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Building Mission-Focused Business Leaders: Reforming Enlisted Contracting Development

December 2025

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Prepared for the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA 93943

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ABSTRACT

The Air Force's enlisted contracting workforce underpins mission readiness by acquiring services, commodities, and construction at the installation level. However, the current training model is rooted in surface-level memorization of regulations, producing a workforce certified on paper but unprepared for today's complex acquisition environment. This thesis addresses that problem through three efforts. First, it conducts an enlisted workforce competency assessment using standardized contracting tasks and knowledge points, along with analysis of existing personnel and workload data to quantify enlisted contributions. Second, it proposes reimagining the Specialty Task Standard into a competency-based framework grounded in the National Contract Management Associations' Contract Management Standard. Third, it evaluates the feasibility and value of embedding commercial certifications into skill-level milestones for enlisted personnel. Using a mixed-method approach, this study blends quantitative data from across the career field with qualitative insights from industry experts to identify proficiency gaps, root causes, and actionable interventions. The intended outcome is a roadmap that links learning objectives to validated competencies and certifications, shifting the training focus from compliance to capability and building a more proficient and knowledgeable, mission-ready contracting force.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACC	Air Combat Command
AETC	Air Education and Training Command
AFGSC	Air Force Global Strike Command
AFICC	Air Force Installation Contracting Center
AFMC	Air Force Materiel Command
AFSC	Air Force Specialty Code
AFRC	Air Force Reserve Command
AFSOC	Air Force Special Operations Command
APDP	Acquisition Professional Development Program
AMC	Air Mobility Command
CBE	Competency-Based Education
CBTE	Competency-Based Training and Education
CCMI	Commerce & Contract Management Institute
CCO	Contingency Contracting Officer
CDC	Career Development Course
CFETP	Career Field Education and Training Plan
CMBOK	Contract Management Body of Knowledge
CMS	Contract Management Standard
CMSgt	Chief Master Sergeant
CRADA	Cooperative Research and Development Agreement
DAF	Department of the Air Force
DAFI	Department of the Air Force Instruction
DAFMAN	Department of the Air Force Manual
DAU	Defense Acquisition University
DoD	Department of Defense
FAR	Federal Acquisition Regulation
Lt Col	Lieutenant Colonel
NCMA	National Contract Management Association
OJT	On-the-Job Training
PACAF	Pacific Air Forces

SAF/AQC	Secretary of the Air Force for Acquisition, Contracting
STS	Special Training Standard
TFTR	Total Force Training Record
USAF	United States Air Force
USAFE	U.S. Air Forces in Europe

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This thesis addresses a critical deficiency in the development of the United States Air Force's (USAF) enlisted contracting force. Although those Airmen play a pivotal role in enabling mission readiness through procuring and administering a diverse contract portfolio, their current training model remains rooted in rote memorization of the Federal Acquisition Regulation. This outdated, compliance-heavy approach produces a workforce that is certified on paper but functionally underprepared for the demands of today's complex acquisition environment.

The primary objective of this research is to provide solutions to the Secretary of Air Force Acquisition, contracting (SAF/AQC), to drive reform in enlisted contracting training and development by transitioning from a task-based framework to a competency-based model. This research focuses on three interconnected objectives: (1) measuring current enlisted proficiency and workload share force-wide; (2) redesigning the current Specialty Training Standard (STS) to reflect universal contracting and business competencies rather than regulatory familiarity; and (3) evaluating the feasibility and value of embedding commercial professional certifications in enlisted skill-level milestones.

The methodology for this thesis employs a mixed-method approach, predominantly focusing on quantitative data from assessments, existing personnel data, and existing contracting data, while blending qualitative insights from senior leaders and external subject matter experts. This structure is intended to generate a grounded understanding of current capability gaps and explore actionable pathways for reform.

Chapter I defines the scope of the problem and sets the foundation for the thesis. It frames the current training model as insufficient for building the adaptive, capable professionals required in contemporary contracting environments. The chapter introduces a clear purpose of research, which is to reform training through a competency-based approach, as well as outlining three pillars to the research centered around assessing proficiency and workload, transforming the Specialty Task Standard, and evaluating the value of commercial certification. The chapter also introduces the potential benefits of

the research, particularly in aligning enlisted development with larger DoD initiatives, and summarizes the key limitations in assessment responses and certification funding that may affect the study's scope. The next chapter describes the theoretical and practical foundations for competency-based training.

Chapter II explores the theoretical and practical underpinnings of competency-based training and its relevance to the defense acquisition context. The review highlights how other educational and professional domains have shifted toward demonstrated capability over passive, surface level, knowledge acquisition. Foundational theories of competency development are supported by frameworks like the DoD Contracting Competency Model, and the National Contract Management Association's Contract Management Standard and Contract Management Body of Knowledge; all of which emphasize capability, lifelong learning, and alignment with operational needs. The chapter goes on to apply auditability theory to demonstrate that competent people are capable processes are inseparable in building a reliable, accountable acquisition enterprise. These insights underscore the broader value of competency-based reform, not just as a training methodology, but as a strategic imperative for senior contracting leaders. The next chapter describes the methodological approach used in this research paper.

Chapter III describes the methodological approach used in this study. It explains how assessment data, workload estimates, and interactions with subject matter experts were designed, collected, and analyzed to create an assessment of enlisted contracting proficiency and their contribution to the Department of the Air Force's contracting portfolio. The chapter outlines each aspect of data collection supporting the larger research objectives outlined in this thesis. How they assisted in developing a competency-based Specialty Training Standard, and finally how professional certifications could be embedded in the enlisted contracting workforce training program. The next chapter presents the findings from these methods and examines how they inform the study's research objectives.

Chapter IV presents the research team's analytical findings from both the assessment results and the enlisted contracting workforce workload data from fiscal year

2024. The chapter provides detailed findings on enlist proficiency in their own seller tasks as well as their knowledge of seller tasks. These findings were then compared to three previous assessments from prior Naval Postgraduate School theses in order to identify strengths and deficiencies in the DAF enlisted contracting workforce when compared to their contemporaries. The chapter then examines the distribution of the DAF contracting workload and the role the enlisted contracting workforce plays in that distribution. The research team coordinated with SAF/AQC to collect contract action data from fiscal year 2024. 121,744 contract actions representing $113,388,537,210.70 were analyzed by the research team in order to ascertain the enlisted contracting workforce's contributions. The data was then categorized by major command before a DAF-wide analysis would be conducted. Finally, the research team will discuss the implications of the combined findings before providing recommendations to SAF/AQC for enlisted contracting workforce training reform.

Chapter V is the final chapter of this research paper and discusses the study's ultimate findings, before restating and answering the research questions, and proposing further areas of possible research. The chapter concludes with the determination by the team that enlisted contracting training must shift towards a competency-based model, aligned with professional organizations, in order to ensure the contracting professionals who comprise the enlisted corps are equipped to operate at a high level in an increasing complex and interconnected acquisition environment.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to frame the focus of this thesis and establish the foundation for the research. It begins by outlining the context in which the Air Force's enlisted contracting workforce operates and why current training approaches are under review. It then identifies the problem the thesis addresses, states the purpose of the research, and presents the guiding questions. The chapter also highlights the expected benefits and limitations of the research and concludes with a brief outline of the thesis structure.

A. BACKGROUND

The United States Air Force's enlisted contracting career field serves as a critical enabler of national defense capabilities through the procurement of essential services, equipment, and technology. Despite the enlisted making up 16% of the field, its on-the-job training is the only one that's written as rote Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) memorization, and it is his thesis team's position that this is an insufficient solution (SAF/AQC, 2024). This training methodology has remained largely unchanged despite evolving defense acquisition challenges and reform initiatives elsewhere in the Department of Defense.

Moreover, the increasingly interconnected acquisition environment demands an enlisted contracting workforce that understands complex interagency coordination, logistics, cybersecurity, and private sector intricacies; domains that are poorly addressed by the current training model seen in the Air Force. This disconnect creates an enlisted contracting workforce that is technically "qualified" (in so much that they have earned a skill level) but is functionally underprepared to execute and manage multi-domain acquisitions.

A RAND Corporation report (2024) discusses that the current Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC)-based progression model for enlisted Airmen fails to fully develop a high level of technical expertise fully, specifically noting a failure of the Air Force to incorporate competency-based training. While not specific to the contracting career field, this RAND report underscores the need for reform that this research will also discuss.

B. PROBLEM STATEMENT

It is discussed in a RAND report on shortfalls in the current AFSC-based model that enlisted contracting professionals often experience insufficient developmental investment at the earliest stages of their careers, resulting in capability gaps that directly impair operational effectiveness (Robbert et al., 2024). The National Contract Management Association's (NCMA) Contract Management Standard (CMS) emphasizes that effective contract management requires advanced competencies such as judgment, situational assessment, and systems thinking capabilities that are not explicitly addressed in the current enlisted Specialty Training Standard (STS) (NCMA, 2024). These omissions suggest that the current training paradigm prioritizes regulatory familiarity and task completion over the development of adaptive thinking and strategic capability.

This deficiency is compounded by organizational inertia, which often resists substantive change even in the face of known performance shortcomings. As Gansler et al. (2010) contend, transitioning toward a competency-based education model is essential for contracting professionals to navigate the complexities of a modern, network-based acquisition environment. Without such a shift, developmental shortfalls will continue to undermine both near-term mission execution and long-term strategic readiness across the Department of Defense contracting enterprise (Aufderheide, 2011; Hayashi & Pfannenstiel, 2020; Moyer et al., 2020)

C. PURPOSE STATEMENT

This research aligns with the Secretary of the Air Force for Acquisition in Contracting's strategic vision to reform and adapt enlisted personnel development across the Air Force contracting enterprise. It pursues three interconnected objectives that together aim to strengthen workforce capability and operational impact. First, this study will measure current enlisted proficiency levels and analyze workload distribution across the force to establish a baseline understanding of enlisted contribution. Second, it will propose a redesign of the existing Specialty Training Standard (STS), shifting its focus from regulatory memorization to a competency-based model grounded in universal contract management skills. Finally, the research will evaluate the feasibility and potential value of integrating industry-recognized and accredited professional

certifications, such as the National Contract Management Association's Certified Federal Contract Manager certification or Certified Professional Contract Manager certification, into enlisted skill-level progression milestones. Together, these objectives form a comprehensive framework for enhancing enlisted readiness and aligning development pathways with the evolving demands of the defense acquisition ecosystem.

D. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There are five research questions to support this thesis:

1. How can the defense enlisted contracting workforce training be updated to align with a competency-based framework?
2. Based on a competency assessment, what is the proficiency level of buyer tasks and knowledge of seller tasks of the enlisted contracting workforce?
3. Can the enlisted proportion of the Air Force contracting workload be measured, and what trends or data does this reveal?
4. How can the Specialty Training Standard (STS) currently in use be transitioned to a competency-based model?
5. How can the current method of awarding enlisted skill levels be improved by incorporating professional certifications? Is there an associated cost with these certifications, and is there a benefit to the Air Force in taking on those costs?

E. BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH

This research offers substantial benefit to the enlisted Air Force contracting community by aligning its method of technical development with broader DoD transformation initiatives.

First, it will establish a baseline understanding of current enlisted contracting proficiency, providing data-driven insights previously unavailable to leadership. Second, it will provide a practical framework for transitioning from a compliance-based model to a more dynamic competency-based one, with an emphasis on mission-focused development, competency progression, and lifelong learning. Finally, it will provide actionable recommendations for enhancing skill-level progression, potentially incorporating industry-recognized and accredited professional certifications.

Collectively, these outcomes support the development of a more flexible and relevant workforce professional training model. The goal is to cultivate mission-focused

business leaders within the contracting workforce who are equipped not only to comply with the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) but also to lead and innovate in support of operational objectives.

F. LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

This study is constrained by several methodological and practical limitations that may influence the generalizability and interpretive validity of its findings.

First, the research will seek to collect input from the broader enlisted Air Force contracting community. If participation is limited, it will restrict the statistical significance of the data and will reduce the extent to which findings can be confidently extrapolated to the wider career field.

Second, the survey relies on self-reported data, which inherently carries the risk of subjective bias. If people are taking a survey that assesses themselves, most people tend to overestimate their knowledge or proficiency level. This limitation may skew the accuracy of the reported data and introduce variance in how individuals interpreted key concepts within the survey instrument.

Finally, because participation in the survey is voluntary and cannot be mandated, the survey is voluntary; people may decide to take it, or some people may decide not to take it. As such, some responses may lack the necessary depth or attention to detail, particularly if respondents perceive the survey as nonessential or overly time-consuming. The inability to control participant motivation or diligence presents a nontrivial constraint on data quality.

To mitigate these limitations, the research will employ a mixed-methods approach that balances the quantitative breadth of survey responses with the qualitative depth of expert interviews. This triangulation of data sources was essential to enhancing the credibility and robustness of the findings, despite constraints in scope and participation.

G. OUTLINE OF REPORT

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter I (Introduction) establishes the research context by articulating the problem statement, purpose, significance, scope, and

guiding research questions. Chapter II (Literature Review) surveys the relevant scholarship and policy frameworks on competency-based training, professional certification standards, and defense acquisition of workforce development, situating the study within the existing knowledge. Chapter III (Methodology and Organizational Context) outlines the research design and methods, including data sources, sampling and instrumentation, analytical procedures, validity and reliability considerations, and the institutional setting in which the study is conducted. Chapter IV (Findings and Analysis) presents empirical results, integrating survey evidence, interview insights, and analytical assessments of current training practices, and interpreting their implications for the contracting enterprise. We will also be including our recommendations based on our findings in this chapter. Chapter V (Summary, Conclusions, and Areas for Further Research) synthesizes the findings into actionable recommendations for further research, reflects limitations and practical implications, and identifies priorities for future inquiry.

H. SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was to frame the thesis and establish the foundation for the research. It described the operational context of the Air Force's enlisted contracting workforce and identified the central problem: a training paradigm anchored in task completion and regulatory recall rather than competency development. The chapter articulated the study's purpose and objectives: measuring enlisted proficiency and workload share, proposing a competency-based redesign of the Specialty Training Standard (STS) aligned with the Contract Management Standard; and assessing the feasibility and value of embedding industry professional certifications into skill-level milestones. It stated the primary and secondary research questions that guide the inquiry and summarized the anticipated benefits of producing a data-driven baseline, a practical transition framework, and actionable recommendations to cultivate mission-focused business leaders.

The chapter also delineated key limitations that bound the interpretation of findings: the biases inherent to self-reported data, the inability to compel participation or attention, and the resource intensity of qualitative interviews. To mitigate these constraints, the study adopts a mixed-methods design that triangulates survey evidence

with collaboration with subject matter experts from professional organizations. The chapter concluded with an outline of the report's structure, previewing the literature review, methodology, and organizational context, findings and analysis, and the synthesis of conclusions and avenues for further research. This summary positions the remainder of the thesis to evaluate, with rigor and practicality, how a competency-based approach can reform enlisted contracting development in support of mission outcomes.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to review the body of research and theory that the team deemed relevant to this thesis's goal of researching the reform of enlisted contracting training and development. It opens with the theoretical foundations, specifically auditability theory, establishing how organizational accountability rests on the interaction of a competent workforce, capable processes, and effective internal controls. It then turns to competency-based training and education, tracing its foundations and explaining how demonstrated capability improves performance. Next, it examines contract management as the point of convergence, showing how auditability pillars and competency-based methods reinforce one another across the contract life cycle. Finally, it draws out the implications for the Air Force contracting career field, detailing how these frameworks inform updating enlisted development, assessment, and policy alignment. While prior studies define the importance of competency and auditability, they have not been applied to the unique context of the Air Force's enlisted contracting workforce, leaving a gap that this research seeks to fill.

B. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

This section presents the theoretical frameworks underpinning the thesis: auditability theory as a complementary model for institutional accountability, as well as competency-based education and its applicability to workforce and process improvement.

1. Auditability Theory

Auditability theory theorizes that organizational accountability and performance depend on the interaction of three components: a competent workforce**,** capable processes**,** and effective internal controls (Rendon & Rendon, 2015; Rendon & Winn, 2017). Rendon and Rendon (2015) describe this relationship as the "auditability triangle," emphasizing that competent personnel, capable processes, and effective internal controls together form an organization's first line of defense in ensuring integrity, transparency, and value for money. A competent workforce comprises individuals who possess the

requisite knowledge, skills, judgment, and professional behaviors to perform their roles reliably and to adapt effectively as conditions change. Capable processes are well-defined, documented and repeatable workflows that yield consistent results, minimize unnecessary variation, and incorporate feedback mechanisms to drive continuous improvement. Effective internal controls are the policies, procedures, and monitoring activities that prevent errors, detect issues at an early stage, ensure compliance with applicable standards, and provide clear documentation to support accountability. Together, these three components create a coherent foundation for organizational performance and assurance, particularly within public procurement and contracting environments where auditability supports transparency, fraud deterrence, and mission integrity (Rendon & Rendon, 2015; Rendon & Winn, 2017).

According to the Department of Defense (2024), a competent enlisted contracting workforce consists of Airmen who can apply core technical and professional competencies, not merely follow checklists, across pre-award, award, and post-award activities. The DoD Contracting Competency Model specifies both technical domain skills (e.g., market research, cost/price analysis, negotiations, contract administration) and cross-cutting professional competencies (e.g., problem-solving, judgment, situational assessment, systems thinking, technical credibility). When aligned with the National Contract Management Association's Contract Management Standard (CMS; NCMA, 2023), the STS and CFETP frameworks can apply observable, criterion-referenced performance criteria that enable enlisted members to demonstrate defensible decision-making, accurate documentation, and effective risk management. These outcomes raise process quality, strengthen auditability, and improve mission support. NCMA (2022, 2023) further emphasizes that such alignment enables traceability of actions, consistent application of standards, and defensible results, essential elements for safeguarding mission assurance and public trust. As Rendon (2015) explains, weaknesses in any auditability component amplify risk in the others: insufficient competence elevates process variability; immature processes stress internal controls; and weak internal controls can mask defects that competent personnel and capable processes would otherwise surface. Similarly, NCMA (2023) describes contract management as an

integrated, auditable system rather than a collection of disconnected tasks. One way to ensure the competency of people is to use competency-based training and education.

2. Competency-based Training and Education

Building on auditability components, competency-based training and education provide the practical means to develop a competent workforce and mature processes by defining clear competencies, assessing observable performance, and supporting longitudinal growth, thereby translating standards into sustained capability. Competency-based approaches shift emphasis from time and task completion to demonstrated capability, knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and other characteristics required for successful performance (Voorhees, 2001; NCMA, 2023). Rooted in outcomes-based education, CBTE emphasizes explicit learning outcomes, criterion-referenced assessment, longitudinal development, and timely, differentiated feedback (Frank et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2014; Lenburg, 1999). Evidence across domains is generally favorable: meta-analytic work in medicine links CBTE to improved clinical performance (Carraccio et al., 2016); workplace studies report higher job performance and reduced time to proficiency (Lucia & Lepsinger, 1999); and higher-education analyses find closer alignment with employer needs and efficiency gains through reduced time-to-credential (Public Agenda, 2015; Desrochers & Staisloff, 2016). At the same time, the literature warns of reductionism, assessor reliability challenges, and implementation complexity that requires substantial organizational change (Morcke et al., 2013; Nodine, 2016; Bramante & Colby, 2012). Effective CBTE, therefore, depends on validated competency definitions, multi-method assessment, and supportive learning environments. In this regard, Holmboe et al. (2010) highlights the use of multiple tailored methods, direct observation, longitudinal tracking, formative feedback, and clear standards for minimally acceptable performance as core to credible assessment. Having established how CBTE develops demonstrable capability, the next section turns to contract management as the operational arena where CBTE and auditability intersect, showing how competency frameworks map onto contract life-cycle tasks and control environments to produce consistent, defensible outcomes.

3. Competency-Based Training and Education in Contract Management

Competency-based training and education (CBTE) turns contracting standards into day-to-day capability by defining exactly what practitioners must demonstrate and then assessing performance in authentic work. In practice, the contracting workforce maps learning outcomes to the DoD Contracting Competency Model and the NCMA CMS/CMBOK. These outcomes cover domain skills (market research, cost/price analysis, negotiations, contract administration) and cross-cutting competencies (situational assessment, systems thinking, problem solving, technical credibility). Performance is then verified with observable criteria such as work samples, direct observation, scenario-based evaluations, and evidence logs (Department of Defense, 2024; NCMA, 2023). Progression is based on demonstrated mastery rather than time in seat, which supports coordinated execution with finance, legal, requirements, and industry partners and strengthens career-long development.

When CBTE is applied consistently, organizations consisting of members with stronger contracting competencies tend to exhibit more mature, controlled processes and fewer contract life-cycle deficiencies (Rendon & Wilkinson, 2016). Layered with auditability theory, competent people, capable processes, and effective internal controls, CBTE provides the mechanism for building and verifying the people side, while the governance frame ensures those competencies translate into consistent, reviewable outcomes across pre-award, award, and post-award phases. Together, they create a clear path from defined competencies to observed performance to auditable results. CBTE also applies to the contracting career field in the United States Air Force, and that will be discussed in the next section.

4. Implications for the Air Force Contracting Career Field

Applied to the Air Force contracting enterprise, the auditability-CBTE synthesis highlights constraints in legacy development approaches and a pathway to reform. Prior theses identify limitations of checklist-oriented training and inconsistent developmental exposure, which dampen critical thinking, systems awareness, and process capabilities central to effective contract management as aligned to the CMS and to the integrity of contracting processes (Aufderheide, 2011; Moyer et al., 2020; Davies et al., 2021). The

current enlisted Specialty Training Standard (STS) emphasizes task completion. In contrast, the CMS and the DoD model emphasize demonstrable, transferable competencies, including judgment, situational assessment, and systems thinking, that underpin capable processes and effective internal controls (NCMA, 2023; Department of Defense, 2024). Where competency is strong, practitioners not only execute but also improve processes by identifying opportunities for optimization and sustaining gains, as illustrated in the Contract Management Maturity Model (CMMM), which benchmarks organizational process capability across five levels ranging from Ad Hoc to Optimized (Rendon, 2015; Valentine & Croston, 2017), thereby reinforcing auditability components through better decisions, fewer errors, and tighter control (Rendon & Wilkinson, 2016). Building on this, a Navy-wide benchmarking study using the Contract Management Maturity Model (CMMM) found higher maturity in pre-award processes but persistent gaps post-award, when it came to administration or closeout processes. The analysis also showed weaker enablers in post-award phases, management support, process integration, and measurement, underscoring the need to integrate contracting with finance, performance, and risk functions and to track results with consistent metrics. The study recommends using CMMM results to target process improvements and training, linking maturity gains to stronger auditability findings that generalize across DoD and are directly applicable to enlisted Air Force contracting (Rendon, 2015). This case is especially compelling in settings with dense interdependencies among requirements, funding, compliance, and vendor ecosystems, where principled adaptation consistently outperforms rote procedure. The next section translates these implications into specific, actionable changes to enlisted-force training and development within the Air Force contracting enterprise.

5. Benefits for Enlisted-Force Training Improvements

Aligning enlisted training with the competent people component of auditability theory and CBTE produces several tangible benefits that directly support mission outcomes.

First, mapping the STS to industry contract management competencies and converting those statements into criterion-referenced performance expectations clarifies

what “minimally acceptable performance” looks like and enables longitudinal tracking of growth. Embedding multi-method assessment, such as direct observation, work-sample evaluations, and documented mastery checks, supports timely, formative feedback and targeted remediation consistent with best practices in competency assessment (Holmboe et al., 2010; Lenburg, 1999; NCMA, 2023).

Second, establishing a baseline of enlisted proficiency and workload distribution through competency-based surveys and performance sampling makes development needs visible and allows leaders to prioritize interventions at the unit and MAJCOM levels (U.S. Department of Defense, 2016). Third, integrating industry-recognized professional certifications (e.g., CFCM/CPCM) at defined skill-level milestones anchors common standards, signals externally validated mastery, and can reduce time-to-proficiency when aligned with curricula benefits that the literature associates with improved relevance and efficiency (Davies et al., 2021; Desrochers & Staisloff, 2016). Fourth, institutionalizing formative development mechanisms, coaching, structured on-the-job training tied to competency outcomes, after-action reviews centered on situational assessment, and rotational experiences across the contract life cycle and contracting domains, builds the judgment and adaptability that procedural training alone does not produce (NCMA, 2023; Department of Defense, 2024).

Finally, linking competency data to process and control metrics such as documentation defect rates, cycle-time variance, and corrective-action frequency creates a governance loop in which better competence yields more capable processes and stronger internal controls, which in turn sustain improved outcomes and reinforce auditability over time (Rendon & Wilkinson, 2016; Rendon & Snider, 2008). Collectively, these improvements shift enlisted development from regulatory recall to mission-focused competency**,** reforming training for contemporary operational demands while supporting enterprise-level readiness (Hayashi & Pfannenstiel, 2020; U.S. Department of Defense, 2016). Having outlined the benefits of aligning enlisted training with the competent people component of auditability and CBTE, the next step is to examine the policy infrastructure that governs how training is actually designed and executed.

C. POLICY OVERVIEW

This section examines the policy framework that governs how enlisted contracting training is designed, executed, and evaluated, and where changes are needed to support a competency-based model. It reviews DAFMAN 36–2689 (the Air Force's OJT structure), the Career Field Education and Training Plan (CFETP) as the binding career-field blueprint, Section 861 of the FY2020 NDAA as the statutory driver for aligning military qualifications with nationally recognized professional certifications, and the Defense Contingency Contracting Handbook Version 5 (2017) for contingency contracting officer policy and procedures.

1. Department of the Air Force Manual 36–2689

Department of the Air Force Manual (DAFMAN) 36–2689, *Total Force Development*, Chapter 5 ("Total Force Upgrade Training Program") establishes the structure for on-the-job upgrade training (OJT) across the enlisted force, including contracting Airmen. The chapter requires progression through skill levels based on a combination of job knowledge, task proficiency, and accrued experience, and it directs supervisors to link training plans to both near-term mission requirements and longer-term career objectives. Programmatically, Chapter 5 organizes upgrade training around three pillars: Career Development Courses (CDCs) to deliver foundational knowledge, OJT to develop hands-on skills, and accumulated job **e**xperience to build judgment and confidence (Department of the Air Force [DAF], n.d.).

While Chapter 5 is exhaustive in specifying how training must be planned, executed, and documented, its operationalization of "qualified" or "trained" is largely evidenced through documentation. For example, completion of CDCs and supervisor certification of tasks, rather than through standardized, criterion-referenced demonstrations of competence that are comparable across units. In practice, this allows Airmen to advance administratively even when deeper capabilities, such as adaptive judgment, systems thinking, or situational assessment, have not been consistently verified. By contrast, competency frameworks used in contract management emphasize measured performance against explicit standards, longitudinal assessment, and direct observation in authentic contexts (National Contract Management Association [NCMA],

2023; Holmboe et al., 2010). Aligning upgrade training with those principles would strengthen the evidence that progression reflects demonstrated competence rather than solely documented activity and would better support the Air Force's objective of producing a workforce capable of operating effectively in complex acquisition environments.

2. Career Field Education and Training Plan

The Career Field Education and Training Plan (CFETP) is the governing blueprint for training, education, and professional development for enlisted Airmen within each Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC), including the contracting career field. It consolidates institutional courses, on-the-job training (OJT), continuation training, and evaluation requirements into a single, authoritative source, thereby aligning expectations across accessions, units, and career stages.

The current CFETP (dated 1 Oct 23) prescribes mandatory elements for contracting Airmen, including initial skills training, structured OJT tied to each skill level, and specialized requirements for contingency contracting. It also outlines rotational development for junior enlisted personnel and provides reference linkages to the Acquisition Professional Development Program (APDP). By mapping skill-level progression to defined tasks and training events, the CFETP is intended to connect technical development with operational readiness and mission support.

Functionally, the CFETP serves as the binding policy that standardizes how training is planned, executed, documented, and evaluated across the enlisted contracting enterprise. As such, any reform that seeks to shift from a task-centric approach to a competency-based framework must be codified within the CFETP, principally through revision of the Specialty Training Standard (STS), incorporation of explicit competency statements and mastery thresholds, alignment of assessment methods with criterion-referenced performance, and, where appropriate, integration of credential milestones. Absent CFETP-level changes, local initiatives will remain ad hoc and unenforceable, limiting the Air Force's ability to update and adapt its enlisted development in a consistent, measurable, and auditable manner.

