Recommendation 60: Implement acquisition career paths that are integrated with an institutionalized competency model tailored to mission needs.

Problem

DoD has taken an unbalanced approach to professionalizing the workforce by focusing primarily on training to meet certification requirements, rather than enhancing the qualifications of the workforce. To develop the workforce, occupational qualifications and competency measures must exist from the time the member enters the AWF until they separate or retire. Twenty-nine percent of AWF members are early in their career, meaning they have 20 or more years until they reach retirement eligibility. More than half of those individuals have less than 5 years of experience.[1] This situation indicates a large wave of early career (i.e., pipeline) professionals who require a long-range plan today for their development. DoD has not addressed the appropriate standards to guide AWF members in increasing their technical and nontechnical competencies to advance in their careers. Solving these problems requires culture change regarding how DoD develops highly qualified AWF members.

Background

A disconnect exists between what behaviors and qualifications members perceive necessary for advancement and promotion, as compared to the actual performance results and promotion potential recognized by their agencies.[2] Today, pipeline members race to become Level III certified within their first 5 years in the AWF, expecting several promotions along the way.[3] This promotion momentum creates a false impression that members are fully qualified and proficient at or near the 5-year mark, whether or not the members have actually performed well in critical elements of their positions and demonstrated competencies needed for future positions.[4]

Career Paths

Career paths are used to illustrate *career possibilities* for employees to progress in their field. Career paths help ensure that qualified members are available to fill positions in DoD that require specific professional qualifications. A long-range career path includes jobs of increasing variety, complexity, responsibility, and accountability, leading to management and leadership opportunities. They describe the occupational qualifications (i.e., education, training, and competencies) and key work experiences required to advance.[5] Career advancement does not constitute a race up the career ladder, but rather, it is an escalation of skills to enhance mission success and fulfill the employee. Career paths would provide AWF members and their supervisor's guidance to help determine what each member needs for career success.

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[1] Sean McKenna et al., *Retirement in the Acquisition Workforce: Update and Insights for the Section 809 Panel Research,* RAND Corporation, August 30, 2018, 39.

[2] AWF stakeholders, communication with the Section 809 Panel, July-August 2018.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] For purposes of this recommendation, the panel defines *key work experiences* as interactions inside and outside of government that foster professional development and career broadening (e.g., rotational assignments, temporary assignments, managerial and leadership experience, defense joint/service/agency collaboration, or simulation/exercise engagement).

Competency Models

The purpose of a competency model is to provide measurable and objective means to determine if members have demonstrated the needed proficiency to execute tasks and meet position requirements for a given job. Competencies are generally gained by a combination of education, training, and practice. They are initially verified when the member demonstrates the task, and validated when someone who has already mastered the competency, such as a supervisor, acknowledges the member's mastery. In the AWF, most positions require competencies that are characterized by varying proficiency requirements. Competency models can add data and direction to career development planning by objectively quantifying skill gaps for the individual and DoD Components.[6] Competencies are not measures of performance, and are not used to evaluate how well AWF members are performing in their current jobs. A member could demonstrate a task competency to a specified proficiency standard, yet when expected to execute that task fall short. Competencies are used to determine a member's qualifications, and what level of proficiency a member has mastered for a new competency task, or to validate that they have gained or maintained proficiency in a competency task. The nontechnical or soft skills are also necessary. AWF members often demonstrate technical proficiency but it is equally important that they demonstrate leadership skills that result from confidence and commitment.

For example, new cadet-pilots are gradually introduced to increasingly complex skills under the guidance of instructor pilots. The instructor must observe the cadet successfully perform a skill or maneuver to specific standards before certifying that the cadet can move on to learn new skills. Only when cadets have demonstrated to the instructor that they can handle the aircraft without supervision, are they allowed to solo.

When veteran pilots move to a different aircraft, or return to flying after an extended period away, they go through the same process. Although they may not have to recertify on basic flight principles, they have to demonstrate to a flight examiner who is experienced and current in the particular aircraft that they are qualified to fly that type of aircraft safely. Similarly, AWF members should demonstrate task competencies at the required proficiency standard to a more senior AWF member that is qualified and experienced in those skills to be considered qualified to perform duties requiring those skills.

Career Development Culture

Creating a policy that simply publishes career paths and implements a competency model, without recognizing the heavy lifting needed to change culture, would be inadequate. Creating career paths and competency models through changes in statute and DoD policy would trigger a fundamental pivot, allowing DoD to transform the acquisition culture. This approach would bring together the acquisition team in new ways, requiring more interdisciplinary/multifunctional collaboration in training and execution. It would shift away from a singular focus on technical skills, to qualifying members based on a mix of technical and nontechnical skills necessary for career development and mission needs. It would emphasize practices that, if implemented, would be the forcing function to change the status quo with respect to how DoD shares new ideas and practices. Shifting to a system

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[6] For example, Military Departments are U.S. Air Force, U.S. Navy, U.S. Army; DoD Agencies can be Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA), Defense Logistics Agency (DLA).

that allows the AWF to develop tailored practical experiences across occupational boundaries would enhance DoD's ability to build teams, think critically, collaborate, innovate, and become less risk averse.

Discussion

Career Paths

Career paths are the range of opportunities available within an AWF functional career field and the criteria for vertical and horizontal movement to positions of increasing responsibility and opportunity, up to the highest position in that field.

Existing Statute

Although Congress has provided statutory direction that specifically requires DoD to develop career paths with key work experiences for more than 27 years, little evidence exists that those measures have been implemented comprehensively for the AWF. DAWIA (codified in Chapter 87 of Title 10 U.S. Code) provided direction to DoD concerning career paths and key work experiences. The statutory sections in Table 5-1 all specify career path requirements. In each case Congress's direction has not been implemented in DoD.[7]

Table 5-1. Chapter 87, Title 10 U.S.C., Statute Governing Career Development

DAWIA Statute	Purpose
§ 1701a(b) Performance Management	Requires DoD development of *attractive career paths*. Requires managers to develop performance plans to give members an understanding of how their performance contributes to their organization's mission and the success of the defense acquisition system.
§ 1721 Designation of acquisition positions	Chapter 87, 10 U.S.C, states that as a minimum the AWF comprises the following acquisition-related positions: ▪ Program management ▪ Systems planning, research, development, engineering, and testing ▪ Procurement, including contracting ▪ Industrial property management ▪ Logistics ▪ Quality control and assurance ▪ Manufacturing and production ▪ Business, cost estimating, financial management, and auditing ▪ Education, training, and development ▪ Construction ▪ Joint development and production (other agencies and foreign) ▪ Intellectual property
§ 1722 Career Development	Requires *appropriate career paths* that include education, training, experience, and assignments necessary for career progression to the most senior acquisition positions.

