

# Leading and Managing High-Performing Army Organizations

Lt. Gen. Thomas Spoehr, U.S. Army

Everyone wants to be a part of a high-performing organization. The difference is clear the moment you join one. People are motivated and purposeful, pride and morale are high, and things of importance are being effectively accomplished. High-performing teams and organizations are focused on their goals and typically far outperform similar outfits. What is the common denominator for high-performing organizations? The presence of great leadership and management.

The Army prides itself on its ability to provide inspired leadership. Dozens of books are written and thousands sold yearly on the merits of military leadership. But, to create and maintain a high-performing organization, both leadership and management must be present. Art and science? Yin and yang? Whatever the analogy, leadership without management is impaired by the lack of an enduring focus, while management without leadership feels mechanical and is unable to produce impressive results. Good leadership can be likened to the ability to recognize that a soldier deserves an award upon departure, while effective management ensures the soldier receives the award before he or she departs. If a leader mismanages an organization, then that leader puts the people and organization in a position to fail. Leadership and management are two sides of the same coin. Separating the functions, for example, in an arrangement where the commander practices leadership while a deputy provides management is imperfect; to achieve levels of high performance, all the top leaders in the organization must employ both qualities simultaneously and seamlessly.

## Army Management

As mentioned, volumes have been written about Army leadership, but leadership by itself is insufficient; it also takes effective management to yield extraordinary results. So, where is the reference on how to manage in the Army, especially when it comes to large, complex organizations? Interestingly, the word “management” is absent from Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-22, *Army Leadership*. In fact, it is generally missing from all Army doctrine and reference publications. Indications are that it was downplayed as a visceral reaction to the perception that certain leaders attempted to “over-manage” Army formations in the Vietnam War.<sup>1</sup> Hence, training is provided to leaders on the basic management functions necessary to operate at the company or battalion level, such as developing a training plan or managing a unit maintenance program. Yet, after that point in their careers, Army leaders receive little education in management techniques. The management skills they must employ in succeeding at more complex assignments at brigade level and beyond are generally acquired either through self-development or observation. Unfortunately, what Gen. Don Starry wrote in 1974 while serving as the commanding general of Fort Knox, Kentucky, is largely still true today:

Army officers are not very good managers. For example, I’m the mayor of the third or fourth largest city in Kentucky, with an annual operating budget of over \$100 million. Nothing in my background, except my three years in ACSFOR (Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development), equipped



(Photo by Master Sgt. Hector García, U.S. Army)

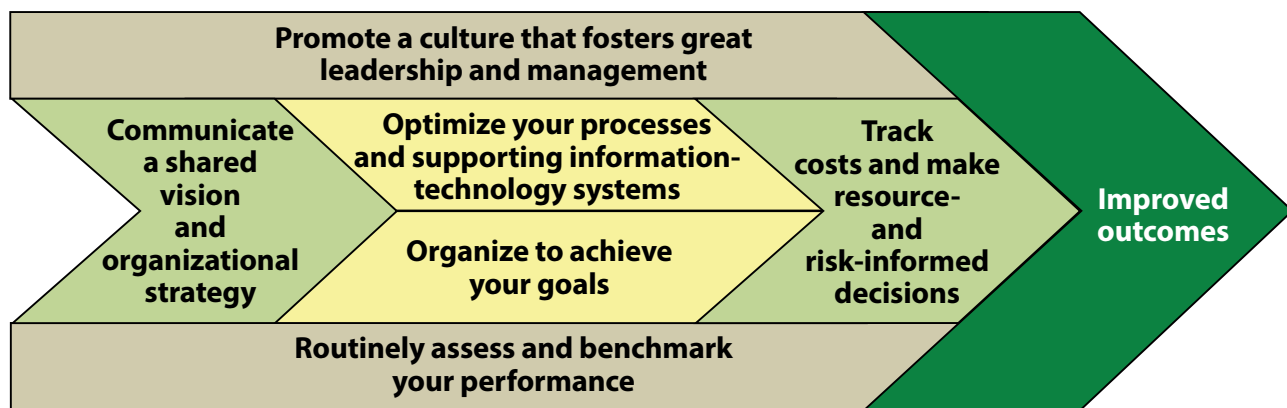
Katherine Hammack, assistant secretary of the Army for installations, energy, and environment, and Maj. Gen. Gwen Bingham, commanding general of TACOM (formerly Tank-automotive and Armaments Command) Life Cycle Management Command, tour Anniston Army Depot 28 September 2015 in Anniston, Alabama. The visit provided a forum for discussion of numerous topics of interest, to include infrastructure, environmental challenges and concerns, and renewable energy, as well as community leadership and outreach. Maj. Gen. Bingham exemplifies how Army leaders must employ exceptional management skills to succeed in more complex assignments.

