Proposed Leadership Structure for Joint Acquisition Programs

Howard Harris and Mark Lewis

Department of Defense (DoD) acquisition programs are becoming more joint, and joint acquisition programs are critical to mission success. In the current DoD acquisition and requirements structure, joint programs are usually assigned to one of the Component Acquisition Executives (CAEs). This causes or exacerbates some of the shortfalls of the existing joint acquisition process. This article investigates the benefits and difficulties of one specific organizational change: creating a Joint Acquisition Executive (JAE), managing joint programs only and reporting to the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, as a peer to current CAEs.

                       image designed by Diane Fleischer »

JOINT ACQUISITION PROCESS

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Department of Defense (DoD) acquisition programs are becoming more joint, but the Department's acquisition process typically does not manage joint acquisition programs well (Defense Science Board [DSB], 2009a). Joint programs are usually assigned to one of the Component Acquisition Executives to lead and oversee. Figure 1 shows a proposed new leadership structure for some Joint Acquisition Category (ACAT) ID and IAM programs. The CAEs include the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Technology (ASA[ALT]); the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition (ASN[RDA]); the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Acquisition (SAF/AQ); and the Director of the Missile Defense Agency. U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) also has an Acquisition Executive, as do the Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA) and other agencies.

FIGURE 1. PROPOSED JOINT ACQUISITION EXECUTIVE (JAE) LEADERSHIP POSITION
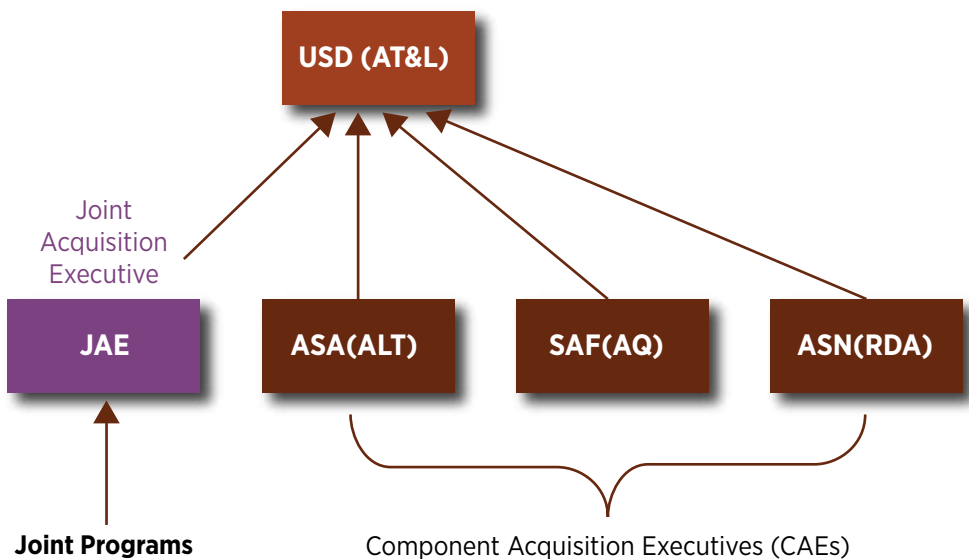
Background/Problem Description

The Goldwater-Nichols DoD Reorganization Act of 1986, Public Law 99-433, was enacted primarily to improve the ability of U.S. armed forces to conduct joint (inter-Service) and combined (interallied) operations in the field; and secondarily, to improve the DoD budget process. The act

contained three major changes: (a) It greatly strengthened the influence and staff of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, compared to that of the Service Chiefs of Staff and military departments; (b) it increased the authority and influence of the unified combatant commands that control U.S. forces in the United States and around the world; and (c) it created a "joint officer" specialization within each Service to improve the quality of officers assigned to the Joint Staff. Many give the act a positive grade for the changes that have resulted in joint operations. While this act did improve Service jointness, it did not address joint acquisition. Unfortunately, significant challenges still remain including in the area of joint program acquisition (Murdock & Flournoy, 2005).

