

Professionally Developing World-Class Product Support Managers

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At the risk of sounding overly dramatic, it is not a stretch to say that we are at a pivotal moment when it comes to DoD weapon system product support and life cycle management. Congress and the president have weighed in with the passage of Section 805 of Public Law 111-84. DoD leadership has contriuted with issuance of Directive Type Memorandum 10-015.

The military components have provided their implementing guidance, identified positions, and designated and assigned a product support manager (PSM) to “every ACAT I and ACAT II program...and to former ACAT I/II programs that are post-IOC or no longer have PMs reporting to CAEs.” So what’s left to do? What’s so pivotal?

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We have a once-in-a-generation chance to implement and execute something truly important. We also have a small window of opportunity to get it right. Policy only gets us so far; to achieve the desired outcomes, successful execution of the requirements is, in many respects, more important. And to successfully achieve the desired product support and life cycle outcomes articulated in statute and policy, we must have the right people, with the right skills, provided the right authorities, afforded the right resources, and with the right mix of experience, expertise, leadership, training, and education.

Thresholds and Objectives

Since we're talking about the acquisition realm, let's apply some acquisition terminology to this discussion, starting with the terms "thresholds" and "objectives." Section 805 of Public Law 111-84, along with DoD Directive Type Memorandum (DTM) 10-015 establishes the thresholds—the bare minimum qualifications a product support manager must meet in order to qualify for the position. These include:

- The position of PSM shall be performed by a properly qualified military Service member or full-time employee of the Department of Defense.
- This PSM will be designated as a key leadership position (KLP) for all major defense acquisition programs and major weapon systems and designated a critical acquisition position (CAP) for all other major weapon systems.
- The PSM will be an integral part of the program management team and will report directly to the program manager (PM).
- Incumbents are required to meet all requirements of the position within the prescribed timeframe for CAPs, as stated in DoDI 5000.66.
- In support of the PM's responsibilities enumerated in the DoD Directive 5000.01, the PSM shall be accountable to the PM for product support. This does not prevent the PSM from having a dual reporting relationship to a DoD component logistics, sustainment or materiel command.
- PSM positions for all major weapon systems must be certified at Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA) Level III in the Life Cycle Logistics career field.

As life cycle logisticians with a total of nearly 5 decades in this business, we believe the lawmakers and the policymakers got this one right. They have established the requirement for a position (we have had similar—if less comprehensive—positions all along) with responsibilities (which we should have had in place all along) and authorities (which we needed all along). Is that the end of the story? Not a chance.

Success will come based on the qualities and capabilities of the people, the Services, and the Department assign to these positions, the value they place on the PSM role, as evidenced by not only the formal and informal authorities and resources they grant prospective new PSMs, but indeed on the strength

of the imperative to assign only their "best and brightest" to PSM positions.

But what will it take to develop those future superstars? What investment must be made today? This is where the other half of the threshold-objective discussion comes into play. Objectives, as opposed to thresholds, are defined as those highly recommended, highly valued, indeed, highly desired, but not necessarily mandatory requirements. OSD policymakers, when crafting DTM 10-015, recognized the interdisciplinary nature of the PSM position—the fact that product support is broader than traditional logistics—and established vitally important desired objectives for future PSMs, namely that "cross-certification at DAWIA Level II or above in accordance with DoDI 5000.66 in the Program Management, Systems Planning Research Development and Evaluation, or Business-Financial Management career fields should be considered as valued criteria during the selection process." Cross-certification, although not mandatory, was deemed as important and was thus strongly encouraged.

Is that sufficient? Certainly a vitally important first step, but in reality, the answer is "Not by a long shot!" Assuming the former is a given, let's take a few moments to consider what else the Services might consider doing to groom these future superstars.

To successfully achieve the desired product support and life cycle outcomes articulated in statute and policy, we must have the right people, with the right skills, provided the right authorities, afforded the right resources, and with the right mix of experience, expertise, leadership, training, and education.

They must understand how acquisition and sustainment intersect, why life cycle management is so critical, and how to design for supportability from the earliest stages of program development.

It's Better to Start at the Beginning

It starts with a culture of excellence, high expectations, clearly articulated requirements, and a rigorous commitment to human capital professional development. It continues with clearly understood competencies, a lifetime commitment to learning, and an excellent suite of training and tools that are viewed not as mandatory requirements or a "check in the block," but, rather, as opportunities to prepare the workforce and the individual for rigorous expectations yet to come. It includes early identification of future superstars, robust mentorship, preparation, and a detailed career roadmap for the individual, as well as an organizational focus on what it will take to ensure programmatic success potentially years into the future.