me adequately to hold this job. And I'm trying to straighten out a lot of pretty bad situations left me by some great guys who preceded me but who, like me, really hadn't been trained for the job.<sup>2</sup>

The gaps in our leaders' knowledge of management are not limited to military officers. In a 2016 survey conducted at the Army's civilian professional

development school, the Army Management Staff College, General Schedule 14- and 15-level students surveyed reported their number one professional gap was in business acumen.<sup>3</sup> The significance of this shortfall in business and managerial acumen is growing as the Army must adapt to reduced funding and the accompanying requirement to make the most of available resources to maintain readiness. Moreover, additional





(Graphic from AR 5-1, *Management of Army Business Operations*)

**Figure. The Army Management Framework**

impetus comes from the need to assure a perpetually skeptical American media and Congress that the Army is truly a good steward of the money provided.

However, there are some promising signs. The Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, offered a 2016 spring elective called “Leading and Managing High Performing Organizations,” and the Army Management Staff College is pursuing modifications to its curriculum to include more coverage of traditional management- and business-operations topics. Additionally, as the demands of long-term conflict ease, more Army officers are electing to attend graduate education in management and business.<sup>4</sup> Also, the program of continued education for Army general officers and senior executive service members includes short seminars at leading graduate business schools.

## Army Management Framework

Perhaps most encouragingly, with the publication of Army Regulation 5-1, *Management of Army Business Operations*, in November 2015, a useful framework has been approved for the application of management techniques in Army organizations (see figure).<sup>5</sup>

The Army Management Framework (AMF) is neither absolute nor immutable. It will undoubtedly change as the understanding of what is required for success advances. But, it provides a conceptual model that relates best Army management practices that, when paired with great leadership, have consistently proven to result in improved outcomes.

Significantly, the AMF is not just applicable to the institutional force. Its principles have repeatedly proven their value to operational formations as well. Today, the six tenets of the AMF, referenced in the figure, are used in many Army organizations, driving increased levels of performance. What makes up these tenets of the AMF and how have Army organizations found them useful? The remainder of this article will address each tenet to answer those questions.

**Promote a culture that fosters great leadership and management.** Because of its pervasive influence, the first tenet appropriately addresses culture. To employ the elements of effective management, Army culture must value it. However, this is not a universally accepted attribute in the Army today. By way of illustration, imagine the reaction if a division commander, attempting to pay a compliment to one of his battalion commanders, publicly exclaimed, “Smith, you are the best damn manager in this division!” How might Smith feel? What is likely is that his or her fellow battalion commanders would silently say to themselves, “I’m glad he didn’t say that about me!”

The impact of such institutional aversion to being a labeled a good manager vice leader is evident in the previously discussed 2016 Army Management Staff College survey. Students often cited a culture that does not value business acumen as a primary reason why they felt professionally unprepared for that domain.<sup>6</sup> What are some of the tangible manifestations of a culture that does not value management in our Army today? We will discuss a few below.

Resource management is often reduced to a simple and very wasteful “use it or lose it” approach. It is often dismissed derisively as the province of the “bean counters” and is not considered a high priority among the many responsibilities of command. Consequently, matters of cost, organizational design, information system capabilities, and performance management are not viewed as “commander’s business” and are often relegated to deputies or executive officers.

