



HRC: New NCOER to ‘Help Shape Army Across the Board’

By Martha C. Koester

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The recent overhaul of the Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Report will help identify the next leaders of the Army by ensuring that NCOs meet requirements before they are given greater responsibility, said officials at U.S. Army Human Resources Command at Fort Knox, Ky. Ultimately, the new NCOER — which will transition from a one-size-fits-all report to one based on the NCO’s rank — will offer Army officials a better tool in determining which Soldiers to place in key assignments.

Plans call for the Army to transition from one NCOER to three separate reports for NCOs of different ranks. The new NCOER, which is due to roll out in September 2015, will also feature new responsibilities for raters and senior raters.

“We need to align [the NCOER] with current doctrine,” said Sgt. Maj. of the Army Raymond F. Chandler III after addressing students in August at the U. S. Army Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas, shortly after NCOER changes were announced. “We should be measuring people against what we say leaders should be, know and do. ... [New control measures] may be part of the solution, but it’s really going to be about noncom-

missioned officers upholding a standard to define what means success, failure or excellence.”

“With new control measures, everyone cannot receive a 1/1 (exemplary rating) anymore,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Charles E. Smith, the command sergeant major of HRC. “It’s also going to help shape the Army across the board because when promotion boards and senior leaders are looking at those files to pick the next future leader of the Army, there will be a clearer distinction between who is among the best.”

Reviewing the old NCOER

The Army began a review in 2010 of the NCOER, which has been in place since 1987. Army leadership wanted to align what they saw as an aging and “over-inflated” NCOER with current leadership doctrine. The goal was to establish and enforce accountability among raters, and determine whether the one-size-fits-all approach of the old NCOER was still appropriate.

Army feedback on the current NCOER, lessons learned from it and comments from centralized selection boards — which noted the difficulty in identifying the very best in the Army for promotions or key assignments — were among



The new Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Report, which is due to roll out in September 2015, will transition from one to three separate reports for NCOs of different ranks. The new NCOER will also feature new responsibilities for raters and senior raters. (Photo by U.S. Army)

the factors that helped contribute to the development of the new NCOER, said Sgt. Maj. Stephen J. McDermid, the sergeant major of HRC's Evaluation Systems Branch.

"The bottom line is it's going to force rating officials to identify the very best, because centralized selection board comments have noted the difficulty that, when everybody's file looks the same, it makes it really hard to know for sure that you're picking the right individuals," McDermid said.

Change was due for the "highly inflated" evaluations of the previous NCOER, McDermid said. Approximately 90 percent of all senior NCOs were basically rated as being among the best in the Army with a 1/1 box check, which is the best possible assessment, he said.

"It was very difficult for the Army, selection boards and career branch managers to identify the best talent [with the previous NCOER]," he said.

Transitioning from one to three reports helps establish the differences between junior and senior NCOs while allowing the assessment to focus on grade-specific technical performance objectives, McDermid said. The new NCOER also delineates official rating roles and responsibilities: Raters are to focus only on performance while senior raters are to address the NCO's potential. The idea is to eliminate the inconsistent ratings often found with the current NCOER.

"[The advantage of the new NCOER for NCOs is] it's going to level the playing field and ensure fairness across

the board," McDermid said. "Right now, we have a system where there is no accountability for the rating officials. ... If raters use [DA Pamphlet 623-3], it clearly identifies, particularly for the senior rater, what those assessments mean and stand for. With a highly inflated system, everybody feels they must have a 1 in order to be competitive. But the reality is that a 1 should only be used for those truly deserving NCOs who have demonstrated the potential to serve at a higher grade or responsibility."

Big Changes Ahead

Another key change of the new NCOER is that support forms will require senior raters to counsel NCOs twice, at a minimum, during the rating period. But despite the changes on the horizon, rating officials don't need to change their rating philosophies until the new NCOER is implemented, McDermid said.

In moving to a senior rater profile, it becomes even more "critical that [the senior rater] sit down, counsel and mentor that rated NCO," he said.

The counseling sessions will force rating officials to sit down with NCOs to make sure that the expectations laid out by leaders are followed through and that the NCOs stay on track, Smith said. Additional responsibility will also be placed on the rated NCO to set a goal for that rating period and to achieve it.

“[NCOs will then hear raters say], ‘If you want to remain competitive, if you want to be a future leader in the Army, you’ll have to do the things that are going to get you there,’ Smith said. “You have to stay proficient in your core competencies. You have to go to school to improve yourself. You have to continue to improve on your physical fitness. All those things that have been laid out for years, those things are really going to come to the forefront because now not everybody is going to receive a 1/1 [rating]. This is going to force leaders and Soldiers to strap up their boot laces and really get after it every day.”

In order to ease the transition to the new NCOER, mobile teams will begin training in April at HRC at Fort Knox. Once completed, mobile training teams will then instruct trainers throughout the Army in May. Those trainers will then return to their installations, and they will train their assigned units and personnel from June through August 2015 in time for the rollout of the new NCOER in September.

“During this time, when we start to roll out and we start training and bringing out mobile training teams to different organizations, it is critical that senior leaders at all levels in the Army are really engaged in this process so that we can properly train the entire Army,” Smith said. “The people who should be putting a lot of emphasis on it are the senior leaders, because if we don’t get this right, we can [adversely] affect some Soldiers’ careers in the long run.”

Establishing and enforcing accountability for rating officials will be paramount in eliminating rating inflation in the evaluation system, officials say.

“Leveling the playing field and making sure that everyone plays by the same rules will create fairness across the board,” McDermid said.

“[The current NCOER] is outdated and highly inflated,” he said. “NCOs must understand the move toward [establishing] the accountability of the rating official, which will ensure that we provide accurate assessments because ... not everybody is a 1 [rating],” he said. “When we talk about a culture change, we’re talking about a significant emotional impact on the NCO Corps once the new NCOER is implemented.” ■

Key Changes in the New NCOER

Secretary of the Army John McHugh approved the following revisions to the Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Report on Aug. 1, 2014. The changes apply to all components: active, Reserve and National Guard. Use of the new NCOER is due to begin in September 2015.

- **Three NCOER forms** aligned with Army leadership doctrine (Army Doctrine Publication 6-22)
 - Sergeant — will focus on proficiency and is developmental in nature
 - Staff sergeant through first sergeant/master sergeant — will focus on organizational systems and processes
 - Command sergeant major/sergeant major — strategic level report will focus on large organizations and strategic initiative
- **A rater tendency label** or rating history for raters of staff sergeant through command sergeant major/sergeant major that will be imprinted on completed NCOER
- **A senior rater profile** established for senior raters of staff sergeant through command sergeant major/sergeant major (managed at less than 50 percent in the “most qualified” selection)
- **Delineation of rating officials’** roles and responsibilities to eliminate inconsistent ratings
 - Rater assesses performance
 - Senior rater assesses potential
- **Assessment format**
 - For raters:
 - Bullet comments (for sergeant through first sergeant/master sergeant forms)
 - Narrative comments (for the command sergeant major/sergeant major form)
 - For senior raters, narrative comments for all forms
 - **The senior rater** will counsel the rated NCO, at a minimum, twice during the rating period
- **A supplementary reviewer** will be required in some situations where there are non-Army rating officials in the rating chain

Source: U.S. Army Human Resources Command Evaluation, Selections and Promotions Division, Evaluations Branch



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