



What is an Army but the Soldiers?

A Critical Assessment of the Army's Human Capital Management System

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE WROTE in *Coriolanus*, “What is a city but the people?” In the same vein, what is an army but the soldiers? The most important activity our institutional Army conducts is human capital management—the assessment, development, and employment of soldiers. However, as analyses by the Secretary of the Army’s Generating Force Reform Task Force and numerous others have suggested, many of these systems are antiquated and flawed. A 2011 survey found that 65 percent of Active Duty general officers rated personnel management as one of the worst performing functions in the Army. As one general noted, “Human capital [management] is the most important, yet the least agile system.”¹ In other words, we are an Army of people, but what we do worst is manage those people. These complex systems are now faltering under the strain of persistent conflict and changing demographics. Significant adjustments are necessary to best meet the needs of the Army in the future.

The Army’s people and organizations are not meeting their potential because of inflexible legacy institutions and systems, based on antiquated, industrial-age management theory.² Secretary Robert Gates recently asked, “How can the Army break up the institutional concrete, its bureaucratic rigidity in its assignments and promotion processes, in order to retain, challenge, and inspire its best, brightest, and most battle-tested young officers to lead the service in the future?”³

The chief of staff of the Army’s transition team also found personnel management an area of significant concern. An *Army Times* article succinctly summed up the team’s findings:

“Personnel management is a source of frustration, the report said. Manning remains the biggest frustration. In the words of one leader, the order to ‘man, train and equip’ has become ‘train, equip and man.’ ‘Need a personnel system that restores human interface,’ one respondent said. ‘Need a major course correction in our personnel management. We need to put the person back in personnel management.’ Officers also said they want to have more input in their career paths.”⁴

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PHOTO: U.S. Army SGT Michael James, center, a human resources specialist assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, Task Force 24, quizzes his soldiers on Army tasks and drills at Cap Draa, Morocco, 6 May 2011. (U.S. Army photo, PFC Chalon Hutson)

The Problem

The Army's human capital management enterprise is a complex system within a larger complex environment. There are numerous competing interests, demand nodes, organizations, laws, and regulations pulling and pushing people in opposing directions. Figure 1 illustrates some of the complexity present in the Army's personnel management system. In this complex system, the requirements set forth by Congress and the Department of Defense drive the Army to develop policy and processes that dramatically affect the life cycle needs of operational force units and individual professionals. Understanding interactions within this complex system illuminates some of the root problems with the Army's current human capital management enterprise.

The management system has four primary shortcomings:

- It struggles to adapt and respond quickly to changing Army requirements.
- It lacks clarity in its personnel inventory and capabilities.
- The Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (DOPMA) constrains the efforts to match talent with requirements, resulting in short and rigid career timelines.
- It has lost the trust of many due to the friction and imbalance between unit manning and individual development.

The Army must resolve these issues to have a flexible, competitive human capital management system and the talent it requires to win on future battlefields.

Failure to adapt and respond quickly. The Army has undergone enormous change during the past decade. Unfortunately, significantly less of that change occurred in the institutional Army's human

