

ENCOURAGING INNOVATION IN DEFENCE CONTRACTING

**USING AGILE PROJECT METHODS IN TENDERING
TO DELIVER INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO THE
AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE.**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Defence can increase its ability to deliver capability by engaging with a greater range of industry partners, including those who have traditionally not engaged with Defence. This greater diversity brings fresh creativity and innovation to tackle Defence's challenges. These non-traditional defence partners however face barriers unique to the defence industry.

We propose an agile acquisition contracting approach, to not only breakdown these barriers, but also facilitate engagement between CASG and industry. This agile acquisition contracting approach would be based on the following ideas:

- Begin with Defence releasing a project capability statement. Potential partners would put forward solution outlines to demonstrate how their solution would meet that capability need.
- First phase. One or more potential partners are selected to refine their proposal in a fixed scope and fixed duration activity. In collaboration with Defence, the proposal and requirements are further developed. This allows the development of a well-understood, innovative, yet achievable requirement specification that meets the capability need. This contrasts with a complete specification written prior to an approach to market, which limits the ability for innovation in industry to influence the design outcomes. This activity may be repeated multiples times, with the performance of current partners used to down-select for further spirals.
- Second phase. Defence selects a partner to proceed into spiral development and production.

Such an approach delivers greater engagement by reducing the barrier of entry and cost to all potential partners. It also provides a mechanism for Defence to be educated, by industry, on the technologies available. At the same time, it assists Defence in understanding its true requirements.

Additionally, embodied in the process, is the embracement of refining change, prioritisation of needs, and collaborative dialog. These are essential to support decisive responsiveness for a nation's evolving mission, for which the acquisition exists in the first place.

This agile mindset and approach is aligned with CASGs desired outcomes such as:

- Delivering improved strategic partnership with industry, because it puts relationships and interactions over process and tools.
- Implementing and embedding the FPR recommendations, which were about changes to more efficiently and effectively deliver military capability, because it puts working solutions over comprehensive documentation.
- Listening and seeking win-win collaboration outcomes which help ensure a sustainable industry base to support defence capability, because it puts customer collaboration over contract negotiation.
- Actively engaging in mature and consistent dialogue regarding cost/capability trade-offs at all levels, because it puts *responding to change* as more important than *following a plan*.

Agile development methodologies have been successfully used in both the commercial and defence software industry. This seeks to apply the ideas as a tool for defence acquisition. Ideal initial candidates for this approach would be:

- those involving fast moving technology areas
- projects which can be iterated in short time scales
- time to delivery on the order of less than a few years



The challenges to its successful application are that it involves significant mindset and cultural change, by the customer (Defence), contracting agency (CASG) and contractor (Industry). Each of these parties must understand their new role and responsibilities to one another, to ensure an effective and collaborative relationship - Defence providing consistent and considered input, CASG facilitating, and Industry being a responsible partner. Ongoing commitment, on all sides, is imperative to ensure 'capability need' becomes 'capability met'.

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DELIVERING INNOVATION THROUGH DIVERSITY

The ADF recognises the importance of a diverse workforce, with the Defence chief, Air Chief Marshall Mark Binskin saying *"A diverse workforce is all about capability. The greater our diversity, the greater the range of ideas and insights to challenge the accepted norm, assess the risks, see them from a different perspective, and develop creative solutions"* [1]. The highlights of this statement are that:

1. It is about capability first
2. A diverse ADF delivers a better capability when it can draw skills from a larger resource pool
3. The diversity brought together, delivers better outcomes because there is a diversity of thought that can lead to creative/innovative solutions

This is echoed on the Diversity homepage of the Department of Defence which states *"The Defence organisation of the 21st Century must harness the broadest talents if we are to remain fully ready to defend Australia."* This emphatically states that:

- we must harness the broadest talents, and
- this is necessary, because it is ultimately about defending our country

We should want to harness the broadest pool of organisations. In fact, if we apply the quote directly, we must harness the broadest possible talent across our nation's organisations so that we are ready to defend this country if need be.