A General Accounting Office (now Government Accountability Office) Report No. GAO/NSIAD-89-158 (1989) defined joint programs as those having multi-Service or multi-Defense Agency participation during the research and development phase and/or during the procurement phase. Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates spoke of DoD's performance in the area of joint procurement (Gates, 2009):

> The Pentagon's weapon-system portfolio requires further adjustments—to better focus on joint requirements and procurement. One of the problems we have—and it's one of the reasons I recommended canceling CSAR-X [Air Force's Combat Search and Rescue helicopter program]—is that we have really come to a point where we do extraordinarily well in terms of joint operations, but we do not do well in terms of joint procurement. It is still very Service-centered. So that's an area—both analytically and in the way we conduct our business—where I think we need to do better.

Various studies catalogue other shortfalls of the existing joint acquisition process, including:

- Single-Component programs often have more senior leader advocacy (including for funding) than do joint programs;

- Execution of joint programs often exceeds cost and schedule parameters more than single-Service acquisitions;

- Joint programs often display a lack of sharing lessons learned and applying them to new joint programs;

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- Joint programs often lack common program management budgeting/funding processes, and sound acquisition reporting practices; and

- Because joint programs often have many customers, the number of requirements tends to be higher than for single-Component programs. Rotating oversight of a joint program among CAEs does not enhance requirements stability.

Another shortfall is that within the DoD, no consolidated joint acquisition community exists (DSB, 2009b). Instead, the joint acquisition process is:

> ... stove-piped with departments and agencies operating within their individual silos, with the attention centered on major platforms rather than capabilities .... The stove-piped nature of the community does not well serve the needs of the combatant commanders—organizations that are by definition 'Joint.' (p. 4)

Many people working joint programs today had little or no previous training or experience in the unique aspects of joint programs, and their next acquisition billet is likely to involve only single-Component programs.

Challenges and Opportunities for Improvement

The following paragraphs group some of the challenges that joint programs face into two categories:

- Program Execution

- Oversight and Advocacy

Program Execution

Creating an organization solely to manage joint programs offers opportunities to address problems the acquisition community has failed to solve.

Schedule and cost. Joint programs often take longer (by at least one third) (Defense Acquisition University, 2004) and cost more than single-Service acquisitions. A Joint Acquisition Executive (JAE) would

manage fewer programs than CAEs do, would therefore have more time to dedicate to each program, and could be more motivated to support joint programs than are CAEs. In addition, a JAE is more likely to successfully argue for more stable funding and more realistic requirements (both of which have derailed many joint programs), which in turn would increase the probability of success.

Independent procurement. The Components have a history of developing and procuring joint capabilities inefficiently (e.g., through duplicative, competing efforts) by not working together. For example, for years the Components separately procured AN/PRC 148 JEM and AN/PRC 152 Falcon III handheld radios and accessories, but in 2007—with the help of the Joint Program Executive Office for the Joint Tactical Radio System—the Components started combining their orders to get quantity discounts. As of October 2011, the Components had saved $620 million by procuring these items jointly.

Better coordinated unity of effort. Joint programs could benefit from a better coordinated unity of effort. A JAE would manage in one organization all DoD joint programs related to a particular capability, facilitating interoperability and cross-program communication and synergy. This approach prevents Components from developing competing joint solutions, which has both positive and negative effects. For example, some negatives of a joint solution are that a single system design isn't optimized for all operating environments, and that competition for the design is limited, increasing the DoD's risk and limiting innovation.

JAE motivation and advocacy. Like USSOCOM, a JAE would also be more motivated than a lead CAE to resist parochialism and Component-unique requirements. Here, negotiating skill brings more stability to requirements and precludes the need to build Component-unique variants that add complexity, cost, and schedule. Otherwise, as responses to the survey results discussed below assert, when the requirement varies for different Services (e.g., Joint Strike Fighter), the variants may be 80 or 90 percent common, but at best there are really at least two different programs that are only "joint" by nomenclature, not in requirements or execution. Also, a JAE would be more focused on the needs of the joint user (e.g., Combatant Commander, or COCOM), while a CAE would be more likely to handle COCOM requirements through

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their Service-specific lens. A JAE is more likely to reach out to COCOMs for requirements, both before program initiation and after baseline requirements have been set.