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[7] Defense Acquisition Workforce, 10 U.S.C. Chapter 87.

DAWIA Statute	Purpose
§ 1722b Special requirements for civilian employees in the acquisition field	Requires DoD to establish policy/guidance for proper development, assignment, and employment of civilian members. Specifically requires the following: ▪ Career paths ▪ Workforce strategy ▪ Opportunities for promotion ▪ Succession planning ▪ Workforce development strategy which focuses on diversity in promotion, advancement, and experiential opportunities.
§ 1723(b) Career Path Requirements	Requires career paths to include "completion of course work, on-the-job-training and demonstration of qualifications." Requires DoD to "develop key work experiences to foster interaction with AWF & end-user." Specifically for the AWF, these experiences are to be imbedded in the end-user environment to enhance experiential learning and help AWF members become seasoned.

Need for Change

10 U.S.C. § 1722 "requires appropriate career paths that include education, training, experience, and assignments necessary for career progression to the most senior acquisition positions," yet DoD has not created career paths for all of its acquisition career fields.[8] Congress purposefully allowed DoD to use discretion in applying this statute; however, DoD failed to make substantial strides to implement career paths and key experiences for career progression. Congress needs to reinforce what is already in statute.

Discussion with all of the DoD Directors, Acquisition Career Management (DACMs) and several key DAU stakeholders highlighted that DoDI 5000.66, Defense Acquisition Workforce Education, Training, Experience, And Career Development Program, and its accompanying *Defense Acquisition Workforce Program Desk Guide* (*Desk Guide*), issued on July 27, 2017, do not clearly explain the workforce requirements for career paths.[9] For example, the DoDI contains Section 6.2, Career Path Requirements, however it provides no actual requirements. DACM and DAU engagement also revealed that Section 6.2 currently only applies to specialty career fields (e.g., international acquisition). The *Desk Guide* defines the AWF by adding a career field not previously defined anywhere else (small business), and excludes international acquisition. DoD fails to use instructions and policy consistently for the AWF to identify which DoD policy requirements apply to them, falling short of congressional intent. DoD's instructions and guides governing career paths and key work experiences is summarized in Table 5-2 below.[10]

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[8] Career Development, 10 U.S.C. § 1722.
[9] Defense Acquisition Workforce Education, Training, Experience, and Career Development Program, DoDI 5000.66 (2017).
[10] Defense Acquisition Workforce, 10 U.S.C. Chapter 87.

Table 5-2. DoD Instruction Governing Career Paths and Development

DoDI	Purpose
DoDI 5000.66 Defense Acquisition Workforce Education, Training, Experience, and Career Development Program [AWF Program] Replaces any other policy and procedure formally issued by the DoD to the AWF for career development.	"In order to establish a consistent framework for constructing acquisition competency models and to facilitate the analysis of cross-functional competencies, the AWF has adopted the 5-tiered DoD Competency Management Framework outlined in Volume 250 of DoDI 1400.25." Contains Section 6.2, Career Path Requirements, which states, "AWF members assigned to career path positions must complete requirements for the career path."

Current DoD policy is confusing to the point that it has become unusable, largely because its regulations fail to define terms to specify the career fields to which this guidance applies. For example, 10 U.S.C § 1721, Designation of Acquisition Positions, broadly designates positions that are considered *related to* the AWF; however, DoD never crosswalks any AWF career fields to this designation. "DoDI 5000.66 gives no direction to its workforce; it's not written for the workforce, it's written to describe roles."[11] Adding a layer of confusion to the problem, existing workforce career development guidance such as the DAU websites, DoDI 5000.66, and the Acquisition Workforce Strategic Plan FY16–21, indicate either 14 or 15 career fields.

Requirements for Career Paths—Key Work Experience

Congress has directed DoD to develop and implement key work experiences in career paths for decades.[12] *Key work experiences* are interactions inside and outside of government that foster professional development and career broadening (e.g., industry exchange, temporary/rotational assignments, managerial and leadership experience/development, multidiscipline/multi-occupational collaboration, simulation/exercise engagements, and contingency deployments).

Providing AWF members with a variety of key work experiences is vital for enhancing their proficiency in collaboration and networking as technology evolves and becomes increasingly prevalent in the AWF's daily operations.

> *Technology is also making some jobs far more important, especially those that only smart government managers can perform, like building bridges among the increasingly networked government and connecting with the ever-growing array of government's constituencies.[13]*

Each AWF career path should include key work experiences that can give AWF members opportunities to develop technical and nontechnical competencies necessary by acquiring skills for innovatively solving real-world problems. AWF stakeholders emphasized the importance of determining how well a

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[11] DACM, AWF stakeholders, communication with the Section 809 Panel, July-August 2018.

[12] General Education, Training, and Experience Requirements, 10 U.S.C. § 1723.

[13] "Excellence in Government: Solving the Right Problem with the Federal Workforce," Terry Gerton and Donald F. Kettl, Government Executive, September 25, 2018, accessed November 6, 2018, https://www.govexec.com/excellence/management-matters/2018/09/solving-right-problem-federal-workforce/151511/.

member learns to reflect on and solve problems.[14] These key experiences can allow individual members and the organization to which they belong to experience different roles and prepare for additional responsibilities.

Rotational Assignments

Recommendation 61 of this chapter stresses the importance of PPEPs for building the AWF's understanding of how industry contributes to national security. The opportunities for professional development fostered by an exchange with industry cannot be matched by internal government mechanisms.[15] Specific opportunities like PPEPs should be identified for each career field, and integrated into career paths. Rotational assignments within DoD can also be used to provide joint key work experience and to spread best practices among the acquisition community.

