracting community had retention issues due to the lack of a structured career path and incentives for qualified officers to stay in the force. The second key finding was that officers in the contracting community faced challenges in career advancement due to contracting not being a primary MOS, which ultimately affected their motivation to stay in the field. The third key finding in this research was how Force Design 2030 emphasized the need for a well-developed and educated acquisition workforce to support future operations, but the current MOS structure for contracting did not support this initiative. Through these key findings, Unger (2022) provided three recommendations. The first recommendation was to designate contracting as a primary MOS to provide officers with experience and growth opportunities. The author argued that this would have a direct correlation to the effectiveness of the contracting and acquisition work force. The second recommendation was a structural change that included increasing the number of contracting officer billets and improving the distribution of contractual support for the Marine Corps' operational needs (as seen in Figure 5). The third recommendation was to implement a structured career roadmap between the contracting and acquisition workforce to encourage qualified officers to join and stay in the field (Unger, 2022).

Overall, this research identified gaps in the Marine Corps' management of its contracting personnel and offered recommendations to overcome those shortcomings. Unger's (2022) findings and recommendations have implications for this research into I MEF's current contracting personnel structure. As this research analyzes I MEF's contract execution profile, processes, and personnel, it seeks to identify if I MEF's current contracting structure can support the array of contracting requirements that come from its customers.

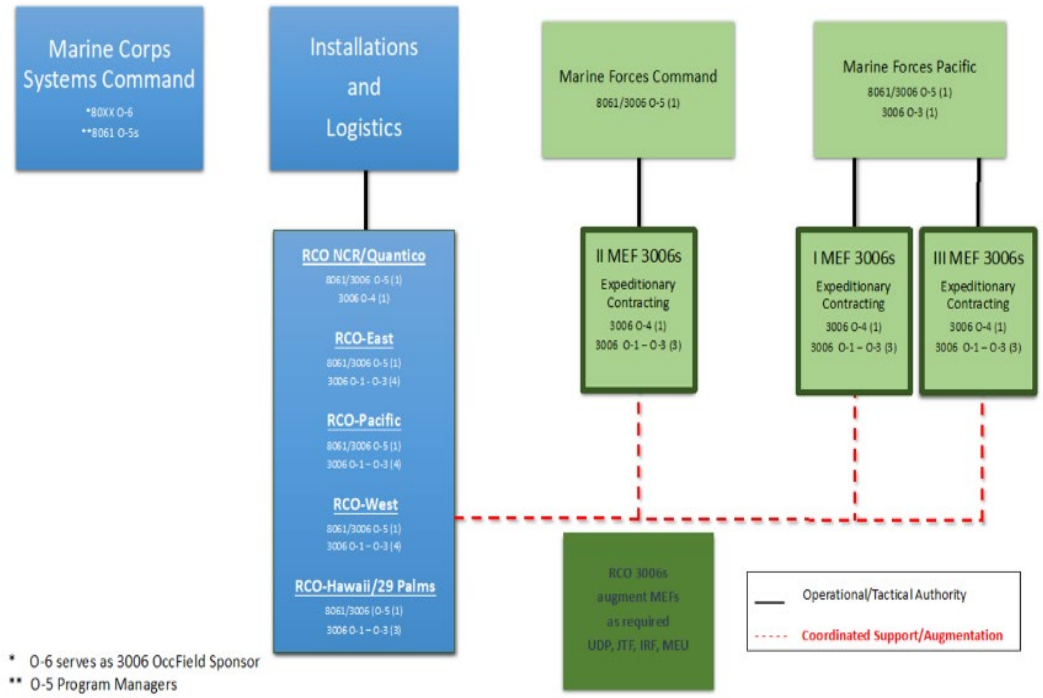

Figure 5. Recommended Contracting Support Structure. Source: Unger, (2022).

B. PROCUREMENT PROCESS

(1) Analyze Purchasing Structure, Roles, and Authority within Large, Private-Sector Organizations and Their Potential Applications and Benefits within Air Force Contracting

Boyle et al. (2020) examined Air Force and public organization procurement methods to determine the advantages and disadvantages of centralized and decentralized procurement methods. The main subjects of the article encompass the differences between centralized and decentralized procurement methods within the Air Force, which provide a framework for comparison for the USMC.

While most entities within the DoD use a centralized approach for most of their approval processes, the narrative in the contracting realm has shifted toward a decentralized approach when considering time and performance measures. Centralized purchasing structures ensure standardized policy is in place, but decentralization allows for faster response times (Boyle et al., 2020). Centralized procurement methods enable parties to ensure consistent application of policies and procedures across the entire organization, which allows for a standardization of policies that is necessary within the DoD.

Additionally, Boyle et al. (2020) argued that centralized methods enable more oversight, reducing the likelihood of fraud and ensuring compliance with legal and regulatory requirements. These are necessary measures when procurement officers have a wide variety of backgrounds and may need more guidance when navigating high-level procurements.

Centralized procurement methods better align with traditional procurement process within the DoD, but decentralized methods, which can be found in many public organizations, are garnering attention due to their potential to improve procurement and contracting processes (Boyle et al., 2020). As previously stated, decentralized procurement methods allow for quicker response times and enable more support for more active operations. Decentralized methods also allow for greater ownership and responsibility at lower levels, which is a common theme within many armed services, specifically the USMC. Additionally, they allow for innovation within the procurement cycle and can be better tailored to specific needs while lowering the burden of bureaucracy on lower-tiered acquisitions, which can greatly increase efficiency of the process.

Decentralized methods may take the spotlight as government acquisition and contracting aim to better align with industry standards, but this does not mean that they are without faults. These methods may lead to inconsistent policies or procedures, which could be detrimental to the DoD's efforts to combat fraud. Although decentralization efforts may save time, they cost more due to lack of centralization and standardization (Boyle et al., 2020). Centralized methods may ensure that individuals with the proper knowledge and background are involved in the contracting process; these professionals may offer guidance to help save costs or provide suggestions for how items or services may have been procured in the past (Boyle et al., 2020). However, centralized methods are detrimental to time-critical contracts. Lastly, decentralized methods are harder to manage, and the lack of oversight will likely be the first issue that gets brought to attention if a case of fraud or non-compliance is reported (Boyle et al., 2020).

