



Summary

Navigating the Evolving Landscape of Contract Management

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Introduction

Kyle Peterson, Ryan Connell, and Dr. Dolores Kuchina-Musina tackle compliance, regulatory requirements, and practical strategies. These are the key components for navigating the current challenges within Contract Management.

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 **Optimize23**

Introducing our speakers



Kyle Peterson

Moderating our roundtable is Vice President of Customer Success here at Visible Thread, Kyle Peterson. In a previous life, Kyle was a Contracts Manager in the aerospace industry.



Ryan Connell

Ryan has almost seven years experience working within the [Commercial Item Group](#) at the DCMA. Starting his role as Deputy Director last year, he knows a thing or two about leveraging technology.



Dr. Dolores Kuchina-Musina

Chief Disruptor at [REXOTA Solutions](#), Dolores's company focuses on creative contract solutions, while helping Government and industry get connected. A self-confessed "contracts nerd", she wrote her dissertation on other transaction authorities. Her field of expertise include the evolving landscape of contract management and how optimization can help.



Challenges facing contracts managers

The first item Kyle, Ryan and Dolores agree on is the pigeonholing of contracts teams. Bureaucratic in nature, they wield lots of red tape and have a tendency to spout legalese. Unsurprisingly, this leads to contracts managers feeling isolated from their commercial partners.

Why is this? Well, Ryan equates the level of bureaucracy to the size of an organization. Dolores, meanwhile, believes it also boils down to company structure.

Having experienced both types of organizations, Dolores can attest that breaking through these cultural barriers are challenging. However, defining exactly what a contract manager does is key. It facilitates passionate people in the field to break boundaries and become a trusted partner for the programs team. And we all know the 'programs vs contracts' debate is ongoing...

This shift in definition results in the contract manager collaborating with the Finance person. Before you know it, you have a cross-functional team communicating and supporting each other.

Further potential pitfalls...

We've identified that the pigeonholing of Contracts Managers can lead to isolation. What are some additional challenges facing the field?

The manual nature of the contracts management function can also hamper proceedings. Haste makes waste, so contracts must take their time if required to go through – let's say – five different RFPs. This tedious (yet necessary) process can bring further isolation. Dolores has been on both sides of the process, and gives more insight from the [5:40 minute mark](#).

Nobody wants to be the bottleneck at the tailend of procurement. This is where early involvement and clear cross-functional communication sets you up for success.

"If organisations are valuing the contracts team as part of the sales enablement piece within the company, then the contracts team really gets brought in early. Then you're able to support the proposal efforts and come into the strategic planning part of it. If you're seen as more of the compliance person, or the person that says 'no' a lot, you're going to be isolated."

[Dr Dolores Kuchina-Musina](#)

"Again, it depends on how the organization is structured. You can be viewed as an enabler or used as a compliance check. The barrier between people making some bad business decisions."

[Dr Dolores Kuchina-Musina](#)



Best practices around silos

Before we traumatize too many people with tension lag time issues, let's pivot into more productive practices. Alongside organizational design, how else can we start to break down silos to reduce that procurement lag time?

In addition to clarity around roles, other ways to mitigate silos and break down that lag time include...

- Utilizing all tools available to speed up the process. For example, tools can help accelerate obtaining electronic signatures, keep you aligned within the negotiation process, etc.
- Implement a clear timeline for providing contracts. By using project management solutions to track progress the team's process, you can manage expectations.
- Consider adopting an agile framework. Break the process down into small sprints to onboard the right partners early.

Ryan delves into a real-world example of onboarding the right people ASAP from the [11:22 minute mark](#). In short, it can save a project tens of thousands of dollars.

“The number one way is ensuring everybody understands what role they have to play within the process. Also within the value chain of getting the contract negotiated. Everyone wants to get to that close, right?”

Dr Dolores Kuchina-Musina

“There's something to be said about an agile framework – trying to set up a process into small little sprints, while bringing the right partners in early.”

Ryan O'Connell



Tech is your friend

In order for the field to progress, you must enhance visibility. Whether it's that NDA lead-time, the teaming agreement, or wildly batting documents back and forth via email – you need to identify the repetitious parts of your processes. Then, you can automate using solutions. The resulting transparency then speeds up the process.

At the [12:52 mark](#), Kyle does a deep dive on the items to which this could be applied. This includes running RFPs or contract sets against a list of predetermined clauses.

Also ensure that you're iterating within that process. For example, if you've created your templates, and currently tracking negotiating, you can expedite things by defining what items that are repeatedly negotiated. Why might that be? Is there something in your wording that isn't sufficiently clear?

Generally, the contracts team is considered very lean in the personnel department, even when supporting very large organizations. So, if you make little tweaks towards automation, it can help expedite the process in a way that doesn't require a big financial outlay.

Now, more than ever, people worry about being replaced by technology. A mindset shift is necessary around this – particularly in contract management. Instead of fighting existing and emerging tech, see how it can work for you.

Existing tools can make the field of contract management better, faster, and more accurate. Metrics matter, particularly in terms of data-driven decision-making. Lean into it, experiment, and find the ones that work for you.

"If we can speed up some of those repetitious tasks, that allows us to run in parallel with the commercials – as opposed to being that anchor."

[Kyle Peterson](#)

"Create a process where you're not editing your template every six months. Perhaps every 18 months you could go into a review process. Enlist someone that's responsible for tracking renegotiated topics. It could be just a simple thing – like you didn't realize you've been putting in the wrong clause reference. That edit cuts down your negotiation time."

