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Navy Contracting Officer Turnover in the Contract Management Process

December 2024

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Prepared for the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA 93943

ACQUISITION RESEARCH PROGRAM
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the impact of military personnel turnover on contract management at the Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA). A contracting competency assessment was administered to both military and civilian acquisition workforce personnel to evaluate their proficiency in buyer tasks and knowledge of seller tasks.

The assessment revealed that buyers at DCMA sites generally demonstrate an "Intermediate" level of proficiency across various contract life cycle phases. Their knowledge of seller tasks was assessed at the "Aware" level, indicating a basic awareness but limited in-depth understanding of contractor competencies. Despite the military contracting officer turnover, DCMA sites continue to fulfill essential defense contracting tasks, suggesting that the presence of experienced military contracting officers may not be critical for mission success.

Further research is needed to design targeted training initiatives to improve buyer proficiency and seller knowledge, as well as to continue competency assessments across both military and civilian personnel. Additionally, accurate coding of billets by NPC and the potential role of Navy Supply Corps officers in contracting officer positions should be examined, especially considering manning shortages and turnover issues.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

LCDR Daniel Dulac is a native of Newington, Connecticut. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with emphasis in Human Resources and International Business at Marist College. He spent two years at Naval Hospital Camp Pendleton as a Logistics Specialist before being selected to attend Officer Candidate School in Newport, Rhode Island earning his commission in February 2015.

His operational assignments include serving as the Food Service Officer and the Sales and Disbursing Officer on board USS PRINCETON (CG 59) homeported in San Diego, CA. While aboard he deployed to 5th and 7th fleet in Support of Operation Inherent Resolve and earned the Battle "E" in 2017. Other operational assignments include serving at Maritime Expeditionary Support Group One (MESG-1) as CSSD Supply Officer out of Imperial Beach, CA. While aboard he deployed to MESG-1 Detachment Guam in 2021 serving as the Det. Supply Officer and in 2022 to Camp Lemonnier Djibouti to support Operation Spartan Shield.

His shore assignments include serving as Supply Officer at Naval Special Warfare Basic Training Command (NSW BTC) from 2018 to 2020 in Coronado, CA. He is currently a MS Candidate at Naval Postgraduate School enrolled in the Defense Contract Management (815) curriculum with an expected graduation of December 2024.

His personal qualifications and awards include the Navy Commendation Medal (2), Navy Achievement Medal (2), Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal along with various campaign and unit awards. He is a qualified Surface Warfare Supply Corps Officer and Navy Expeditionary Supply Corps Officer.

Upon graduation, LCDR Dulac will report to DCMA Boeing PA for a contracting utilization tour, where he will apply the knowledge gained in the classroom to real-world scenarios.

LCDR Andrea Villarreal is currently assigned to DCMA Lockheed Martin Missile Dallas as an Administrative Contracting Officer.

LCDR Villarreal is originally from San Antonio, TX. She is a graduate from Michigan State University, holding a Bachelor of Arts in Finance and received her commission from Officer Candidate School in June 2015. She has her Master of Science

in Defense Contracting from Naval Post Graduate School. Her military education includes the Basic Leadership Course, Supply Basic Course, Expeditionary Combat Course, U.S. Navy Insight into Industry Management Course, Supply Officer Department Head Course, Submarine Officer Basic Course, and JPME Phase 1.

Her operational assignments include Assistant Supply Officer, Naval Mobile Construction Battalion FIVE (NMCB5) out of Port Hueneme, CA. During her tour, she participated in two field training exercises and two INDOPACOM deployments to Okinawa, JPN. Served as Supply Officer for a duration of 9 months for a gapped billet. NMCB5 was awarded the Battle Efficiency "E" award for 2017. Supply Officer, SSGN 727 USS MICHIGAN BLUE out of Bangor, WA. She led her department in the first underway in three years and an extended C74 deployment. USS MICHIGAN was awarded the Battle Efficiency "E" award for 2022.

Her shore assignment was to Joint Operational Logistics (J4), Joint Staff as an Intern in Arlington, VA. During her tour, she coordinated and executed multiple U.S. and multi-national 3-star level strategic engagements. She represented J4 as lead coordinator for the Pacific Area Senior Logistic Symposium (PASOLS) 48 in Hawaii and Logistics Development (LOGDEV) 19 Exercise in Europe. Served as Assistance to Chief of Staff on the J4 Coronavirus-19 Mission Essential Team. The Joint Staff was awarded the Joint Meritorious Unit award for 2019.

LCDR Villarreal's personal decorations include one Joint Service Commendation Medal, two Navy Commendation Medal, one Joint Service Achievement Medal and multiple campaign and unit awards. She is a qualified Submarines Supply Officer, Navy Expeditionary Supply Officer, and Seabee Combat Warfare.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAI	Assessment Associates International
ANSI	American National Standards Institute
AQD	Additional Qualification Designator
BtB	Back to Basics
CCCM	Certified Commercial Contract Manager
CPCM	Certified Professional Contracts Manager
CMBOK	Contract Management Body of Knowledge
CMS	Contract Management Standard
DAWIA	Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act
DCMA	Defense Contract Management Agency
DFARS	DoD Federal Acquisition Regulation Supplement
DoD	Department of Defense
DoD IG	Department of Defense Inspector General
DoD OIG	Department of Defense Office of Inspector General
FAI	Federal Acquisition Institute
FAR	Federal Acquisition Regulation
FY	Fiscal Year
GAO	Government Accountability Office
IRB	Institution Review Board
KSA	Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities
NCMA	National Contract Management Association
NOBC	Navy Officer Billet Classification
NPC	Naval Personnel Command
NPS	Naval Postgraduate School
OFPP	Office of Federal Procurement Policy
PCS	Permanent Change of Station
SSP	Subspecialty System Code

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I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an introduction to our research. We first present a background of government contracting and military personnel job assignment as it relates to our research topic. We then provide our problem statement and the purpose of our research, followed by the method in which we conduct our research. Next, we provide the limitations and benefits of our research. Finally, we conclude with the outline of our report.

A. BACKGROUND

Government contracting is vital to the success of the U.S. military, which heavily relies on government contracts to provide essential goods, services, and technological solutions to stay ahead of the competition (Levy, 2019). As shown in Figure 1, the Department of Defense (DoD) made up 60% of the United States' overall Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 obligations in contract dollars, highlighting the importance of defense contracting in supporting the warfighter (Sehgal, 2024). However, time constraints, erosion of skills, and the operational workload leave U.S. service members in contracting positions overburdened; therefore, it is more efficient to tap into private sector expertise to fill the gaps (Kopp & Chriscaden, 2020). To fill these gaps, the DoD commonly turns to the group of defense contractors known as the Big 6: Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Raytheon Technologies, Northrop Grumman, General Dynamics, and BAE Systems. The military has intentionally positioned defense contracting officers within the offices of the Big 6 to build key partnerships and manage the complexities of defense contracting (Sanders, 2023). Defense contracting is a time-consuming, detail-oriented process that adds to the complexity of government regulations and the criticality of the technology being acquired (Levy, 2019). Therefore, it is critical that personnel in the acquisition workforce possess the necessary knowledge, tools, continuous training, and developed skills to execute major weapon system acquisitions effectively and efficiently (Levy, 2019). The DoD has strategically utilized government employees, both civilian and military personnel, to build a robust acquisition workforce to meet the mission of delivering capabilities to the warfighter. Unfortunately, defense contracting officers are

not exempt from job assignments and are subject to rotation even when working on major weapon system acquisitions.

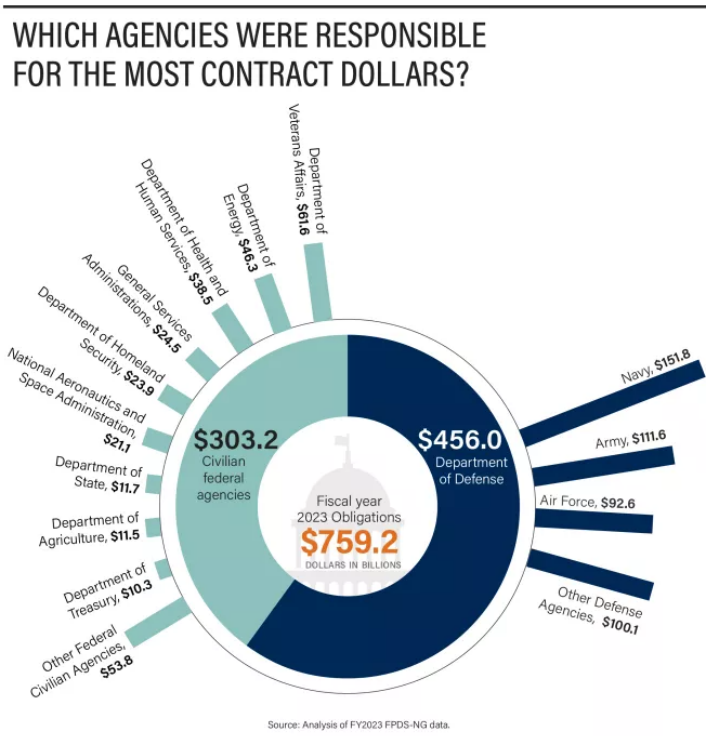

Figure 1. FY 23 Contracting Dollars Obligated Source: Sehgal (2024).

Service members are familiar with the term permanent change of station (PCS), the relocation of service members and their families from one duty station to another to take on new responsibilities and adapt to the military's constantly changing requirements. PCS is a foundational aspect of military life, allowing the military to respond to strategic needs while enabling the service members to grow professionally by gaining valuable experience through job rotation and diverse experiences (Hankins, 2021; R. Smith & Jones, 2020). While the intention of rotation is meant to benefit the service member and commands, often the disadvantages are overlooked. When a service member transfers from a command, they take with them a wealth of knowledge and a developed skill set that takes their replacement months, if not years, to acquire. Training new service members takes time and valuable resources. Unfortunately, many commands face a series of challenges that can hinder the training of new hires, such as a lack of manpower, hard deadlines, and ongoing major operations. The challenge to get up to speed and be a

functional member of the command becomes more difficult as service members progress through the ranks.

The role of a defense contracting officer in managing a major defense contract is crucial. They are the primary liaison between the government and contractors, responsible for ensuring compliance with rules, regulations, and contractual obligations (R. G. Rendon, 2016). Knowledge of the rules and regulations governing defense contracts is paramount for the contracting officer to navigate the complexities of procurement processes, risk mitigation, and to protect the interests of the government and taxpayers (A. Cohen, 2019). Understanding the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR), DoD FAR Supplement (DFARS), and agency-specific guidelines is essential to effectively negotiate, administer, and oversee contracts (Schwartz, 2021). With this expertise, contracting officers shall interpret and apply regulations accurately, address potential legal issues, and enforce contractual provisions to maintain accountability and transparency throughout the contract life cycle (Schwartz, 2021). Additionally, staying abreast of evolving regulations and industry best practices enables contracting officers to adapt strategies, identify opportunities for cost savings or performance improvements, and uphold the integrity and efficiency of major defense acquisitions (Schwartz, 2021). In major defense contracts, the relationship between the contracting officer and the seller (contractor) directly impacts the success and efficiency of the procurement process (A. Cohen, 2019). Cultivating a strong and collaborative partnership with the seller fosters open communication, mutual understanding, and trust, which are essential for navigating the complexities of defense acquisitions (A. Cohen, 2019). By establishing clear lines of communication and building rapport, the contracting officer can effectively convey the government's requirements, expectations, and objectives while also understanding the seller's capabilities, constraints, and concerns (A. Cohen, 2019). By resolving issues, negotiating contract terms, and addressing disputes promptly, this collaboration ensures that both parties work together toward the common goal of delivering high-quality products or services that meet the military's needs (A. Cohen, 2019). Moreover, a positive and cooperative relationship with the seller fosters innovation, promotes cost-effective solutions, and enhances the overall efficiency and effectiveness of major defense acquisitions (R. G. Rendon, 2016).

The duration of a major defense contract can vary significantly depending on several factors, such as the complexity of the project, procurement regulations, budgetary considerations, and unforeseen challenges. The timeline for a major defense contract from award to completion can range from several years to over a decade, highlighting the meticulous planning and rigorous processes involved in ensuring the success and integrity of defense acquisitions (Mackenzie & Smith, 2020). In a 10-year contracting life cycle, the sellers will interact with four or more defense contracting officers (due to their rotation every 2–3 years). Each contracting officer brings their unique experiences and insights, and when military contracting officers rotate, they take with them a wealth of knowledge and relationships that cannot be easily replaced or rebuilt, highlighting the importance of a level transition between the defense contracting officers in major weapons systems acquisitions (Johnson, 2018). This background information is used to present our problem statement in the next section.

B. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Even though the percentage of military service members occupying contracting billets is low, these positions rotate frequently, and that rotation may have an impact on these service members' competency levels. Specifically, the proficiency level of performing the buyer's task and the knowledge level of the seller's task. We have shared our problem statement and transition to discuss the purpose of our research.

C. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The DoD acquisition workforce plays a critical role in delivering essential capabilities to the warfighter. However, it faces numerous challenges that hinder its ability to fulfill this mission effectively, particularly in the context of rapidly advancing defense technologies and shifting geopolitical landscapes (J. Smith, 2021). A recent audit by the Department of Defense Office of Inspector General (DoD OIG), Report No. DoDIG-2022-104, titled "Audit of Sole-Source Depot Maintenance Contracts" (July 21, 2022), highlighted specific shortcomings in contract negotiations. The audit found that in 21 of 34 sole-source depot maintenance contracts, DoD contracting officials lacked proper measures to ensure justified spending which led to inflated costs and diminished

readiness (DoD OIG, 2023, p. 17). These findings underscore the persistent challenges within the acquisition workforce that need to be addressed to ensure more effective and efficient contracting practices.

Military contracting officers, who play a role in the acquisition workforce, oversee the procurement of goods and services for defense contracting. We think there may be a competency issue, specifically with military contracting officer billets. Unlike their civilian counterparts, military contracting personnel come with limited experience and training prior to rotating into the contacting officer role. The frequent rotation amongst military contracting officers lowers their competency level, which may increase the issues the GAO (2023b) noted, such as cost overruns, schedule delays, and performance requirements.

Thus, the purpose of this case study is to conduct a competency assessment and compare it to the turnover rate for military contracting personnel in the contract management process. Through this research we aim to offer a deeper understanding of the two as they relate to the acquisition workforce, highlighting the critical impact of personnel stability on mission effectiveness (Thompson et al., 2020). Furthermore, we seek to provide solutions and recommendations based on the data collected that can be used to support future research. Next, we state our research questions.

D. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

We will accomplish the purpose of this case study by answering the following research questions.

1. What is the military contracting officer turnover rate at the Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA)?
2. What is the proficiency level of those performing buyer tasks at DCMA?
3. What is the knowledge level of seller tasks at DCMA?
4. Is the role of military contracting officers at DCMA critical to meeting mission objectives?

E. RESEARCH METHOD

We answer these questions by conducting a competency assessment on the contracting workforce (both military and civilian) and collecting data on military

turnovers. We will be collecting survey responses on military officers' and their civilian counterparts' competency levels at DCMA. We will be collecting data on military turnovers and personnel gaps as well. After the data has been collected, we conduct an analysis of the findings, which will reveal the answers to our research questions. We determined our research method. Now we discuss the limitations of our research in the next section.

F. LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

This study is limited to the contracting workforce at DCMA Boeing PA, DCMA Missiles Dallas, and DCMA Missiles Orlando. The data for this research was collected through an anonymous, voluntary survey based on self-assessment, which means it depends significantly on participants' willingness to engage and provide honest responses. Due to the voluntary and anonymous nature of the survey, there is a risk that the data may not accurately represent the views of the entire contracting workforce at the participating DCMAs. Furthermore, as the survey relied on individuals' self-assessments of their own proficiencies and their knowledge of seller competencies, it may be influenced by personal biases. Differences in participants' experiences, training, and interpretations of specific competencies could result in inconsistencies, impacting the data's reliability and completeness. These limitations must be taken into account when interpreting the study's results.

This study is limited by the data provided by the Naval Personnel Command (NPC) regarding the military turnover rate at the participating DCMAs. While the data serves as a key input for analysis, it may not be entirely accurate, current, or comprehensive. Changes in personnel status, reporting delays, or inconsistencies in data collection methods could contribute to potential inaccuracies or gaps in the data. As a result, the findings of this study should be interpreted with caution, as the limitations of the available data may impact the generalizability and precision of the conclusions drawn.

G. BENEFITS OF RESEARCH

This study offers valuable insights by analyzing competency assessments on the contracting workforce, including both military and civilian personnel at DCMA Boeing PA, DCMA Missiles Orlando, and DCMA Missiles Dallas. Also, this study offers insight on Navy military contracting officer's turnover rate at these DCMA locations. By examining these trends, the study highlights strengths and identifies areas for improvement within the workforce. This analysis allows the participating DCMAs to pinpoint specific competency gaps and design future training programs that directly address these needs. The findings can inform the creation of tailored, command-specific training initiatives that align with the unique challenges faced by each location, ultimately improving workforce proficiency and enhancing retention.

H. OUTLINE OF REPORT

This report is organized into six chapters. Chapter I provides a background, problem statement, purpose of the research, research questions, research method, limitations of the research, benefits of the research, and an outline of the report. Chapter II provides a literature review, covering auditability theory, competency modeling, GAO reports, and DoD Inspector General (IG) reports. Chapter III provides an overview of DCMA, to include DCMA background, DCMA contracting workforce, and contract management detailing and billeting. Chapter IV provides our methodology, covering survey development, survey deployment, and competency levels. Chapter V provides results of the competency assessment, the results of the analyses of military turnover, and discusses if there is any relationship between competency and turnover. Chapter VI covers the summary, conclusion, and areas of further research.

I. SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an introduction to our research. We provided background related to our research topic. We provided our problem statement, purpose of our research, research questions, and research method. We covered the limitations and benefits of our research and provided an outline of the report. Chapter II will discuss the literature review.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a literature review that sets the foundation for our research. We first discuss auditability theory and discuss how it leads to organizational success. Then, we discuss competency modeling to highlight the importance of expertise and how it impacts contract management. Next, we provide GAO reports that identify DoD contract management high-risk areas and areas in need of improvement. After, we provide DoD IG reports that echo the DoD contract management issues by detailing specific problems with recommendations. Finally, we discuss other research on competency assessments of the DoD contracting workforce.

A. AUDITABILITY THEORY

"The theory of auditability incorporates aspects of governance which emphasizes effective internal controls, capable processes, and competent personnel" (J. M. Rendon & R. G. Rendon, 2015, pg. 715). As illustrated in Figure 2, these components are interrelated with each requiring certain attributes to make whole. An organization will only achieve success once it has effectively addressed all three of these critical areas.

"The internal controls aspect, in relation to auditability in organizations, refers to the objective of enforcing internal control policies to ensure compliance with laws and regulations, monitoring procedures to assess enforcement, and reporting material weaknesses" (J. M. Rendon & R. G. Rendon, 2015, pg. 716). "Process capability is measured in terms of processes that are fully established, institutionalised, mandated, integrated with other organisational processes, periodically measured, and continuously improved" (J. M. Rendon & R. G. Rendon, 2015, pg. 716). In particular, the importance of robust procurement processes has been highlighted in studies focused on the public sector, where the need for transparency and accountability is increasing. (J. M. Rendon & R. G. Rendon, 2015) Within the DoD, the auditability of operations heavily relies on the maturity and capability of contracting processes, which are critical for ensuring effective oversight and operational efficiency (J. M. Rendon & R. G. Rendon, 2015).

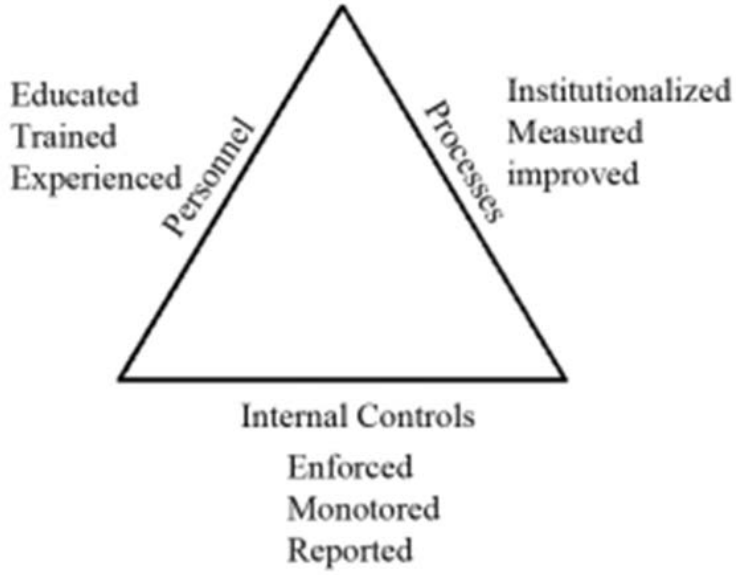

Figure 2. Auditability Triangle. Source: J. M. Rendon and R. G. Rendon (2016).

For personnel in an organization to be educated, trained, and experienced, they must be competent. Competent personnel are crucial, as their expertise and training directly impact the organization's ability to mitigate risks and respond to challenges (Frame, 1999). The DoD adopted the National Contract Management Association (NCMA) Contract Management Standard (CMS) and defined what it means to be a competent contracting officer: "The purpose of the Contract Management Standard is to describe contract management in terms of the processes and stakeholder relationships created through the integration and interaction of job tasks and competencies, and the purposes they serve" (NCMA, 2019, p. 1). Held to this standard, service members are considered competent contracting officers who are well educated, trained and experienced to perform their duties.

Because our research is focused on competency, the next section will discuss competency modeling.

B. COMPETENCY MODELING

To understand competency modeling, we must first define competency. According to Chouhan and Srivastava's (2014) article "Understanding Competencies and Competency Modeling – A Literature Survey,"

> Competencies include the collection of success factors necessary for achieving important results in a specific job or work role in a particular organization. Success factors are combinations of knowledge, skills, and abilities (more historically called "KSA's") that are described in terms of specific behaviors and are demonstrated by superior performers in those jobs or work roles. (p. 16)

Now that we have defined competency, we can define a competency model. According to Chouhan and Srivastava's (2014) definition,

> A competency model is an organizing framework that lists competencies required for effective performance in a specific job, job family (e.g., a group of related jobs), and organization. The model is organized into tiers of competencies and includes descriptions of the activities and behaviors associated with each competency. Competency models are often highly tailored to the organization. As such, the elements of a competency model communicate, in clear terms, the circumstances and conditions of performance. Individual competencies are organized into competency models to enable people in an organization or profession to understand, discuss, and apply the competencies to workforce performance. (p. 18)

Figure 3 is an example of a competency model used by Assessment Associates International (AAI) to help organizations identify talent during the hiring process (AAI, n.d.). The model is organized into basic organizational competencies, with activities and/or behaviors associated within each competency as described by Chouhan and Srivastava (2014). Effective organizations use competency models to standardize knowledge and performance expectations, assist in recruiting and training, and ensure employee competencies are aligned with organizational goals. Any organization looking to improve its workforce would be wise to perform a competency assessment. A competency assessment can help management determine the workforce's overall knowledge and proficiency and detect areas that require further development. Because our research is focused on the DoD competency model, the next section goes into further detail about the DoD competency model.

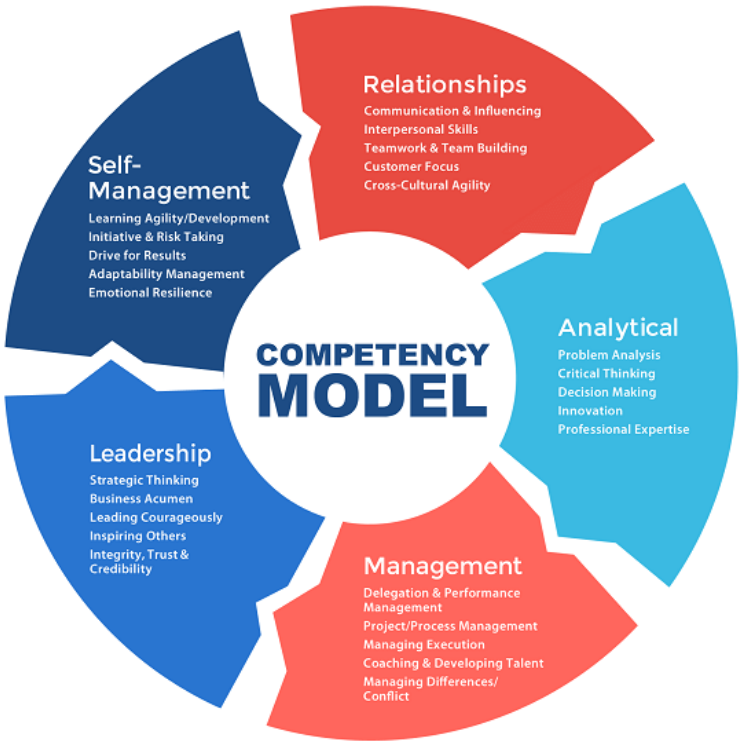

Figure 3. Competency Model Example. Source: AAI (n.d.).