Boyle et al. (2020) stressed the importance of both methods and provided insight into the benefits that decentralized methods may provide the DoD as it navigates a world that necessitates more contracts. While both methods offer multiple strengths and

weaknesses, the authors highlight a hybrid structure that allows for decentralized contract authority but uses centralized command oversight to balance the challenges (Boyle et al., 2020). The article highlights the challenges the Air Force faces in procurement and offers much knowledge to compare with USMC processes and procedures. The hybrid structure may provide the flexibility and oversight required of USMC contracting officers. With a small contracting workforce and personnel who leave that workforce for roughly 3 years, the USMC may find in this recommended structure a solution to its speed of contracting efforts and oversight problems.

C. PROCESS MAPPING AND MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS IN CONTRACTING ORGANIZATIONS

The final phase of this literature review covers past research on areas where contracting agencies' efficiencies and processes can be improved. The articles covered exhibit methodologies and research into the efficiency and effectiveness of contracting agencies and the need for improvement across the contracting force.

(1) Operating Metrics That Effectively and Efficiently Measure Contract Performance Operations within an Organization

Downer (2019) sought to identify and develop metrics that contracting organizations could use to increase the efficacy of their internal operating procedures. The author highlighted the complexity of the contracting process and the need for an overarching system to track and manage contracting organizations. The author analyzed the various systems and metrics that the Fleet Logistics Center (FLC) Norfolk and private-sector organizations use to make decisions (Downer, 2019). The author found that FLC Norfolk used various systems to track metrics that encompassed personnel, internal controls, and contract life cycles. However, the author found that FLC Norfolk had no standard with which it distributed the workload among its contracting activities. Additionally, the system FLC Norfolk used to track internal metrics was Procurement Administrative Lead Time (PALT). The author found that this system did not always produce accurate data regarding timelines for contract requirements. For instance, the author found that the PALT timeclock started before a contract specialist could begin working on the contract, leading to inaccurate tracking (Downer, 2019). This issue resulted

in inaccurate data regarding the time required to complete contract items, resulting in information that could not be used to understand the actual time it took to complete items for each contract. The author concluded that "there is not an emphasis on taking a hard look at the processes in-house to ensure that what is currently being implemented is the most effective and efficient way" (Downer, 2019, p. 41). This conclusion provides an insight into the current state of contracting within the DoD and highlights the lack of oversight on the effectiveness of contracting agencies.

The results of this research highlight the importance of understanding the effectiveness of the systems and processes used to track metrics and success of contracting agencies. The author recommends implementing a universal metric system that bridges the gap between end users and contracting agencies, specifically systems used by private industry that have yielded favorable results in the private sector. This research aligns with Yoder et al.'s (2012) model regarding the importance of protocol in establishing efficiencies within contracting organizations. These recommendations have implications for this research into I MEF processes and procedures and highlight the potential for procurement of a new system that can enhance and develop I MEF contracting processes.

(2) Improving Interaction between Technical and Contracting Personnel at Naval Surface Warfare Center, Philadelphia Division

Issues within the contracting process are a common point of friction, as seen in recent NPS theses. A 2022 study by Ostrom et al. (2022) used process mapping to analyze the contracting process at Naval Surface Warfare Center, Philadelphia Division (NSWCPD). The authors explored the challenges that exist between end users and contracting offices throughout the procurement process. The authors also used process mapping to determine the effectiveness of the NSWCPD contracting process during the pre-award phase (Ostrom et al., 2022).

Through their research, the authors found that the relationships and processes between technical and contracting personnel were inefficient (Ostrom et al., 2022). Through process mapping, the authors identified redundant areas within the contracting process and opportunities for improvement. The authors accomplished this by developing both a current-state and future-state process map. By developing a current-state process

map, the authors pinpointed the areas where improvement could occur, resulting in the future-state process map (Ostrom et al., 2022).

The authors also acknowledged that process mapping has it challenges when being applied in complex environments such as contracting (Ostrom et al., 2022). A difficulty the authors identified was capturing the process's full complexity during evaluation (Ostrom et al., 2022). Overall, this study provides insight into the application of process mapping in contracting organizations. The study demonstrates the utility of process mapping in identifying inefficiencies and proposing improvements, providing a baseline for use of process mapping in this study. Lastly, the study's methods contribute to the broader understanding of how process mapping can be leveraged to enhance communication, collaboration, and efficiency within an organization.

D. LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY

In summary, this literature review provided a foundation for understanding the Marine Corps contracting system and the applicability of process mapping to analyze efficiency within an organization. This chapter included a discussion of the personnel in USMC contracting and the lack of continuity in the field, processes utilized by the USAF that could increase efficiency if adopted by the USMC, and, lastly, how organizations analyze process mapping and measures of effectiveness to improve their contracting processes. While recent literature on Marine Corps contracting analyzes personnel and resource shortfalls across the force, there is minimal literature on the root cause of inefficiencies within Marine Corps contracting activities. Thus, a mixed-methods approach to identifying and mitigating inefficiencies, using process mapping within I MEF contracting activities, is needed to enhance the MCFCS.

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IV. ANALYSIS

This chapter outlines the methods, analysis, and findings of the research. First, the methods section outlines the data collected and interviews conducted with I MEF contracting personnel. Next, the data analysis section summarizes the data through the lens of process improvement. The findings will list the limitations discovered and are presented with recommendations to improve the I MEF contracting processes. Lastly, the analysis section will illustrate a current state process map created from the responses of the interviews, and then a proposed future state process map to gain efficiencies within I MEF.

A. METHODOLOGY

The authors developed the research design using a qualitative approach study including interviews of I MEF contracting members. Much of the data collected came from interviews conducted with I MEF contracting personnel. The first step was conducting interviews and collecting contract data from the SRRB and I MEF contracting agencies. The next step was an analysis of the interview questions and analysis of contract data.

B. DATA COLLECTION

1. Qualitative Data

The authors developed a questionnaire pertaining to the three objectives of this project and sent it to members of I MEF contracting agencies. This questionnaire was designed to identify issues and potential solutions pertaining to inefficiencies and opportunities for consolidation of requirements within I MEF contracting. The desired outcome of this approach was to identify issues, current processes, and areas of improvement within I MEF.

