

CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS ACQUISITION CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE

Purpose

This CONOPS defines the objectives and functions for the Acquisition Center of Excellence (ACE) organization and how all elements of the ACE community contribute to the overall strategy for implementing Agile Acquisition.

Background

The primary mission (Commander's Intent) of our acquisition system is to rapidly deliver to the warfighters affordable, sustainable capability that meets their expectations (AFPD 63-1). In Mar 2002, the Air Force Service Acquisition Executive (SAE) rolled out his plan for Agile Acquisition - a concept that set out to improve both the speed and credibility of the AF acquisition system. The SAE created the SAF Acquisition Center of Excellence (ACE) to be an incubator of and a testbed for change, to capture and help institutionalize lessons learned from its experiments and to be a source of rapid, reliable help for the acquisition workforce. The Commander, Air Force Materiel Command (AFMC), followed suit and created an ACE at HQ AFMC, at the product/logistic/test centers/certain key subordinate entities, and at the Air Force Research Laboratory. In December 2003, the SAE and the Commander of AFMC signed an Agile Acquisition CONOPS to ensure that the capabilities of both organizations operate in concert to achieve the key pillars of Agile Acquisition.

Agile Acquisition has as its foundation the following five pillars:

Collaborative Requirements - The acquirer collaboratively working with the user as he develops program requirements. Here the role of the acquirer is to inject the "art of the possible" into requirements deliberations. Likewise, the user remains closely connected with the acquirer as courses of action are developed to meet requirements. This is to ensure requirements, to include implied intent, are well understood throughout the program strategy process.

Technology Transition - The S&T community in lock-step with and driven by the needs of the warfighting community. The thrust of this initiative is to drive collaboration with the acquisition and user communities and if necessary re-investment of resources to accelerate those technologies that offer highest payoff to meet the most pressing of user requirements. A strong linkage must exist between the S&T and the Capability Review and Risk Assessment process.

Seamless Verification - The melding of contractor, developmental, and operational testing into one seamless verification process. This promises to reduce 1) overlap and duplication of test events and resources and 2) test time. Key to this initiative is the early involvement of the operational test community as the test strategy is created to ensure common test goals can be met to the maximum extent.

Robust Systems Engineering - The application of the systems engineering function within the Air Force with a focus on implementation of system engineering practices that drive designs to be robust (i.e. insensitive to variability in manufacturing and use, and that are inherently scaleable/expandable/supportable, etc.). This initiative focuses on identifying those leading indicators that provide the Government confidence throughout the development process that the design will be robust. A key is to create contract incentives that reward suppliers for delivering

capabilities that exhibit robust characteristics. An implied task is to develop new principles and methodologies relevant to engineering for complex systems.

Expectations Management - The acquisition community and the customer establish at a senior level the program expectations. The goal is to have clear traceability on cost, schedule, and performance at a sufficient level of detail to ensure at any given time all three match.

Other transformation initiatives focused on improving acquisition processes (e.g. process redesign, divestiture, etc.) facilitate the implementation of Agile Acquisition.

ACE Functions and Activities

The four major functions the ACE accomplishes to implement Agile Acquisition are:

- 1) Support acquisition and sustainment programs in implementing the SAE's Agile Acquisition agenda, focusing on: Collaborative Requirements, Seamless Verification, Technology Transition, Systems Engineering, and Expectations Management.
- 2) Provide specific acquisition help/advice/assistance as a "trusted agent" to the program execution leadership (MDA, SAE, PEO, and Center Commander).
- 3) Drive innovation and streamlined acquisition processes through the identification of execution process problems, the elimination of non-value added steps, and the redesign of processes to enhance the delivery of capabilities to the warfighter.
- 4) Work as a force multiplier to program teams and the acquisition workforce to ensure the quality and timeliness of acquisition and sustainment products to the warfighter.

