



# Operational Talent Management: The Perfect Combination of Art and Science

■ By 1st Lt. Shelby L. Phillips

*Col. Ronald Ragin and Command Sgt. Maj. Jacinto Garza, the 4th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade's command team, brief Command Sgt. Maj. Michael A. Crosby, the 4th Infantry Division and Fort Carson's senior enlisted Soldier, and Command Sgt. Maj. Charles M. Tobin, the Defense Logistics Agency's senior enlisted Soldier, on the brigade's talent management process on July 7, 2016. (Photo by Sgt. Benjamin Kullman)*



U.S. ARMY

RAGIN



## FEATURES

The 4th Infantry Division uses operational talent management to ensure its Soldiers are matched with the right jobs to get the desired sustainment effects.

In his book *Bleeding Talent*, Tim Kane argues that the U.S. military is “bleeding talent—and it’s not just because of money. Talent is bleeding externally as top officers quit the ranks in frustration, and talent is bleeding internally because those that serve are stuck in a bureaucracy that inefficiently matches people with jobs.”

Talent management is a concept that Army leaders have agreed upon as a way ahead. But what is really being done to execute talent management? The sustainment team of the 4th Infantry Division (ID) found success in this area by implementing a deliberate talent management process.

The 4th ID sustainment leaders believe that they have both the ability and the responsibility to actively influence people’s careers for the better. They believe that they own part of the problem, part of the sustainment enterprise, and part of the profession of arms. Therefore, leaders must be groomed today to solve the complex problems of the future.

The 4th ID Sustainment Brigade commander and command sergeant major (CSM) have taken responsibility for managing the logisticians of the 4th ID and influencing the management of tenant units, including the 71st Ordnance Group, the 10th Special Forces Group Support Battalion, and the Army Field Support Battalion (AFSBn)—Fort Carson, Colorado.

### A Need for Art and Science

According to the 4th ID Sustainment Brigade commander, “Real talent management is the perfect combination of art and science; without the two, we have names on an excel spreadsheet. This data tells us nothing about the talented humans behind the names.”

The officer and enlisted record briefs, which S-1s instinctively pull in order to better understand what kinds of logisticians are coming to units, barely express critical facts about the motivation, drive, and capabilities of incoming Soldiers. This data alone

cannot tell leaders about a logistician’s work- and family-related goals, strengths, weaknesses, and commitment to this profession.

So how can organizations combine the qualities of art and science for talent management? They can put leaders into the same room, face-to-face, to transparently discuss the future of the profession. The process used at Fort Carson is transparent and includes multiple stakeholders who participate in a board-like process. Participants include the commander and CSM from each of the brigade support battalions (BSBs), the group support battalion, and the AFSBn.

### Operational Talent Management

Operational talent management includes the management of leaders in the ranks of captain through lieutenant colonel and master sergeant through sergeant major.

Operational talent management is conducted in three phases:

- Phase I, administration (science).
- Phase II, assessment (art).
- Phase III, concurrence and follow-up counseling.

The goal of the process is to ensure the right talent is matched to the right position to get the desired sustainment effects across the installation. The 4th ID also wants to develop leaders through the right mix of experiences.

### Phase I

Each brigade S-1 section begins the first phase by preparing administrative data. Each logistics leader in the 4th ID has a business card-sized snapshot that includes the Soldier’s name, rank, date of rank, current position, effective date of position, availability date (year and month), and Department of the Army photo. This is similar to data provided for board proceedings and can be very telling. Preparing this data for the hundreds of logisticians within the division is tedious, but it is absolutely vital for accurate

talent management discussions.

Each card has a specified place on a magnetic white board inside the 4th ID's talent management room. Each card's placement is based on the most current modified table of organization and equipment. Using a hierarchical order enables talent management decision-makers to easily identify vacant or soon-to-be vacant positions within the division. Once the scene is prepared, the leaders begin the art of assessment.