Although there is not yet DoD-wide consensus on specific requirements, we believe that over the longer term, it will also likely entail a formal selection process, such as prescreening, and possible board selection. We also believe the Services should continue to make a major effort to recruit into the life cycle logistics community and professionally develop greater numbers of uniformed military personnel in order to ensure sufficient numbers of highly qualified, well-experienced professionals to join their civilian counterparts in competing for these highly sought-after positions. As individuals, PSMs and future PSMs must methodically establish and cultivate professional and personal credibility as competent life cycle logisticians, acquisition professionals, and strategic thinkers with the interdisciplinary perspective, long-range life cycle management vision, personal integrity, intellect, and motivation to successfully execute this important task.

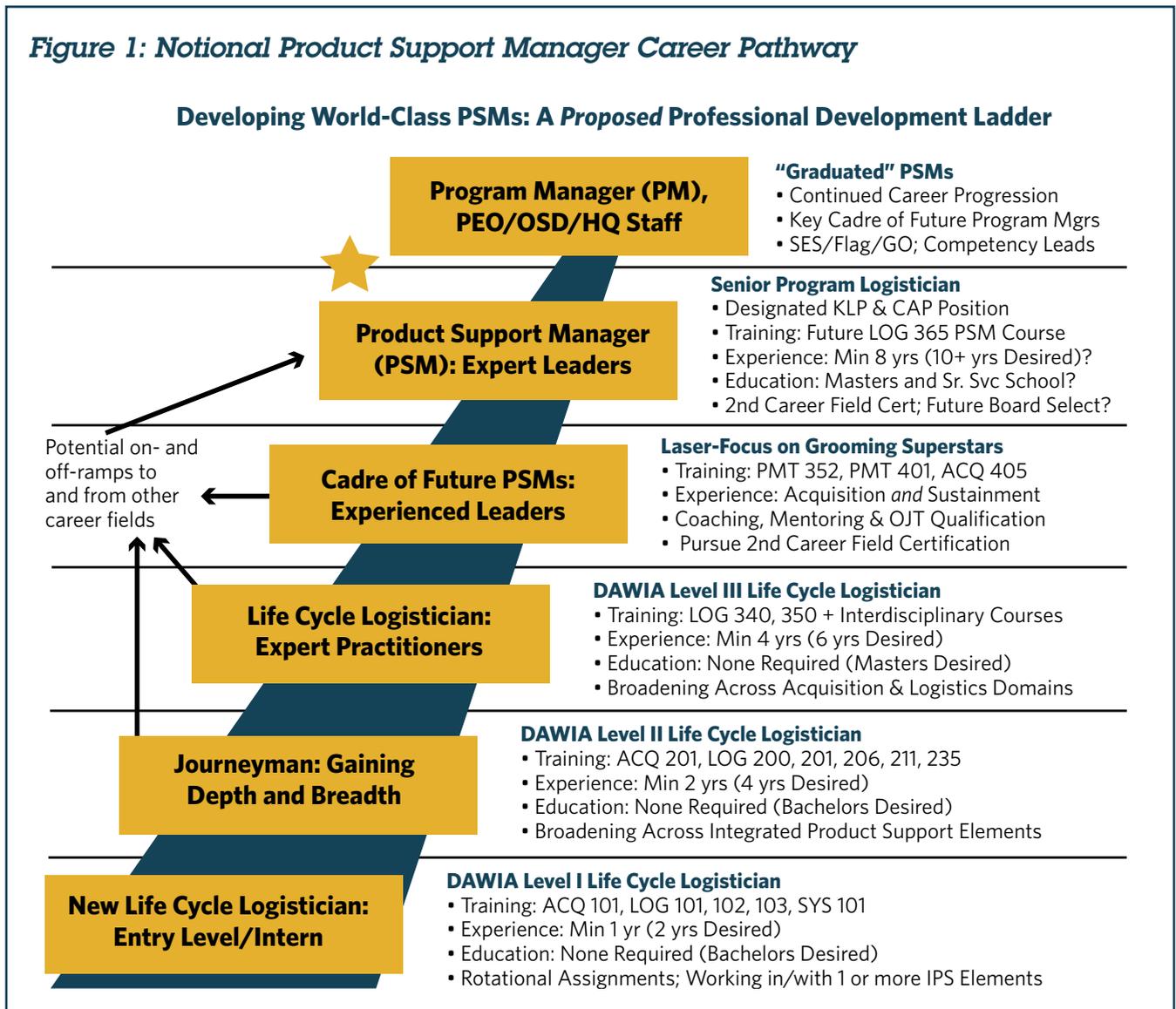
How would all this be achieved? We can start by building a diverse, innovative workforce that thoroughly understands the political, economic, and programmatic realities in which they are called to operate. They must understand both acquisition and sustainment processes, procedures, and requirements. They must understand how industry operates. They must understand how acquisition and sustainment intersect, why life cycle management is so critical, and how to design for supportability from the earliest stages of program development. Next, organizations at every level must cultivate innovation, initiative, creativity, agility, and responsiveness. Understand what it takes to satisfy key stakeholders and customers. Demand excellence. Establish clearly understood metrics, incen-

