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**Acquisition Transformation Best Practices:
Workforce, Culture, and Decision Quality as the Engines
of Mission Delivery**

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Acquisition Transformation Best Practices: Workforce, Culture, and Decision Quality as the Engines of Mission Delivery

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Abstract

The Department of War's Acquisition Transformation Strategy focuses on eliminating unnecessary processes, improving collaboration, and enabling the acquisition workforce to deliver faster and more effective mission results. The keystone to this seismic shift is the acquisition workforce, the people who build and buy weapons systems. To succeed, the acquisition community should apply transformation science which examines how lasting change occurs, including the conditions, behaviors, and systems that support it. Drawing from direct experience supporting ACAT I programs and federal civilian workforce engagement initiatives, we present case-study-driven transformation best practices. Sustainable transformation demands targeted workforce initiatives including rotational assignments, blended career paths, and empowerment of program offices to tailor enterprise strategies. Institutionalizing scenario-driven training, critical thinking, and risk-embracing leadership prepares acquisition professionals to operate with authority, flexibility, and speed. By anchoring performance to mission goals, deploying psychometric assessments, and promoting open communication, acquisition organizations can achieve measurable cultural transformation as demonstrated by the MRAP program's documented workforce culture improvements and the Department of Labor's dramatic improvement in Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey scores. This blend of proven human capital practices and systemic workforce transformation delivers innovative solutions at the speed, scale, and quality required to maintain strategic advantage for America's warfighters.

Keywords: acquisition, collaboration, transformation, workforce, innovation

Introduction

The Department of War's Acquisition Transformation Strategy represents a watershed moment for defense acquisition, articulating a vision that demands nothing less than a



fundamental reimagining of how the United States develops, procures, and sustains weapons systems and capabilities. The Strategy's central mandate is unambiguous: eradicate process-for-process's sake, instill cross-functional collaboration, and accelerate the delivery of warfighting capabilities at the speed required to maintain strategic advantage against increasingly capable adversaries (DoW, 2024). In an era defined by great-power competition and rapidly evolving threats, the traditional acquisition apparatus (characterized by linear processes, risk-averse cultures, and compliance-oriented mindsets) is insufficient to deliver capability at the speed of relevance.

The gap between strategic intent and operational reality has been persistent in the past and, unfortunately, remains a considerable challenge. Despite decades of acquisition reform, defense acquisition programs continue to experience cost overruns, schedule delays, and capability shortfalls (Sullivan, 2009). Legislative and policy reforms, while necessary, are insufficient without a commensurate transformation of the acquisition workforce itself. The Adaptive Acquisition Framework (AAF) provides pathways for tailored acquisition strategies, yet the workforce responsible for executing these pathways often lacks the tools, training, and organizational culture required for sustained transformation (Defense Acquisition University, 2020). Put simply, acquiring systems is fundamentally a human endeavor, and the quality of outcomes depends on the quality, adaptability, and empowerment of the people executing the mission.

This paper argues that the acquisition workforce is the keystone of the Acquisition Transformation Strategy, the single element upon which the arch of reform either stands or collapses. To build a workforce capable of delivering on the Strategy's ambitious goals, acquisition leaders must embrace the tenets of *transformation science*, which is defined as the systemic study of how profound, lasting changes occur, not just what changes, but how and why those shifts happen, the mechanisms that drive them, and their long-term effects (Mezirow, 1991). Transformation science goes beyond traditional change management by examining the structural, cultural, and psychological mechanisms that produce durable organizational change. Complementing transformation science, the discipline of industrial-organizational (I-O) psychology provides validated tools for personnel selection, training design, performance management, and culture assessment, tools that are directly applicable to the acquisition workforce challenge (Schein, 2010).

Despite the availability of these frameworks, the acquisition community has not systematically applied transformation science or I-O psychology tools to workforce development. Existing research on defense acquisition workforce development focuses primarily on competency models, educational requirements, and certification structures (Defense Acquisition University, 2020). While important, these approaches address surface-level qualifications without transforming the underlying organizational culture, leadership behaviors, and interpersonal dynamics that drive performance. The present paper addresses this gap by synthesizing real-world case studies with theoretical foundations to derive actionable best practices for acquisition workforce transformation.

We draw on two primary case studies from the direct experience of Transformation Systems, Inc. (TSi), a Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) with more than 30 years of experience applying I-O psychology and management systems engineering to federal organizations. The first case study examines the Joint Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicle Program (JMVP), where TSi conducted organizational culture assessments and facilitated strategic transformation during one of the most accelerated acquisition programs since World War II (Coleman et al., 2010). The second case study examines TSi's work with the Department of Labor's Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO), where the LEAP framework and DiSC personality assessments produced dramatic improvements in Federal Employee



Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) results. Together, these cases demonstrate that measurable, sustainable workforce transformation is achievable when grounded in validated science and deployed with organizational commitment.

The paper proceeds as follows. We first review the theoretical foundations of workforce transformation, spanning transformation science, I-O psychology, and the Department of War's strategic framework. We then describe our case study methodology before presenting detailed analyses of the MRAP and Department of Labor (DOL) cases. We synthesize findings into ten best practices for acquisition workforce transformation, discuss implications and limitations, and conclude with a call to action for acquisition leaders.

Theoretical Foundations of Workforce Transformation

Transformation Science

Transformation science draws on multiple intellectual traditions to explain how organizations and individuals undergo profound, lasting change. Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory posits that transformation occurs when individuals critically examine their assumptions, their "meaning perspectives," and reconstruct them through reflective discourse and disorienting experiences. In the acquisition context, this means that workforce transformation requires more than new procedures; it demands that acquisition professionals fundamentally reexamine assumptions about risk, authority, collaboration, and mission primacy.