In contrast, at Headquarters, U.S. Army Pacific (USARPAC), leadership and management go hand in glove, and the results have been impressive. Under the USARPAC commanding general’s direction, purposeful management is emphasized as a valued command-centric trait and a key element of the command culture.

One technique the USARPAC command effectively uses to inculcate management into its command climate is a quarterly multi-echelon executive steering board to comprehensively review the command’s progress against its strategic plan. According to the chief of staff, Maj. Gen. Chris Hughes, “This process drives organizational cross talk, collaboration, and critical thinking.” Hughes continues, “Gen. Brooks constantly challenges his senior team to find ways to get more from their efforts: no new starts, only new outcomes.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, organizational change, innovation programs, and the institutionalization of a “cost culture”—evidence of a culture that highly values management practices—all enjoy a high priority at USARPAC.

**Communicate a shared vision and organizational strategy.** This tenet is fundamental. Despite the reputation of military leaders for being masters of strategic art, organizational strategies for noncontingency operations are often absent or deficient. Most military leaders are familiar with the process of devising a strategy and planning to defeat an adversary within a given area of operations. However, arguably, a more difficult task is to devise a multiyear strategy that will allow an organization to succeed in a complex, changing environment with multiple stakeholders, often with competing or conflicting interests. For example, consider the challenge involved in crafting a multiyear strategy for U.S. Army Recruiting Command to convince qualified American citizens that they should join the Army in sufficient numbers to meet evolving manpower requirements under changing social, economic, and demographic conditions. Because the skills needed to develop such a roadmap differ so

significantly from normal operational art, Army leaders are often challenged by conducting such a task. Still, many are successful.

One example of managerial success is Fort Stewart, Georgia, home of the 3rd Infantry Division. The installation has won the coveted Army Community of Excellence award an unprecedented six times, most recently in 2015. To achieve such recognition in the face of stiff competition, Fort Stewart’s culture recognizes that strategic planning, vision, and strategy development form the basis for everything that is done.<sup>8</sup> Bringing together a diverse group of tenants, senior mission-command representatives, and the garrison, Fort Stewart leadership effectively forges a shared vision where everyone can clearly see their interests represented.

Col. Townley R. Hedrick, garrison commander, offers, “Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Airfield are run using the IPB (Installation Planning Board) process to maintain a strategic, long-term focus on the installation’s needs. The key to the successful IPB is the participation and buy-in of all stakeholders that live, work, train, and deploy on and from Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Airfield; combined with the guidance and vision of the Senior Commander.”<sup>9</sup> The Fort Stewart strategic planning process is disciplined and repeatable, and it is an Army best practice.<sup>10</sup>

**Routinely assess and benchmark your performance.** Without a means to implement and measure execution, the best strategy is just another “coffee table book.” That is why this third tenet is so critical and inextricably tied back to strategy development. You cannot objectively assess a strategy that does not contain tangible goals and objectives. And, you cannot effectively improve performance without goals. Therefore, the best strategies have their assessments built together in an integrated fashion.

The goals should adhere to the principles identified in the acronym SMART; they should be specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused, and time-bound.<sup>11</sup> And, when establishing goals and associated metrics, leaders should include some that are “stretches.” Stretch goals inexorably pull the organization to levels of performance that at first blush may seem unachievable.

Army organizations often struggle with creating balance in the SMART concept, establishing so many measures that assessments become bogged down, or setting the bar too low to ensure a goal can be met.



(Photo courtesy of U.S. Army)

Col. Evan Rentz (right), Brooke Army Medical Center (BAMC) commander, discusses hospital performance with some of his leadership team. As the largest Department of Defense medical treatment facility, BAMC has become an Army leader in assessing and managing organizational performance.

Sessions to assess performance should be short and attended by key leaders, contain a balance of lagging and leading indicators, and be focused on the actions and decisions needed to fix underperforming areas.

Brooke Army Medical Center (BAMC) at Joint Base San Antonio, Texas, exemplifies Army best practice in this area. Consider the number of metrics and goals that are required to manage the largest medical center in the Department of Defense. The leadership at BAMC must monitor a multitude of metrics that include medical accreditation, safety, patient satisfaction, quality, and cost, in addition to all the other mandatory requirements of an Army organization. Without a system to manage and act on all these assessments, any commander would quickly become overwhelmed with data, and—in that environment—failure to recognize a downward trend could have tragic consequences.