SME Track

Many AWF members are specialists in their craft, and although they want to skillfully master their jobs, they have no desire to lead organizations. These members' goals may be to have a career as an SME. Similarly, DoD has many missions that require specific technical career paths. DoD needs the flexibility to identify career paths that focus on accumulating high expertise in a particular domain or key technical skills. Providing key work experiences that focus on enhancing domain expertise and technical skills would support members who want to pursue the SME track. Supervisors and members should continue career development conversations throughout members' careers. Members who select an SME track should, however, have an option to change course and gain the competencies necessary for leading people.

Managerial/Leadership Track

A recurring theme in stakeholder feedback was the importance of leadership. In general, stakeholders indicated DoD needs to identify members with managerial and leadership interests earlier in their careers and provide avenues for them to practice small-scale leadership before taking on a supervisory role. This practice is common in military career models, but not often practiced in the civilian workforce. DoD should facilitate early leadership experiences for members interested in managerial/leadership tracks and prepare them in nontechnical skills discussed below.

Implementing a Career Path Framework in the AWF

The Section 809 Panel assessed the case study below, focused on the financial management (FM) workforce, as an example that could be emulated for the AWF. This case study notes similarities between the AWF and the financial-management sector, with its 13 distinct career fields, and acknowledged the AWF career fields have a broader array of disciplines that perform drastically different roles within DoD. Because the AWF performs across many different domains and supports many different missions, functional communities should provide input to the DoD Components regarding the broad body of knowledge that is common across their functional career fields, and the

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[14] AWF senior leader, communication with the Section 809 Panel, June-August 2018.
[15] AWF stakeholders, communication with the Section 809 Panel, July-August 2018.

DoD Component should be responsible for developing career paths that consider the functional input yet are tailored to the DoD Components' respective missions.

Case Study:
Best Practice Civilian Career Roadmap and Competency Development in the FM Workforce

This case study provides overarching career development information for the FM workforce, which marries measurable job activities and aligns competencies for its workforce into career paths.[16] This case study, which highlights career paths, as a best practice and is similar to what is recommended for the DoD AWF. More information about the FM competency model is available at: https://fmonline.ousdc.osd.mil/Professional/Civilian-Career.aspx.

Problem: The DoD FM community recognized that no institutionalized, standard body of knowledge existed for the FM workforce and used a competency foundation to improve the overall proficiency of the workforce.

Example: An Air Force hiring manager looking for a GS-12 0510 Accountant could not determine the competency or proficiency of an Army GS-12 0510 Accountant.

Context: The Human Capital and Resource Management unit for the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (OUSD) (Comptroller) developed a comprehensive FM workforce portfolio that includes DoD-wide FM civilian career roadmaps. The portfolio also includes a competency-based certification program that mirrors the expectations in the career roadmaps. After a pilot in 2013 and approval of DoDI 1300.26, implementation began in 2014 and the program was fully operational in 2015.

Highlights: The program's foundation is a set of 24 enterprisewide competencies aligned to applicable occupational series, their associated proficiency levels, and selected leadership competencies. FM community leaders are able to assess and close gaps between current competencies and capabilities and those required in the future. Because the program is based on enterprisewide FM competencies, it is the centerpiece of the community's strategic human capital mosaic, which binds together career roadmaps, IDPs, competency gap assessments, associated strategies to close the gaps, and ultimately hiring practices.

- As members progress, at a certain level there is a mandate for a minimum 3-month developmental assignment.

- An e-catalogue includes a course inventory with more than 13,000 courses aligned to the FM competencies to include 80 web-based courses developed by the OUSD(Comptroller) office.

- The program spans the tenure of the employee and uses technical and nontechnical competencies and proficiency levels.

- The program operates within a governance structure of DoD FM leaders from the DoD Components; they provide input and recommendations on the program's policy and overall operation.

The program enables DoD FM leadership to focus training in necessary areas and track progress. It reinforces the culture of professional development within DoD, ultimately increasing proficiency in technical and leadership disciplines and enabling the FM community to keep pace with evolving warfighter needs.

In this construct, members of the AWF can visualize what experiences, (i.e., education, competencies, potential assignments, leadership) constitute a path toward career progression that aligns with their individual goals to move toward being an SME or leader. It is important to identify how the AWF could develop these two integrated concepts for each career field, similar to the FM community's *career roadmap*.

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[16] "Civilian Career Roadmaps & Job Items Library," DoD FM Online, accessed November 6, 2018, https://fmonline.ousdc.osd.mil/Professional/Civilian-Career.aspx.

How DoD establishes its policies and funding to support these initiatives will dictate the range and success they will have on influencing the workforce. To be truly effective, echelons below OSD (i.e., DoD Components) should manage their own programs' Defense Acquisition Workforce Development Fund (DAWDF) allocations to match specific mission-related, career-broadening opportunities to what would be best for the individual AWF members and their organizations' mission requirements. DoD also must understand that talent management plays an important role in integrating career paths within its workforce. Successfully implementing a talent management framework would help unleash the benefits of career paths for individual employees and DoD as a whole.

Competency Models

Congress needs to enact statute and guidance to require competency models with proficiency standards that include technical and nontechnical skills to be implemented for the AWF. A competency model requires a tailored, mission-related task set of competencies, with proficiency standards that measure both technical and nontechnical skills. It must be designed to assist each AWF member to develop and demonstrate the competencies and proficiencies for success through all phases of their careers, based on the following definitions:

- **Task Competency:** Methods for a member to demonstrate individual tasks or task elements specific to the member's current position in an effort to occupationally qualify the member in "an observable, measurable pattern of knowledge, abilities, skills, and other characteristics that individuals need to perform work roles or occupational functions successfully."[17] Task competencies use specific mission-related tasks that require direct supervisor feedback to identify any on-the-job training gaps present in real-time. At all stages of their career, AWF members should be assessed by a more senior acquisition professional for each task competency using proficiency standards. Competencies may be gained through education, training, or experience. Task competencies can be categorized as technical or nontechnical as follows:

  - **Technical:** Associated with a specific occupation or functional skills to perform the job task required. These competencies reflect domain-specific requirements and are associated with critical functions particular to the mission.[18]
  - **Nontechnical:** Demonstrate the ability to relate, manage, lead and/or develop others. Personal attributes and characteristics associated with "people skills or soft skills."[19]

- **Proficiency Standards**: Distinct formal categories used to describe various levels of expertise which represent a scale of demonstrated occupational skills. These categories describe the member's ability to execute a task competency successfully and are used as an occupational qualification measure.