In accordance with NPS guidelines regarding research, the authors submitted a Human Subject Research Determination request to the Institutional Review Board and the United States Marine Corps Human Research Protection Program. The Institutional Review Board and United States Marine Corps Human Research Protection Program

determined the research to not be human research. Upon approval, the authors reached out to the head of the I MEF RCO to identify individuals with varying experience and knowledge of I MEF contracting policies to interview. Including individuals from different offices with varying experience ensured that responses included different perspectives from a wide range of qualified contracting professionals. Interviews were conducted in a semiformal manner and transcribed during the interview. Identifiable information such as name, rank, and billet were removed to maintain anonymity of the respondents who participated in the interviews.

The authors coordinated with the head of I MEF RCO to identify individuals with a range of experience and expertise within I MEF contracting organizations. The target audience for the interviews were personnel that are intimately involved in the SRRB and contracting process at I MEF. The interview questions were sent to members of the MCIWEST, I MEF RCO, and I MEF ECP 1st MLG. The authors invited six personnel to respond to this survey and their experience ranged from one to ten years of experience in Marine Corps contracting agencies. Of the six personnel invited the authors conducted four interviews with respondents. The experience of the interviewed personnel ranged from 1 to 10 years of experience within Marine Corps contracting and one to five years within I MEF contracting agencies. The interview questions were created to answer the research questions posed in this project and are tied to the objectives proposed by the authors.

a. Objective 1: Identify inefficiencies and areas of improvement within I MEF contracting

Question 1: What are the major challenges or bottlenecks you encounter in the contracting processes within I MEF?

Purpose: Identify issues within I MEF contracting processes and lay foundation of the current process map within I MEF.

Question 2: Are there any recurring issues or delays that impact the efficiency of contracting activities?

Purpose: Identify areas within I MEF where the current process is hindering the efficiency of contracting agencies.

Question 3: Do you feel that the current allocation of personnel and resources is adequate to support efficient contracting operations?

Purpose: Give the authors a baseline on personnel shortfalls and show what the ideal staffing would look like in MCFCS.

b. Objective 2: Determine the effectiveness of the I MEF SRRB process

Question 4: What are the major challenges or bottlenecks you encounter in the SRRB process?

Purpose: Give the authors an understanding of the I MEF SRRB process and how requirements are reconciled across the MEF.

Question 5: How is the effectiveness of the SRRB process currently measured or evaluated?

Purpose: Understand the current metrics and methods used to assess the SRRB process, highlighting potential gaps or areas for improvement in evaluation.

Question 6: Do you have any suggestions for improving the efficiency or effectiveness of the SRRB process?

Purpose: Collect feedback on the current SRRB process from individuals involved in the SRRB process and how I MEF reconciles contract requirements.

c. Objective 3: Identify criteria for consolidation of requirements

Question 7: In your opinion, are there opportunities for consolidating requirements within I MEF contracting activities, and if so, what criteria would be beneficial in identifying these requirements?

Purpose: To explore limitations, feasibility, and benefits of consolidation and reconciliation of requirements.

C. DATA ANALYSIS

This section provides a summary of responses gathered during the interview process. It also highlights similarities and differences between respondents' answers to the questions.

(1) What are the major challenges or bottlenecks you encounter in the contracting processes within I MEF?

Most respondents stated that a challenge with the contracting process within I MEF includes customer expectations in regard to timeliness and execution of requirements. Customer expectation management was a common theme among the respondents. This was a direct result of customers generating requirements needed immediately without prior planning or preparation of an acquisition ready requirements package (ARRP). For example, Respondent 1 stated "Requirement lead time is short and

requirements generator needs the requirement now without shaping the requirement." (interview with authors, October 16, 2024). This package, which is required for contracting agencies to begin the process, ensures they have all the necessary documentation and information to execute contract actions. Respondent 3 noted that the ARRPs are often submitted incomplete, which requires additional time and resources from both the customer and contracting personnel to complete (interview with authors, October 16, 2024). Ideally, ARRPs are submitted complete and ready for contracting personnel to begin market research.

(2) Are there any recurring issues or delays that impact the efficiency of contracting activities?

The most common responses to this question were centered around customer knowledge of how to work with contracting agencies and the turnover within the contracting agency. The lack of training or knowledge that requirements generators, or customers, had directly affected whether issues or delays occurred during contracting actions. Respondents stated that while the units supported were the same, the individual working with the contracting agency had not worked with a contracting agency previously. For example, respondent 2 stated "Most customers do not routinely work with contracting so most request come in missing required documents and a lot of back and forth happening with the customer" (interview with authors, October 16, 2024). All respondents noted that the process is more streamlined when working with personnel who had previously gone through the contracting process and understood the contracting process requirements (interview with authors, October 16, 2024). Lastly, the training provided to requirement generators was lacking due to the high turnover of personnel in requesting units (Respondent 4, interview with authors, October 16, 2024). The contracting process knowledge does not transfer to replacement personnel thus creating a continuous gap.

(3) Do you feel that the current allocation of personnel and resources is adequate to support efficient contracting operations?

Across all interviews, personnel and resources were identified as shortfalls for efficient contracting operations. Respondent 1 noted that the manning was sufficient to

meet the current mission requirements but was not sustainable if there was fluctuation in requirements due to a contingency environment (interview with authors, October 16, 2024). Specifically, these shortfalls were heavily emphasized where civilian employees made up the preponderance of the workforce in a contracting agency. Additionally, finding experienced civilian contracting professionals to fill current vacancies has been difficult for I MEF and led to multiple key billets unfilled for multiple fiscal years (Respondent 2, interview with authors, October 16, 2024). Respondents also noted that the definition of success was awarding contracts within the required timeframes, which is currently attainable, but would be significantly degraded if they were to lose additional personnel (Respondents 1, 4, interview with authors, October 16, 2024).

(4) What are the major challenges or bottlenecks you encounter in the SRRB process?

There were few respondents who had direct involvement with the SRRB process, and those not involved had varying understanding of the SRRB. Those involved highlighted that there are challenges with competing priorities of those involved with the SRRB and how the SRRB process is conducted. Respondent 1 and 2 noted that each MSC hosts their own SRRB, which ultimately gets filtered up to I MEF for review and final approval (interview with authors, October 17, 2024).Respondent 2 identified a specific challenge was understanding the needs of the customer if the requirement is not polished, which can lead to delayed requirements and extending timelines (interview with authors, October 17, 2024). Additionally, there is minimal involvement from contracting agencies when requirements are pushed through the SRRB process, which can lead to a requirement going through the SRRB process and then sent to a contracting agency with an incomplete ARRP. Lastly, once approved in the SRRB process, the requirements are pushed back to the requirement generator and they are directed to a contracting agency of their choice. This choice for the generator can lead to requirements that could be fulfilled by the RCO or other local agencies instead get forwarded to external sources, such GSA, that add additional management costs to the contract.