[Dr Dolores Kuchina-Musina](#)

"I don't worry about technology taking over my job. I worry about someone who has learned the technology, and is better at using it, will become a more efficient employee taking over my job!"

[Ryan O'Connell](#)



Navigating risky regulatory waters

You may have heard a lot about cybersecurity, supplier diversity vendor lock, and intellectual property concerns. With regards to the procurement side of things, what should industry buyers be aware of when navigating these regulatory waters?

“I think it’s pretty obvious that the Department is moving towards finding more non-traditional players. I mean, that’s been a narrative for several years, trying to find that balance. Trying to find them can soon become a market research exercise, which is labor intensive... But a web scrape that can highlight potential market players, even those that haven’t had a federal contract before, is of interest to me.”

Ryan O’Connell

The opportunity to identify a group of non-traditional players could potentially aid supply chain challenges. This, however, can lead to its own issues. Technology is changing very quickly, as are the solutions being offered. Trying to keep track of it all can seem like a losing battle.

“When you’re going into some of these emerging markets, it’s hard not to lean on those familiar vendors. So this market research aspect is so critical. Companies are popping up regularly trying to build a solution, and they’re trying to put it at the forefront for the government to use. Whether it’s DOD, or another agency, they’re trying to figure out how can they solve that problem... and the government is inundated with all of the information that’s coming towards them. This is where automation can help people to focus on the analytical part, while ensuring that the technology essential for the mission is being accomplished.”

Dr. Dolores Kuchina-Musina

When we get bogged down in all manner of manual processes, it can seem safer to go with who you know. Kyle and Ryan discuss how to escape this diversification rut from [21:31 minutes](#).



Final Thoughts: the future of contracts management

With automation, AI, and analytics currently trending in contract management; what's next for the field? While it's important to automate where possible within the contract space, it's also worth pinpointing aspects that require human intervention.

What do our guest speakers see coming down the contract management pipeline? Moreover, which parts of contract management should we automate and which ones should we not? Here are just some of their thoughts, you can [dig down further with them both from 31.02 minutes](#).

Ryan Connolly

“Data can improve decision-making and reduce risk in the methodical part of contract strategy. However, there is a problem-solving part of contracting where you pay experts and let them understand the FAR. They can use their problem-solving ability to make decisions and navigate regulations to pursue the best option. From the data perspective though, since Chat GPT got launched, it's been everywhere, and I've experimented with it. I haven't had a whole host of luck from the contracting perspective yet. More so write-ups and those kinds of things, more narrative. That said, there's so much data out there.

There are products on contract for how many dollars, names of cleanse, names of contracts, all that data. My team puts hundreds of market research reports together annually. Being able to read those reports, and understand that data, that is technology that we have access to. We need to figure out the best way to use and procure the data, and how to make decisions based on it after ingestion. And I know they're starting; I'm seeing it with [Advana](#) Gamechanger within the DOD space. This allows the ingestion of policy.

They've subsequently launched Gamechanger contracts, which have all of the DOD contracts. I can search a part number or search a clause and find the contracts it's in. So, you start thinking, 'Wow, there's a lot of power behind that, should I insert this clause? I don't know.' Then you hit 'search', and you can see how it's used in a thousand contracts. There's power at your fingertips. I think there are some absolute benefits that we can take advantage of.”



Dr Dolores Kuchina-Musina

“I think many people are looking to automate the contract negotiation piece or contract construction. It’s important to start with a template. Everyone hates starting from a blank page. This is why the lawyers make the big bucks; they can start from a blank page to write clauses. But it’s difficult to get there, especially if you’re writing for something that doesn’t exist currently. Tech can assist in finding similar contracts or language for reference in writing.

Earlier, I talked about tracking your negotiations. That’s something software can do. There’s software that rips through solicitations, that rips through contracts. It can point out, ‘Hey, this could be risky, this isn’t so risky, maybe this clause doesn’t belong. Things like that help flag it for you. And then you have the people that can use their discretion of like, “Can we accept this risk? Can we not accept it? Should we negotiate? Should we modify it?”

I think we can definitely automate, but we have to first understand how to automate it. Then, at what stage should someone verify the automated process and ensure it remains valid and repeatable? The automated process should be repeatable and applicable to all types of contracts.”



Key takeaways

It starts with organisational structure and how the contracts team is prioritised. Investing in solutions will free up your time so you can now focus on more value add activities.

The perception of contract management as a bureaucratic and compliance-driven function serves to limit its value. Consider it your mission to break this stereotype. Make it easier for contract managers to forge strong bonds with program teams and finance personnel for a productive cross-functional team!

Also, silos need dismantling. This reduces procurement lag time and missed opportunities. Organizations can optimize contract management by comprehending the role plus using all tools available. Employing clear timelines and adopting agile frameworks are other ways to achieve greater contract management success. These steps will improve efficiency and collaboration, alongside enhanced risk management and better business outcomes.

Dr. Dolores Kuchina-Musina and Ryan Connolly left us with these final points.

- ✓ Contracts people are allies. Advancing the profession requires teamwork, plus using proper terms to achieve goals.
- ✓ Contract management is iterative and requires continuous improvement. It also needs research to locate technologies that can create efficiencies and cut turnaround time.
- ✓ Investing in solutions like VisibleThread can free up time and improve professionals' skills by embracing technology.
- ✓ Claiming there isn't enough time/resources to invest in technology can be more costly than not investing.

We hope you found this to be an informative roundtable, providing sound insights to help optimize contract management processes. The full session is available below:

[View full session](#)



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