Streamlined reporting and budget/funding processes. According to the DSB (2006), "Program managers spend far too much time reporting to satisfy oversight demands and too little time managing the program." Also, the high "level of oversight leaves program managers and program executive officers only about 50 percent or less of their time to actually manage their programs" (Murdock & Flournoy, 2005). Component bureaucracy that has built up over the years slows decision making and increases the administrative burden upon the program manager. As a small, new organization, a JAE can keep this bureaucratic and administrative burden small. However, while streamlining oversight and reporting processes in the interest of efficiency is a worthwhile pursuit, the literature indicates it will not address the root causes of schedule and cost growth that plague so many acquisition programs (Drezner et al., 2007). For example, "One key misconception should be dismissed right away. While oversight by government agencies and their reporting requirements can indeed be burdensome, they clearly are not the causes of the continuing miserable record of program stretch-outs and cost growth" (Christie, 2006, p. 31).

Joint programs require more resources, people, and training. The Defense Acquisition University's *Joint Program Management Handbook* (2004) lists additional complexities joint programs face. One is that dealing with the different processes in different Components and more stakeholders causes joint programs to often require more resources, people, and training within each program office than do single-Component programs. For example, today each of the four Services could require a joint program to use their Service-unique status reporting process. In 2005, the Joint Program Executive Officer for the Joint Tactical Radio System (JPEO JTRS) addressed this issue and cut costs by providing only quarterly Defense Acquisition Executive Summary reports to the Services in lieu of previously required Service-unique reports (e.g., the Air Force's Monthly Acquisition Report, the Army's Probability of Success, and the Navy's Dashboard). Like JPEO JTRS, a JAE could establish a single set of acquisition regulations and administrative procedures for joint acquisition programs, thus relieving the burden on program managers to create their own or to adopt the lead Service standards that might have become overly bureaucratic over

the decades. Another possible problem for the joint program manager is that contracting procedures vary between the Services. Since joint programs may contract through more than one Service and may have more requirements changes than other programs, having one set of multi-Service contracting procedures would reduce the learning curve and training necessary to adhere to each Service's contracting procedures.

Oversight and Advocacy

Many have criticized the lack of hierarchical decision making and personal accountability in DoD acquisition. The axiom "when everyone is responsible, no one is responsible" is even more likely to apply to joint programs where each of the Services and other organizations has a strong voice. The result of each Service having a strong voice is that lead CAEs are less responsible for their joint programs; thus, USD(AT&L) often becomes the de facto responsible party. However, the Office of the Under Secretary is not staffed to do the necessary legwork to tee up all the decisions for the USD(AT&L)—this is a traditional role of the CAE's staff. However, in the authors' opinion, CAE staff teeing up a decision on a joint program are more likely to favor their Component's position (to the detriment of other Components and possibly the DoD) when conflict arises. Also, lead Components can have difficulty articulating and defending other Components' (i.e., joint) needs. In these cases, the USD(AT&L) becomes the first line of arbitration between the Components. The creation of a JAE appropriately pushes arbitration and synergy on joint programs to a lower echelon. A JAE—clearly responsible for resources, program execution, and advocacy (and possibly requirements)—centralizes responsibility and accountability. The JAE would report directly to the USD(AT&L), who retains oversight. For example, the JAE (instead of each Service) could submit requests for Defense Wide–Research, Development, Test and Evaluation funding directly to the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), and funding could flow from the OSD Comptroller directly to a JAE Comptroller. Other Oversight and Advocacy challenges that joint programs face are discussed below.

Alignment. It is important for authority to be aligned with the chain of command. We are aware of one joint program where one Component leads the requirements development; execution-year funding gets consolidated into the funding line of a different Component; that same Component provides contracting and other administrative support; the program's leader reports to a third Component; and nobody is the clear advocate. A joint program is more likely to be successful if requirements,

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funding, advocacy, and management reporting all follow the same chain; when this is not the case, OSD oversight of joint programs is strained due to OSD's other commitments and lack of staffing.

Joint program structure. DoD's acquisition community has little guidance and direction specifically for joint programs, but in some ways joint programs are managed differently from Service-centric programs. (For example, Defense Acquisition University's *Joint Program Management Handbook* [2004] discusses nine different management structures for joint programs.) A JAE could provide senior leader advocacy to ensure that DoD policies and regulations take into account the unique aspects of joint programs. Additionally, Department of Defense Instruction 5000.02 (DoD, 2008) and the *Defense Acquisition Guidebook* have little guidance and direction for the proper execution of complex and expensive joint programs.

