

Enabling the enablers



KATHERINE ZIESING | CANBERRA

I'M in that difficult spot where the nation has not voted in a federal election but by the time you read this editorial, the nation will have made their choice. It has surprised me how little coverage there has been of Defence issues on the election trail.

The billions in national treasure that goes into Defence is worth talking about in the context of choosing a government but there seems to be little appetite for a conversation about why Defence matters in public discourse. Apart from the jobs the industry can bring, the topic barely rated a mention.

The big sexy platform side of Defence is actually kicking along quite well and should continue to do so under whoever forms the next government of Australia. Already 2016 has been a big year in terms of announcements that will shape Defence capability for the next generation, particularly in the naval space.

This year alone has seen decisions on submarines, oilers, upgrades and sustainment for the surface fleet, and shortlists for frigates and OPVs. A downselect for Phase 2 of Land 400 is also imminent, a defining program for Army.

It is the key enablers that the White Paper speaks of that I'm concerned about. The programs that you hear little about - the standalone capabilities like space, cyber, EW, ISR, simulation, satcoms - are the glue that makes the big sexy platforms into an actual capability.

In this edition we have a look at some of those 'glue' programs like space and how to make the most of the sensor feeds that the next generation of UASs are offering the ADF. Another element in these programs not being thought of in the public domain as much as perhaps they should be are their security clearance levels and the high levels of technicality. Both these concerns make it hard for non-specialists to be engaged in such topics. *ADM* tries to make them accessible to readers in a way that applies to both specialists and those wanting to learn more about key enablers.

In the last month I've been able to go to a range of events that have brought together the Defence community such as D+I, *ADM's* Cyber Security Summit and the launch of a mentoring program for young female engineers and program managers. Each event provided a wealth of information and an opportunity to network, an excellent stepping-stone for future collaboration.

It was, however, the mentoring program that highlighted what Defence can do when it collaborates effectively. The Future Through Collaboration (TFTC) mentoring program is a partnership of agencies and companies including Raytheon, Airservices, BAE Systems, Navy, Jacobs, Kinetic Recruitment, QinetiQ, the Department of Defence, and Lockheed Martin.

Building on the success of the pilot program last year that saw 11 mentors and mentees matched up, the programs this year is hosting 30 mentors and mentees through a guided programs to grow the skills of all parties.

"We can't tackle diversity on our own," Alex Parkin, engineering manager at Airservices Australia said at the Canberra launch. "We need to build links and partnerships across industries and disciplines."

As a formal mentoring program, mentors and mentees are matched based on their goals, objectives and professional backgrounds. Through the course of 12 months they will meet on a monthly basis to discuss and plan how to actualise their goals.

Participants are provided with an induction training session every quarter and will be supported throughout the year with facilitated group sessions to encourage their success.

One of participants from the 2015 pilot program Caroline Chai of BAE Systems said the program had "a profound impact on her".

"The program provided me tools and guidance to go forward but also relationships that I will carry with me," Chai told the new program entrants. "TFTC is collaboration in action in industry."

The oft-repeated statement that the best asset any organisation has are its people has begun to ring hollow in many ways. Investment in people is often under rated given the culture of the job market. Some companies can be reticent about investing in their people for fear of them leaving. But I've found that people in the Defence community tend to stay in the Defence community. They may change companies but the specialist knowledge is vital and sometimes only applicable in a defence space.

People are the best key enabler that any organisation can have. They may not be as movable as capital or as flexible as other inputs, but they are THE key enabler when it comes to the defence community. *



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