



## **All Things Financial Management**

### **Episode 7: The Functions and Future of the FM Workforce with Ms. Kirstin Riesbeck**

**INTRO:** Welcome to “All Things Financial Management,” an ASMC podcast sponsored by Guidehouse, where we discuss all things under the auspices of the Comptrollers’ Office and address top-of-mind issues in the Financial Management community.

**TOM RHOADS:** Good Morning. My name is Tom Rhoads. I'm a Partner with Guidehouse, where I work with clients across the DoD and other government agencies to transform and optimize their financial management functions. I will be your host for today's Podcast.

For those of you who may be new to this podcast series, let me take just a moment to provide some background on the American Society of Military Comptrollers. The American Society of Military Comptrollers, or ASMC, is the non-profit educational and professional organization for individuals – military, civilian, corporate, or retired -- involved or interested in the field of defense financial management. ASMC promotes the education and training of its members and supports the development and advancement of the profession of defense financial management. The Society provides membership; education and professional development; and certification programs to keep members and the overall financial management community abreast of current issues and encourages the exchange of information, techniques, and approaches.

And with that, I'd like to introduce our guest today, Ms. Riesbeck. Ms. Riesbeck serves as the Director, Human Capital & Resource Management, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) and DoD Functional Community Manager for approximately 54,000 DoD Financial Management (FM) civilians and military. She is responsible for the DoD FM workforce strategy and the DoD Financial Management Certification Program. She is the senior administrative official for OUSD(C) with oversight of management and administration functions including resource management, budgets, contracts, facilities, personnel, security and correspondence. Most recently, Ms. Riesbeck served as Director of the Administrator's Action Group for the Transportation Security Administration where she led a Futures Team directly supporting the TSA Administrator by anticipating challenges and opportunities, analyzing issues, encouraging innovative thinking, and advancing the TSA Administrator's vision.

Ms. Riesbeck has more than 18 years in federal service focused on homeland and national security, international affairs, and science and technology policy. Ms. Riesbeck holds a J.D. with a concentration in National Security Law & Policy from George Mason University, a M.A. in National Security and Strategic Studies from the U.S. Naval War College, and a B.A. in Public Policy with a concentration in Science and Technology Policy from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Ms. Riesbeck, thanks for being with us this morning.

**KIRSTIN RIESBECK:** Thank you for having me.

**TOM:** Would you mind taking a moment and just sharing with us your journey and what brought you to your current role as the Director of Human Capital and Resource Management within OSD?



**KIRSTIN:** Yes, thank you. Let me start by saying I grew up in a military family. I had two grandfathers that both served in the Army during World War II, and my dad served in the Marine Corps down in eastern North Carolina and some of my earliest memories were of him serving and in particular, we just passed the anniversary of the Beirut Barracks bombings and he was one of the guys that went over after that to help resecure that facility over there, and those were really some of my formative memories of what it meant to serve the country and be a part of the military.

Growing up in eastern North Carolina, I was really used to the sound of freedom and you'd see the big signs going down to the beach when you're in high school, so I knew from a very early age that service was something that was very important to me and that I would, at some point, try to serve the country in some way. So shortly after 9/11, I joined the Federal Service. My first job was with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and I was the IAEA, International Atomic Energy Agency, desk officer where I got to see and work first-hand with the intersection of nuclear safety and nuclear security missions.

From there, when the Department of Homeland Security stood up, I made the jump and went over because it was a brand new mission. It was very important. 9/11 was seared in everybody's mind at that point and there was a common goal across the nation of securing of our way of life against terrorism.

So moving over to DHS, my first job was with the Science and Technology Director where I had the opportunity to negotiate some bilateral and multilateral science and technology cooperation agreements, looking at how we can use science and tech to secure our nation.

When Katrina hit, I volunteered and went down to serve in the response functions for Katrina and that's where I met a bunch of really cool Coasties, US Coast Guard members and shortly after Katrina, I ended up making the jump over to the US Coast Guard, where I served with Admiral Allen for a number of years and then in a bunch of different positions including state local travel engagements at the Coast Guard.