Importance of a single point of contact. In addition, senior defense officials and the Congress may become involved in very large or well-publicized joint programs. A JAE would be their single point of contact for the programs in the JAE's portfolio—a point of contact with more accountability than an OSD principal staff assistant, for example, who often tries to perform that role.

Training and experience pays dividends. Acquisition professionals who are specialized in joint programs can reasonably be expected to be more effective in managing joint programs. Many people working joint programs today have little or no previous training or experience in the unique aspects of joint programs, and their next acquisition billet is likely to involve only single-Component programs. A prime example of where training and experience pays dividends is joint testing, which often has OSD oversight and more stakeholders, needs more joint users (for their knowledge of their Component's tactics, etc.), numerous test facilities, numerous test organizations, a distributed test environment, and separate tests of Component-unique systems or modifications. A JAE could provide funding and training development for joint functional areas (testing, logistics, contracting, systems engineering, etc.) and sponsor a new career track (Joint Acquisition) within the DoD. Creating a "Joint Acquisition" corps could broaden the workforce's knowledge of all Services' policies, processes, etc. (e.g., for operational testing), but unfortunately it could

reduce the joint acquisition team's understanding of any one Service's operating environments. This approach could trade off deep expertise for broad expertise.

Standard selection criteria. A JAE could establish standard selection criteria for key personnel assigned to an ACAT ID or IAM joint program. Presumably, personnel selected as JAE staff would already have experience working in Service acquisition programs.

Survey Methodology

Survey Background

To gauge the joint acquisition community's support for the JAE concept, and to identify additional pros, cons, and potential pitfalls, the authors sent a survey via e-mail to current or previous joint program managers, joint deputy program managers, Joint Program Executive Office leaders, and principals and their action officers in the OSD and in CAE organizations. Figure 2 shows the respondents' distribution

FIGURE 2. SURVEY DISTRIBUTION BY COMPONENT AND LEVEL
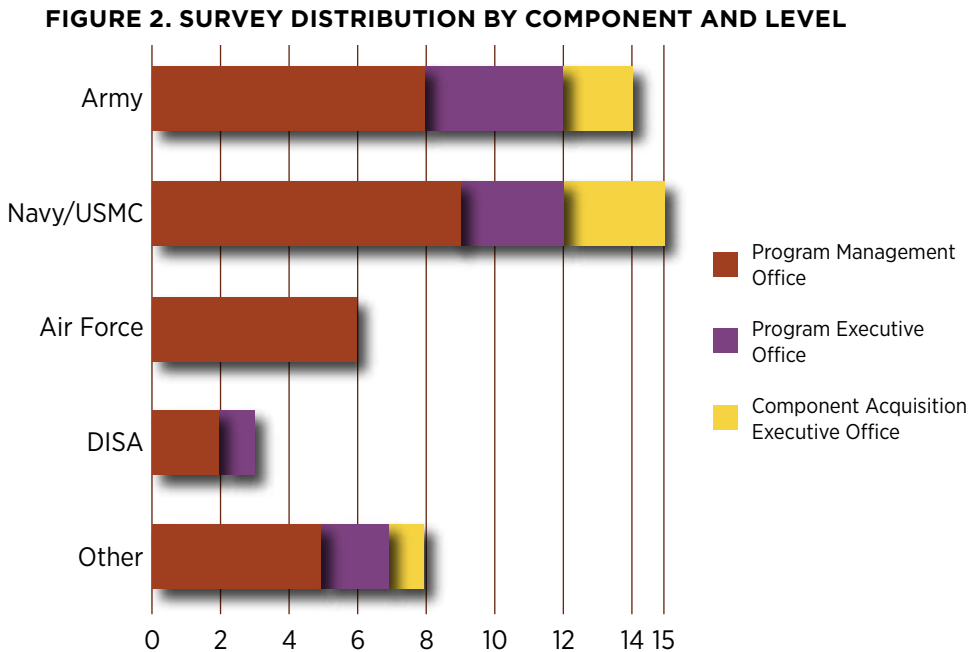
between the Components and between program office-level, program executive office-level, and CAE-level organizations. Forty-seven current and former government civilians and military personnel out of 170 individuals survey recipients—all known to have experience leading, managing, or overseeing joint acquisition programs—completed a Web-based survey. All but four respondents have 15 or more years of DoD experience; the median is 17 years. Twenty-eight respondents have 15 or more years in acquisition/program management; the median is 17 years. One of the 43 OSD personnel asked to participate responded.