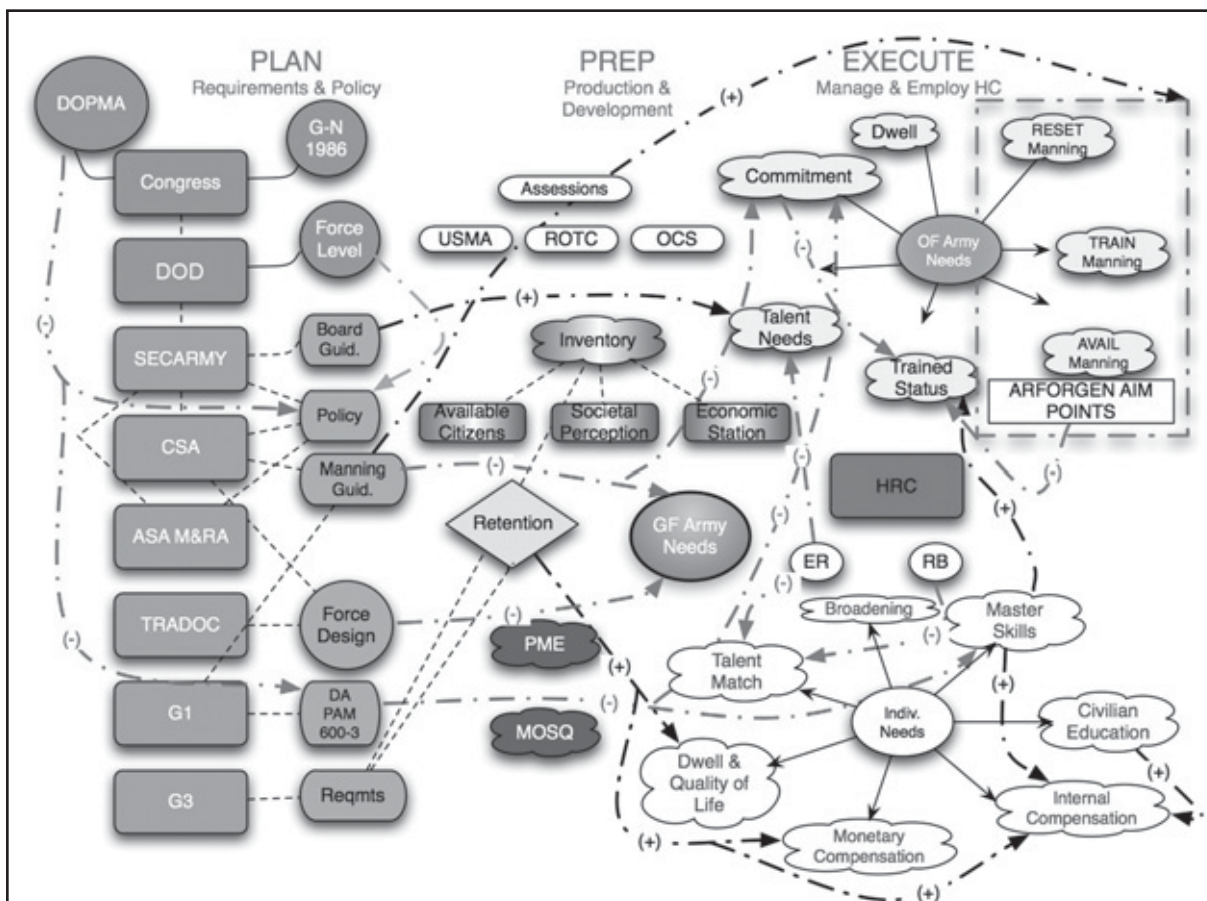


Figure 1: Army Human Capital Management System.

ARFORGEN Army Force Generation ASA M&RA Assistant Secretary of Army-Manpower and Reserve Affairs CSA Chief of Staff of the Army DOPMA Defense Officer Personnel Management Act of 1980 ER Evaluation Report RB Records Brief G-N 1986 The Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 GF Generating Force HRC Human Resources Command HC Human Capital MOSQ Military Occupational Skill Qualification OF Operational Force PME Professional Military Education



(SPC Charles Smith, U.S. Army)

A U.S. soldier assigned to 1st Armored Division Stability Transition Team explains different ways to improve Iraq to the Iraqi Army during a meeting in Layla, Iraq, 2 July 2010.

capital management arena. Emerging requirements such as military transition teams in Iraq and the establishment of the Army's Cyber Command were significant shocks to the institution, which failed to adapt and respond quickly. When the Multi-National Force-Iraq commander provided a detailed proposal for the fielding of military transition teams in Iraq, he included broad definitions for the personnel requirements. For instance, the rank of the logistics advisor could range from sergeant first class through captain, but the individual had to be someone who understood and could train the Iraqis on battalion sustainment. That allowed the Army to fill the slot with a supply sergeant, a transporter, an infantryman who had been an S4, or support platoon leader. The Army (G1, G8, and G3) immediately rejected the flexibility, insisting they could not manage like that. The requisition did not match the requirements system.⁵

The Army's resourcing of Cyber Command was another example of failure to adapt and respond quickly. The Army is still struggling to assess, develop, and employ the cyber talent it needs more than two years since it established Cyber Command. While force developers designate positions in

accordance with a simplified coding methodology, the Army's personnel database cannot identify the required skills and experience within its 1.1 million-person organization.