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[17] DoD Civilian Personnel Management System: Civilian Strategic Human Capital Planning (SHCP), DoDI 1400.25, Volume 250, 21 (2016).
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.

DoD should consider following proficiency standards, which would correspond to specific task competencies, as a way for the supervisor to determine how a member demonstrates a single task for purposes of occupational qualification. The following are examples of possible proficiency standards:

- **Entry:** The level at which an individual demonstrates a particular task competency in basic acquisition situations. As related to tasks, the member can identify "simple processes; name parts, tools, and simple facts/terms about the task; requires close/extensive guidance, and needs to be told or shown how to do most of the tasks."[20]

- **Intermediate:** The level at which the individual demonstrates a particular task competency in some difficult acquisition situations. As related to the task, the member demonstrates successfully most parts of the task but requires frequent guidance and oversight.[21] On-the-job training is necessary to develop task proficiency. Intermittently executes tasks independently.

- **Advanced:** The level at which the individual demonstrates a particular task competency in select complex acquisition situations. As related to the task competency, the member demonstrates extensive skill and is technically competent in most complex situations in one or more areas. "Applies the competency in difficult situations, needing only spot checks; can determine step-by-step procedures for the tasks; only requires occasional guidance."[22]

- **Expert:** The level at which the individual demonstrates a particular task competency in the widest variety of acquisition situations. As related to the task competency, the member demonstrates expert technical skills at the highest level of complexity with no assistance. Superior ability to transform technical skill into teachable actions for the occupational series in which they reside.

Competency Model with Proficiency Standards

To date, AWF qualifications have centered on skills that were largely unmeasurable because they lack proficiency standards to gauge the competency level. Consequently, DoD has used time served and certification levels as a proxy for experience when qualifying the workforce. This model does not allow DoD to plan for future career development, while measuring current competencies. "We need to move from a focus on rules and compliance to a focus on performance and learning."[23] A formalized method to determine individual proficiency standards would identify how a member *actually demonstrates* the job tasks, and to what level of proficiency, rather than just cataloging how many years a member has held an acquisition position. By knowing what proficiency is expected of them in the future, members and their supervisors can address appropriate development needs when creating IDPs.

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[20] OUSD, *DoD Financial Management: Certification Program Handbook,* October 2016, accessed November 6, 2018, https://fmonline.ousdc.osd.mil/Assets/documents/docs-certification/DoD_FMCertification_Handbook.pdf.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] "Excellence in Government: Solving the Right Problem with the Federal Workforce," Terry Gerton and Donald F. Kettl, Government Executive, September 25, 2018, accessed November 6, 2018, https://www.govexec.com/excellence/management-matters/2018/09/solving-right-problem-federal-workforce/151511/.

At the DoD Component or unit level, hiring activities do not have a method to effectively qualify members using a set of competencies, so they cannot effectively determine their person's fitness for the next job.[24]

> *Replace the over-defined job specifications of the current system with a competency-based, talent-management model. Competencies should be vested in individuals and individuals should be matched to missions, instead of having static occupations define both. Rules have calcified the federal personnel system to the point that compliance has become the driving rule. What the federal government most needs is a system that recognizes that it doesn't matter where government employees sit—what matters is what they know and how they contribute to the mission. It's the capacity of the government's managers, not the specifications of their seats, that counts. As work becomes more complex and more managers need to work across complex networks to get the job done, that's going to be increasingly important.[25]*

In today's system, if new members demonstrate the same tasks every year for 4 years in a row with no attempt made to broaden their career experiences, they are presumed to be equally qualified as individuals who demonstrated a variety of tasks over the same period.[26] In either case, 4 years' experience provides no information about how proficient the members are at the tasks they demonstrated, or to what degree new tasks have been introduced and mastered.

DoD must stop attempting to categorize the AWF into buckets of apprentice, journeyman, and expert. Every AWF occupation requires varying degrees of expertise as it relates to mission tasks. Those tasks represent an array of proficiency standards. Individuals should be considered for moving to the next tier based on how they perform mission-related tasks at the appropriate mission-related proficiency standard.

Many stakeholders and senior leaders reported that AWF members need a level of proficiency that directly correlates to a current position and current and future mission requirements. They indicated there is no value in attempting to master a general list of competencies for a career field, some of which their AWF members may never be required to use. Some pointed to their own careers, for which they have mastered a specific AWF competency so long ago that their skills atrophied far below what would be considered expert level today.[27] Not all competencies are necessary to master, and competency requirements should be tailored for each position. DoD should consider the following in implementing competency models:

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[24] *Unit* is a level of organization below the Military Department/Defense Agency. It is usually associated with a command led by a flag officer. Designation of the unit to participate in the development of competency and proficiency standards is left to the Military Department/Defense Agency.

[25] "Excellence in Government: Solving the Right Problem with the Federal Workforce," Terry Gerton and Donald F. Kettl, Government Executive, September 25, 2018, accessed November 6, 2018, https://www.govexec.com/excellence/management-matters/2018/09/solving-right-problem-federal-workforce/151511/.

[26] AWF stakeholders, communication with the Section 809 Panel, July-August 2018

[27] Ibid.

- Key work experiences have a return on investment greater than a classroom can offer.[28]

- A competency model allows for DoD to consider the competencies commercial-sector employees gained by their experience in industry that could satisfy competencies in the government AWF, and enable DoD to recruit qualified midcareer candidates when needed. It would allow AWF members to leave government for jobs in industry and return later, bringing with them an increased understanding of industry that DoD needs. If DoD considers the competencies developed in industry as part of the competency models, AWF members may regard opportunities with industry as career enhancements, rather than career interruptions.