Figure 3 shows the functional area of expertise of the survey respondents. Twenty-nine respondents listed program management as their primary functional area of expertise, followed by 10 logisticians.
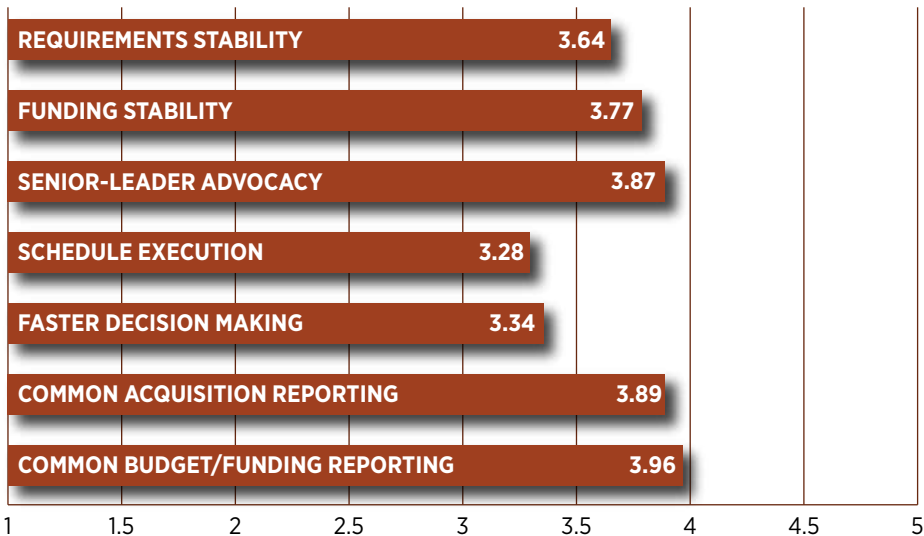
FIGURE 3. FUNCTIONAL AREA OF EXPERTISE

Number of Respondents
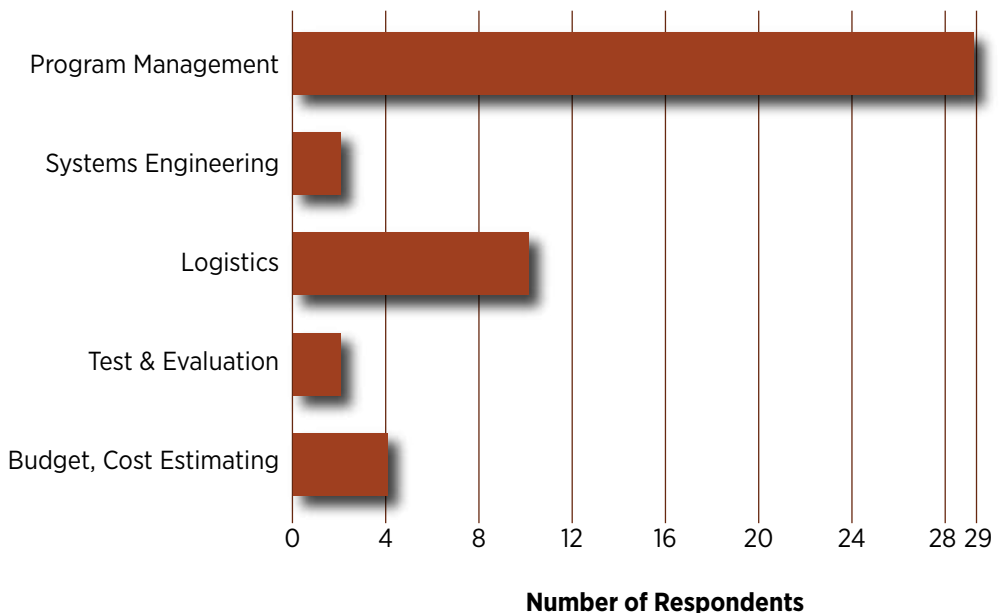
The survey gave participants five options for answering each question, ranging from "Not At All Helpful," "Neutral," to "Very Positive" (or similar terms). The scale of ranking was from one (the lowest) to five (the highest score).

