

A New Model for a Shared Lessons Learned System

For the Future Defence Delivery Agency and Australian Defence Industry

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Peter - The Challenge: When Did We Last Really Learn?

Opening question for participants

"When was the last time your organisation learned something important from a defence project — and then actually changed what it does because of it?"

\$17B

Annual defence
acquisition &
sustainment spend

160+

Major projects
currently in
portfolio

\$122B

Portfolio value
currently under
management

The ability to systematically learn from experience is not an administrative burden — it is a strategic imperative.

ANAO CONSISTENT FINDINGS

Cost overruns averaging **15–30%** of approved budgets

Schedule delays of **12–36 months** beyond plan

Recurring challenges in requirements, governance, schedule, resourcing and contract management

Same categories repeated year on year since 2008

35+ significant reviews of Australian defence acquisition since 1973 — the same problems resurface after each one.

2021–22 MAJOR PROJECTS REPORT EXAMPLE

22 major projects examined

9 projects with NO lessons in the Defence Repository

7 projects not maintaining a lessons log at all

Source: ANAO Major Projects Report 2021–22 & 2024–25

Amy - Five Interlocking Barriers to Effective Learning

Why the current system is not performing

1

Short Lifecycle Capture

Lessons captured at project completion — too late to influence programs currently in delivery.

2

No Full End-to-End Process

Critical gap in delivery and early sustainment phases — when the richest learning is available.

3

Cultural Barriers & Incentives

Candid reporting competes with self-protection. Rational actors choose vagueness every time.

4

Limited Sharing with Industry

System is government-only. Industry generates knowledge that immediately dissipates.

5

Absent Common Taxonomy

No shared classification system linking Defence and industry for cross-program pattern recognition.

Together these produce lesson-learned performance — the appearance of a functioning system without the substance.

Amy - Why Now? The Transformation Imperative

A confluence of three unique factors aligning in 2026



2026–2027

THE DDA TRANSITION A once-in-a-generation window

Defence Delivery Group activates 1 July 2026; the Defence Delivery Agency fully operational 1 July 2027. Policies are being written now. This institutional transition creates a time-limited opportunity to build the system you want, not inherit the one you have.

PRESENT

STRATEGIC URGENCY The era of strategic warning time is over

The 2024 National Defence Strategy confirms Australia faces its most challenging security environment since WWII. The IIP is the most ambitious acquisition agenda in the post-Cold War era. The cost of learning slowly has increased dramatically.

IN DESIGN NOW

THE C2D2 OPERATING MODEL Agile delivery demands continuous learning

C2D2 delivers capability in successive iterative cycles. You cannot run an agile delivery model on a waterfall learning model. The lessons system must capture and apply learning within delivery cycles, not across them.

Miss the DDA transition window and this opportunity may not arise for another decade.

Peter - The Aviation Safety Model: A Proven Alternative

How just culture transformed the world's most complex industry

FROM BLAME TO LEARNING

Early aviation: Blame-and-prosecute culture destroyed the information environment. People did not report near-misses because reporting carried risk.

The paradigm shift:

"Just Culture" recognised that most incidents stem from systemic issues, not individual moral shortfalls. Treating systemic issues as personal issues does not fix the system — it punishes the person who happened to be there when the incident occurred.

The results:

Commercial aviation is now among the safest human activities on earth. NASA's Aviation Safety Reporting System has operated since 1976.

ICAO Safety Management System: proof the model works at scale.

JUST CULTURE: THREE CATEGORIES

Honest Errors & Systems Issues

Protected from punitive action — treated as learning opportunities

At-Risk Behaviour

Addressed through coaching and system improvement

Reckless or Wilful Violations

Subject to appropriate disciplinary action — just culture is not impunity

1 Security

Tiered access controls operating across classification levels. Classified lessons shared between appropriately cleared government and industry personnel. Security is a design requirement, not a reason to abandon information sharing.

2 Non-Attribution

Individuals and organisations reporting errors and systemic weaknesses in good faith must be explicitly protected from administrative, contractual and reputational consequences — grounded in a Just Culture Charter.

3 Decision-Informing

Senior leadership must visibly use lessons data. When contributions influence gate reviews, investment choices and contract structures, the system gains credibility. Lessons that disappear into a repository will not change behaviour.

4 Contracted Delivery Quality

Participation obligations embedded in contract structures for both government and industry — so sharing lessons is a contractual requirement, not a discretionary act of goodwill on competing-pressure days.

01

Joint Governance

Co-chaired by DDA and industry. Domain working groups (maritime, land, air, cyber, space) and functional groups jointly staffed — industry as contributor with equivalent standing, not observer.

02

Common Taxonomy

Collaboratively developed; granular enough for cross-program pattern recognition; stable enough for longitudinal analysis; aligned to ODCS programme and project classification structure.

03

Tiered Data Access

Unclassified aggregated lessons shared broadly, including with allied partners and academia. Sensitive technical/operational lessons available to cleared government and industry personnel.

04

Independent Lesson Validation

QA function drawing on secondments, contracted analytical capability and academic engagement to distinguish validated systemic findings from project-specific anomalies or confirmation bias.

05

Integration with DDA Governance

Mandatory review of relevant lessons at gate review preparation; feeds Smart Buyer analytics; informs contracting templates. A lessons system that does not connect to governance will not change behaviour.

Peter - Implementation Timeline

A realistic three-phase roadmap 2026–2029

Now → July 2027

PHASE 1 FOUNDATIONS

- Establish joint governance structure
- Develop common taxonomy collaboratively
- Agree the Just Culture Charter
- Launch pilots: maritime, land, software-intensive systems
- Secure DDA and industry senior leadership commitment

2027 → 2028

PHASE 2 ENTERPRISE ROLLOUT

- Lessons participation standard across all DDA programs
- Knowledge management system fully operational
- First annual Defence Capability Lessons Learned Conference
- Specialised training programs for government and industry

2029 onwards

PHASE 3 FULL INTEGRATION

- Lessons data informs DDA performance and accountability
- Policy and contracting templates updated on validated lessons
- Predictive analytical capability: pattern recognition across programs

Design work must begin in the next 12 months — the DDA transition window will not remain open indefinitely.

Peter: The Choice in Front of Us

The challenge is cultural, not technical

An inability to create conditions where honest reporting is safe and shared learning is valued — not a process or technology deficit.

The window is now

The DDA is being designed today. If we want a lessons system embedded rather than bolted on, design work must begin in the next 12 months.

A genuinely joint enterprise

Not a government system that industry is invited to observe — instead built together, recognising that the knowledge needed to deliver better is distributed across hundreds of organisations and decades of experience.