The Case for Non Traditional Partners

There are numerous successful companies that have not traditionally partnered with Defence, yet stand to offer new ways of thinking, different technology expertise and potentially innovative ways to meet Defence's capability needs.

These Non-Traditional Partners (NTPs) could be categorised as follows:

1. Well established large companies. Successful in other industries, with substantial resources.
2. SMEs (Small to Medium Enterprises). Successful in other industries, but with limited resources.
3. Start-up companies (also a SME). Limited track record, strong innovative ideas, but very limited resources.

SMEs are generally understood to be non-subsiary, independent firms which employ fewer than 250 employees. Despite their smaller size, the value of SMEs has been recognised, with the Hon. Christopher Pyne stating. *"(SMEs) are vital to the preparedness of our current military forces and their ability to conduct operations; the development of future military capabilities and the ability of our nation to quickly mobilise industrial resources during times of crisis and conflict"* [2].

Barriers for Non-Traditional Partners

SMEs and other non-traditional partners (NTPs) however face many practical challenges to fully participate in the defence industry.

UNDERSTANDING IMPLIED DEFENCE EXPECTATIONS

Those new to the defence industry may not be familiar with the commonly-used Defence terminology, and may lack the understanding of accepted industry norms. Tender specifications may not be written

to the level of detail to allow less experienced NTPs to fully understand the requirements without the ability to 'read between the lines' based on knowledge from previous tenders. The large number of acronyms often used exacerbate this issue.

If a company originates from a different industry, such as automotive, its engineers may not have prior knowledge of military standards required for materials or testing. While the technical solution they propose may be fundamentally innovative and original, a lack of understanding may result in substantial time wasted and under or over-engineered solutions.

SUBCONTRACTED TENDERS FROM PRIME CONTRACTORS

Major Defence contracts are usually executed by a large Prime Contractor, which are established large organisations with good industry knowledge and expertise. These Primes will often subcontract aspects of the system to other companies, including SMEs that are relatively new to the industry. Each Defence prime will tender its subcontracts differently, and often using different methods than Defence itself. This makes it even more challenging for NTPs to demonstrate their innovative solutions, as they struggle to adequately respond to tenders issued by the Primes.

OPERATE OUTSIDE OF DEFENCE CONVENTIONS

Fixed and detailed requirements centred around a perceived solution type are a barrier to innovation. They preclude NTPs involvement, who may come from another industry, but have technology which could meet the capability need, yet does not fit within the specification for the perceived solution type. Fundamentally, we do not want to dictate the details of a solution to a subcontractor with innovative ideas.

SMES PERCEIVED AS HIGH RISK

SMEs are often young organisations that may not have robust financial backing. This may be perceived as a risk by Defence or other larger contractors. Defence and larger contractors may be more likely to collaborate with an SME, if this perceived risk could be somehow mitigated.

LENGTH AND RIGIDITY OF THE TENDERING PROCESS

Defence acquisition tenders commonly require an extensive tender submission. For an NTP this can be daunting, as parts of this submission can be Defence peculiar. For all involved, and especially SME, the investment to tender can be significant. Together, these can discourage NTP involvement, despite potentially having an innovative approach to meet the capability need. If the cost and complexity to offer their idea for a solution could be reduced, new connections and opportunities may arise.

Benefits Non-Traditional Partners Could Deliver

Addressing these issues can make the defence industry more accessible to NTPs, and allow Australian Defence to benefit from the innovation in the solutions these enterprises can deliver. This means:

- More innovative and superior solutions, that can lead to a technological edge.
- A generally better position for Australia to quickly mobilise industrial resources during times of crisis and conflict.