To manage this flow of information, the BAMC leadership team has developed an extraordinarily sophisticated battle rhythm of assessments, each only taking an hour or less. On the same day of each week, the commander meets with his department heads and,

on a rotating basis, discusses areas of organizational importance. For example, on the first Tuesday of the month, human resources indicators such as the status of awards, evaluations, and civilian personnel actions are reviewed. On the second Tuesday of the month, operations indicators such as the status of taskings, quarterly training tasks, deployments, and professional-filler-system readiness are reviewed. On the third Tuesday of the month, the business plan is reviewed, and clinical departments brief their performance compared to business plan targets and address actions they are taking to correct any performance gaps.

Finally, on the fourth Tuesday of the month, quality is addressed. Department heads provide an update on all open major events and risk-control actions. When reflecting on the success of the system, the current commander, Col. Evan Rentz, remarked, “All meetings are tailored for efficiency, utilize ‘dashboards’ to emphasize only the relevant metrics in real time, and allow leaders to get back to their mission in less than one hour.”<sup>12</sup>

**Optimize your processes and supporting information technology systems.** This tenet focuses on



continuous improvement. From the infantry squad to the Pentagon staff, all organizations are driven by processes. Some of these processes are inherited from our predecessors, while others are directed by policy. Regrettably, a process is sometimes prescribed to us by the old Army adage, "That's the way it has always been done here." Regardless of how our work processes originated, their importance to the long-term viability of our Army cannot be overstated. After all, organization-

has a long-term commitment to steadily increase the efficiency of its manufacturing, and other processes such as talent management, through Lean and Six Sigma efforts.<sup>13</sup>

The arsenal begins the cycle with annual strategic planning that determines key performance indicators and performance targets for the coming year. To align continuous improvement with strategic planning, process-improvement events are planned to sup-



(Photo courtesy of Watervliet Arsenal)

Col. Lee Schiller Jr. (left) reviews progress with his arsenal leadership team at one of Watervliet's monthly continuous process review stand-ups 3 March 2016 at Watervliet Arsenal, Watervliet, New York.

al processes drive our daily battle rhythm, from ordering parts for an Abrams tank to awarding a multibillion dollar contract for a new weapon system.

Despite organizational processes having such an important role in all that is done in the Army, many are rarely examined or improved. Quite simply, this lack of attention sub-optimizes our efficiency and, in turn, our readiness. The longer a process has been in place, or the longer an organization allows a process to continue as is, the tougher it is to recognize inefficiencies.

At the Army's oldest continuously active arsenal, the Watervliet Arsenal in upstate New York, the tyranny of time is not part of any leader's vocabulary. This arsenal today has one of the most progressive continuous-improvement programs in the Army, despite being in operation for more than 202 years. It

port pursuit of these targets. Every month, arsenal commander Col. Lee H. Schiller Jr. convenes his key leaders and representatives from the workforce for a stand-up around an operational-style type of board, similar to what one may find in a battlefield operations center. At this board, frank and spirited discussions take place concerning the progress being made toward mutually agreed-upon improvement goals, and, at the end of the huddle, all walk away as one team with common direction and priorities.

One of the arsenal's current improvement projects that has generated a great deal of interest is its focus on the professional development of its diverse workforce. "We have been very aggressive in instituting Lean and Six Sigma methodologies into our operations," said Schiller. "But, as we ramped up those

efforts, it became clear that we had a training shortfall. Leaders and the workforce were not achieving the high level of performance required to move the arsenal forward.” This became a focus for the next process-improvement event. “What we learned by looking at the workforce development process is that much of our previous focus was on making our production more efficient and not on people,” Schiller said. “As difficult as it was to change this process (workforce development), we knew that our ability to grow in the Army’s organic base was limited unless we did change.”<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, the U.S. Army Recruiting Command at Fort Knox provides a superb example of an organization that determined its information technology (IT) systems were failing to meet its needs and took visionary action to remedy the situation. Army recruiting processes were being serviced by an outdated IT system that did not give recruiters and their commanders the tools needed to accomplish their missions. The many recruiting applications were not integrated, requiring separate log-in, and a laborious virtual private network (VPN) connection needed to be established to access routine information, which was very difficult when the recruiters were away from their stations.