(5) How is the effectiveness of the SRRB process currently measured or evaluated?

Overall, respondents did not identify any metric on which the SRRB was measured or evaluated. Respondents highlighted that the SRRB was a validation process to ensure requirements submitted were bona fide and had support of the chain of command to the final decision authority. For example, respondent 1 stated "No measure of effectiveness, requirements are validated through the MSCs, MSEs and finally the General" (interview with authors, October 17, 2024). Additionally, the only metric that was identified was the approval rating of those requirements that made it to the final review board at the MEF level (Respondent 2, interview with authors, October 17, 2024). Respondents involved in the SRRB process noted that there is no analysis done on current and past requirements to see if common or recurrent requirements were being submitted across the MEF. For example, respondent 2 stated "No benefit ends at the MEF and upon approval contracts are pushed to agencies without review of effectiveness or value to the force" (interview with authors, October 16, 2024). Lastly, the SRRB is perceived as another requirement that had little buy in but is required per the policy to facilitate service requirements above the SAT. This is highlighted by respondent 3 statement that the SRRB is "Simply a requirements validation board to determine if the requirement is a bona fide need" (interview with authors, October 17, 2024).

(6) Do you have any suggestions for improving the efficiency or effectiveness of the SRRB process?

The respondents involved in the SRRB process noted one limitation of the process is the limited number of SRRB conducted during the fiscal year. Respondent 2 recommended moving away from a scheduled SRRB to a fluid one that allows for requirements to be pushed to the MEF as they are generated (interview with authors, October 17, 2024). Another area of improvement recommended introducing a centralized contracting organization to oversee and analyze requirements to find areas of consolidation across the MEF and ultimately across the force (Respondent 1, interview with authors, October 17, 2024). This centralized contracting organization can then take those approved requirements and direct them to the appropriate contracting agency to maximize organic capabilities. The contracting agency could help minimize the number

of requirements that currently get sent to external agencies, such as DLA, that add additional management charges to the overall contract price. Respondent 3 highlighted the impact of this outsourcing stating that "Many of these requirements go to DLA/TS that require a % payment on top of contract to have DLA execute the contract. We are paying more for contracts because we pass them to outside sources. Why are we not sourcing them to the RCO?" (interview with authors, October 17, 2024).

(7) In your opinion, are there opportunities for consolidating requirements within I MEF contracting activities, and if so, what criteria would be beneficial in identifying these requirements?

Most respondents shared similar sentiments towards consolidation of requirements and responded that there are areas where consolidation could occur. The potentially beneficial criteria identified included contracting professionals understanding where to look for similar type contracts but is ultimately on the shoulders of contracting personnel to identify and coordinate with existing contracts. Respondent 3 and 4 both highlighted the importance of contracting personnel knowing how to conduct due diligence in market research to find areas of consolidation (interview with authors, October 17, 2024). Additionally, seeking out existing contracts for like requirements and tapping into those contracts was highlighted. For example, respondent 1 identified common contracts such as wireless services that exist and are indefinite delivery indefinite quantity type contracts that are available to tap into (interview with authors, October 17, 2024). While this is a part of market research, it is not always feasible as coordination and approval to tap into preexisting contracts is required within prescribed timeline. Additionally, there is not a dedicated office or organization that looks at the entire MEF, or enterprise, to identify common or reoccurring requirements to create economies of scale (Respondent 1, interview with authors, October 16, 2024).The lack of reconciliation and limited ability to cross organizational lines limits the ability of contracting agencies within I MEF to create these economies of scale.

D. PROCESS-RELATED FINDINGS

This section will utilize the data above and list the limitations that the authors identified while conducting the interviews. The limitations of the current process range

from the lack of standardized procedures in the current process, manning inefficiencies, and the friction between command and contracting authority. This section will detail these inefficiencies and their sources.

Our interviews with members of Marine Corps Installation West (MCIWEST), I MEF RCO, and I MEF ECP display a disconnect between how each office perceives the process from requirement creation to contract award. The variances in response show that the Marine Corps does not have a set process and that this lack of process produces knowledge gaps and an opportunity to create a process map for requirement owners to utilize. While the current lack of a process map allows for flexibility in the requirements that each office may cover, this limits the ability to identify bottlenecks and improve the requirements flow process. Additionally, members admit that the process is currently personality or relationship driven when in reality it should be command and structure driven.

Alongside the lack of a standardized process, the interviews with the respondents also identified challenges of the manning of current contracting offices within I MEF. Meanwhile manning alone is an issue, the compounding effects of manning and creates bottlenecks. One such area that this bottleneck occurs and delays the process within one office is that each requirement gets filtered through a single position. This individual accepts all requirements or steers the customers to the other appropriate contracting agencies based on the authority required. This individual created this check of requirements due to their continuity at the office, and expertise at identifying requirements that should be sourced elsewhere. While this filter is a helpful step for the office to ensure the incoming requirements are valid, it creates an area that is susceptible to failures with no redundancy to ensure it continues.

The respondents identified multiple challenges with the SRRB and how it is currently utilized. Members not involved with the SRRB perceive the board as a tool for validating funds and agree that it is currently underutilized as a potential tool for consolidating or analyzing requirements data. The individual SRRBs are approved by the separate MSC Commanding Generals, then sent to the I MEF Chief of Staff to head a board of colonels to validate the list. This process is perceived as a funds check because

once a general from one of the MSCs approves a requirement, the requirement will not be stopped assuming funding is available. Members involved with the SRRB disagree that the board is purely a "funds check" and that its purpose is to ensure that requirements are a bona fide need. Involved members agree that the SRRB is tailored for operations occurring Outside the Continental United States (OCONUS), and less for garrison, but is currently conducted to encompass all requirements. SRRBs conducted for OCONUS operations aid in prioritizing requirements for limited resources in areas that may not have an industrial base able to support the operation.

