



A Soldier participates with Polish soldiers for a combatives demonstration in Boleslawiec, Poland, Nov. 9, 2018. The 91st Brigade Engineer Battalion, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, has participated in a number of joint activities with the host Polish 23rd Field Artillery Regiment in Boleslawiec in order to strengthen interoperability between U.S. and NATO forces to support Atlantic Resolve in Europe. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Ron Lee)

Talent Management

A Contemporary Issue Facing the Army

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Today's Army is the most well-equipped and most responsive in its well-storied history. But for as many things the Army is doing right in creating an elite fighting force, it also faces contemporary leadership issues that present challenges to its noncommissioned officers (NCOs). One of the problems that hinder the Army's performance is talent management. Talent is the sum total of a Soldier's unique skills, experiences, and behaviors ("Noncommissioned officer strategy," 2016). A Soldier's life experiences, personal and familial relationships, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, personality, education, and learning style contribute to form the Soldier's raw talent.

According to the U.S. Army (2016), talent management is a systemic investment that balances the needs of the Soldier and the organization, ensures proper placement, and empowers employees. Talent management is much more than a system of aligning Soldiers with open requisitions to meet the current and future needs of the Army ("Noncommissioned officer strategy," 2016). It is the responsibility of the U.S. Army Human Resources Command (HRC) to equip units based on Army manning guidance. But it is the senior NCOs within Army units that execute talent management.

Framework for Army Talent Management

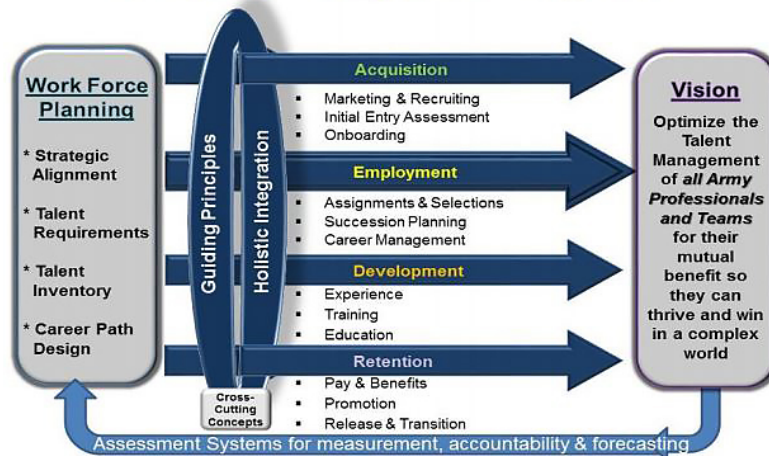


Figure 1. Framework for Army Talent Management. From *Talent Management Concept of Operations for Force 2025 and Beyond*.

Manning the Force

HRC resources Army units based on a Modification Table of Organization and Equipment (MTOE) or Table of Distribution and Allowances (TDA). Both documents outline the number of personnel, equipment, and organizational structure required to properly resource a unit in order to accomplish their specific Mission Essential Task List (METL). An assignment manager that utilizes a computer program to manage hundreds of thousands of enlisted personnel is only a part of the process because they will never see more than a digital representation of the Soldier.

Manning results in Soldiers being assigned to units based upon open requisitions. Criteria like military occupational specialty, security clearance, additional skill identifiers, and rank, represent some of the criteria HRC uses to assign Soldiers to their units. Once Soldiers arrive at their unit, are properly slotted, introduced to their teammates, squad leader, section sergeant, platoon sergeant, platoon leaders, first sergeant, and company commander, these Soldiers have officially entered the workforce.

Manning is a forced, systemic, generic, and cyclical process devoid of input from the lower levels. Talent management is not forced, generic, or cyclical; it is based upon getting to know someone and understanding the unique requirements of your organization and involves lines of effort from the top down and the bottom up. Manning an organization can exist without a formal or informal talent management process. However, manning is also vital to the Army's current talent management strategy.

Talent Mismanagement

Young Soldiers are trained to utilize the chain of command and NCO support channels to resolve problems at the lowest level. Yet, once they become NCOs, they

are expected to become the problem solvers. As NCOs, we constantly remind our Soldiers to utilize their NCO support channels and chain of command. However, we fail to understand that "the lowest level" is an equally valid concept when discussing talent management, or in this case, mismanagement.

NCOs (corporal thru sergeant major) are responsible for evaluating Soldiers. This might take place on a DA Form 4856 (Developmental Counseling Form) or through the NCO evaluation system. Evaluations are crucial to talent management at the lowest level. NCOs must honestly evaluate their Soldiers and NCOs. When their performance is poor and they demonstrate a lack of potential, NCOs must honestly quantify this information during their evaluations.

Evaluations are used by HRC to determine qualification for nominative assignments, drill sergeant, recruiter, and warrant officer. Failure to properly identify and quantify those who exceed standards from those who did not, results in promotion boards selecting unqualified Soldiers to fill those positions. Once these leaders are trained and receive their assignments they report to their new units.

At their unit, it becomes the responsibility of the sergeants major and senior NCOs to review records and determine where the leader can best serve the organization. Now the talent pool is effectively tainted because leaders at the lowest level failed to accurately record the performance of their Soldiers. Simultaneously, great leaders are being denied opportunities because their evaluations were written poorly or did not accurately reflect their performance.

How to Manage Talent Across the Army

According to the U.S. Combined Arms Center, "the Army must ensure that leaders are both empowered to



Army indirect fire infantrymen assigned to 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, operate the M121 120 mm mortar system during live-fire training at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, Nov. 19, 2018. During the live-fire training the paratroopers honed their crew served weapon skills by conducting fire missions at night utilizing the M252 81 mm and M121 120 mm mortar systems. (U.S. Air Force photo by Alejandro Pentildea)

execute talent management activities at all levels and are properly versed in the principles of talent management" ("Talent Management," 2015, p. 18). So to properly manage talent, leaders at the unit level should take the following actions:

1. Review HRC guidance regarding the preparation of NCO evaluation reports. Utilize after action review comments from centralized promotion boards to further strengthen evaluations. When NCOs fail a NCO professional development school the commander should initiate a bar to continued service (Army, 2016).
2. Units, division and below, should develop a common operational picture of talent within their organization. The U.S. Army Cyber Protection Brigade used the "Cyber Baseball Card" to rank talent throughout the entire organization. The baseball cards were used to determine future assignments within the brigade and within Army Cyber and U.S. Cyber Command.
3. NCOs should read and understand the Active Component Manning Guidance (or the document specific to their component).

Understanding at what strength the Army will man your unit assists leaders in the development of a specific unit level talent management strategy.

4. Communication amongst senior NCOs is crucial to effective talent management. We need to ensure our Soldiers are numerically ranked (amongst their peers) and quantifiably enumerated by their senior raters. The Army promotes based upon potential and senior raters are charged with ranking and enumerating potential to ensure the most qualified Soldiers are selected for promotion.

Implementing these four steps will help repair the significant deficits we are currently experiencing with regard to talent management.

Conclusion

The United States Army Human Resources Command assigns people based upon manning document requirements (MTOE or TDA). Open requisitions are filled by assignment managers based upon Army priorities (Active Component Manning Guidance or ACGM) which is only one part of the talent management process. Assignment managers do not have the time

or context to understand a Soldier's unique skills, experiences, and behaviors. They do have access to evaluations, Service Record Briefs (SRBs), and Service School Academic Evaluation Reports (DA Form 1059).

Those forms are driven by input from unit leaders. Once HRC assigns personnel to a specific unit, leaders must seek to understand a Soldier's unique skills, experiences, and behaviors and place them accordingly.

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