3. National Defense Authorization Act, Fiscal Year 2020, Section 861

Section 861 of the Fiscal Year 2020 National Defense Authorization Act directs the Department of Defense to align acquisition-workforce certification with standards developed by third-party accredited programs to the maximum extent practicable (National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 [NDAA FY2020], 2019, §861). In practice, this allows DoD to adopt certifications accredited by an independent body such as the American National Standards Institute's ANSI National Accreditation Board, which accredits personnel-certification programs to ISO/IEC 17024 (ANSI National Accreditation Board [ANAB], n.d.).

For the enlisted contracting workforce, Section 861 presents the opportunity and the legislative impetus for training and development reform as it heavily adopts standards which lead to the use of professional certifications within the training pipeline. By embedding those certifications in the skill-level upgrade milestones, the Department of the Air Force could not only satisfy statutory directives but also use them as an opportunity to reorient a core component of its workforce with the broader contracting profession (Department of Defense [DoD], 2022; National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 [NDAA FY2020], 2019, §861; Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition & Sustainment [USD(A&S)], 2020). With the policy environment established, the review now turns to past research to situate this study within the existing evidence base and to identify where the literature leaves gaps, particularly regarding enlisted contracting development, that this research is designed to address.

4. Defense Contingency Contracting Handbook

The Defense Contingency Contracting Handbook provides on-site guidance for contingency contracting officers in support of deployed or emergency operations. It's intended to translate acquisition policy from different publications into contingency centric procedures for planning, executing, and closing contract actions in declared contingencies.

D. PAST RESEARCH

This section reviews and refers to past research and academic studies on competency-based development in defense acquisition to situate the present work and surface remaining gaps. Collectively, these works highlight the promise of competency-based approaches and credentialing while critiquing checklist-driven training. However, they give limited attention to enlisted Air Force contracting, its baseline proficiency, workload share, and structured development pathways. This study addresses that gap by focusing explicitly on the enlisted force and linking measured competencies to concrete training and progression changes.

To anchor this review in federal and analytic evidence, GAO and RAND provide the broadest, most policy-relevant assessments of acquisition workforce capability and development needs. GAO's government-wide examinations (2011; 2015) found uneven use of competency assessments across defense acquisition career fields, limited follow-through on using those assessments to guide training, and gaps in workforce planning, conditions consistent with this study's diagnosis of checklist-driven progression and inconsistent verification of competence in the enlisted contracting pipeline. Complementing GAO's oversight, RAND's Section 843 assessment defined business acumen as an understanding of industry behavior and trends that enables smarter government decisions and reported that gaps in business acumen and industry knowledge persist, affecting skills such as negotiation, requirements development, and cost/price analysis (Werber et al., 2019, pp. 11–12, 112–113). In that report, evidence indicated Contracting has a very high relative need for this industry-related knowledge, yet key training such as DAU's "Understanding Industry: Business Acumen" (ACQ 315) is required only at the most advanced certification level, leaving earlier development stages thinly supported (Werber et al., 2019, pp. 34–41). Together, these findings substantiate the need for a competency-based approach that links measurable skills to training, assessment, and advancement decisions and support this thesis's focus on establishing a baseline of enlisted proficiency, quantifying workload share, and redesigning the STS/CFETP to emphasize observable competence rather than documentation alone.

Bradley Hoover (2021) conducted a competency-based assessment on the Marine Corps' expeditionary contracting community using the NCMA Contract Management Standard. His findings highlighted increased proficiency in performing the buyer tasks and decreased levels of knowledge of the seller tasks, while recommending specific training solutions. However, while Hoover's use of the CMS as a measurement tool aligns with this thesis's methodological foundation, his scope excluded workload measurement and did not address formal enlisted training structures or integration of professional certification into those structures.

Hayashi and Pfannenstiel (2020) emphasized the need for agile, competency-based learning systems to support acquisition professionals in rapidly evolving operational contexts. Their study, which focused on Department of the Navy acquisition professionals, argued for moving away from one-size-fits-all training programs toward adaptive models that integrate field feedback and mission outcomes. Similarly, Moyer, Walls, and Phillips (2020) identified the limitations of compliance-focused instruction in preparing contracting professionals for the strategic demands of contingency and operational contracting. These findings resonate with the present study's critique of rote regulatory memorization within the Air Force's Specialty Training Standard (STS) and affirm the urgency of reforming instructional design for enlisted personnel.

For consistency across studies that discuss certifications, this thesis distinguishes occupational certifications (organization-required credentials tied to a specific employer framework, e.g., DAWIA/Back-to-Basics) from professional certifications (portable, profession-wide credentials such as NCMA's CFCM that remain valid across employers), which is discussed in the Contract Management Body of Knowledge (National Contract Management Association [NCMA], 2023; Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition & Sustainment [USD(A&S)], 2020). This distinction matters because the literature on credentialing benefits typically concerns professional certifications and their linkage to competency development and market credibility, precisely the focus of the next study.

Davies, Markelz, and Rostermundt (2021) demonstrated how the integration of industry professional certifications within acquisition career fields increases workforce credibility, retention, and alignment with private-sector standards. Building on their

findings, this thesis evaluates the value of embedding professional certifications into skill-level progression, particularly for enlisted airmen who often lack access to structured civilian credentialing pathways. This extension of commercial best practices into enlisted development represents a unique contribution and a practical innovation not yet addressed in previous research.

Davies, Markelz, and Rostermundt's (2021) work advances research by Aufderheide (2011), who advocated for performance-based training models in DoD acquisition. While Aufderheide focused on program management competencies and officer pipelines, this study applies similar principles to the overlooked enlisted contracting workforce. By incorporating quantitative performance data and qualitative insights from career field leaders, this thesis establishes a baseline for competency gaps and offers a concrete framework for linking training to validated acquisition outcomes.

E. THIS RESEARCH'S CONTRIBUTION TO LITERATURE

This research makes a novel contribution to the growing body of literature focused on military contracting workforce development, competency-based education, and defense acquisition reform.

While prior research has underscored the importance of competency-based models in officer and civilian acquisition development, they have not explored their application to the enlisted Air Force contracting force. This thesis fills that gap by proposing a comprehensive, competency-based redesign of the enlisted training pipeline, rooted in the Contract Management Standard (CMS) and the Contract Management Body of Knowledge (CMBOK). It further distinguishes itself by investigating the share of the Air Force's contract portfolio procured or administered by enlisted Airmen and by exploring the integration of commercial professional contracting certification into enlisted skill-level progression.

F. SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was to review the research and theory relevant to reforming enlisted contracting training and development. It opened with auditability theory, establishing how organizational accountability rested on the interaction of a

competent workforce, capable processes, and effective internal controls. It then turned to competency-based training and education, traced its foundations, and explained how demonstrated capability improved performance. Next, it examined contract management as the point of convergence, showing how auditability components and competency-based methods reinforced one another across the contract life cycle. Finally, it drew out implications for the Air Force contracting career field, detailing how these frameworks informed updating the enlisted development, assessment, and policy alignment. The chapter concluded that, although prior studies identified the importance of audibility and competency, they had not been applied to the unique context of the Air Force's enlisted contracting workforce, a gap this research addresses.

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III. METHODOLOGY

A. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodological approach used to examine the reform of enlisted contracting training and development in the United States Air Force. This chapter explains the research design, the setting in which the research occurs, and the procedures used to access, collect, analyze, and report data. The methodology was selected to align directly with the study's three primary objectives: measure current enlisted proficiency and knowledge and workload share; evaluate the suitability of transitioning the Specialty Training Standard (STS) from a task-based to a competency-based model; and assess the feasibility and value of embedding professional certifications at enlisted skill-level milestones. These will be discussed in three categories: quantitative, qualitative, and policy.

B. DATA SOURCES

This research paper draws on a wide range of data sources in its attempt to reform enlisted contracting training and development. The sources selected provided both quantitative and qualitative insights, which ensured findings that, while grounded in practical data, were framed with insight from subject matter experts.

1. Quantitative

Quantitative data for this research will be divided into two areas of research: Measures of Enlisted Contract Proficiency and Measures of Enlisted DAF Contract Portfolio Share.

a. Measures of Enlisted Contracting Proficiency

The primary dataset for this area of research will be a workforce competency assessment to administer to the Air Force's active duty enlisted contracting community. The instrument will capture self-assessed proficiency in core buyer tasks and knowledge of seller tasks (in line with the National Contract Management Association's Contract Management Standard). This will produce a baseline picture of enlisted contracting

proficiency and knowledge. Items will be anchored to competency descriptors drawn from recognized contracting frameworks so that responses reflect performance expectations rather than generic confidence. Participation will be voluntary, with only limited demographic information (e.g., skill level, rank, years of experience) collected.

To place results in a broader defense context, findings will be compared to prior competency assesses with substantially similar constructs and response formats, enabling cross-study comparison (found in chapter four of this thesis).

The previous assessments that will be used were found in Grennan and McCrory's (2016) assessment of the Navy contracting workforce; Hayashi and Pfannenstiel's (2020) assessment of the Marine Corps Systems Command; Hoover's (2021) assessment of Marine Corps Expeditionary Contracting Platoons; and Hekkila, Shettle, and Lee's (2024) assessment of Army Contracting Support Brigade. While differences in mission sets and organizational structure are acknowledged, these studies provide useful benchmarks for interpreting relative strengths, gaps, and patterns across services.

b. Measures of Enlisted DAF Contract Portfolio Share

A second set of quantitative data will be used to create a proxy estimate of the enlisted workforce's contribution to the overall DAF contract workload. SAF/AQC provided a current alpha roster to establish the size and distribution of the enlisted contracting force. This roster will be paired with a comprehensive list of all fiscal year 2024 DAF contract actions, that will be extracted from the Federal Procurement Data System (FDPS). This will allow the team to link force size to action counts, which will enable an approximation of workload share attributable to enlisted personnel.

While the measurements of workload share does not directly address proficiency, it does frame the operational significance of the enlisted contracting workforce's contributions, allowing any other findings of this research to be interpreted in the context of the criticality of the enlisted contracting workforce's operational role.

2. Qualitative

Qualitative data will include targeted discussions with representatives from the National Contract Management Association (NCMA) and the Commerce & Contract

Management Institute (CCMI) to understand how the Contract Management Standard can be integrated into an Air Force training environment that remains anchored in FAR-based requirements. These interviews pursue three lines of inquiry. First, they translate CMS competency language into clear, observable performance expectations that can be mapped to the STS and CFETP. Second, they identify assessment practices, such as direct observation, that credibly demonstrate competence while complementing existing FAR-driven compliance checks. Third, they explore credential pathways and curriculum elements that align CMS competencies with government-specific contexts across pre-award, award, and post-award execution. Insights from these sessions will shape the competency-to-task crosswalks used in the analysis and will inform practical recommendations for embedding CMS-aligned outcomes within upgrade training and professional development, without diluting statutory and regulatory governance.

3. Policy

The policy sources for data in this research will be limited to those used directly as reference frameworks in developing a new, competency-based Specialty Training Standard (i.e., the Contract Management Standard and the Contract Management Body of Knowledge). This section will exclude policy sources such as the Career Field Education and Training Plan and Department of the Air Force Manual 36–2689, as they will serve only as background policy references, not as data sources.

The third edition of the Contract Management Standard will be used as source data for developing the competency requirements in the Specialty Training Standard that will correspond to the award of the 5-Skill Level (Journeyman) qualification. Domains and job task standards will be drawn directly from the document and will be used to map the specific tasks within the Specialty Training Standard. This will ensure the journeyman skill level reflects the core contracting competencies of a contracting professional with approximately 12 months of on-the-job experience, consistent with the standards outlined in both the Certified Contract Management Associate certification and the career field's CFETP standard for award of the journeyman qualification. The seventh edition of the Contract Management Body of Knowledge will be used as part of the source data for developing the competency requirements in the Specialty Training

Standard that will correspond to the award of the 7-Skill Level (Craftsman). This will ensure qualification requirements for more experienced enlisted contracting personnel reflect the advanced knowledge areas and professional practices expected of seasoned contracting professionals across the career field.

C. DATA ACCESS

This section describes how the data sources identified previously will be obtained by the research team. All data obtained will be unclassified and properly handled.

1. Quantitative

The research team developed the enlisted contracting workforce proficiency assessment in the Naval Postgraduate School's secure Qualtrics environment. To reach the target population, the survey link will be transmitted to the Chief Enlisted Policy at SAF/AQC, who will disseminate it to the Department of the Air Force Major Command of Chief Enlisted Managers. These managers will forward the invitation to Squadron Senior Enlisted Leaders for distribution to enlisted contracting Airmen across units. Participation is voluntary, and the landing page will include a brief consent statement describing the study's purpose, and the anonymous nature of responses will be included. No personally identifiable information will be requested or collected; only minimal, non-identifying demographics (e.g., skill level, duty location, years of service) were used for subgroup analysis. This distribution and access approach ensures broad coverage of the enlisted contracting community while protecting respondent confidentiality and data integrity.

An alpha roster of active duty enlisted contracting personnel will also be provided by the Chief of Enlisted Policy. This roster will include first name, last name, and rank of active duty enlisted contracting Airmen, but no personal data will be included beyond what is commonly available on duty rosters. The roster will be used only to establish the total size of the enlisted contracting force and for the research team to match personnel numbers against the fiscal year 2024 contract action data to create an approximation of the share of actions and dollars touched by the enlisted contracting workforce.

The fiscal year 2024 contract action data will be provided by the Office of the Chief of the Contracting Workforce Development Division. This data will include all recorded contract actions by the Department of the Air Force in fiscal year 2024 and all associated information, such as who created it, who approved it, who last modified it, contract type, and dollar amount.

2. Qualitative

For the qualitative component, the research team will conduct semi-structured interviews by phone, secure video, or email, based on participant preference. Interviewees will include representatives from NCMA and the Commerce & Contract Management Institute. Participants will receive an information sheet and be provided with verbal or written consent. Protocols will cover competency domains (e.g., judgment, situational assessment, systems thinking), contract life-cycle phases (pre-award, award, post-award), and development mechanisms (DAFMAN 36–2689, CFETP/STS, OJT/coaching, certifications). With permission, sessions will be recorded and transcribed; email responses served as written transcripts. Transcripts will be de-identified and stored in a restricted, encrypted workspace.

3. Policy

The third edition of the Contract Management Standards is publicly available and will be accessed directly from the National Contract Management Association's (NCMA) website by the research team. The seventh edition of the Contract Management Body of Knowledge will initially be accessed through personal copies owned by the research team, with guidance obtained through close coordination with NCMA. The research team will work directly with the Vice President of Research for the Commerce and Contract Management Institute and NCMA's Director of Certification to ensure that all use of any documents is consistent with how the organization intends its standards and documents to be applied.

In summary, all data used in this research will be obtained through official or professional channels, will be handled responsibly by the research team, and will be used only for research pertinent to this thesis. The assessment will be distributed through the

career field's senior-enlisted leadership chain; operational data (i.e., the personnel roster and contract data) will be provided by the sponsoring officer; and all professional standard documents will be accessed with direct support from NCMA.

D. DATA LIMITATIONS

Data collected by the research team will be subject to several limitations that will affect how the findings can be interpreted.

The research team will use a voluntarily completed assessment distributed through functional channels, which will lead to uneven coverage across units and MAJCOMs and will limit control over who responds or how carefully they complete it. Nonresponse and coverage bias will be possible and likely. Additionally, if response rates are limited, the team will need to pivot to basing inferences on a sample rather than the total population. The assessment will reflect self-reported proficiency and knowledge, not observed performance; responses may be influenced by overconfidence bias, local interpretations, and social desirability. The cross-sectional design will capture a single point in time and will not establish causation or developmental change.

Workload estimates will combine a SAF/AQC alpha roster with a fiscal-year contract-action dataset. The alpha roster will provide the number of active-duty enlisted contracting Airmen, along with rank and skill level, while the contract-action dataset will indicate how many actions occurred, of what type, and by whom. Because no complete dataset exists that merges these sources, the research team will integrate them to the best of its ability. The datasets will not tie every action to a specific person or grade; these will remain estimates rather than exact counts, but they will provide useful context for the enlisted share of the total workload. In addition, the career field does not maintain historical alpha rosters of enlisted personnel across fiscal years, leaving a single-year snapshot and no means to track trends in enlisted portfolio share over time.

Qualitative interviews will be conducted with intent but will be limited by access and scheduling. Depth will vary across roles, and perspectives may reflect rank dynamics or organizational loyalties. Anonymity, standardized prompts, and clarification checks will mitigate, but will not eliminate these risks.

Policy and standards documents (DAFMAN 36–2689; CFETP/STS; CMBOK/CMS; DoD Contracting Competency Model) will be used to frame constructs and assess alignment, not as empirical data, and versions may change over time. Finally, de-identification will prevent linking responses to personnel records or training outcomes, which will limit external validation and generalizability beyond the sampled enlisted contracting community.

E. DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis will proceed in three parts: assessment data on enlisted proficiency and development exposure, administrative data used to approximate workload share, and interview data that contextualize and interpret observed patterns. Throughout, results will be organized by competency domains like buyer activities, seller-side knowledge, and professional competencies such as judgment, situational assessment, systems thinking, and by contract life-cycle phase. They will also be interpreted against governing standards and policies: for example, the CMBOK/CMS, DoD Contracting Competency Model, DAFMAN 36–2689, and CFETP/STS.

1. Assessment Data

Assessment responses will be exported from the secure Qualtrics workspace in de-identified form. The dataset will be cleaned to remove incomplete records that lack core variables, normalize categorical labels, and check out-of-range values. Items will be grouped into competency domains using the instrument blueprint, which is aligned to the CMS and the DoD model. For each domain, the analysis will produce descriptive statistics like counts, means, and medians, as well as visualizations. Subgroup comparisons will examine differences by skill level, years of service, organization type, and life-cycle phase. Internal consistency checks will be conducted for multi-item domains to confirm that items designed to measure the same construct move together. To mitigate common self-reporting issues, several items will utilize behaviorally anchored scales and frequency prompts, with interpretation focusing on patterns and relative differences rather than single-item point estimates. Where comparable, results will be

benchmarked against earlier theses done by other services that used similar instruments to provide external reference points.

2. Workload Share: Alpha Roster & Fiscal-Year Contract Actions

To contextualize proficiency findings, the analysis will estimate the enlisted contribution to the Department of the Air Force contracting portfolio by combining two administrative sources: the SAF/AQC alpha roster, which will show force size and distribution, and the fiscal-year contract-action extract, which will show volume by phase/action type. Because the contract-action file will not attribute every action to a specific grade or individual, these figures will be treated as approximations intended to indicate scale and pattern rather than precise counts of executed actions. Visualizations will present these relationships and will be used to frame the operational significance of observed proficiency patterns.

3. Interview Data

Audio or written responses from semi-structured interviews will be transcribed and reviewed using a structured template. The analysis will first apply a predefined lens incorporating competency domains, life-cycle phases, and development mechanisms. For each documented theme, the research team will build a brief write-up that will include a short explanation and a cross-reference to relevant policy or standards. Where interview perspectives contradict the assessment patterns, the narrative will explicitly note the divergence and will discuss plausible reasons for why it occurred.

4. Integration and Interpretation of Data

This section will draw together patterns that consistently appear across assessment statistics, workload indicators, and interview themes. The goal will be to show where competency development aligns, or fails to align, with current training architecture and policy expectations, and to translate those findings into concrete implications for revising the STS/CFETP, shaping OJT objectives, and identifying opportunities to embed professional certifications into enlisted training.

Limitations that bear directly on interpretation, such as voluntary participation, self-reporting, and attribution constraints in the data used to analyze enlisted workload, will be reiterated alongside affected findings so readers can judge the weight of evidence in context. All figures and tables will include clear captions, axis labels, and notes on scale interpretation; detailed tabulations and instrument artifacts will be placed in appendices to preserve transparency without interrupting the flow of results.

F. FORMAT FOR REPORTING OF FINDINGS

A mixed-methods approach will be used, combining quantitative data (assessment metrics and workload figures) with qualitative data (interviews and written responses) within the same study. Each dataset will be analyzed separately, and the results will then be integrated to compare, corroborate, and explain patterns across sources. The assessment will quantify what and how much (e.g., proficiency and knowledge levels by competency and enlisted workload share), while the interviews will explain why those patterns appear and how units are implementing, or struggling with, training practices. This design will link numerical trends to experience, yielding findings that are both empirically credible and directly actionable for training and workforce development.

Quantitative findings will be presented first using response counts, descriptive statistics (means and medians), and data visualizations (tables, bar/box charts, heat maps). A dedicated section will depict workload share by combining the SAF/AQC alpha roster with the fiscal-year contract-action dataset to show enlisted contribution across phases and action types. Where comparable, results will be benchmarked against earlier service studies that used similar instruments, and graphics will include clear captions, axis labels, and notes on scale interpretation.

Qualitative results will follow as a narrative organized by research question and major themes (e.g., documentation versus demonstrated competence, barriers to systems thinking, feasibility of certification integration). Each theme will include a short explanation, an anonymized quotation, and a brief note linking the insight to relevant policy and standards. Brief notes on limitations that affect interpretation, such as voluntary participation and uneven depth across roles, will appear where relevant.

G. SUMMARY

The chapter outlined the research methodology and the study design; identified data sources: an enterprise assessment of enlisted contracting Airmen, administrative files used to approximate workload share (SAF/AQC alpha roster paired with the FY24 contract-action extract), and semi-structured interviews with field leaders and external experts (including NCMA and the Commerce & Contract Management Institute); and explained data access, protection, and de-identification procedures. It also detailed how survey items were mapped to recognized contracting competency frameworks such as the CMS and the DoD Contracting Competency Model, how responses would be cleaned and summarized with tables and graphics, and how workload indicators would be derived to situate proficiency findings in an operational context. The chapter also specified how interview themes would be organized by research question and competency domain and linked back to the governing policy DAFMAN 36–2689 and the CFETP/STS. Finally, it set the format for reporting results and acknowledged key limitations, voluntary participation, self-report measures, attribution constraints in workload data, and uneven interview depth, so readers can judge evidence strength. Together, these choices establish a transparent and reproducible path from data collection to analysis, enabling the findings in the next chapter.

IV. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

A. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the quantitative data described in Chapter III. This includes data collected from the measures of enlisted contracting competency assessment, which measured proficiency in buyer tasks and knowledge of seller's tasks for the enlisted contracting workforce, as well as measures of enlisted DAF portfolio share areas of research.

The analysis in this chapter will examine how the enlisted contracting workforce performed across each of the primary contract domains outlined in the Contract Management Standard; then compare those results against three recent competency assessments of buyer task proficiency and seller task knowledge in other Department of Defense contracting workforces, to provide a measurement of relative proficiency.

Finally, it will examine the enlisted contracting workforce's share of the Department of the Air Force's contracting portfolio to evaluate how the workload distribution might align with proficiency. Together, these analyses will provide a clear, data-driven assessment of the enlisted contracting workforce. These results can then be used by the research team to make a recommendation on workforce development that can be implemented to ensure that the enlisted contracting workforce can better meet the needs of the Department of the Air Force.

This section will present the research team's quantitative findings in the two primary areas of research outlined previously. The first portion will analyze the assessment data collected by the research team to establish a baseline of the enlisted contracting workforce's proficiency and knowledge across the three Contract Management Standard life cycle phases. The section will also examine the enlisted contracting workforce's share of the Department of the Air Force contract portfolio from fiscal year 2024. Together, the two sets of data are expected to provide a comprehensive, data-driven illustration of the state of the enlisted contracting workforce.

B. FINDINGS

This section will present the quantitative findings and analysis of the assessment data collected by the research team in order to establish a baseline of the enlisted contracting workforce's proficiency and knowledge across the different Contract Management Standard domains.

1. Competency Assessment

The assessment used by the research team represented the first instance in the Department of the Air Force where the proficiency and knowledge of the enlisted contracting workforce related to contemporary Department of Defense contracting workforces in relation to the National Contract Management Association's Contract Management Standard. It was done to establish quantitative baseline proficiency and knowledge in support of the research team's larger goal of reforming enlisted training and developing within the contracting career field.

2. Design and Implementation

The assessment used by the research team was originally developed by Rendon (2021) for use in previous Naval Postgraduate School research as a means of measuring proficiency and knowledge for different contracting workforces. For this research, the team used the Naval Postgraduate Schools' "Qualtrics" assessment tool. While the core of the assessment remained as it had appeared in previous theses (within the competency domains of the National Contract Administration's Contract Management Standard), a third section was added to the assessment to assess the Department of the Air Force's enlisted contracting workforce's contingency contracting proficiency.

The use of the assessment ensured that any data collected by the research team would not only be comparable to previous research but provide a standardized and repeatable means of evaluating the proficiency and knowledge of the enlisted contracting workforce in any future research.

The assessment was published by the research team on 16 April 2025 and remained open for approximately 90 calendar days. It was disseminated by the Chief of Enlisted Policy as SAF/AQC through Major Command Chief Enlisted Manger, followed

by installed Contracting Senior Enlisted Leaders. The assessment received 53 valid responses out of approximately 1,500 enlisted contracting Airmen, giving an estimated response rate of 3.53%. The assessment reviewed self-reported proficiency in performing buyer tasks and knowledge of seller tasks (as defined by the Contract Management Standard), by using a five-point Likert Scale of responses.

3. Measuring and Analyzing Outcomes

To evaluate the outcomes of the enlisted contracting workforce assessment, the research team calculated the mean proficiency rating of each task within the Contract Management Standard aligned competency area.

In addition to measuring the overall proficiency or knowledge of respondents in each area, the research team used the standard deviation in responses to attempt to infer the reliability of respondent's self-assessments. A lower standard deviation indicated a more robust consensus among participants and presumed greater group confidence in the tasks. A higher standard deviation indicated a wider variation in responses received to a query, indicating inconsistency in group familiarity with a task and presumed overestimation of proficiency or knowledge among some respondents.

For the purposes of the analysis, and to ensure the same standard was applied to each area, the research team used a simplified approach for interpreting the standard deviations of the data provided in the assessment. The teams approach followed Darling (2022), who outlined that a lower standard deviation meant responses were tightly clustered around an average, and as that standard deviation increased beyond 1.0 responses would become significantly more scattered. This meant the research team considered a standard deviation of less than .75 to represent an extremely tight clustering of responses and was interpreted by the research team as having a very low likelihood of group overestimation. A standard deviation between .76 and 1.00 represented a moderate variation in responses consistent with a normal spread and was interpreted by the research team as having a lower likelihood of group overestimation. A standard deviation between 1.01 and 1.19 represented a higher variation in responses that may not be consistent with a normal spread and was interpreted by the research team as having a higher likelihood of group overestimation. Finally, a standard deviation greater than 1.20

represented a very high variation in responses that were outside of the expectations of a normal spread of responses and was interpreted by the research team has having a very high likelihood of group overestimation.

4. Demographics

Figure 1 below illustrates the distribution of skill levels among participants. It shows that of the 50 respondents who answered the question, approximately 36% were journeymen or lower, and approximately 84% were craftsmen or lower. The composition of the figure suggests that the assessment primarily captured members of the enlisted contracting workforce between the ranks of E1 and E6, the portion of the workforce responsible for executing day-to-day mission (per Air Force Handbook 36–2618, Enlisted Force Structure). This group was the primary target of research.

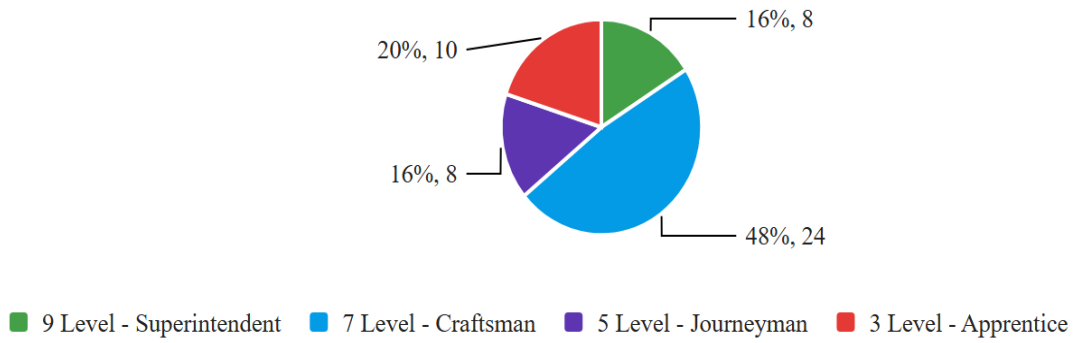


Figure 1. Assessment Participant Skill Level Distribution

Figure 2 below illustrates the distribution of contracting experience among participants. It shows that of the 50 respondents who answered the question, approximately 62% of respondents had less than 10 years of experience in the career field, and only 8% of respondents had more than 15 years of service. While the research team had initially hoped for stronger representation from entrants with five or less years of service (approximately 40% of the sample in Figure 2), the distribution still confirmed that the assessment primarily captured the core of the enlisted contracting workforce, those in the early to middle stages of their careers responsible for day-to-day operational execution.