All respondents agree that the SRRB results provide data that can be used for analysis to justify consolidation and likely result in best-value contracts. However, manning limitations continue to persist and no commander will willingly give up personnel to work for an "enterprise level task" when the offices are struggling with manning and expertise. All respondents agree that manning continues to be an issue in offices where civilians fill a majority of the roles. Gaps in billets continue for timelines of over a year, and the offices adjust workloads to ensure mission is met. While they continue to operate successfully, respondents admit that if peacetime operations ended, they would likely not be able to provide the support necessary.

Another concern voiced by all respondents, includes issues due to the authority of each office, and most respondents also identified potential solutions or compared the USMC to other U.S. military branches to highlight the issue. The separate offices have different contract authority, so certain requirements can only be met by certain contracting agencies, one such example being construction. While the authority helps ensure that the best suited agency handles certain requirements, there are multiple instances of contracts that are handled at lower levels due to the lack of authority within USMC contracting. This lack of authority and command is different from other branches like the Navy, which has specific contracting agencies like NAVSEA, NAVAIR, and NAVFAC, which are prescribed to handle any and all requirements that fall under their purview. In the Marine Corps, Training and Education Command (TECOM) typically handles contracts for training and education that are required service-wide, or necessary, for each MEF. However, there are examples of training contracts being conducted separately at each MEF, although the training requirement exists service-wide, because

TECOM simply will not accept the requirement, and no office or contracting agency has done the analysis on data to force TECOM to take the responsibility. Additionally, each MEF continues to fulfill the requirement individually because they each have customers who still need the training in a timely manner. An example of a training requirement that is currently completed at each MEF is the live tissue training. Live tissue training is a service-wide requirement and respondents agree that the training should be handled by TECOM, but due to the Marine Corps not containing a contract command, they cannot direct TECOM to accept the requirement. All other branches of the U.S. military contain contracting commands that can authorize and direct certain offices to accept requirements if the requirement falls under their area of expertise. The Marine Corps receives their contracting authority from I&L, which is not a Marine Corps command, and therefore cannot direct agencies and only provide suggestions. The contracting agencies do not have the authority to push requirements higher and are forced to handle them to ensure the customer receives their training. A potential solution for this limitation includes the USMC creating a contracting command which mirrors the other branches and will provide the authority necessary to delineate the jobs of each contracting entity.

Through the interviews, the authors identified multiple limitations of the current process, and were able to create the current process map for requirements through to contract award. The lack of procedure within the contracting system creates issues of authority, understanding, and expertise. Additional issues consistent with manning and knowledge of the workforce continue to plague the offices, which hinders them from analyzing the data at their disposal. The analysis section will describe the current processes in-depth, and introduce the future state process map to identify and explain areas the authors recommend for improvement and efficiency.

E. ANALYSIS

1. Current Map

The process map in Figure 6 shows the current process flow for requirements in I MEF. The interviews allowed the authors to highlight multiple limitations of the current process in the findings section. This section will give a brief summary of the current

requirements flow, and conclude with the future process map and explain the multiple solutions proposed.

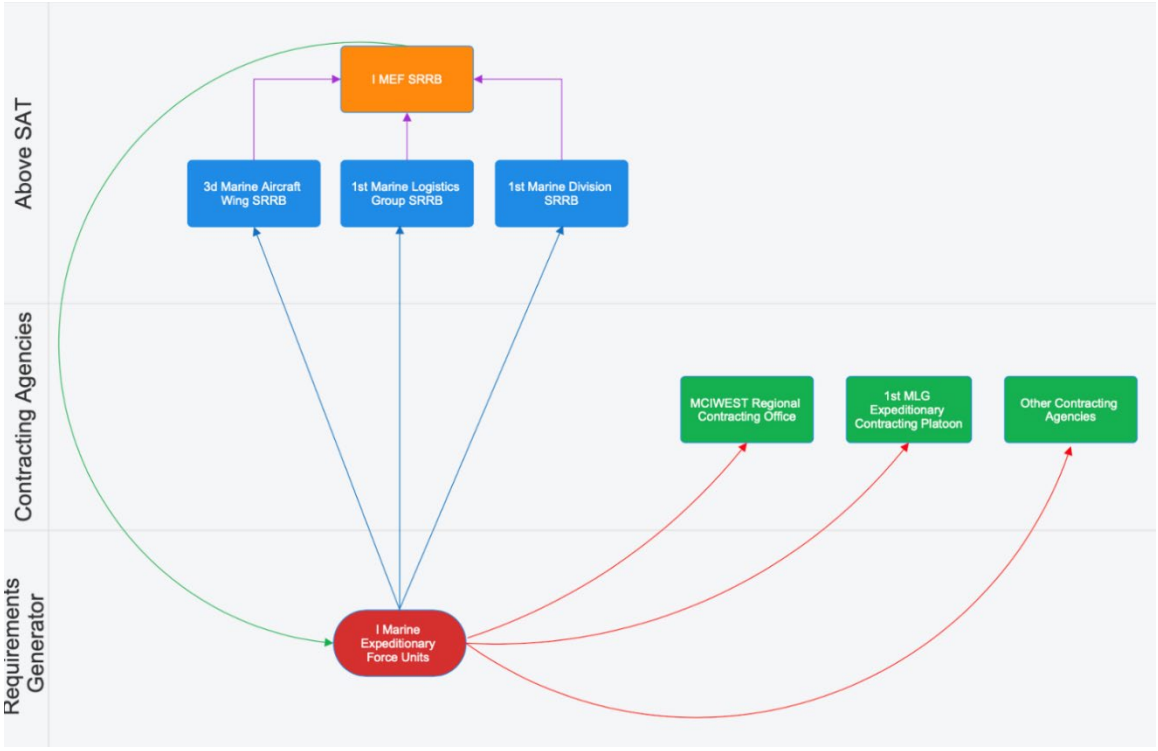

Figure 6. Current I MEF MCFCS Process Map

Currently requirements are generated at the unit and tactical levels, with the responsibility typically falling to the unit's supply officer. If a requirement exceeds the supply officer's purchasing authority, it is escalated to the next level involving a contracting agency.

For contracting requirements within the SAT, the supply officer submits a purchase request to a contracting agency within I MEF. If the request pertains to garrison-related needs, it is usually sent to the MCIWEST RCO for execution, and for deployment or exercise-related requests, the ECP handles the execution. Additionally, other agencies, such as NAVFAC, DLA, and MCICOM, possess contracting authority to fulfill various needs.