AGILE ACQUISITION CONTRACTING

We propose an Agile approach to acquisition tendering, where Defence releases a statement of capability required, from which potential contractors demonstrate solution approaches which would deliver that capability need. This allows potential contractors, including SMEs, to demonstrate both the contracting outcomes as well as innovation in design.

This contrasts with traditional procurement, where Defence would define a set of high-level specification which broadly scopes the product they are looking to acquire. By releasing such a specification, Defence drives potential contractors to build, acquire or modify solutions to meet that specification. In many cases, SMEs will be unable to meet specific 'requirements', even if the products they build or design would fit the Defence need more effectively. These enterprises often do not have the resources to modify their designs to meet the specification, and so are excluded from tendering.

If the Government Policy related to Defence Contracting were modified to allow Defence to instead release a capability statement, potential contractors could demonstrate how their solution would deliver that capability need. In this scenario however, it is clear that Defence must work with potential contractors to refine the proposed designs and select those contractors who best meet the defined need. Hence tendering should in itself be an Agile process.

Agile and its History

Agile is a methodology that fosters the evolution of requirements and solutions through the collaborative effort of cross-functional and organisational teams, it advocates:

- adaptive planning;
- iterative and incremental development;
- early delivery;
- continuous improvement;
- encourages rapid and flexible response to change;
- short feedback cycles; and
- efficient face-to-face communication.

The Agile methodology emerged in 2001 after 17 industry leaders created the Agile Manifesto which consists of 4 main values (listed on the right side of Table 2) and 12 principals. The methodology was originally created to establish better ways of developing and sharing software. Its use has now broadened into other markets and industries, and increased in popularity due to the ever-changing world we live in, where technology is developing faster than the products of acquisition contracts, and complexity is dramatically increasing.

Precedence for Agile in Defence

Agile is a proven concept with successful applications in commercial and international defence organisations. In 2010, the United States of America approved Section 804 of the Department of Defence (DoD) Acquisition Bill which specifies the policies and procedures when acquiring information technology systems. The key language used in Section 804 of the acquisition bill directly aligns with Agile theories and methodologies, examples include:

- early and continual involvement of the user;
- multiple, rapidly executed increments or releases of capability;

- early, successive prototyping to support an evolutionary approach; and
- a modular, open-systems approach.

The report prepared by the US DoD for congress on Section 804 further supported the alignment of Agile with the following language used:

- deliver early and often
- incremental and iterative development and testing
- rationalized requirements
- flexible/tailored process

In summary, the US DoD made Agile Methodology virtually mandatory for the acquisition of IT systems.

The Italian Army also implemented Agile to develop Command and Control (C²) software as they identified that the rapidly changing scenarios of each operation made it difficult to define stable and consolidated list of requirements.

In 2006, the FBI Sentinel initiated the \$425M Sentinel project which developed software to manage the FBI's record retention and case management of files and data from investigations. This software development would allow agents to rapidly analyse, compare and discover connection between cases. After two attempts spanning a total of 10 years of using traditional project management methodologies the project was aborted with a total project cost of \$600M. A new Chief Information Officer (CIO) started the project almost from scratch implementing an Agile approach. The project was then completed using Agile in 3 years at a cost of \$99M [3].

Textron internally developed the Scorpion Jet from an idea to a flying aircraft within two years using an agile approach. The project reportedly only cost tens of millions of dollars and at the height of the project only had a couple hundred people working on it. One of the keys to Textron's success was they built a set of requirements for the product but evolved them over time.

These case studies prove that Agile can be highly effective for hardware as well as software development and acquisition. It must be noted however, that this paper is proposing Agile be implemented during the tender phase of a project before metal is cut or code is written.