Analysis & Results

Survey Findings

Figures 4, 5, and 6 provide a graphical summary of the respondents' answers and comments to the survey questionnaire. The values shown on these three figures are the averages of the respondents' rankings.

FIGURE 4. DEGREE OF HELPFULNESS TO PROGRAM MANAGER AND PROGRAM EXECUTIVE OFFICE
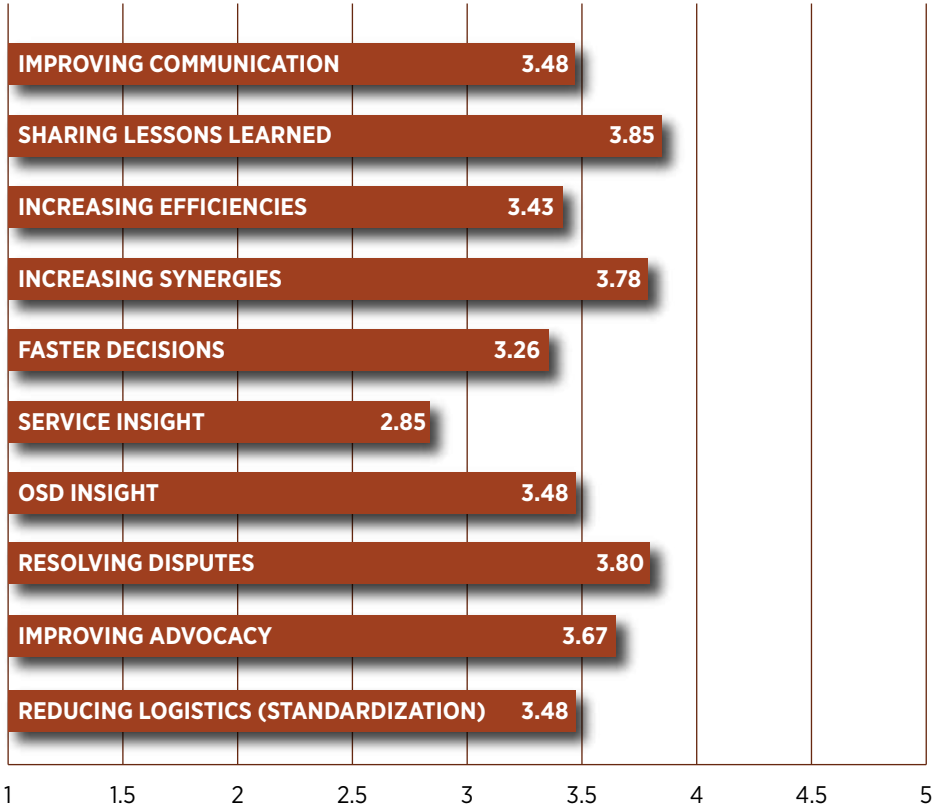
Category	Value
REQUIREMENTS STABILITY	3.64
FUNDING STABILITY	3.77
SENIOR-LEADER ADVOCACY	3.87
SCHEDULE EXECUTION	3.28
FASTER DECISION MAKING	3.34
COMMON ACQUISITION REPORTING	3.89
COMMON BUDGET/FUNDING REPORTING	3.96

How helpful would it be to the Joint ACAT ID and IAM program manager and program executive office to report directly to a JAE (instead of a CAE)?

(→ BETTER)

The strongest responses were that reporting through a JAE (instead of a CAE) who oversees joint ACAT ID & IAM programs would be helpful or very helpful for joint programs' (a) common budget and funding processes, (b) common acquisition reporting, and (c) senior-level advocacy, in that order. The authors were somewhat surprised with the lower ranking of faster decision making because we envisioned the JAE organization to be small and less bureaucratic. If the JAE has a small enough portfolio of programs, there would be little need for program executive officers between the program managers and JAE, thus speeding decision making.