In cases where a service contract exceeds the SAT, the requirement is forwarded to the unit's respective Major Subordinate Command (MSC) for review by the SRRB. Once validated as a bona fide need by the MSC SRRB, it is sent to the I MEF SRRB for final validation and funds check. After validation, the requirement is returned to the

customer, likely the unit's supply officer, who submits a purchase request to a contracting agency for execution.

2. Future Process Map

The recommended process map (Figure 7) was created to alleviate the inefficiencies and friction points identified from the findings of the interviews and feedback from I MEF contracting personnel. The main idea in the future process map is introducing a structured contracting command that would have both contracting and command authority in the MEF. Currently, the disconnect between command and contracting authority is a friction point within the USMC and differs from other U.S. military branches. Contracting authority is delegated from HQMC I&L to contracting agencies like MCIWEST RCO and the ECP. However, these contracting agencies fall under the MSCs that have command authority over them, and their priorities are driven by the MSC Commanding Generals based on deployment capabilities or identified gaps. The lack of a central contracting command ultimately limits MCFCS to manage and reconcile contracting requirements within I MEF. When a service contract requirement is over the SAT and goes through the MEF SRRB process, it is sent back to the requirement generator to action with one of the contracting agencies. While the current process allows for the customer to decide which office to utilize, that choice means that potentially the appropriate contacting cell is not being used. The proposed contracting command would instead direct the customer to an office that specializes in those requirements thus creating opportunities to consolidate like requirements into one cost-saving contract amongst the MSC and MEF levels.

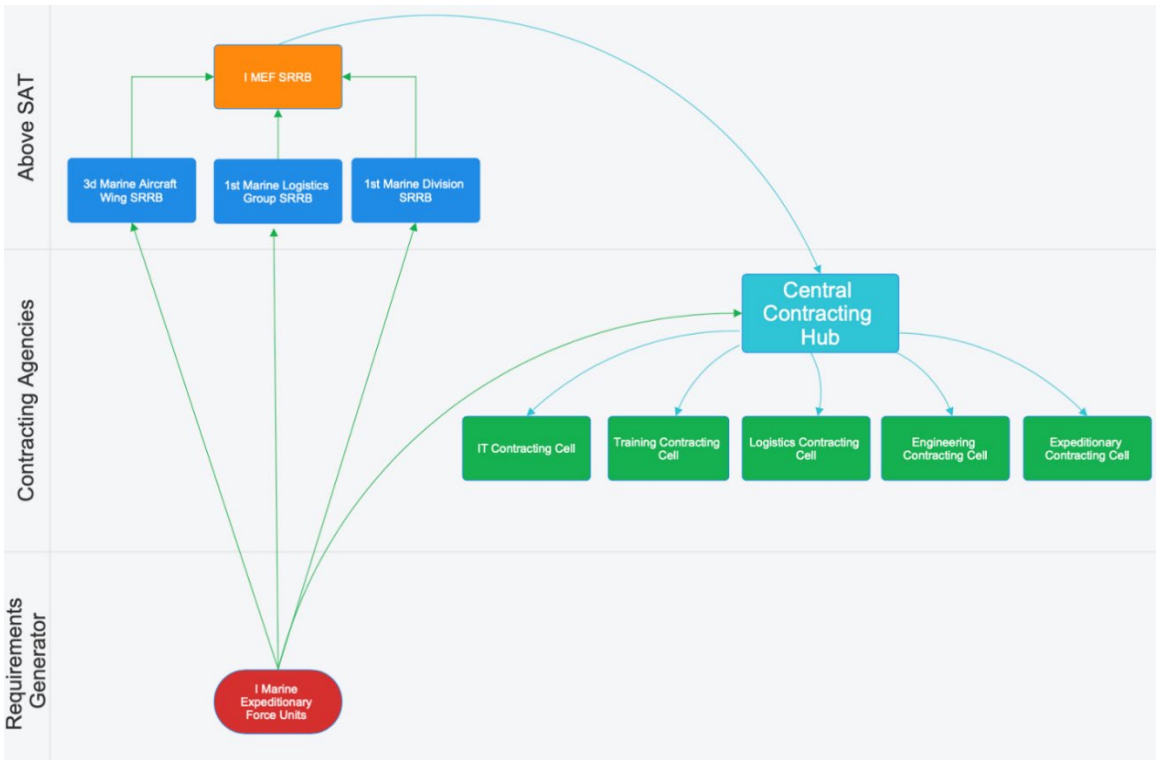

Figure 7. Recommended I MEF MCFCS Process Map

The future process map shows a regional central contracting hub that would have both contracting and command authority in the MEF. I MEF units would continue to generate their requirements, and be forwarded to the SRRB for validation for service requirements above the SAT. However, instead of sending the validated requirement back to the requirement generator, it would be sent to the central contracting hub to decide on how to execute the contracting requirement. This change in the process would give more autonomy to the contracting professionals in I MEF to not only delegate the requirement to the appropriate contracting agency, but to also gather data and facilitate reconciliation for cost-saving measures through consolidation and other efforts. A central contracting command would provide opportunities to establish standardized procedures that would alleviate the redundancies with the customer base that were identified by the respondents.

The second major change proposed in the future process map will utilize specialization, or enterprise sourcing and category management in the MCFCS. This specialization will mirror the other U.S. military branches, and would have branches of contracting cells from the centralized hub. These cells would have specialization in

specific categories of contracts, similar to those agencies like NAVSEA, NAVFAC, and NAVAIR. For example, there would be contracting cells with their own Chief Contracting Officer (CCO) and HCA that specialize in contracts regarding IT, training, logistics, engineering, expeditionary, and other requirements. The contracting cells would create opportunities for improving efficiencies through standardization of procedures for each category and consolidating frequent requirements within the MEF. This improvement and standardization of procedures is only possible through the central contracting command that would have direct supervision of all contracting requirements in the MEF.