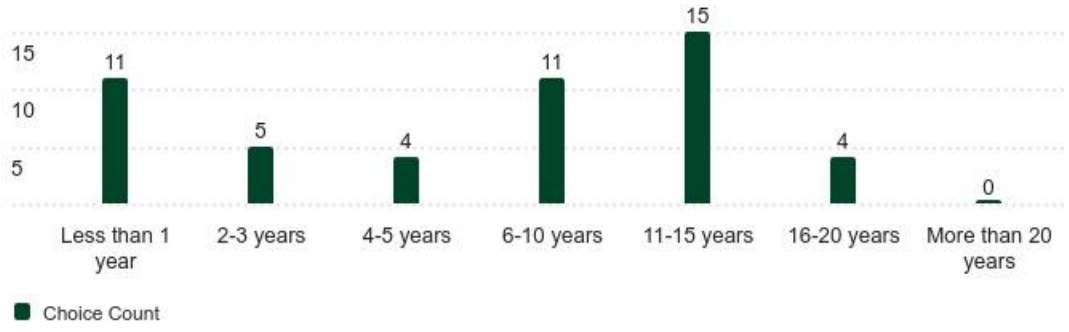


Figure 2. Assessment Participant Experience

Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of education levels among participants. It demonstrates the enlisted contracting workforce brings a broad range of education levels to the career field (note: the query was single-choice and was meant to denote the *highest* level of degree held, this means for example, some individuals with a bachelors degree may or may not have a CCAF or associates degree). With 76% of respondents holding at least a CCAF or an associate's degree), 50% of respondents holding a four-year degree or higher, and 24% of respondents holding higher than a bachelors degree to include at least a graduate degree. The data collected by the research teams assessment demonstrated that the Air Force's enlisted contracting workforce is significantly more educated than the broader Department of Defense enlisted population (*Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy, 2020),* where only 23% of the population holds at least a two-year degree, 9% hold a four-year degree or higher, and 2% hold a graduate degree or higher.

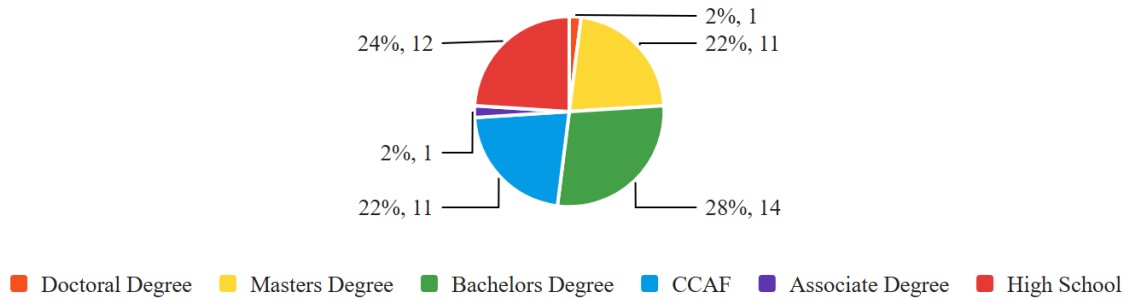


Figure 3. Assessment Participant Education Level

Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of Contracting Officer warrants among participants. Approximately 64% of the respondents reported holding an active Contracting Officer warrant.

Figure 4. Assessment Participant Warrant Status

In summation, the demographic data collected by the research team reveals that the preponderance of respondents were junior to mid-level enlisted members, with less than 10 years of experience, the target group of this research. The data also revealed that this group appeared to hold a comparatively high level of formal education in comparison to the larger Department of Defense enlisted force, with approximately half of respondents holding at least a 4-year degree. Finally, approximately 64% of respondents reported holding an active Contracting Officer's warrant at the time of the assessment.

Collectively, this demographic data established that the research teams sampling effectively captured the core group of the Air Force's enlisted contracting workforce. Junior to mid-level enlisted Airmen involved in day-to-day contracting execution, who possess adequate formal education, career field experience, and contracting authority to provide a meaningful picture of the Air Force's enlisted contracting work force's proficiency and knowledge.

5. Buyer Task Proficiency

The figures and analysis found in this section discuss enlisted contracting professionals' self-assessed proficiency in performing key buyer tasks across the contract management life cycle.

Figure 5 illustrates the mean proficiency rating for all buyer task domains across the contract management life cycle. The following sections examine each phase individually.

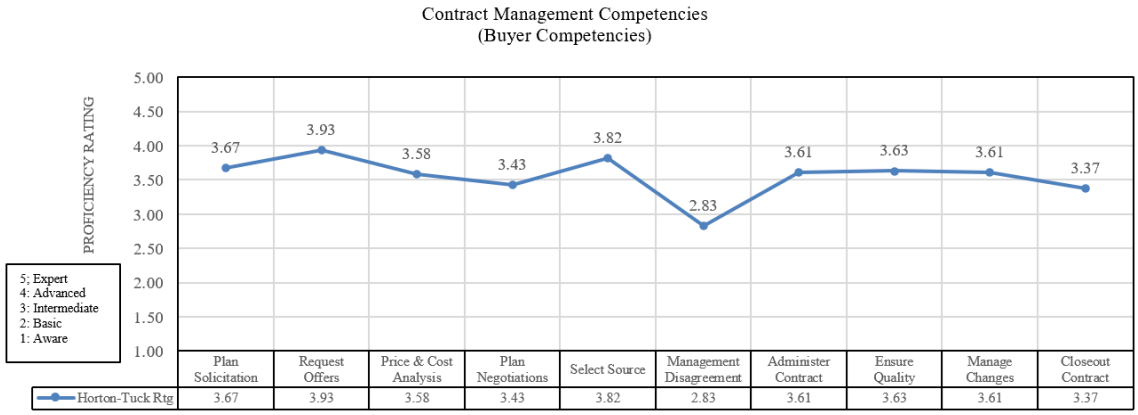


Figure 5. Mean Buyer Proficiency Ratings – Overall

a. Pre-Award

Figure 6 illustrates the Plan Solicitation domain results, which describes buyers' early planning that define the requirement and solicitation strategy. The overall mean proficiency for the competency area was 3.67. The highest rated task was *Make Supply or Services Determination* (4.16). The lowest rated task was *Conduct Make or Buy Assessment* (2.94). The Standard Deviation for responses in this area was 1.07, which indicated a higher level of variation among responses, suggesting inconsistent familiarity with the tasks and possible inflation in the mean based off perceived proficiency. The upper and lower ends of self-assessment suggest respondents demonstrated confidence in requirement and solicitation planning activities, but less confidence in tasks required analytical sourcing judgement.

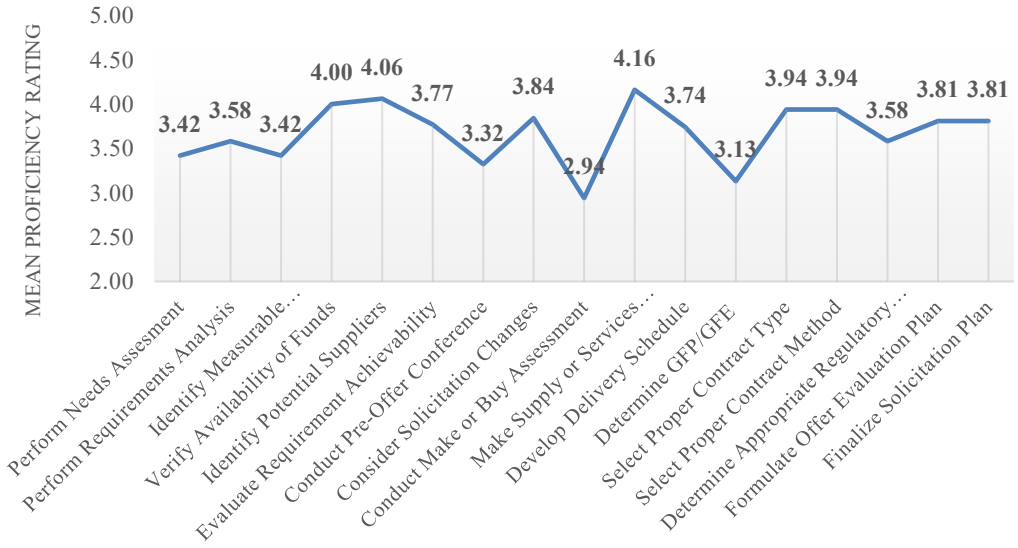


Figure 6. Buyer Task Proficiency – Plan Solicitation

Figure 7 illustrates the Request Offer domain results, which describes buyers' tasks concerning issuing and managing solicitations. The overall mean proficiency for the competency area was 3.93. The highest rated task was *Amend Solicitation* (4.16). The lowest rated task was *Determine Need for Pre-Offer Review* (3.48). The Standard Deviation for responses in this area was 0.96, which indicated a moderate level of variation among responses, suggesting the results were more broadly reliable, though subject to normal variations in experience. The upper and lower ends of self-assessment suggest respondents demonstrated strong confidence in procedural activities, but less confidence in tasks requirement discretionary judgment.

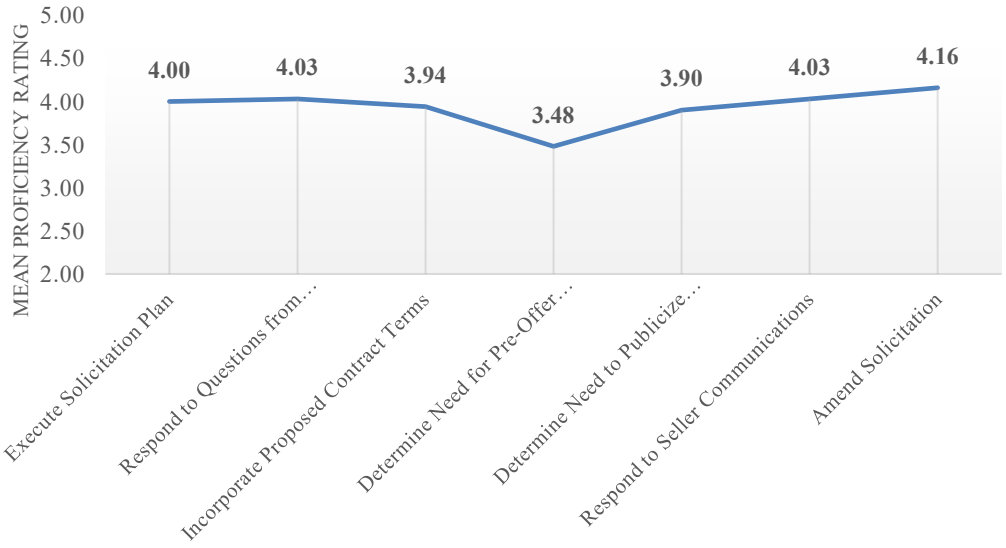


Figure 7. Buyer Task Proficiency – Request Offers

b. Award

Figure 8 illustrates the Analyze Price or Cost domain results, which describes buyers' tasks associated with evaluating offers to determine price reasonableness and overall best value. The overall mean proficiency for this competency area was 3.58. The highest rated task was *Comprehend Offer* (3.87). The lowest rated task was *Perform Cost Analysis* (2.97). The standard deviation for responses in this area was 0.96, which indicated a moderate level of variation among responses, suggesting the results are broadly reliable, though subject to normal variation in experience. The upper and lower ends of self-assessment suggest respondents demonstrated stronger confidence in documenting, and less confidence in performing any analysis of offerors proposals beyond price analysis.

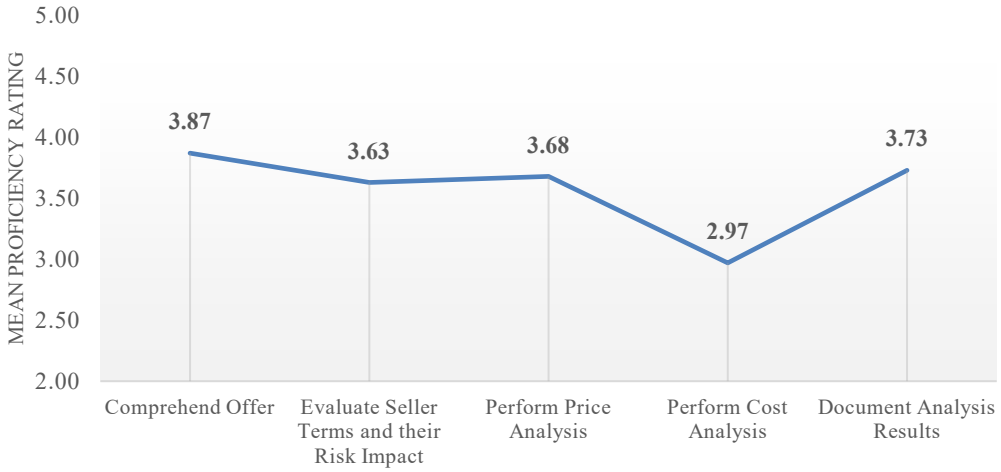


Figure 8. Buyer Task Proficiency – Analyze Price or Cost

Figure 9 illustrates the Plan Negotiations domain results, which describes buyers' tasks associated with clarifying offers and planning negotiations prior to award. The overall mean proficiency for this competency area was 3.43. The highest rated task was *Prepare Clarification Requests* (3.52). The lowest rated task was *Document Negotiation Objective* (3.37). The standard deviation for responses in this area was 1.01, which indicated a higher level of variation among responses, suggesting inconsistent familiarity with the tasks and possible inflation in the mean based off perceived proficiency. The upper and lower ends of self-assessment suggest respondents demonstrated stronger confidence in engaging in lower impact exchanges, but less confidence in preparing for formal negotiations.

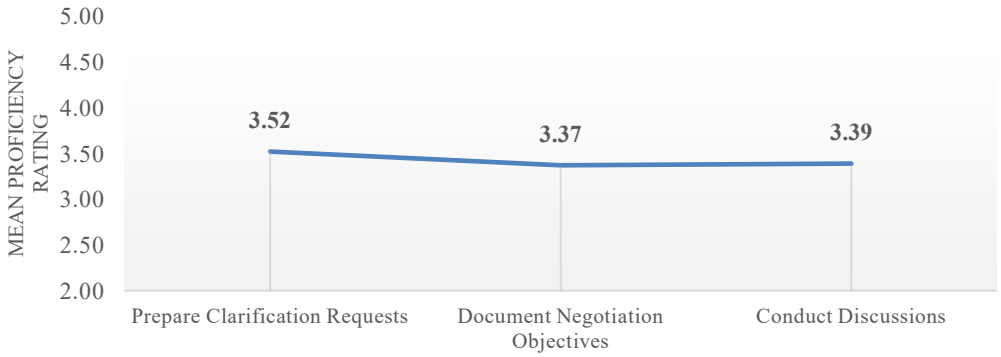


Figure 9. Buyer Task Proficiency – Plan Negotiations

Figure 10 illustrates the Select Source domain results, which describes buyer's tasks associated with finalizing negotiations, evaluation of proposals, and contract award.

The overall mean proficiency for this competency area was 3.82. The highest rated task was *Award Contract* (4.30). The lowest rated task was tied between *Conduct Negotiations* (3.23) and *Finalize Negotiations* (3.23). The standard deviation for responses in this area was 1.00, which indicated a moderate level of variation among responses, suggesting the results are broadly reliable, though subject to normal variation in experience. The upper and lower ends of self-assessment suggest respondents demonstrated stronger confidence in administrative award procedures, but less confidence in active negotiation activities.

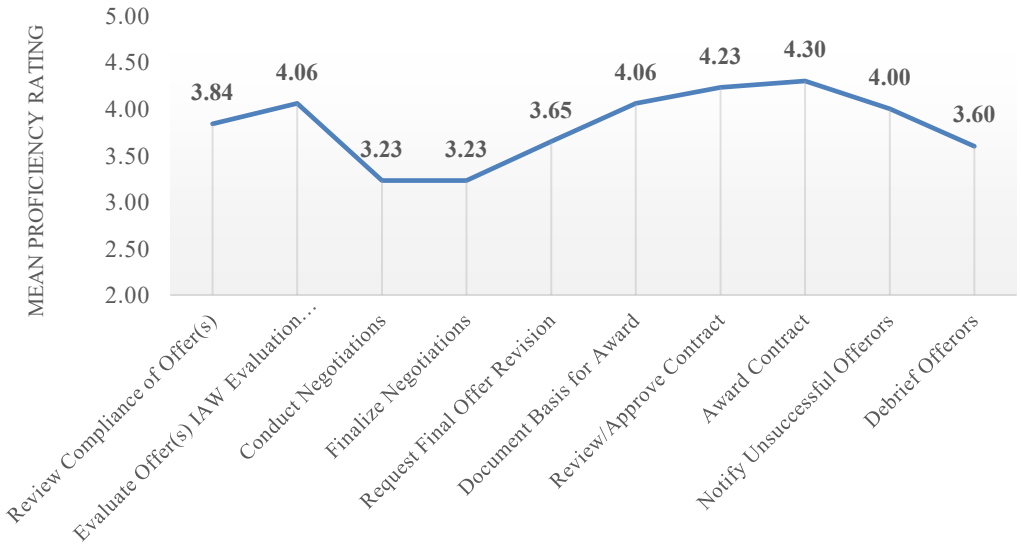


Figure 10. Buyer Task Proficiency – Select Source

Figure 11 illustrates the Manage Disagreements domain results, which describes buyers' proficiency in responding to disagreements from interested parties during the award phase. The competency area included only a single element. The standard deviation for responses in the area was 1.13, which indicated a higher level of variation among respondents suggesting inconsistent familiarity and possible inflation in the mean based off perceived proficiency. The results suggest limited hands-on experience among respondents regarding formal protests after contract award.

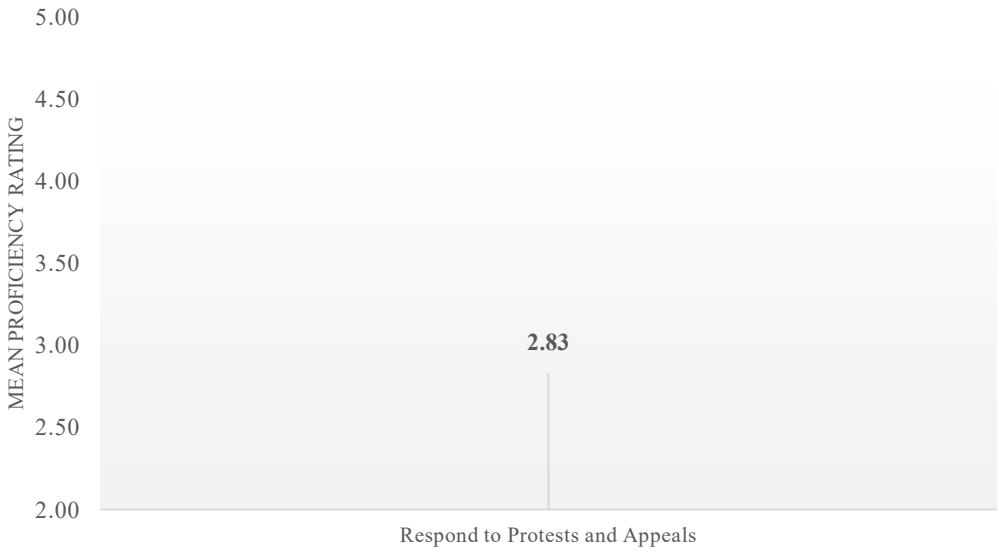


Figure 11. Buyer Task Proficiency – Manage Disagreements

c. Post-Award

Figure 12 illustrates the Administer Contract domain results, which describes buyers' tasks associated with administering contracts after successful award. The overall mean proficiency for this competency area was 3.61. The highest rated task was *Execute Contract* (4.06). The lowest rated tasks was *Administer GFP/GFE* (3.00). The standard deviation for responses in this area was 1.17 which indicated a higher level of variation among responses, suggesting inconsistent familiarity with the tasks and possible inflation of the mean based off perceived proficiency. The upper and lower ends of self-assessment suggests respondents demonstrated stronger confidence in routine contract administration tasks, but less confidence in property accountability and technical oversight responsibilities.

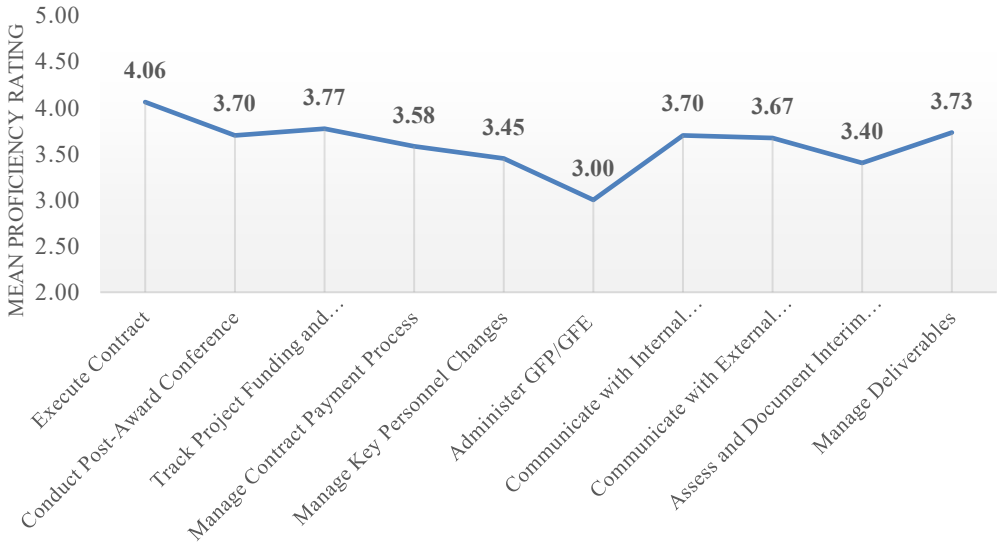


Figure 12. Buyer Task Proficiency – Administer Contract

Figure 13 illustrates the Ensure Quality domain results, which describes buyers' tasks associated with monitoring and validating contractor performance to ensure quality outcomes. The overall mean proficiency for this competency area was 3.63. The highest rated task was *Inspect and Accept Contract Performance* (3.65). The lowest rated task was *Conduct Contract Performance Reviews* (3.61). The standard deviation for responses in this area was 1.18, which indicated a higher level of variation among responses, suggesting inconsistent familiarity with the tasks and possible inflation in the mean based off perceived proficiency. The upper and lower ends of self-assessment suggest respondents demonstrated confidence in accepting performance in electronic systems (i.e., the Procurement Integrated Enterprise Environment), but less confidence in more subjective areas such as overseeing government furnished property or managing changes in personnel.

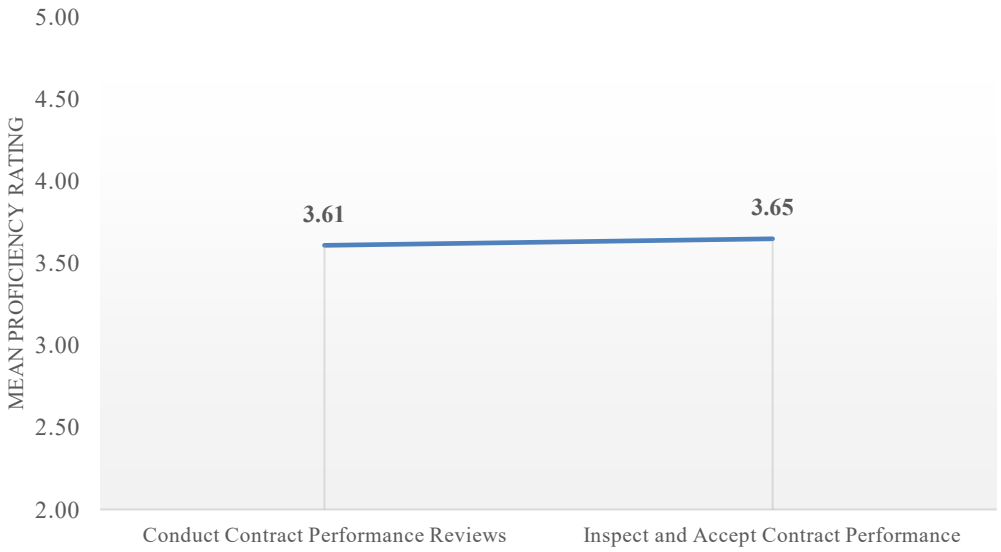


Figure 13. Buyer Task Proficiency – Ensure Quality

Figure 14 illustrates the Manage Subcontracts domain results, which describes buyers' tasks associated with subcontracting requirements during the administration of a contract. The overall mean proficiency for this competency area was 2.40. The highest rated task was *Subcontract Planning* (2.43). The lowest rated task was *Subcontract Administration* (2.37). The standard deviation for responses in this area was 0.96, which indicated a moderate level of variation among responses, suggesting the results were broadly reliable, though subject to normal variations in experience. The upper and lower ends of self-assessment respondents demonstrated limited confidence in all areas of subcontract management, possibly reflecting minimal exposure to subcontracting processes in operational roles.

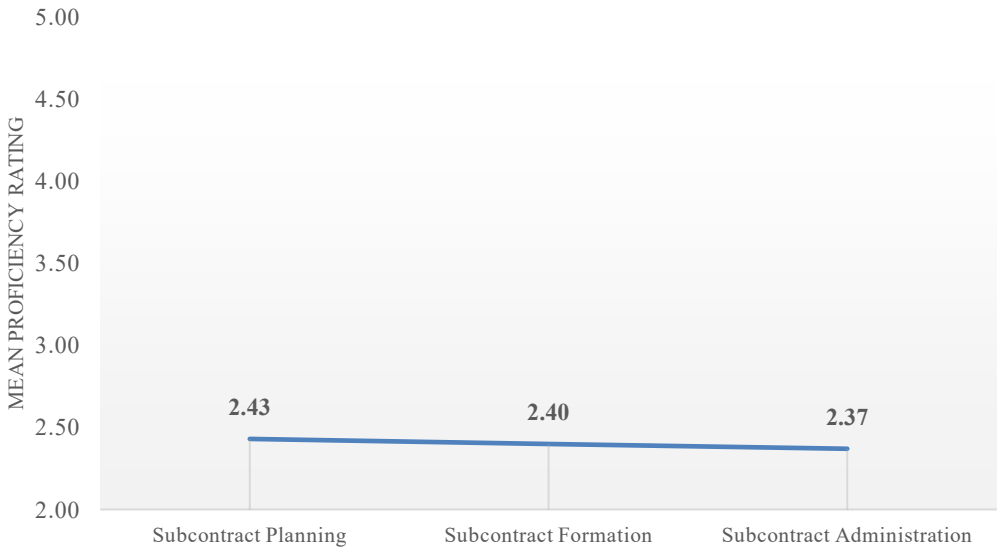


Figure 14. Buyer Task Proficiency – Manage Subcontracts

Figure 15 illustrates the Manage Changes domain results, which describes buyers' tasks associated with planning, executing, and administering contract modifications. The overall mean proficiency for this competency area was 3.61. The highest rated task was *Modification Administration* (3.97). The lowest rated task was *Execute Contract Termination* (2.97). The standard deviation in responses for this area was 1.01, which indicated a higher level of variation in responses, suggesting inconsistent familiarity with the tasks and possible inflation in the mean based off perceived proficiency. The upper and lower ends of self-assessment suggest respondents demonstrated stronger confidence in routine modification execution, but less confidence in managing contract terminations.