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**FIGURE 5. DEGREE OF IMPACT TO PROGRAM MANAGER AND PROGRAM EXECUTIVE OFFICER**

Category	Value
IMPROVING COMMUNICATION	3.48
SHARING LESSONS LEARNED	3.85
INCREASING EFFICIENCIES	3.43
INCREASING SYNERGIES	3.78
FASTER DECISIONS	3.26
SERVICE INSIGHT	2.85
OSD INSIGHT	3.48
RESOLVING DISPUTES	3.80
IMPROVING ADVOCACY	3.67
REDUCING LOGISTICS (STANDARDIZATION)	3.48

1   1.5   2   2.5   3   3.5   4   4.5   5

Rate the impact of creating a JAE (as an alternative to a CAE).

(→ BETTER)

Participants expressed that creating a JAE would (a) increase the sharing of lessons learned and best practices unique to joint programs (responses to this question generated the tightest standard deviation); (b) assist in arbitrating for joint programs in resolving disputes between the Components; and (c) increase synergies of joint programs.

In only one area of the survey did participants clearly believe that a JAE would do more harm than good: Component Insight into Joint Programs. This could be because a specific Component has deep insight into the joint programs it is already managing; and for joint programs

FIGURE 6. SUPPORT FOR ESTABLISHING A JAE TO OVERSEE SOME ACAT ID AND IAM JOINT PROGRAMS

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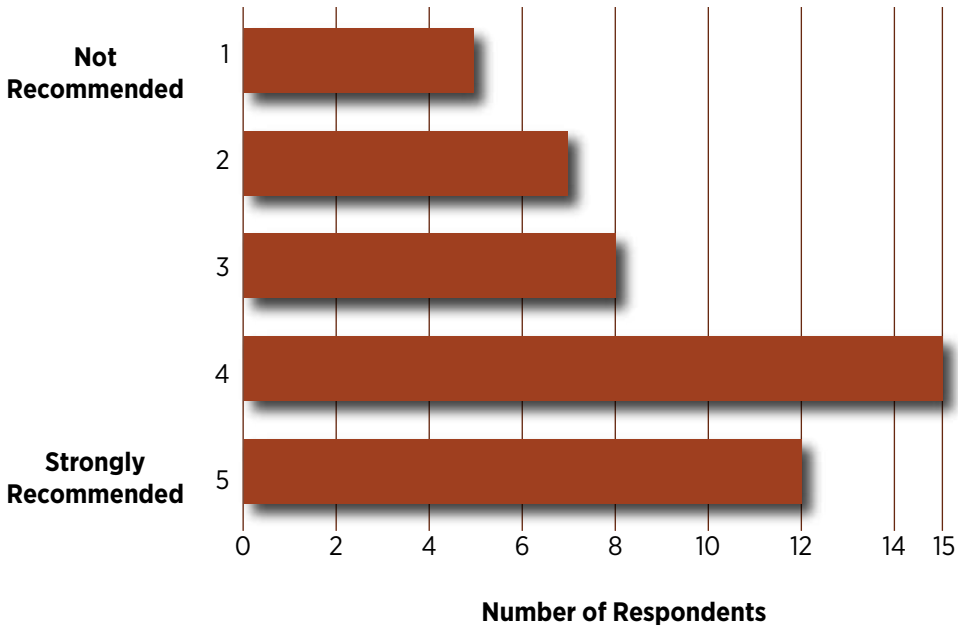
managed elsewhere, the Component already has some mechanisms (personal relationships, formal processes, etc.) to get some level of insight. It would take time to establish those mechanisms in a JAE organization.

Most participants in the survey recommended that a JAE be established, anticipated that a JAE would be effective or very effective in fielding joint capability, and anticipated that there would be significant benefits to the DoD (though not necessarily to every Component) to creating a JAE. Several mentioned USSOCOM's acquisition organization as a model. One participant pointed out that a JAE is more likely to be effective for certain types of technologies (for example those in which the JAE staff has expertise) and where there are fewer Component-unique legacy systems with which to interoperate. However, 13 respondents cautioned against the idea, believed the necessary political and cultural changes are unlikely, or expressed doubt that the DoD would execute a JAE effectively. They raised these specific concerns:

Added level of bureaucracy. Even with a JAE, the CAE staff would still need or want to be involved. In this case, and especially if the JAE or OSD does not control the funding, the JAE would be an additional level of bureaucracy (one participant mentioned Joint Forces Command as an example of a level of bureaucracy added without removing any previous levels). This was one of the most often voiced concerns.

