ADAPTIVE GROWTH

Adaptive Growth in a Changing Acquisition Environment

The FAR Is Being Rewritten. Can Your Growth Model Move With It?

How small and emerging federal technology contractors can detect change, challenge stale assumptions, and create relevance beyond their current footprint.

A practitioner point of view for contractors navigating acquisition reform, rapid technology change, and the operating challenge of keeping growth decisions current.

THE CENTRAL IDEA

Federal acquisition, technology, and mission conditions are changing faster than many contractor growth models can adapt. Business as usual may continue to protect existing work. Creating new relevance requires an organization that can detect change, challenge inherited assumptions, and convert current intelligence into changed decisions before the pursuit hardens.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The acquisition environment is changing unevenly enough that contractors seeking growth beyond their current footprint need the organizational ability to detect relevant change, revalidate inherited assumptions, and propagate current information into qualification, positioning, solution design, pricing, and pursuit decisions before the opportunity hardens.

The disciplines are not new. The question is whether the organization operates them as a current, connected learning system, or possesses them as separate practices that do not reliably change one another.

> **THE CORE IDEA**
>
> Adaptive growth is the organizational ability to detect relevant change, revalidate assumptions, and convert current intelligence into coordinated action before the market or pursuit moves past the existing answer.

This paper is written for the professionals who carry that work: small and emerging federal technology contractors, capture leaders, proposal professionals, acquisition specialists, and business-development executives operating while the Federal Acquisition Regulation is being rewritten.

It does not argue that established capture, acquisition, or proposal practices are obsolete. It offers a structured way to examine which capabilities remain effective, where information stops changing decisions, and what the current environment may require an organization to preserve, connect, strengthen, or build.

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CONNECTING THE PIECES

Some contractors already operate much of this way. Others have individual pieces, strong relationships, disciplined capture, capable proposal teams, sound acquisition judgment—but no reliable loop connecting them. The purpose of this paper is not to declare every existing model obsolete. It is to provide a way to examine whether current information can challenge inherited assumptions, change a pursuit decision, and propagate through the organization before the opportunity hardens.

Some small and emerging contractors still operate these systems as disconnected functions: relationships carry capture, marketing becomes collateral, proposals become document production, and acquisition rules are treated as something that matters only after the solicitation appears.

That separation can remain hidden when the environment is stable. When customer needs, technology, and the acquisition baseline are moving, it slows the organization's ability to learn, challenge stale assumptions, and change the pursuit before the answer hardens.

WHAT THIS PAPER DOES NOT CLAIM

This paper does not argue that established capture, acquisition, or proposal practices are obsolete. It offers a way for contractors to examine which capabilities remain effective, where information stops changing decisions, and what the current environment may require them to preserve, connect, strengthen, or build.

> **THE PURPOSE IN ONE SENTENCE**
>
> This paper helps an organization identify what it already does well, where information stops moving, and where its current operating model may be optimized for continuity rather than adaptation.

1 WHY NOW

The rules are changing unevenly, making it unsafe to assume that one inherited baseline controls every acquisition. In a stable environment, procedural familiarity compounds. During transition, its value depends on how quickly inherited knowledge can be revalidated.

The Revolutionary FAR Overhaul did not arrive as a single switch. It arrived through rolling agency class deviations, followed in June 2026 by the first proposed rules in the formal rulemaking phase. Model text applies to an agency only after adoption through a class deviation; Practitioner Albums and other guides remain non-regulatory and non-mandatory.

That is the operating environment contractors must navigate now.

> **THE STRUCTURAL SHIFT**
>
> A stable and reliable edge in this market has been procedural familiarity and program-office relationships: knowing the people, knowing the process, knowing how the last three of these went. That edge is real, and in a stable environment it compounds. But part of its value comes from accumulated familiarity with the people, processes, and patterns that shaped prior acquisitions. When those patterns are being rewritten, inherited knowledge requires faster revalidation.

Adapting a growth posture within this change requires the organizational ability to detect relevant change, revalidate assumptions, and convert current intelligence into coordinated action before the market or pursuit moves past the existing answer.

It does not require discarding relationships, acquisition experience, or proven operating practices. It requires knowing which parts remain current, which no longer do, and whether the organization can tell the difference in time.

The rewrite is the fact. The final form is the variable.

Experienced federal acquisition professionals have seen reform initiatives arrive with urgency before, only to slow down, become absorbed into existing practice, or change direction under a later administration. That experience is real and should be acknowledged.