Mindset differences

Agile methodologies have significant mindset differences to traditional waterfall methods which are typically employed in Australian Defence contracting. The traditional method of project management is referred to as 'waterfall' as it is a less iterative and flexible than Agile, and progress flows in one direction in large deliverables or phases from the contractor to the client. Some of the key mindset differences between Agile and traditional methodologies are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison between Agile and traditional project management methodology

Property	Agile	Traditional 'Waterfall'
Prioritization	Time and Cost; Not scope	Scope; Not Time and Cost
Requirements	Iteratively refined during development	Completely defined in detail up front

Risk Reduction	Incremental release and sprints; small, frequent, and informative review	Large document intensive reviews at key milestones that may be months apart
Leadership Style	Collaborative; flexible; team advocate	Hierarchical and contractual 'command and control'
Measure of Success	Outcome focused; satisfied customer	Conformance to a plan or contract

To further elaborate on Table 1, Agile focuses on structured iterations of work that are of fixed duration and budget, it accepts that total predictability is not possible and therefore embraces changes in scope and requirements. Traditional methods try to be predictable resulting in a high focus on scope which is a contributing factor to many defence projects overrunning on both cost and schedule.

Agile iteratively refines and reprioritizes requirements as a continuous activity throughout the development while traditional waterfall methods emphasis on predictability means everything must be detailed up front which limits innovation and collaborative solutions between stakeholders.

To reduce project risk, Agile utilises frequent, structured and small incremental reviews that are often fixed in duration, so the customer is continually aware of the projects progress and direction and has the opportunity change scope as new information comes to light. Traditional methods try to mitigate risk with large document intensive reviews, however these reviews are often long intervals apart which increases the likelihood of customer dissatisfaction as they may not be aware and agree with key decisions or the project direction for many months. This method also limits collaboration and communication between the parties and may cause extra effort in preparing documentation than working towards a solution.

Agile utilises a flat team structure that is flexible and collaborates with other disciplines and the customer to work towards a solution. Traditional methods however, commonly implement a hierarchical command and control structure where the culture and relationship are very much client-contractor based, instead of collaboration between the parties. Traditional methods also create single sources of failure as the method relies on individuals holding much of the information and direction of the project in their head.

Agile is highly focused on producing quality outcomes that satisfies the customer's and other relevant stakeholder's needs and expectations. While projects that use traditional methods measure success by the conformance to the contract which is usually written many months if not years before a solution is delivered, circumstances may have changed making the project less effective for the customer and end user.

How it would work

In order to apply Agile project management to procurement, Defence must extract the key high-level concepts and apply them to the tender process. In fact, an Agile process would allow contractors to submit fixed-priced proposals, even as the proposed solution develops. This can be achieved using a multiple-phased tendering approach.

In the first phase of an approach to market, Defence would issue a request to appropriate contractors for a described capability in a fixed-scope and fixed-duration activity. This will allow the contractors to demonstrate the high-level effectiveness of their solution to meet the capability need. For complex

acquisition, this activity may be repeated multiple times to define solution components. During this process, the contractors are able to develop both the proposal and the requirement specification in iterative collaboration with Defence. This allows the requirement specification to define a well-understood, innovative, and achievable capability. This is in contrast to a complete specification written prior to an approach to market, which limits the ability for innovation in industry to influence the design outcomes.

In the next phase of the tendering process, Defence can apply agreed Performance-Based assessments to the delivered solutions so far. Those contractors who have demonstrated the ability to deliver a design in a timely manner, to the required quality standards, and within budget can be selected to proceed to the next phase of solution development.

Those contractors selected from the first phase will continue to refine their offer to Defence in an iterative and collaborative manner. Through each fixed-duration cycle, the contractor can develop a component of the solution, and the associated requirement specification as agreed with Defence. Defence can in turn apply Performance-Based assessments to the delivered design solutions to assist in selection of the successful contractors to continue the process. These phases may continue until the proposed solution is well defined, and it is agreed between a selected contractor and Defence that a contract will be awarded to proceed to development.