Kotter's (2012) eight-step model for leading change provides a complementary organizational-level framework, emphasizing the sequential importance of establishing urgency, building guiding coalitions, communicating vision, empowering action, generating short-term wins, consolidating gains, and anchoring change in culture. Kotter's model has been widely applied in both corporate and government settings, and its emphasis on cultural anchoring is particularly relevant to acquisition organizations where entrenched bureaucratic cultures resist reform (Kotter, 2012). Lewin's (1947) foundational change management model of unfreeze, change, and refreeze, provides the theoretical substrate for understanding organizational change as a deliberate, staged process. Lewin's insight that change requires destabilizing existing equilibria before new patterns can solidify remains foundational to modern organizational development.

Integrating these frameworks, transformation science in the acquisition context encompasses three dimensions: (a) the mechanisms of change (what cognitive, structural, and cultural processes drive transformation), (b) the catalysts of change (what events, interventions, or leadership actions initiate transformation), and (c) the durability of change (what sustains transformation over time and prevents regression). This three-part framework guides our analysis of case studies and the derivation of best practices.

Industrial-Organizational Psychology in Acquisition

Industrial-organizational (I-O) psychology applies psychological science to the workplace, encompassing personnel selection, training and development, performance appraisal, organizational culture, leadership, and team dynamics (Muchinsky & Howes, 2019). In the acquisition workforce context, I-O psychology provides validated tools for understanding and improving the human systems that drive acquisition outcomes.

Schein's (2010) model of organizational culture identifies three levels, artifacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions, that must be addressed for culture change to take hold. The Organizational Culture Inventory® (OCI®) and Organizational Effectiveness Inventory® (OEI®), developed by Human Synergetics International (2020), operationalize



Schein's model by measuring 12 cultural styles along constructive, passive/defensive, and aggressive/defensive dimensions. These instruments have been validated across hundreds of organizations and provide quantifiable baselines against which transformation progress can be measured.

The DiSC personality assessment, based on Marston's (1928) behavioral model, categorizes behavioral tendencies along four dimensions: Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Conscientiousness. In workforce development contexts, DiSC facilitates self-awareness, social awareness, and interpersonal effectiveness, competencies directly relevant to cross-functional acquisition teams that must navigate diverse stakeholder interests (Wilson, 2013). The Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS), administered by the Office of Personnel Management (2022), provides government-wide benchmarks for employee engagement, satisfaction, and organizational climate, enabling cross-agency comparisons and longitudinal tracking.

The Adaptive Acquisition Framework and Workforce Implications

The Department of War's Adaptive Acquisition Framework (AAF) replaced the monolithic DoD 5000 process with six tailored acquisition pathways: Urgent Capability Acquisition, Middle Tier of Acquisition, Major Capability Acquisition, Software Acquisition, Defense Business Systems, and Acquisition of Services (Defense Acquisition University, 2020). The AAF demands a workforce that can exercise judgment in selecting and tailoring pathways, manage portfolio risk across diverse acquisition strategies, and collaborate across functional boundaries. Traditional workforce development models, designed for a single linear acquisition process, are inadequate for this purpose (Clark, 2019).

The Department of War's Acquisition Transformation Strategy

The 2025 Acquisition Transformation Strategy articulates four strategic pillars: (a) eradicate process-for-process's sake to remove bureaucratic impediments that slow capability delivery; (b) instill cross-functional collaboration to break down organizational silos; (c) accelerate the speed of acquisition to deliver capabilities at the pace of threats; and (d) empower the acquisition workforce as the engine of transformation (DoW, 2025). The Strategy explicitly identifies the workforce as the critical enabler, noting that cultural change and workforce empowerment must precede and sustain procedural reforms.

The Strategy aligns with broader government efforts to modernize human capital management in the federal workforce. It emphasizes extended tenures for key program leaders, transparent performance metrics, leadership coaching, and talent management practices that reward innovation and risk-taking rather than mere compliance (DoW, 2024). It also operates in concert with the Department's Acquisition Workforce Reform Strategy (DoW, 2026), which reiterates the need for credentialing reform, rotational development, and a defense acquisition workforce equipped to exercise judgment under the Adaptive Acquisition Framework. Together, these directives create both the opportunity and the imperative for systematic application of transformation science and I-O psychology tools.

Prior Research on Defense Acquisition Workforce Development

Research on defense acquisition workforce development has historically focused on competency models, educational requirements, and certification structures. The Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA) established certification standards and career development frameworks, while the Defense Acquisition University (DAU) serves as the primary educational institution (DAU, 2020). However, Rendon and Snider (2019) argue that competency-based approaches, while necessary, are insufficient without attention to organizational culture, leadership behavior, and systemic incentive structures.



The role of psychometric assessment in organizational change has been extensively documented in civilian contexts but underutilized in defense acquisition. Research demonstrates that validated instruments such as the OCI®/OEI® (Human Synergistics International, 2020), DiSC (Wiley, 2011), and FEVS (Office of Personnel Management, 2022) provide reliable baselines for cultural assessment and longitudinal tracking of transformation outcomes. The present paper contributes to this literature by demonstrating the application of these tools in both defense acquisition and federal civilian contexts.

Methodology

This study employs a multiple-case study methodology consistent with Yin's (2018) framework for case study research and applications. Case study research is particularly appropriate for investigating complex, real-world phenomena within their operational contexts, conditions that characterize defense acquisition workforce transformation (Yin, 2018). The multiple-case design enables cross-case pattern matching and the identification of recurring mechanisms of change across varied organizational settings, rather than statistical generalization to all acquisition environments.

