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The Contract Management Body of Knowledge: Understanding an Essential Tool for the Acquisition Profession

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KNOW

THE
CONTRACT
MANAGEMENT
BODY OF

LEEDGE:

UNDERSTANDING AN ESSENTIAL TOOL
FOR THE ACQUISITION PROFESSION

By **Neal Couture** and **Steve Schooner**

KNOWLEDGE provides a solid foundation for professional success.

CM readers recognize the complexity inherent in government purchasing and the wide breadth and scope of the government marketplace. The professionals involved in the acquisition process, on both sides of each business transaction, are delegated a dizzying array of duties and tasks that must be accomplished competently within prescribed boundaries set by innumerable laws and regulations.

For the acquisition system to function effectively, the individuals charged with managing and operating it, whether federal employees or contractors, must be highly trained, mastering the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities in their respective disciplines.

Today's environment of budget uncertainty makes it even more critical that acquisition professionals perform at the top of their game, meeting mission and program objectives while remaining flexible and constantly planning and re-planning tasks, schedules, and budgets.

Knowledge provides a solid foundation for professional success. The collective knowledge of any profession is commonly referred to as its "body of knowledge." In our profession, NCMA's collective wisdom organizes, and periodically updates a broadly accepted conceptual inventory of the profession's acquired knowledge. This article describes the *NCMA Contract Management Body of Knowledge (CMBOK)*, how it was developed and is maintained, and its importance and relevance to people concerned with the contract management profession.

A body of knowledge includes information from a wide array of sources that pertain to the work of that profession. Such knowledge sources include written documents such as books, reference documents, regulations, policies, best practices, standards, studies, reports, journal and magazine articles, conference proceedings, presentation notes, and more, as well as information contained in other media, such as audio and video recordings of presentations, speeches, and training sessions, and, increasingly, web pages. As you can imagine, such a library collection would be extensive for any profession, and the contract management profession is no exception. One could surmise, then, that given the importance of managing government contracts, and how extensively the subject has been studied and written about, that the contract management body of knowledge would necessarily contain thousands and thousands of "objects" in written and electronic form.

How then to make sense and order of this diverse and extensive library of knowledge? And how could such a library be put to use, and by whom? Most important, who is charged with organizing, summarizing, and sharing our collection, deciding what is important and should be shared, and what should be excluded? In short, who gets to decide what is included in our body of knowledge?

Starting with the last question, the short answer is: you. The contract management professional, your business partners, your peers, and your mentors decide what is included in the contract management body of knowledge. To the extent you may be too busy to manage such a daunting task, you should be relieved to know that, working together, our community can accomplish the task, with the help of some knowledge professionals. NCMA first started this task when the organization was founded more than 50 years ago, in 1959. NCMA published our profession's first *Contract Management Body of Knowledge (CMBOK)* in September 2002, and it continues to remain a relevant, even essential, document today.¹ More accurately, the document actually serves as a guide, since, as we noted earlier, the true body of knowledge is a large, disaggregated collection of documents and media representing the profession's collective "knowledge."

The process for deciding what is included (and excluded) in the guide is deliberate and planned; even scientific. When the baseline *CMBOK* initially was established, NCMA brought together a group of experts from within the profession; people who would be

in a position to know what a contract management professional does, and what knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities were essential to the profession. This group of experts outlined knowledge areas, prioritized and summarized, and published the result for comment. Once the people in the profession reviewed and commented on the draft, a final outline was established, which was the basis for a “job task analysis study,” which is simply the process of studying what people do in their jobs and identifying those tasks that are performed most frequently and those that are considered most important. Using a comprehensive written questionnaire, the team obtained detailed input from thousands of professionals describing their work. Through psychometric analysis,² NCMA identified a set of tasks and activities that the profession collectively performs in common, that are performed most frequently, and that are the most important. As one might imagine, the work of a profession changes over time (e.g., an obvious example is the introduction of information technology into the work place and the commercial marketplace), requiring that the job task analysis periodically be repeated. NCMA does exactly that, conducting a new study every five years.

The *CMBOK* specifies five knowledge areas, following the chronology of the life-cycle of acquisition:

- Pre-award competencies;
- Acquisition planning and strategy competencies;
- Post-award competencies;
- Specialized knowledge area competencies; and
- Business competencies.



<p>1.0 Pre-Award Competencies</p>	1.1 Laws and Regulations
	1.2 Contract Principles
	1.3 Standards of Conduct
	1.4 Socioeconomic Programs
	1.5 Contract Types
	1.6 Contracting Methods
	1.7 Contract Financing
	1.8 Intellectual Property
	2.1 Acquisition Planning, Market Research, and Marketing
<p>2.0 Acquisition Planning and Strategy Competencies</p>	2.2 Drafting Solicitations
	2.3 Responding to Solicitations
	2.4 Cost and Price Analysis
	2.5 Negotiation
	2.6 Source Selection and Contract Award
	2.7 Protests
	3.1 Contract Management
<p>3.0 Post-Award Competencies</p>	3.2 Contract Performance and Quality Assurance
	3.3 Subcontract Management
	3.4 Contract Changes and Modifications
	3.5 Transportation
	3.6 Contract Interpretation and Disputes
	3.7 Contract Closeout
	3.8 Contract Termination
	4.1 Research and Development
<p>4.0 Specialized Knowledge Area Competencies</p>	4.2 Architect-Engineer Services and Construction
	4.3 Information Technology
	4.4 Major Systems
	4.5 Service Contracts
	4.6 International Contracting
	4.7 State and Local Government
	4.8 Supply Chain Management
	4.9 Government Property
	4.10 Other Specialized Areas
	5.1 Management
<p>5.0 Business Competencies</p>	5.2 Leadership Skills
	5.3 Marketing
	5.4 Operations Management
	5.5 Financial Analysis
	5.6 Accounting
	5.7 Economics
	5.8 Information Science/Technology