The use of multiple fixed-duration cycles for proposal development also allows potential contractors to 'fail-fast' when it is clear their solution will not meet the Defence need. In a traditional tendering model, potential contractors will often invest significant time and money in developing complete proposals that are ultimately rejected by the customer. The addition of design assessment gates on a regular basis allows contractors to exit the competition when it is clear their design will not meet the Defence need, saving time and money in the process. This increases the competitiveness of the industry, which in turn strengthens the capability available to Defence.

We see this as an additional tool in the Defence contracting toolkit. We do not propose Agile as a silver bullet. It is not designed to be employed for every Defence tender. Rather, when implemented and tailored correctly to fit the situation and context, can be highly effective and beneficial.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

Industry Engagement

In a traditional tendering model, industry will often invest significant time and money in developing complete proposals that are ultimately rejected by the customer. The Defence procurement decision-making process is complex and timely to ensure the right solution and contractor have been selected. The Agile approach will accelerate the decision-making process by reducing the risk to Defence in the tender selection.

The addition of design assessment gates following fixed duration cycles allows contractors to exit the competition when it is clear their design will not meet the Defence need, saving time and money in the process. This increases the competitiveness of industry, which in turn strengthens the capability available to Defence. As the contractor will not need to accept the large investment risk typically associated with producing a full tender response, Australian Industry Capability (AIC) is increased through potential engagement of both traditional non-tradition industry partners.

When applied to the tendering process, Agile management will allow the key needs of the desired solution to be well understood without restricting innovation. Defining Capability in procurement will allow industry to demonstrate both the contracting outcomes as well as innovation in design by leaving the 'how-to' up to the contractor. The contractor delivering the solution is best positioned to know how innovation capability can be implemented effectively within their existing processes and design constraints.

By allowing industry to lessen the risks quantified in complex Defence programs, Defence can achieve cost savings in procurement through reduced acquisition costs.

Alignment with CASG Principles

There is clear alignment of Agile values with CASG goals, as illustrated by Table 2. The Agile values listed are extracted from the Agile Manifesto.

Table 2. CASG's alignment with the Agile manifesto

CASG Goals	Agile Values
Improve our strategic level partnerships with industry	INDIVIDUALS AND INTERACTIONS over processes and tools
Reform, implement and embed the First Principles Review (FPR) recommendations	WORKING SOLUTIONS over comprehensive documentation
We listen to each other and seek win-win collaboration outcomes which help ensure a sustainable industry base to support Defence capability.	CUSTOMER COLLABORATION over contract negotiation
We actively engage in mature and consistent dialogue regarding cost/capability trade-offs at all levels	RESPONDING TO CHANGE over following a plan

Decisive Responsiveness

By nature, Agile is responsive. When applied to the tendering process it provides the mechanism for the acquisition to respond to changing defence needs.

By focusing on the highest importance and well understood requirements first, Agile methods allow prioritized capability to enter Initial Operating Capability sooner.

“Simply delivering what was initially required on cost and schedule can lead to failure in achieving our evolving nations security mission – the reason defense acquisition exists in the first place”

Honourable Frank Kendall, US Under Secretary of Defence

CHALLENGES

There are significant challenges in the successful application of this approach.

Embracing a New Mindset

The Agile mindset is very different from current approaches, as discussed earlier. It will need education of all parties. Customer (Defence), contracting agency (CASG), and contractor (Industry) need to clearly understand their roles within this partnership.

For example, a key difference is requirement flexibility is used to achieve cost and schedule control - flexibility to refine, remove and add requirements. To ensure flexibility does not degenerate to flop:

