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TECHNICAL REPORT

The Defense Acquisition Workforce

An Analysis of Personnel Trends Relevant to Policy, 1993–2006

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Prepared for the Office of the Secretary of Defense

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Summary

In DoD, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics (OUSD (AT&L)) is responsible for developing a human capital strategic plan for the defense acquisition workforce. The DoD share of the federal acquisition workforce is large in itself, consisting of more than 126,000 military and civilian personnel in over a dozen different services and agencies and representing several functional communities. While much of the strategic human capital planning in DoD occurs within individual services and agencies, DoD-wide visibility over such groups is still essential to effective management and planning for a workforce that cuts across multiple organizational boundaries.

OUSD (AT&L) responsibility for human capital strategic planning, in turn, rests with the Director, AT&L Human Capital Initiatives (HCI), who also serves as the President of the Defense Acquisition University (DAU). AT&L HCI/DAU has asked RAND to conduct workforce analysis in support of strategic human capital planning. Through an analysis of the acquisition workforce (both current snapshots and trends over time), RAND has assisted AT&L HCI/DAU in identifying and better understanding analytical challenges and in developing strategies for improving workforce management in the future. This report documents RAND's efforts.

Data Sources and Methods

The Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) maintains rich data sources on DoD's military and civilian workforces. Because of congressional reporting requirements, even more information is available about the acquisition workforce. However, these data are not readily usable for workforce analysis. To create analytical files, RAND assembled data from several sources and linked records across time and across data files.

DMDC provided RAND with annual civilian inventory and transaction file data covering the period October 1, 1991, to September 30, 2006. The inventory data provide annual demographic "snapshots" of each civilian employee—e.g., his or her grade, location, education level. The transaction data complement the inventory data by noting "transactions" that occur to workers between inventory snapshots. Attrition transactions were of central interest to us.

DMDC also provided RAND with acquisition workforce person file data covering fiscal year (FY) 1992 through FY 2006. These data identify both military and civilian personnel who are part of the acquisition workforce and provide additional information on these workers relevant to the acquisition community.

We also analyzed the military Work Experience file (WEX). The WEX contains information on anyone who has served in the U.S. military since 1975.

The Civilian Acquisition Workforce: Profile

The civilian acquisition workforce hit a low of 77,504 as of September 30, 1999, after the post–Cold War drawdown. It climbed steadily to 119,251 as of September 30, 2005, then declined slightly to 113,605 as of September 30, 2006. The civilian AW is better educated and more experienced than the DoD civilian workforce as a whole. The civilian AW has a disproportionate share of employees who are currently eligible to retire and who are nearing full retirement eligibility—one of the concerns giving rise to this research.

Mitigating the AW's retirement eligibility is that civilians in the AW voluntarily and involuntarily separate from DoD employment at very low rates. In addition, AW employees who become eligible to retire tend to remain employed by DoD for longer than is true of other retirement-eligible DoD civilian employees.

The Careers of Acquisition Workforce Senior Executive Service Members

There were 454 AW Senior Executive Service members (SESs) as of September 30, 2006. Most were long-time DoD civilian employees; 393 of the 454 had been DoD civilian employees on September 30, 1992.

Sixty-one of the 454 were already SESs on September 30, 1992; 307 of the 454 were GS- or GM-15s for at least one year between 1992 and 2005. Durations spent as a GS- or GM-15 varied widely. The time-in-grade of the civilian AW SES population is much more variable than that of military officers.

Of the 454 AW SESs, 398 did not work in multiple military services between 1992 and 2006. For civilian employees, the system appears to both value and reward depth of experience, not breadth. To the extent that the FY 2006 AW SESs did change services, their moves tended to be from the Department of the Navy toward the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) or the Army.

While the norm has been for AW SESs to be long-time DoD civilian employees, there are some exceptions. Still, many so-called "surprising SESs" (those without significant prior civilian federal government experience) were previously high-ranking military officers instead.

The Military Acquisition Workforce and Its Implications for the Civilian Acquisition Workforce

In FY 2006, more than one-third (39.6 percent) of new AW civilian employees had prior military experience. This reflects a steady increase from just over 20 percent in FY 1993 and is consistent with observed increases in the fraction of all DoD civilian new hires who have prior military experience. Though military members represent a minority of the AW overall, they appear to be an important and growing source of future AW civilian leaders, especially in light of the undersized (drawdown-era) cohorts of DoD civilians.

Recommendations

Better definition and tracking of the acquisition workforce would improve workforce planning. Our analyses reveal that imposing a precise definition on the acquisition workforce is difficult, with numerous DoD civilians being recategorized into and out of the acquisition workforce each year. This report analyzes the extent to which these recategorizations reflect substantive changes in the nature of the job a person is performing versus administrative decisions on the part of the defense components to classify a particular organization as an acquisition organization or an individual as an acquisition worker. We define a recategorization to be *administrative* if, for the recategorized employee, his or her agency (e.g., military service), bureau (e.g., major command), functional occupational group, occupational series, and pay plan stayed the same. We find that by this definition, most recategorizations, both into and out of the AW, are administrative, not substantive.

A lack of clarity as to the definition of the workforce and how it varies across organizations is a barrier to effective management of the acquisition workforce and the development of recruitment, training, and retention policies. OSD should work together with the services to revise data collection policy guidance and should use that guidance to improve consistency of human capital planning across organizations. More precisely defining the workforce is central to this outcome.

More-detailed analysis of the current acquisition workforce and historical trends could yield additional insight. In this report, we provide only a few examples of the type of supply analysis that could more fully inform the management process. While considerable workforce analysis should occur at the service or major command level, there are some cross-cutting areas in which a DoD-wide perspective, including a comparison across services and agencies, might be particularly valuable. For example, a better understanding of the careers and performance of individuals in key leadership positions and the careers of acquisition workforce alumni might be particularly useful for both DoD and the services. In addition, an improved understanding of the careers of new civilian hires with prior military experience would improve DoD's civilian acquisition workforce management.

Workforce analysis is only one step in an overall strategic human capital planning effort. In this report, we have provided an overview of the DoD acquisition workforce and examples of the types of workforce supply analyses that can be supported by DoD data. Nevertheless, it is important to note that supply analysis is only one step in a strategic human capital planning effort. Such analyses must be combined with demand analyses. A better understanding of workload drivers for the acquisition workforce, as well as of the relationship between changes in the acquisition process and workload levels, would facilitate strategic human capital planning efforts for the acquisition workforce.