The mismatch between requirements and available inventory is also worth mentioning. As new organizations emerge and drive requirements for knowledgeable, skillful, and experienced personnel, the Army's current limited lateral entry and continuum of service policies prohibit hiring. To succeed in an uncertain future, the Army must learn how to meet emerging requirements rapidly. Doing so requires flexibility.

Lack of clarity on personnel inventory and capabilities. The Army cannot account for its personnel in numbers, costs, and abilities. The fragmented method in which the Army manages its people across components limits flexibility and responsiveness to the detriment of the organization and employees. The legacy systems, policies, and tools used by our human resource organizations compound this problem. The Officer Evaluation Report (OER) is an example of an antiquated tool. Using a non-searchable form with a culturally skewed and inflated narrative that overly focuses on

command, this document provides little real utility to determine an individual's potential and actual skills or his intellectual character.

Instead, the OER measures short-term performance and accomplishments from the eyes of two or three superiors and is generally inaccurate and unscientific. The 2009 Army Research Institute survey found that 88 percent of officers self-evaluated themselves to be in the top 25 percent of their peer group—an indicator of the Army's inability to use a developmental tool like the OER to review and develop its leaders.⁶ This poor mechanism for evaluating future leaders has many consequences. Chiefly, it robs the Army of the ability to clearly see what skills, behaviors, and experiences its people possess. A 2010 report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies recommended an overhaul of the current Department of Defense practices for tracking officer competencies, skills, and abilities to inform a future, more flexible personnel management system.⁷

There is also a principal-agent disconnect. According to a report by the Army's Strategic Studies Institute, it arises when—

two parties do not share the same information and have differing interests. For example, commanders (*the principals*), are charged with leading their organizations to successful outcomes. They desire “ace” job candidates—[professionals] who can dramatically exceed minimal performance requirements because there is a high correlation between their talents and work requirements. However, when making assignments, Human Resource Command (HRC) branch managers (*the agents*) have no real mechanism for determining which specific talents commanders are seeking, or how large the supply of them is.⁸

For example, a security force assistance brigade may have a pending mission in central Africa. If it requires a planner with regional expertise, under the current system, HRC cannot identify an officer who recently graduated from Georgetown University with a Masters in Public Policy, wrote his thesis on central African government and politics, and has a grasp of basic French. Although this officer is the ideal candidate, the brigade may not receive the talent it requires, and the officer will miss an opportunity to employ his acquired knowledge.

The ongoing conversion of the “the Army Profession” has identified the Army’s manning and requirement determination systems as “antiquated.”

A recent survey of West Point graduates found that just 16 percent believe the current personnel system does a good job matching talents with jobs.⁹ The ongoing conversion of the “the Army Profession” has identified the Army's manning and requirement determination systems as “antiquated.”¹⁰ The current system diminishes the Army's return on its human capital investment at the cost of both the organization and the individual.

DOPMA constraints. The current DOPMA limits the Army's ability to flexibly manage its officers, resulting in short and rigid career timelines. As originally crafted, DOPMA was designed to reward good performance while encouraging nonperformers to leave, provide predictable career progression, and maintain young and healthy corps of officers.¹¹

The primary result of this law is cohort management. Cohort management forces the Army to push leaders though a system based on a clearly defined timeline for promotion. Department of the Army Pamphlet (DA PAM) 600-3 describes this roadmap in great detail and lays out the standardized career for all officers within a 20-year lifecycle.¹² The Army committed to a system that efficiently met the needs of a previous generation but is inflexible to the requirements of today's force.