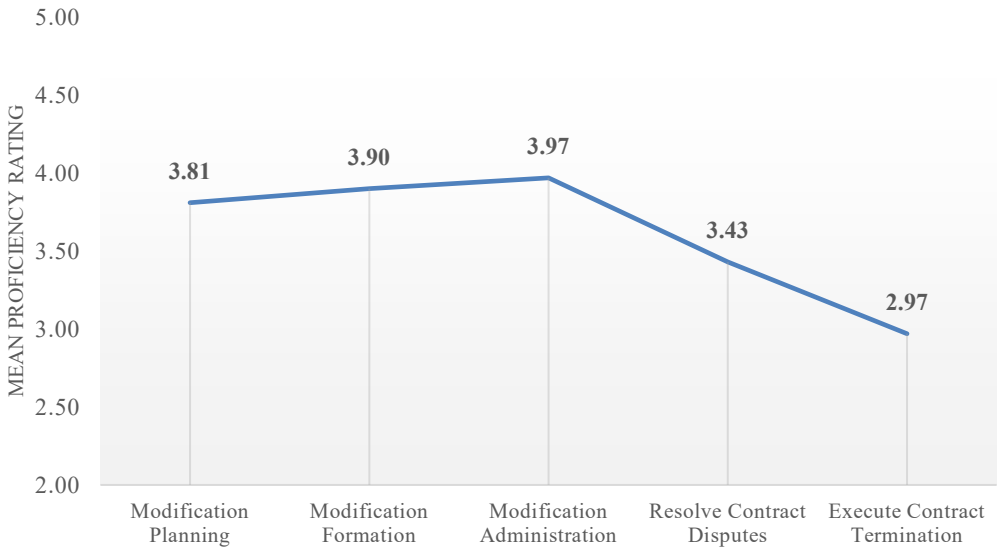


Figure 15. Buyer Task Proficiency – Manage Changes

Figure 16 illustrates the Contract Closeout domain results, which describes buyers' tasks associated with finalizing contract performance and conducting administrative contract closeout actions. The overall mean proficiency for this competency area was 3.37. The highest rated task was *Finalize Contract Closeout* (3.84). The lowest rated task was *Respond to Audits* (2.61). The standard deviation for responses in this area was 1.17, which indicated a higher level of variation among responses, suggesting inconsistent familiarity with the tasks and possible inflation in the mean based off perceived proficiency. The upper and lower ends of self-assessment suggest respondents demonstrated stronger confidence in conducting administrative closeout actions in electronic systems (i.e., the Procurement Integrated Enterprise Environment), but less confidence in more complex audit or property related disposition tasks.

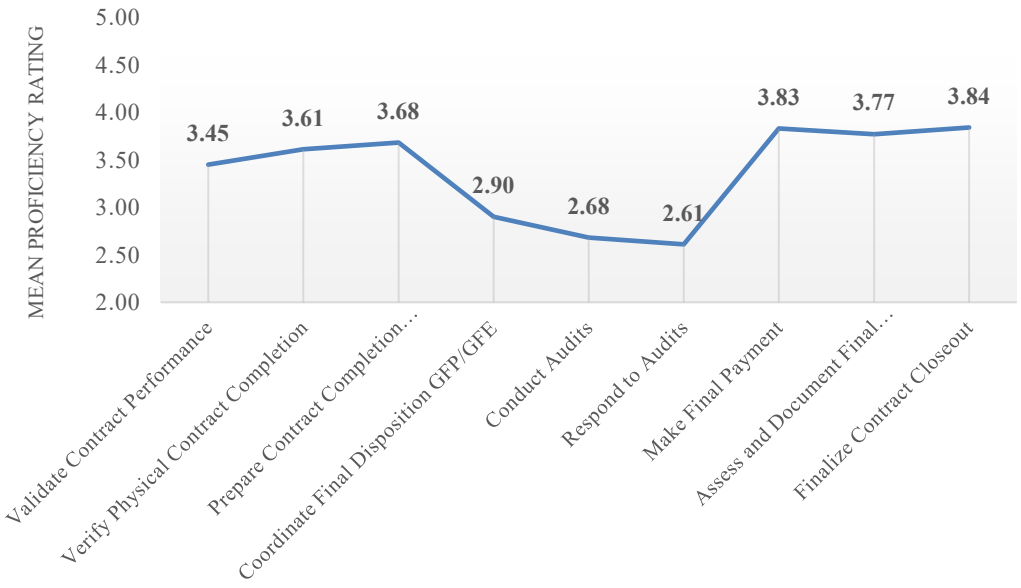


Figure 16. Buyer Task Proficiency – Closeout Contract

6. Seller Task Knowledge

The figures and analysis found in this section discuss enlisted contracting professionals' self-assessed knowledge of seller tasks across the contract management life cycle.

Figure 17 illustrates the mean knowledge rating for all seller task domains across the contract management life cycle. The following sections examine each domain individually.

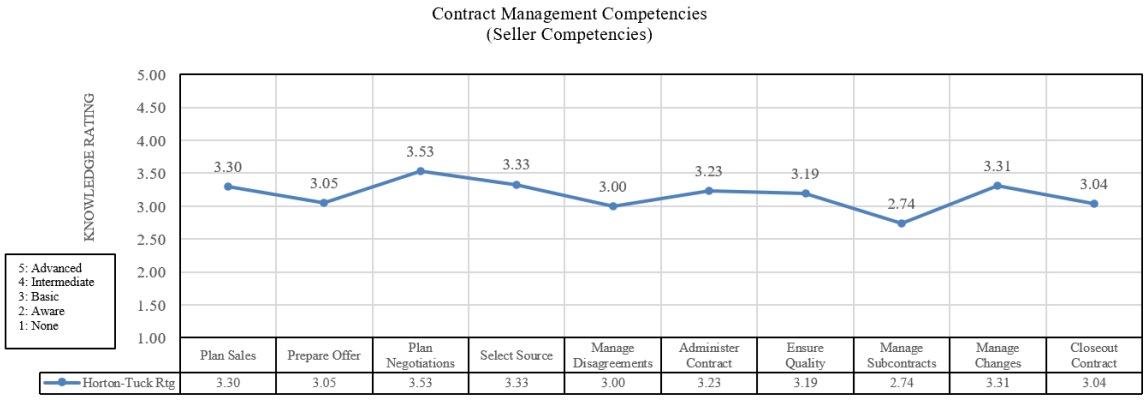


Figure 17. Mean Seller Knowledge Rating – Overall

a. Pre-Award

Figure 18 illustrates the results for the Plan Sales domain, which describes buyers' knowledge of seller's tasks associated with identifying potential contract opportunities, as well as developing marking and sales strategies. The overall mean for this competency area was 3.30. The highest rated task was *Propose Solicitation Changes* 3.74). The lowest rated task was *Finalize Sales Plan* (2.77). The standard deviation for responses in this area was 1.11, which indicated a higher level of variation among responses, suggesting inconsistent familiarity with the tasks and possible inflation in the mean based off perceived knowledge. The upper and lower ends of self-assessment suggest that respondents demonstrated stronger confidence in knowledge of seller tasks wherein they were directly engaged with the buyer, but less confidence in understanding sellers' internal business planning.

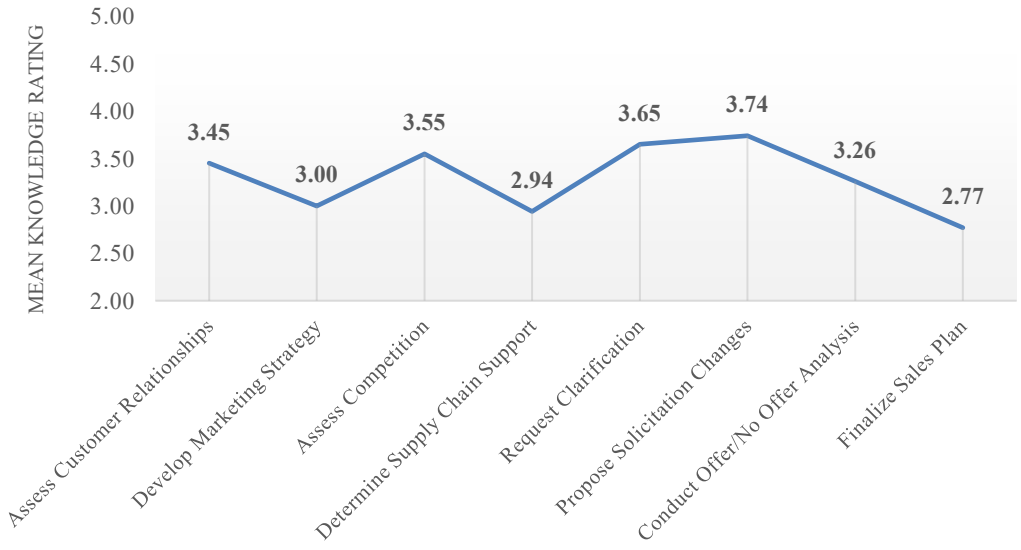


Figure 18. Seller Task Knowledge – Plan Sales

Figure 19 illustrates the results for the Prepare Offer domain, which describes buyers' knowledge of seller's tasks associated with developing and submitting offers in response to solicitations. The overall mean for this competency area was 3.05. The highest rated task was *Assess Capability to Satisfy Requirements* (3.52). The lowest rated tasks were tied between *Execute Sales Plan* (2.77) and *Negotiate Nondisclosure Agreements* (2.77). The standard deviation for responses in this area was 1.03, which indicated a higher level of variation among responses, suggesting inconsistent familiarity

with the tasks and possible inflation in the mean based off perceived knowledge. The upper and lower ends of self-assessment suggest that respondents demonstrated stronger confidence in understanding seller tasks that required direct interaction with buyer documents, but less confidence with how sellers may internally develop offers.

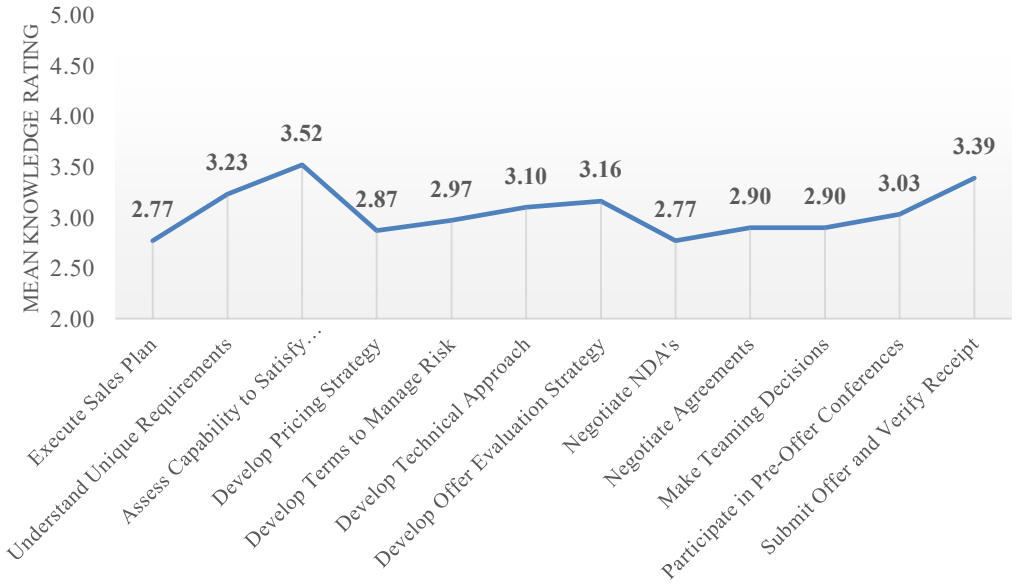


Figure 19. Seller Task Knowledge – Prepare Offer

b. Award

Figure 20 illustrates the results for the Plan Negotiations domain, which describes buyers' knowledge of seller's tasks associated with exchanges with buyers after submission of an offer but prior to a buyer's selection of a source. The overall mean for this competency area was 3.53. The highest rated task was *Respond to Clarification Requests* (3.65). The lowest rated task was *Document Negotiation Objectives* (3.39). The standard deviation for responses in this area was 0.91, which indicated a moderate level of variation among responses, suggesting the results were broadly reliable, though subject to normal variations in experience. The upper and lower ends of self-assessment suggest that respondents demonstrated stronger confidence in their knowledge of how sellers interact with buyers during exchanges, but less confidence in the seller's internal documentation processes that precede those exchanges.

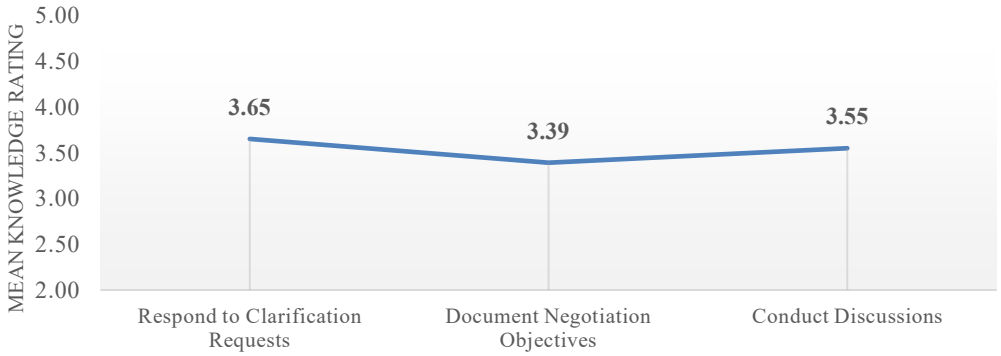


Figure 20. Seller Task Knowledge – Plan Negotiations

Figure 21 illustrates the results of the Select Source domain, which describes buyers' knowledge of seller's tasks associated with finalizing negotiations and receiving contract award. The overall mean for this competency area was 3.33. The highest rated task was *Review/Approve Contract* (3.55). The lowest rated tasks were tied between *Withdraw Offer* (3.19) and *Finalize Negotiations* (3.19). The standard deviation for responses in this area was 1.06, which indicated a higher level of variation among responses, suggesting inconsistent familiarity with the tasks and possible inflation in the mean based off perceived knowledge. The upper and lower ends of self-assessment suggest that respondents demonstrated stronger confidence in seller actions that mirror buyer actions, but less confidence in internal seller decision making.

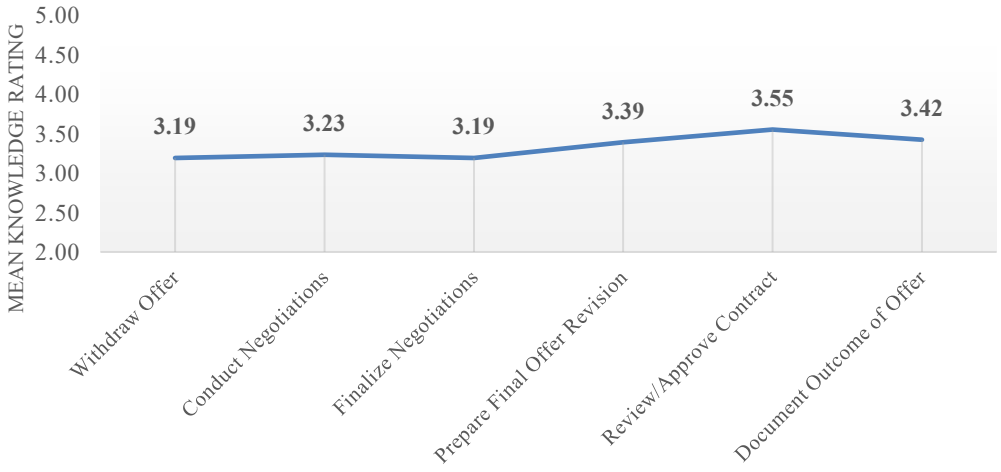


Figure 21. Seller Task Knowledge – Select Source

Figure 22 illustrates the results for the Manage Disagreement domain, which describes buyers' knowledge of the seller task associated with submitting protests and/or

appeals following an unsuccessful offer. The overall mean for this competency area was 3.00. The standard deviation for responses in this area was 0.92, which indicated a moderate level of variation among responses, suggesting the results were broadly reliable, though subject to normal variations in experience. The results of the self-assessment suggest that respondents demonstrated limited confidence with how sellers internally approach recourse to source selection, likely due to minimal exposure.

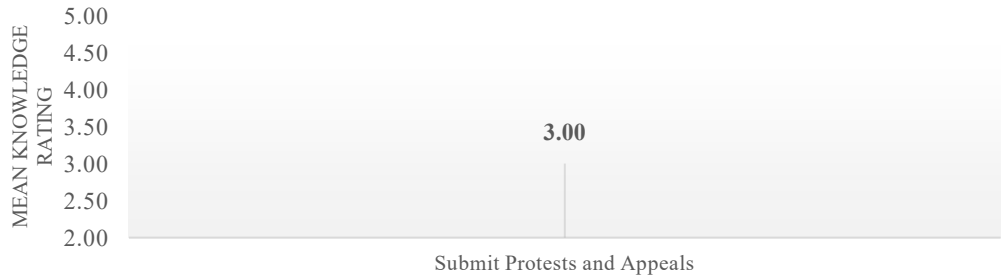


Figure 22. Seller Task Knowledge – Manage Disagreement

c. Post-Award

Figure 23 illustrates the results for the Administer Contract domain, which describes buyers' knowledge of seller's tasks associated with managing contract performance after award. The overall mean for this competency area was 3.23. The highest rated task was *Conduct Post-Award Conference Meeting* (3.52). The lowest rated task was *Administer GFP/GFE* (2.81). The standard deviation for responses in this area was 1.16, which indicated a higher level of variation among responses, suggesting inconsistent familiarity with the tasks and possible inflation of the mean based off perceived knowledge. The upper and lower ends of self-assessment suggest that respondents demonstrated strong confidence in knowledge of how sellers communicate with the buyers and how they manage payment in electronic systems (i.e., requesting payment in the Procurement Integrated Enterprise Environment), but less confidence in internal seller controls for managing furnished property or oversight functions.

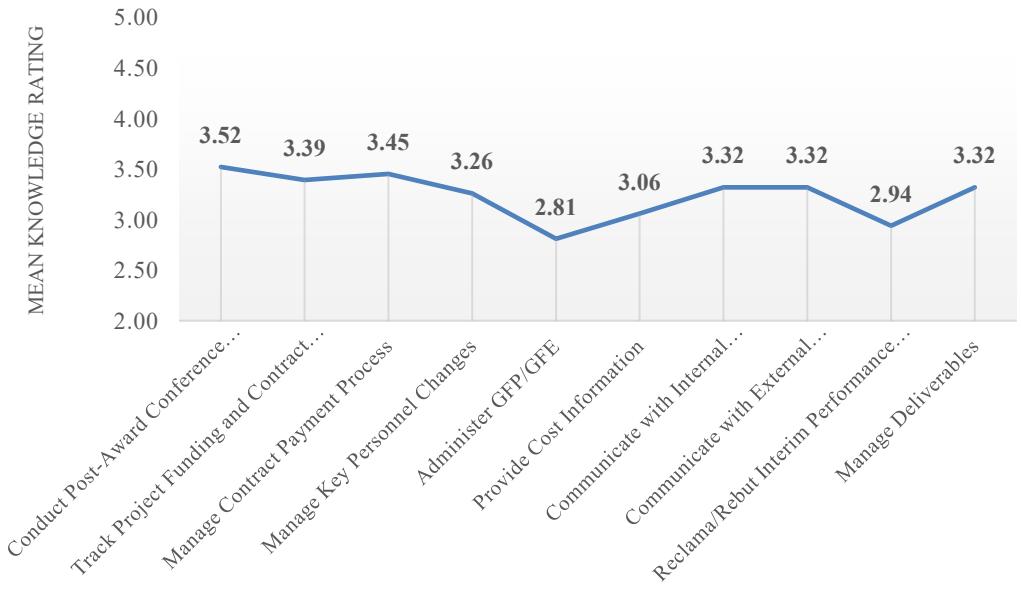


Figure 23. Seller Task Knowledge – Administer Contract

Figure 24 illustrates the results for the Ensure Quality domain, which describes buyers' knowledge of seller's tasks associated with managing the cost, schedule, and performance elements of a contract. The overall mean for this competency area was 3.19. The highest rated task was *Control Quality for Contract Performance* (3.32). The lowest rated task was *Allocate Resources for Contract Performance* (3.06). The standard deviation for responses in this area was 0.99, which indicated a moderate level of variation among responses, suggesting the results were broadly reliable, though subject to normal variations in experience. The upper and lower ends of self-assessment suggest that respondents demonstrated relatively balanced confidence in their knowledge of all tasks under the competency area.

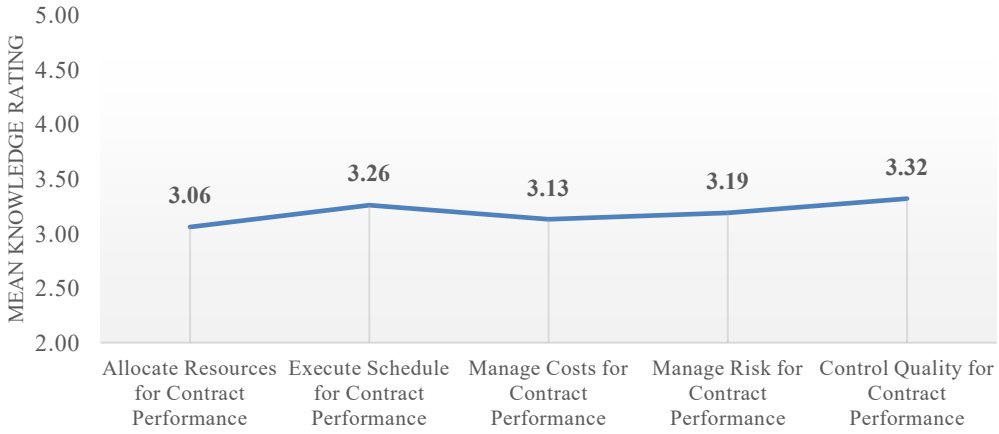


Figure 24. Seller Task Knowledge – Ensure Quality

Figure 25 illustrates the results of the Manage Subcontracts domain, which describes buyers' knowledge of seller's tasks associated with managing subcontracts. The overall mean for this competency area was 2.74. The standard deviation for responses in this area was 0.95, which indicated a moderate level of variation among responses, suggesting the results were broadly reliable, though subject to normal variations in experience. The self-assessment results suggest that respondents demonstrated very limited confidence in understanding sellers internal supply chain management activities, possibly reflecting minimal exposure to internal seller supply chain planning.

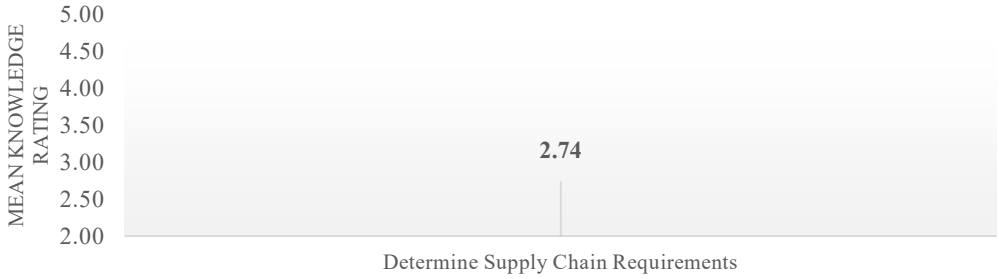


Figure 25. Seller Task Knowledge – Manage Subcontracts

Figure 26 illustrates the results for the Manage Changes domain, which describes buyers' knowledge of seller's tasks associated with planning for, forming, and administering modifications to a contract. The overall mean for this competency area was 3.31. The highest rated task was *Modification Formation* (3.48). The lowest rated task was *Execute Contract Termination* (3.13). The standard deviation for responses in this area was 1.02, which indicated a higher level of variation among responses, suggesting

inconsistent familiarity with the tasks and possible inflation in the mean based off perceived knowledge. The upper and lower ends of self-assessment suggest that respondents demonstrated stronger confidence in knowledge of standard modification processes, but less confidence in understanding the seller's role in the resolution of disputes and/or contract terminations.

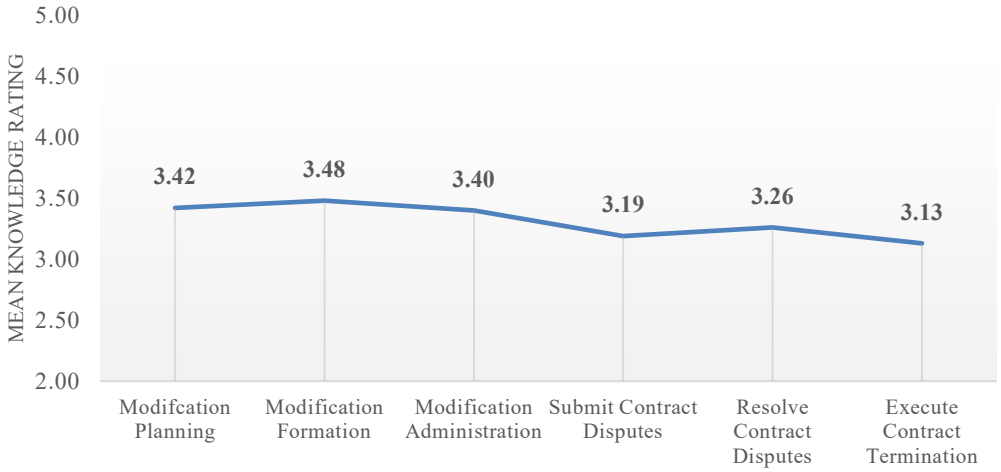


Figure 26. Seller Task Knowledge – Manage Changes

Figure 27 illustrates the results for the Contract Closeout domain, which describes buyers' knowledge of seller's tasks associated with completing contract performance and closing out contractual obligations. The overall mean for this competency area was 3.04. The highest rated task was *Verify Contract Performance* (3.68). The lowest rated task was *Settle Subcontracts* (2.58). The standard deviation for responses in this area was 1.04, which indicated a higher level of variation among responses, suggesting inconsistent familiarity with the tasks and possible inflation of the mean based off perceived knowledge. The upper and lower ends of self-assessment suggest that respondents demonstrated stronger confidence in knowledge of final performance verification activities by the seller, but less confidence in understanding how sellers settle subcontracts and conduct internal audits.

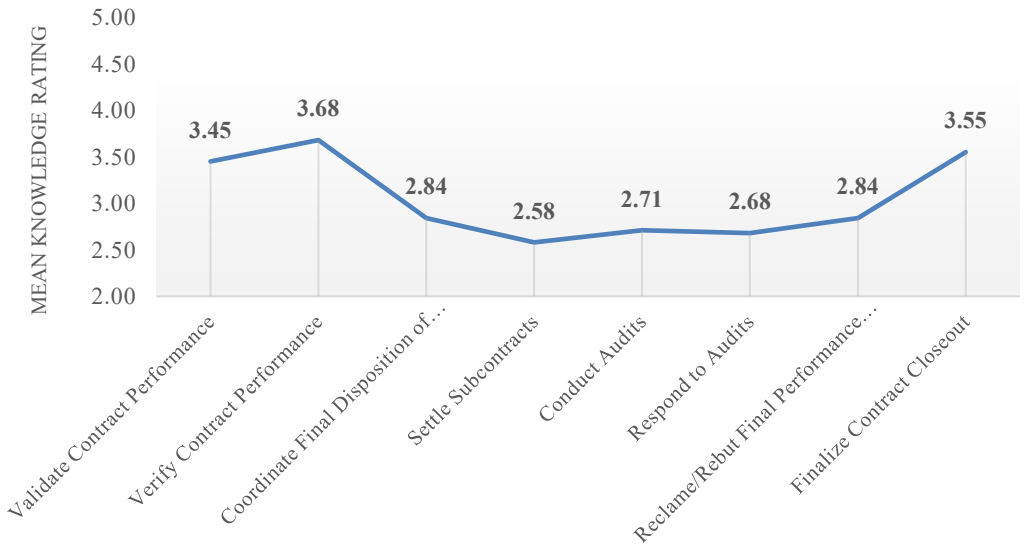


Figure 27. Seller Task Knowledge – Closeout Contract

7. Contingency Contracting Operations Proficiency

In addition to the buyer task proficiency and seller task knowledge assessments conducted above, the Chief Enlisted Manager for SAF/AQC asked the research team to create a smaller assessment of enlisted contracting Airmen's proficiency in tasks associated with their role as the Air Force's contingency contracting workforce. The research team used the Defense Contingency Contracting Handbook (2017) as the primary source material for developing the queries used in the enlisted contracting workforce assessment to ensure they were aligned with established Department of Defense standards.

The figures and analysis found in this section discuss enlisted contracting professionals' self-assessed proficiency in performing contingency contracting tasks before, during, and after contingency operations. The ratings in this section used the same Likert Scale used in the measurement of buyer task proficiency (1-Aware, 2-Basic, 3-Intermediate, 4-Advanced, 5-Expert).

a. Pre-Deployment Planning

Figure 28 illustrates buyers' proficiency in tasks associated with contingency contracting planning and preparation activities. The overall mean for this competency area was 3.17. The highest rated task was *Develop and Validate Statement of Work for*

Contingency (3.42). The lowest rated task was *Utilize the Operational Contracting Support Portal to Identify Existing Resources* (2.69). The standard deviation for responses in this area was 1.24, which indicated a very high level of variation among responses, suggesting substantial differences with familiarity with the tasks and an increased likelihood of inflation in the mean based on perceived proficiency. The upper and lower ends of self-assessment suggest that respondents demonstrated stronger confidence in basic contingency contracting planning activities, but less confidence in contingency-specific tools and/or resource identification.