C. DOD CONTRACT COMPETENCY MODELING

In 2020, the DoD transitioned to a new contract competency model. "The DoD Contracting Competency Model is based on the National Contract Management Association's (NCMA) *Contract Management Standard* (CMS) Publication, an American National Standards Institute (ANSI) accredited publication (reference ANSI/ NCMA ASD 1–2019). This satisfies section 861 of the Fiscal Year 2020 National Defense Authorization Act" (Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, 2020, p.2). Section 861 of the FY 2020 National Defense Authorization Act directed the DoD to change its contract management training and establish a competency model that was based on an industry standard that was accredited by a third party. The adoption of the CMS was a giant step toward addressing a decades-long GAO concern. Since 1992, the GAO has identified contract management as a high-risk area due to challenges with its workforce, inadequate oversight, and vulnerability to fraud, waste, and abuse amongst other issues. Not only did the DoD adopt the CMS, but the Federal Acquisition Institute (FAI; n.d.) followed suit in 2023. Additionally, the "Office of

Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) adopted DoD's contracting competencies to ensure that DoD and civilian agency contracting workforces develop common skills that may be transferable between agencies" (Field, 2023, p. 4). By adopting the CMS, the DoD, other government entities, and government civilian organizations would now follow the same practices and speak the same contracting language. The continued CMS adoption can be seen as industry partners including "Leidos, The FedPROPEL Institute, Lockheed Martin, Federal Publications Seminars, SMX, Bidscale, and BMRA have adopted the CMS" (Cleven, 2024, p. 48). Additionally, higher education institutes including the University of California Irvine, University of Maryland Global Campus, and Webster University have aligned contract management programs and curriculum to the competencies based on the CMS (Cleven, 2024). From the NCMA's *Contract Management Body of Knowledge (CMBOK)*, "the CMS provides stability by integrating and standardizing the common job tasks and competencies that produce significant contract management deliverables" (NCMA, 2019, p. 21). The CMBOK goes on to say, "when contract management terminology, practices, policies, and processes are interpreted consistently, the likelihood of reaching agreement on matters relating to contract intent and interpretation is increased" (NCMA, 2019, p. 21).

Unlike the previous DoD competency model, the CMS considers both buyer and seller perspectives while using a life-cycle approach:

> The CMS presents what buyers should know, and equally as important, it presents what sellers should know. Depending on the contract life cycle stage (i.e., "pre-award," "award," or "post-award"), each function has its own job tasks, competencies, and deliverables. However, at other points in the contract life cycle, these job tasks, competencies, and deliverables come together and direct interaction between buyers and sellers occurs. (NCMA, 2019, p. 21)

This is an important distinction from the previous model, as understanding both buyer and seller perspectives improves communication and understanding of position, reduces negotiation time, builds trust, and ensures both parties are getting the best value for their time, effort, and money. Understanding the relationship of buyers and sellers in contract management is crucial for decision making. R. G. Rendon reflects on his

personal experiences that shaped his appreciation and value in understanding both sides of the buyer and seller perspectives in contracting:

> I have always known the value of understanding "the other side" of contracting and how my procurement decisions would impact the seller's activities. For example, during acquisition planning, when selecting the procurement approach, contract type, award strategy, or other contract terms and conditions, I always tried to anticipate how my decisions would impact industry and the potential offerors as they conduct their bid/no-bid decision and develop their proposal strategy. Furthermore, I would consider how my decision to use a fixed-price contract and a trade-off award strategy would affect the seller's business development activities (such as developing market strategy and assessing competition) and affect the seller's effort to develop a winning strategy to capture the business. The implications of the buyer's contracting decisions on the seller's contracting strategy are an important knowledge area for contract management professionals, especially the federal government contracting workforce. (2017, p. 10)

Recognizing both the buyer and seller perspectives creates a balanced dynamic that promotes collaboration, reduces conflict, and leads to more successful contracting outcomes.

As seen in Figure 4, the CMS framework is structured in a top-down approach. The guiding "principles apply to all contract managers in all phases of the contract life cycle" (NCMA, 2023, p.2). The guiding principles include skills and roles, contract principles, standards of conduct, regulatory compliance, situational assessment, team dynamics, and communication and documentation (NCMA, 2023). These guiding principles feed into the contract life-cycle phases (pre-award, award, post-award). The pre-award phase consists of two domains: Develop Solicitation and Develop Offer. The award phase consists of one domain: Form Contract. The post-award phase consists of two domains: Perform Contract and Close Contract (NCMA, 2023). The five domains are further broken down into competencies and associated buyer/seller job tasks. Because this research is focused on conducting a competency assessment using the CMS, it is necessary for us to examine other research and reporting that has been conducted regarding DoD competency levels, including reporting done by the GAO. The next section provides a discussion of GAO reporting.

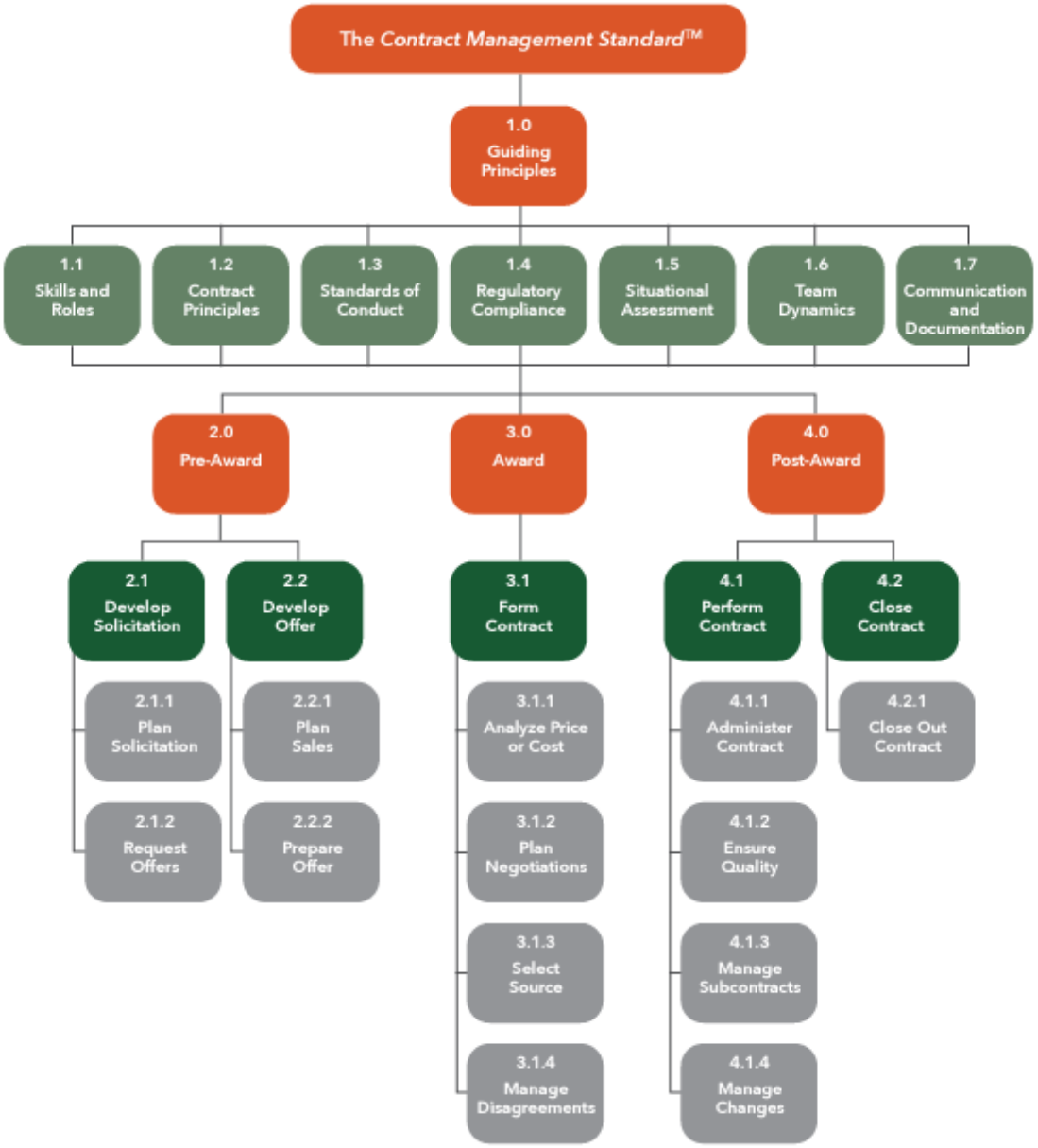

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Figure 4. The NCMA Contract Management Standard. Source: NCMA (2023).

D. GAO REPORTS

The GAO's (2023b) *Performance and Accountability Report, Fiscal Year 2023* listed DoD contract management as a high-risk area. DoD Contract Management is an area that the government has identified as "vulnerable to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement or in need of transformation" (GAO 2023b, p. 36). The April 2023(a) GAO *High-Risk Series* report stated, the "DoD spends hundreds of billions of dollars

annually on contracts for goods and services. If these contracts are not well-managed, the department could lack the information needed to make informed and cost-effective decisions and reduce its vulnerability to various risks. For these reasons, we added DoD's contract management to our High-Risk List in 1992" (p. 209). While the DoD has made progress over the last 30 years, it has not been enough to alleviate the GAO's concerns, and DoD contract management continues to be closely monitored. Figure 5 acknowledges that the DoD realizes there is still work to be done to fix its contract management issues but it also reports that "No changes" have been made to fix this issue since the last update. The DoD will need to continue increasing its acquisition workforce size, create an action plan, demonstrate progress, and continuously improve the skill sets of its workforce for DoD contract management to be removed from the GAO's High-Risk List. In addition to appearing in GAO reporting, contract management has been widely discussed in DoD Inspector General (DoD IG) reports. The next section provides a discussion of contract management in DoD IG reporting.

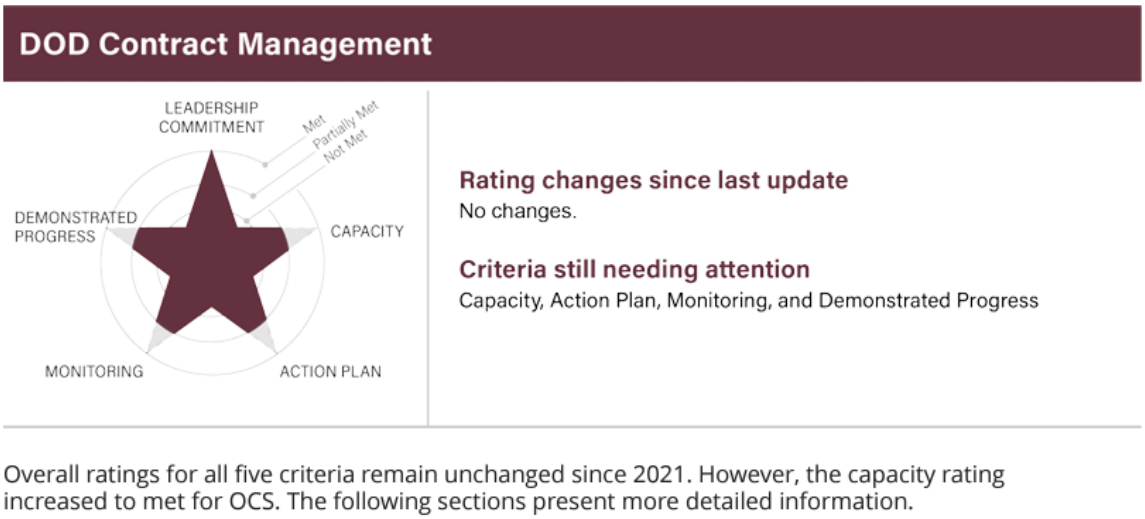

Figure 5. DoD Contract Management High-Risk Area Progress Criteria Rating. Source: GAO (2023a).

E. DOD INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORTS

Contract management has consistently been identified as a major challenge by the DoD IG, similar to GAO reporting. In the FY 2024 report on the *Top DoD Management and Performance Challenges*, contracting is ranked as the third most significant issue within the DoD (DoD OIG, 2023). The 2024 report highlighted two issues in particular,

current government regulations impeding contracting officers' ability to make informed decisions and errors by contracting officials, as contracting's biggest transgressions (DoD OIG, 2023). Several examples of government contracting regulations impeding a contracting official's ability to make an informed decision can be seen throughout the FY 2024 DoD OIG report.

> Report No. DoDIG-2022-104, "Audit of Sole-Source Depot Maintenance Contracts," July 21, 2022, examined a sample of sole-source depot maintenance contracts to determine whether the DoD negotiated fair and reasonable prices. The report concluded that in 21 of 34 contracts, DoD contracting officials may have failed to negotiate fair and reasonable prices, leading to increased costs and decreased readiness. (DoD OIG, 2023, p. 17)

Additionally, the *Audit of the Business Model for TransDigm Group Inc. and Its Impact on Department of Defense Spare Parts Pricing* (DoDIG-2022-043) "estimated that TransDigm earned an excess profit of at least $20.8 million on 150 contracts due to the lack of reliable information for contracting officials to perform cost analysis" (DoD OIG, 2023, p.17).

The second contract management issue the DoD OIG highlighted was errors by contracting officials. The FY 2024 report stated, "Contracting officers' failure to follow or properly interpret regulatory policy contributed to suboptimal contract outcomes. In DoDIG-2022-104, the DoD OIG found that contracting officials did not develop well-defined requirements for 9 of 34 sole-source depot maintenance contracts, as required by the FAR" (DoD OIG, 2023, p. 18), increasing the likelihood of incurring additional costs. Additionally, an audit of sole-source depot maintenance contracts found that "Contracting officials did not consistently comply with Federal and DoD acquisition regulations. This led to cost escalation of at least $71.9 million and negative impacts on mission completion and readiness" (DoD OIG, 2023, p. 18). Another DoD IG report dated "May 9, 2023, found that in 17 of 63 terminations examined, contracting officers did not document adequate rationale for settling costs and may have inappropriately reimbursed contractors up to $22.3 million" (DoD OIG, 2023, p. 18).

