Understanding DoD Program Success

PSM Conference
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Dr. Robert Charette
President
ITABHI Corporation

State of Acquisition

"The current situation is characterized by massively accelerated cost growth in many major defense programs, lack of confidence by senior leaders, and no appreciable improvement in the defense acquisition system in the past two decades."
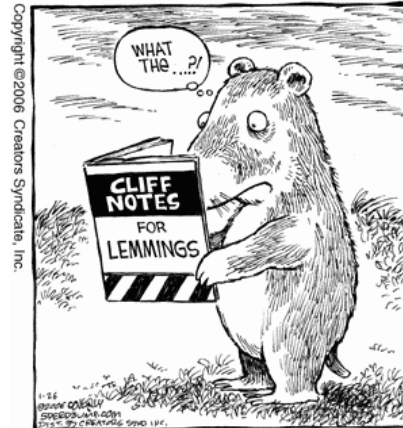
DAPA Project Team Report December 2005

Contention

You learn more about program failure by studying program success.

Key Questions

1. What do successful programs look like?
2. Why are they different from unsuccessful ones?
3. Can program success be duplicated?

Can program success rates be increased?

What is Success?

AGM-65A Maverick

The program's opportunity costs were worth the investment

Success Characteristics

Compelling Mission Need

Powerful Constituency Support

Politically and Technically Savvy Program Team Management

Systems Engineering that Effectively Translates Political into Technical Requirements

Excel at the Basics: Right Processes/Right Technology

Open Communication of Risks and Problems

Realistic Balanced Goals and Resources

Robust Performance Bias

Strong Personal Leadership and Commitment

Compelling Need, Political Support

F-16A Falcon

- Clear mission objective
- Decisive, urgent need
- Powerful constituency

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Translate Political into Technical

- Savvy sys engineering
- Objectives alignment
  - Political
  - Technical
- Measurable objectives
  - Political
  - Technical
- Proactive management
  - Expectations
  - Perceptions

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Objective Realism, Risk Disclosure

F-18E/F Super Hornet

- Defined program envelop
- Realistic estimates
- Evidence-driven decisions
- ERM and cost views
- Balance
  - Cost-Benefit
  - Risk-Reward

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Very Strong Performance Bias

"Build a little, test a little, learn a lot."

- Robust actions
  - Flexibility
  - Adaptability
  - Positive
- Ever quicker OODA
- Doing the basics
- Making the calls
- Means aren't ends

Aegis Cruiser

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Personal Commitment

"To be somebody or to do something."

Col. John Boyd

1. Adm. Hyman Rickover
2. Adm. Levering Smith
3. Gen. Bernard Schriever
4. Col. John Boyd
5. Gen. Curtis LeMay
6. Adm. Wayne Meyer

Correlation or Causation?

30 April 1975

US Army Colonel Harry Summers once told a North Vietnamese Colonel, "You know, you never defeated us on the battlefield." Through his interpreter his counterpart responded by saying, "This may be so. But it is also irrelevant."

Not Failing Isn't Good Enough

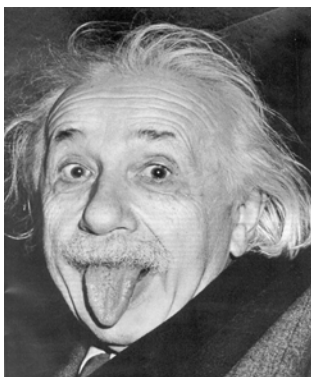*"A program manager's No. 1 priority is keeping a program alive and moving through the acquisition process."*

OSD Acquisition Study 1995

RAH-66 Comanche

"Abnormal" Success Criteria

"A perfection of means, and confusion of aims, seems to be our main problem."

- **Success is defined broadly**
- **Program success is worth taking a risk on ...**
  … and maybe being cancelled
- **The needs of the many …**

Minimize Sources of Risk

- **Minimize uncertainty**
  - Manage status
  - No surprises
- **Maximize …**
  - Stability
  - Predictability
- **Foster responsibility**
  - Information
  - Decision

The problem lies with Ada.

Maximize Decision Freedom

- **Control is destiny**
- **Maximize operating context**
- **Improve Sit Awareness**
- **Increase OODA boundary**
- **Decide only when needed**

"Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity."
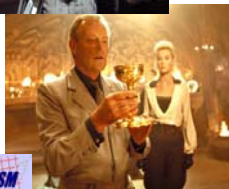
Can Success Be Duplicated?

"All happy families are like one another: each unhappy family is unhappy in their own way."

- **Present environment**
  - Failure prevention
  - Best practice addiction
  - "Gotcha" mentality
  - Do more with less
  - Elimination of mavericks
- **Acquisition reform**
  - No change in 30+ years
  - Capability-based Acq next "good idea"
  - Question of power/control
- **No learning from the past**
  - "Back to basics"
  - Successful programs ignored

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Success is a Choice

Meaningful acquisition reform is doubtful, so programs must …

1. Fight for objective realism
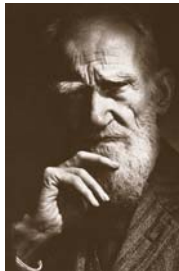2. Duplicate past successes
3. Do the *real* basics

And ...
OSD must create new behavioral incentives to enable program success

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PSM, Risk & Successful Programs

"The only man who behaved sensibly was my tailor; he took my measurement anew every time he saw me, while all the rest went on with their old measurements and expected them to fit me."

"Criticism may not be agreeable, but it is necessary. It fulfils the same function as pain in the human body. It calls attention to an unhealthy state of things."

Contact Information

Robert N. Charette
ITABHI Corporation
(540) 972-8150
Charette@ITABHI.com