Recently the Defense Science Board offered this analysis of career management:

Careers of the Department's military personnel, active and reserve, are currently managed within a restrictive set of laws, regulations, and policies, all reinforced by culture and tradition. Many of these laws and regulations have been in force fifty years or more. They all may have been sensible fifty years ago, but the Defense Science Board believes they certainly have the effect today of inhibiting the Department's flexibility and adaptability,

lessening its ability to use and deploy people efficiently, and ultimately wasting human capital.¹³

Because of these restrictions, the Army cannot adapt to meet the demands of changing force generation models and cycles or provide additional broadening opportunities to develop tomorrow's leaders, and may lose a generation of leaders—military and civilian—with the experience and knowledge to succeed in other organizations.

Due to the strict adherence to cohort management, officers move from position to position regardless of force generation cycles. Broadening opportunities have two inherently detrimental elements. First, it forces officers to move at a predetermined rate, with little regard to acquired skills, knowledge, and experience. This hurts the officers and the organization. The operational force commander and the individual should have a voice on the timing of leader moves. The second negative effect is the cultural stigma associated with broadening assignments. If the Army's ultimate test is promotion and selection board results, then those with the most operational time most often win. Those that can beat the system and remain in tactical assignments have a higher selection rate for command.¹⁴

Loss of institutional trust. There is loss of institutional trust due to the friction and imbalance between unit manning and individual development. Unit manning of the Army's modular force structure operating under a rotational readiness cycle is lagging months behind requirements. Leaders in the operational force lack stability, ultimately resulting in personnel turbulence that can lead to decreased unit cohesion. Unit cohesion is a primary predictor of combat effectiveness and adaptability.¹⁵ The reality of our current manning system is that units equip, train, and then man their formations en route to combat in a "just-in-time" manner. The chief of staff of the Army's manning guidance solidifies this policy.¹⁶ For example, in my most recent operational force assignment, the brigade deployed with eight of its 12 battalion executive and operations officers not completing any training with their staff or unit. It also experienced a 46 percent turnover in the course of 14 months. Less than three months before deploying, 155 crewmembers were still conducting individual readiness level progression in their assigned aircraft. In other words, a large portion of the brigade's

primary fighting force was still not proficient on individual tasks when the brigade was loading out for Afghanistan.¹⁷

Institutional trust is lost because operational force commanders do not believe the institution will behave in a way that is good for their units. Specifically, HRC will require a brigade combat team (BCT) commander to rotate several field grade officers and company commanders out of Afghanistan to the institutional Army when the brigade is just three months into its deployment and at the height of the fighting season. This turnover decreases cohesion, continuity, and combat effectiveness. From an HRC perspective, the officers must move because their time is up, and the guidance in DA PAM 600-3 indicates the officer's next requirement is a broadening assignment. It argues that we must continue to push officers through the defined gates to ensure we have the necessary leaders for the future. While the BCT commander and the institution both have valid arguments, the institution should have the flexibility to support the warfighting commanders and still meet individual development needs. Unfortunately, the current system rarely allows this to happen.

Outcomes for the Army Human Capital Management System

The Army has not adapted its human capital management systems beyond their rigid industrial-age foundations.¹⁸ To transform the Army's human capital management system from an antiquated and inflexible structure, the Army must clearly identify the desired strategic human capital management outcomes that will drive the development of truly modern systems.¹⁹ These systems must empower individual flexibility while maximizing organizational performance and agility. We must exploit available knowledge and innovative technologies to build a human capital system worthy of all our professionals.

Outcome 1. Rapid response to requirements. The Army's human resource management systems must be able to keep pace with the rapid change cycle of today's environment. To do so, the Army should adopt a talent management framework that supports overall objectives while mitigating risk. The short-term risk is the cost of a mismatch in people and requirements combined with the cost of losing talented people to the civilian labor market.²⁰ The long-term risk is a decline in the performance of the

Army as a profession and as a warfighting arm of the nation's security strategy.