Case Selection

We selected two primary cases based on purposive sampling criteria: (a) both cases involved systematic organizational culture interventions using validated I-O psychology tools; (b) both cases yielded quantitative, longitudinal outcome data; (c) the cases span military and civilian federal contexts, enabling comparison across organizational environments; and (d) Transformation Systems, Inc. served as the intervention agent in both cases, ensuring methodological consistency.

Case 1, the Joint Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicle Program (JMVP), represents a high-stakes military acquisition program that required transformational leadership, cross-functional collaboration, and organizational culture change under extreme time pressure. Case 2, the Department of Labor's Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO), represents a federal civilian workforce engagement initiative that deployed leadership coaching and psychometric assessment to improve organizational climate and employee satisfaction.

Data Sources

Consistent with Yin's (2018) recommendation for triangulation, we drew on multiple data sources for each case.

Organizational Culture Surveys. For the MRAP case, TSi administered the Organizational Culture Inventory® (OCI®) and Organizational Effectiveness Inventory® (OEI®) developed by Human Synergistics International (2020) at baseline and follow-up (approximately two years post-intervention). For the DOL case, the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) served as the primary longitudinal measure, with data spanning 2018 through 2022 (Office of Personnel Management, 2022).

A note on instrument selection is warranted. The OCI® and OEI® are well-documented, psychometrically-validated instruments widely regarded as reliable, research-based measures of organizational culture and effectiveness (Human Synergistics International, 2020). Multiple peer-reviewed studies and technical reports document the factor structure of the OCI® and its ability to distinguish culture types, and the OEI® is designed to work in tandem with the OCI® to measure climate, structures, systems, and outcomes. DiSC, by contrast, is used throughout this work in its defensible role as a low-stakes developmental and communication tool, supporting coaching, workshops, and self-reflection, rather than as a selection instrument or a high-stakes diagnostic.



Interview and Archival Data. Semi-structured interviews with program leadership, workforce participants, and stakeholders informed both case analyses. Archival records including strategic plans, performance metrics, Contractor Performance Assessment Reporting System (CPARS) evaluations, and workshop and coaching satisfaction surveys supplemented survey data.

Program Performance Metrics. For the MRAP case, we analyzed production rates, fielding timelines, IED casualty data, and program management review outcomes. For the DOL case, we analyzed FEVS indices (Global Satisfaction Index and Employee Engagement Index), workshop and coaching satisfaction rates, and cross-organizational benchmarking data.

Analytical Approach

We employed a longitudinal comparison design (pre-intervention vs. post-intervention) within each case, followed by cross-case pattern matching to identify common mechanisms, catalysts, and durability factors (Yin, 2018). This approach enabled us to identify convergent evidence for best practices that transcend organizational context. We also reference the 2017 SYSCOM Manpower Requirements Model (Clark, 2017) as a conceptual foundation for understanding workforce affordability trade-offs in acquisition organizations, a framework we revisit in the Discussion section.

Case Study 1: Transformation Under Fire: Lessons from the Joint MRAP Vehicle Program

Background and Urgency

By 2006, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) had become the single greatest threat to coalition forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, responsible for approximately 60% of coalition casualties (Lamb et al., 2009). The lethality and sophistication of IED attacks escalated rapidly, and existing vehicle fleets, including up-armored HMMWVs, provided inadequate protection. By the time the Joint Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicle Program (JMVP) was formally established in October 2006 under the Department of the Navy, more than 1,000 coalition service members had been killed by IEDs. The urgency was absolute: every day of delay in fielding survivable vehicles translated directly to additional casualties (Sullivan, 2009).

The JMVP represented one of the most accelerated acquisition programs in modern military history. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates designated the MRAP program as the Department of Defense's number one acquisition priority, assigning it a DX priority rating that ensured first access to industrial resources (Lamb et al., 2009). The program shaved as much as six years off the typical acquisition timeline, compressing development, testing, production, and fielding into a fraction of normal timelines (Sullivan, 2009). At its peak, MRAP production reached rates not seen since World War II, with multiple manufacturers producing vehicles simultaneously across parallel production lines.

Scale and Requirements Evolution

The MRAP program's scale evolved dramatically as threat assessments, combatant commander demands, and Congressional support grew. Initial requirements called for approximately 1,000 vehicles. Within months, the requirement expanded to 4,060, then to 7,774, then to 15,374, and ultimately to more than 26,000 vehicles across multiple categories and OEMs (Coleman et al., 2010). This exponential growth in requirements, combined with an immature production base (only Force Protection Industries was actively producing MRAP-type vehicles at program inception) created unprecedented challenges for acquisition professionals.

The results were nothing short of transformational. Within just over a year of large-scale MRAP deployment, IED casualties dropped from approximately 60% of total casualties to just



5% (Coleman et al., 2010). The MRAP program saved thousands of lives and demonstrated what the acquisition enterprise can achieve when empowered, focused, and freed from process-for-process's sake—precisely the conditions the Acquisition Transformation Strategy seeks to institutionalize.

Table 1. JMVP Program Timeline and Key Milestones

Year/Period	Milestone
Pre-2006	IED casualties reach ~60% of coalition fatalities; over 1,000 killed
Oct 2006	JMVP formally established under Department of the Navy
2007	SecDef Gates designates MRAP as DoD #1 acquisition priority (DX rating)
2007–2008	Requirements grow from ~1,000 to 26,000+ vehicles; production rates reach WWII levels
2007–2014+	TSi supports JMVP with culture assessments, strategic planning, and process improvement
Post-deployment	IED casualties drop from ~60% to 5% within one year of MRAP fielding

Program Challenges

Coleman et al. (2010) documented five critical challenges that defined the JMVP acquisition environment:

Highly accelerated schedule. The urgency of the warfighter's need compressed every phase of the acquisition process. As Coleman et al. (2010) noted, the delay of a single vehicle by a single day could result in the loss of life. Traditional milestone reviews, documentation requirements, and approval chains were fundamentally incompatible with this timeline.