- It requires Defence to provide consistent and coherent input to changing requirements and their effects on meeting capability need. Defence need to be committed to engagement by providing appropriate and consistent personnel for the duration of the acquisition. Because an Agile process requires close and intense collaboration between stakeholders, it is important to maintain this continuity in terms of human resourcing. Ideally, posting cycles would be aligned with the project, or at a minimum, personnel made available until and accountable for final delivery of the project, even if they have since been posted elsewhere.
- It requires CASG to understand documentation alone does not guarantee acceptable delivery. A better way to confirm things are on track, is to see them in action. Incremental releases show the real state of the project to all stakeholders. CASG will need to become more facilitative rather than authoritative gate keepers. This aids in keeping CASG slim and focussed.
- It requires a responsible Industry, who are flexible to requirement change without using it as an excuse for profiteering. And who are first interested in meeting the capability need, and not simply hawking a product. Such disingenuous behaviour ultimately damages the defence industry, the effectiveness of our defence forces and the safety of our nation. Open dialog and collaboration are to reduce risk and benefit all. Trust is essential to success. This process cannot work as adversaries.

Managing the Ethical Screen

The Agile approach to acquisition in the first phase, allows engagement with multiple partners to refine their requirements and design. This engagement would be much closer than in traditional approaches, with Defence and CASG having significant visibility into each partner's designs. It is important the strengths, weaknesses and details of designs are not inadvertently spilled to competing partners. Failure to do so damages the transparency essential to the process.

APPLICABILITY

This approach for Agile acquisition contracting not only facilitates innovation, but assists the acquisition remaining relevant by the time of delivery. It helps with this by:

- Reducing time needed for market study. It allows industry, who are placed to understand the current state-of-art, to provide the best ways the capability need could be met. And Defence to focus on understanding and articulating their capability needs.
- Accelerating the decision-making process. The current decision-making process for Defence procurement is complex and time-intensive, to ensure the right solution and a suitable partner who can deliver are selected. By splitting the tendering process into fixed scope and duration activities, risk to Defence in the tender selection is reduced, as unsuitable contractors can be identified early and quickly.
- Collaborative requirement development and refinement allowing adaptation to meet a potentially changing situation, such as an evolving threat or due to rapid technology change.

Hence ideal acquisitions for pilot use of this approach would be:

- In areas utilising technology that is rapidly developing, or where timeliness is imperative to success. The time to delivery would be on the order of less than a few years.
- Where the capability could and would be iterated in short time scales by enhancement/alteration/replacement in order to meet a changing environment.
- Requiring only collaboration between contractor, CASG and Defence. That is, minimising the scale of necessary interfacing in an initial trial.

We believe the approach is applicable to broader situations. But the outlined challenges to its initial adoption would likely reduce the expected gains in broader situation until the process is refined and further experience gained.

CONCLUSION

We are advocating for the application of Agile as a new approach for acquisition. This would be implemented by starting engagement with industry at the capability stage, in contrast with only once the requirements have been fully defined. It would involve a multi-phase and potentially multi-spiral approach which would have industry propose potential approaches to meet capability from which one or more 'tenders' are selected, and requirement and design could be collaboratively developed.

We believe this can deliver innovation through:

- Lowering the barrier for industry to engage with industry through a lower risk first phase, thereby providing the opportunity to engage with a more diverse range of potential partners. This diversity of thought has the potential for innovative solutions to meet capability, in ways Defence may not have known or even considered through self-initiated market study.
- By adopting a mindset, embodied in the process itself, that requirements are not absolutely fixed, allowing adaptation to changing fast paced environment the acquisition seeks to meet.

We have highlighted the benefit of this approach for acquisition within fast-moving technology areas and where timeliness affects the relevance of the acquisition. It seems compatible within the Smart Buyer decision framework, as the risk of irrelevance of the acquisition may provide grounds to apply this Agile strategy for acquisition in these fast-moving technology areas. And this approach could fit within the current Defence Procurement Policy Manual [4] which describes what documentation would normally be requested and what the statement of work should be comprised of, but does not list it as a directive, and states that it should be informed by the Smart Buyer Project Execution Strategy.

Furthermore, the new Capability Life Cycle (CLC) process calls out wanting to involve industry earlier in the life cycle. This proposal may provide a practical mechanism to accomplish this. And we hope this idea will be considered further.

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