It is reasonable to debate which current deviations will survive, how individual FAR parts will change through notice-and-comment rulemaking, how consistently agencies will implement them, and what a future administration may revise. But that debate should not obscure what is already happening.

On June 23, 2026, the FAR Council published the first four of twelve planned proposed rules under FAR Cases 2026-001, 2026-002, 2026-005, and 2026-007. Together, those first four rules touch 20 distinct FAR parts when associated Part 52 changes are included. The public comment period closed July 23, 2026; timely comments will be considered in forming the final rules. The proposed text remains subject to change.

At the time of publication, the FAR Part Deviation Guide listed agency class deviations for 38 agencies under FAR Part 1, 30 under Part 39, 29 under Part 40, and 28 under Part 53.

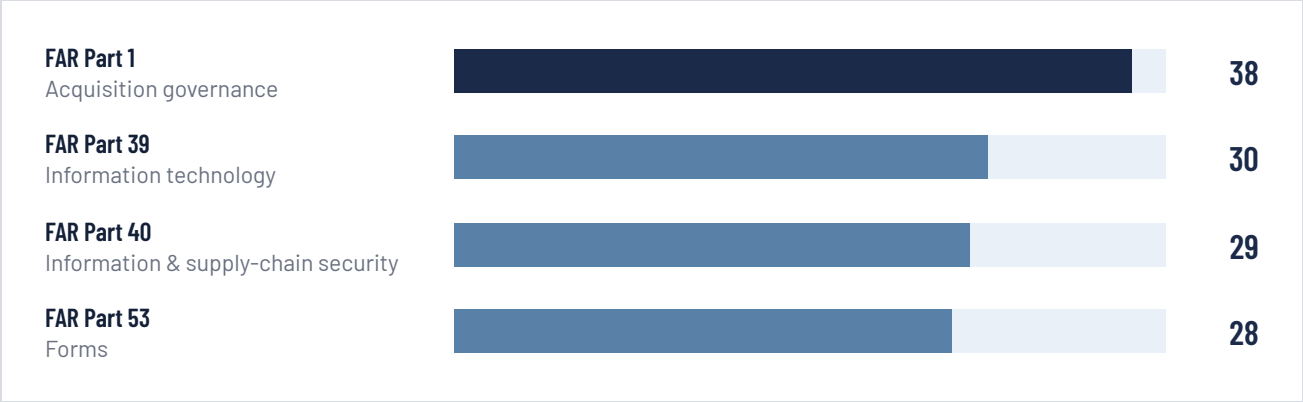


FIGURE 1. Agency Class Deviations Under the Revolutionary FAR Overhaul

Number of agencies listed under selected FAR parts in the FAR Part Deviation Guide as of July 24, 2026. Source: Acquisition.gov RFO tracker.

Those numbers do not mean implementation is complete or uniform. They show that agencies have already moved from model text to actual class deviations across acquisition governance, information technology, information security, supply-chain security, and forms.

The market now contains two realities at once: enough adoption that contractors cannot safely assume the former baseline still controls, and enough variation that they cannot assume the RFO model text automatically governs every acquisition.

The question is no longer whether change is coming. It is what mechanisms are already in place and what is needed for detecting change, challenging assumptions, and updating decisions across the pursuit.

That makes "business as usual will return" more than healthy skepticism. It is a strategic forecast about what the final rules, agency behavior, buying practices, technology market, and competitive environment will eventually look like. The forecast may prove partly correct. Some current changes may be revised, narrowed, or abandoned. Familiar practices may reassert themselves.

Experienced practices and procedural knowledge will continue to matter. But a contractor must still decide what the central assumption is beneath its growth strategy, and whether that assumption still holds up in light of the changes that are upon us.

If the rewrite produces lasting changes, a wait-it-out posture costs the organization learning time, market relevance, and competitive position. If implementation remains uneven, firms will need stronger, not weaker systems for verifying controlling authority, tracking change, interpreting customer needs, and converting emerging capability into defensible value.

If a future administration redirects portions of the overhaul, the organization will still benefit from current account intelligence, evidence-based qualification, tested positioning, institutional memory, technical-price-delivery alignment, and the ability to adapt without losing control.

Those are not RFO-specific capabilities. They are "no-regret" growth capabilities. The practical question is not: Will every feature of the current RFO survive? But rather: Should a contractor build its growth strategy around the assumption that the old environment will return substantially intact? Perhaps it will. Perhaps it will not.

But hope that business as usual returns is not a substitute for an operating model capable of performing while the rules are being rewritten. A wait-it-out posture may be entirely rational for a contractor primarily concerned with protecting incumbency, pursuing familiar recompetes, and expanding around an existing footprint. It is less sufficient for one entering new agencies, emerging missions, or unfamiliar technologies, where learning and credibility must be built while the market is moving.