Extreme penalties for performance and schedule failures. Unlike most acquisition programs where schedule slippage results in budget overruns and Congressional criticism, MRAP schedule failures had immediate, tangible consequences measured in casualties. This unique accountability environment created both extraordinary motivation and extraordinary stress.

High degree of scope and requirement uncertainty. Requirements changed rapidly and dramatically as threat assessments evolved, new theater demands emerged, and production capabilities were better understood. The workforce had to operate effectively under conditions of continuous ambiguity.

Immature production base. At program inception, the industrial base for mine-resistant vehicles was virtually nonexistent at scale. Only Force Protection Industries was actively producing MRAP-type vehicles. Building a production base capable of WWII-era output rates required simultaneous development of manufacturing capacity and supply chains.

Complex stakeholder management. The JMVP operated under intense oversight from multiple stakeholders, including Senators, Congressional committees, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Service Secretaries, and combatant commanders in theater. The program office navigated competing priorities and expectations while maintaining execution focus.



Innovative Acquisition Responses

The JMVP's response to these challenges provides a template for acquisition innovation that directly informs the best practices we derive later in this paper.

Focus on critical program objectives. The program leadership made an early, deliberate decision to focus on exactly two objectives: field survivable vehicles, and do so as quickly as possible (Coleman et al., 2010). All other considerations—including traditional requirements such as commonality, standardization, and lifecycle cost optimization—were subordinated to these two imperatives. This ruthless prioritization enabled rapid decision-making and eliminated bureaucratic friction associated with balancing competing requirements.

Accept incremental, “good enough” progress. Rather than pursuing a single optimized solution, the JMVP adopted a strategy of incremental progress through a series of mini-programs. Each increment delivered improved survivability to the warfighter while the program continued to refine requirements and solutions. This approach directly challenged the acquisition community's cultural preference for fully defined, optimized solutions before fielding.

Phased testing with multiple manufacturers. The program conducted phased testing and issued incremental production orders to multiple manufacturers simultaneously. This approach maintained competitive pressure, reduced single-source risk, and enabled rapid production ramp-up across parallel lines. It required acquisition professionals to manage multiple contracts and production relationships concurrently, a fundamentally different skill set than managing a single prime contractor.

Selective risk acceptance (two-basket approach). Coleman et al. (2010) described the JMVP's risk management approach as a “two-basket” model. The first basket contained core risks, threats to survivability and fielding speed, which were absolutely unacceptable and rigorously mitigated. The second basket contained non-core risks, threats to cost, commonality, or long-term sustainment optimization, which were explicitly accepted and managed. This framework empowered program managers to make rapid trade-off decisions without seeking approval for every risk acceptance.

Maintaining options through competitive prototyping. The program deliberately avoided early down-selects, maintaining multiple vehicle options and manufacturers throughout the development phase. Bidders were required to demonstrate solutions through competitive prototyping, not merely propose them on paper. This approach, while more expensive in the short term, reduced risk, maintained schedule flexibility, and ultimately delivered better outcomes.

Aggressive communication and rapid decision-making. The JMVP institutionalized open, aggressive communication across functional boundaries and hierarchical levels. Decision-making cycles were compressed dramatically, with program leadership empowered to make decisions that would ordinarily require flag-level or senior executive approval. Communication was not just frequent but transparent, ensuring that all stakeholders—from production lines to Congressional offices—operated from common situational awareness.

TSi's Organizational Culture Transformation

Transformation Systems, Inc. supported the JMVP from 2007 through 2014, providing organizational culture assessment, strategic planning, and process improvement services. The JMVP was a coalition of U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and special operations program offices, and TSi was tasked with identifying barriers to cooperation and providing guidance to strengthen collaborative efforts.



TSi's approach began with a comprehensive assessment using semi-structured interviews and Human Synergistics' OCI® and OEI® surveys (Human Synergistics International, 2020). The initial assessment revealed a "Type A" organizational culture: competitive, aggressive, and tense driven by the extreme urgency of the mission. While this culture produced results under emergency conditions, it also generated schedule delays, communication breakdowns, and inefficiencies from suboptimal working relationships and inconsistent processes.

Based on assessment findings, TSi facilitated the identification, prioritization, and implementation of multiple change initiatives, including the development of the JMVP Strategic Plan, a Transition Plan, a Product Team Effectiveness Initiative, Engineering and Integration Support (EIS) process documentation, knowledge transfer protocols between locations, product divestiture planning, and an award and recognition program. Supporting leadership actions included assigning cost, schedule, and performance responsibility to assistant program managers; instituting mini-program management reviews; improving contractor oversight; and conducting regular all-hands communication events.

After approximately two years of targeted interventions, follow-up OCI®/OEI® surveys documented significant cultural transformation:

Table 2. JMVP Organizational Culture Transformation Results (TSi OCI®/OEI® Assessments)

Metric	Result
Culture gaps reduced (Current vs. Ideal)	8 of 12 gaps reduced
Causal factors showing improvement	33 of 43 factors improved
Communication survey improvement	20+ percentile point increase
Communication areas improved	Upward, downward, peer-to-peer, and learning communication modes

These results were, in the language of the assessment team, the product of a "critical mass of targeted interventions combined with supporting leadership actions." The JMVP case demonstrates that even under the most extreme operational pressures, systematic organizational culture intervention can produce measurable, positive results when grounded in validated assessment tools and supported by committed leadership.

