

## 2015: The Year of Acquisition Revolution?

Written by Nick Sanders

Wednesday, 07 January 2015 00:00

---

*You say you want a revolution  
Well, you know  
We all want to change the world  
You tell me that it's evolution  
Well, you know  
We all want to change the world*

...

*You say you got a real solution  
Well, you know  
We'd all love to see the plan  
You ask me for a contribution  
Well, you know  
We're all doing what we can*

“Revolution” – The Beatles

This article is being written in that strange time between New Year's Eve and the start of the new work year on January 5th. It's a strange time when one pauses and contemplates the year that was and the year that might be. (Unless you are an accountant who's up to your ears in the close of the fiscal year, in which case God bless you for your sacrifices.) At this pause between years, the future seems available and within reach, ready for picking like a perfectly ripe fruit.

It's a new year, a new opportunity for change. That's what we tell ourselves, right? We will stop what didn't work last year and start something new.

## 2015: The Year of Acquisition Revolution?

Written by Nick Sanders

Wednesday, 07 January 2015 00:00

---

We can make some New Year's Resolutions: Stop smoking, lose weight, hit the gym a bit more. Maybe cut back on TV or read some good books. Maybe get back to school and finish that degree, or get that Certification we've been thinking about for the past couple of years. Maybe plan that trip we've been meaning to take because travel is educational.

Or perhaps we will resolve to spend less time in the office and more time with the family. To stop working those insane hours for people who don't appreciate our efforts, and who have developed the unjustified idea that they are somehow *entitled* to those extra hours put in by their employees. We could polish the resume and go out and find a new job; we could quit this dead-end job and find something that has a future and that sparks some passion. We could find something and some place that gets us excited to go to work in the morning. That would be nice, wouldn't it?

It can happen. Anything can happen, or so it seems right now.

It's a new year. Change is in the air.

It feels like anything is possible. *Even reform of the Federal acquisition system.* Even that elusive goal seems within reach in this moment of possibility.

Let's dedicate this article to an exploration of circumstances that might lead to fundamental change, to a real reform of the current system, in the upcoming year.

First, we have a new Administrator of the Office of Federal Procurement Policy. The new Administrator, the Honorable Anne Rung, replaced Joe Jordan. From what we can tell, she seems focused on making real changes to the Federal acquisition environment. She [testified](#) at her nomination hearings that she would have three main priorities at the OFPP—

-

To improve federal acquisition spending, with a focus on strategic sourcing;

## 2015: The Year of Acquisition Revolution?

Written by Nick Sanders

Wednesday, 07 January 2015 00:00

---

-

To drive greater innovations in the acquisition processes;

-

To improve the training and development of the acquisition workforce.

In addition, she testified –

There are a few areas where I think we can move forward more aggressively. I would like to look, if confirmed, at new and innovative ways we can train our workforce. I'd like to get industry input on the ways they think there are smart practices out there and we can do it better ... FAI has recently created a new specialized COR-plus training, where they take the acquisition workforce and focus their skills on IT project management. This is an area where we can do more in. I like the idea of creating specialized areas within the acquisition workforce. You gain a real expertise in that area.

Ms. Rung mentioned the important role filled by the Federal Acquisition Institute (FAI) in training the Federal acquisition workforce. We have some doubts that that FAI is going to be much of a change catalyst. For one thing, the FAI has been without a permanent Director for the past six months. That kind of tells us that workforce training is not as high a priority as one would think it should be. In addition, more than a dozen FAI contracting classes ("CON" series) were cancelled in GFY 2014 because of a lack of attendance; there were insufficient registered students to justify holding the classes. If training is so important to the workforce, why aren't all the classes full with a long waiting list? It's difficult to reconcile the important role envisioned for FAI with the reality. But perhaps Ms. Rung will drive change "more aggressively" in that area.

Let's not get bogged down in negativity. There are more potential drivers of change to discuss.

For instance, there is a new Director at the Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA). Lt. General Wendy Masiello replaced Mr. Charlie Williams in mid-2014. She seems very aware

## 2015: The Year of Acquisition Revolution?

Written by Nick Sanders

Wednesday, 07 January 2015 00:00

---

of the relationship between the quality of her workforce and achievement of acquisition outcomes for the Department of Defense. General Masiello [recently told](#) her team –

... we are at a critical time at DCMA. Budget uncertainty, staffing reductions, officer relocations and consolidations, and large numbers of employee retirements are taking their toll. In order for the agency to continue successfully and to exceed customer expectations, we needed to take a close look at our mission, our vision and the strategic goals we had set for ourselves. ...

General Masiello identified four strategic goals to guide her leadership team's decision-making. They were –

-

Inform and contribute to affordability decisions.

-

Optimize mission execution to support the acquisition enterprise through agile business practices.

-

Create an agile learning organization and culture to support future customer requirements.

-

Achieve and sustain audit readiness for ourselves and our customers.

We noticed that the word “agile” was listed twice so we presume it has some level of importance to General Masiello. We're not sure what she means in the context of her strategic goals, but “agile” can mean “nimble” or “flexible” or even “quick” in some definitions – so perhaps she is looking to develop an organization that can respond quickly to changing conditions, an organization that is not based on rigid prescriptive rules but, instead, on

## 2015: The Year of Acquisition Revolution?

Written by Nick Sanders

Wednesday, 07 January 2015 00:00

---

application of independent business judgment. That would be an awesome environment in which to work, and quite a sea change from what we understand to be the current environment at DCMA.

We have oft opined that the current DCMA business environment is far too bureaucratic and that there are far too many levels of management review. Every significant decision made by a warranted Contracting Officer must be reviewed by an independent Board, it seems. We were told that those Boards exist to protect COs from unwarranted allegations and phone calls to the IG Hotline, but it seems that those Boards serve another purpose: to protect the Agency from criticism. Reducing the role of the Review Boards and increasing the discretion of the warranted COs would be an amazing, courageous, leadership decision. We hope General Masiello pushes for that change as well as others that would lead to her desired “agile” future state.

But there is another vector of potential change to be discussed: there is a new Director at the Defense Contract Audit Agency (DCAA) – Ms. Anita Bales. Ms. Bales has been with the audit agency since 2011. Prior to that date, she was with the Army Audit Agency, as was the man she replaced, Pat Fitzgerald. Together they are the first two DCAA Directors not to be promoted from within the audit agency to its highest leadership position.

Ms. Bales will have an opportunity to continue the initiatives started by Mr. Fitzgerald, or perhaps to start a few new ones of her own. We’ll have to see. But we do know that Ms. Bales has represented DCAA on the Defense Acquisition Workforce Senior Steering Board, whose stated goal is to create a “high-quality, high-performing Defense acquisition workforce.” Thus, we expect she is well aware of the impact that human capital decisions have on the Defense acquisition system.

Together, these three new leaders (Ms. Rung, General Masiello, and Ms. Bales) will have enormous influence on the shape of the Federal acquisition workforce and the processes that support individual decision-making. They will have an opportunity to create real change in 2015, or to perpetuate the status quo. It will be up to them to drive change, to create an acquisition revolution that will lead to a better functioning environment.

## 2015: The Year of Acquisition Revolution?

Written by Nick Sanders

Wednesday, 07 January 2015 00:00

---



We'll say it what they do with the opportunity they've been given.