F. SUMMARY

The chapter presented the data from interviews conducted with contracting professionals within I MEF, introduced the limitations of the current requirements flow process through the findings section, and concluded with an analysis of the current process map and proposed potential solutions to those limitations with the future process map. Through a qualitative approach via interviews of I MEF contracting members, the authors were able to create the current process map and utilize the map to identify the friction points and inefficiencies associated with them. Upon identifying the inefficiencies, the analysis section contains the proposed changes that would improve the flow of contracting requirements, and provide standardized procedures and oversight. The next chapter will provide a summary of the research, and areas for further research.

V. SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This section provides a summary of the study presented in previous chapters and addresses the research questions, limitations, recommendations, and offers areas of further development.

A. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

The research began with the presentation of the problem statement, research questions, methodology, and recommendations. Then a background on the Marine Corps contracting policy, processes, and procedures provided the foundation for the research. Next, a literature review was presented to investigate policy and current objectives of the MCFCS and explore the application of process mapping to a contracting agency. Finally, the researchers analyzed the data collected through interviews using principles identified in Yoder's three pillars for success in contracting (2012).

B. RESEARCH QUESTIONS ADDRESSED

This study addressed the primary research question: *How does I MEF reconcile contract requirements?* Chapter Four outlines the findings of our research and provides an overview of the process map that displays the current requirement flow within I MEF contracting. The development of a process map identified gaps in the overall reconciliation process of contract requirements across I MEF. Due to the personnel and resource limitations across the contracting agencies, the ability to reconcile and analyze contracting requirements was limited. Additionally, due to the authority limitations and command structure of the Marine Corps, there is no central office with the appropriate authority to manage and reconcile contracting requirements within I MEF or across the force. Additionally, the interviews provided insight on what each stakeholder defined as success in contracting. Within I MEF, the overarching main objective was awarding contracts within the requirement generator's timeline. Due to constraints from personnel, expertise, and lack of accepted procedure, additional reconciliation to gain efficiencies or economies of scale are not possible. The organizational boundaries within the Marine

Corps structure and lack of overall understanding of contracting capabilities and importance directly impact the resources available to further develop I MEF contracting processes. Contract requirement reconciliation is a major gap in I MEF contracting, limiting the MEF's ability to identify consolidation opportunities and conserve resources. This issue leads to the execution of multiple contracts for similar needs, such as live tissue training within I MEF.

The secondary research question was: What is the current process for contract consolidation and life-cycle management within I MEF, and where can efficiencies be gained? Each respondent identified the process for life-cycle management and requirements flow from an implicit knowledge perspective, but the answers among the respondents differed due to no current explicit process flow existing. While life-cycle management occurs in the sense that contracts are followed from requirements generation through close out, there exists a gap in the analysis of existing like requirements or contracts across the service. The respondents acknowledged that the necessary data for analysis exists and could be used to identify areas of efficiency through contract consolidation but is not utilized due to manning issues. Respondents identified that issues with experience retained by civilian and military contracting personnel, and lack thereof, due to vacancies in key supervisor and technical billets across the contracting agencies persists. Currently, there is a gap between the resident knowledge needed to meet mission requirements and the processes in place to retain and build that knowledge. Additionally, the respondents identified key individuals who hold the wealth of knowledge for contracting within I MEF that present a single point of failure if they were to leave the organization.

Respondents identified different definitions of success across I MEF contracting. Examples include awarding the contract within the required timeframe, excellent customer service, and meeting initiatives passed down from the Deputy Commandant Installations and Logistics (DCI&L) Contracts Division (LB). These competing objectives created a clash between contracting professionals, the customer, and contracting authorities. Due to these competing objectives and resource constraints, there exists minimal availability to analyze organic contract requirements for areas of consolidation and efficiency in the contracting process in I MEF. While all respondents

desired to pursue efficiency through consolidation to limit work required to support similar or same requirements across I MEF, they were limited in both the authority and resources to analyze and direct the processes. The SRRB is a prime example of where requirements are generated and approved by the MEF with little to no involvement from the contracting personnel. Contracting does not have the appropriate authorities to direct or provide oversight on all contracting processes which limits their ability to be a force multiplier for I MEF. Another area for improvement, voiced by respondents, is ensuring contracting personnel had the authority to direct contracts to the appropriate source vice customers selecting a source based on preference or what was done in the past. This current process has the potential to limit requirements being fulfilled by external agencies that could be fulfilled by the organic contracting capabilities. Lastly, a highly-sought after change was the development of a contracting command to provide oversight and have the authority to direct how contracts were managed and executed. Respondents identified this issue in regard to live tissue training where it was an enterprise-wide training requirement, but no enterprise-wide contract has been established and each MEF is left to execute and manage this requirement independently. Thus, each MEF was generating and contracting for the same requirement and duplicating efforts across the enterprise.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

Using the findings from the research and identification of key issues within I MEF, the below recommendations are made to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of I MEF and have applications to the MCFCS enterprise. The first recommendation focuses on the education of customers, specifically leaders, in the contracting process. The second recommendation hinges on personnel and policy updates to bridge the gap between requirements reconciliation and the overarching contracting process prevalent in I MEF. The third recommendation has implications on the organizational structure of the MCFCS, manpower, authorities, and contracting processes across the MCFCS enterprise.

(1) Recommendation 1. Implementation and formalization of baseline training, doctrine, and repository of information across all contracting agencies organic to I MEF.

The most common challenge or issue identified by respondents was the lack of knowledge that requirement generators had regarding the contracting process. This obstacle was evident across the RCO, ECP, and OCS respondents due to many reasons. The agencies provide a repository of best practices, templates, and references for customers to pull from when developing an ARRP, but the reality is that it is not widely utilized. This knowledge gap induces extra work that burdens the contracting agencies at the beginning of the contract process because they must aid customers with paperwork and accurately defining their requirements. Creating a MEF-wide training program available for customers and requiring engagement with contracting agencies would help mitigate the issues identified by the contracting professionals interviewed. One avenue of educating and influencing commanders, which will in turn influence their subordinates, would be through adding to Marine Corps Doctrinal Publications (MCDP). Leaders in the Marine Corps are expected to be knowledgeable of these doctrines of warfighting. Adding to MCDP 5 Planning, a section on the basics and necessity of contracting could influence commanders on the capabilities that contracting offers. This formalization of policy aligns with Yoder's three pillars for success in contracting (2012) by utilizing the protocol pillar, which encompasses policy. These training and education products would provide a foundation for bridging the knowledge gap of customers and reducing the additional work required by contracting personnel.