> **WHERE THE OPPORTUNITY IS**
>
> Periods of uncertainty do not erase incumbency or relationships. They do create room for firms that can provide current, verifiable clarity: what controls, what remains unsettled, what the market can credibly deliver, and which adoption path reduces mission and implementation risk. That is not a substitute for government authority. It is useful market participation. When the baseline is moving, current relevance becomes more valuable than inherited confidence alone.

2 WHEN EXPERIENCE STOPS UPDATING

An experienced pursuit team can have strong relationships, capable technical leaders, legitimate prior performance, and a disciplined review process, and still become wrong together. When the same assumptions circulate through capture, solution development, and proposal review without being tested against current evidence, internal agreement begins to look like validation.

INTERNAL AGREEMENT IS NOT CUSTOMER VALIDATION

On a major DoD enterprise technology pursuit, I led development of the technical response. Capture, the technical leads, our SMEs, and I believed we had built an exceptional solution. We had, quite frankly, drunk our own Kool-Aid.

The debrief made clear that the operating model we described did not reflect how the work was then being performed. The failure was not a lack of expertise. It was a closed validation loop. Prior experience, internal agreement, and repeated review had become substitutes for current customer understanding. The lesson was not that experience has no value. It was that experience does not update itself.

A contractor needs a reliable way to ask:

- What do we believe to be true?
- What current evidence supports it?
- What would invalidate it?
- Can that evidence change the pursuit before confidence becomes commitment?

Experience is valuable. It is not a self-updating source of truth. Internal agreement is not customer validation.

3 THE OPERATING MODEL

Adaptive growth begins with an honest inventory. What does the organization already do well? Where does information stop moving? Which assumptions are no longer current? Which decisions are difficult to revisit once a pursuit gains momentum? What capability is missing between the operating model the company has and what the environment now requires?

The point is not to rebuild everything. It is to preserve what remains useful, identify the delta, and build the missing capability needed to close it. That requires a learning loop connecting three systems.



FIGURE 2. The Adaptive GovCon Growth Engine

The relationship among the human decision system, the growth operating system, and the federal acquisition system. These systems can remain organizationally separate; they cannot remain informationally disconnected.

These systems can remain organizationally separate. They cannot remain informationally disconnected. New evidence about the customer, technology, market, or controlling acquisition baseline must be able to change qualification, positioning, solution design, staffing, price, and pursuit posture before inherited confidence hardens into commitment.

THE ADAPTIVE LOOP

The organization must be able to answer four questions repeatedly.



FIGURE 3. The Adaptive Learning Loop

A recurring loop rather than a fixed stage-gate: the four questions repeat as new information appears, and each answer updates the next decision.

Adaptive growth is not constant reinvention. It is the ability to recognize when the current operating model is sufficient, when it is not, and what practical change the situation actually requires.

> **The operating model is not a fixed answer. It is the organization's ability to diagnose and close the gap before the environment moves past it.**

THE MODEL THAT CREATES GROWTH MAY NOT BE THE ONE THAT SUSTAINS IT

Outside GovCon, I co-founded and helped scale a MarTech SaaS platform to approximately $87,000 in monthly recurring revenue. We entered the market early and, for a period, were close to the only game in town. That advantage served us well. Customers had limited alternatives, and the business grew without requiring a particularly sophisticated retention operation. Then the market changed.

New competitors entered, some at significantly lower prices. Churn began to expose a weakness that had been less visible while competition was limited. The issue was no longer simply how to acquire customers. We needed a better way to create and manage the customer relationship after the sale.

We examined what the business already had, what the changing market now required, and where the two no longer matched. That led us to develop a new customer-relationship model designed to reduce churn and strengthen retention. The original growth model was not wrong. It had become incomplete.

The new approach contributed to the company's growth from approximately $25,000 to $87,000 in monthly recurring revenue in the span of less than a year.

Adaptation did not mean abandoning what had worked. It meant recognizing what the market now required and building the capability that was missing.

4 THE RFO AS AN OPERATING TEST

The Revolutionary FAR Overhaul is intended to simplify regulatory text, separating binding requirements from non-regulatory guidance, and placing greater emphasis on mission outcomes, sound business judgment, market research, managed risk, commercial solutions, and faster adoption of emerging technology.[2]–[5]

RFO Part 1 emphasizes mission outcomes, personal initiative, sound business judgment, innovation, teamwork, managed risk, commercial solutions, and decision-making at the appropriate level.[3] While RFO Part 10 requires market research appropriate to the circumstances during the information gathering, pre-solicitation phase,[4] RFO Part 39 explicitly emphasizes faster acquisition and secure deployment of new or emerging information and communication technology.[5] That language recognizes that acquisition outcomes depend on the quality of the information, judgment, collaboration, and execution contributed by everyone involved within each participant's legal role.