- The AWF is dynamic. DoD's mission evolves continuously, so the AWF must be able to innovate with changes in mission, technology, law, policy, operating concepts, or other factors. AWF members' skills cannot be static, and must be tailored to the mission.

Defense Acquisition Corps

As articulated in 10 U.S.C. § 1731, Defense Acquisition Corps (DAC) and 10 U.S.C. § 1732, Selection Criteria and Procedures, the DAC construct has outlived its purpose, and should be eliminated from statute. 10 U.S.C. § 1732, Critical Acquisition Positions, requires AWF members to meet a 4-year experience requirement, specific education requirements, and "demonstrated analytical and decision-making capabilities, job performance, and qualifying experience." These criteria flow over to § 1733 (CAP) because these candidates are required to be members of DAC. A shift in focus from years of experience to demonstrated skill would render DAC qualification criteria obsolete.

Interviews with DoD stakeholders showed that, for the most part, the DoD Components do not use the DAC construct to manage the AWF. Since DAWIA was enacted in statute, other means have been used to track and manage the AWF to ensure that the requirements of these provisions are met. Specific DAC provisions, such as officer promotion rate and the mobility statement, should be retained in statute but not explicitly linked to DAC.

Critical Acquisition Positions

The requirements in 10 U.S.C. § 1733, Critical Acquisition Positions, do not appropriately describe the competencies necessary for these positions. Experience based on years in a job as well as specific education requirements should be replaced with competency requirements. DoD should specify competency requirements for CAPs. The implementation of career paths and a competency model for the AWF should allow DoD the flexibility to define the standards for the AWF and CAPs within each career field.

Basis for Statutory Change to Require Competency Model

DoD has dedicated substantial resources toward competency development (e.g., AWQI, Acquisition Qualification Standard, DoDI 1400.25 Civilian Personnel Management System).[29] Although these

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[28] Ibid.

[29] DAU Stakeholder Engagement, August 2018. DoD Civilian Personnel Management System: Civilian Strategic Human Capital Planning (SHCP), DoDI 1400.25, Volume 250, 2 (2016). R. Wood, "Knowledge vs. Experience; The Need for an Acquisition On-the-Job Qualification Standard," *Defense AT&L Magazine,* May-June 2009, 10-12.

models were developed, they have not been successfully implemented into the civilian AWF. Because all of these efforts and guidance are not mandatory for the AWF, they have not been implemented. The panel does not endorse any particular model, rather examples are provided to demonstrate that a significant body of knowledge already exists to begin the work needed to develop a competency model for each AWF career field.

Nontechnical Competencies

With implementation of this recommendation, AWF members would be required to demonstrate the appropriate balance of technical and nontechnical skills, as both technical and nontechnical skills are required to meet mission needs. The AWF has failed to appropriately develop nontechnical competencies before members begin to supervise. Requiring AWF members to demonstrate nontechnical competencies helps their supervisors determine members' readiness for positions that requires them to interact more with people. The following are examples derived from the DoD FM community requirements:[30]

- brainstorming in a group setting
- flexibility
- patience
- resilience
- interpersonal skills
- credibility
- team building

Congress has repeatedly directed DoD to "develop key work experiences that foster interaction with the acquisition workforce and end-user."[31] In doing so, DoD should include appropriate nontechnical competencies that meet Congress's intent for each AWF career field.

Arguably, the civilian workforce is reluctant to evaluate the same type of character traits known as *people skills* that the military evaluates. Military performance reports target individual nontechnical competencies in addition to technical competencies to assess performance and encourage specific behaviors to build military culture. For example, the Army officer rating system evaluates individuals on these skills:[32]

- communication
- teamwork
- followership
- team building
- interpersonal skills (i.e., people, coaching, teaching, counseling, motivating, empowering)
- emotional characteristics (i.e., self-control, calm under pressure)

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[30] "Civilian Career Roadmaps & Job Items Library," DoD FM Online, accessed November 6, 2018, https://fmonline.ousdc.osd.mil/Professional/Civilian-Career.aspx.
[31] Career Path Requirements, 10 U.S.C. § 1723(b).
[32] See sample Army Officer Evaluation Report, DA Form 67-9, October 2011, accessed September 5, 2018, https://www.femplate.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/army-oer-support-form-army-oer-support-form-army-oer-support-form-examples-army-oer-support-form-character-bullets-army-oer-support-form.jpg.

- ▪ ability to develop subordinates
- ▪ conducting assessments (i.e., after action reports, facilitating continuous improvement)

The Senior Executive Service (SES) qualification standards provide an example of how the civilian workforce assesses critical nontechnical skills (e.g., collaboration, team building, innovation). Almost all of the SES skills depend on employees' ability to successfully master nontechnical skills that demonstrate their ability to lead people, lead change, drive results, build business acumen, and build coalitions. [33] To qualify for an SES position, an employee must draw from accomplishments only within the last 10 years prior to appointment. [34]

There are specific things DoD can do to help develop critical nontechnical competencies, as they relate to career development. Enhancing these competencies could help alleviate cultural boundaries that exist around stove-piped career fields in the AWF. Some examples include fostering the ability to build and lead cohesive teams, applying critical thinking to technical problems, collaborating, and experimenting with ways to eliminate risk-averse habits and build innovative solutions.

Change Status Quo Culture

There is a continuous demand for culture change in the AWF, yet DoD does not routinely provide AWF members with the nontechnical skills needed to drive change. To build practical experience, reduce gaps, and cultivate these nontechnical competencies, DoD must develop these nontechnical skills earlier in members' careers. "Innovation occurs when organizations solve difficult problems in an environment that encourages experimentation, risk taking and allows for short term failure."[35] With new ideas come increased risk, unacquainted procedure, and inexperience. Often, it can be difficult for a good idea to withstand the momentum familiarity carries.