I next moved over to what was, at the time, the National Protection Programs Directorate, NPPD, at the Department of Homeland Security and their focus was on cyber and critical infrastructure protection. This is now the agency known as CISA. Then, most recently, transferred over to TSA where I got to work transportation security challenges across the federal space.

So, this past year is really when I made the jump over to the Department of Defense. And I joined the Comptroller's team last September. It's a great team and in this role, I get to lead the financial management community across the Department of Defense. I've really enjoyed this role and it is really insightful to get to look across the department at the priorities and play a key role in facilitating the operations of the front line war fighter.

**TOM:** Thank you for sharing that Ms. Riesbeck. It's really neat how a lot of us are impacted by mentors or role models or parents in our formative years and how that comes into play later on in life and for your decision after 9/11 to join federal service. I want to thank you for your service. In your current role can you share with us a little bit about the FM community? Who makes up the FM community within DOD and what kind of challenges they face?

**KIRSTIN:** The FM community is a really large group. There's over 55,000 employees, military and civilian members across the department that make up this community. We know that about 80% is civilian and



about 20% is military. The splits across the services are probably what you would expect, with the Army taking the lion share of almost 30% of the FM federal work force. But the functions of the FM community are also really diverse. We have over 12 different categories or codes series for the FM community. It ranges from everything from financial clerical assistance to civilian pay, vouchers, budget analysis, and accounting and auditing, just to name a few. But we also know that there's a lot of functions in other job series that also include FM skills. So, it's important that we recognize the workforce across the whole department and those positions that people play. What's also interesting is the function that the FM community plays for the War Fighter. DOD is a really large and complex organization, and when you look across the number of employees, I think DOD has over three million civilian and military members stationed around the world. This is larger than populations for nearly 100 countries around the globe. So, we are larger than most small countries here at DOD. We also know that we have presence in 40 countries around the world, all 50 states and seven territories. We're working in air, land, sea, cyber and now space. That's a lot of domains and when you look at the amount of assets that we have to take care of for the department, we're talking about over \$700 billion in discretionary appropriations and more than 603,000 buildings and structures that range from everything from runways and training facilities to medical facilities, housing and industrial complexes. So, this is a really large variety of functions that the FM community has to serve on a daily basis to ensure that our war fighters are able to do their job.

**TOM:** It's amazing when you talk about the size and scale of the Department of Defense and I doubt there's too many organizations that have approximately 54,000 accountants that work for them and it just creates an amazing challenge when there's that size and scale of an organization and the FM workforce that you're leading. How have the FM roles and responsibilities changed over time?

**KIRSTIN:** That's a great question. If you look at where this Comptroller is trying to head, we're really looking at the roles of the FM community coming out of those maybe back offices where we're doing the number crunching and really to the decision table. So, there's a role for the FM community as a strategic advisor again, for the war fighters and the decision makers, the secretary and the dep sec. So, really being at the table to help inform those tough decisions that they have to make.

And I think what this means for the FM community is that we need to, as a whole, become smarter on how we make data driven decisions and provide insight to help leadership in those challenging times to make those educated decisions.

**TOM:** So, it sounds like for the FM work force into the future, they're going to be more strategic advisors and provide data and information that allow decision makers to have better insights. In order to do that, what skills will the FM workforce need to be successful in that environment?

**KIRSTIN:** So, we know that future trends in the FM community will focus on data analytics. You can see a lot of the work that we're doing within the department with Advana being able to pull in information from across the department and help it make sense and inform our decisions. We're also seeing a lot of robotics process automation or RPA as well as AI and machine learning to help the FM community do their job better. We also see changes in terms of customer services and expectations, and this is a direct impact from the pandemic where we've had to progress faster in the pandemic because we've moved to



this virtual environment, so we've had to find ways to work smarter and more dispersed and we've had to make decisions quicker.

So, of course now know that we can do that, that we can be more agile, that we can look for new ways and innovate quicker. I think going into the future, they're going to continue to expect that. So, in the future, I think the FM workforce is gonna need to be much more kind of data savvy and we're gonna look to be more innovative and agile as we implement new procedures and new tools to be able to do what we do best.