The more important operating fact is that they are being implemented unevenly through agency class deviations while formal rulemaking continues. That means the federal acquisition system cannot always be treated as a fixed backdrop. For a live pursuit, the organization must be able to determine:

- Which regulatory baseline applies
- Which agency supplement and adopted deviations control
- What remains guidance rather than authority
- Whether the solicitation incorporates the change
- What later amendments or authorized clarifications altered
- Which pursuit decisions must now be revisited

The challenge is not simply staying informed about the RFO. It is determining whether a change is relevant, what it invalidates, and whether the organization can revise the pursuit before the existing answer hardens.

Knowing that a deviation exists is not the same as understanding whether it changes the acquisition. Understanding that it changes the acquisition is not the same as allowing it to change the pursuit. Adaptive capacity is demonstrated when new evidence can overturn an inherited assumption and produce coordinated action.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR ADAPTIVE GROWTH

The RFO creates a live test of three organizational capabilities.

1. Can the company distinguish direction from authority?

A Practitioner Album may be useful without being binding. Model text does not automatically govern every agency. Broad policy direction does not silently amend a solicitation already on the street.

2. Can the company determine which changes are consequential?

Adaptive growth does not mean reacting to every policy announcement. It means determining which change affects the agency, acquisition, customer decision, or proposed operating model—and which does not.

3. Can the company translate the consequence into changed action?

Once the consequence is validated, can the organization revisit the affected decisions and align the pursuit accordingly? A change that updates only compliance artifacts but leaves the underlying solution, staffing, price, security posture, or transition plan untouched has not changed the pursuit.

> **THE IMPLEMENTATION REALITY**
>
> The RFO is not one uniform switch. Model deviation text becomes applicable to an agency only after that agency adopts it through a class deviation. Non-regulatory guides remain non-mandatory. During the transition, practices and solicitation language can vary. The operational rule remains straightforward: verify the agency's adopted authority, follow the solicitation as issued, track amendments, and do not treat future direction or a Practitioner Album as a substitute for controlling requirements.[6] This variability makes strong proposal governance more important, not less—flexibility without a verified baseline and a reliable change loop can produce faster confusion rather than faster acquisition.

"Business as usual will return" is not a neutral posture. It is a strategic forecast about an unknown, future state that may or may not come to pass.

5 THE ADAPTIVE TECHNOLOGY CONTRACTOR

The objective is to understand the agency's need, operating environment, constraints, and acquisition path well enough to determine whether the contractor can deliver a meaningful result, and perform it exceptionally well. That requires more than technical proximity to innovation.

Technical proximity to an emerging capability does not establish mission fit. The capability must be examined within the customer's operational, acquisition, security, budget, integration, adoption, and delivery environment. Adaptive market engagement helps both parties determine what is true.

The agency gains a clearer understanding of

- What the market can currently do
- Which capabilities are mature
- Which remain experimental
- What tradeoffs matter
- What evidence should be requested
- What implementation paths are realistic
- What risks must be managed

The contractor gains a clearer understanding of

- Whether it has correctly defined the need
- Whether its capability addresses the full problem or only part of it
- Which assumptions require validation
- Whether the agency can realistically adopt and operate the solution
- Whether the proposed approach can be performed as promised
- Whether the pursuit should continue, change, narrow, partner, or stop

> THE STANDARD
>
> The agency should leave better informed, and the contractor should leave with a more accurate understanding of the fit.

WHAT CREDIBLE ENGAGEMENT SOUNDS LIKE

> *"Here is what the market can do now, and here is what remains experimental."*

> *"This capability affects this mission outcome. These additional features do not materially change that result."*

> *"Our approach depends on data access, integration support, authority, or security conditions that must be validated."*

> *"A full deployment would introduce unnecessary risk. A bounded first increment would demonstrate whether the most important assumption is true."*

> *"The requested timeline is achievable only if the first outcome is narrowed."*

> *"Our capability addresses part of the condition, but we would need a partner or a different operating model to address the whole requirement."*

> *"This requirement may unintentionally limit viable commercial alternatives or create future lock-in."*

> *"The evidence does not yet support the broader claim. Here is what we can demonstrate now."*

These statements demonstrate technical judgment, performance discipline, and confidence grounded in evidence.