> *Furthering a culture of innovation within the DoD will contribute to the achievement of these transformational visions. Senior DoD leaders have endorsed and promulgated a culture of innovation … and challenged officers during a speech at the U.S. Naval Academy to 'risk failure, because in failure, we will learn and acquire the knowledge that will make successful innovation possible.'[36]*

The functional communities and DoD Components must provide means for the AWF to cultivate new experiences—cross-functional and cross-organizational discussions with scenarios that highlight best practices in critical thinking, collaboration, innovation, and reduced risk aversion—resulting in a more mission focused mindset. AWF members can benefit from trusted sources that have navigated similar situations. AWF members are often reluctant to try innovative practices without a coach or a mentor.[37]

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[33] "Senior Executive Service: Executive Core Qualifications," OPM.gov, accessed September 1, 2018, https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/senior-executive-service/executive-core-qualifications/.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Jeff Windham, "20 Observations on Innovation," *Defense AT&L Magazine,* July-August 2016, accessed November 6, 2018, https://www.dau.mil/library/defense-atl/DATLFiles/Jul-Aug2016/Windham.pdf.

[36] Craig Whittinghill, David Berkowitz, and Phillip A. Farrington, "Does Your Culture Encourage Innovation?," *Defense Acquisition Research Journal,* Volume 22, Issue 2, 216-239 (2015).

[37] AWF stakeholders, communication with Section 809 Panel, July-August 2018.

Mentorship

Military leaders spend much of their time developing subordinates; it is engrained in their culture, and they are evaluated on how well they develop people and teams.[38] Military leaders encourage critical thinking skills by coaching and mentoring at all levels.[39] Much can be gained from how the private-sector provides mentoring as well. A February 2018 GAO report noted that in one Fortune 500 company "leaders are expected to participate in long-term career development for people two-levels below them, and provide managers access to external coaches who focus more on leadership."[40]

Case Study:
Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) Energy's Contracting Officer Mentoring Program

This case study of DLA Energy's Contracting Officer Mentoring Program, illustrates the power of mentorship and collaboration. The agency cross-populates its contracting officers within an organization. This program resulted in a chain-reaction of critical thinking and innovation, while cultivating acquisition conversations in small-group settings to help solve unique problem sets.

DLA Energy's Contracting Officer Mentoring Program enhances experiential and collaborative skills. This program purposefully brings together individuals from diverse experiences regarding contract types, complexity, tactics, policy barriers, career path, and rotational experiences. This method provided a platform for cross-directorate networking and experiential learning.

The Contracting Officer Mentoring Program runs annually for 8-months, meeting monthly to discuss a specific topic with senior leaders or SMEs. The program has a mix of small-group sessions and large-group guest speaker sessions. The large-group sessions are led by an assigned emerging leader (someone new to supervision), which provides these individuals the opportunity to lead a larger group and interact independently with the senior leader when establishing a forum for the session. In the small group sessions, contracting officers interact with an organizational senior leader on topics chosen based on workforce feedback.

The idea-sharing approach resulted in new uses of contracting methods and techniques to streamline award time, learn more about industry challenges, and collaborate on best practices. It also forged informal mentoring matches. Workforce feedback regarding this program indicates it has been completely successful and rewarding to both the participants and the organization.

Implementing a Competency Model Framework in the AWF

Although functional communities play a critical role identifying career field foundational knowledge that is common across DoD, the role of the DoD Components in shaping competencies based on mission requirements and the role of members' direct units in determining the competencies and proficiencies for specific jobs is more important.[41] DoD should consider the FM Case Study's best practice of the functional community only flowing down the broadest competencies from the top. For example, the FM community had just 24 DoD-wide competencies established across all 13 FM career

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[38] Ibid. Army Officer Evaluation Report, DA Form 67-9, October 2011, accessed September 5, 2018, https://www.femplate.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/army-oer-support-form-army-oer-support-form-army-oer-support-form-examples-army-oer-support-form-character-bullets-army-oer-support-form.jpg.

[39] AWF stakeholders, communication with Section 809 Panel, July-August 2018.

[40] GAO, *Defense Acquisition Workforce: Opportunities Exist to Improve Practices for Developing Program Managers, GAO-18-217,* February 2018, accessed July 25, 2018, https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/690094.pdf.

[41] AWF stakeholders, communication with Section 809 Panel, July-August 2018.

fields. FM's additional competencies were tailored at the DoD Component and unit level. In the AWF context, equivalent inputs could come from the following:

- Functional communities (i.e., functional leads and functional integrated product teams) for broad technical knowledge.

- DoD Components (e.g., U.S. Air Force, Defense Contract Management Agency) for mission- and domain-specific knowledge.

- Unit (e.g., Acquisition Systems Command, DLA Energy) for job-specific requirements.

The broadest input would come from the functional communities, which would determine each acquisition career field's baseline range of competencies, define the terms that describe proficiency standards, and ensure the baseline is consistent across DoD. Then, the DoD Components would add competencies specific to their respective current or future mission requirements. Lastly, the unit would develop occupational competencies unique to its specific jobs and mission needs. DoD must recognize that the competency model would be best served by placing the functional communities in a supporting role in relation to the DoD Components. DoD Components are well-positioned to understand their own competency requirements, and they should take the lead in developing the competency model within their ranks.

At this lowest level, the unit would draw from the functional communities' and DoD Components' catalogs of competencies for the career fields to determine which requirements for a particular job or position are necessary. Supervisors would then qualify AWF members by assessing their competencies and proficiencies against job requirements to determine their development needs.

These layers would not produce competencies that duplicate each other, but rather would build off of the foundational competencies described at the functional community level, and become more mission focused with the agency and unit task competencies. This example shows the functional community, DoD Components, and units as decision makers for task competency and proficiency standard development; however, DoD should be given the flexibility to implement this arrangement in any appropriate fashion to allow the development of the proficiency standards. DoD would have the flexibility to recognize existing models from career fields, like FM, that may have already implemented competency models.

Conclusions

To help ensure members of the DoD AWF are adequately qualified to perform tasks associated with their respective positions and prepared to traverse their chosen career trajectory, DoD must clearly identify and define AWF career paths and create competency models.