The Recruiting Command commanding general, then Maj. Gen. Allen Batschelet, took time to fully understand the problem and subsequently marshalled the necessary external support to put the command on a trajectory to acquiring a state-of-the-art customer-relationship management application. With the same system businesses use to identify new customers, Recruiting Command devised the architecture to make the customer-relationship management application accessible from tablet computers without the need to first establish a VPN connection.<sup>15</sup> Although the conversion will take years, this is a solid first step in the right direction.

While in the midst of attempting these changes, Batschelet shared, “I’m finding bureaucratic courage more rare than battlefield courage.”<sup>16</sup> What he was alluding to was how hard it was to find supporters willing to shortcut risk-averse processes to facilitate innovation. Implementing a significant effort like this is difficult and will typically not succeed without involved leadership and management. In this case, they were present.

**Organize to achieve your goals.** In a corporate setting, many companies find they must undertake moderate organizational change at least once a year and major change every four-to-five years. However, similar change is much less frequent in the Army, perhaps because the authority to modify the organization is reserved for the higher echelons.<sup>17</sup> But, hard is not impossible, and leaders must constantly keep a running estimate of how well their organizations remain suited to accomplish their missions based on both effectiveness and efficiency. And, when appropriate, they must implement change.

Artificial divisions in process management between organizations, continued organizational conflict, inequitable workload distribution, and excessive cycle time spent in completing a process may all be signs structural change is needed. This assessment comes naturally to Army planners when devising a task organization for a given operation by conducting a troops-to-task analysis and allocating forces appropriately.

Assessing the need for permanent change in a non-combat situation when members have become very accustomed to the existing organization is more challenging and typically encounters significant resistance. Army Medical Command’s (MEDCOM) sweeping reorganization from five regional medical commands to four multifunctional regional health commands integrating medical, dental, public health, Warrior Care, and transition functions provides a great example of a command reorganizing itself to meet emerging mission requirements and a changing environment.<sup>18</sup>

Conceived by Lt. Gen. Patricia Horoho, then surgeon general, the reorganization began in 2015 with the intent to bring the command in line with the changing needs of the Army and to provide a single geographic point of accountability for health readiness in each region, aligned where possible to an Army corps. Prior to the reorganization, MEDCOM had twenty subordinate headquarters. Following the change, it had fourteen, allowing the command to become more agile and responsive.

However, accomplishing this needed reorganization proved to be a significant administrative and managerial challenge. Not only was the surgeon general required to obtain the approval of the Army senior leaders, but the proposal required repeated coordination with the defense health establishment, as well



as the affected members of Congress, to get to “yes.” Despite these difficulties, MEDCOM persevered, and today, because of its efforts, the command is well on the road to a complete reorganization with all its expected benefits.<sup>19</sup>

In contrast, because Army investments do not produce bottom-line profits, and with so many of the intended benefits intangibles that cannot be calculated in dollar and cents, determining specific cost effectiveness is a more challenging endeavor. If, like private



(Photo by Kristen Schabert, U.S. Army)

The Bavaria Health Command holds an activation ceremony 25 September 2015 in Vilseck, Germany. The activation was an element of the larger U.S. Army Medical Command (MEDCOM) reorganization to achieve a balanced, agile, and integrated organization better aligned to enhance health readiness for the Army Force 2025 and beyond.

**Track costs and make resource- and risk-informed decisions.** Army organizations usually track their expenditures closely so they do not overspend but are typically challenged in tracking the full-burdened costs of their activities or processes, especially when they span multiple commands. A focus on execution concentrates on what is left in the checkbook, while a focus on cost can help measure and understand the outcomes or results obtained for the money spent.