A successful talent management strategy has two key ingredients. The first is organizational transparency of opportunities, requirements, and eligible personnel in near real-time and in all dimensions of individual talent. Currently, the Army's human resource system does not provide a clear understanding of skills, knowledge, and behaviors residing within the organization. Using existing information technology and data-mining systems, the Army can build decision-support tools to help human resource managers and organizational leaders identify available talent and future potential through an integrated database of knowledge instead of antiquated management techniques that rely upon non-searchable assessments, centralization, and limited information.²¹ (See Figure 2 for an example, the pilot program, *Green Pages*, developed by the Office of Economic Manpower Analysis).²² The second element should address the friction between unit manning and individual development models. A new human capital management system should enable unit manning

that increases unit cohesion at the brigade level and below while remaining adaptive to meet changing force generation requirements.

Outcome 2. Leaders identified, developed, and retained. Human capital management strategy cannot be developed in isolation. It must incorporate relevant development and retention plans across the total Army. We must integrate institutional, individual, and self-development systems to meet goals established in the Army learning concept and management systems that empower individual direction. These same systems must have the built-in flexibility to ensure the development and retention of a diverse array of talents to meet the Army's ever-evolving talent and skill requirements.

Options the Army should consider to identify, develop, and retain our best leaders include—

- Improving retention beyond 20 years.
- Adjusting allowable trainees, transients, hold-ees, and students.
- Revising evaluation systems to ensure that they adequately assess the attributes we seek in our future leaders.