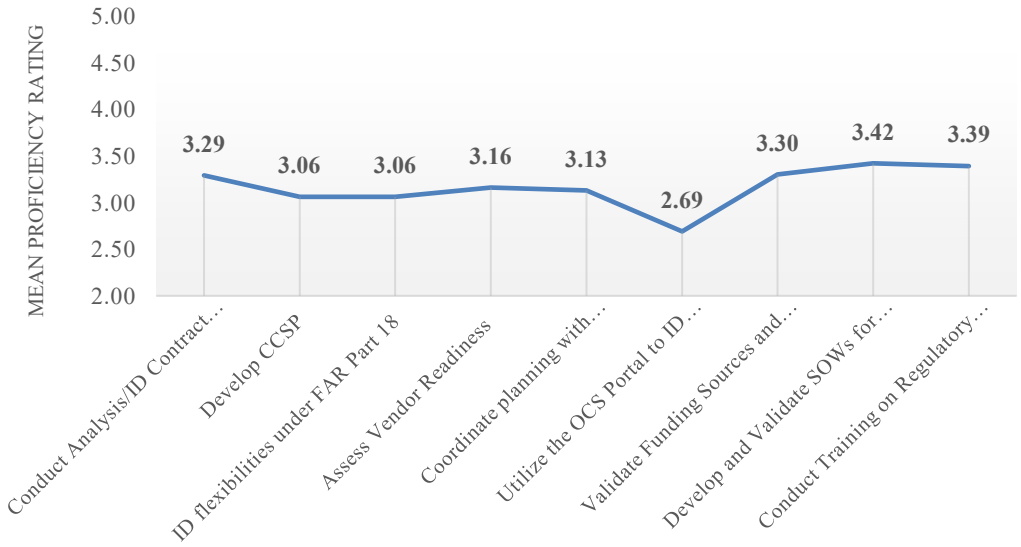


Figure 28. CCO Task Proficiency – Pre-Deployment Panning

b. Deployment Activities

Figure 29 illustrates buyers' proficiency with tasks associated with executing and managing contracts in a contingency. The overall mean for this competency area was 3.23. The highest rated task was *Execute Contingency Contracts* (3.39). The lowest rated task was *Conduct Vendor Threat Assessment* (3.03). The standard deviation for responses in this area was 1.24, which indicated a very high level of variation among responses, suggesting substantial differences in familiarity with the tasks and an increased likelihood of inflation in the mean based on perceived proficiency. The upper and lower ends of self-assessment suggest that respondents demonstrated stronger confidence in simple contract execution and oversight, but less conducting threat-based assessments regarding vendors in contingency environments.

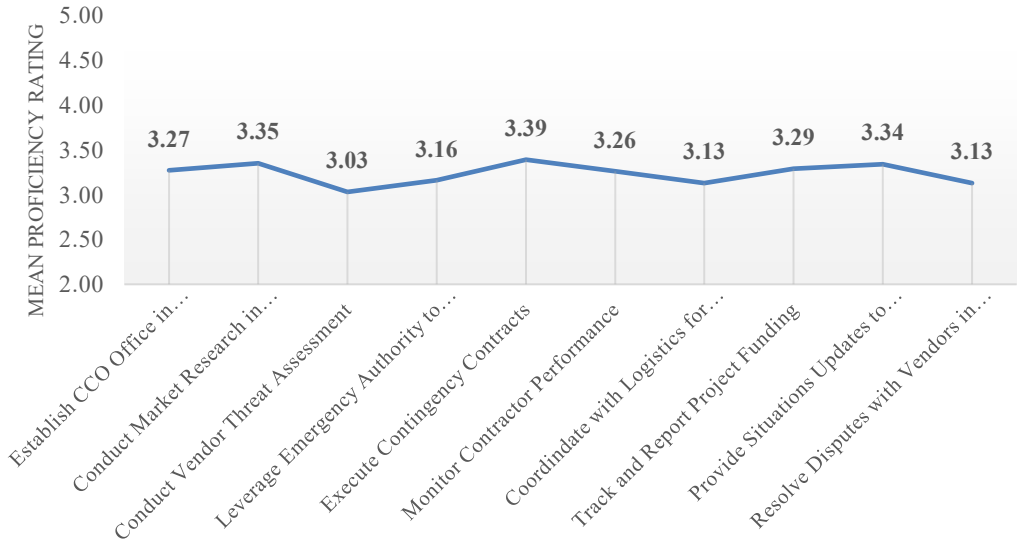


Figure 29. CCO Task Proficiency – Deployment Activities

c. Post-Deployment Activities

Figure 28 illustrates buyers' proficiency in tasks associated with post-deployment contracting activities. The overall mean for this competency area was 3.18. The highest rated task was *Conduct After Action Report* (3.26). The lowest rated task was *Update Training Plans Based on Deployment* (3.13). The standard deviation for responses in this area was 1.29, which indicated a very high level of variation among responses, suggesting substantial differences in familiarity with the tasks and an increased likelihood of inflation in the mean based on perceived proficiency. The self-assessment suggests respondents were moderately confident in executing required post-deployment actions but may not understand how to apply lessons learned.

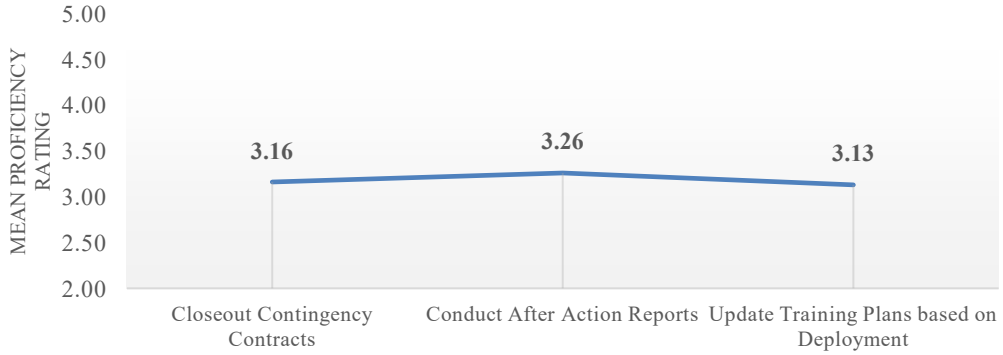


Figure 30. CCO Task Knowledge – Post-Deployment Activities

8. Assessment Analysis Discussion

a. Buyer and Seller Task Summary

The analysis across buyer and seller competency areas revealed a consistent pattern of the enlisted contracting workforce demonstrating greater confidence in their proficiency in buyer-related functions (i.e., the government) than their confidence in their knowledge of seller-related functions (i.e., the contractors).

Across the entirety of all life cycle domains, the mean proficiency rating for buyer tasks was approximately 3.48, which suggested an Intermediate level of self-assessed proficiency. In contrast, the mean knowledge rating for seller tasks was approximately 3.17 (a .31 or 10% decrease), which suggested a Basic to Intermediate level of understanding. The gap between the two ratings may indicate that while the enlisted contracting workforce may feel more confident in performing buyer-centric procedural and administrative tasks, they may lack insight into how sellers plan, execute, and manage corresponding tasks. Furthermore, the gap between the two ratings may indicate that the current training provided to the enlisted contracting workforce caters overwhelmingly to the buyer's tasks and foregoes any significant focus on the seller's tasks.

The strongest areas identified in the assessment were *Request Offers* (3.93) and *Select Source* (3.82). These areas center on distribution of solicitation and execution of contract award, which implies familiarity with the procedural aspects of their jobs, as governed by the policies found in the Federal Acquisition Regulation and its supplements. This coincided with stronger mean knowledge ratings for seller tasks that also relate to the solicitation and award of a contract, with higher mean knowledge ratings in *Plan Negotiations* (3.53) and *Select Source* (3.33).

Conversely, the mean ratings in both buyer and seller tasks declined in areas that required analytical judgment and/or management of a process rather than just following a procedure. The lowest rated proficiency means for buyer tasks were *Conduct Make-or-Buy Assessment* (2.94) and *Manage Subcontracts* (2.40). The lowest rated knowledge means for seller tasks were *Manage Subcontracts* (2.74) and *Manage Disagreements* (3.00).

Standard deviations also ranged widely in the assessment (between approximately 0.90 and 1.30), which indicated moderate to high variance in the self-assessments provided by respondents. The higher variance recorded suggest uneven familiarity with different contract management tasks across the population assessed and, the research team believes, an increased likelihood of overestimation of proficiency and/or knowledge. A finding that reinforces the need for standardized, competency-based training rather than the simple use of task-completion metrics in training.

Finally, the research team noted that both buyer task proficiency and seller task knowledge declined in the post-award life cycle phase versus pre-award and award phases. Each mean for buyer task proficiency and seller task knowledge in each of the pre-award and award phases were higher than the means for buyer and seller tasks in the post-award phase. This decline suggests that the enlisted contracting workforce may be more confident executing contract actions and less confident sustaining the performance of those actions over time. Furthermore, this decline may represent a reflection of the Air Force prioritizing its training of the enlisted contracting workforce on processes leading to contract award (i.e., preparing solicitations or documenting the basis for award) with less emphasis on later domains of the award phase (i.e., managing protests) and domains within the post-award phase of the contracting life cycle (i.e., understanding subcontracting aspects for the seller, or monitoring and surveilling the contractor).

b. Contingency Contracting Officer Task Proficiency Summary

The analysis of the results of the self-assessment of the enlisted workforce's proficiency in contingency contracting officer tasks indicates a Basic to Intermediate level of proficiency. The mean proficiency rating across all three contingency domains was approximately 3.20: lower than the mean proficiency rating for buyer tasks (3.48), but slightly higher than the mean knowledge rating of seller tasks (3.17).

However, the standard deviation in responses for contingency tasks were markedly higher than any other competency area in the assessment with *Pre-Deployment Activities, Deployment Activities, and Post Deployment Activities* having standard deviation response scores of 1.24, 1.24, and 1.29 respectively. The recorded highest standard deviation in either buyer or seller tasks was 1.18, recorded in the *Buyer Task*

Proficiency – Ensure Quality competency area. The wide disparities recorded by the research team may reflect limited number of personnel with recent or repeated contingency exposure.

Finally, The strongest proficiency appeared in basic execution tasks such as awarding and administering contingency contracts, while the weakest areas involved analytical and institutional learning activities, including vendor threat assessment and integrating lessons learned into future training. These findings imply that the enlisted contracting workforce may be procedurally capable but operationally underdeveloped in contingency environments,

9. Comparison of Assessment Findings with Previous Research

This section compares the results of the research teams enlisted contracting workforce assessment with three prior Naval Postgraduate School studies that used the same Contract Management Standard-based framework.

a. Purpose of Comparison

The purpose of comparing the findings of the research teams enlisted contracting workforce assessment against the findings of other substantially similar studies conducted across other Department of Defense contracting workforces is to contextualize how the Department of the Air Force's enlisted contracting force performs relative to peer contracting workforces and to identify any possible broad patterns across the wider Department of Defense contracting workforce.

b. Deviations

This section will not include comparison on the buyer tasks surrounding the management of subcontracts in the post-award domain, as the area was not assessed in prior assessments. Additionally, Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act certification levels were replaced by Air Force Specialty Code skill levels in order to better understand the enlisted specific population the research team was targeting in their current assessment.

c. Reference Assessments

Three previous Naval Postgraduate School theses have employed substantially the same assessment used by the research team. Each study below targeted a specific subset of Department of Defense contracting workforces in order to assess proficiency in buyer tasks and knowledge of seller tasks.

d. Analysis of the Marine Corps Expeditionary Contracting Workforce

Bradley J. Hoover's (Hoover 2021) Naval Postgraduate School thesis analyzed the competency of contracting professionals at various Marine Corps Expeditionary Contracting Platoons and their associated regional contracting offices using an assessment developed by Rendon (2020), based on the National Contract Management Association's Contract Management Standard. Approximately 41 responses were received with a 33% response rate.

e. Marine Corps Systems Command Contracting Workforce

Spencer Hayashi and Alex J. Pfannenstiel's (Hayashi et al. 2020) Naval Postgraduate School thesis analyzed the competency of contracting professionals at Marine Corps Systems Command using an assessment developed by Rendon (2020), based on the National Contract Management Association's Contract Management Standard. Approximately 43 responses were received with a 19.5% response rate.

f. Analysis of Army Contracting Workforce Competency Assessment

Jamie N. Davies, David Markelze, and Stephanie A. Rostermundt's (Davies et al. 2021) Naval Postgraduate School thesis analyzed the competency of contracting professionals at Army Contracting Command-Orlando and Installation Contracting Command Field Directorate-Fort Sam Houston using an assessment developed by Rendon (2020), based on the National Contract Management Association's Contract Management Standard. Approximately 53 responses were received with a 34% response rate.

g. Comparative Overview – Buyer Task Proficiency

Buyer task proficiency appeared to follow a consistent pattern across all four studies, demonstrating higher self-assessed confidence in pre-award and award competencies and lower self-assessed confidence in post-award competencies. The Air Force's enlisted contracting workforce's mean ratings were typically below the mean ratings of both the Davies et al. and Hayashi et al. studies, though they were above the mean proficiency ratings demonstrated in the Hoover study.

The Air Force enlisted contracting workforce's strongest areas of proficiency were *Request Offers* (3.93) and *Manage Changes* (3.97). These ratings were closely aligned with the patterns in the other three studies where the same tasks also scored near the top of rating distribution.

Conversely, the Air Force enlisted contract workforce's weakest areas of proficiency were *Manage Disagreement* (2.83) and *Closeout Contract* (3.37). These ratings were also closely aligned with the patterns found in the other three studies.

The Air Force enlisted contracting workforce demonstrated an intermediate confidence in their proficiency in *Price & Cost Analysis* (3.58) and *Plan Negotiations* (3.43). However, these areas also represented the largest average decreases in mean proficiency ratings from both the populations from the Davies et al. and Hayashi et al. studies, averaging approximately .73 points lower across the two competency areas.

Overall, the data collected by the research team indicate that while the Air Force enlisted contracting workforce's buyer task proficiency follows general DoD patterns, it ranks below the mean proficiency of its peers in eight of ten competency areas.

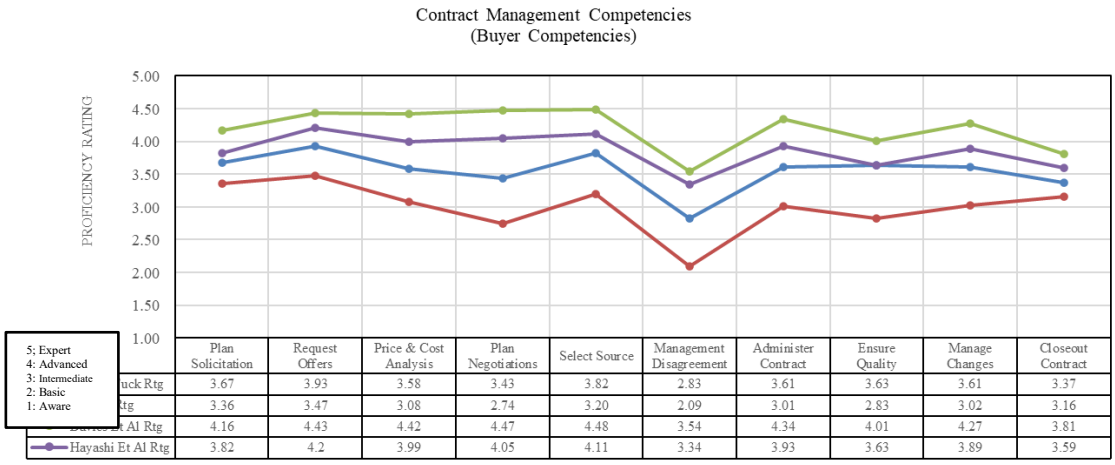


Figure 31. Mean Buyer Task Competency Level by Contracting Workforce

h. Comparative Overview – Seller Task Knowledge

Seller task knowledge appeared to follow a consistent pattern across all four studies, demonstrating lower self-assessed confidence ratings compared to corresponding buyer tasks. The Air Force enlisted contracting workforce's mean ratings were generally below those of both the Davies et al. (2021) and Hayashi et al. (2020) studies, though they remained above the mean ratings demonstrated in the Hoover (2021) study.

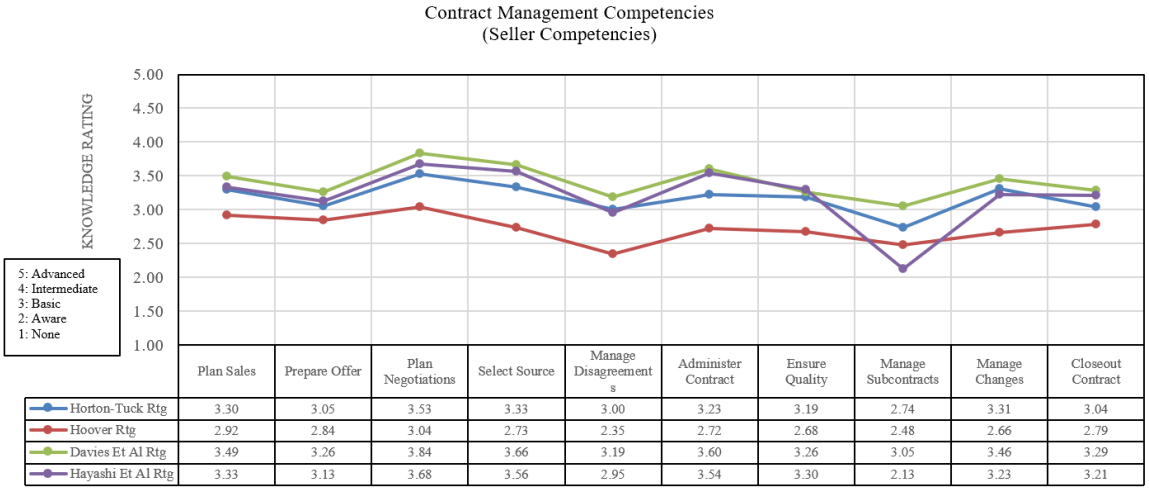
The Air Force enlisted contracting workforce's strongest areas of seller task knowledge were *Prepare Offer* (3.62) and *Plan Sales* (3.59). These ratings were closely aligned with the patterns in the other three studies where the same tasks also scored near the top of rating distribution.

Conversely, the Air Force enlisted contract workforce's weakest areas of seller task knowledge were *Manage Disagreement* (2.84) and *Manage Subcontracts* (2.95). These ratings were also closely aligned with the patterns scored near the bottom of rating distributions for the other three studies.

The Air Force enlisted contracting workforce demonstrated an Intermediate confidence in their seller task knowledge in the *Select Source* (3.33) and *Administer Contract* (3.23) competency areas. However, these areas also represented the largest average decreases in mean proficiency ratings from both the populations from the Davies

et al. (2020) and Hayashi et al. (2021) studies, averaging approximately .31 points lower across the two competency areas.

Overall, the data collected by the research team indicate that the Air Force enlisted contracting workforce's seller task knowledge follows general DoD patterns, and it only ranks below the mean proficiency of its peers in three of ten competency areas. However, its overall mean seller knowledge task rating of 3.17 remains lower than both the Davies et al. (2020). (3.41) and Hayashi et al. (2021). (3.21) mean seller knowledge task ratings.



	Plan Sales	Prepare Offer	Plan Negotiations	Select Source	Manage Disagreements	Administer Contract	Ensure Quality	Manage Subcontracts	Manage Changes	Closeout Contract
Horton-Tuck Rtg	3.30	3.05	3.53	3.33	3.00	3.23	3.19	2.74	3.31	3.04
Hoover Rtg	2.92	2.84	3.04	2.73	2.35	2.72	2.68	2.48	2.66	2.79
Davies Et Al Rtg	3.49	3.26	3.84	3.66	3.19	3.60	3.26	3.05	3.46	3.29
Hayashi Et Al Rtg	3.33	3.13	3.68	3.56	2.95	3.54	3.30	2.13	3.23	3.21

Figure 32. Mean Seller Task Knowledge Level by Contracting Workforce

i. Comparative Analysis Summary

The comparative analysis between the research teams 2025 assessment of the Department of the Air Force's enlisted contracting workforce, and the three previous studies of different Department of Defense contracting workforces revealed that while the Air Force's enlisted contracting workforce's proficiency and knowledge levels appear to be in line with overall Department of Defense patterns, they are predominantly lower overall across most competency areas.

Both buyer proficiency and seller knowledge task self-assessments followed a consistent pattern of higher confidence in structured pre-award and award domains, but lower confidence in the post-award domain and more analytical tasks.

These results suggest that the Air Force's enlisted contracting workforce performs below the overall Department of Defense average, reflecting an generally basic, albeit uneven level of proficiency and knowledge that falls short of peer contracting workforces.

Finally, these findings provide the research team with a relative benchmark of proficiency and knowledge across the enlisted contracting workforce that will provide necessary context for the next portion of quantitative analysis of examining how the Air Force enlisted contracting workforce's proficiency and knowledge align with its share of the Air Force's contract action portfolio from fiscal year 2024.

C. ENLISTED DAF CONTRACT PORTFOLIO SHARE FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

1. Introduction

This section will examine the share of the Department of the Air Force's contract action portfolio overseen by the enlisted contracting workforce. The research team believes understanding the current distribution of contract actions and dollar amounts between the enlisted and their contemporaries (the officer corps and the civilian contracting workforce) within the Air Force will provide critical context to the research by illustrating the scope of the enlisted contracting workforces' contribution to the overall mission.

2. Purpose of Analysis

The purpose of the analysis in this section is to measure the enlisted contracting workforce's share of the Department of the Air Force's overall contract action portfolio. This analysis will be expressed in both the number of contract actions and the total dollars affected by those actions.

By quantifying the approximate distribution of contracting actions between the enlisted and other elements of the contracting workforce, the analysis intends to provide a measure of representation in the Air Force's contracting enterprise.

3. Method of Measurement

In order to determine the enlisted contracting workforce's share of the Air Force's contract action portfolio, the research team sought out and received a current roster of all active duty enlisted contracting Airmen. The research team also received a list of every Air Force contract action completed during fiscal year 2024 (1 October 2023 – 30 September 2024).

The roster, provided by the career field's Chief of Enlisted Policy, included only first name, last name, and rank. The fiscal year 2024 contract action data, provided by the career field's Chief of the Contracting Workforce Development, included all Department of the Air Force contract actions records during the fiscal year. The metadata used by the research team included the preparer, approver, and last modifier of each Contract Action Report, as well as the individual dollar amount of the action.

The research team first standardized both sets of data to ensure consistent formatting in naming conventions between the two documents. Additionally, because the intent of the analysis was to measure workload share, the research team determined the overall throughput of dollars a more accurate representation of workload share. Thus, the analysis considered the dollar figure for any action a positive amount (i.e., a de-obligation of $100,000 may read as a negative figure in the contract action data but would be considered a positive figure for purpose of analysis). The documents were then combined into a single workbook. Following that the research team designed a query that was able to successfully search three key data points in the fiscal year 2024 contract action data: the preparer, approver, and last modifier of the Contract Action Report. The query searched each of these fields for an enlisted contracting member's name, and, if the members name appeared in any one of the fields the action was determined to have been worked by an enlisted contracting Airman. This process was applied across the nine predominant Major Commands in the Air Force (Air Combat Command, Air Education and Training Command, Air Force Global Strike Command, Air Force Materiel Command, Air Force Reserve Command, Air Force Special Operations Command, Air Mobility Command, Pacific Air Forces, and U.S. Air Forces in Europe). The major command Air Forces Southern was not analyzed as it was only activated on 11

September 2024 and has no contract actions associated with it. The results were analyzed first at the major command level and then in aggregate to determine the enlisted contracting workforce's share of total contract actions and dollar amounts.

After preliminary analysis, the research team made the determination to exclude two major commands from the aggregate comparison, Air Force Reserve Command and Air Force Materiel Command. The former was removed from the aggregate analysis because there are currently no enlisted contracting Airmen assigned to that command. The latter was excluded from the aggregate analysis because the enlisted contracting workforce historically represented an infinitesimally small portion of the contracting workforce in the Air Force Materiel Command. The team determined that including these major commands in the aggregate analysis would have introduced significant distortion in the results, as they would overstate the relative influence of major commands which have historically precluded enlisted contracting professionals. These determinations are substantiated by the major commands contract share analysis, discussed later in this section.

4. Limitations of Methods of Measurements

While the datasets provided a reliable approximation of enlisted contracting activity, the research team identified several limitations that constrained the precision and scope of the analysis.

The first limitation observed by the research team centered around a minor timing mismatch between the datasets. The fiscal year 2024 contract action data and the enlisted roster did not perfectly align because there was no complete fiscal year 2025 contract action data, and because the career field does not currently maintain any historical rosters of active duty contracting airmen. This misalignment meant that some Airmen who have entered or exited the career field during fiscal year 2024 may not have been accurately accounted for.

The second limitation observed by the research team was that the analysis was only able to capture a single fiscal year (fiscal year 2024). This was because the career field does not currently maintain historical rosters of active duty contracting Airmen.

This, in turn, meant the research team lacked the longitudinal data needed to attempt to observe and measure trends in enlisted contracting workforce share over time.

The third limitation observed by the research team centered around the attribution method applied to the analysis. The analysis assumed that if an enlisted member's name appeared as a preparer, approver, or modifier of a Contract Action Report, then they contributed to that action. While that assumption is objectively true, it cannot measure the extent or nature of their contribution to the contract action. Additionally, the majority of contract actions are inherently collaborative, and often involve effort from multiple contracting personnel at various stages of the contract life cycle. As a result, some of the enlisted attributed workload likely represents shared participation rather than exclusive ownership of an action/dollar amount.

The fourth limitation observed by the research team centered around the reliance of the research team on the administrative quality of the data. While the team was able to standardize the data provided, inconsistencies or manual errors from end-users could adversely affect the results analyzed by the team.

The fifth limitation observed by the research team was that there is currently an absence of any granular data that identified an exact breakdown of the specific number of enlisted and non-enlisted contracting professionals in each specific major command. Without this dataset the research team was unable to examine workload share relative to workforce size beyond the aggregate level.

The final limitation observed by the research team centered around the absence of contingency contracting data. The fiscal year 2024 contract action data provided to the research team included only home station contract actions and excluded any contract actions from deployed locations, which is not currently available. Because the enlisted contracting workforce constitute the overwhelming majority of the Air Force contingency contracting workforce, the omission of that data will ensure an under-representation of their true share of the Department of the Air Force's contracting action portfolio and overall contribution to the contracting mission.

5. Findings

The following section presents the results of the research team's portfolio share analysis. It begins with an approximation of the Department of the Air Force's contracting workforce distribution. It then examines the distribution of contracting actions across each of the nine predominant major commands in the Air Force, illustrating the share of actions and dollars overseen by the enlisted contracting workforce in each major command.

Together these findings will provide a quantitative approximation of the enlisted contracting workforce's contribution to the Air Force's contracting enterprise.

a. Demographics

Figure 33 illustrates an approximate demographic composition of the Department of the Air Force's contracting workforce. The workforce consists of three personnel elements: DAF and local national civilians (approximately 75.59%), uniformed officers (approximately 8.21%), and uniformed enlisted members (approximately 16.2%). The data was provided by the career field's Chief of the Contracting Workforce Development and provides a baseline context for the enlisted share of contract actions from fiscal year 2024.

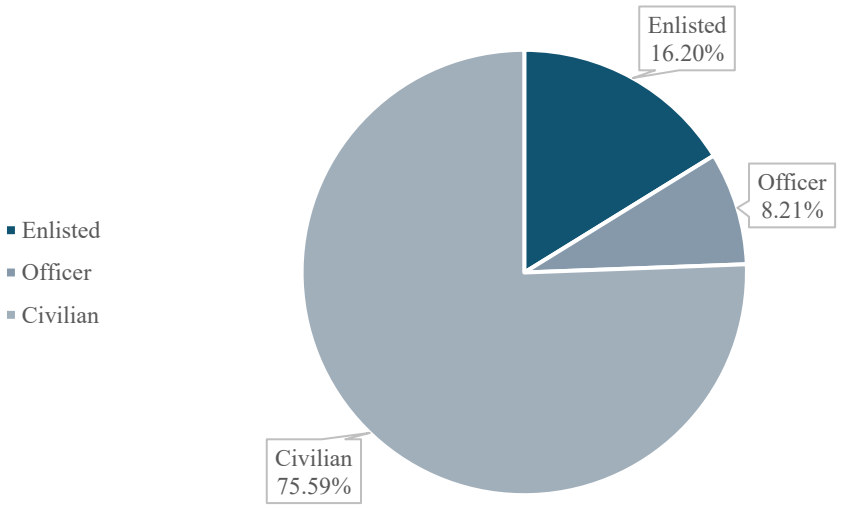


Figure 33. Department of the Air Force Contracting Workforce Demographics

The following charts will discuss three items for each major command: the number of contract actions overseen by the enlisted workforce, the dollar value of those contract actions overseen by the enlisted contracting workforce, and how those values relate to the portion of DAF's contracting workforce comprised of enlisted personnel.