FIGURE 1. THE CMBOK KNOWLEDGE AREAS/OUTLINE OF COMPETENCIES

Each area is broken down into specific competencies—a total of 41 competencies are defined and described, as shown in **FIGURE 1**. The *CMBOK* also provides context and framework for the competencies and the work of the contract management professional. (See **FIGURE 1**.)

Returning to our questions: how could such a knowledge library be put to use, and by whom? The *CMBOK* is a very useful tool, for the association, employers, educators, and individual professionals. NCMA uses the book as an organizing rubric to identify its knowledge objects, to ensure their programs and publications stay within the boundaries of the profession, to ensure that all areas of knowledge are covered, and to index knowledge objects for easier retrieval for members. NCMA conference programming closely aligns with *CMBOK* competencies. For example, attendees at the World Congress 2013 conference program could view the schedule of available subject matter and discipline-based tracks (or individual sessions) correlated to the *CMBOK*, with an analogous, companion chart organized along the lines of the DOD and Federal Acquisition Institute competencies. This illustration helped attendees select sessions in specific knowledge areas that were of most interest to them. NCMA also uses the book in the development and maintenance of its certification exams, study guides, and preparatory programs, ensuring that credentialing exams truly measure the relevant knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities of the profession. Employers use the book to develop job descriptions, performance standards, recruitment efforts, and training programs, ensuring that their contract management professionals are focused and trained on the right work (or their most frequent and most important needs). Educators use the *CMBOK* to develop curricula, courses, and training programs. And, of course, contract management professionals, young and old, consult the *CMBOK* to identify opportunities to expand their skill set or fill in training or educational gaps. (For example, even the most highly skilled and experienced systems engineers may not have been exposed to cost and price analysis,

just as veteran contract negotiators may be unfamiliar with the nuances of quality assurance).

Although intended to be exhaustive or at least all-inclusive, the *NCMA CMBOK* is but one tool in the professional's tool kit. Other publications help define the work that contract management professionals do, such as the *DOD Contracting Competency Model*,³ the Federal Acquisition Institute competency reports⁴, as well as competency models created by large defense and aerospace companies (that are not available publicly). Employees within those workforces, of course, should become familiar with the tools that apply most specifically to them. NCMA's *CMBOK* is unique, however, in that it is employer and industry neutral—it is relevant and useful to all contract management professionals regardless of where they work in the acquisition system. Published by a professional association, the *CMBOK* remains largely free from political or parochial influence and interest.

Given the uncertainties and complexities facing our profession, there is perhaps no better time to become familiar with the *CMBOK*. We encourage you to use it the next time you attend a conference, develop a training plan, or prepare for a certification exam. Consult it as a reminder of how rich, varied, and challenging our profession is, and continue to develop your professional mastery. **CM**

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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ENDNOTES

1. Learn more about the *Contract Management Body of Knowledge*, 4th Edition at www.ncmahq.org/cm/newCMBOK.
2. "Psychometrics [was] initially defined as 'The art of imposing measurement and number upon operations of the mind.' Today, psychometrics covers virtually all statistical methods that are useful for the behavioral and social sciences including the handling of missing data, the combination of prior information with measured data, measurement obtained from special experiments, visualization of statistical outcomes, measurement that guarantees personal privacy, and so on." *Psychometrics & the Psychometric Society*, available at <http://www.psychometrika.org/society/>.
3. The DOD Contracting Competency Model included 12 units of competence, 28 technical competencies, and 10 professional competencies. See, generally, http://www.acq.osd.mil/dpap/ops/contracting_competency_assessment.html or http://www.acq.osd.mil/asda/docs/fact_sheets/competency-based_management.pdf; see also the Department of Defense Contracting Workforce Competency Assessment Final Report, retrieved from <https://dap.dau.mil/workforce/Documents/Comp/DoD%20ATL%20Defense%20Acquisition%20Workforce%20Competency%20Model%20-%20Contracting.pdf>.
4. The FAI Contracting Competency Model included 10 professional (or technical) competencies (plus one professional competency), plus 28 technical competencies and 10 professional competencies. See generally, <http://www.fai.gov/drupal/node/92> or <http://www.fai.gov/drupal/sites/default/files/cca-contractingcompetencymodel.pdf>. See also The 2012 Acquisition Workforce Competency Survey Report, available at <http://www.fai.gov/drupal/sites/default/files/2012%20Acquisition%20Workforce%20Competency%20Survey%20Report.pdf>.