tives, and expectations, then hold people accountable, and reward desired outcomes. These revolve around the foundational tenet of affordable readiness, and align rather nicely with the mandatory top-level DoD life cycle sustainment metrics of materiel and operational availability, materiel reliability, operations and support cost, and mean down time. Reduced logistics footprint and measures of supply chain efficiency and effectiveness are probably helpful here as well.

What else? First, seek to encourage young life cycle logisticians to strive to grab the PSM "brass ring." Reward competence when it comes to basic technical skills such as supportability analysis, configuration management, and reliability, availability, and maintainability. Does the PSM or PSM candidate understand the basic requirements and responsibilities of the position? Linking warfighter readiness requirements to key product support outcomes? Developing, validating, documenting, refining, and implementing a life-cycle focused product support strategy? Do they (and their parent organization) maintain a broadly-based integrated acquisition and sustainment perspective? Is there a firm commitment to a tight life cycle logistics, systems engineering, test and evaluation, financial management, and program management alignment? Do they seek to understand how these other functional disciplines operate and what their unique considerations and issues are? Do current and future PSMs "play well with others?" Do they communicate constantly and well—logically and compellingly articulating logistics and product support requirements, but also listening and understanding competing demands when design trades are being made?

If we're serious not only about current PSM success but also future PSM professional development, it is imperative that DoD commit to the following four principles: first, we must build "bench strength"—both in terms of breadth and depth. Second, we must commit to identification, mentoring, and coaching of our successors. Third, we must individually and corporately commit to and foster a culture of continuous lifetime learning, and fourth, we must commit to investing in professional development, no matter how few people we have available, how many pressing priorities there are, or how tight the budget is. We must continuously refine the required competency set for life cycle logisticians and product support managers, and indeed build more granular experience

Figure 1: Notional Product Support Manager Career Pathway



requirements, including perhaps a list of specific tasks and required experiences, rather than simply requiring "X" number of years of life cycle logistics experience in an acquisition and/or sustainment organization.

At the end of the day, human capital professional development is not something intended only for good budgetary times, but is particularly important in austere times. We must each resist the temptation to "eat our seed corn" by focusing only on today's mission without regard to investing in the future. This short-sighted perspective risks leaving our current workforce not only burned-out and frustrated, but ill-suited and unprepared to meet the challenges and demands of tomorrow. Just-in-time training has its place, but in the case of a PSM, anything less than a career's preparation risks being akin to an afterthought.

All well and good from a philosophical perspective, but let's put some "shoe leather" on this discussion. What will it take to prepare and groom these current and future superstars

we expect to assume the demands of serving successfully as a world-class product support manager? What can I do?

Set your sights on the position early (or encourage your subordinates and colleagues to do so), and prepare yourself for ascent to that lofty goal. Obtain the necessary life cycle logistics certification requirements and credentials, but don't stop there. Go back and take new or modified classes established after you became certified. In fact, seek to be "fully qualified," rather than simply "fully certified." View 80-hour biennial recertification requirements as a bare-minimum threshold, rather than the ultimate end-state objective. Avail yourself of every continuous learning module and training course identified in the core plus guides of the DAU iCatalog. Begin working on that cross certification into another discipline. Take upper-level courses, such as PMT 352, ACQ 405, and ACQ 450-52. Get a professional certification. Hone your leadership and communications skills. Join Toastmasters. Seek opportunities to career broaden. Move around; look for other programs to develop breadth and depth. Cultivate a network