Workforce Transformation Lessons from MRAP

The JMVP offers several workforce transformation lessons directly applicable to the Acquisition Transformation Strategy. First, cross-functional teams integrating contracting officers, program managers, engineers, testers, and logisticians proved essential to the program's success. Second, collaborative cultures outperformed command-and-control cultures in sustaining high performance under pressure. Third, program offices empowered with delegated authority to make trade-off decisions without layered approvals moved faster and achieved better outcomes. Fourth, organizational culture assessment using validated instruments (OCI®/OEI®) provided both a diagnostic foundation and a measurable framework for tracking transformation progress.

Case Study 2: Scaling Transformation: LEAP and DiSC in Federal Civilian Workforce Development

Background

While the MRAP case study illustrates workforce transformation under extreme operational pressure, the DOL case study demonstrates that the same transformation science principles and I-O psychology tools can produce equally compelling results in a federal civilian context. In



2020, the DOL’s Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) engaged TSi to implement employee development coaching with the goal of improving FEVS results and overall organizational climate. The OCFO sought to address declining satisfaction and engagement metrics that trailed both DOL-wide and government-wide benchmarks.

TSi’s LEAP Framework and DiSC Integration

TSi deployed a comprehensive intervention strategy built on two foundational tools: the LEAP framework developed by Dr. Marta Wilson and the DiSC personality assessment system.

The LEAP framework (Wilson, 2013) structures leadership development around four critical masteries:

Personal Mastery: Developing self-awareness, emotional regulation, and alignment between personal values and professional behavior. Personal mastery provides the foundation upon which all other masteries are built.

Interpersonal Mastery: Building effective relationships, communication skills, and the capacity for empathy and perspective-taking. In acquisition contexts, interpersonal mastery enables the cross-functional collaboration that the Acquisition Transformation Strategy demands.

Organizational Mastery: Understanding organizational systems, culture, and dynamics. Organizational mastery enables leaders to diagnose systemic barriers to performance and design effective interventions.

Motivational Mastery: Inspiring and sustaining engagement, commitment, and high performance in others. Motivational mastery transforms managers into leaders who create the conditions for others to excel.

The DiSC personality assessment complemented LEAP by providing each participant with a profile of their behavioral tendencies across four dimensions: Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Conscientiousness (Wiley, 2011). DiSC assessments facilitated introspection, self-awareness, and social awareness, competencies that Goleman (1995) identified as foundations of emotional intelligence. TSi deployed DiSC through personality assessments, workshops, and individual coaching sessions, creating a common behavioral language that improved team communication and collaboration.

The combined intervention included individual coaching sessions, open-enrollment workshop training, and facilitated team-building sessions. Additional training topics included collaboration, communicating with confidence, emotional intelligence, conflict management, time optimization, feedback delivery, and inclusiveness. Over the engagement period, TSi reached 70 of the OCFO’s approximately 90 employees—a participation rate that ensured broad organizational impact.

Quantitative Results

Table 3. DOL OCFO FEVS Results, 2018–2022

Metric	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
FEVS GSI	66%	61%	69%	71%	82%
FEVS EEI	—	—	—	—	86%

The results were striking. The OCFO’s Global Satisfaction Index (GSI) on the FEVS rose from 66% in 2018 to 82% in 2022—a 16-percentage-point increase over four years. The 2022



Employee Engagement Index (EEI) of 86% represented the highest score in the organization’s history. To contextualize these results, the OCFO’s 2022 GSI of 82% significantly outperformed the DOL-wide average of 67% and the federal government-wide average of 62% (Office of Personnel Management, 2022). Similarly, the OCFO’s EEI of 86% surpassed the DOL average of 75% and the government-wide average of 71%.

Table 4. DOL OCFO Performance vs. DOL and Government-Wide Benchmarks (2022)

Metric (2022)	OCFO	DOL Average	Gov.-Wide Average
GSI	82%	67%	62%
EEI	86%	75%	71%

Additional performance indicators confirmed the intervention’s impact. The OCFO received “Exceptional” ratings on the Contractor Performance Assessment Reporting System (CPARS), the highest possible rating. Coaching satisfaction reached 100%, with all participants indicating they would recommend the program to colleagues. Top development areas identified by participants all directly aligned with the LEAP framework’s four masteries including acquiring new tools and techniques, leveraging personal talents, understanding others, enhancing collaboration, and building leadership skills.

Scalability and Implications for Acquisition

A particularly notable indicator of the intervention’s effectiveness was its organic growth: requests from other DOL organizations for TSi’s coaching and development services “skyrocketed” following the OCFO’s visible improvement. This organic demand signals that the intervention produced visible, credible results that generated confidence across organizational boundaries, a critical factor for scaling transformation initiatives.

The DOL case study’s relevance to acquisition workforce transformation is direct. The same LEAP framework, personality assessments, and coaching methodologies that transformed the OCFO’s organizational climate are directly applicable to acquisition program offices, contracting organizations, and test and evaluation agencies. TSi has already deployed LEAP within the Navy Acquisition Workforce through its support to the Director of Acquisition Talent Management (DATM), demonstrating the framework’s adaptability across federal contexts. The DOL case provides quantitative evidence that these tools produce measurable results at scale within federal organizations.

Best Practices for Acquisition Workforce Transformation

Synthesizing findings from both case studies and our theoretical foundations, we propose ten best practices for acquisition workforce transformation. These practices are designed to be actionable, evidence-based, and aligned with the Department of War’s Acquisition Transformation Strategy. Each practice is grounded in transformation science, validated by I-O psychology research, and illustrated by our case study evidence.