TRANSLATION AND VALIDATION ARE THE WORK

The solution becomes relevant only when it can be translated across mission operations, acquisition, security, budget, evaluation, integration, adoption, and delivery. The useful questions change by audience.

To the engineer

What operational result changes, what evidence demonstrates it, and what technical or integration risks remain?

To the customer

What problem must be solved first, what constraints shape the decision, and what result would establish confidence?

To the acquisition team

How do market maturity, competition, contract structure, evaluation, security, and delivery risk fit together?

To the delivery organization

Can we execute the operating model being proposed and produce the performance record on which future growth will depend?

To the pursuit team

Does the evidence support a true fit, or are we interpreting every new fact in a way that preserves the answer we entered with?

THE GROWTH POSTURE IN CURRENT MARKET CONDITIONS

The adaptive contractor builds enough mission understanding, technical credibility, acquisition awareness, and delivery discipline to determine where it can create real value and demonstrate that it can perform.

> A GROWTH POSTURE THAT MEETS THE MOMENT
>
> The goal is not merely to win the work. It is to win work the company can perform exceptionally, and use that performance to earn the government's confidence for what comes next.

6 A PRACTICAL MODEL FOR ADAPTIVE GROWTH

Adaptive growth does not begin with a universal process. It begins by examining how the organization currently learns, decides, pursues, and performs.

A contractor may already have strong customer relationships, experienced capture leaders, capable technical teams, disciplined proposal processes, or mature delivery operations. The question is not whether those capabilities exist in isolation. It is whether they remain current, connect to one another, and allow new evidence to change the company's direction when necessary. The practical model is therefore a recurring loop rather than a fixed stage-gate.

#	DISCIPLINE	OPERATING QUESTION
1	**Read the environment**	What has changed in the mission, customer organization, technology market, competitive field, budget, or acquisition baseline—and which changes are consequential to us?
2	**Examine the current model**	What do we already do well? Where does information stop moving? Which decisions are difficult to revisit? Which capabilities depend too heavily on individual knowledge or prior experience?
3	**Understand the need and test the fit**	What is happening operationally? What consequence matters? Does our capability address the actual condition, only part of it, or not enough of it to justify pursuit?
4	**Validate the assumptions**	What do we believe about the customer, technology, authority, funding, competition, security, integration, adoption, and delivery—and what current evidence supports or challenges those beliefs?

#	DISCIPLINE	OPERATING QUESTION
5	**Identify the delta**	What does this market, account, or pursuit require that our current operating model, capability, evidence, access, or delivery approach does not yet provide?
6	**Build the proportionate response**	Should we narrow the solution, develop evidence, add a partner, change the acquisition path, strengthen an internal process, redesign the adoption model, or stop the pursuit?
7	**Align, act, and learn**	Do qualification, positioning, technical approach, staffing, price, security, transition, schedule, and delivery describe one operation—and does what we learn become available to improve the next decision?

The disciplines may occur simultaneously and repeat as new information appears. The purpose is not procedural uniformity. It is to prevent the organization from continuing with an answer after the conditions supporting that answer have changed.

A mature contractor may discover that most of the required capability already exists but is fragmented. Another may find that the customer understanding is strong while evidence, decision rights, or acquisition awareness are weak. A third may conclude that the operating model is entirely adequate for its current market but insufficient for the new market it intends to enter. The point is not to manufacture a gap. It is to determine whether a meaningful gap exists and address only what the situation requires.

THE GOVERNING QUESTIONS

- What do we already have?
- What does the environment now require?
- Where is the consequential delta?
- Can we close it before the opportunity or market moves past our current answer?

> **ONE QUESTION KEEPS THE MODEL GROUNDED**
>
> Will the resulting pursuit produce work the contractor can perform credibly and exceptionally? This prevents adaptation from becoming an end in itself.

7 WHERE ADAPTIVE CAPABILITY SHOWS UP

A company may already possess adaptive capability in several areas. The practical question is where that capability remains current and connected—and where the loop may break.