> *It's no secret that Department of Defense (DoD) acquisition professionals work in a very challenging, high-pressure environment. The acquisition process involves an integrated product team of diverse functional experts who must employ critical thinking skills, collaborative problem-solving and robust*

> *communications to be effective. This dynamic means that the acquisition team's behaviors often can be critical factors in a program's outcome.*[42]

Integrating Career Paths and Competency Models

DoD could accelerate cultural change in the AWF by using career paths and competency models together. Although either could be implemented independently, integrating them adds leverage to create change. If, for example, acquisition units map the competencies and proficiencies to acquisition career field career paths, AWF members would see "the range of opportunities available within an AWF functional career field and the criteria for vertical and horizontal movement to positions of increasing responsibility and opportunity, up to the highest position in that field," and could direct their career development to acquire needed technical and nontechnical skills.[43] Although some DoD Components have made progress in creating an integrated career path and competency model, none have a complete system as described here.

Such a model can best be achieved when DoD Components use key work experiences to bring acquisition teams together in ways that transform the workforce culture. The following are three key areas that illustrate how DoD can reinforce competency model skills by creating key career path work experiences:

- Building and leading cohesive teams to enhance critical thinking.
- Providing opportunities for collaboration.
- Encouraging risk taking and innovation.

AWF members need opportunities to practice certain nontechnical skills that would match well with the key work experiences needed to reinforce the acquisition team concept (i.e., multidiscipline/cross organizational teams). These interconnected competencies (i.e., building teams, critical thinking, collaboration, innovation, and risk taking) embody the core nontechnical skills required to navigate defense acquisition in the 21st century dynamic marketplace. The examples below illustrate a sample of the broader opportunities.

Creating Key Work Experiences that Broaden Culture and Break Down Barriers

Building and Leading Cohesive Teams in Effort to Enhance Critical Thinking

Successful teams identified in academic literature—such as New Zealand's All Blacks rugby team, the Navy Seals, Clemson Football, the Miami Heat, Apple, and Ford—consistently practice team building, cohesiveness, and distinct team development using team-oriented critical thinking to solve problems.[44] Much of the academic research showed that critical thinking occurs in multidiscipline/ cross-occupational collaborative group settings, exercises, and simulations that bring together the acquisition team to practice specific decision-making and problem-solving skills. To capitalize on this success model, DoD needs to do the following:

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[42] Brian Schultz, "The Seven Lethal Acquisition Diseases," *Defense AT&L Magazine,* January-February 2017, 32-35, accessed September 13, 2018. https://www.dau.mil/library/defense-atl/DATLFiles/Jan-Feb2017/Schultz.pdf.

[43] As cited under the *career path* definition earlier in this section.

[44] Jon Gordon, *The Power of Positive Leadership* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017).

- Transition all AWF career paths from presentation-based training to experiential learning that incorporates simulation exercises for which critical thinking, rather than rote learning, is demonstrated.

- Include open-ended exercises for which critical thinking is emphasized throughout all AWF career paths. Training, other than for basic technical skills, should include multidiscipline/cross-occupational, team-based scenarios.

Collaboration

Many programmatic roadblocks and cultural issues can be addressed if DoD enhances internal and external collaboration. "Collaboration is NOT cooperation…it is more than the intersection of common goals, but a collective determination to reach an identical objective by sharing knowledge, learning and building consensus."[45] Every conversation that explores how other entities solve acquisition problems induces innovation.

> *Innovation, in the commercial and the DoD context, tends to be based on collaboration. Multiple technical disciplines often have to come together, and the synergy between multiple disciplines may be the central feature of the innovative idea. In the DoD, technical ideas only reach the market when the using [M]ilitary Service decides to embrace the new concept or new product. This is not quite the same as the commercial market where 'early adopters' from a large customer base may help a technology establish a foothold and gain credence. Commercial entrepreneurs build the better mouse trap first and expect customers to come. In DoD the customers, the [M]ilitary Departments, ask for fairly specific products and then budget the resources to pay for the development of those products.[46]*

DoD could enhance collaboration by promoting and using a platform specifically for the AWF to effectively share ideas, collaborate, and trade documents representing best practice.[47] Examples that illustrate how such collaboration can work already exist:

- One stakeholder organization indicated that it recognizes and rewards implementation of other agencies' best practices.[48] Often, recognition is given to the inventor of a best practice, which fosters recreating the wheel, rather than collaboration. Real problem solving occurs when two DoD components talk to each other when trying to implement a solution.

- The FM community has mandatory developmental assignments as part of its career progression, which greatly aids collaboration and generation of new ideas.[49]

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[45] "Leadership Collaboration Skills: Everyone Focuses on Developing These," Mike Schoultz, Digital Spark Marketing, January 11, 2016, accessed September 13, 2018, https://digitalsparkmarketing.com/leadership-collaboration-skills/.

[46] Frank Kendall, "Innovation in the Defense Acquisition Enterprise," *Defense AT&L Magazine,* November-December 2015, 4-5.

[47] AWF stakeholders, communication with the Section 809 Panel, July-August 2018.

[48] Deputy DACM, AWF stakeholders, communication with Section 809 Panel, July-August 2018.

[49] "Civilian Career Roadmaps & Job Items Library," DoD FM Online, accessed November 6, 2018, https://fmonline.ousdc.osd.mil/Professional/Civilian-Career.aspx.

Risk and Innovation

Lack of opportunity and risk-aversion limit opportunities to innovate. To get the AWF comfortable with accepting more risk will require a convergence of key work experiences and nontechnical skill development. "DoD is afraid to fail, and if you cannot fail, there is no learning environment."[50] To create an avenue for practical experience to innovate means to create an environment that allows for short-term failures, trial and error, and latitude to make decisions at a lower level.

> *We have a very punitive, risk-averse system that treats most every mistake or failure as an ethical or criminal act as opposed to just a mistake. So we shouldn't be surprised that the workforce, particularly those on the acquisition side, is risk averse.[51]*

Scenarios for critical thinking need to be fostered by leadership, but driven by AWF members who have the passion to create change. "Passion drives innovation—not rank, power or position."[52] Leadership must create an environment accepting of appropriate risk, or the AWF will lack an avenue for practical experience to innovate. "Leaders can't order innovation to occur; they can be champions and help clear roadblocks, but, in general, senior leaders are not the driving force in innovation."[53]

Culture and Leadership

Unless DoD is willing to take a holistic approach to culture change, to include building the AWF professionals' qualifications, rather than relying on certifications, no change will occur.[54] Applying a concise, well defined competency model in career paths (similar to the *FM Case Study*) will better establish what qualifications should look like. A career path illuminates the possibilities and potential areas of focus, and the competency model proposed here goes beyond focusing on qualification. When combined, career paths and competency models support cultural change.