ACE Structure

In order to meet the functions outlined above, there needs to be a federated approach to the management structure of the ACE community. The Director SAF/ACE, working for the SAE, provides center ACEs overall guidance on the SAE's direction for Agile Acquisition. Working with the PEOs, the SAF ACE and Command ACEs promulgate this direction throughout their portfolio and acquisition workforce. The Command ACE Directors work directly for and take their day-to-day direction from the PEO/Center Command Section. Since many ACE objectives require a challenging of the status quo, it is imperative the center ACE director report directly to Center Command leadership to ensure impartiality when recommendations are evaluated. The Director, SAF/ACE will provide to the center command section level the appropriate input to the ACE Director's performance appraisal.

SAF ACE

The SAF ACE is structured to provide program acquisition execution support to SAE. A lean staff of multi-skilled personnel provides a unique capability to support the SAE's vision of Air Force acquisition. The SAF ACE functions as the SAE's "trusted agent" and provides opportunities for creating synergy across the acquisition community to promote and implement the SAE agenda for Agile Acquisition: speed and credibility. Because the ACE operates in such a broad range of acquisition areas and programs, it is expected to provide knowledgeable, informed advice on a wide range of topics, from program execution and problem solving to policy and process change.

Specifically, the SAF ACE will:

- 1) Provide acquisition execution (pre and post award) support to the SAE, PEOs, and Logistic Center Commanders including removing roadblocks to agile acquisition
- 2) Identify and promote innovative initiatives.
- 3) Integrate Agile Acquisition Initiatives into program strategies
- 4) Recommend changes to acquisition policy and processes based on lessons learned

Product and Logistic Center ACEs

Product, Logistic, and subordinate command ACE offices provide the day-in, day-out support to the execution chain and program teams. ACE offices at all levels do not work in a traditional staff role but focus on “hands-on” work directly related to acquisition and sustainment programs and processes. At any given time, they may perform functions in multiple roles (e.g. advisor, process re-designer, roadblock buster, evangelizer for agile acquisition, educator, etc.) to the acquisition workforce. Therefore, each center ACE office will have a small number of very experienced individuals who can act as a trusted agent for the SAE, PEOs, System Program Directors (SPDs) and program managers. Although a key focus area may be the implementation of agile acquisition, the PEO/Center Commander may also have a need to maintain an entity to provide specific “how to” support to individual programs. Specifically, the center ACEs will:

- 1) Provide direct program support to the PEOs and program teams. This support serves as an opportunity to infuse the key pillars (Collaborative Requirements, Seamless Verification, Technology Transition, Systems Engineering, and Expectations Management) into new and existing programs.
- 2) Provide direct program support to Center Commanders and Single Managers on sustainment programs and initiatives.
- 3) Champion acquisition transformation and the pillars of Agile Acquisition in the field
- 4) Promote and implement the re-engineering of processes that inhibit the effective implementation of the tenets of Agile Acquisition.
- 5) In the “supporting command” role, act as the SAF ACE extended staff on acquisition roadblocks and execution issues.
- 6) Provide a conduit to communicate and infuse the SAE vision for Agile Acquisition to the acquisition workforce.

Other Key ACEs

In order to effectively promote the pillars of Agile Acquisition, all command components within the acquisition community must participate in the process re-engineering and shaping of the acquisition system. Test Center and Air Force Research Laboratory ACEs are critical to ensuring that the entire acquisition workforce is represented and all processes are optimized to reach the SAE goals: Speed and Credibility. Unlike the program execution support roles that product and logistic centers maintain, the thrust of these ACEs is on re-engineering processes within the test and technology community that are embedded within the acquisition framework and ensuring their seamless integration within the systems acquisition process. Generally, in addition to the center and logistic responsibilities above, these ACEs will:

- 1) Reduce seams between the technology, acquisition, and test communities that will increase the speed and credibility of the acquisition process
- 2) Facilitate the collaborative environment between the acquisition, sustainment, test, and S&T communities

SAF/AQX

This directorate is responsible for 1) long term process re-engineering under the purview of SAF/AQ, 2) acquisition policy affecting program execution, 3) divestiture of unnecessary SAF/HAF processes and activities, and 4) training aimed at culture change. As the SAF ACE, center ACEs and HQ AFMC identify problem areas requiring policy changes, process redesign, or divestiture, they will work with SAF/AQXA to ensure changes are institutionalized within the acquisition system.