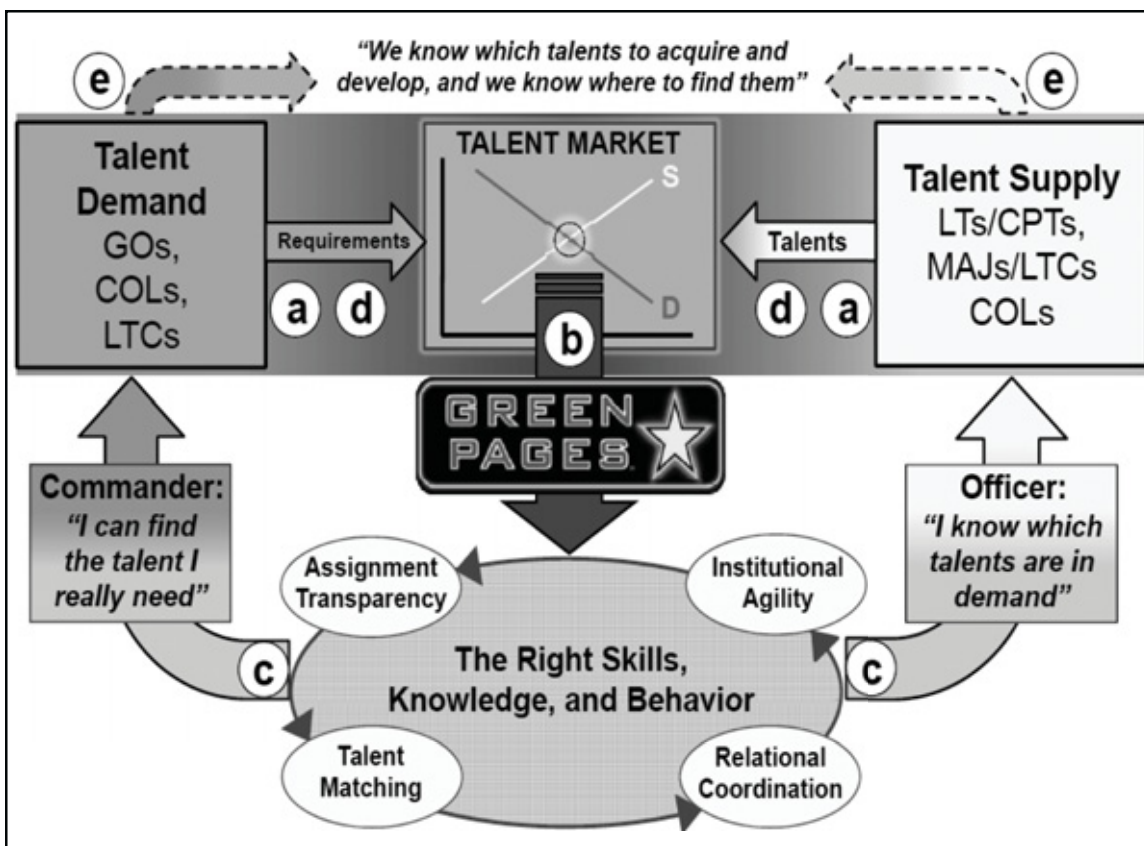


Figure 2: Army Green Pages.

- Increasing nonoperational developmental opportunities with flexible promotion, retention, and retirement policies.

- Revising DOPMA to support these proposals while allowing for improved unit readiness.²³

Outcome 3. An integrated human capital management system. The Army will continue to struggle to be “One Army” until the various human resource management systems (active, guard, reserve, and civilian) are merged. The Army must field a new service delivery model with the necessary authorities and tools to perform all human resources work requirements and deliver human resource services with the most effective administration feasible with the available level of technology. This integrated system for management of all human capital must meet the needs of the Army and the individual soldier and civilian while also supporting Army objectives. Essential to this outcome is the integrated management of all components and cohorts throughout the Army.

Outcome 4. Army ethics and values. The Army must continue to maintain its distinctive place as an institution of exceptional respect because of our culture of professionalism. The adoption of mission command is key to the evolving Army culture in our operational force and in our institutional Army as well. As the Army considers options to reform its human capital management system, it should reinforce the conceptual foundations of mission command by decentralizing, thus reinforcing the independence of leaders and the desire to accept and take responsibility. Finally, mission command calls into question the size of our headquarters organizations and their bloated personnel accounts. To faithfully implement mission command, the Army needs to consider options for reducing staff size and headquarters from the brigade to the Department of the Army.²⁴

Implementation

Implementing these changes will not be easy. The Army will have to overcome cultural barriers, break up the institutional concrete and its bureaucratic rigidity, and rewrite existing law and regulations. It will require support and direct involvement from senior leaders. Although the challenges may be great, the rewards for the Army will be enormous.

First, organizational and individual performance will increase because of the reformed and enhanced human capital resource system.²⁵ As the abilities of people are properly aligned with requirements, individuals will thrive and so will organizations. Additionally, by flexibly managing leaders, operational units will have increased cohesion. Warfighting units that are manned fully and early and remain intact will be more effective and more adaptable on the battlefield.

Second, the personnel system, and the Army as a whole, will be more responsive and adaptable once they adopt a truly modern system that maximizes talent. Talent management will integrate organizational goals with a comprehensive human resource strategy to attract, identify, develop, retain, and employ individuals.²⁶ This new system will allow the Army to better know its people and more quickly assess where to best employ them to help the Army succeed.

Finally, and significantly, the Army will increase retention because its changed system engages individuals and aligns individual desires and abilities with requirements.²⁷ Increased retention will allow the Army to decide who should remain in the Army and who should move on, instead of creating conditions where the soldier is frustrated, underdeveloped, and underappreciated.

To avoid further declines in combat readiness, loss of exceptional professionals, and damage to Army professionalism, we need to reshape our institutions from rigid manufacturing machines to adaptable and innovative networks that provide the very best support to our soldiers and civilians and their families.

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ADP 3-0

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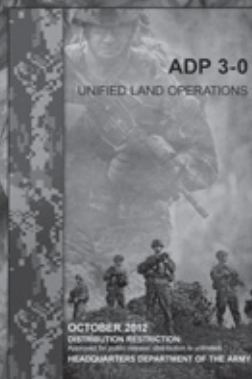
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