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Program Management Tips for Keeping Obsolescence at Bay

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April 2014

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A Diminishing Manufacturing Sources and Material Shortages (DMSMS) issue is the loss, or impending loss, of manufacturers or suppliers of items, or raw materials, or software. No system or program is immune from DMSMS issues; they are inevitable. Nevertheless, robust DMSMS management will cost effectively

- Minimize the scope of DMSMS-related out-of-cycle redesigns when they cannot be eliminated
- Eliminate DMSMS-related production schedule impacts
- Eliminate DMSMS-related degradations to readiness

It doesn't matter who manages DMSMS, ultimately it is the program manager's responsibility. Therefore, program leadership should pursue a series of high leverage actions to promote effective DMSMS management. They are:

- Establish the Strategic Underpinnings for DMSMS Management. The strategic underpinnings include: (1) establishing DMSMS management objectives; (2) identifying DMSMS management team (DMT) membership, roles, and responsibilities; and (3) establishing DMT operating guidelines. One of the most important operating guidelines is to take a risk-based approach concerning what to monitor based upon considerations such as susceptibility to DMSMS issues, criticality, safety, etc. Another key guideline defines the nature of the periodic health assessments conducted by the DMT.
- Establish a Strong Foundation for Robust DMSMS Management. Without adequate DMSMS management preparation, a program will have significantly elevated risk of experiencing a severe readiness or cost impact due to DMSMS. The most basic elements of preparation for a strong foundation for robust DMSMS management are (1) access to bills of material (BOMs) or parts lists and the predictive tools that are used to forecast obsolescence, (2) strong contract requirements and incentives for the specific activities where prime contractor and original equipment manufacturer (OEM) support are needed, and (3) the use of independent subject matter experts to increase efficiency in resolving issues.
- Ensure DMSMS is Fully Funded. The scope and corresponding workload for the identification and assessment of DMSMS issues and the determination of how to resolve them needs to be adequately funded. A risk-based approach minimizes the resources required. However funding to implement resolutions also must be made available.

- Make DMSMS Management a High Priority in the Program Office and with the Prime Contractor. Program leadership should reinforce the need for all members of the DMT to be responsive and to cooperate and communicate fully. Program leadership should also ensure that the DMT is empowered to make decisions.
- Link DMSMS Health Assessments to Product Roadmaps. Program leadership should ensure that product roadmaps and technology refreshment plans are linked in order to minimize out-of-cycle redesigns. Technology refreshment, which is informed by DMSMS health assessments, should be considered by the product roadmap to reduce cost.
- Obtain DMSMS Comments on All Designs, Redesigns, and Design Reviews. A program office is a very busy place. All stakeholders do not always have an opportunity to coordinate on everything. It is up to program leadership to ensure that the DMT has an opportunity to comment on all designs and redesigns because of the likelihood of lowering the cost of redesigns and finding items that should be designed out before it is too late.

In his article, “10 Things Great Program Managers Know about Product Support,” published in *Defense AT&L*, November–December 2011, Bill Kobren (Director of Defense Acquisition University’s Logistics and Sustainment Center) wrote “Obsolescence and DMSMS will eat your lunch (along with breakfast and dinner if you’re not careful.)” The above list is the minimum that a program manager must do to minimize these bad outcomes. Program leadership does not have to be involved in the day-to-day aspects of DMSMS management but should be accessible to the DMT to remove delays and other barriers as well as to make decisions on issues, especially those that cross organizational boundaries.

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