



Effectively Communicating the Acquisition Impact

LTC Kevin P. Shilley, USA

FOR FAR TOO LONG CONTRACTING OFFICERS (KOS) HAVE BEEN ARTICULATING IN A RATHER UNDERWELMING way the impact their acquisition efforts have on enhancing capabilities, mission success, and ultimately supporting the Warfighter. The terms that KOs typically use to frame their support to the Warfighter involve detailing the dollars obligated and number of contract actions performed in support of the Warfighter. While this approach is used widely within the acquisition community to describe the efforts of contracting professionals, it does little to effectively illustrate the impact of contracting professionals or their teams' contributions to the Warfighter. In order to effectively communicate/articulate their support with key stakeholders outside the acquisition community, contracting professionals need to change their words and approach and develop their message.

Shilley is Battalion Commander of the 902nd Contracting Battalion, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, in Washington State. Simultaneously, he is serving as the Chief of Contracting for Regional Contracting Center-Operation Inherent Resolve, Iraq, and is due to redeploy in March 2020. In 2008, he transitioned to the Army Acquisition Corps. His acquisition assignments include Contract Management Officer, Contracting Team Lead, Contracting Battalion Operations Officer, Program Integrator, Regional Contracting Center (Iraq), Contracting Battalion Commander. He is Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act certified Level III in Contracting, and Level I in Program Management. He earned a master's degree in Procurement and Acquisitions Management from Webster University.

More specifically, they need to transform their message from a technical one to a dialogue that is relatable outside of the acquisition enterprise.

Operationalizing Contracting

An illustration of the need to change how the acquisition professional's value is described is the concept of "operationalizing contracting," which was introduced by Gen. Gustave Perna, Army Materiel Command Commanding General, in 2017. In an online Army Contracting Command article, Perna shared his vision of operationalizing contracting by describing it as "...integrating and synchronizing

ing the information necessary to answer "why" is crucial to further contracting professionals' communications. Equipped with that vital information, development can begin of an effective communications framework to utilize when interacting with the supported commanders and their staffs on requiring activities. Building an effective communications framework begins with fundamentals and requires an understanding of:

- The levels of warfare (*Field Manual [FM] 3-0, Operations*).
- The Phases of the Operation (*FM 3-0*).
- The commander's key tasks and intent.



There is no denying that there is a continued reliance on contracted support by Army units on both the battlefield and home stations to meet their needs.

contracting across the materiel enterprise in order to meet the Army's priorities and the combatant commander's priorities." He adds, "It's not about the number of actions and the dollars obligate ..." but rather "... it's about outcomes for the Soldier on the battlefield and for the Army."

There is very little debate that a complex Base Life Support (BLS) or Logistics Civil Augmentation Program contract, valued at more than \$1 billion, undoubtedly provides a significant capability to a combatant commander across all levels of warfare and warfighting functions. However, if contracting professionals continue to express their value to supported units in terms of dollars and actions, they will fail to illuminate the impact of less complex contracts that also greatly enhance a unit's ability to train, fight, and win at the tactical and operational levels.

Training Environment

In deciding how to effectively communicate to their stakeholders, contracting professionals need to consider several things. One way to build a better framework for their communications to the non-acquisition community is to start with an understanding of the "why, what, and how" associated with the requirement being acquired for the supported unit. Frankly, contracting professionals are well versed in focusing adequate energies and efforts in understanding the what, as well as the how. But how much effort is dedicated to understanding why? Furthermore, are staffs and requirements developers prepared to provide the necessary information about why it is necessary to contract for a requirement or capability? Simply put, the stakeholders are singularly focused on the "what." Hav-

- Operational Contract Support (OCS) (*Joint Publication 4-0, Joint Logistics*).
- The Warfighting functions (*Army Doctrine Publication 3-0, Operations*).

Doctrine is the language of our profession while the acquisition policies and regulations are a dialect. A focus on the use of doctrinal language should extend past the confines of Professional Military Education.