1. Adopt Transformation Science as the Operating Framework

Acquisition organizations should adopt transformation science, not merely change management, as their operating framework for workforce development. Transformation science examines mechanisms, catalysts, and durability of change (Mezirow, 1991), providing a more comprehensive lens than incremental change management models. The MRAP program demonstrated that true transformation, not merely procedural adjustment, was required to



deliver capability at unprecedented speed. Acquisition leaders should be trained in transformation science principles, including Mezirow’s transformative learning theory, Kotter’s (2012) eight-step model, and Lewin’s (1947) change management framework, and should apply these frameworks systematically to workforce initiatives.

2. Implement Psychometric Assessment Baselines

Before launching workforce transformation initiatives, acquisition organizations should establish cultural baselines using validated, research-based organizational culture and effectiveness surveys, complemented by individual behavioral assessments. Government-wide surveys such as the FEVS provide powerful benchmarking capability (Office of Personnel Management, 2022). In the MRAP case, organization-level culture and effectiveness assessments identified a “Type A” culture and specific causal factors that needed to be addressed. In the DOL case, FEVS baseline data enabled precise measurement of a 16-percentage-point improvement in the Global Satisfaction Index. Without quantified baselines, transformation initiatives risk becoming subjective exercises without measurable accountability.

3. Institutionalize Cross-Functional Collaboration

The Acquisition Transformation Strategy explicitly calls for breaking down organizational silos (DoW, 2024). The MRAP program demonstrated that cross-functional teams integrating contracting officers, program managers, engineers, testers, logisticians, and end users are essential to high-performance acquisition. The JMVP was a coalition of Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and special operations elements, and its success depended on collaborative working relationships across Service boundaries. Acquisition organizations should institutionalize cross-functional team structures, joint training exercises, and shared accountability metrics that incentivize collaboration over functional optimization.

4. Deploy Leadership Coaching and Empathy Frameworks

The DOL case study demonstrated that leadership coaching using the LEAP framework (Wilson, 2013) and personality assessments produces measurable improvements in organizational climate and employee engagement, as reflected in the 2018–2022 FEVS trajectory documented in Case Study 2. The LEAP framework’s four masteries, Personal, Interpersonal, Organizational, and Motivational, provide a structured development pathway that builds the leadership competencies required for acquisition transformation. Personality assessments create a common behavioral language that improves team communication and reduces interpersonal friction. Mid-level and senior acquisition supervisors should receive leadership coaching grounded in these frameworks as a standard element of their professional development.

5. Embrace Mission-Focused, Intentionally Governed Risk-Taking

The MRAP program’s “two-basket” risk model (Coleman et al., 2010) provides a practical framework for acquisition risk management that directly supports the Acquisition Transformation Strategy’s mandate to move faster. By clearly distinguishing core risks (which must be mitigated) from non-core risks (which can be explicitly accepted), acquisition professionals can make rapid trade-off decisions without seeking approval for every deviation from standard processes. This approach requires empowering program offices with the authority to make risk-acceptance decisions within defined boundaries, a cultural shift from the approval-seeking behavior that characterizes risk-averse acquisition cultures.

Critically, mission-focused risk-taking must be deployed intentionally from the top rather than left to individual interpretation. Senior leaders should define, in writing and in governance



forums, which risks belong in each basket, what authorities are delegated to program managers, what evidence is required to move a risk from core to non-core, and how escalation occurs when conditions change. Absent this top-down clarity, the “two-basket” language becomes a slogan rather than an operating discipline, and individual acquisition professionals are left to infer risk boundaries on their own, often reverting to the approval-seeking behavior the Strategy seeks to retire. Intentional governance of risk-taking, paired with coaching and psychometric insight into how leaders reason about obligation and accountability, is what converts risk tolerance from aspiration into sustained behavior.

6. Establish Transparent, Quantifiable Performance Metrics

Both case studies demonstrate the power of transparent, quantifiable metrics. The MRAP program focused on two measurable objectives, survivability and speed of fielding, and measured performance against these objectives relentlessly. The DOL engagement tracked FEVS indices, CPARS ratings, and participant satisfaction rates, creating a quantitative narrative of transformation. Acquisition organizations should establish outcome-directed metrics tied to mission goals, not process compliance, and report these metrics transparently to all stakeholders. As the Acquisition Transformation Strategy emphasizes, performance metrics should drive accountability for mission outcomes, not merely adherence to procedures (DoW, 2024).

7. Implement Rotational Assignments and Blended Career Paths

Cross-functional understanding is built through experience, not merely training. Rotational assignments that place acquisition professionals in different functional roles—engineering to contracting, test and evaluation to program management, operational units to acquisition offices—cross-pollinate perspectives and build the holistic understanding required for effective trade-off decisions. Blended career paths that reward breadth of experience alongside depth of expertise create a workforce capable of the adaptive, cross-functional collaboration demanded by the Acquisition Transformation Strategy. The Project Management Institute (2021) emphasizes the importance of cross-functional competency in effective project management, a principle directly applicable to acquisition career development; the Institute’s case literature also reminds acquisition leaders that, in defense programs, “lives are at stake” when project management judgment and cross-functional coordination fail (Project Management Institute, n.d.).

TSi’s own engagements illustrate how rotational exposure and blended career paths operate in practice. Supporting the Director of Acquisition Talent Management (DATM), TSi helped inform talent management, training strategy, data analytics, and executive coaching across a Navy acquisition workforce of approximately 65,000 personnel, an enterprise scale at which rotational design and career-path transparency directly shape productivity, innovation, and technical excellence across acquisition career fields. At Naval Surface Warfare Center Port Hueneme Division (NSWC PHD), TSi’s work reinforced the need to rotate engineers, sustainment professionals, and acquisition staff across fleet-support, in-service engineering, and program-office responsibilities so that trade-offs between technical rigor and operational availability are made by leaders who have actually operated in each environment. The Marine Corps Expeditionary Radars (ExR) program offers a similar lesson at the program level: radar capability requires tight coordination among operators, engineers, logisticians, maintainers, program staff, and contracting officers, and blended career experience measurably improves the quality of those integrated decisions. Taken together, these engagements indicate that rotational assignments and blended career paths are not an abstract HR preference but a



repeatable acquisition-performance lever with observable effects on collaboration, decision quality, and warfighter outcomes.