OPERATING AREA	CAPABILITY THAT MAY ALREADY EXIST	THE ADAPTIVE QUESTION
Market and account selection	A target-account list, opportunity feeds, relationships, contract forecasts, and pipeline reviews	Can changing mission priorities, budgets, acquisition strategies, competitive signals, or customer evidence alter which accounts and opportunities receive investment?
Customer understanding	Experienced capture leaders, agency relationships, incumbent knowledge, and prior-performance insight	Is current understanding being revalidated, or is the organization extending familiar knowledge into conditions that may have changed?
Qualification	Gate reviews, probability scores, bid decisions, and pipeline values	What evidence would strengthen, change, or kill the pursuit thesis—and can that evidence overcome internal enthusiasm or sunk cost?
Positioning	Capability statements, win themes, discriminators, and marketing collateral	Has the positioning been tested against the customer's actual condition, alternatives, constraints, and decision criteria, or merely made more persuasive internally?
Technology fit	Strong products, technical experts, demonstrations, and solution architectures	Can the company distinguish technical possibility from mission fit, adoption readiness, acquisition viability, and performable delivery?
Evidence	Past performance, prototypes, case studies, metrics, and technical validation	Does the evidence demonstrate the specific outcome being claimed, and is the organization willing to narrow the claim when it does not?

OPERATING AREA	CAPABILITY THAT MAY ALREADY EXIST	THE ADAPTIVE QUESTION
Acquisition awareness	Contracts specialists, compliance processes, vehicles, and regulatory knowledge	Can the organization distinguish policy direction from controlling authority and determine whether a change should alter the pursuit?
Organizational knowledge	CRM records, shared drives, meeting notes, and relationship histories	Is knowledge merely stored, or can it be retrieved, challenged, connected to decisions, and updated when reality changes?
Pursuit alignment	Capture plans, solution reviews, pricing processes, color teams, and proposal governance	Do technical, staffing, pricing, security, transition, and delivery still describe the same operation after assumptions change?
Vehicle activation	IDIQ access, task-order teams, customer relationships, and reusable proposal assets	Is the vehicle being treated as an award already won, or as a market requiring continuing account development, qualification, evidence, and learning?
Delivery feedback	CPARS, program reviews, customer feedback, lessons learned, and performance metrics	Does contract performance update future positioning, qualification, solution design, and claims—or remain separated from growth?
AI and technology enablement	Drafting tools, CRM automation, search, document repositories, and analytics	Is technology increasing output volume, or improving retrieval, change detection, evidence traceability, decision quality, and institutional memory under human control?

WHAT CHANGES IN PRACTICE

The visible difference is not that an adaptive organization has more meetings, more tools, or a more elaborate process. It is that the organization can trace a change from evidence to consequence:

- A new fact appeared.
- An assumption was reconsidered.
- The affected decision owner evaluated it.
- Qualification, positioning, solution, staffing, price, acquisition posture, or delivery changed where necessary.
- The revised answer became part of the organization's working knowledge.

Some companies will already perform this well in several areas. Others will recognize isolated strengths but no reliable connection among them. The diagnostic value lies in locating where the loop stops, not in assigning the company to a simplistic category.

> **THE POINT**
>
> Adaptive capability is not the presence of every practice. It is the organization's ability to recognize which capability the situation requires, determine whether it has it, and close the material gap without rebuilding what already works.

8 THE ORGANIZATION MUST BE ABLE TO CHANGE ITS MIND

The FAR is being rewritten, RFO implementation is unfolding unevenly, and emerging technologies can change faster than traditional pursuit cycles. In that environment, customer intelligence, acquisition assumptions, and solution logic can expire during the pursuit itself.

The challenge is not simply getting capture, technical, pricing, contracts, and proposal teams to collaborate. It is ensuring that new information can change the company's decision before inherited solutions, sunk effort, and internal momentum make the answer difficult to reverse.

An adaptive organization must detect relevant change, challenge stale assumptions, and revise the pursuit before the environment moves past its existing answer.

TRY TO KILL THE ASSUMPTION BEFORE THE CUSTOMER DOES

My Python, quantitative research, and algorithm-development work taught me a discipline I now apply to capture and proposals: define what evidence would invalidate the thesis, then actively look for it.

I think of it as a kill strategy. Instead of asking only, "How do we strengthen this win theme or solution?" ask: What would prove our customer interpretation, technical claim, or operating assumption wrong? Current evidence should survive deliberate challenge before it becomes positioning, proposal language, pricing logic, or an AI-assisted output. The goal is not cynicism. It is to kill weak assumptions early—before they become polished, priced, and submitted. A weak thesis does not become true because the proposal team makes it persuasive.

AI CAN ACCELERATE THE LOOP. IT CANNOT REPLACE JUDGMENT.

AI helped me formulate and organize my thinking for this white paper. It helped collect ideas, identify connections, test structures, and turn a large body of thought into something I could examine. The version you are reading is nowhere close to the first AI-assisted draft. The substantive work began after the draft existed.