The DoD IG continues to list contract management as one of its top management challenges, for good reason, and it would not be a surprise if contract management made

an appearance in next year's report. In the next section, we discuss other research conducted on competency assessments.

F. OTHER RESEARCH ON COMPETENCY ASSESSMENTS

Graduate contract management curricula at NPS has been the inspiration for many NPS student theses and faculty reports. The Calhoun Collection in the Dudley Knox Library has a repository of research dedicated to the NCMA CMS and assessments of organizations utilizing it. In 2013, Jonathan Albano "conducted a detailed comparative analysis of the contracting competencies established by the DoD, the FAI, and the NCMA. It identified the similarities and differences in the models and competencies" (Albano, 2013, p. i). He determined that the "level of detail provided in the CMBOK is much greater than that of DoD/FAI competency model" (Albano, 2013, p. i). As previously discussed, the CMS was adopted in 2020, which led to R. G. Rendon's creation of a CMS-based competency assessment instrument (R. G. Rendon and Schwartz, 2020). Several students have used R. G. Rendon's competency assessment instrument since its creation. The following are some of the theses that have utilized R. G. Rendon's CMS-based competency assessment in their research:

1. Analysis of Marine Corps Systems Command Contracting Workforce Competency Assessment by Spencer Hayashi and Alex J. Pfannenstiel (2020)

In a previously completed workforce contracting competency assessment of Marine Corps Systems Command, Hayashi and Pfannenstiel found that "buyer ratings trend higher, being 4.01, 3.87, and 3.76 for pre-award, award, and post-award, respectively, compared to seller ratings at 3.23, 3.39, and 3.28 for the same respective phases" (2020, p.45). They noted that Manage Disagreement was the lowest rated buyer competency and Request Offer was the highest rated. Manage Disagreement was also the lowest rated seller competency and Plan Negotiations was the highest rated competency. They also found that buyer proficiency ratings for the post-award phase were the lowest of the contract life-cycle (Hayashi and Pfannenstiel, 2020).

2. Analysis of NGB Enterprise Contract Management Competencies by Richard W. Powell II (2021)

In a previously completed workforce contracting competency assessment of the U.S. Army National Guard Bureau, Powell found that "the overall buyer proficiency rating being higher than the overall seller knowledge rating" (2021, p. 34). He noted that Manage Disagreement was the lowest rated buyer competency and Ensure Quality was the highest rated. Manage Disagreement was also the lowest rated seller competency and Administer Contract was the highest rated competency. He also found that buyer proficiency and seller knowledge ratings for the pre-award phase were the lowest of the contract life-cycle (Powell, 2021).

3. Analysis of Army Contracting Workforce Competency Assessment by Jamie N. Davies, David Markelz, and Stephanie A. Rostermundt (2021)

In a previously completed a workforce contracting competency assessment of Army Contracting commands comparing survey respondents at Fort Sam Houston and in Orlando. Davies, Markelz, and Rostermundt found that "the research findings indicate buyer task proficiency ratings [were] higher than seller task knowledge level ratings" (2021, p.v). They noted that Manage Disagreement was the lowest rated buyer competency for both Fort Sam Houston and Orlando. Manage Subcontracts was also the lowest rated seller competency for both Fort Sam Houston and Orlando (Davies et al., 2021).

4. Analysis of the Marine Corps Expeditionary Contracting Workforce Competency Assessment by Bradley A. Hoover (2021)

After conducting a workforce contracting competency assessment of the Marine Corps Expeditionary Contracting Platoons, Hoover found "as expected, the surveyed population scored higher in overall in buyer proficiency than they did in seller knowledge" (2021, p. 59). He noted that Manage Disagreement was the lowest rated buyer competency and Request Offer was the highest rated. Manage Disagreement was also the lowest rated seller competency and Plan Negotiations was the highest rated competency. He also found that buyer proficiency and seller knowledge ratings for the pre-award phase were the highest of the contract life-cycle (Hoover, 2021).

G. SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a literature review that sets the foundation for our research. We first discussed auditability theory and discussed how it leads to organizational success. Then we discussed competency modeling to highlight the importance of expertise and how it impacts contract management. Next, we discussed GAO reports that identified DoD contract management as a high-risk area in need of improvement. After, we discussed DoD IG reports that echoed the DoD contract management issues in GAO reporting and noted specific problems and recommendations. Finally, we provided other research on competency assessments of the DoD contracting workforce. The next chapter will discuss the DCMA.

III. DCMA

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the DCMA organization as the setting of this research. First, we discuss the purpose DCMA serves in government contracting and how it came to be the organization that it is today. Next, we discuss an overview of the DCMA contracting workforce. Within the DCMA Contracting Workforce section, we go into detail about the role of the military contracting officer. Then, we discuss an overview of the Navy Supply Corps officer contracting billeting process. Finally, we close out this chapter with a discussion on Navy contracting officer turnover.

A. DCMA BACKGROUND

DCMA was established in 1990 as a result of the Defense Management Review, which aimed to streamline and improve the oversight of defense contractors (DCMA, 2024). DCMA's mission statement is "We are the independent eyes and ears of DoD and its partners, enhancing warfighter lethality by ensuring timely delivery of quality products, and providing relevant acquisition insight supporting affordability and readiness" (DCMA, 2024, p.1). Its creation consolidated several existing contract management organizations to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in overseeing the acquisition process. DCMA is responsible for ensuring that defense contractors comply with contract terms and deliverables, providing quality assurance and managing cost, schedule, and performance metrics (Pugh, 2022). This role is crucial in supporting the military by ensuring that the equipment and services procured meet the necessary standards and are delivered in a timely and cost-effective manner (Pugh, 2022). The agency also plays a significant role in resolving contractual disputes and providing oversight to mitigate risks associated with defense procurement (DCMA, 2024). Now that we have an understanding of DCMA as an organization, we take a deeper look at the DCMA contracting workforce in the next section.

B. DCMA CONTRACTING WORKFORCE

DCMA embraces a philosophy that integrates both civilian and military personnel into its workforce to enhance its support for the warfighter. Figure 6 displays the effort of

DCMA's combined military and civilian workforce, breaking down the number of workers, locations serviced, number of contracts, and value in dollars of the operation as of 2024 (DCMA, 2024). This blended approach leverages the unique strengths of each group to improve the effectiveness of defense contract management (J. T. Smith, 2023). Military personnel bring operational experience and a deep understanding of the requirements and challenges faced by the armed forces, ensuring that contracts align with military needs and standards (J. T. Smith, 2023). Civilian employees, on the other hand, contribute specialized expertise in areas such as logistics, finance, and engineering, offering technical proficiency and continuity in contract management (J. T. Smith, 2023). By combining these perspectives, DCMA fosters a more comprehensive approach to managing defense contracts, leading to more effective oversight, better quality control, and timely delivery of goods and services crucial to military operations (J. T. Smith, 2023). Next, we will discuss the military contracting role in DCMA.

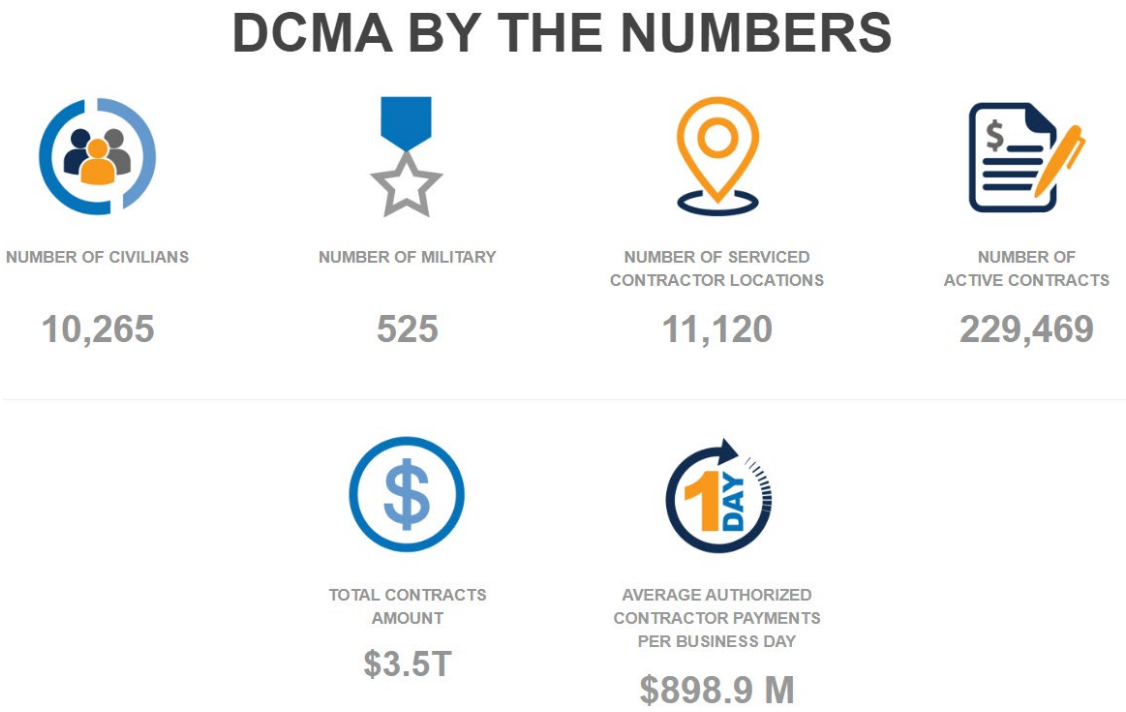

Figure 6. Q3 FY24 DCMA Data. Source: DCMA (2024).

C. DCMA MILITARY CONTRACTING ROLE

Throughout the contract management life cycle, contracting officers at DCMA are pivotal to ensuring that defense contracts are executed in accordance with their terms and

conditions (DCMA, 2024). This involves a range of responsibilities aimed at overseeing and managing contract performance after the contract award has been made. Key duties include monitoring contractor performance to ensure compliance with technical requirements, schedules, and cost constraints (NCMA, 2019). Contracting officers are tasked with evaluating the quality of deliverables and addressing any issues related to contract modifications or disputes (M. R. Jones, 2023). They also play a crucial role in managing the financial aspects of the contract, such as reviewing invoices and ensuring that payments are made correctly and in accordance with the contract terms (M. R. Jones, 2023). Additionally, contracting officers must coordinate with various stakeholders, including the military end-users, to resolve any operational issues that may arise and facilitate effective communication between the contractor and the government. Our research focuses not only on the competency assessment of the contracting workforce but also on the turnover rate of Navy contracting officers at DCMA. Navy contracting officers are assigned to their DCMA position based on the detailing and billeting process. The next section in this chapter provides a discussion of detailing and billeting for Navy contracting officers.

D. CONTRACT MANAGEMENT DETAILING AND BILLETING

Naval officer detailing occurs at Naval Personnel Command (NPC), headquartered in Millington, TN. According to the Officer Distribution – Process publication, MILPERSMAN 1301–102, placement officers, more commonly known as detailers, "are charged with the responsibility of properly executing the policies of NAVPERSCOM and ensuring the best match between billet requirements and officer qualifications" (NPC, 2015). To best match billet requirements and officer qualifications, each billet is "coded" to ensure the right personnel, with the appropriate skill set(s), are assigned to the appropriate billets. Navy contract management billets are coded in three ways: an Additional Qualification Designator (AQD), a Navy Subspecialty System Code (SSP), and/or a Navy Officer Billet Classification (NOBC) Code (MyNavy HR, n.d.). The AQD, SSP, and NOBC codes and descriptions for contract management billets are further defined in Tables 1–3. Despite the NPC's best efforts to match billet requirements to officer qualifications, there are times when the Navy has more coded billets than

qualified officers available. In these cases, if there are no qualified officers immediately available and a command cannot afford to gap the billet, the protocol at NPC is to fill the coded billet with an officer having no experience. The officer would then receive on-the-job training regardless of how the billet is coded.

According to the detailing office at the NPC, there are, at the time of this report's publication, 234 Supply Corps billets currently coded with one or more of the AQDs, SSPs, or NOBCs listed in Tables 1–3. Of those 234 billets, 197 billets are filled, meaning that 84% of Navy coded contract management billets are currently manned. Although the Navy has 234 coded contract management billets in its inventory, the NPC was quick to point out that billet coding in the Supply Corps and across the Navy is at best inaccurate. The Supply Corps is in the middle of an intensive community billet coding review, which is expected to take at least a year to complete. This data should be considered as an estimate but raises questions for further research. The next section will discuss Navy contracting officer turnover.

Table 1. Contracting AQD Codes and Descriptions. Adapted from MyNavy HR (2024).

AQD Code	Description
ACN	Contracting – Non-Critical Acquisition Billet
ACC	Contracting – Critical Acquisition Billet
ACK	Contracting – Key Leadership Position

Table 2. Contracting SSP Codes, Descriptions, and Requirements. Adapted from MyNavy HR (2024).