8. Extend Key Leader Tenures

The Acquisition Transformation Strategy recommends extended tenures for key program leaders (DoW, 2024). The MRAP case study illustrates why: sustained relationships, institutional knowledge, and cultural continuity are essential to transformation. Frequent rotations, the norm in military acquisition, disrupt transformation initiatives, erode institutional knowledge, and prevent leaders from seeing the results of their change efforts. Extended tenures of three to five years for program managers and key leaders enable them to build relationships, sustain culture change, and be held accountable for outcomes, not just for their tenure’s slice of the acquisition timeline.

9. Create Experiential Learning Environments

Transformation science demonstrates that lasting change occurs through experience, not instruction alone (Mezirow, 1991). Acquisition organizations should invest in scenario-driven training, peer-group simulation, tabletop exercises, and experiential learning environments that replicate the complexity and ambiguity of real-world acquisition decisions. “Ask Me Anything” sessions with experienced program managers and cross-functional task forces expose the workforce to perspectives they would not encounter in their functional silos. The DOL case study demonstrated that workshops, coaching sessions, and facilitated team-building exercises, all experiential learning methods, produced more durable results than traditional classroom instruction.

10. Conduct Regular Talent Audits and Transparent Career Pathways

Workforce skills must evolve with acquisition demands. Regular talent audits assess current workforce competencies against future requirements, identifying gaps that can be addressed through targeted development, recruitment, or reorganization. Transparent career pathways communicate to acquisition professionals how their skills and experiences translate to advancement, reducing uncertainty and improving retention. Performance incentives should reward risk-taking and innovation, the behaviors the Acquisition Transformation Strategy values, rather than mere compliance and risk avoidance (DoW, 2024).

Table 5. Summary of Best Practices for Acquisition Workforce Transformation

#	Best Practice	Supporting Evidence
1	Adopt Transformation Science Framework	Mezirow (1991); Kotter (2012); MRAP case
2	Implement Psychometric Assessment Baselines	OCI/OEI (MRAP); FEVS (DOL); DiSC
3	Institutionalize Cross-Functional Collaboration	MRAP cross-Service coalition; Strategy pillar
4	Deploy Leadership Coaching and Empathy Frameworks	LEAP/DiSC (DOL); 100% satisfaction rate
5	Embrace Mission-Focused, Intentionally Governed Risk-Taking	MRAP two-basket model (Coleman et al., 2010)
6	Establish Transparent Performance Metrics	MRAP survivability metrics; FEVS indices



7	Rotational Assignments and Blended Career Paths	AAF workforce implications; PMI (2021)
8	Extend Key Leader Tenures	Strategy recommendation; MRAP continuity
9	Create Experiential Learning Environments	DOL workshops; Mezirow (1991)
10	Regular Talent Audits and Career Pathways	Strategy mandate; DOL scalability evidence

Discussion

The findings from our two case studies converge on a central conclusion: systematic application of transformation science and I-O psychology tools produces measurable, sustainable workforce transformation in both military acquisition and federal civilian contexts. This conclusion has direct implications for the Department of War's Acquisition Transformation Strategy and the broader defense acquisition enterprise.

Alignment with the Acquisition Transformation Strategy

The ten best practices derived from our case studies align closely with the Strategy's four pillars. The mandate to eradicate process-for-process's sake is supported by Best Practices 1 (transformation science framework), 5 (mission-focused risk-taking), and 6 (outcome-directed metrics). The call to instill cross-functional collaboration is supported by Best Practices 3 (institutionalize collaboration), 4 (leadership coaching), and 7 (rotational assignments). The imperative for speed is supported by Best Practices 5 (empowered risk-taking), 8 (extended tenures), and 9 (experiential learning). The emphasis on workforce empowerment is supported by all ten practices, which collectively build the competencies, culture, and organizational conditions required for empowered acquisition professionals (DoW, 2024).

Implications for DATM and Navy Acquisition Workforce

The Director of Acquisition Talent Management (DATM) within the Department of the Navy has a particular opportunity to lead acquisition workforce transformation. TSi's ongoing support to DATM, including the deployment of LEAP-based coaching and the development of the *TSi Decision Intelligence Architecture™*, positions the Navy to serve as a proving ground for the best practices articulated in this paper. The Navy's acquisition workforce can leverage the tools and frameworks validated in both the MRAP and DOL cases to establish a model for enterprise-wide transformation.

The DATM portfolio is substantial in scope. The Navy acquisition workforce comprises approximately 55,000 personnel distributed across Systems Commands, Program Executive Offices, and supporting organizations. Transforming a workforce of this scale requires an integrated strategy that couples training and talent management with data analytics, executive coaching, and sustained programmatic support. TSi's engagement with DATM weaves these threads together: LEAP-based coaching develops leaders who can model collaborative, risk-embracing behavior; talent-management analytics surface workforce risks (skill gaps, attrition, bench depth) early enough to act on them; and the *TSi Decision Intelligence Architecture™* provides a shared data and decision-support environment that connects workforce signals to program outcomes. Each of these elements is a direct operationalization of the best practices articulated in this paper, applied at enterprise scale rather than at the level of a single program or office.

