SUPPLEMENT 15-A

RISK MANAGEMENT IN DOD ACQUISITION

Policy

DoD policy is quite clear in regard to risk management: it must be done.

The PM shall identify the risk areas in the program and integrate risk management within overall program management. (DoD 5000.2-R.)

In addition, DoDD 5000.4 identifies risk and cost analysis as a responsibility of the program manager.

Risk Management View

A DSMC study indicates that major programs which declared moderate risk at Milestone B have been more successful in terms of meeting cost and schedule goals than those which declared low risk (DSMC TR 2-95). This strongly implies that program offices that understand and respect risk management will be more successful. For this reason, the program office needs to adopt a systems-level view of risk. The systems engineer provides this view. Systems Engineering is the cornerstone of program office risk management program because it is the connection to realistic assessment of product maturity and development, and the product is, in the final analysis, what system acquisition is really about.

However, the program office has external risks to deal with as well as the internal risks prevalent in the development process. The Systems Engineer has to provide the program manager internal risk data in a manner that aids the handling of the external risks. In short, the systems engineer must present bad news such that it is reasonable and compelling to higher levels of authority. See Chapter 20 for further discussion on this topic.

Factoring Risk Management into the Process

Risk management, as an integral part of the overall program planning and management process, is enhanced by applying a controlled, consistent, approach to systems engineering and using integrated teams for both product development and management control. Programs should be transitioned to the next phase only if risk is at the appropriate level. Know the risk drivers behind the estimates. By its nature there are always subjective aspects to assessing and analyzing risk at the system level, even though they tend to be represented as quantitative and/or analytically objective.

Risk and Phases

Risk management begins in the Concept and Technology Development phase. During Concept Exploration initial system level risk assessments are made. Unknown-unknowns, uncertainty, and some high-risk elements are normal and expected. When substantial technical risk exists, the Component Advanced Development stage is appropriate, and is included in the life-cycle process specifically as an opportunity to address and reduce risks to a level that are consistent with movement into systems acquisition.

The S&T community has a number of vehicles available that are appropriate for examining technology in application and for undertaking risk reduction activities. These include Advanced Technology Demonstrations, Advanced Concept Technology Demonstrations, as well as Joint Warfighting Experiments. The focus of the activities undertaken during these risk reduction stages include:

- Testing, analyzing, or mitigating system and subsystem uncertainty and high risk out of the program.

- Demonstrating technology sufficient to uncover system and subsystem unknown-unknowns (especially for integration).

- Planning for risk management during the transition to and continuation of systems acquisition during the System Development and Demonstration phase, especially handling and tracking of moderate risk.

System Development and Demonstration requires the application of product and manufacturing engineering, which can be disrupted if the technology development is not sufficient to support engineering development. Risk management in during this phase emphasizes:

- Reduction and control of moderate risks,

- All risks under management including emerging ones, and

- Maintenance of risk levels and reaction to problems.

Objective Assessment of Technology

The revised acquisition process has been deliberately structured to encourage and allow programs to progress through appropriate risk reduction stages and phases, based on an objective assessment of the maturity levels associated with the products and systems under development. It is therefore, particularly important that program managers and their staffs ensure that the decisions made regarding recommendations to proceed, and the paths to be taken, be based on as impartial and objective opinions as possible. The temptation is always to move ahead and not to delay to improve the robustness of a given product or system. When systems are hurried into engineering development and production, in spite of the fact that the underlying technologies require further development, history indicates that the results will eventually show the fallacy of speed over common sense. And to fix the problem in later stages of development—or even after deployment—can be hugely expensive in terms of both monetary cost and human lives.

The prevailing presumption at Milestone B is that the system is ready for engineering development. After this, the acquisition community generally assumes that risk is moderate to low, that the technology is "available." There is evidence to support the assertion that programs often progress into engineering development with risks that actually require substantial exploratory and applied research and development to bring them to the moderate levels of risk or lower. One approach that has proven successful in making objective risk assessments is the use of independent evaluation teams. Groups that have no pre-determined interest to protect or axe to grind are often capable of providing excellent advice regarding the extent to which a system is ready to proceed to the next level of development and subsequent phases.

Risk Classification on the System (Program) Level

Classification definitions should be established early and remain consistent throughout the program. The program office should assess the risks of achieving performance, schedule, and cost in clear and accurate terms of both probability and consequence. Where there is disagreement about the risk, assessment efforts should be immediately increased. Confusion over risk is the worst program risk, because it puts in doubt the validity of the risk management process, and therefore, whether program reality is truly understood.

The system level risk assessment requires integration and interpretation of the quantified risk assessment of the parts. This requires reasonable judgement. Because integration increases the potential for risk, it is reasonable to assume overall risk is not better than the sum of objective data for the parts.

Reality Versus Expectations

Program managers are burdened with the expectations of superiors and others that have control over the program office's environment. Pressure to accommodate these expectations is high. If the systems engineer cannot communicate the reality of risk in terms that are understandable, acceptable, or sufficiently verifiable to management, then these pressures may override vertical communication of actual risk.

Formal systems engineering with risk management incorporated can provide the verifiable information. However, the systems engineer also has the responsibility to adequately explain probability and consequences such that the program manager can accept the reality of the risk and override higher level expectations.

Uncertainty is a special case, and very dangerous in an atmosphere of high level expectations. Presentation of uncertainty issues should strongly emphasize consequences, show probability trends, and develop "most likely" alternatives for probability.