HQ AFMC

HQ AFMC will promote consistent application of policy or process changes across the command. HQ AFMC is the process owner for acquisition and sustainment processes across the Command and is responsible for providing the underlying resources necessary to execute each programs directive. HQ AFMC implements the policy and provides the necessary training and process reengineering support across AFMC. As the ACE network or PEO structure identifies problem areas requiring policy changes, process redesign, resource shaping, or divestiture, they will work with SAF/AQXA and HQ AFMC to address, examine and propose changes to the acquisition framework for greater speed and efficiency. Specifically HQ AFMC/XR will:

- 1) Support the development, assess, and deconflict policies from SAF/HAF to ensure that they are aligned with the acquisition, sustainment, and business processes of AFMC.
- 2) Develop, re-engineer, remove roadblocks, and implement processes to enable acquisition support provided by AFMC.
- 3) Promote common and consistent application of acquisition and sustainment processes across AFMC.
- 4) Provide unique “as needed” expertise and support to the ACE network
- 5) Work with SAF/AQXA and the acquisition network to address, examine and propose changes to the acquisition framework for greater speed and efficiency
- 6) Development and promote common acquisition tools, training, and lessons learned across the acquisition workforce.
- 7) (HQ AFMC/XRQ) Serve as the umbilical cord for the ACE structure into HQ AFMC.
- 8) Inject Agile Acquisition tenets into the capabilities planning process in order to increase the speed of delivery of capabilities to the customer.

Communication

Open, free-flowing, and frequent communication among ACE offices is crucial to success. ACE communications can occur in both formal and informal forums -- the following represent key formal avenues for communication:

ACE Director’s Meetings provide top-level face-to-face interaction with SAF ACE. These meetings will take place between 3-4 times per fiscal year. The Director, SAF ACE will use these forums to promulgate the latest SAE vision, re-direct focus if necessary, measure accomplishment, and provide general guidance for the near term.

ACE Consortium meetings, once or twice a year, will include a larger gathering of ACE members from Centers and the SAF ACE, HQ AFMC, and Industry association representatives. These forums will continue to provide a sounding board for feedback on how the SAE vision is being received by their constituents.

Periodic "meet-me" calls with all ACE participants provide an excellent forum to establish informal relationships. These interactions provide opportunities for the various ACE offices to find out what is going on in other places. Participation by all ACE employees is encouraged. By creating a virtual family, ACE interaction becomes a norm versus a rarity.

Measures of Success

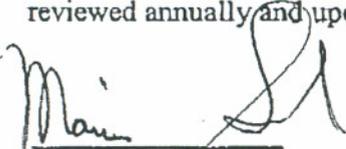
Providing advice/support that ultimately leads to the increased credibility and reduced cycle time of acquisition and sustainment programs is the overall measure of ACE performance. Satisfaction feedback from those accountable for program outcomes (e.g. SPD, PEO, SAE) will be the significant indicator for success. All metrics will be 1) quantifiable, 2) tied to the ACE objectives and 3) drive behavior.

Funding

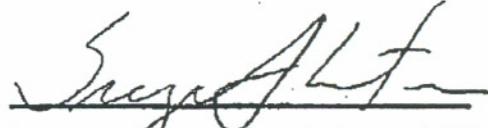
Each center is responsible to provide facilities, supplies, personnel, and funding for travel, training, and other operating expenses for the ACEs.

Implementation of the ACE Network

The Director, SAF/ACE, will support each PEO/Center Commander in establishing an ACE organization that meets the intent of this CONOPS. Full implementation of the ACE structure as outlined above should occur within 90 days of the signing of this document. This CONOPS will be reviewed annually and updated as appropriate.



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