SSP Code	Description and Requirements
1306S	Defense Contract Management Billet – No experience needed to fill the billet.
1306P	Defense Contract Management Billet – Master's Degree in Contract Management needed to fill the billet.
1306Q	Defense Contract Management Billet – Master's Degree in Contract Management and one experience tour needed to fill the billet.
1306R	Defense Contract Management Billet – Master's Degree in Contract Management and two experience tours needed to fill the billet.

Table 3. Contracting NOBC Codes and Descriptions. Adapted from MyNavy HR (2024).

NOBC Code	Description
1476	Procurement Management Officer (PRCM MGT)
1480	Procurement Contracting Officer (PRCM CONTRACT)
1485	Administrative Contracting Officer (ADMIN CONTRACT)
1490	Contracting Professional DAWIA Certified (ACQ DAW CERT)

E. NAVY CONTRACTING OFFICER TURNOVER

Personnel turnover is a common occurrence in today's job market. Unlike the civilian sector, where turnover is often influenced by the economy, military personnel are locked into contracts requiring them to serve a fixed amount of time before leaving for a new assignment. Typical civilian employee turnover involves an employee leaving for another job in search of better opportunities, due to personal reasons, or because of dissatisfaction in their current position. A civilian employee may also leave a job because they have reached retirement age or the company has decided to part ways with the employee.

In order for the military to keep a ready and capable force, service members do not have the same freedoms as their civilian counterparts due to the service contracts they sign. While some of the turnover is due to attrition, much of military turnover involves service members transferring to new commands rather than leaving the service. The typical length for a set of orders for a military contracting officer is between 2–3 years at a command. Service members typically detach from a command when they reach their projected rotation date, leading to an assignment of an officer to fill the vacated billet (NPS, 2015). Whether or not a back fill has been identified, the service member moves on to another command to fulfill the remaining time left on their contract, potentially leaving a billet to be gapped in the process. This type of military turnover is scheduled and accounted for by the detailers at NPC. The detailers do their best to limit the time a billet is gapped, but some things are out of their control. The current Navy Supply Corps manning shortage has presented the NPC with the challenge of determining which billets to prioritize, as there are not enough officers to fill the current allotment of billets.

The detailers at the NPC already have a tough assignment, but addressing unexpected turnover and attrition in critical billets can make that task even more challenging. One scenario that may result in unexpected turnover is when a service member reaches the end of their service obligation, and they decide they would like to leave the military. Another scenario is when a service member encounters health and fitness issues that can lead to them being declared unfit for duty. Service members can also face administrative or disciplinary issues, causing them to be removed from their position and/or involuntarily separated. While service contracts allow the military to have more control of the turnover of their personnel, there are many factors that can lead to billets becoming vacant and leaving commands understaffed in critical positions. In the next chapter, we will discuss the methodology used in this research.

F. SUMMARY

In this chapter, we introduced the DCMA organization as the setting of this research. First, we discussed the purpose DCMA serves in government contracting and how it became the organization that it is today. Next, we discussed an overview of the DCMA contracting workforce. Within the DCMA Contracting Workforce section, we went detailed the role of the military contracting officer. Then, we discussed an overview of the Navy Supply Corps officer contracting billeting process. Finally, we closed out the chapter with a discussion on Navy contracting officer turnover.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the methodology used in this research. We first discuss how and why the survey was developed. We then discuss how the survey was deployed to our respondents. Then we discuss the structure of the survey in terms of the competency levels for proficiency in performing the buyer's tasks and knowledge of the seller's tasks.

A. SURVEY DEVELOPMENT

The contracting competency assessment instrument was created by R. G. Rendon and published in an Acquisition Research Program Sponsored Report Series coauthored by Brett Schwartz in 2020 (R. G. Rendon & Schwartz, 2020). R. G. Rendon developed the contracting competency assessment instrument in response to prior research conducted by R. G. Rendon and Winn (2017). Their research suggested that the current DoD contracting competency model may fall short in effectively evaluating the capabilities of today's contracting workforce (R. G. Rendon & Winn, 2017). As a result, a new contracting competency assessment instrument was created and based on the National Contract Management Association (NCMA) Contract Management Standard (CMS) framework. "The development of the contracting competency assessment instrument included structuring contracting competency statements for each of the contract management phases (pre-award, award, post-award), as well as from both contracting perspectives (buyer and seller)" (R. G. Rendon & Schwartz, 2021, p. 127).

The contracting competency assessment instrument is broken down into three parts: a brief demographics section, a proficiency-level assessment of the tasks as a buyer, and a knowledge-level assessment of tasks performed by the seller. The demographics section serves to collect some background information from the participants. Survey participants are asked about their contracting experience, Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA) certification, other professional certifications they may have earned, the organization they work for, and if they are military or civilian staff. The second section of the contracting competency assessment instrument is a self-assessment in performing buyer tasks. Participants are asked to rate

their level of proficiency in the pre-award phase (Plan Solicitation and Request Offers), award phase (Price or Cost Analysis, Plan Negotiations, Select Source, and Manage Disagreements) and post-award phase (Administer Contract, Ensure Quality, Manage Changes, and Close Out Contract) processes. The closing section of the contracting competency assessment instrument is a knowledge-level assessment of tasks performed by sellers. Participants are asked to self-assess their level of knowledge in the pre-award phase (Plan Sales and Prepare Offer), award phase (Plan Negotiations, Select Source, and Management Disagreements), and post-award phase (Administer Contract, Ensure Quality, Manage Subcontracts, Manage Changes, and Close Out Contract) processes. Now that we have explained the development and structure of the contracting competency assessment instrument, we discuss in the next section how the instrument was deployed to the participants.

B. SURVEY DEPLOYMENT

The NPS Institution Review Board (IRB) determined that this study did not meet the federal definition of "research" as defined under 32 C.F.R. 219 (Protection of Human Subjects, 2024). The NPS IRB did not consider this survey to be human subject research, allowing us to move forward in deploying R. G. Rendon's survey. The next step in getting the survey administered to the contracting workforce was gaining approval from DCMA Boeing PA, DCMA Missiles Dallas, and DCMA Missiles Orlando. After receiving approval from each command, we sent the contracting competency assessment instrument survey link to key points of contact at each of the DCMA organizations to disseminate amongst the contracting workforces. We then accessed an electronic survey using the Qualtrics XM platform. "Qualtrics is the preferred survey tool for NPS online data collection" (NPS, n.d., para. 3) and enables participants to respond anonymously. The Qualtrics XM "survey technology has revolutionized the ability to get data, quickly, from a large number of respondents by automating the process of sending out surveys across a variety of channels from websites and mobile to apps, email and even chatbots" (Qualtrics, n.d., para. 7).

The survey was deployed to military contracting officers, military contracting officer leadership and civilian personnel working in government contracting at the

DCMA Boeing PA and DCMA Missiles Dallas manufacturing plants. All survey participation was conducted on a voluntary basis. This method offered a direct means of gathering substantial, qualitative data from participants. The diverse acquisition workforce of contracting officers across multiple service branches and their civilian counterparts offered a non-biased response to our surveys based on personal experience and years of knowledge while working at multiple DCMAs. Now that we have described the process to deploy the contracting competency assessment instrument, we discuss in the next section the competency levels.

C. COMPETENCY LEVELS

The demographics section of the contracting competency assessment instrument consists of seven multiple-choice questions. The proficiency level of the buyer tasks and knowledge level of the seller tasks use a Likert scale with values ranging from 1 to 5. "The competency statements would be rated by the contracting workforce members using a Likert scale reflecting different levels of proficiency for performing the buyer job tasks and a Likert scale reflecting the different levels of knowledge of the seller job tasks" (R. G. Rendon & Schwartz, 2021). Tables 4 and 5 represent the buyer proficiency levels, seller knowledge levels, and their corresponding definitions.

Table 4. Buyer Proficiency Levels. Adapted from R. G. Rendon and Schwartz (2020).

Proficiency Level	Definition
(1) Aware	Applies the competency in the simplest situations and requires close and extensive guidance
(2) Basic	Applies the competency in somewhat difficult situations and requires frequent guidance
(3) Intermediate	Applies the competency in difficult situations and requires little or no guidance
(4) Advanced	Applies the competency in considerably difficult situations and generally requires no guidance
(5) Expert	Applies the competency in exceptionally difficult situations and involves serving as a key resource and advises others
N/A	Not applicable/not needed in my job

Table 5. Seller Knowledge Levels. Adapted from R. G. Rendon and Schwartz (2020).

Knowledge Level	Definition
(1) None	"I am aware of this Contractor competency."
(2) Aware	"I am aware but have no knowledge of this Contractor competency."
(3) Basic	"I have basic-level knowledge of this Contractor competency."
(4) Intermediate	"I have intermediate-level knowledge of this Contractor competency."
(5) Advanced	"I have advanced-level knowledge of this Contractor competency."

Finally, to calculate the buyer proficiency and seller knowledge levels in the contracting competency assessment instrument, we averaged the survey participant response data for each specific question.

D. SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the methodology used in this research. We first discussed how the survey was developed. We then discussed how the survey was deployed. Finally, we discussed the structure of the survey in terms of the competency levels for proficiency in performing buyer tasks and knowledge of the seller tasks. The survey responses are analyzed and presented in the following chapter.

V. ASSESSMENT RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this chapter is to assess the findings of the contracting competency assessment responses and analyze the data. The results from all three sections (demographics, buyer competencies, and seller competencies) of the contracting competency assessment instrument are discussed. The buyer proficiency levels and seller knowledge levels are analyzed according to the three categories of the contract life cycle (pre-award, award, and post-award). We then compare our results with other organizations that have previously taken the same contracting competency assessment instrument. Following this, we discuss the impending Navy contracting officer turnover scenarios at DCMA Boeing PA and DCMA Missiles Dallas. Finally, we offer recommendations for enhancing training and competency development.

A. ANALYZING THE ASSESSMENT RESULTS

This section provides our contracting competency assessment results in a visual form to help analyze the data we obtained. Demographic questions were included in the competency assessment to help our research team differentiate groups in our survey and identify possible consistencies or patterns in the assessment results. Comparisons of DAWIA certification, years of overall contract management experience, years of contract management experience at their current organization, professional certifications obtained, warranted versus non-warranted contracting officers, and military versus civilian status are analyzed in further detail. Buyer proficiency and seller knowledge competency responses are analyzed as a whole and then at each of the three levels of the contracting life cycle: pre-award, award, and post-award.

According to our points of contact at the three DCMAs surveyed, the contracting competency assessment was distributed to a total of 61 potential respondents and had an overall response rate of 34% (21 completed responses). At DCMA Boeing PA, the survey was distributed to 12 employees. The demographics portion of the assessment was completed by 92% (11 of 12) of survey respondents. The remainder of the survey was completed by 75% (nine of 12) of survey respondents.

At DCMA Missiles Orlando, the survey was distributed to 43 civilian employees. Of the 43 civilian employees who had the opportunity to participate in our assessment, only five employees did so. The five employees that did participate completed the survey in its entirety. The survey response rate at DCMA Missiles Orlando was 12%.

At DCMA Missiles Dallas, the survey was distributed to six military contracting officers. Four of the six military contracting officers opened and completed the contracting competency assessment in its entirety. The survey response rate at DCMA Missiles Dallas was 67%.

Due to the voluntary nature of the assessment, we did not have any influence upon who was or was not administered the survey other than our request that the survey was deployed to those in a contract management role. We understand the results of this exploratory research may not fully represent the contracting workforces at DCMA Boeing PA, DCMA Missiles Dallas, and DCMA Missiles Orlando due to the small sample size. Additionally, some survey participants chose not to answer every question, leading to different response rates for each question. Finally, the response data for buyer and seller competency levels reflects the mean average of all survey participants who responded to each particular question.

1. Demographics

The overall results for all three DCMA organizations obtained from the demographics section of the contracting competency assessment can be seen in Table 6. The demographics data we collected will be further analyzed throughout this section.

Table 6. DCMA Contracting Workforce Competency Assessment Demographics Overview

DAWIA Level Certification	
None	2
Contracting Professional	18

Warranted Contracting Officer	
Yes	8
No	12

Professional Certifications	
CFCM	1
CCCM	2
CPCM	1
Other	3
None	12

Current Status	
Military	7
Civilian	12

Contract Management Years of Experience	
3 or Less	5
4 to 8	7
9 to 13	2
14 to 18	3
19 or more	3

Years in Organization	
3 or Less	7
4 to 8	6
9 to 13	3
14 to 18	2
19 or more	2

Of the 21 survey participants, 20 responded to the first demographic question, "What is your DAWIA Back to Basics (BtB) contracting certification level?" Figure 7 shows that 18 out of our 20 (90%) respondents reported that they are DAWIA BtB contracting professional certified. One of the respondents who did not claim to be a DAWIA contracting professional identified as a military member. A possible explanation for this could be that one of the military billet position descriptions at DCMA Boeing PA lists contract management and contracting experience as preferred rather than needed. As previously noted, manning shortages are hindering the detailers at NPC to align coded billets with qualified service members. The remaining respondent who self-assessed as not being a contracting professional is a DCMA Missiles Dallas civilian with less than 3 years of contracting experience and no professional contracting certifications. Perhaps this is a new hire who is in the process of working toward DAWIA Back to Basics certification.

