

HONR269i

To the Moon and Back: The Apollo Program

Discussion Questions

Session 7: The Command Module

This class session provides our first of three opportunities to look at the major contracts that were central the Apollo program. So let's use this opportunity to think a bit more broadly about the nature of this contracting process.

1. North American was the prime contractor for the Command and Service Modules, but many of the parts were built by subcontractors. What advantages are there to having a prime contractor who has subcontractors (as opposed to NASA directly contracting with those subcontractors)? What are the disadvantages of such an approach?
2. In the chapter we read from "Digital Apollo", Mindell writes about the "culture" and "values" of the people at MIT who built the navigation system and the ways in which those factors shaped their decisions. Apply this perspective to the people at North American who built the Command Module. What were their culture and values like, and how did that shape their decisions? Then do the same for the people in the Apollo Spacecraft Program Office at the Manned Spacecraft Center – in what ways were their culture and values different, and how did that shape their decisions?
3. Much of what we have read talks about how NASA tried to influence the actions of their contractors. Let's flip the question – what can contractors do to influence the actions of NASA? Don't focus here on things outside the contracting relationship – we talked about lobbying last week, but this week let's focus on things that contractors can do to influence NASA that are within the scope of their contracted activities.