Where the percentage of actions or dollars exceeds the enlisted representation of the workforce (16.2%) a positive value contribution will be noted. Conversely, where the percentage of actions or dollars are shown to be below the 16.2% figure, a negative value contribution will be noted.

b. Air Combat Command (ACC)

Figure 34illustrates the distribution of contract actions within Air Combat Command. It distinguishes between those executed by enlisted contracting professionals and those executed by all other personnel categories combined. Of the 12,254 actions analyzed, 3,255 were performed by enlisted members. This reflected a 9.79% positive difference between enlisted workforce representation and their share of total contract actions, which in turn indicated a proportionally higher level of workload participation in the major command.

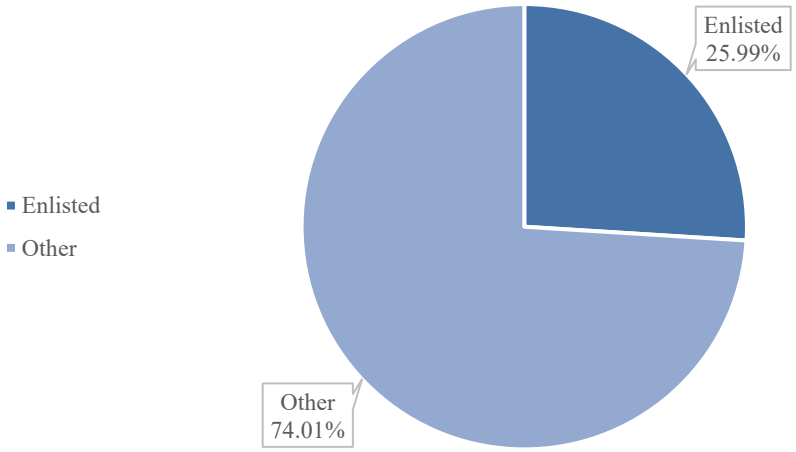


Figure 34. Fiscal Year 2024 Contract Action Distribution (ACC)

Figure 35 illustrates the distribution of contract action dollars within Air Combat Command. It distinguishes between dollar amounts executed by enlisted contracting professionals and dollar amounts executed by all other personnel categories. Of the $3,965,411,635,635.48 analyzed, $454,716,310.98 was executed by enlisted members. This reflected a 4.73% negative difference between enlisted workforce representation and their share of total contract action dollars, which in turn indicated a proportionally lower level of portfolio influence within the major command.

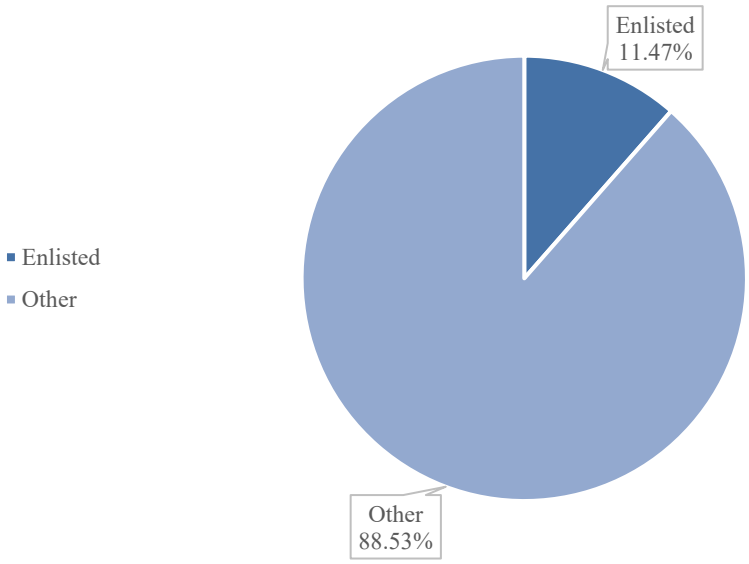


Figure 35. Fiscal Year 2024 Contract Action Dollar Distribution (ACC)

c. Air Education and Training Command

Figure 36 illustrates the distribution of contract actions within Air Education and Training Command. It distinguishes between those executed by enlisted contracting professionals and those executed by all other personnel categories combined. Of the 8,166 actions analyzed, 1,292 were performed by enlisted members. This reflected 0.38% negative difference between enlisted workforce representation and their share of total contract actions, which in turn indicated a lower level of workload participation within the major command.

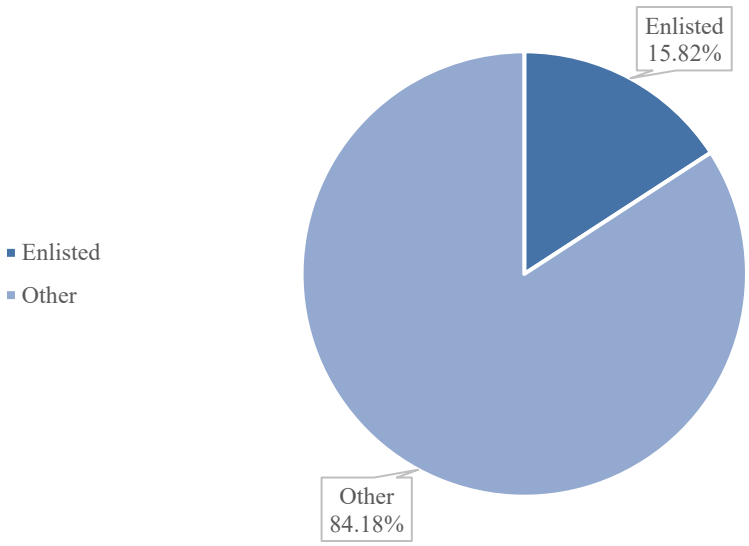


Figure 36. Fiscal Year 2024 Contract Action Distribution (AETC)

Figure 37 illustrates distribution of contract action dollars within Air Education and Training Command. It distinguishes between dollar amounts executed by enlisted contracting professionals and dollar amounts executed by all other personnel categories. Of the 3,650,222,518.76 analyzed, $1,354,875,955.78 was executed by enlisted members. This reflected a 20.93% positive difference between enlisted workforce representation and their share of total contract action dollars, which in turn indicated a proportionally higher level of portfolio influence within the major command.

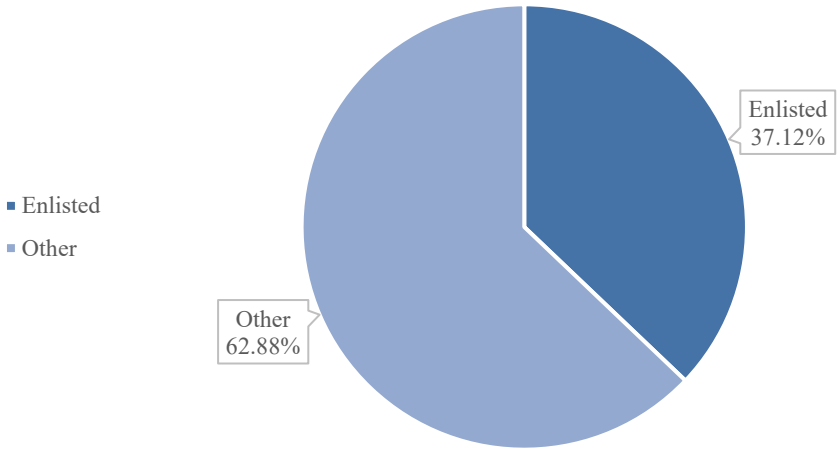


Figure 37. Fiscal Year 2024 Contract Action Dollar Distribution (AETC)

d. Air Force Global Strike Command

Figure 38 illustrates the distribution of contract actions within Air Force Global Strike Command. It distinguishes between those executed by enlisted contracting professionals and those executed by all other personnel categories combined. Of the 4,440 actions analyzed, 1,221 were performed by enlisted members. This reflected an 11.3% positive difference between enlisted workforce representation and their share of total contract actions, which in turn indicated a proportionally higher level of workload participation within the major command.

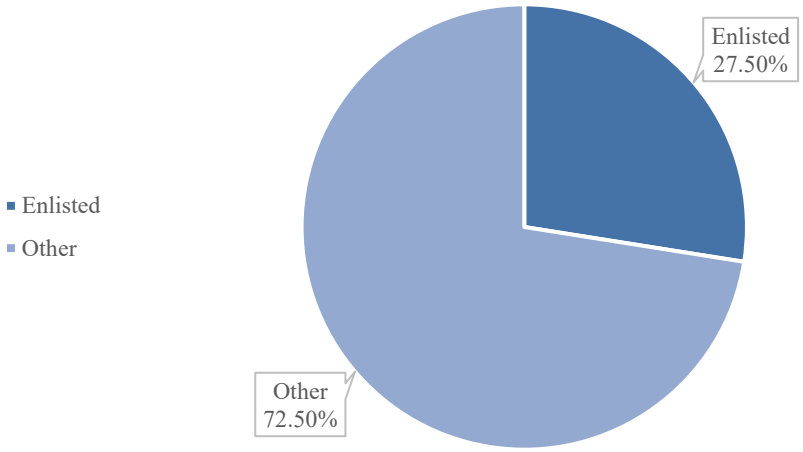


Figure 38. Fiscal Year 2024 Contract Action Distribution (AFGSC)

Figure 39 illustrates distribution of contract action dollars within Air Force Global Strike Command. It distinguishes between dollar amounts executed by enlisted contracting professionals and dollar amounts executed by all other personnel categories. Of the $685,309,187.25 analyzed, $130,564,254.00 was executed by enlisted members. This reflected a 2.85% positive difference between enlisted workforce representation and their share of total contact action dollars, which in turn indicated a proportionally higher level of portfolio influence within the major command.

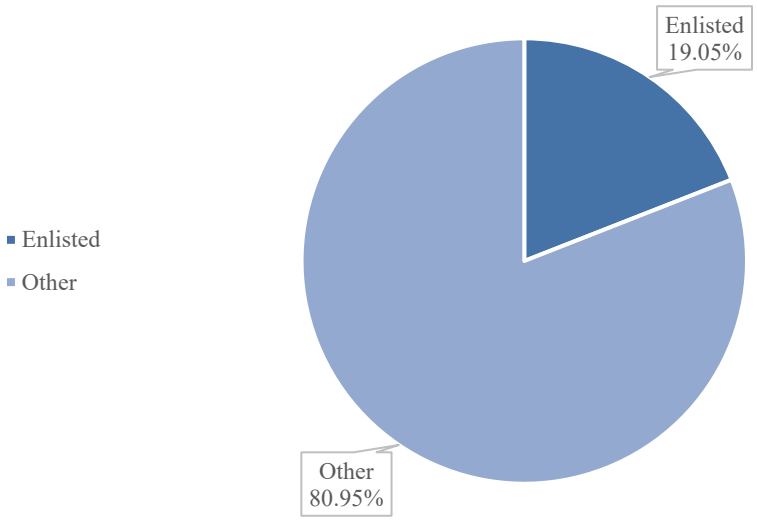


Figure 39. Fiscal Year 2024 Contract Action Dollar Distribution (AFGSC)

e. Air Force Materiel Command

Figure 40 illustrates the distribution of contract actions within Air Force Materiel Command. It distinguishes between those executed by enlisted contracting professionals and those executed by all other personnel categories combined. Of the 62,033 actions analyzed, 1,221 were performed by enlisted members. This reflected a 14.23% negative difference between enlisted workforce representation and their share of total contract actions, which in turn indicated a proportionally lower level of workload participation within the major command.

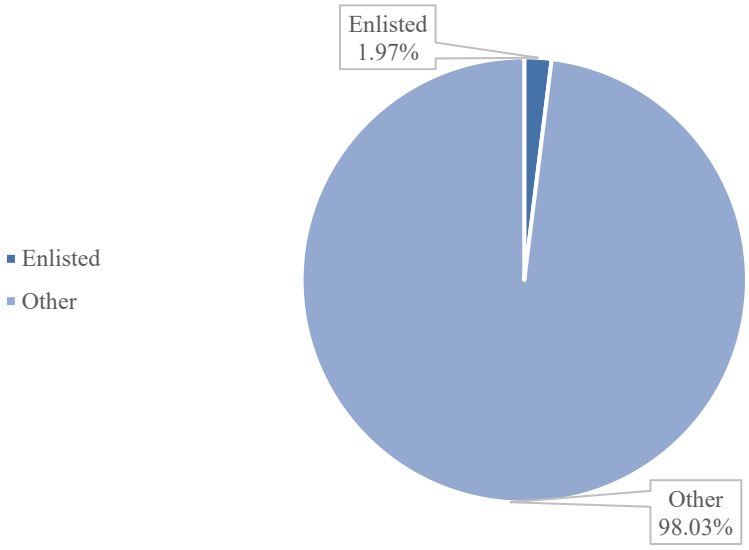


Figure 40. Fiscal Year 2024 Contract Action Distribution (AFMC)

Figure 41 illustrates distribution of contract action dollars within Air Force Materiel Command. It distinguishes between dollar amounts executed by enlisted contracting professionals and dollar amounts executed by all other personnel categories. Of the $83,559,885,411.27 analyzed, $372,789,224.96 was executed by enlisted members. This reflected a 15.75% negative difference between enlisted workforce representation and their share of total contract action dollars, which in turn indicated a proportionally lower level of portfolio influence within the major command.

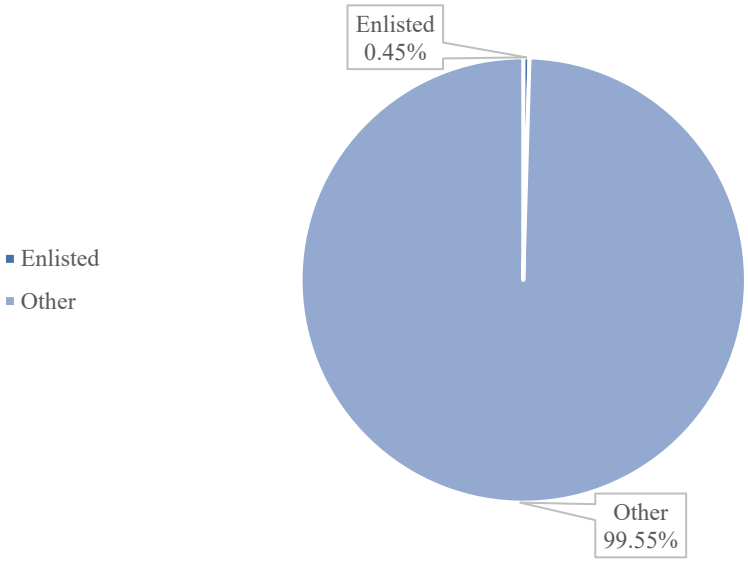


Figure 41. Fiscal Year 2024 Contract Action Dollar Distribution (AFMC)

f. Air Force Reserve Command

Figure 42 illustrates the distribution of contract actions within Air Force Reserve Command. There are zero enlisted contracting professionals assigned to this major command. Of the 1,394 actions analyzed all of them were performed by non-enlisted contracting personnel.

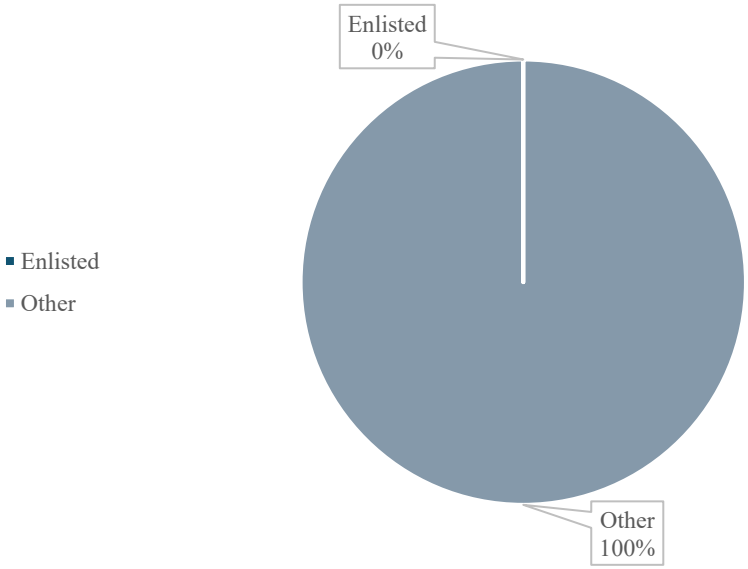


Figure 42. Fiscal Year 2024 Contract Action Distribution (AFRC)

Figure 43 illustrates the distribution of contract action dollars within Air Force Reserve Command. There are zero enlisted contracting professionals assigned to this major command. Of the $291,770,512.59 analyzed, all of it was executed by non-enlisted contracting personnel.

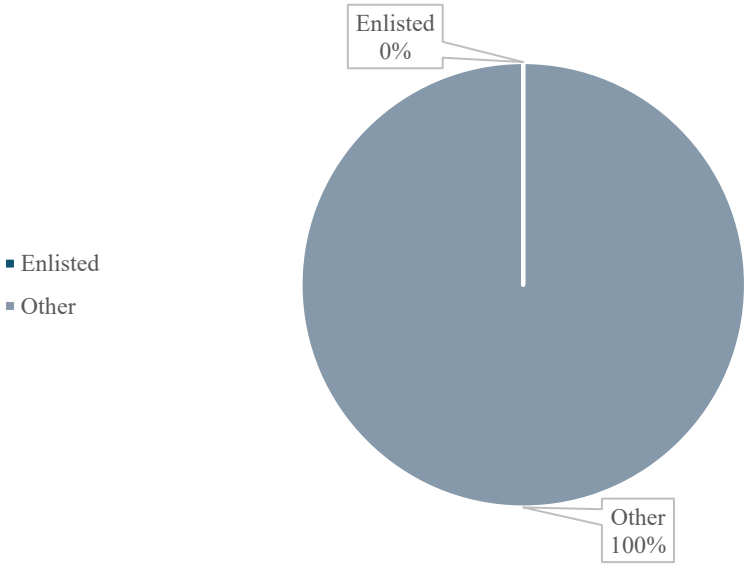


Figure 43. Fiscal Year 2024 Contract Action Dollar Distribution (AFRC)

g. Air Force Special Operations Command

Figure 44 illustrates the distribution of contract actions within Air Force Special Operations Command. It distinguishes between those executed by enlisted contracting professionals and those executed by all other personnel categories combined. Of the 1,742 actions analyzed, 539 were performed by enlisted members. This reflected a 14.75% positive difference between enlisted workforce representation and their share of total contract actions, which in turn indicated a proportionally higher level of workload participation within the major command.

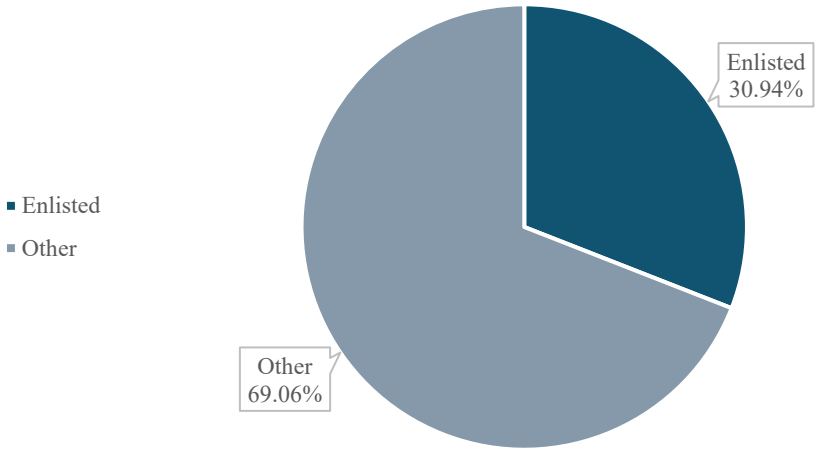


Figure 44. Fiscal Year 2024 Contract Action Distribution (AFSOC)

Figure 45 illustrates distribution of contract action dollars within Air Force Special Operations Command. It distinguishes between dollar amounts executed by enlisted contracting professionals and dollar amounts executed by all other personnel categories. Of the $292,935,435.03 analyzed, $59,691,727.24 was executed by enlisted members. This reflected a 4.18% positive difference between enlisted workforce representation and their share of total contract action dollars, which in turn indicated a proportionally higher level of portfolio influence within the major command.

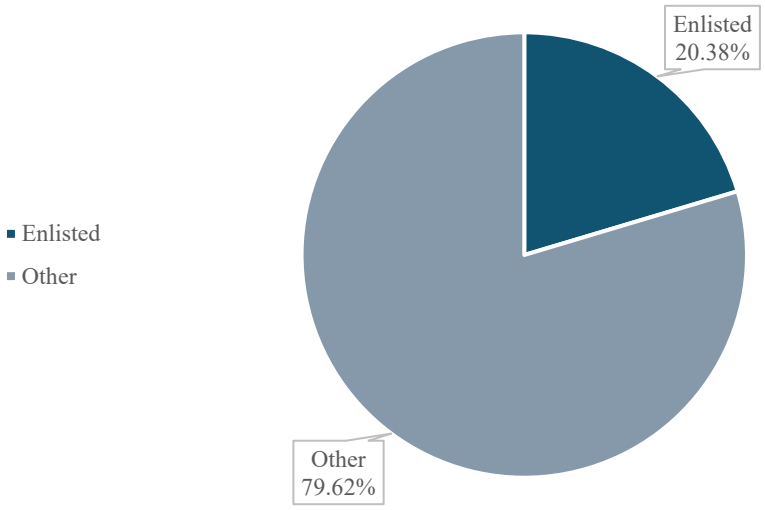


Figure 45. Fiscal Year 2024 Contract Action Dollar Distribution (AFSOC)

h. Air Mobility Command

Figure 46 illustrates the distribution of contract actions within Air Mobility Command. It distinguishes between those executed by enlisted contracting professionals and those executed by all other personnel categories combined. Of the 6,728 actions analyzed, 1,203 were performed by enlisted members. This reflected a 1.68% positive difference between enlisted workforce representation and their share of total contract actions, which in turn indicated a proportionally higher level of workload participation within this major command.

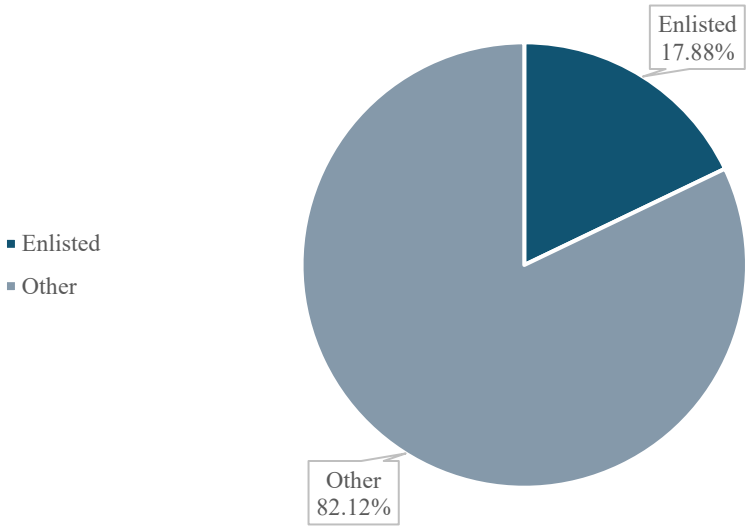


Figure 46. Fiscal Year 2024 Contract Action Distribution (AMC)

Figure 47 illustrates distribution of contract action dollars within Air Mobility Command. It distinguishes between dollar amounts executed by enlisted contracting professionals and dollar amounts executed by all other personnel categories. Of the $1,158,299,450.87 analyzed, $173,352,590.48 was executed by enlisted members. This reflected a 1.23% negative difference between enlisted workforce representation and their share of total contract action dollars, which in turn indicated a proportionally lower level of portfolio influence within the major command.

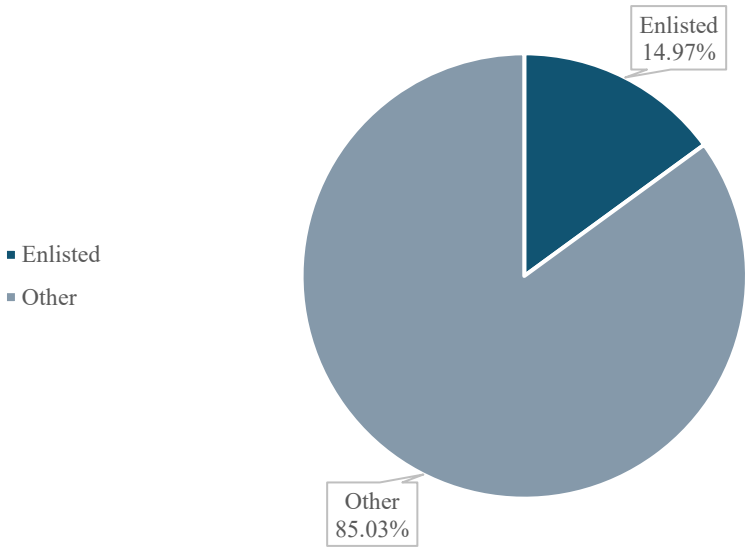


Figure 47. Fiscal Year 2024 Contract Action Dollar Distribution (AMC)

i. Pacific Air Forces

Figure 48 illustrates the distribution of contract actions within the Pacific Air Forces. It distinguishes between those executed by enlisted contracting professionals and those executed by all other personnel categories combined. Of the 5,975 actions analyzed, 1,910 were performed by enlisted members. This reflected a 15.77% positive difference between enlisted workforce representation and their share of total contractions, which in turn indicated a proportionally higher level of workload participation within the major command.

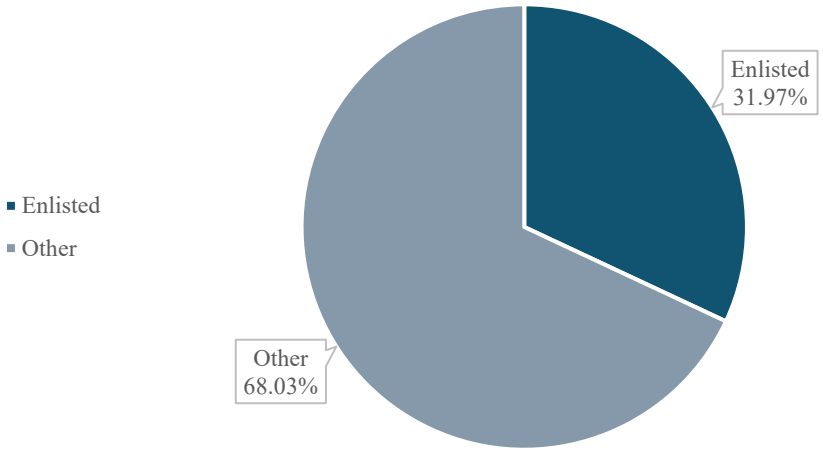


Figure 48. Fiscal Year 2024 Contract Action Distribution (PACAF)

Figure 49 illustrates distribution of contract action dollars within the Pacific Air Forces. It distinguishes between dollar amounts executed by enlisted contracting professionals and dollar amounts executed by all other personnel categories. Of the $2,389,071,528.11 analyzed, $430,312,954.11 was executed by enlisted members. This reflected a 1.82% positive difference between enlisted workforce representation and their share of total contract action dollars, which in turn indicated a proportionally higher level of portfolio influence within the major command.

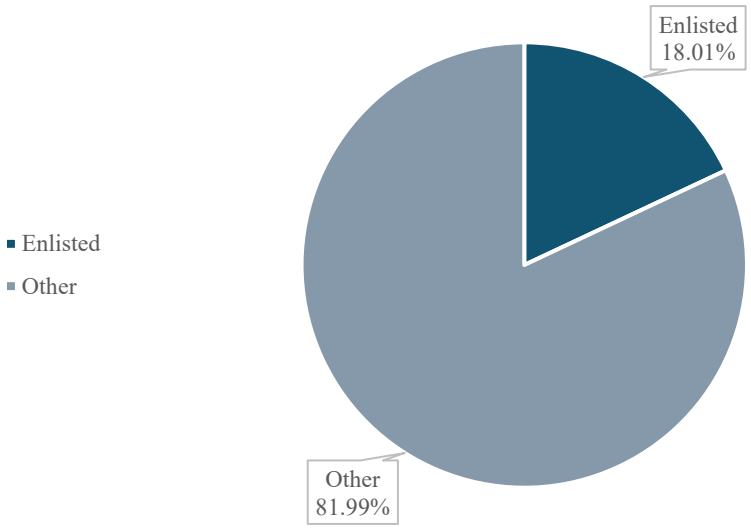


Figure 49. Fiscal Year 2024 Contract Action Dollar Distribution (PACAF)

j. U.S. Air Forces Europe

Figure 50 illustrates the distribution of contract actions within U.S Air Forces Europe. It distinguishes between those executed by enlisted contracting professionals and those executed by all other personnel categories combined. Of the 4,355 actions analyzed, 1,803 were performed by enlisted members. This reflected a 25.2% positive difference between enlisted workforce representation and their share of total contract actions, which in turn indicated a proportionally higher level of workload participation within the major command.