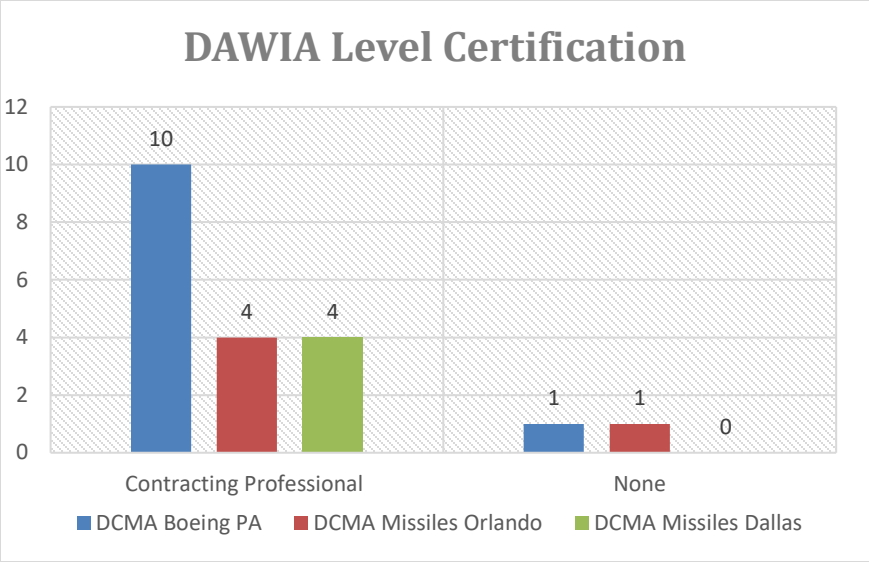

Figure 7. DAWIA Comparison

Of the 21 survey participants, 20 responded to our next demographic question, "Are you a warranted contracting officer?" Figure 8 shows that eight out of our 20 (40%) respondents are warranted contracting officers. Five out of 11 (45%) of the DCMA Boeing PA survey respondents, two out of five (40%) of the DCMA Missiles Orlando survey respondents, and one out of four (25%) of the DCMA Missiles Dallas survey respondents are warranted contracting officers. Of the eight warranted contracting officer respondents, six are civilian employees and two are military members.

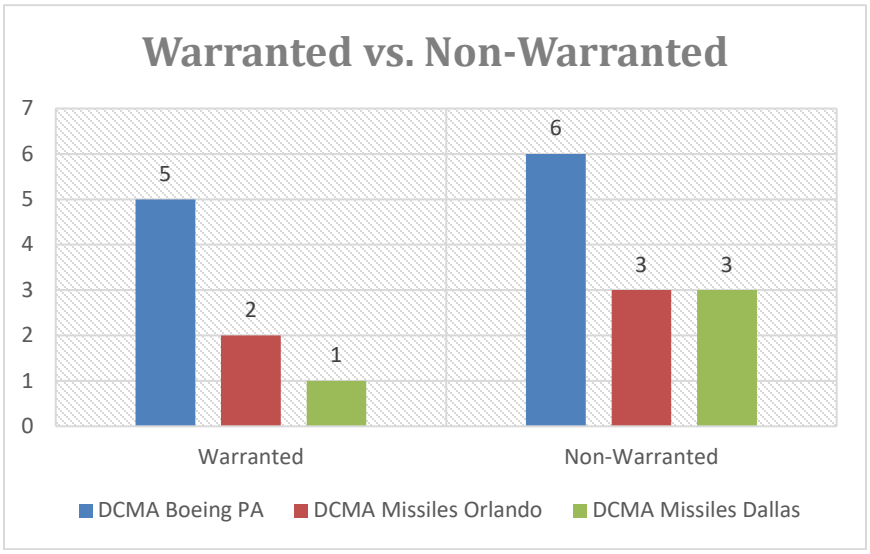

Figure 8. Warranted Contracting Officer vs. Non-Warranted Contracting Officer Comparison

Of the 21 survey participants, 19 responded to the next demographic question, "What professional certifications have you earned?" Figure 9 shows that a majority of our respondents (63%) have not earned any professional certifications. Seven respondents have earned a professional certification. Two respondents are Certified Commercial Contract Managers (CCCMs), one respondent is a Certified Federal Contract Manager (CFCM), another is a Certified Professional Contract Manager (CPCM), and three other respondents claimed they earned other professional certifications not listed. The final two survey participants chose not to answer this question.

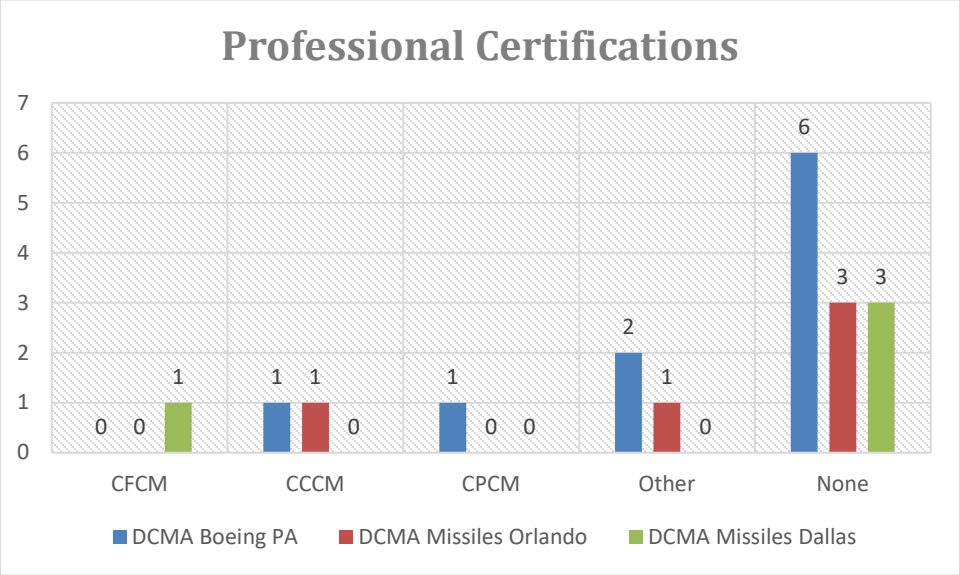

Figure 9. Professional Certification Comparison

Of the 21 survey participants, 20 responded to the next demographic question, "How many total years of contracting experience do you have?" Figure 10 shows that the majority (60%) of the survey respondents have less than 8 years of contract management experience. Included in the 12 survey respondents with less than 8 years of contract management experience were six of our seven military survey respondents. This is not surprising due to the frequent rotation associated with Army and Navy military contracting officers. Neither the Army nor Navy offers a dedicated contracting career path like their Air Force counterparts. Without a defined career path, Army and Navy contracting officers have limited exposure to contracting roles, reducing the amount of experience they can accumulate in this specialized area. Conversely, Air Force

contracting officers benefit from a structured career path, allowing them to rotate from one contracting role to another, thereby gaining valuable experience in the field.

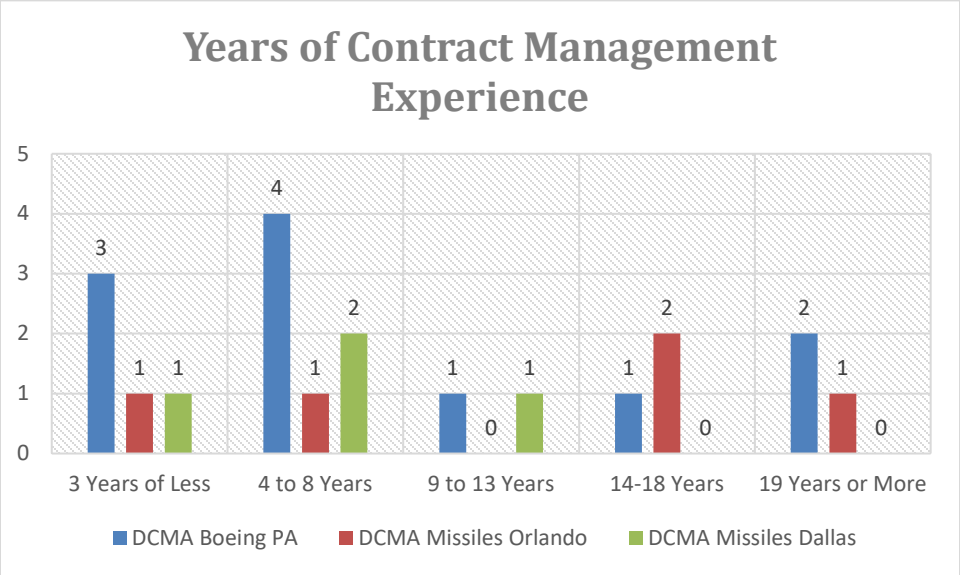

Figure 10. Contract Management Years of Experience

Of the 21 survey participants, 20 responded to the next demographic question, "How many years of contracting experience do you have with your current organization?" Figure 11 shows that the majority (65%) of the survey respondents have less than 8 years of contract management experience with their current organization. Within the 13 survey respondents with less than 8 years of contract management experience were all seven military survey respondents, which is not surprising due to the frequent rotation associated with Army and Navy contracting officer service. It should be noted that two respondents had more years of contract management experience at their organization than total years of contract management experience.

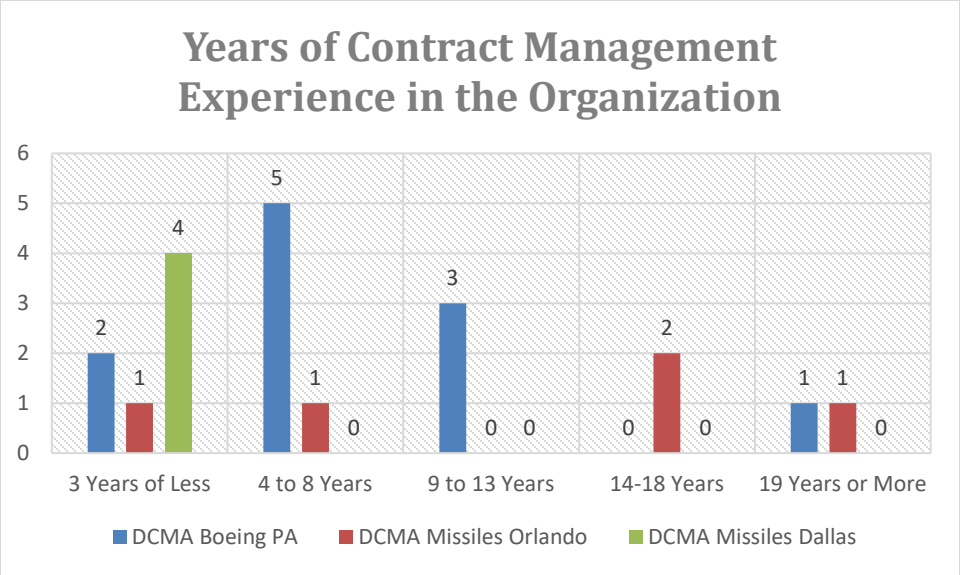

Figure 11. Years of Contract Management Experience at Current Organization

Of the 21 survey participants, 19 responded to the next demographic question, "Which of the following best describes your current status?" Figure 12 shows that the majority (63%) of the survey respondents identified as civilian employees. This was not a surprising result, as we know the majority of the DMCA workforce is civilian employees, while only a handful of military members serve alongside the civilian workforce. Two survey respondents chose not to answer this question. In the next section, we discuss the buyer proficiency responses.

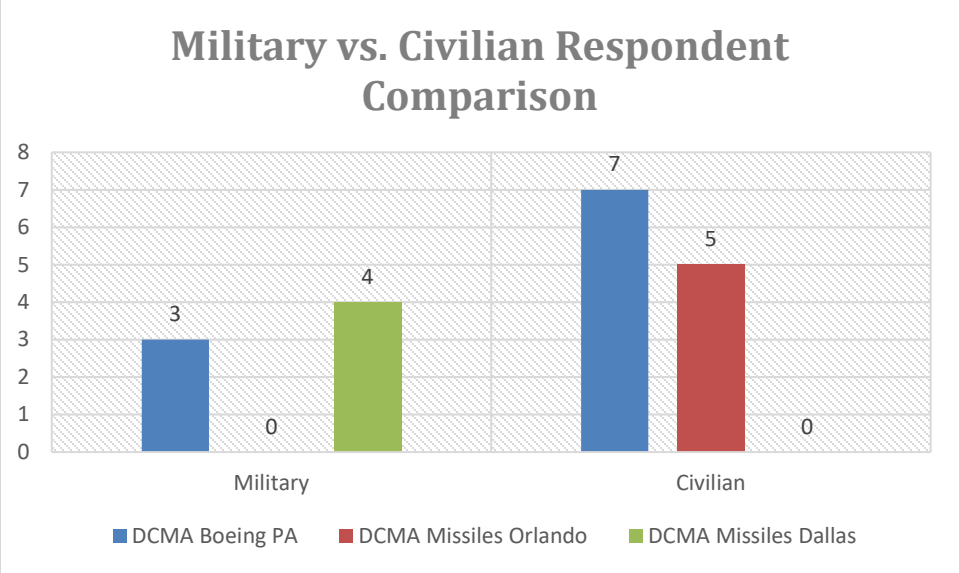

Figure 12. DCMA Workforce Comparison

2. Buyer Competency – Proficiency Levels

For all three DCMA organizations combined (Boeing PA, Orlando, and Dallas) half (50%) of the buyer competencies were self-assessed at an Intermediate or above proficiency level. The average buyer proficiency rating for all competencies in this survey was 3.24, which correlates to an Intermediate proficiency rating, indicating the survey respondents can apply the competencies in difficult situations and they require little guidance (R. G. Rendon and Schwartz, 2020). Figure 13 is a graphical representation of the buyer competency results from our survey broken down into each contract life-cycle competency.