To date, DoD has operated with disjointed instructions and inconsistent application. Instead, DoD should operate with tailored competencies and proficiency standards with integration of technical and nontechnical skills, so AWF members can understand what is expected of them, and how to work toward managerial/leadership and SME positions. The legislative changes associated with this recommendation will require AWF leadership to develop AWF members capable of building a cohesive, mission-focused team that thrives on exchanges inside and outside of government. Implementing career paths for each AWF career field and a competency model tailored for each AWF career field together, provides AWF members a developmental and experiential career progression, and clarifies what qualifications members requires for their current jobs and for future jobs. These frameworks complement each other and act as key components to transform workforce development.

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[50] "Acquisition: Eliminating the culture barrier to innovative acquisition," Billy Mitchell, FedScoop, April 27, 2015, accessed August 27, 2018, https://www.fedscoop.com/the-cultural-roadblock-to-innovative-acquisition.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Jeff Windham, Jeff, "20 Observations on Innovation," *Defense AT&L Magazine,* July-August 2016, accessed November 6, 2018, https://www.dau.mil/library/defense-atl/DATLFiles/Jul-Aug2016/Windham.pdf.

[53] Ibid.

[54] James N. Phillips, Jr., "Instruction, Direction and Correction: Improving the Acquisition Culture," *Defense AT&L Magazine,* March-April 2018, 26-28, accessed November 6, 2018, https://www.dau.mil/library/defense-atl/DATLFiles/Mar-April_2018/Phillips.pdf.

Implementation

Legislative Branch

Career Paths

- Establish a requirement in 10 U.S.C. § 1701a, Performance Management, requiring DoD to develop career paths for every designated career field in the AWF within 24 months of enactment of this recommendation.

    – Amend 10 U.S.C. § 1722, Career Development, to require DoD to develop appropriate career paths for all AWF career fields.

- Establish a requirement in 10 U.S.C. § 1721, Designation of Acquisition Positions, directing DoD to define in policy which occupational career fields are designated for the AWF. These career fields must be codified in DoD instruction and kept current.[55] In statute, require DoD to publish a policy adhering to this statute 6 months after enactment of this recommendation.

- Establish in 10 U.S.C. § 1722b, Special Requirements for Civilian Employees in the Acquisition Field, a requirement that DoD develop key work experience in the form of multidiscipline training (e.g., multifunctional, cross-discipline, multi-occupational).

    – Require DoD to submit a plan in 12 months from enactment that identifies specific actions the department will take to develop key work experiences for each AWF career field.

- Amend the requirement in 10 U.S.C. § 1723, Career Path Requirements, to apply to all AWF career fields (as opposed to only critical acquisition-related duties and tasks).

    – Require DoD to develop a strategic target that specifies a percent of the workforce, or a percent of funding, it will dedicate annually to identifying, developing, and establishing key work experiences. Include the target and rationale in the report(s) to be submitted in response to the change to 10 U.S.C. § 1722b above.

Competency Model

- Establish a requirement in 10 U.S.C. § 1701a, Performance Management, that DoD develop a competency-based model with defined proficiency standards and technical and nontechnical competencies for every designated career field in the AWF within 24 months of enactment of this recommendation.

    – Require civilian qualification assessments to include both technical and nontechnical competencies.

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[55] Currently, 14-15 AWF career fields exist, managed under 20 functional leaders. These career fields are not the same as the *acquisition related positions* designated in 10 U.S.C. § 1721, nor are they designed to be the same; however, DoD must decide exactly which AWF career fields are officially apart of the AWF, understanding that each requires a career path.

- Repeal 10 U.S.C. § 1731, Defense Acquisition Corp and 10 U.S.C. § 1732, Selection Criteria and Procedures.

  - Preserve 10 U.S.C. § 1731 (b), Promotion Rate for Officers.
  - Preserve the Mobility Statement and Promotion Rate for Officers currently included in 10 U.S.C. § 1732(e).
  - Relocate Mobility Statement and Promotion Rate for Officers to 10 U.S.C. § 1733 Critical Acquisition Positions.

Executive Branch

- Cancel DoDI 5000.66, Defense Acquisition Workforce Education, Training, Experience, and Career Development Program.

- Replace DoDI 5000.66, Defense Acquisition Workforce Education, Training, Experience, and Career Development Program, with guidance that clearly establishes responsibility, scope, and definitions of the AWF career influencers and DoD's developmental program within 18 months of enactment of this recommendation.

  - Delegate the responsibilities and authorities to the DoD Components to develop and implement the guidance on career paths and competency models. The guidance should establish the OSD HCI office role as a facilitator in support of the DoD Components in developing and implementing the guidance codified in this recommendation.

  - Ensure a peer review, at a minimum with the Military Services' senior acquisition executives (SAEs) or agency component acquisition executives (CAEs).

  - Clarify how career fields are affected by the changes created by the split of Acquisition, Technology and Logistics into Acquisition and Sustainment and Research and Engineering, identify which career fields will be managed by Acquisition and Sustainment and which by Research and Engineering, and indicate how the two organizations will collaborate on career management responsibilities.

- Delegate responsibility and authority to the DoD Components to develop a user guide for AWF supervisors.

  - Require DoD Component user guides to include all AWF career fields assigned to the respective organizations.
  - Require career paths to include guidance to identify SME and managerial/leadership tracks in career paths.

- Require a report to the Secretary of Defense, within 6 months of enactment of this recommendation, that details how DoD will implement Congress's direction.

Implications for Other Agencies

- The changes in how the AWF is trained, qualified, and developed should be presented to OFPP. If these recommendations are implemented, they may affect how the AWF in other executive branch agencies are managed.