Because businesses closely track their costs, they operate with somewhat of an advantage because they can easily assess whether a given expense or investment makes sense based on their base-line profit margin. One example of this is Apple's choice whether to build an iPhone case out of either plastic or aluminum, which in part was based on extensive cost-benefit analysis.

business, Army organizations similarly knew the fully burdened cost of many of our internal processes, like maintenance contracts, leave form processing, or IT expenses, it is likely changes or different decisions would be made.

Encouragingly, to address capturing such costs to increase managerial efficiency and cut down on needless expenditures, many areas of the Army have begun to appreciate the need for better tracking of costs.

Headlining this push is the Army's effort to more accurately capture the cost of training. During the period of sequestration in 2013, Army leaders realized the models for training costs (e.g., collective training events such as a company live fire) were imprecise, and that underlying estimates did not represent actual costs. Since then, Army leaders have



commissioned a series of pilot exercises led by the Army G-3/5/7 to refine procedures and models by studying what operational units actually spend to execute the training strategy. The intent is to develop better, repeatable methods to estimate the cost of training and, thereby, make better-informed readiness decisions.

Brig. Gen. John P. “Pete” Johnson, who led the kick-off briefing for the cost-of-training pilot program given to the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, in February 2016 explained the value in this way: “Stewardship of our precious training resources is commander’s business, and these pilots are designed to better enable that critical role while also allowing the Army to better see itself.”<sup>20</sup>

Usually because of external pressures, certain Army organizations have already become masters of cost consciousness. Army Test and Evaluation Command’s Redstone Test Center (RTC) in Alabama is one such organization. Operating in a very competitive environment, RTC is responsible for testing aviation, missile, and sensor systems; subsystems; and components. Ninety-five percent of its funding comes from external customers, and those customers have options. If RTC’s costs grow, they will go elsewhere. The commander, Col. Pat Mason, reports that in the past RTC had no way to understand its overhead costs such as IT, labor, and maintenance because they were “all lumped together in a blob.”<sup>21</sup> Because of that shortfall, Mason has since implemented a sophisticated system of cost management so that he and his leaders can understand what they are spending in specific categories on a real-time basis.

Capitalizing on the flexibility and power of the General Fund Enterprise Business System, the Army’s state-of-the-art resourcing system, Mason set up custom “cost centers” and “work breakdown

schedules,” allowing complete command transparency on estimates and actual expenses.<sup>22</sup> This enabled RTC to make better-informed, fact-based decisions. RTC’s precision extends to having the uniformed members complete time cards so that their work can be appropriately identified and binned. This extraordinary visibility enabled RTC to quickly determine that it did not need four of its seventy helicopters and a major piece of test equipment. By turning them in, RTC reduced its overhead cost to customers.<sup>23</sup>

While most Army organizations do not face the same customer-centric challenges that RTC does, carefully managing cost can make any organization more efficient and facilitate more-informed decision making. With the budget forecast grim for the foreseeable future, the still-looming threat of sequestration, and the uncertainty of global mission requirements, the Army faces unprecedented challenges in remaining a strong and agile force.

## Conclusion

While not a panacea, strengthening Army management will go a long way toward optimizing effectiveness and efficiency in order to fulfill the Army’s obligation to the Nation. The AMF tenets provide the underpinnings of a structured, systematic approach to managing the Army at large as well as its individual components. Supporting this are the many Army leaders, both those mentioned above and many others, who are employing effective, purposeful management approaches to drive high performance in their organizations. They demonstrate that by pairing the tenets of the AMF with inspirational leadership the results are inevitably high-performing organizations, which are paramount to accomplishing the Army’s mission to fight and win the Nation’s wars.

Army Strong! ■

### Biography

*Lt. Gen. Thomas Spoehr, U.S. Army, is the director of the Army Office of Business Transformation, responsible for recommending ways and implementing policy for the Army to become more efficient in its business practices. He holds a BS from the College of William and Mary and an MA in public administration from Webster University. His prior assignments include director, Program Analysis and Evaluation, Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA); deputy commanding general, U.S. Forces–Iraq (Support); and director, Force Development, HQDA.*

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