Figure 13. Buyer Proficiency Rating Levels

a. Pre-Award Phase: Plan Solicitation and Request Offer

The survey responses show that the average buyer proficiency rating for the pre-award phase process competencies was self-assessed at 2.77, or a Basic proficiency rating. The DCMA workforce respondents self-assessed at a Basic proficiency rating for Plan Solicitation (2.88) and Request Offer (2.65). A basic proficiency rating indicates the survey respondents can apply the competencies in somewhat difficult situations and they require frequent guidance (R. G. Rendon and Schwartz, 2020). The pre-award phase processes were the lowest self-assessed average proficiency ratings of the buyer competencies.

b. Award Phase: Price and Cost Analysis, Plan Negotiations, Select Source, and Manage Disagreement

The survey responses show that the average buyer proficiency rating for the award phase competencies was self-assessed at 2.94, or a Basic proficiency rating. The DCMA workforce respondents self-assessed at an Advanced proficiency rating for Price and Cost Analysis (4.10), a Basic proficiency rating for Plan Negotiation (2.54), a Basic proficiency rating for Select Source (2.70), and a Basic proficiency rating for Manage Disagreement (2.44). A basic proficiency rating indicates the survey respondents can apply the competencies in somewhat difficult situations and they require frequent guidance (R. G. Rendon and Schwartz, 2020).

c. Post-Award Phase: Administer Contract, Ensure Quality, Manage Changes, and Close Out Contract

The survey responses show that the average buyer proficiency rating for the post-award phase process competencies was self-assessed at 3.76, or an Intermediate proficiency rating. The DCMA workforce respondents self-assessed at an Intermediate proficiency rating for Administer Contract (3.81), an Advanced proficiency rating for Ensure Quality (4.03), an Intermediate proficiency rating for Manage Changes (3.33), and an Intermediate proficiency rating for Close Out Contract (3.89). An average of an Intermediate proficiency rating indicates the survey respondents can apply the competencies in difficult situations and require little or no guidance (R. G. Rendon and Schwartz, 2020). The post-award phase processes were the highest self-assessed average proficiency ratings of the buyer competencies. In the next section, we discuss the seller knowledge level responses.

3. Seller Competencies – Knowledge Levels

For all three DCMA organizations combined (Boeing PA, Orlando, and Dallas) the majority (80%) of the seller competencies were self-assessed at an Aware knowledge level. The average seller knowledge rating for all competencies in this survey was 2.60, which correlates to an Aware knowledge rating, indicating the survey respondents are aware of the contractor competency but do not have any knowledge about it (R. G. Rendon and Schwartz, 2020). Figure 14 is a graphical representation of the seller

competency results from our survey broken down into each contract life-cycle competency.

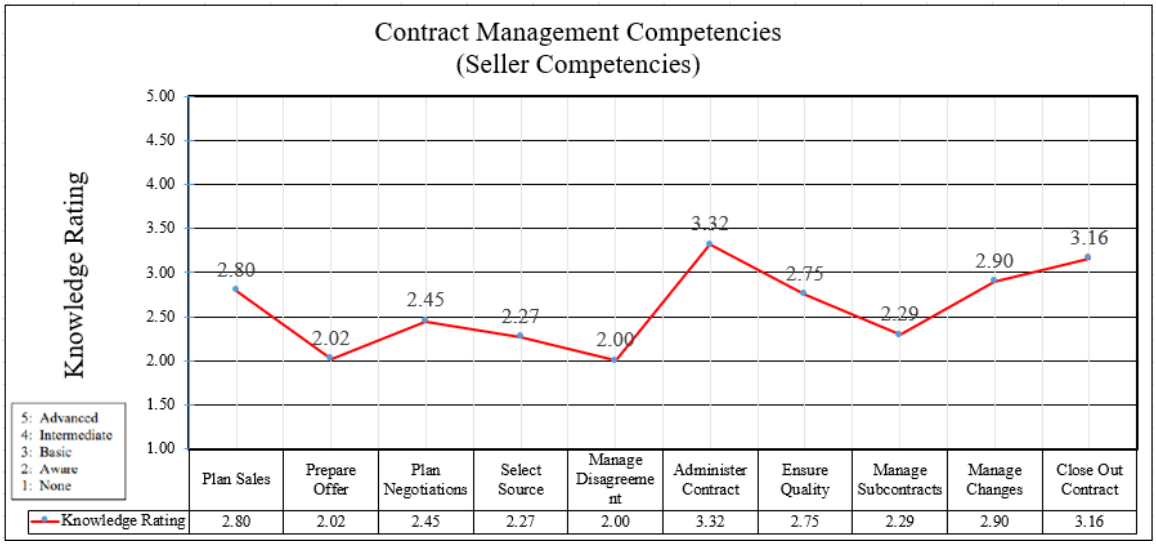

Figure 14. Seller Knowledge Rating Levels

a. Pre-Award Phase: Plan Sales and Prepare Offer

The survey responses show that the average seller knowledge rating for the pre-award process competencies was self-assessed at 2.41, or an Aware knowledge rating. The DCMA workforce respondents self-assessed at an Aware knowledge rating for Plan Sales (2.80) and Prepare Offer (2.02). An average Aware knowledge rating indicates the survey respondents are aware of the contractor competency but do not have any knowledge about it (R. G. Rendon and Schwartz, 2020).

b. Award Phase: Plan Negotiations, Select Source, and Manage Disagreement

The survey responses show that the average seller knowledge rating for the award process competencies is 2.24, or an Aware knowledge rating. The DCMA Boeing PA workforce respondents self-assessed at an Aware knowledge rating for Plan Negotiations (2.45), Select Sources (2.27), and Manage Disagreement (2.00). An average Aware knowledge rating indicates the survey respondents are aware of the contractor competency but do not have any knowledge about it (R. G. Rendon and Schwartz, 2020). The award phase processes were the lowest self-assessed average knowledge ratings of the seller competencies.

c. *Post-Award Phase: Administer Contract, Ensure Quality, Manage Subcontracts, Manage Changes, and Close Out Contract*

The survey responses show that the average seller knowledge rating for the post-award phase process competencies was self-assessed at 2.89, or an Aware knowledge rating. The DCMA workforce respondents self-assessed at a Basic knowledge rating for Administer Contract (3.32), an Aware knowledge rating for Ensure Quality (2.75), an Aware knowledge rating for Manage Subcontracts (2.29), an Aware knowledge rating for Manage Changes (2.90), and a Basic knowledge rating for Contract Closeout (3.16). An average Aware knowledge rating indicates the survey respondents are aware of the contractor competency but do not have any knowledge about it (R. G. Rendon and Schwartz, 2020). The post-award phase processes were the highest self-assessed average knowledge ratings of the seller competencies. Next, we compare our research findings with previously completed contracting workforce competency assessments.

B. COMPARISON WITH PREVIOUS RESEARCH FINDINGS

The CMS-based competency assessment has been deployed to several organizations across the DoD, and NPS researchers have found some consistency in the assessment's results. According to the previous contracting workforce assessment responses mentioned in Chapter II, the proficiency levels of the buyer tasks are higher compared to the knowledge level of the seller tasks. The results from our survey are consistent with the previous research. Our contracting workforce self-assessed an average buyer proficiency level of 3.24, compared to an average seller knowledge level of 2.60.

Another consistency with earlier findings is that survey respondents self-assessed the Manage Disagreement competency as the lowest rated competency for both buyer proficiency and seller knowledge (Hoover, 2021). Our survey results show consistency with the previously conducted NPS research, as Manage Disagreement was also our lowest self-assessed buyer proficiency and our lowest self-assessed seller knowledge.

Unlike the survey responses from the previously conducted workforce competency assessments, Request Offer was our third lowest self-assessed buyer proficiency competency. This is a contrast to what we have seen in previous studies, as Request Offer was the highest self-assessed buyer proficiency in the analysis of the

Marine Corps Expeditionary contracting workforce, the Marine Corps Systems Command contracting workforce, and Mission Installation Contracting Command Field Directorate Office-Fort Sam Houston. Additionally, Request Offer was the third highest self-assessed buyer proficiency at Army Contracting Command-Orlando and the fourth highest at the Army National Guard Bureau.

When comparing survey outcomes across organizations, our DCMA respondent results best aligned with responses from Army National Guard Bureau respondents. The DCMA and the Army National Guard Bureau had the same highest self-assessed seller knowledge competency (Administer Contract). Both organizations had Ensure Quality highly rated amongst their self-assessed buyer proficiency ratings. The DCMAs rated Ensure Quality as its second highest competency behind Price and Cost Analysis, while the Army National Guard Bureau rated Ensure Quality its highest self-assessed buyer proficiency. Manage Disagreement was the lowest buyer proficiency and the lowest seller knowledge competency for the Army National Guard Bureau and the DCMAs surveyed in our assessment. Additionally, both DCMA and the Army National Guard Bureau demonstrated the highest buyer and seller competencies in the post-award phase. DCMAs in general focus on the post-award phase, so it is not surprising that the survey respondents self-assessed this life-cycle phase at higher levels. Perhaps the Amry National Guard Bureau is a similarly structured organization that prioritizes the post-award phase. Next, we discuss Navy contracting officer turnover rate.

C. NAVY CONTRACTING OFFICER TURNOVER RATE

As previously discussed in Chapter I, military turnover plays a critical role in the retention and transfer of knowledge, skills, and organizational culture. Despite repeated attempts to reach out to NPC Millington in an effort to gather data on historical contracting officer turnover for the specific commands surveyed in this research and general contracting officer turnover data, we did not receive any meaningful responses to our inquiries. This gap in our data leaves room for future exploratory research to be conducted. However, what we can expand upon is the billeting situations both authors of this research will be entering upon our graduation from NPS, which we describe next.

The military contracting officer billet at DCMA Boeing PA is coded as 1306R, meaning that the contracting officer who fills this billet should have a master's degree in contract management and two experience tours. The contracting officer who will fill that billet will have the necessary education requirement but will lack the 4–6 years of experience required for a billet coded as 1306R (assuming the billet is coded correctly). Additionally, the DCMA Boeing PA billet has been gapped since June 2024, as the previous military contracting officer reached his projected rotation date and transferred from the command to fill a new role in another organization. DCMA Boeing PA will have operated with a vacant military contracting officer billet for 7 months before an underqualified military contracting officer reports to the command to fill the contracting billet.

The military contracting officer billet at DCMA Missiles Dallas is coded as 1306P, meaning that the contracting officer who fills this billet should have a master's degree in contract management to fill the billet. The contracting officer who will fill that billet will have the necessary education required for a billet coded as 1306P (assuming the billet is coded correctly). This billet has been gapped since July 2024, as the previous military contracting officer submitted his paperwork to retire from the military and took his terminal leave before separating from service. DCMA Missiles Dallas will have operated with a vacant military contracting officer position for 6 months before a recent NPS graduate with no contract management experience reports to the command. While this officer has the required background desired for the position, implementing the knowledge learned from classroom lectures and textbooks is much different than the real-world application of the principles.

A proper in-person turnover with an incumbent military contracting officer can make a drastic difference when a new member joins the command. Unfortunately, in both of these scenarios, the incumbent military contracting officer will not be available to pass along the critical knowledge learned while on the job. The gaining commands have assigned other military officers within the organizations who have not served in these contracting roles to be their sponsors. This will likely lead to a longer learning curve and an increase in opportunities for these new members to make mistakes. In summary, DCMA Boeing PA and DCMA Missiles Dallas face challenges moving forward. First,

the military contracting officer billets have been gapped for over six months. Second, the incoming replacement for the contracting officer billet is underqualified. In the next section, we discuss the recommendations based on our contracting workforce competency assessment results and our research.

D. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our survey responses, combined with the known limitations previously discussed, we present our recommendations in this section.

1. Buyer Competency Development Areas

Based on our contracting competency assessment results, the survey respondents self-assessed themselves significantly higher in the post-award phase buyer competencies than the pre-award and award phase competencies. The pre-award phase competencies were nearly a full point lower, and the award phase competencies were over three quarters of a point lower than the post-award phase competencies.