This paper went through repeated kill passes. Claims were challenged, narrowed, or removed. Generic language was cut. Sections were reorganized. Arguments that sounded compelling but could not survive scrutiny were discarded. Each revision required a human decision about what was accurate, useful, defensible, and genuinely connected to the thesis.

That is the role AI can play inside an adaptive organization. It can shorten the distance between new information and something worth evaluating. It can help identify what changed, locate relevant evidence, compare assumptions, preserve knowledge, and expose contradictions before they spread through a pursuit.

But it does not decide which evidence matters, whether the source is current, when an assumption has failed, or whether the organization should change course.

> **AI can accelerate the learning loop. It cannot supply the judgment—or the willingness to change—that makes the loop useful.**

AI helped me get to the real work faster. It did not remove the real work.

9 AN ADAPTIVE-GROWTH DIAGNOSTIC

The purpose of this diagnostic is not to classify the organization as adaptive or non-adaptive. Most companies will find that they already have important parts of the capability. The more useful questions are: which strengths remain current; which practices are effective but disconnected; where does new information stop changing decisions; and what does the company's growth strategy now require that its current operating model does not yet provide?

#	AREA	DISCUSSION QUESTION
1	**Environmental awareness**	What changes are we tracking across the mission, customer organization, technology market, competition, budget, and acquisition environment—and how do we determine which are consequential to us?
2	**Mission understanding**	Can we explain the customer's current operational condition, consequence, and desired outcome without beginning with our product or capability?
3	**Demonstrated fit**	Can we state what our capability changes, what evidence supports that claim, what assumptions must be true, and what it does not yet prove?
4	**Account focus**	Have we intentionally selected the agencies, programs, stakeholders, and use cases where we can create credible value—and can current evidence change those priorities?
5	**Qualification discipline**	What evidence would strengthen, narrow, reshape, or kill the pursuit thesis? Can that evidence overcome enthusiasm, sunk effort, or an executive preference to continue?
6	**Decision system**	Do we understand both the customer's decision environment and our own internal decision rights? Who can qualify, challenge, change, stop, or accept risk in the pursuit?
7	**Acquisition interpretation**	Can we distinguish broad policy direction, nonbinding guidance, controlling authority, solicitation language, amendments, and the practical consequence for the acquisition in front of us?

#	AREA	DISCUSSION QUESTION
8	**Evidence discipline**	Are our metrics, demonstrations, past performance, resumes, technical claims, and delivery assumptions current, approved, relevant, and traceable to the result being claimed?
9	**Pursuit coherence**	After new information appears, do the technical approach, staffing, price, security posture, transition, schedule, evidence, and delivery model still describe the same operation?
10	**Organizational learning**	Can customer and pursuit knowledge be retrieved, challenged, updated, and connected to decisions—or is it merely stored in systems, inboxes, and individual memories?
11	**Performance feedback**	Do delivery results, customer feedback, CPARS, task-order experience, and lessons learned change future qualification, positioning, evidence, solution design, and claims?
12	**Adaptive capacity**	When an assumption fails, can the organization determine what the new information affects and revise the appropriate decisions before the opportunity, market, or customer moves past the existing answer?

The purpose is not to produce a maturity score or manufacture deficiencies. A contractor may already perform strongly in several areas. It may discover that the required capability exists but is fragmented, that one missing connection is slowing the entire loop, or that its current model is entirely adequate for the markets it intends to serve.

The diagnostic is intended to reveal the delta between what the organization has now, what its strategy and environment require, and what must be preserved, connected, strengthened, built, or stopped.

THE GOVERNING QUESTION

Can the organization recognize when its current answer no longer fits—and determine what practical change the situation actually requires?

10 THE OPERATING QUESTION

Federal acquisition remains exceptional for good reasons. Public funds, competition, delegated authority, security, auditability, and mission consequence require disciplines that ordinary commercial selling does not fully address. Those constraints are not obstacles to work around. They are part of the operating environment the contractor must understand.

The FAR is being rewritten. Agency implementation is unfolding unevenly. Mission priorities, available technologies, security expectations, budgets, and acquisition strategies can all change while an organization is still relying on knowledge developed under earlier conditions.

The answer is not to discard relationships, experience, capture discipline, proposal process, or proven delivery practices. It is to stop assuming that prior success makes them permanently sufficient.

Some contractors already possess much of the capability described in this paper. They have strong customer access, experienced leaders, disciplined reviews, credible technology, mature delivery operations, or reliable proposal processes. The question is whether those strengths remain connected to current evidence.