Two additional settings reinforce the cross-organizational relevance of these practices and are worth noting briefly, pending fuller treatment in future work. The Naval Surface Warfare Center, Port Hueneme Division (NSWC PHD) operates at the intersection of engineering rigor,



sustainment, fleet support, and acquisition execution—a combination that demands the same collaborative, outcome-oriented behaviors documented in the MRAP and DOL cases. Marine Corps Expeditionary Radars (ExR) program integration requires operators, engineers, logisticians, maintainers, program staff, and contracting professionals to act as a single team, which is exactly the pattern that Best Practices 3, 4, 7, and 8 are designed to produce. Together, DATM, NSWC PHD, and ExR illustrate that the same transformation-science and I-O psychology practices scale from a single rapid-fielding program to an enterprise workforce, and from warfare-center engineering organizations to expeditionary program offices.

Limitations

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. First, case study research, while rich in contextual detail, has inherent limitations in external generalizability (Yin, 2018). The MRAP program operated under uniquely urgent conditions that may not replicate in routine acquisition programs. The DOL OCFO, a relatively small organization of approximately 90 employees, may present different dynamics than large acquisition commands with thousands of personnel. Second, both cases involved TSi as the intervention agent, introducing potential researcher bias that we have attempted to mitigate through reliance on validated instruments and quantitative outcome data. Third, organizational context differences between military acquisition and federal civilian workforce environments may limit the direct transferability of specific practices without adaptation.

Future Research

Several avenues for future research emerge from this study. First, longitudinal tracking of transformation metrics across multiple acquisition organizations would strengthen the evidence base for the best practices proposed here. Second, the integration of artificial intelligence and decision intelligence tools into workforce transformation frameworks represents an emerging opportunity. TSi's development of the *TSi Decision Intelligence Architecture™* suggests the potential for AI-augmented assessment, coaching, and performance tracking. Third, comparative studies across military departments and defense agencies would test the generalizability of our findings. Fourth, research examining the interaction between workforce transformation and acquisition outcomes—cost, schedule, and performance—would establish the causal links between workforce investment and mission readiness. Finally, the 2017 SYSCOM Manpower Requirements Integration and Trade-Off Analysis model warrants revisitation and extension: as acquisition organizations implement the practices outlined here—particularly psychometric assessment baselines, extended tenures, and rotational assignments—they must balance transformation investments against workforce affordability constraints. An updated SYSCOM, or now-PAE, model that incorporates the transformation-science and I-O psychology dimensions described in this paper would provide a more complete decision-support tool for acquisition leaders, enabling them to evaluate workforce transformation initiatives as both effective and fiscally sustainable.

Policy Recommendation: A Minimum Standard for ACAT I Programs

The evidence assembled in this paper supports a specific policy recommendation: the Department of War should establish a minimum workforce-transformation standard for Acquisition Category I (ACAT I) programs. These programs are the largest, most consequential, and most visible in the defense acquisition portfolio, and they are precisely the programs in which workforce and cultural factors most directly determine cost, schedule, and technical outcomes. A minimum standard would ensure that the practices validated in this paper are applied consistently at the level of the acquisition enterprise where the stakes are highest. The standard should include five elements:



1. **Validated baseline.** At program initiation, a validated baseline assessment of organizational culture, workforce climate, and behavioral and developmental indicators, using instruments appropriate to the program context (e.g., OCI®/OEI®, FEVS, LEAP-based coaching diagnostics).
2. **Recurring workforce analysis.** Periodic re-assessment across the program life cycle to identify talent risks, collaboration barriers, leadership effectiveness gaps, and developmental priorities, with findings explicitly tied to program execution plans.
3. **Integrated developmental interventions.** Integration of coaching, team facilitation, and experiential learning into program execution rather than as ad hoc or optional activities, with leaders held accountable for participation and outcomes.
4. **Broader assessment where appropriate.** Selective use of the supplementary instruments described in this paper (MVPI, HVP, DIT-2, MFQ) where values alignment, judgment quality, or ethical framing carry disproportionate program risk.
5. **Routine governance review.** Routine review of transformation indicators alongside cost, schedule, and technical performance at major program governance forums (e.g., Defense Acquisition Boards, program reviews), so that workforce health is treated as a first-class program metric rather than a supporting concern.

A minimum standard of this kind is consistent with the Department of War's Acquisition Workforce Reform Strategy (DoW, 2026) and with the broader Acquisition Transformation Strategy. It converts the evidence and practices in this paper into a specific, actionable governance requirement, and it sets a floor that ACAT I programs can be expected to meet and that acquisition leadership can be expected to enforce.

Conclusion

The Department of War's Acquisition Transformation Strategy articulates a bold vision for defense acquisition. Achieving this vision requires transforming the acquisition workforce—the people who design, develop, test, contract for, and sustain the systems that protect the nation. Transformation of this magnitude cannot be achieved through policy directives and procedural reforms alone; it requires the systematic application of transformation science and industrial-organizational psychology to the human systems that drive acquisition outcomes.

The ten best practices derived from our case studies provide a practical roadmap for acquisition leaders. These practices are not theoretical abstractions; they are grounded in real-world experience with programs that saved thousands of lives and transformed organizational cultures. They are aligned with the Acquisition Transformation Strategy and designed to be implemented systematically across the acquisition enterprise.

The acquisition workforce is the keystone of the Acquisition Transformation Strategy. Invest in the workforce with the same rigor, commitment, and urgency that we invest in weapons systems, and the Strategy's vision will become reality. Fail to transform the workforce, and no amount of policy reform will deliver the warfighting capabilities our nation requires. The evidence is clear, the tools are available, and the time for action is now.

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