Our first recommendation is for the three DCMA organizations (Boeing PA, Orlando, and Dallas) to focus training on the pre-award and award phase buyer competencies. Based on the average proficiency level rating of Basic, increased training is needed on Plan Solicitation, Request Offer, Plan Negotiations, Select Source, and Manage Disagreement.

2. Seller Competency Development Areas

Based on our contracting competency assessment results, the average seller knowledge rating levels (Aware) were lower than the average buyer proficiency rating levels (Intermediate). Survey respondents self-assessed their seller knowledge levels as higher in the post-award phase compared to the pre-award and award levels. Although the post-award phase seller competencies were nearly half a point higher than the pre-award and award phases, all three life-cycle phases rated at an Aware level and rated below their corresponding buyer proficiency levels.

Our recommendation is for the three DCMA organizations to focus training on all three life-cycle phases of the seller knowledge level competencies with a goal of

improving to a Basic knowledge level. The three DCMA organizations would have to customize their training programs based on the CMBOK and CMS, as the FAR does not emphasize the seller's perspective in contracting. "Federal government contracting professionals, whose contracting knowledge may be limited to training provided by their agencies, will benefit greatly from understanding the "other side" of contract management related to the seller side, as reflected in the CMS and CMBOK" (R. G. Rendon, 2017, p. 10). An Aware knowledge level shows that the survey respondents "have no knowledge of this contractor competency" (R. G. Rendon & Schwartz, 2020), which leaves plenty of room to improve the seller knowledge competencies.

To note: Our assessment results were consistent with the previous assessments conducted at NPS in that the seller competencies were lower than the buyer proficiency levels. A possible reason for this is that under the previous DoD contracting competency models, the DoD contracting workforce was primarily trained on buyer competencies and not seller competencies. With 13 of the 20 (65%) survey respondents having 4 or more years of contracting experience at their current organization (and therefore among those trained primarily on buyer competencies), this qualifies those survey respondents as a segment of the contracting workforce that would greatly benefit from more training and education opportunities in seller task competencies.

3. Professional Certifications

According to our assessment results, seven of the 19 (37%) survey respondents had earned a professional contracting certification, which is a low percentage compared to the 90% who are DAWIA Back to Basics Contracting Professionals. The professional certifications listed in our contracting workforce competency assessment are awarded by the NCMA (n.d.). The organization's CFCM and CCCM certification requires 2 years of work experience, while the CPCM certification is more advanced, requiring at least 5 years of work experience (NCMA, n.d.).

Our recommendation is to encourage the contracting workforce to pursue professional certifications conferred by the NCMA. This will help to increase both buyer proficiency and seller knowledge levels. Additionally, incentivizing professional

certifications is one way to reward employees for attaining professional certifications while adding value to the organization.

4. Navy Contracting Officer In-Person Turnover

Our final recommendation is for Navy contracting officers to conduct in-person turnovers. While this may not be possible in all turnover situations, it may set up the incoming military contracting officer with the greatest amount of success. Contracting organizations would be wise to reach out to NPC Millington and inform them of the difficulties military contracting officers face when they do not perform in-person turnover. In the next chapter, we discuss our summary, conclusions, and areas for further research.

E. SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was to assess the findings of the contracting competency assessment responses and analyze the data. The results from all three sections (demographics, buyer competencies, and seller competencies) of the contracting competency assessment instrument were discussed. We analyzed the buyer's and seller's competencies according to the three categories of the contract life cycle (pre-award, award, and post-award). We then compared our results with those of other organizations that have previously taken the same contracting competency assessment. Following this, we discussed the Navy contracting officer turnover scenarios at DCMA Boeing PA and DCMA Missiles Dallas. Finally, we offered recommendations for enhancing training and competency development.

VI. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the contracting workforce competency assessment and military turnover at DCMA Boeing PA, DCMA Missiles Dallas, and DCMA Missiles Orlando. Then we discuss the findings by answering the four research questions. Finally, we provide recommendations for further areas of research based on this competency assessment and military turnover.

A. SUMMARY

Government contracting plays a crucial role in the success of the U.S. military, as it provides essential goods, services, and technological solutions needed to maintain a competitive edge. The DoD accounts for a significant portion—60%—of the total U.S. government contract obligations for Fiscal Year 2023, underscoring the importance of defense contracting in supporting military operations (Sehgal, 2024). However, the complexity of defense contracting, coupled with time constraints, skill erosion, and the operational workload, has made it increasingly challenging for U.S. service members to manage contracting tasks effectively. The acquisition workforce plays a pivotal role in supporting the military's strategic needs, with military contracting officers strategically placed within contracting offices with their government civilian counterparts to facilitate partnerships and navigate complex procurement processes (Sanders, 2023). To ensure success in acquiring critical technologies and major weapon systems, it is essential that contracting officers possess up-to-date knowledge, skills, and continuous training to execute their responsibilities effectively (Levy, 2019).

Military service members are subject to permanent change of station (PCS)—the relocation required for career development—a process that may have unintended drawbacks when applied to defense contracting officers. PCS rotations are essential; they provide military personnel with diverse experiences and training opportunities that improve skill sets across the force. However, when contracting officers are transferred, their valuable institutional knowledge and trusted relationships may take months or even years to rebuild. This turnover of contracting officers can result in gaps in expertise and

delays in the effective execution of major defense contracts, which are highly dependent on experienced personnel (Hankins, 2021). As contracting officers rotate every 2–3 years, their replacement officers present their own perspectives and experiences, potentially disrupting continuity in the procurement process. Given the critical nature of defense acquisition and the complexity of these long-term contracts, the constant turnover of contracting officers can hinder the efficiency of operations (R. Johnson, 2018). It is essential to address these challenges through strategic workforce planning and well-ordered transitions to maintain the integrity and success of the acquisition process over the life cycle of major defense contracts. The purpose of this research was to conduct a competency assessment on the acquisition workforce and compare it to the turnover rate for Navy military contracting officers. We accomplished this purpose by answering the following research questions below.

B. CONCLUSION

The following conclusions have been drawn from the results of the competency assessment and military turnover analysis.

1. What Is the Military Contracting Officer Turnover Rate at DCMA?

The question of the military contracting officer turnover rate at the DCMA sites remains unresolved due to the lack of data obtained from NPC Millington. Despite multiple attempts to acquire historical military contracting officer turnover data for the specific DCMA commands surveyed in this research, no meaningful responses were received. This data gap prevents a clear understanding of the turnover rate and its potential impact on the effectiveness and continuity of contracting operations within the DCMA.

2. What Is the Proficiency Level of Those Performing Buyer Tasks at the DCMA?

The proficiency levels of buyers performing contracting tasks at the DCMA sites show a varied but generally intermediate level of competence across different phases of the contract life cycle. The survey results indicate that, on average, half of the buyer

competencies were self-assessed at an Intermediate proficiency level or above, with an overall average proficiency rating of 3.24.

However, there were notable differences across the contract life-cycle phases. In the pre-award phase, competencies such as Plan Solicitation and Request Offer were rated at a Basic proficiency level, indicating that these tasks often require frequent guidance and support. In contrast, the post-award phase showed stronger proficiency, with competencies like Ensure Quality and Administer Contract self-assessed at Intermediate or Advanced levels, suggesting greater confidence and autonomy in managing post-award responsibilities.

These findings highlight areas where targeted training and development may be needed, particularly in the pre-award and award phases, while also showcasing strengths in post-award contract management. Overall, the DCMA workforce can apply buyer competencies in moderately difficult situations with minimal guidance (R. G. Rendon & Schwartz, 2020).

3. What Is the Knowledge Level of Seller Tasks at the DCMA?

The knowledge level of seller tasks at the DCMA sites is predominantly at the Aware level, as reflected in the survey responses. On average, 80% of the seller competencies were self-assessed at an Aware knowledge level, with an overall average rating of 2.60, indicating that the respondents are aware of the seller competencies but lack in-depth knowledge and understanding of the sellers competencies (R. G. Rendon & Schwartz, 2020). This trend was consistent across all phases of the contract life cycle.

In the pre-award phase, competencies such as Plan Sales and Prepare Offer were rated at an Aware knowledge level, suggesting limited understanding of the contractor's perspective and processes. Similarly, the award phase showed the lowest ratings, with competencies like Plan Negotiations and Select Sources also assessed at an Aware level. In contrast, the post-award phase, while still largely at the Aware level, exhibited slightly higher self-assessments, particularly for competencies such as Administer Contract and Contract Closeout, which were rated closer to a Basic knowledge level.

These findings suggest that while DCMA personnel are aware of seller-related competencies, they may require additional training and exposure to develop a deeper understanding of seller competencies across all phases of the contracting process.

4. Is the Role of Military Contracting Officers at the DCMA Critical to Meeting Mission Objectives?

Current gaps in military contracting officer billets at DCMA Boeing Philadelphia and DCMA Missiles Dallas raise significant concerns. Both positions have been vacant for several months, with the upcoming replacements lacking the necessary experience or real-world application of contract management principles. The DCMA Boeing Philadelphia billet, gapped since June 2024, will be filled by an officer who meets the education requirements but lacks the 4–6 years of experience typically needed for a billet coded as 1306R.

Similarly, the DCMA Missiles Dallas billet, gapped since July 2024, will be filled by a newly graduated officer with no practical contracting experience, further exacerbating the challenges faced by the command. These vacancies and underqualified replacements will result in a prolonged learning curve and increased risk of mistakes, as the new contracting officers will not have the opportunity to learn directly from an incumbent with hands-on experience.

The findings highlight that these DCMA organizations can meet their mission objectives and deliver on critical defense contracting tasks despite the absence of seasoned military contracting officers. This suggests the role of the military contracting officers at DCMA is non-critical in meeting mission objectives.

C. AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Based on the findings and recommendations from the competency assessment and military turnover, we have identified the following areas for further research.

Our first area for further research is the need to explore focused training initiatives, based on the data collected from DCMA sites, to improve overall buyer proficiency across all phases of the contracting life cycle. The findings suggest that while there is a strong foundation of intermediate-level proficiency in certain areas, there are

notable gaps in buyer competencies, especially in the pre-award and award phases, where proficiency was rated lower. Targeted training programs designed to address these gaps could enhance the consistency and effectiveness of the workforce, ultimately improving the quality and efficiency of the contracting process.

Additionally, further investigation into the knowledge of seller competencies, particularly in the pre-award and award phases, could help identify areas for improvement in collaboration between DCMA buyers and contractors. Strengthening knowledge in these phases could foster more effective communication, reduce errors, and streamline the contract management process, leading to better outcomes in major defense acquisitions.

Our second area for further research is continued competency assessments on both buyer proficiency and seller knowledge within the acquisition workforce, encompassing both military and civilian personnel. By regularly assessing competencies across the contract management process, researchers can identify broader patterns, such as similarities that may highlight significant knowledge gaps or training deficiencies that affect the workforce as a whole.

Additionally, comparing results across different commands can reveal specific differences that indicate command-specific areas in need of improvement. These findings would enable targeted interventions to address these gaps, ensuring that training initiatives are better tailored to the unique needs of each command. Moreover, ongoing research could help identify best practices and facilitate the sharing of successful training programs and new initiatives across commands, ultimately leading to a more consistent and effective acquisition workforce. By bridging these knowledge gaps, the research will contribute to the overall improvement of competency within the contracting process, enhancing the efficiency and success of major defense acquisitions.

Our third area for further research centers on contracting officer billeting. It is essential that the coding of billets by the NPC is accurate, current, and complete, so that the right officers with the appropriate qualifications are assigned to the right contracting officer roles within the DCMA sites. Accurate billet coding is crucial for aligning the

education, experience, and expertise of assigned personnel with the specific requirements of each position.

This updated information would allow for a deeper investigation into turnover rates and their impact on knowledge transfer, skill development, and overall operational efficiency within the DCMA. By examining these factors, future researchers could provide valuable insights into how turnover and misaligned assignments affect the stability and effectiveness of military contracting functions. Understanding these dynamics would inform better workforce management strategies, improve billet assignment practices, and help ensure that the DCMA has a well-qualified, capable workforce to meet mission objectives in the long term.

Finally, our fourth area for further research regards the efficiency and effectiveness of utilizing Navy Supply Corps officers to fill contracting officer billets, particularly in the context of ongoing manning shortages and the resulting blind turnover. As contracting officer positions remain gapped and are often filled by officers who may lack the requisite experience or credentials, it is important to assess whether these officers are being used in the most efficient manner to meet the DCMA's mission objectives. Specifically, research should explore how the performance of Navy Supply Corps officers compares to their fellow joint military contracting officers and civilian counterparts, particularly in fulfilling the complex requirements of administrative contracting officer roles.

This analysis could provide insights into potential gaps in training, the need for additional qualifications, and strategies for improving the continuity and effectiveness of contracting operations in the face of personnel shortages. Understanding how these gaps in experience and expertise affect mission success will be critical to optimizing resource allocation and ensuring that contracting officer billets are filled by personnel who can effectively contribute to the achievement of the DCMA's objectives.

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