(2) Recommendation 2. Implement a contracting hub within I MEF that can provide oversight and management on all contracting matters.

I MEF would benefit from dedicating an office to manage and oversee contracts across the MEF. This office would combine the RCO, ECP, and OCS into one entity that could provide general support to the MEF in all contracting matters. This centralization would enable the colocation of experienced contracting personnel to level spread workload and provide flexibility with personnel shortfalls. Additionally, all requirements would flow through this office to direct and facilitate requirements to the appropriate internal or external agency. This structure would also provide a central hub to enable

analysis of requirements to seek economies of scale and consolidation. This structure would allow the director of the contracting hub to match resources to requirements and surge or reduce resources as required to support the MEF. Lastly, this hub would be integral to the SRRB process and facilitate a single contracting hub that can analyze all requirements data for consolidation, ultimately seeking to improve the contracting capabilities of the MEF through dedicated oversight and management of all MEF contracting requirements.

(3) Recommendation 3. Establish a Marine Corps Contracting Command with appropriate authorities to direct and manage contracting across the MCFCS enterprise.

The final recommendation takes best practices from other branches of the military such as the Air Force and Navy. These departments have dedicated contracting commands that facilitate all contract actions within their functional area. An example of this is NAVSUP which oversees and manages the Navy supply chain as the HCA while NAVSEA oversees and manages design, building, and maintenance of the fleet as the HCA. These commands have the authorities and ability to direct and oversee all contracting within their respective areas of responsibility. While the Navy conducts category management through their contracting commands we recommend the Marine Corps have one contracting command with a regional contracting command located at each MEF with centers of excellence for each key requirement category. As shown in Figure 8, each MEF would have a contracting command that would receive its authority from the Marine Corps command and execute all contracting requirements for its region. This would allow the regional commands to have direct oversight and control over all contracting within their respective region.

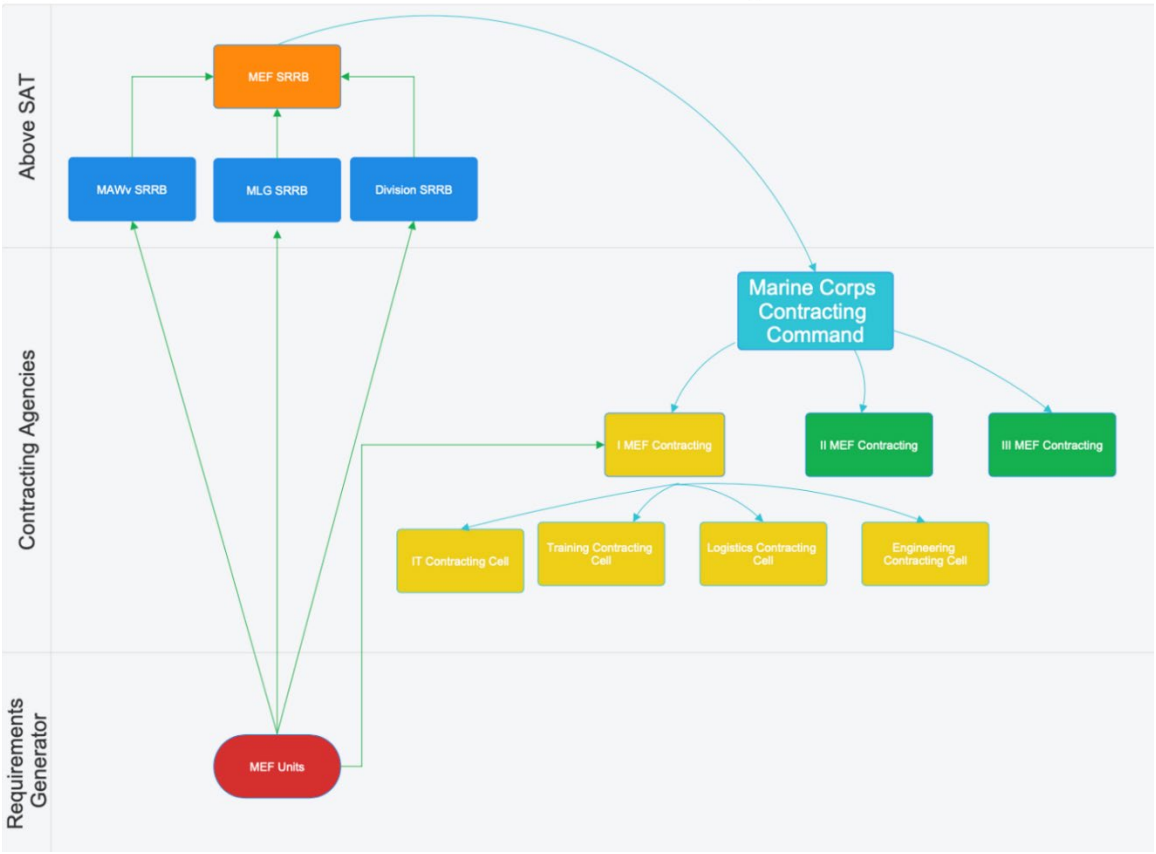

Figure 8. Ideal MCFCS Process Map

D. AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Upon completing the research, the authors identified three areas for further research that could be explored.

First, this research focused exclusively on the MCFCS for I MEF, not on the contracting processes of II MEF and III MEF. Further research could explore contracting processes in the other MEFs to identify opportunities to increase efficiency in their procedures as well. Additionally, this study could also explore opportunities for the Marine Corps to integrate all three MEFS and consolidate service-wide requirements and implement policies to standardize all the MEFs.

Second, the research utilized a qualitative approach to explore the contracting processes of I MEF. Further research could use a quantitative approach and examine historical contract data to determine if there would be significant cost savings from the improved contracting processes identified in this research.

Last, an area for further research would be a quantitative analysis on the Marine Corps' dollars spent with contracting as a percentage of the top line budget and then compare that percentage to those of the other branches, like Army, Navy, and Air Force. This analysis would portray the lack of utilization, knowledge, and understanding that the Marine Corps has in comparison to the other services. This future study would also highlight how other branches, and specifically leadership in other branches, have more interest in contracting and utilize it to its fullest potential.

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Acquisition Research Program
Naval Postgraduate School
555 Dyer Road, Ingersoll Hall
Monterey, CA 93943

www.acquisitionresearch.net