- **Can customer understanding be revalidated?**
- **Can the company distinguish technical possibility from true, performable fit?**
- **Can a change in acquisition authority alter the pursuit rather than merely update the compliance matrix?**
- **Can delivery experience refine future positioning and claims?**
- **Can evidence overturn a solution the organization has already begun to prefer?**
- **Can the company determine what it already has, identify the consequential delta, and build only what the situation requires?**

THE UNCOMFORTABLE PART

The greatest risk is not always that the organization lacks capability. It may have capable people, legitimate experience, strong relationships, a disciplined proposal function, and a history of successful delivery—and still continue operating from assumptions that no longer fully match the environment.

> **The risk is not incompetence. It is competence optimized for conditions that have changed.**

Adaptive growth does not mean rebuilding the company every time the market moves. It means preserving the capabilities that still work while remaining able to detect when an assumption, process, solution, or growth posture needs to be reconsidered.

FOR SMALL AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGY CONTRACTORS

The opportunity is not to adopt another universal model. It is to build the organizational capacity to:

- Understand the environment as it currently exists
- Determine where the company can create and demonstrate real value
- Test whether the assumed fit is true
- Identify what is missing between current capability and the desired market
- Build a proportionate response
- Perform the work exceptionally
- Let performance and new evidence improve the next decision

Not every contractor will need the same capabilities at the same level. A company protecting a stable incumbent position faces a different problem from one entering a new agency, activating a contract vehicle, commercializing an emerging technology, or growing beyond founder-led relationships. The work is determining which problem the organization actually has.

THE FINAL STANDARD

The adaptive organization is not the one that predicts every regulatory change, market shift, customer need, or competitive move correctly. It is the one capable of discovering that its answer is no longer current—and changing that answer before confidence, investment, and internal momentum make correction too difficult.

THE ADVANTAGE

The environment will keep moving. The advantage is not having one permanent answer. It is building an organization capable of recognizing when the answer must change—and changing it in time.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Gloria Gunn is a federal proposal and pursuit leader who has built proposal, technical-writing, and task-order operating systems for government technology contractors. She led the successful small-business prime response that secured a position on the $1.4 billion CAAS IV IDIQ for Air Combat Command and later managed complex DoD pursuits across enterprise IT, cybersecurity, facilities, and mission support.

Since 2016, she has built commercial growth, SaaS, publishing, quantitative-research, and governed AI systems. Her current work applies those capabilities to federal acquisition change, technical pursuits, proposal governance, and organizational learning.

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NOTES & SOURCES

Official references used for the RFO and technology-acquisition discussion. Acquisition and rulemaking information verified through July 24, 2026. RFO implementation remains agency-specific during the transition.

1. **Acquisition.gov — Revolutionary FAR Overhaul overview**
   The initiative's stated goals include faster acquisitions, greater competition, and better results; it also distinguishes the streamlined FAR from non-regulatory buying guides.

2. **Acquisition.gov — RFO Frequently Asked Questions**
   Explains the two-track implementation, model-deviation adoption, non-mandatory buying guides, industry impact, and the testing period.

3. **Acquisition.gov — RFO Part 1, Federal Acquisition Regulations System**
   Emphasizes mission outcomes, sound business judgment, innovation, teamwork, managed risk, commercial solutions, and the roles of acquisition team members.

4. **Acquisition.gov — RFO Part 10, Market Research**
   Requires market research appropriate to the circumstances and encourages responsible, constructive exchanges with industry while preserving fairness and procurement integrity.

5. **Acquisition.gov — RFO Part 39, Acquisition of Information and Communication Technology**
   Emphasizes faster acquisition and secure deployment of new or emerging technology, managed risk, and modular contracting through successive interoperable increments.

6. **Acquisition.gov — RFO FAR Part Deviation Guide**
   Provides the definitive list of rewritten FAR parts and agency deviations; model text is not applicable to an agency until adopted through a class deviation.

7. **Federal Register, Federal Acquisition Regulation**
   Revolutionary Federal Acquisition Regulation Overhaul Parts 1, 2, 4, 33, 39, 40, and 53, FAR Case 2026-001, 91 FR 37550, June 23, 2026.

8. **Acquisition.gov, FAR Federal Register Publications**
   Requesting Comments, showing FAR Cases 2026-001, 2026-002, 2026-005, and 2026-007 and the July 23, 2026 comment deadline.

> **PRACTITIONER NOTE**
>
> This paper is a strategic and operational point of view, not legal, contracting, cybersecurity, or procurement advice. Contractors should verify the current FAR, agency supplement, adopted deviations, solicitation, amendments, clauses, and authorized specialist guidance for each pursuit.