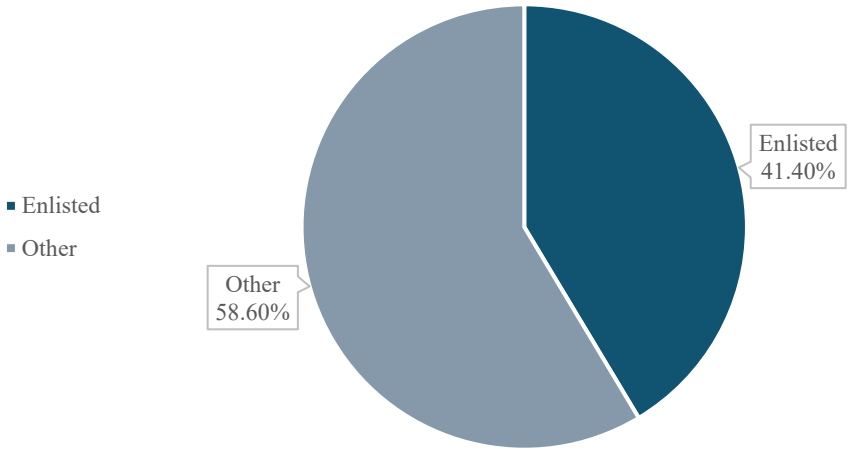


Figure 50. Fiscal Year 2024 Contract Action Distribution (USAFE)

Figure 51 illustrates distribution of contract action dollars within U.S Air Forces Europe. It distinguishes between dollar amounts executed by enlisted contracting professionals and dollar amounts executed by all other personnel categories. Of the $753,713,748.19 analyzed, $188,165,204.99 was executed by enlisted members. This reflected an 8.77% positive difference between enlisted workforce representation and their share of total contract action dollars, which in turn indicated a proportionally higher level of portfolio influence within the major command.

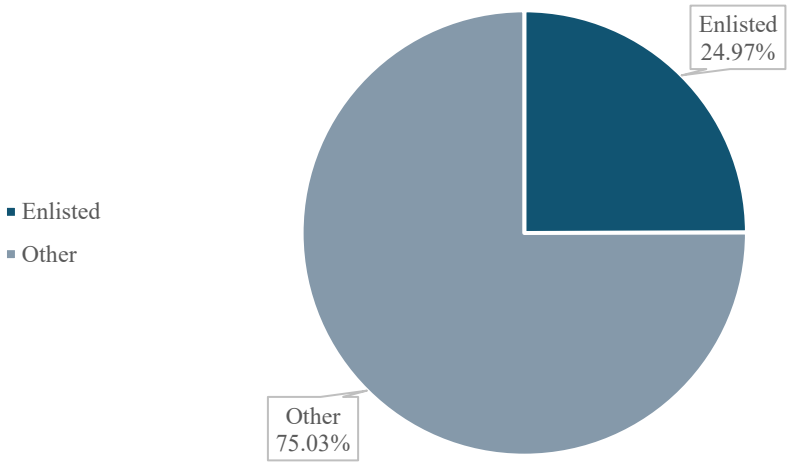


Figure 51. Fiscal Year 2024 Contract Action Dollar Distribution (USAFE)

k. Department of the Air Force (Excluding AFMC and AFRC)

Figure 52 illustrates the distribution of contract actions across the Department of the Air Force (excluding Air Force Materiel Command and Air Force Reserve Command). It distinguishes between those executed by enlisted contracting professionals and those executed by all other personnel categories combined. Of the 43,930 actions analyzed, 11,223 were performed by enlisted members. This reflected a 9.36% positive difference between enlisted workforce representation and their share of total contract actions, which in turn indicated a proportionally higher level of workload participation across the enterprise.

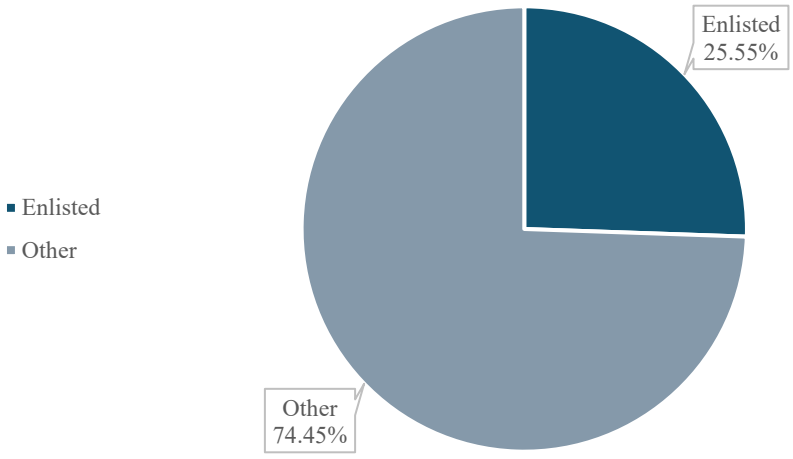


Figure 52. Fiscal Year 2024 Contact Action Distribution (DAF)

Figure 53 illustrates distribution of contract action dollars across the Department of the Air Force (excluding Air Force Materiel Command and Air Force Reserve Command). It distinguishes between dollar amounts executed by enlisted contracting professionals and dollar amounts executed by all other personnel categories combined. Of the $12,893,963,513.69 analyzed, $2,791,678,997.58 was executed by enlisted members. This reflected a 5.45% positive difference between enlisted workforce representation and their share of total contact action dollars, which in turn indicated a proportionally higher level of portfolio influence across the enterprise.

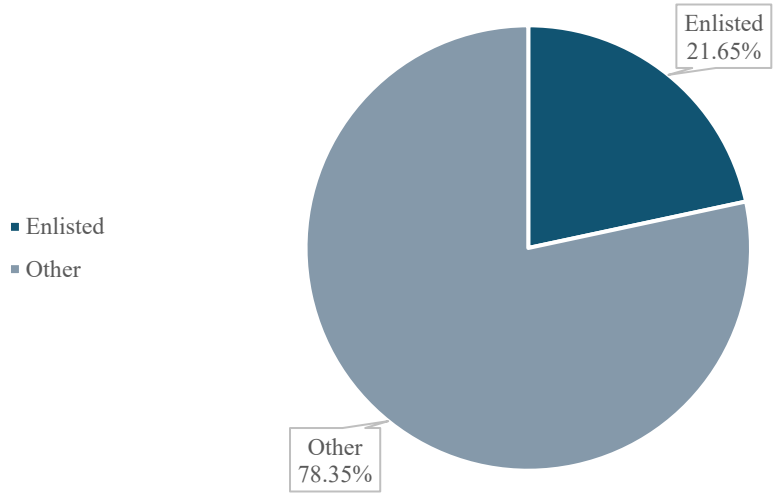


Figure 53. Fiscal Year 2024 Contract Action Dollar Distribution (DAF)

6. Analysis

This section is intended to interpret the overall data collected by the research team in order to identify patterns in the enlisted share of the Department of the Air Force's contract action portfolio from fiscal year 2024.

The distribution of contract actions and dollars for all major commands analyzed (excluding Air Force Materiel Command and Air Force Reserve Command) provided a clear picture of how the enlisted contracting workforce contributes to the overall contracting mission (actions and dollars) within the organization. As illustrated in Figure 54 below, enlisted participation most often exceeds their approximate workforce representation of 16.2%. The pattern identified by the research team is consistent in 11 of 14 measurements in the seven commands chosen by the team to most accurately and precisely depict the enlisted share of the portfolio.

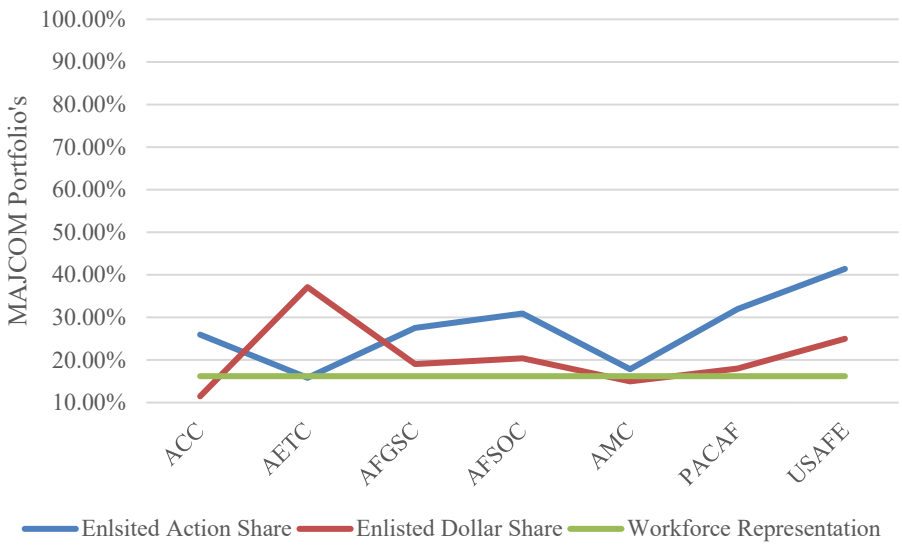


Figure 54. Enlisted participation in Major Command Contract Action Portfolios Related to Workforce Representation

While the enlisted contracting workforce was involved in approximately a quarter of all contract actions during fiscal year 2024, their share of contract action dollars was nearly 5% lower than their share of actions, which may indicate that enlisted contracting professionals may manage a higher volume of lower value actions. The research team noted that both major commands overseas appeared to have the highest level of enlisted participation in share of actions.

In summary, the results of the research team's analysis of the enlisted share of the Department of the Air Force's contract portfolio appear to indicate that the enlisted contracting workforce execute a proportionally greater share of the overall workload than their baseline representation in the contracting workforce would suggest. While their share of contract action dollars was noticeably lower than their share of actions, enlisted contracting professionals appear to be responsible for a disproportionate and substantial share of the contract portfolio across the Air Force. The following section will consider how this portfolio analysis aligns with the assessment of the proficiency and knowledge of the enlisted contracting workforce.

D. IMPLICATIONS OF COMBINED FINDINGS

This section will examine the combined findings of both the research team's assessment results as well as their analysis of portfolio distribution. When considered together, the team believes the findings will provide insight into how the Department of the Air Force currently develops and employs its enlisted contracting workforce and provide an analysis that links the measurements of proficiency and knowledge to the distribution of workload across the enterprise. The research team believes this connection will ultimately support the research's broader objectives of informing the senior leaders in the DAF contracting career field, more specifically, SAF/AQC, on how to adapt enlisted on-the-job training for better mission outcomes.

The combined data appears to indicate that the enlisted contracting workforce is involved in a disproportionately large share of the Air Force's contracting portfolio relative to its size and education levels (approximately half of the career field does not hold a 4-year college degree, a requirement for any other personnel component within the contracting field). Additionally, self-reported assessments of proficiency and knowledge across all major domains of the contract management life cycle suggests a below average level of acumen relative to other contracting workforces within the Department of Defense. When these two positions are considered together, the findings imply that while enlisted contracting professionals sustain a workload that exceeds their expected share relative to their numerical representation in the career field, their acumen remains limited which leaves minimal room for additional responsibility without adapting their training and development to better meet an evolving mission set.

The research team believes the relationship findings between proficiency and workload above highlights a structure imbalance within the Air Force contracting enterprise. While the data suggests the Air Force relies heavily on the enlisted contracting workforce to execute a large portion of its contract portfolio, the existing training framework provided to those same enlisted members may not fully equip them with the required competencies needed for more advanced contracting functions. This imbalance, in turn, reinforces the need for an updated development training model that more effectively builds the width and breadth of expertise required to manage increasingly

complex contract actions in an increasingly complex contracting environment. This may better meet the needs of the mission sets the contracting career field across the Air Force is charged with overseeing.

E. RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON FINDINGS

The findings and analysis of the research conducted revealed an evident misalignment between the proficiency and knowledge levels of the Department of the Air Force's enlisted contracting workforce, their share of the of the organizations contract portfolio, and the training framework currently in use to develop enlisted contracting Airmen on-the-job.

In response to the research, the team, in collaboration with the National Contract Management Association (NCMA) and Commerce and Contract Management Institute (CCMI), has formulated two recommendations structured to assist in updating the Air Force's enlisted on-the-job training. The first recommendation centers on transitioning from the in-use task-based Specialty Task Standard to a competency-based standard aligned with the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) accredited Contract Management Standard (CMS). The second recommendation focuses on embedding professional certification pathways directly into enlisted on-the-job training.

These recommendations by the research team were derived from the findings that enlisted contracting professionals demonstrated marked deficiencies in their proficiency in the post-award contract life cycle phase job tasks and their knowledge of seller tasks across all contract life cycle phases when compared to contemporary workforces. The research implies that these enlisted contracting professionals may receive training that overly focuses on policy memorization and surface level buyer tasks, leaving major gaps in their overall contracting competence.

The research team believes the implementation of the following recommendations offer the DAF's enlisted contracting workforce solutions to the deficiencies identified in the research. Adapting the current Specialty Task Standard to one that aligns with the Contract Management Standard will ensure training provided to enlisted contracting

Airmen reflects the entire contract management life cycle from both a buyer and seller perspective, and to a depth beyond basic policy memorization.

Additionally, embedding a framework for professional certification into enlisted on-the-job training through their skill level milestones formalizes how enlisted contracting Airmen demonstrate their growth and mastery of critical contracting competencies over their early career. This recommendation also reinforces an element of auditability theory within enlisted on-the-job training by providing a more effective control for individual enlisted contracting Airmen technical skill level award. Embedding professional certifications in the manner described further on in this research provides more transparent, and universal standards for award of a higher skill level by tying them to professional certification.

1. Update the Specialty Task Standard

The research team wrote tan updated Specialty Task Standard from the ground up (with a specific focus on 5 and 7 skill level tasks) in an attempt to realign enlisted contracting development with professional standards. The determination was made to leave apprentice and superintendent levels unchanged, as they already fulfilled their respective purposes of technical training qualification and senior leadership preparation. Additionally, the Contingency Contracting Officer section was left mostly untouched with the focus of the updated document on Joint Operational Contracting Support Courses I, II, and III.

The primary focus of the research team was to adapt the journeyman and craftsman skill level tasks of the Specialty Task Standard to center around the Contract Management Standard domains. Each domain was then mapped to buyer and seller competencies outlined in the Specialty Task Standard and organized with both the Career Field Training and Education Plan's Qualitative Requirements table (Figure 55 below) Bloom's Taxonomy in mind. This was done in order to establish a clear developmental progression that focused on understanding Contract Management Standard Guiding Principles before shifting towards the application of pertinent Federal Acquisition Regulation directives to buyer and seller tasks.

QUALITATIVE REQUIREMENTS

Proficiency Code Key		
	Scale Value	**Definition: The individual**
Task Performance Levels	1	Can do simple parts of the task. Needs to be told or shown how to do most of the task. (Extremely Limited)
	2	Can do most parts of the task. Needs only help on hardest parts. (Partially Proficient)
	3	Can do all parts of the task. Needs only a spot check of completed work. (Competent)
	4	Can do the complete task quickly and accurately. Can tell or show others how to do the task. (Highly Proficient)
*Task Knowledge Levels	a	Can name parts, tools, and simple facts about the task. (Nomenclature)
	b	Can determine step by step procedures for doing the task. (Procedures)
	c	Can identify why and when the task must be done and why each step is needed. (Operating Principles)
	d	Can predict, isolate, and resolve problems about the task. (Advanced Theory)
**Subject Knowledge Levels	A	Can identify basic facts and terms about the subject. (Facts)
	B	Can identify relationship of basic facts and state general principles about the subject. (Principles)
	C	Can analyze facts and principles and draw conclusions about the subject. (Analysis)
	D	Can evaluate conditions and make proper decisions about the subject. (Evaluation)

Explanations

* A task knowledge scale value may be used alone or with a task performance scale value to define a level of knowledge for a specific task. (Example: b and 1b)

** A subject knowledge scale value is used alone to define a level of knowledge for a subject not directly related to any specific task, or for a subject common to several tasks.

- This mark is used alone instead of a scale value to show that no proficiency training is provided in the course or CDC.

X This mark is used alone in the course columns to show that training is required but not given due to limitations in resources.

NOTE: All tasks and knowledge items shown with a proficiency code are trained during war time.

Figure 55. Air Force 6C0X1 Career Field Education and Training Plan Qualitative Requirements

The result of this work was a more rigorous and adaptable, competency-based training framework designed to effectively replace the current one used by the DAF contracting career field. The updated Specialty Training Standard is intended to replace older, rote training with training built to link enlisted on-the-job training outcomes with nationally accredited professional standards.

The updated document is provided by the research team in the Appendices of this paper, and its adoption is strongly recommended as the basis for all future efforts by the enlisted contracting career field to adapt the current Specialty Task Standard to the new version.

2. Embed Professional Certifications into Enlisted On-the-Job Training

This recommendation was jointly conceived and created by the research team, the National Contract Management Association, and the Commerce and Contract

Management Institute. It is intended to align enlisted skill progression with measurable, professionally recognized measures of contracting competence and business acumen.

The proposal is to be provided to SAF/AQC by the research team and provides two frameworks for the Air Force to consider for the adoption of the National Contract Management Association's Certified Contract Management Associate (CCMA) and Certified Federal Contract Manager (CFCM) certifications into the enlisted skill level progression structure, specifically at the receipt of an enlisted contracting Airmen's 5 and 7 levels.

The Certified Contract Management Associate (CCMA) certification supports foundational contracting competencies within the three life cycle phases of the Contract Management Standard. These basic requirements align with the expectation put on enlisted contracting Airmen earning their 5-level. Beyond that, the Certified Federal Contract Manager (CFCM) certification represents a mastery of both the competencies outlined in the Contract Management Standard and how these competencies are applied in the Federal Acquisition Regulation (a demonstration of application under Bloom's Taxonomy). Inclusion of the professional certification in the requirement for their upgrade (see Figure 56 below) provides an external, standardized measure of validating an enlisted contracting member's competency in core contracting areas, an understanding of seller related tasks, and an ability to apply those principles to the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR).

Figure 56 below illustrates the proposed change to Figure 3.1 of the enlisted contracting career fields Career Field Education and Training Plan. The proposal does not change or remove any current requirements but simply adds the requirements for the additional professional certification at each stage of the enlisted contracting Airmen's progression.

Upgrade to 5-Skill Level (6C051/Journeyman) Possess the 6C031 AFSC Minimum 12 months on the job/upgrade training, not to exceed 24 months Complete all core task training in accordance with QTP Earn the Certified Contract Managagement Associate certification Recommended by supervisor Approved by commander
Upgrade to 7-Skill Level (6C071/Craftsman) Possess the 6C051 AFSC Minimum rank of SSgt DoD Contracting Professional Certification Minimum 12 months on the job/upgrade training, not to exceed 24 months Earn the Certified Federal Contract Manager certification Recommended by supervisor Approved by commander

Figure 56. Proposed requirements for receipt of 5 and 7 skill levels.

The proposed framework provides two paths for implementation. The first option would focus on reducing the financial barriers of professional certification and require minimal external coordination from the contracting career field. It would provide enlisted contracting professionals with a streamlined path for National Contract Management Association membership and access to the required certification examinations. The burden for funding would fall to the career field but would be at a significantly reduced rate provided by the association in order to foster growth at the lowest levels of the contracting career field in the Department of the Air Force. The second, costlier, option would provide for a more integrated and robust partnering between NCMA and the Air Force by embedding NCMA-level coursework directly in junior Airmen's on-the-job training. These courses would ingrain a deeper baseline understanding of core contracting competencies and allow Airmen preparing for their 5-level to do so under NCMA's instruction.

Each option discussed is outlined in more granular detail in a proposal to be presented to SAF/AQC by the research team as part of their recommendations based on this research. The proposal is not included in this research paper due to its proprietary

nature. Both options achieve the desired end-state of aligning the enlisted contracting workforce development with standards developed by third-party accredited programs

F. SUMMARY

Chapter Four discussed the findings and subsequent analysis of the team's quantitative research on the Department of the Air Force's enlisted contracting workforce through two distinct, but associated areas of research, an assessment of the enlisted contracting workforce's proficiency and knowledge of tasks within the prominent domains of the contract management life cycle, and a measurement of the enlisted contracting workforce's share of the Air Force's contract action portfolio.

The analysis of the first research area established a baseline of self-assessed capability; the research team's assessment provided the career fields first-ever quantitative site picture of the enlisted contracting workforce's competency relative to the Contract Management Standard and peer Department of Defense contracting workforces. The results of that assessment illustrate a workforce that patterns consistently with other organizations in terms of strengths and weaknesses in the various contracting domains, but ultimately, it measurably lags behind its contemporaries. A workforce that, while procedurally adequate, failed to demonstrate higher-level proficiency and knowledge in more complex contracting tasks.

The analysis of the second research area examined the enlisted contracting workforce's share of the Air Force's contract actions and their associated dollar values, specifically in fiscal year 2024. The results of that analysis indicated that enlisted contracting professionals were responsible for approximately one-quarter of all contract actions and approximately one-fifth of the dollars associated with those actions. These figures were proportionally higher than the approximately 16.2% enlisted representation within the workforce. These findings ultimately indicated that the enlisted contracting workforce may hold substantial operational influence within the Air Force's contracting enterprise, particularly in overseas major commands.

When considered together, the two sets of analysis conducted by the research team illustrates a contracting workforce that "punches above its weight," in terms of size,

education, and in training received by the Air Force. However, it also highlighted an imbalance between the scope of the enlisted workforce's contributions to the mission and their underlying training and development required to support it.

The findings and analysis worked in conjunction to form the basis for two targeted recommendations by the research team. Working with guidance from professional associations, the team designed an updated Specialty Task Standard to replace the current one. Additionally, the team collaborated with the National Contract Management Association on a proposal to embed professional certifications within the current on-the-job training framework. Together, it is the research teams' desire that these two deliverables assist in translating the research's insights into practical solutions for implementation by SAF/AQC for all enlisted contracting Airmen.

The final chapter of this research will provide cumulative summary and conclusions of the research as well as potential areas for future research to expand on the concept of enlisted contracting workforce training and development.

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V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

A. SUMMARY

The Air Force's enlisted contracting workforce has long served as a critical contributor to mission readiness by procuring the goods, services, and capabilities required across the Department of the Air Force. As this thesis has shown, however, the training structure that supports those enlisted members remained rooted in rote Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) memorization and procedural task completion. Despite the increasing complexity of defense acquisition, the enlisted training model had not meaningfully evolved. As a result, the career field continued to produce Airmen who were technically "qualified" on paper but often underprepared to apply judgment, integrate across domains, or manage strategically significant contracting actions.

This broader context led directly to the central issue identified at the outset of the research. Recalling the problem presented in Chapter 1: enlisted contracting professionals frequently entered the workforce with insufficient developmental investment during their earliest career stages, resulting in observable gaps in core competencies and strategic capability. These gaps reflected a training paradigm that emphasized regulatory familiarity over the development of judgment, situational assessment, systems thinking, and other advanced competencies required by the contemporary acquisition environments. The research literature, from RAND analyses to NCMA standards, reinforced the urgency of moving away from checklist-based qualification toward a competency-based model that better supports operational effectiveness. This thesis, therefore, sought to address these persistent shortfalls through a structured inquiry into enlisted proficiency, workload contribution, and training design. The purpose of this research was to align enlisted development with SAF/AQC's strategic vision by (1) measuring current enlisted proficiency and workload distribution; (2) proposing a competency-based redesign of the Specialty Training Standard (STS); and (3) evaluating the feasibility and value of integrating industry-recognized certifications, such as the CFCM or CPCM, into enlisted progression. Together, these objectives provided a

foundation for reforming enlisted contracting development and strengthening the Air Force's broader acquisition capability.

B. CONCLUSION

The research team accomplished their research purpose by conducting assessments and analyses and now provide their summary answers to the research questions below.

1. How can the defense enlisted contracting workforce's training be adapted to align with a competency-based framework?

The research demonstrated that development reform requires shifting the enlisted training pipeline from task-based, FAR-centric qualification toward demonstrated competency aligned with the NCMA Contract Management Standard (CMS) and the DoD Contracting Competency Model. This transition can be achieved through a redesigned STS, competency-based assessments, structured rotational development, and the integration of validated professional certifications. A competency-based framework provides clearer performance expectations, improves auditability, and strengthens mission readiness by developing Airmen capable of applying judgment and systems thinking across the acquisition life cycle.

2. Based on a competency assessment, what is the proficiency level of buyer tasks and knowledge of seller tasks of the enlisted contracting workforce?

Assessment results indicated that enlisted contracting Airmen reported moderate proficiency in most buyer tasks, particularly administrative and procedural activities, but demonstrated lower confidence in analytical, judgment-based, and negotiation-related skills. Knowledge of seller-side tasks followed a similar pattern, with stronger familiarity in transactional processes than in complex evaluation or risk-based activities. Variation across responses suggests inconsistent developmental experiences across units. These findings reinforced the limitations of task-based training and highlighted gaps in the advanced competencies required by the CMS.

3. Can the enlisted proportion of the Air Force contracting workload be measured, and what patterns or data does this reveal?

By combining the SAF/AQC alpha roster with the fiscal year 2024 contract-action dataset, this research approximated the enlisted share of the Department of the Air Force's contracting workload. The data showed that enlisted members contribute significantly across pre-award, award, and post-award actions despite comprising a smaller proportion of the total workforce. These results confirmed that enlisted Airmen carry substantial operational responsibility, underscoring the importance of reforming training to match their mission impact.

4. How can the Specialty Training Standard (STS) currently in use be transitioned to a competency-based model?

The STS can be updated by mapping each task to clear competency requirements, incorporating observable performance criteria, and restructuring assessments around demonstrated mastery rather than administrative certification. Integrating multi-method evaluation, such as direct observation, scenario-based assessments, and documented work samples, would ensure consistent validation of competence across units. Embedding competency thresholds at each skill level and aligning OJT rotations with domain exposure would create a sustainable foundation for competency-based upgrade training.

5. How can the current method of awarding enlisted skill levels be improved by incorporating professional certifications? Is there an associated cost with these certifications, and is there a benefit to the Air Force in taking on those costs?

The research found that incorporating professional certifications such as the CFCM or CPCM into upgrade milestones would provide externally validated indicators of technical competence and align enlisted development with industry standards. Although these certifications carry financial costs, the benefits, higher technical credibility, increased consistency in skill-level progression, reduced time to proficiency, and closer alignment with DoD workforce reforms, suggest that funding these certifications would be a strategic investment in strengthening the capability and professional standing of the enlisted contracting force.

C. AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

While this thesis concentrated on the enlisted contracting workforce, its findings have broader implications for professional development across the defense contracting community. Future research should build upon this foundation by expanding the scope to include other segments of the acquisition workforce and by evaluating the long-term outcomes of competency-based training.

First, further study should be conducted to apply similar competency assessments to the officer and civilian contracting workforces. Using the same methodology, surveying workforce proficiency against the Contract Management Standard, and linking results to workload data, would reveal developmental trends and performance gaps across the entire contracting enterprise. Such research would provide a total force perspective of competency alignment and identify opportunities to create shared training pathways and credentialing frameworks between enlisted, officer, and civilian personnel.

Second, cross-service comparative research could be considered in order to examine how other branches: the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Space Force develop their contracting professionals. Conducting parallel competency assessments and analyses across the other services would generate comparative insight, support joint standardization efforts, and advance a more unified DoD contracting competency model grounded in the Contract Management Standard.

Third, longitudinal studies should be pursued to evaluate the long-term impacts of competency-based training on performance, certification attainment, and retention. Tracking cohorts of Airmen who progress through a redesigned, competency-based STS would provide empirical evidence of performance outcomes relative to legacy task-based approaches. This method of research would require significant collaboration with SAF/AQC to build new processes to more granularly track the demographics of the contracting workforce across fiscal years.