Obtaining buy in. Obtaining buy in from the Components and OSD organizations on the new roles and responsibilities would be challenging. This was a common theme.

Insufficient Component advocacy. A JAE would lack sufficient Component advocacy for funding, causing instability. Budgeting would still be done by each Component (e.g., via a cost sharing agreement) rather than jointly, and the Components would still engage in budget gamesmanship to avoid losing funds to joint programs.

Little impact on requirements stability/Component-unique requirements. A JAE would have little impact on requirements stability and little power to prevent the inclusion of Component-unique requirements. This could increase system complexity, increasing cost and schedule.

No impact on parochialism. Component differences and disagreements that impact joint programs are due to Component cultures and requirements; a JAE would not change this. Parochialism will still be alive and well.

Who's in charge? Components like to be in charge of the program to ensure their requirements are met.

Levels of inaction. A JAE organization would get bogged down by "all the action officers and staff" in the Components. One respondent cautioned, "Now we spend so much time educating staff members that by the time we get to the decision makers, we've been beaten and badgered."

Redundancy. A JAE organization would likely perform functions redundant to those in the Components, weakening any cost efficiency or synergy arguments. "I see huge turf battles," said another.

Anomalies overlooked. A JAE would not pay sufficient attention to the fielding and logistical anomalies of the individual Components.

Staffing the JAE organization. For example, at the present time Congress is pressuring the DoD to decrease the number of Senior Executive Service and Flag/General Officer billets, but new billets would be created under a JAE.

We recommend at the end of this article that the DoD further study the concerns discussed in this section and consider creating a JAE.

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Conclusions

The existing joint acquisition process has many shortfalls (e.g., too Service-centered, less senior-level advocacy for joint programs than for single-Component programs, lessons are not adequately communicated among joint programs), but JAE oversight of joint programs might have advantages over CAE oversight in addressing these shortfalls. A sample of practitioners of joint acquisition in the DoD Components tends to

② believe that creating a JAE would help program managers and program executive officers better manage Joint ACAT ID and IAM programs, particularly in the following areas:

- Common budget and funding processes;

- Common acquisition reporting;

- Senior-level advocacy;

- Increase in sharing lessons learned and best practices unique to joint programs;

- Assistance in arbitrating for joint programs in resolving disputes between the Components; and

- Increase in synergies of joint programs.

Survey participants believed that creating a JAE would hurt Component insight into joint programs and raised other concerns, especially that:

- The JAE would be an additional level of bureaucracy and that no current levels would be eliminated; and

- Obtaining buy in from the Components and OSD organizations on the new roles and responsibilities would be challenging.

In the next section we identify topics OSD should study in more detail before considering creating a JAE.

Recommendations

JAE oversight of joint programs might have advantages over CAE oversight and deserves further study by OSD. We recommend that such studies focus on the following:

- The potential of a JAE to move the DoD further from Service-centric procurement and closer to joint-centric procurement;

- Defining the scope of the JAE's portfolio of programs to increase unity of effort and interoperability (i.e., managing within one organization all DoD joint programs related to a particular capability or focusing on acquiring Service-neglected joint capability requirements);

- Ensuring the JAE has clear responsibility and accountability for resources (possibly via defense-wide funding), program execution, and advocacy (and possibly requirements);

- Changing roles and responsibilities of the Components and OSD organizations in their oversight and management of joint programs;

- Giving the JAE responsibility for establishing and operating a new process to collect and synthesize COCOM requirements (and providing COCOMs analytical assistance to more fully engage in the Joint Capabilities Integration and Development System before handing those joint requirements to its acquisition arm);

- Offsetting the cost of establishing and staffing the JAE by cutting redundant functions and staff in the Components;

- Offsetting the additional layer of oversight by relieving the JAE's programs of oversight and bureaucracy elsewhere (possibly by eliminating program executive officers between the program manager and JAE);

- Estimating the number and experience of personnel needed to staff the JAE organization, and creating new joint billets for civilians and military personnel;

- Determining what legislative changes, if any (e.g., authorizing a JAE to equip forces, instead of only the Services) would be necessary; and

- Investigating USSOCOM as an effective model for a JAE.

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Acknowledgements

Author Biographies

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