Resources, Tools, & References

DoD Product Support Policy, Guidance, Training & Tools —

<https://acc.dau.mil/productsupport>

DoD DTM 10-015 —

<https://acc.dau.mil/Community-Browser.aspx?id=443634&lang=en-US>

DAU iCatalog —

<http://icatalog.dau.mil/onlinecatalog/CareerLvl.aspx>

PSM Guidebook —

<https://acc.dau.mil/psm-guidebook>

Defense Acquisition Guidebook —

<https://dag.dau.mil/pages/default.aspx>

DAU Continuous Learning Site —

<http://icatalog.dau.mil/onlinecatalog/tabnavcl.aspx?tab=CLL>

Logistics Community of Practice —

<https://acc.dau.mil/log>

PSM Resource Repository —

<https://acc.dau.mil/psm>

PSM Toolkit —

<https://acc.dau.mil/psmtoolkit>

Life Cycle Logistics career field initiatives, events, and

policies— <https://dap.dau.mil/career/log/blogs/default.aspx>

of top-notch professionals and seek feedback, mentorship, and career guidance from them. Lead by example. Support those around you by helping them succeed, and learn in the process. Take calculated risks. Cultivate personal resiliency and a positive mental attitude. View professional setbacks and perceived career stumbles as learning opportunities, grow from them, and resolve never to repeat the same mistakes. If you are working on a program in early acquisition, seek to broaden into a fielded program already in sustainment. Ask yourself what options you might choose to address key programmatic and budgetary issues facing your program's leadership. Recognize that PSMs are, in many respects, program managers—a program manager of product support. And, like a top-notch program manager, the exceptional PSM will be part accountant, part cheerleader and coach, part negotiator who can both empathize and "play hardball," all at the same time, and of course, be a strong leader with both a strategic and tactical perspective. Sufficiency of PSM experience is less a matter of years than of "scar tissue"—that largely indefinable professional maturity that teaches one how to compromise gracefully and how—from a leadership perspective—to be a persuasively assertive team player, having the wisdom to prioritize for the long term, no matter how the short-term crises mount.

As in the education arena where the difference between accumulation of facts, and the ability to synthesize data and turn it into useable information is a critical distinguishing difference between success and failure, so too must a PSM have

more than a mere mechanical understanding of the acquisition system. Indeed, the PSM must grasp both the tactical details of the life cycle sustainment plan, in addition to the overarching strategy of the acquisition plan, as well as the minute-by-minute conglomeration of criticalities and trivia in between. Recognize too, that a successful PSM would likely be well suited to serve as a future program manager or even a program executive officer.

Additionally, go above and beyond the career field requirements for education. Consider obtaining a baccalaureate degree—or a master's degree—in a logistics, business, management, or technical field. Pursue completion of a certificate program in systems design and operational effectiveness or similar systems engineering/technical education, business administration, and/or supply chain management—but don't stop there. Consider pursuing joint professional military education (JPME) at institutions such as Industrial College of the Armed Forces (ICAF) or the Service war colleges. Future PSMs must possess a broad strategic perspective. Such rigorous educational pursuits will facilitate such perspective, as well as hone the critical thinking skills necessary to be successful in these important endeavors.

Actually, You CAN Get There From Here

There will likely be as many unique pathways to the PSM pinnacle as there are PSMs, and virtually any variety of leadership and life cycle logistics experience is valid if it accumulates and combines the foundational education and training with successful application in the real world. But given the all-encompassing responsibilities of the product support manager, that extent of capability is derived largely from a steady, conscientious plan developed and executed over time!

Although not officially adopted by DoD, the notional career development roadmap ladder at Figure 1 outlines one possible step-by-step professional development strategy the Services, as well current and future PSMs might want to consider tailoring and adopting as their own. The sidebar offers a list of resources, tools and references useful along the way. While we are not advocating mandatory implementation of this approach, if we are serious about ensuring our future PSMs have the requisite skills required for successful execution of the rigorous requirements of the position, we must ensure we have committed to their professional development well in advance.

That time is now. To achieve the successful acquisition and sustainment outcomes the warfighter, the taxpayer, Congress, DoD, and indeed, our own organizational leadership expects, will take all of us—OSD, Services, individual life cycle logisticians, DAU, our industry counterparts—all working together to ensure we have made the appropriate and requisite investments in the professional development of our current and future product support managers.

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