Practical Example

Let's utilize the previously described contract action to help illustrate how to better effectively communicate contracting support in terms that are "operationalized." Remember the BLS contract described earlier as valued at more than \$1 billion? For illustrative purposes, let's assume you are preparing a message for the Task Force (TF) Commander under a combatant commander. The TF staff described the BLS contract support as being necessary due to the Boots On Ground limitations established by the host nation (the why). Some other background information is necessary before we begin to build the communications framework. Let's assume that the audience for the discussion is the TF Commander and, for the purposes of this illustration, he is most interested in the impacts contracted support have in the strategic level of warfare. Operation X is currently in Phase III, and one of the commander's key tasks and intent for the current phase is to deny the enemy safe haven and freedom of movement throughout the Joint Operations Area (JOA). As a contracting professional, you are primarily concerned with the BLS contract

acquisition timeline. How do you communicate the significance within the OCS framework?

Based upon the process described above, a more effective method of describing your organization's impact to the mission might look like this: Regional Contracting Center (RCC)-Operation X utilizes 15 acquisition professionals to provide administrative oversight of the BLS contract in country that provides mission critical contracted support to 10,000 Soldiers across six Camps/Bases. RCC-Operation X's administrative oversight provides mission partners with secure and sustainable facilities and infrastructure that enhance their capability to plan and provide mission command across the JOA. RCC-Operation X's support provides a platform to marshal and mobilize forces rapidly through the use of mission enhancing services such as maintenance, logistical resupply, and health services in order to deny the enemy safe haven and freedom of movement throughout the JOA. This contracted capability provides the commander with the ability to rapidly scale operations as necessary.

Value of Effective Communications

While changing the way contracting professionals express their value to the formation is one aspect of the issue, it is only one part. The other facet that requires some attention is the working relationship that contracting professionals have with requiring activities. There is no denying that there is a continued reliance on contracted support by Army units on both the battlefield and home stations to meet their needs. It is critical that contracting professionals work as closely as possible with supported units from logistics planning to requirements development to help facilitate this reliance on contracted support. A concerted effort from all stakeholders is necessary to more effectively involve contracting professionals in the acquisition process. Increasing the involvement and touch points across staff functions coupled with an expectation of communication from contracting professionals that is grounded in doctrine will help set the conditions for success.

Increasing Opportunities

To develop this critical skill set, it is crucial to create opportunities, and the environment and situations that facilitate the contracting professionals' use of a more effective framework for communicating their support of the Warfighter. The cohesion, trust, and communication our maneuver commanders have with the contracting community can be helped significantly by increasing the contracting professionals' involvement in Warfighter Exercises, Table Top Exercises, training rotations at combat training centers, and logistics planning. Relying on contracting professionals to develop the "language" only when deployed is not an effective training model. We are, however, in luck, because the acquisition support that is provided to our

mission partners at the Camps, Bases, Posts, and Home Stations provides us with an environment that is ripe with opportunities to train.

Conclusion

Finally, a simple example of changing the communications framework contracting professionals use is the pervasive use of the term "customer" when describing the units we support. The use of the term conjures up images of "take a number and have a seat," work hours posted on the door, and long lines at "customer service" sections. This is not the image of a combat enabler that provides a diversity of enhancements, operational flexibility, and reduces vulnerabilities of the Warfighter across all warfighting functions. More appropriate terms that should be used are, for example, requiring activity, mission partners, stakeholders or support unit. Knowing when to use and when not to use certain terms can go a long way to better convey our value to the Warfighter as contracting professionals.

In closing, in order to fully articulate the impact contracting professionals have to the mission and Warfighter, it is critical that: (1) contracting professionals develop a relatable lexicon in describing their impact; (2) increase opportunities and touch points with supported units that facilitate practice in utilizing these skills for contracting professionals; and (3) adopt a simple change such as no longer using the term "customers" as the catalyst for change.

The author can be contacted at Kevin.P.Shilley@mail.mil.

MDAP/MAIS Program Manager Changes

With the assistance of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Defense Acquisition* magazine publishes the names of incoming and outgoing program managers for major defense acquisition programs (MDAPs) and major automated information system (MAIS) programs. This announcement lists recently reported changes of leadership for both civilian and military program managers.

Navy/Marine Corps

CAPT D. Scot Searles relieved **CAPT Brian A. Metcalf** as program manager for the LPD 17 San Antonio Class Amphibious Transport Dock Ship Program (PMS 317) on Feb. 10.

Timothy J. Roberts relieved **CAPT D. Scot Searles** as program manager for the Strategic Theater and Sealift Program (PMS 385) on Feb. 17.