So, within the FM community, it's really important that we continue to promote a culture of learning across the board and part of this is making sure that we have the resources available, but another piece is making sure that we can bring the community together to have important conversations and to really challenge each other. And so, we've done that through a number of new activities this past year. For example we started a brown bag series, a virtual training series that we've recently relabeled the FM Vision Exchange, and this is an opportunity for folks to come into a virtual environment learn something new about either a competency or hopefully in the future we're going to have more conversations around current events within the department around FM and really have people have a forum that they can talk about and ask questions about what's going on and why and get folks from all the way across the department so it's not just within a service.

We've also started hosting more forums like the succession planning forum that we hosted last month, to really encourage folks to have conversations about specific topics on growing the community, in this case making sure that we have plans for talent management across the FM community in place and sharing best practices so that the offices can institute those within their own organizations. We also have the FM awards program to recognize key talent in our organization and really celebrate the accomplishments of the FM community.

**TOM:** It's interesting that for the FM community, they're going to need to be as you mentioned, data savvy and probably have an understanding of RPA and IA machine learning. How is your organization working to arm the workforce to be successful with these new skills?

**KIRSTIN:** So that's a great question. In the next couple of months you should see the Comptroller will be publishing the DOD FM strategy. And in that, we're going to be looking at a couple of key priorities that will focus around empowering those data driven decisions and making sure that the workforce has the tools that they need. So, this includes making sure that we have the platforms and the applications that allow us to make these decisions and share this information across the department to help inform those decisions.

So, I think you'll see a real focus on training the workforce in these new skill sets. and we're looking at that from the DOD FM community standpoint as making sure that we are thinking about new ways to convey information, so whether that's micro learning or things like stackable certificates making training and education easy to access. We're going to do this through some new portal platforms we're hoping to get on board where we can really create a community, share information seek out and have mentorship engagements across the department, and really be able to also network and engage with academia, both within the department as well as outside. So when you think about the Defense Resource Management Institution Naval Post Grad School, CFO Academy, really utilizing those resources



and making them available across the department, but then looking outside at partners in private sector and academia to bring in the best practices because I think one of the key things with the Department of Defense and the size of our workforce is we really have to be a leader in the FM space, really be a thought leader and bring in the best and the brightest to do this work. I also think that you'll see the comptroller focused on the actual tools to help folks improve the way that they do work and that way we'll see some initiatives for modernizing some of our platforms over the next couple of years.

**TOM:** Ms. Riesbeck, thank you for your leadership and helping the FM workforce to move to this, strategic advisor type role and being intimate with data and the most recent automated tools to help manage and to package data in a way that can be useful. For our last question this morning, we wanted to ask you, knowing what you know now, what advice would you give to new careerists as they enter the federal workforce?

**KIRSTIN:** So, Tom, in the beginning I talked about my windy career through the federal space and I shared a lot of that because I'm sure that it doesn't necessary all align to a traditional FM career path. But what I was taught at an early age in my federal career was to seek out new opportunities and to say yes. So, as I went through my career and new opportunities came up, whether it was, the call for volunteers to go down to Katrina or it was a need for a new arctic strategy and help writing and working with our tribal and indigenous populations. Saying yes created new opportunities and it gave me new experiences that helped me think about problems differently and I think that my advice to anybody starting out in the federal space is not to pigeonhole yourself and to say yes and seek out those opportunities to explore beyond your comfort zone and try something new because I think that will make you a stronger policy person a stronger government servant and it will give you those perspectives to really help you understand the new and emergent issues at hand as we go into the future. So, say yes.

**TOM:** That's really good advice. And do appreciate that. And once again, Ms. Riesbeck, thank you for your service and thank you so much for your time this morning.

**KIRSTIN:** Thank you again for having me.

**OUTRO:** Thank you for tuning in to "All Things Financial Management," an ASMC podcast series sponsored by Guidehouse. You can find all our episodes on ASMC's Engage platform and at <http://www.guidehouse.com/allthingsfinancialmanagement>.

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