

QUESTION: How would you suggest that we change our DOD procurement practice to effect improvement and utilization of R. & D. funds?

MR. WARD: Well, I believe I could answer it very nicely to you and very unpopularly to many. First off, as procurement agencies, you have got to get rid of a lot of the checks and inhibitions that are thrown around your work presumably to protect the Government. Procurement officers should be permitted to use more judgment, and to have less fear of the need for substantiation of things that go wrong. They must feel that they will be backed up on this.

That is No. 1. No. 2, after a research team is selected and the objective has been properly stated you do not turn them loose. You then proceed to monitor them in such a way as to restrict their efforts in many ways. What that does is sometimes unbelievable-- to the overall cost and to the desired accomplishment. It sometimes inhibits to such an extent that it also serves to prevent some of the best brains from working on the project. Many creative types will not work under those conditions.

It so happened that I was asked to address a meeting some years ago at Wright Field, after I got out of my then aviation company and at which time I was a free agent. The address was on the subject of your question. I had the time of my life. I said, "I do not give a darn what you do to me. I'm not here to get any contracts. I'm going to tell you how it looks now from a long period of working for you and your behalf." The points expressed were some of the things that I was able to develop as facts by using specific examples. We would be told to do a certain thing--and in that day it was much more down to earth than what we are talking about nowadays--then after we had been given the job and the specifications for it, as an example, we would be told, "No, you must not use that alloy. You must use an A&N alloy of such and such." Well, you see, the A&N Standardization Boards had not gotten around yet to adapting this new alloy to their standards. But the procurement regulations stated, "You must use A&N standards and materials." In such instances the contract objective would be defeated because we would be forced to turn backward toward a lower level of performance and often a higher cost.

This is what may occur when you try to tell a contractor how to carry out his job after you have strictly defined the end objective. For Heaven's sake, do not select the research team if you