Fourth, additional research is needed to assess the economic and organizational effects of integrating professional certifications into enlisted training pipelines. Such analyses should evaluate the cost-benefit balance of exam sponsorship, curriculum integration, and credential recognition to optimize resource allocation while maintaining

developmental rigor. This research may consider the establishment of a Cooperative Research and Development Agreement (CRADA) with the National Contract Management Association and/or the Commerce & Contract Management Institute in order to create a more formal relationship between the two professional organizations and the Naval Postgraduate School to better understand how to train and develop junior contracting personnel across the Department of Defense. The formalization of that relationship would allow for the exchange of proprietary data between all parties that would otherwise be impossible without the contract in place.

Finally, as digital tools continue to reshape education and workforce management, future research should explore how analytics platforms and learning management systems, such as myTraining or the Total Force Training Record (TFTR), can be leveraged to monitor competency progression, automate assessment, and provide real-time feedback to trainers and supervisors.

In summary, the findings of this thesis demonstrate that transitioning the enlisted contracting workforce to a competency-based framework will close current developmental gaps and enhance operational capability. Extending this approach to officers, civilians, and other branches offers an opportunity to unify the Department of the Air Force and the wider defense acquisition community under a common standard of professional excellence.

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APPENDIX A. UPDATED SPECIALTY TASK STANDARD – 5 SKILL LEVEL

Attachment 2, STS 6C0X1 1. Tasks, Knowledge & Technical References	2. Core Tasks			3. Certification for OJT					4. Proficiency Codes Used to Indicate Training/Information Provided (See Note)					
	A	B	C	A	B	C	D	E	A 3 Skill Level		B 5 Skill Level		C 7 Skill Level	
	3 Level	5 Level	7 Level	Tng Start	Tng Complete	Trainee Initials	Trainer Initials	Certifier Initials	(1) Course	(2) QTP	(1) Course	(2) QTP	(1) Course	(2) QTP
Upgrade to 5-Skill Level (6C051/Journeyman) Tasks and Knowledge Items														
1.0 Guiding Principles of Contract Management Knowledge														
1.1 Skills & Roles		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.1.1 Identify the purpose of contract management		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.1.2 Identify key elements managed in a contract		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.1.3 Identify the two primary contract manager roles		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.1.4 Identify the personal attributes that support contract leadership		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.1.5 Identify the key disciplines relevant to contract management		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.1.6 Identify the value of continuous learning in contract management		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.2 Contract Principles		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.2.1 Identify the four elements required to form a contract		*							-	-	-	B	-	-

1.2.2 Identify the conditions for a contract to be valid and binding		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.2.3 Discuss the following general contract principles		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.2.3.1 Describe the concept of principle and agent		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.2.3.2 Describe the two types of authority in contracting		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.2.3.3 Describe the purpose of market research		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.2.3.4 Describe the role of competition in contracting		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.2.3.5 Describe the importance of fair and reasonable pricing		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.2.4 Discuss the following terms & conditions for specific contract matters		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.2.4.1 Describe the purpose of inspection and acceptance		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.2.4.2 Describe what constitutes an excusable delay		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.2.4.3 Describe the concept of repudiation in contracts		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.2.4.4 Describe the role of		*							-	-	-	B	-	-

warranties in a contract														
1.2.4.5 Describe the purpose of payment terms		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.2.4.6 Describe when and how contract changes occur		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.2.4.7 Describe the concept of a contract termination		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.3 Standards of Conduct		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.3.1 Identify the purpose of standards of conduct		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.3.2 Identify the four broad ethical behaviors required of contract manager		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.3.3 Identify where standards of conduct apply		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.4 Regulatory Compliance		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.4.1 Identify the legal nature of a contract		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.4.2 Identify the sources of regulatory guidance for contracts		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.5 Situational Assessment		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.5.1 Discuss the importance of seven behaviors used to assess contracts		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.5.1.1 Describe capturing and sharing knowledge		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.5.1.2 Describe aligning		*							-	-	-	B	-	-

requirements with organization goals														
1.5.1.3 Describe contract action interdependence		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.5.1.4 Describe life cycle principles		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.5.1.5 Describe collecting and using market intelligence		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.5.1.6 Describe identifying opportunity for process improvement		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.5.1.7 Describe negotiating terms that meet user needs		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.6 Team Dynamics		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.6.1 Identify the purpose of the contract management team		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.6.2 Identify the primary roles included in the contract management team		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.6.3 Identify when the team relationship becomes formal		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.6.4 Identify why team members must understand other roles		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.6.5 Identify why collaboration is needed to solve contracting problems		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.6.6 Identify why recording		*							-	-	-	B	-	-

lessons learned is a team duty														
1.7 Communication and Documentation		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.7.1 Identify the purpose of communication in contract management		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.7.2 Identify the requirements for effective communication		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
1.7.3 Identify how documentation facilitates communication		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.0 Pre-Award Buyer Task Proficiency														
2.1 Develop Solicitation		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1 Plan Solicitation		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.1 Shape Internal Customer Requirements		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.1.1 Perform a needs assessment		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.1.2 Perform a requirements analysis		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.1.3 Identify measurable outcomes and incentives		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.2 Conduct Market Research		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.2.1 Identify potential suppliers		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.2.2 Evaluate requirement achievability		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.2.3 Conduct pre-		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-

offer conference														
2.1.1.2.4 Consider solicitation changes		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.3 Perform Risk Analysis		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.3.1 Make-or-Buy assessment		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.3.2 Determine supply or service classification		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.3.3 Develop delivery schedule		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.3.4 Determine government-furnished property requirements		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.4 Formulate Contracting Strategy		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.4.1 Select proper contract type		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.4.2 Select proper contract method		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.4.3 Determine business or regulatory requirements		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.4.4 Formulate offer evaluation plan		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.4.5 Finalize solicitation plan		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.2 Request Offers		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.2.1 Execution Solicitation Plan		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.2.2 Prepare Solicitations		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-

2.1.2.2.1 Respond to offeror questions		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.2.2.2 Incorporate proposed contract terms		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.2.2.3 Determine need for pre-offer review		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.2.3 Issue solicitation		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.2.3.1 Determine need to publicize solicitation		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.2.4 Respond to Seller Communications		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.2.5 Amend solicitation		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.0 Pre-Award Seller Task Knowledge														
2.2 Develop Offer		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.1 Plan Sales		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.1.1 Discuss the purpose of conducting pre-sales activities		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.1.1.1 Describe the role of customer relationships in selling		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.1.1.2 Describe how sellers use marketing strategy		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.1.1.3 Describe why sellers assess competition		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.1.1.4 Describe how sellers determine supply chain support		*							-	-	-	B	-	-

2.2.1.2 Discuss the purpose of evaluating a solicitation		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.1.2.1 Describe how sellers request clarification		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.1.2.2 Describe how sellers propose changes to the solicitation		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.1.3 Identify how sellers make bid/no-bid decisions		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.1.4 Identify how sellers finalize a sales plan		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2 Prepare Offer		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1 Discuss how sellers prepare an offer		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.1 Describe how sellers develop an execution plan		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.1.1 Identify unique or special requirements in a solicitation		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.1.2 Identify how sellers assess their ability to meet requirements		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.2 Describe how sellers develop risk mitigation plans		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.2.1 Identify how sellers develop a pricing strategy		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.2.2 Identify how seller use terms to manage risk		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.2.3 Identify how sellers define a		*							-	-	-	B	-	-

technical approach														
2.2.2.1.2.4 Identify how sellers evaluate their own pricing before submission		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.3 Describe how sellers assess teaming options		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.3.1 Identify the purpose of nondisclosure agreements		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.3.2 Identify why sellers negotiate teaming agreements		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.3.3 Identify how sellers make teaming decisions		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.4 Identify how sellers participate in customer communications		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.5 Describe how sellers finalize an offer		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.5.1 Identify how sellers submit the offer and verify receipt		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
3.0 Award Buyer Task Proficiency														
3.1 Form Contract		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.1 Analyze Price or Cost		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.1.1 Review an offer for pricing and term comprehension		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.1.2 Evaluate seller terms to		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-

identify pricing risks														
3.1.1.3 Determine if pricing is too low and/or too high		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.1.3.1 Perform a price analysis		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.1.3.2 Perform a cost analysis		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.1.4 Document results of price or cost analysis		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.2 Plan Negotiations		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.2.1 Prepare clarification request based on offer review		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.2.2 Document negotiation objective aligned to evaluation criteria		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.2.3 Participate in exchanges with offerors		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.3 Select Source		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.3.1 Review offer(s) for compliance with solicitation requirements		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.3.2 Evaluate offer(s) against solicitation evaluation criteria		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.3.3 Participate in negotiations with offeror(s)		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.3.4 Finalize negotiation outcomes with offeror(s)		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.3.5 Request a final offer		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-

revision when necessary														
3.1.3.6 Document the basis for award in the contract file		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.3.7 Review and approve contract for award		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.3.8 Award the contract to the selected offeror(s)		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.3.9 Notify unsuccessful offeror(s)		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.3.10 Conduct debriefings with offeror(s) as required		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.4 Manage Disagreements		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.4.1 Receive and log protests or appeals submitted by offeror(s)		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.4.2 Coordinate response to protests or appeals in accordance with policy		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.0 Award Seller Task Knowledge														
3.1.1 Analyze Price or Cost	*Not Applicable*													
3.1.2 Plan Negotiations		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
3.1.2.1 Explain how sellers respond to clarification requests		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
3.1.2.2 Explain the purpose of a seller's negotiation objectives		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
3.1.2.3 Explain the purpose of seller		*							-	-	-	B	-	-

discussions with buyers during negotiations														
3.1.3 Select Source		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
3.1.3.1 Identify reasons why a seller may withdraw an offer		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
3.1.3.2 Identify what sellers do when negotiating terms with buyers		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
3.1.3.3 Identify what sellers do to approve a contract		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
3.1.3.4 Identify what sellers may submit as a final offer revision		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
3.1.3.5 Identify what sort of information sellers may seek during a debriefing		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
3.1.3.7 Identify how sellers record the result of their offer		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
3.1.4 Manage Disagreements		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
3.1.4.1 Identify why sellers submit a protest		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.0 Post-Award Buyer Task Proficiency														
4.1 Perform Contract		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.1 Administer Contract		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.1.1 Execute contract		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.1.2 Conduct post-award conference		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-

4.1.1.3 Maintain contract documentation and files		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.1.3.1 Track project funding and contract value		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.1.3.2 Manage contract payment process		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.1.3.3 Manage key personnel changes		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.1.3.4 Administer owner-furnished property, equipment, or information		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.1.5 Establish and maintain communication with stakeholders		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.1.5.1 Communication with internal stakeholders		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.1.5.2 Communication with external stakeholders		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.1.6 Assess and document interim contractor performance		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.1.7 Manage contract deliverables		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.2 Ensure Quality		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.2.1 Plan for contract performance monitoring		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.2.1.1 Conduct performance reviews		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.3 Manage Subcontracts		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-

4.1.3.1 Issue subcontracts		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.3.1.1 Conduct subcontract planning		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.3.1.2 Execute subcontract formation		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.3.1.3 Perform subcontract administration		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.4 Manage Changes		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.4.1 Manage contract changes		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.4.1.1 Perform modification planning		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.4.1.2 Execute modification formation		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.4.1.3 Perform modification administration		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.4.2 Conduct contract interpretation		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.4.2.1 Resolve contract disputes		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.4.3 Determine contract termination		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.4.3.1 Execute contract termination		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.2 Close Contract		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.2.1 Close out contract		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.2.1.1 Validate performance requirements are met		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-

4.2.1.2 Verify physical contract completion		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.2.1.3 Prepare contract completion documents		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.2.1.4 Coordinate final disposition of owner-provided equipment		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.2.1.5 Settle subcontracts in accordance with contract terms		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.2.1.6 Reconcile contract record		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.2.1.6.1 Conduct required contract audits		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.2.1.7 Make final payment to contractor		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.2.1.8 Evaluate final contractor performance		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.2.1.8.1 Assess and document final contractor performance		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.2.1.9 Finalize the contract file		*							-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.0 Post-Award Seller Task Knowledge														
4,1 Perform Contract		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.1 Administer Contract		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.1.2 Recognize why sellers join post-award conferences		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.1.3 Understand why sellers keep contract files		*							-	-	-	B	-	-

4.1.1.3.1 Recognize why sellers track funding and value		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.1.3.2 Recognize why sellers manage payment process		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.1.3.3 Recognize seller key personnel changes impacts		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.1.3.4 Recognize seller role in managing owner-furnished property		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.1.4 Understand why sellers provide cost information		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.1.5 Recognize why sellers communicate with stakeholders		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.1.5.1 Recognize some seller internal stakeholders		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.1.5.2 Recognize some seller external stakeholders		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.1.6 Understand why sellers rebut performance assessments		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.1.7 Recognize seller role In managing deliverables		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.2 Ensure quality		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.2.1 Recognize why sellers plan for performance delivery		*							-	-	-	B	-	-

4.1.2.1.1 Recognize sellers need to allocate resources		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.3.1.2 Recognize seller need to follow schedule		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.2.1.3 Understand seller objective in managing costs		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.2.1.4 Understand seller objective in managing risk		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.2.1.5 Recognize why sellers control quality		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.3 Manage Subcontracts		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.3.1 Identify supply chain requirements that drive subcontracting		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.4 Manage Changes		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.4.1 Identify seller role in managing contract changes		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.4.1.1 Identify seller role in modification planning		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.4.1.2 Identify seller role in modification formation		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.4.1.3 Identify seller role in modification administration		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.4.2 Identify seller role in contract interpretation		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.4.2.1 Identify seller		*							-	-	-	B	-	-

role in submitting disputes														
4.1.4.2.2 Identify seller role in resolving disputes		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.4.3.1 Identify seller role in the contract termination process		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.2 Close Contract		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.2.1 Closeout Contract		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.2.1.1 Identify seller role in validating contract performance		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.2.1.2 Identify seller role in verifying completion		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.2.1.3 Identify seller role in disposition of owner-furnished property		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.2.1.4 Identify seller role in settling subcontracts		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.2.1.5 Identify seller role in reconciling contract		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.2.1.5.1 Identify seller role in responding to audits		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.2.1.7 Identify seller purpose in rebutting final performance assessment		*							-	-	-	B	-	-
4.2.1.8 Identify seller role in finalizing contract		*							-	-	-	B	-	-

APPENDIX B. UPDATED SPECIALTY TASK STANDARD – 7 SKILL LEVEL

Attachment 2, STS 6C0X1 1. Tasks, Knowledge & Technical References	2. Core Tasks			3. Certification for OJT					4. Proficiency Codes Used to Indicate Training/Information Provided (See Note)					
	A	B	C	A	B	C	D	E	A 3 Skill Level		B 5 Skill Level		C 7 Skill Level	
	3 Level	5 Level	7 Level	Tng Start	Tng Complete	Trainee Initials	Trainer Initials	Certifier Initials	(1) Course	(2) QTP	(1) Course	(2) QTP	(1) Course	(2) QTP
Upgrade to 7-Skill Level (6C071/Craftsman) Tasks and Knowledge Items														
1.0 Guiding Principles of Contract Management Knowledge														
1.1 Skills & Roles			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.1.1 Apply FAR 1.1 principles to define contract management purpose			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.1.2 Identify key elements managed in a contract			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.1.3 Evaluate buyer and seller contract roles			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.1.4 Analyze attributes supporting contract leadership			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.1.5 Evaluate interdisciplinary knowledge in contract management			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.1.6 Assess value of continuous learning in contracting			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.2 Contract Principles			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.2.1 Analyze the 4 elements forming a valid contract			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.2.2 Evaluate conditions ensuring contract enforceability			*						-	-	-	C	-	-

1.2.3 Apply foundational contract management principles			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.2.3.1 Evaluate principal–agent relationships in contracting			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.2.3.2 Analyze express and implied contracting authority			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.2.3.3 Evaluate market research as a decision tool			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.2.3.4 Assess competition's role in contract performance			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.2.3.5 Analyze fair and reasonable pricing principles			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.2.4 Apply specific contract terms and conditions			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.2.4.1 Evaluate inspection and acceptance requirements			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.2.4.2 Analyze excusable delay criteria and impacts			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.2.4.3 Evaluate repudiation within contractual obligations			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.2.4.4 Assess warranty purpose and enforceability			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.2.4.5 Analyze payment term structures and compliance			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.2.4.6 Evaluate procedures for executing contract changes			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.2.4.7 Analyze termination principles and their application			*						-	-	-	C	-	-

1.3 Standards of Conduct			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.3.1 Evaluate the purpose of ethical conduct			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.3.2 Analyze the four core ethical behaviors required as a CO			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.3.3 Assess the application of standards throughout the acquisition process			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.4 Regulatory Compliance			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.4.1 Analyze the legal framework of contracts			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.4.2 Evaluate regulatory sources guiding contract decisions			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.5 Situational Assessment			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.5.1 Evaluate behaviors guiding contract assessments			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.5.1.1 Apply knowledge-sharing to contract improvement			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.5.1.2 Align requirements with organizational objectives			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.5.1.3 Analyze contract interdependence across actions			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.5.1.4 Apply life-cycle principles to acquisition planning			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.5.1.5 Evaluate the purpose and use of market intelligence			*						-	-	-	C	-	-

1.5.1.6 Apply process improvement to contract management			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.5.1.7 Evaluate negotiation alignment with user needs			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.6 Team Dynamics			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.6.1 Analyze the purpose of the contract team			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.6.2 Evaluate interdependent roles within the contract team			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.6.3 Determine when contract team relationships formalize			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.6.4 Assess need for cross-role understanding			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.6.5 Analyze collaboration to resolve contracting challenges			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.6.6 Implement lessons learned as a team responsibility			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.7 Communication and Documentation			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.7.1 Analyze compliant communication in contract management			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.7.2 Analyze requirements ensuring effective communication			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
1.7.3 Evaluate how documentation facilitates communication			*						-	-	-	C	-	-
2.0 Pre-Award Buyer Task Proficiency														

2.1 Develop Solicitation			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1 Plan Solicitation			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.1 Develop clear, functional requirements			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.1.1 Assess and validate mission need			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.1.2 Analyze and refine requirements analysis			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.1.3 Define performance outcomes and incentives			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.2 Conduct Market Research and analyze industry capability			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.2.1 Assess supplier capability and competition			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.2.3 Lead transparent pre-offer conferences			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.2.4 Amend Solicitation changes for fairness and clarity			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.3 Analyze Solicitation and performance risk			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.3.1 Evaluate make-or-buy feasibility			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.3.2 Classify supple or service needs			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.3.3 Optimize delivery schedule and risk			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.3.4 Analyze government-furnished property needs			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.4 Formulate Contracting Strategy			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-

2.1.1.4.1 Select contract type balancing risk and incentive			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.4.2 Justify Acquisition method selection			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.4.3 Align business strategy with policy			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.4.4 Design compliant evaluation criteria			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.1.4.5 Synthesize FAR 5, 7, and 10 elements to finalize solicitation plan			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.2 Request Offers			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.2.1 Execute and manage solicitation release			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.2.2 Prepare compliant solicitation documents			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.2.2.1 Manage, respond and document offeror inquiries			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.2.2.2 Evaluate and integrate proposed terms under FAR 12, 15, and 52			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.2.2.3 Determine need for pre-offer review			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.2.3 Release, manage, and control solicitation			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.2.3.1 Evaluate competition and policy factors to determine solicitation publicizing requirements.			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-

2.1.2.4 Manage seller communications and ensure transparency			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.1.2.5 Analyze and manage solicitation amendments for compliance.			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
2.0 Pre-Award Seller Task Knowledge														
2.2 Develop Offer			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.1 Plan Sales			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.1.1 Evaluate vendor pre-sales activities for acquisition alignment.			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.1.1.1 Analyze customer relationships to assess selling strategies.			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.1.1.2 Analyze how seller marketing strategies shape competition.			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.1.1.3 Describe why sellers assess competition			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.1.1.4 Assess seller supply chain strategies for feasibility.			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.1.2 Analyze seller solicitation evaluations to anticipate competition.			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.1.2.1 Describe how sellers request clarification			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.1.2.2 Evaluate seller change proposals for fairness and impact.			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.1.3 Analyze seller bid decisions to			*						-	-	-	B	-	-

anticipate competition.														
2.2.1.4 Assess seller sales plans to predict proposal strategy.			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2 Prepare Offer			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1 Analyze seller offer preparation to assess proposal quality			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.1 Interpret seller execution planning to evaluate proposal			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.1.1 Analyze unique solicitation requirements to assess proposal impact			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.1.2 Evaluate seller capability to meet solicitation requirements			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.2 Describe how sellers develop risk mitigation plans			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.2.1 Analyze seller pricing strategies to evaluate competitiveness			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.2.2 Analyze seller contract terms that allocate performance risk			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.2.3 Assess seller technical approaches for solution credibility			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.2.4 Examine seller price evaluations for			*						-	-	-	B	-	-

accuracy and realism														
2.2.2.1.3 Analyze seller teaming decisions to gauge capability alignment			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.3.1 Apply nondisclosure principles to protect acquisition information			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.3.2 Evaluate seller teaming agreements to understand collaboration intent			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.3.3 Identify how sellers make teaming decisions			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.4 Evaluate seller communication practices for transparency and influence			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.5 Analyze seller offer finalization for compliance and readiness			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
2.2.2.1.5.1 Manage seller offer submission and verify receipt documentation			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
3.0 Award Buyer Task Proficiency														
3.1 Form Contract			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.1 Analyze Price or Cost			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.1.1 Evaluate offer pricing and terms for understanding			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.1.2 Analyze seller terms to identify pricing risk			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.1.3 Evaluate pricing data to determine reasonableness			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-

3.1.1.3.1 Interpret price analysis results to inform negotiation strategy			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.1.3.2 Evaluate cost analysis results to support pricing decisions			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.1.4 Synthesize pricing analysis results into defensible documentation			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.2 Plan Negotiations			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.2.1 Develop clarification requests to resolve offer ambiguities			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.2.2 Formulate negotiation objectives aligned with evaluation results			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.2.3 Facilitate compliant exchanges to enhance proposal understanding			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.3 Select Source			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.3.1 Evaluate offers to confirm compliance with solicitation			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.3.3 Lead negotiation discussions to achieve fair agreements with offeror(s)			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.3.4 Confirm and document final negotiation agreements			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.3.5 Determine and request final offer revisions appropriately			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.3.6 Compile and justify award decisions through documentation			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-

3.1.3.7 Review and approve contract for award			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.3.8 Execute contract award ensuring compliance and accuracy			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.3.9 Notify unsuccessful offeror(s)			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.3.10 Lead debriefings to ensure transparency and professionalism as required			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.4 Manage Disagreements			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.4.1 Understand, manage, and document offeror protests or appeals.			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.1.4.2 Coordinate response to protests Coordinate protest responses to ensure policy compliance			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
3.0 Award Seller Task Knowledge														
3.1.1 Analyze Price or Cost	*Not Applicable*													
3.1.2 Plan Negotiations			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
3.1.2.1 Analyze seller clarifications to guide compliant buyer actions			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
3.1.2.2 Explain the purpose of a seller's negotiation objectives			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
3.1.2.3 Interpret seller negotiation goals to inform buyer negotiation strategy			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
3.1.3 Select Source			*						-	-	-	B	-	-

3.1.3.1 Analyze seller withdrawal actions to guide buyer response			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
3.1.3.2 Interpret seller negotiation tactics to strengthen buyer position			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
3.1.3.3 Anticipate seller approval actions to finalize awards			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
3.1.3.4 Evaluate seller final revisions for impact and compliance			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
3.1.3.5 Anticipate seller debrief questions to ensure compliance			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
3.1.3.7 Interpret seller offer results to inform contract records			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
3.1.4 Manage Disagreements			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
3.1.4.1 Analyze seller protest causes and motives			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.0 Post-Award Buyer Task Proficiency														
4.1 Perform Contract			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.1 Administer Contract			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.1.1 Apply contracting authority to execute contract			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.1.2 Lead post-award conferences to ensure performance alignment			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.1.3 Manage contract files to ensure accountability			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.1.3.1 Monitor funding and contract value for fiscal accuracy			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-

4.1.1.3.2 Oversee contract payments to ensure accuracy and compliance			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.1.3.3 Oversee key personnel changes to sustain contract performance			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.1.3.4 Validate use of furnished assets in contract performance			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.1.5 Lead stakeholder communication to align contract performance			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.1.5.1 Coordinate internal communication to manage performance oversight			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.1.5.2 Facilitate external communication to maintain contract integrity			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.1.6 Evaluate interim performance to guide contract administration			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.1.7 Manage and Validate contract deliverables meet requirements			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.2 Ensure Quality			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.2.1 Develop monitoring plans to assess contract performance			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.2.1.1 Lead performance reviews to evaluate contractor effectiveness			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.3 Manage Subcontracts			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-

4.1.3.1 Issue, Evaluate, and approve subcontract actions			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.3.1.3 Administer subcontract performance to ensure flow-down compliance			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.4 Manage Changes			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.4.1 Integrate authorized changes to preserve contract scope			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.4.1.1 Plan contract modifications to balance scope and impact			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.4.1.2 Authorize and document contract modifications for compliance			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.4.1.3 Document and oversee modification implementation activities			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.4.2 4.1.4.2 Conduct contract interpretation			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.4.2.1 Resolve contract disputes through analysis and coordination			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.4.3 Assess contract conditions to justify termination decisions			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.1.4.3.1 Execute contract termination with balanced buyer–seller insight			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.2 Close Contract			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.2.1 Finalize contract closeout ensuring mutual accountability			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-

4.2.1.1 Validate performance requirements are met			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.2.1.2 Confirm physical completion through inspection and validation			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.2.1.3 Compile completion documentation to finalize contract record			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.2.1.4 Coordinate final disposition of furnished equipment responsibly			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.2.1.5 Oversee subcontract settlements for fairness and compliance			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.2.1.6 Reconcile contract record for complete, auditable closeout			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.2.1.6.1 Conduct and interpret contract audits for compliance assurance			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.2.1.7 Authorize final payment ensuring accuracy and compliance			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.2.1.8 Assess and document final contractor performance results			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.2.1.8.1 Assess final performance and document evaluation outcomes			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-
4.2.1.9 Finalize contract file ensuring completeness and accountability			*						-	-	-	3c	-	-

4.0 Post-Award Seller Task Knowledge														
4,1 Perform Contract			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.1 Administer Contract			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.1.2 Recognize seller motives for post-award participation			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.1.3 Understand seller recordkeeping to ensure audit readiness			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.1.3.1 Interpret seller funding tracking to prevent overruns			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.1.3.2 Understand seller payment management to ensure compliance			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.1.3.3 Recognize seller key personnel changes impacts			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.1.3.4 Recognize seller role in managing owner-furnished property			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.1.4 Apply seller cost data analysis			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.1.5 Apply seller stakeholder communication strategy			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.1.5.1 Assess seller internal stakeholder communication			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.1.5.2 Assess seller external stakeholder communication			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.1.6 Evaluate and respond to seller performance rebuttals			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.1.7 Evaluate seller responsibility for			*						-	-	-	B	-	-

deliverable management														
4.1.2.1 Assess seller performance planning			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.2.1.1 Analyze seller resource allocation			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.3.1.2 Evaluate seller schedule adherence			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.2.1.3 Be aware of seller cost management objectives			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.2.1.4 Analyze seller risk management objectives			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.2.1.5 Evaluate seller quality control methods			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.3 Analyze seller subcontract management practices			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.3.1 Assess seller supply chain requirements			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.4 Analyze seller change-management practices			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.4.1 Evaluate seller role in contract changes			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.4.1.1 Analyze seller modification planning			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.4.1.2 Evaluate seller role in modification formation			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.4.1.3 Analyze seller role in modification administration			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.4.2 Evaluate seller role in			*						-	-	-	B	-	-

contract interpretation														
4.1.4.2.1 Analyze seller approach to submitting disputes			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.4.2.2 Evaluate seller approach to dispute resolution			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.1.4.3.1Analyze seller role in contract termination			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.2 Close Contract			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.2.1 Closeout Contract			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.2.1.1 Evaluate seller role in performance validation			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.2.1.2 Analyze seller role in verifying completion			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.2.1.3 Identify seller role in the coordination of disposition of owner-furnished property			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.2.1.4 Understand contract settlements from seller perspective			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.2.1.5 Identify seller role in reconciling contract			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.2.1.5.1 Analyze seller role in audit response			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.2.1.7 Evaluate seller rebuttal of final assessment			*						-	-	-	B	-	-
4.2.1.8 Assess how sellers finalize the contract			*						-	-	-	B	-	-

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