## Phase II

The second phase begins when each officer and noncommissioned officer (NCO) is given the opportunity to submit a "baseball card," which gives them a chance to have a voice. On the baseball card, Soldiers are asked to provide both personal and professional goals and outline their five-year plan.

The cards are collected by the battalion S-1s, reviewed by the battalion commander, and submitted to the brigade S-1 section for compilation. These cards are also used to guide monthly performance counseling discussions; it is another tool battalion commanders and CSMs can use to teach, coach, and mentor their leaders. When a Soldier does not submit a baseball card, the 4th ID Sustainment Brigade S-1 includes the Soldier's officer or enlisted record brief in its place.

Next, the key sustainment leaders meet in the limited access talent management room to begin the actual assessment discussion. Each commander and CSM has an opportunity to speak about the performance strengths and weaknesses of officers and NCOs in their battalion. Then they assess each officer and NCO according to the three-tiered assessment system created by the board members. Honest assessments are critical to maintaining the integrity of the talent management process.

The commander places a color-coded magnetic dot on the board

# A Talent Management Program for NCOs

The 4th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade's talent management program identifies, grooms, and places talented noncommissioned officers in the right positions so that they can grow professionally.

■ By Command Sgt. Maj. Jacinto Garza

As the Army continues to draw down, it is imperative that the talent within the noncommissioned officer (NCO) corps be identified. NCOs should be groomed and placed in the right positions to allow organizations and Soldiers to flourish. Senior leaders owe the Army and its NCOs a management process that allows Soldiers to maximize their potential both professionally and personally.

In July 2015, a new 4th Infantry Division (ID) Sustainment Brigade command team implemented a talent management program. The brigade was given the responsibility for managing the senior logistics in both the 4th ID and across Fort Carson, Colorado. The 4th ID Sustainment Brigade dedicated a room within its headquarters to host quarterly talent management meetings with senior logistics command teams from across Fort Carson.

## NCO Talent Management

Within the talent management room, photos of the installation's senior logistics NCOs (E-8s and E-9s) are organized on a white board. Also in the room is a display of every senior logistics position on the installation, organized by brigade combat team (BCT) or section, to provide awareness of current and upcoming talent gaps.

The room also houses binders that contain officer and enlisted records briefs and cards that provide the Soldiers' official photos, previous assignments, future goals, desired assignments, year groups, and family circumstances.

The 4th ID Sustainment Brigade embedded two NCOs (a staff sergeant and a sergeant) within the division G-1 to assist with the talent management program. These NCOs have access to most of the systems used by the G-1. They are responsible for forecasting requirements, identifying, contacting, and recommending placement of inbound Soldiers, creating packets, and identifying potential gaps or losses.

They also ensure that every senior logistics NCO that arrives at the installation meets with the 4th ID Sustainment Brigade command team as part of in-processing. The two embedded NCOs within G-1 are critical to the success of the talent management program.

*Continued on page 47.*



*White boards in the 4th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade's talent management room display photos and information of current and potential leaders.*

next to the individual's photo to reflect the assessment. This allows sustainment leaders to see if talent is stacked or unbalanced on the installation. It also helps to match particular officers and NCOs at the unit level to get desired performance effects.

An officer's or NCO's assessment can be changed by the commander, for better or worse, at the next quarterly talent management meeting. This flexibility is vital because performance may change as leaders move to different positions.

The color-coded dot assessment system allows 4th ID leaders to focus their efforts on developing leaders who need more attention or experience. It also assists the division in providing vital feedback to the Human Resources Command about leaders who need further development in the larger Army enterprise (through internships, long-term education, and joint positions).

Once all battalions have provided

their input, the sustainment brigade S-1 section confirms projected shifts, vacancies, and moves and forwards this information to the division G-1 to be fed into the Human Resources Command mission-essential request.

This leads to a battalion-level personnel draft meeting led by the sustainment brigade commander. During this discussion, each battalion receives draft numbers based on the commanding general's priorities.

Battalion commanders select their first and second choices from a talent pool that includes "free agents" (available leaders that can be recruited from throughout the Army) and "bench" leaders (official division inbound Soldiers and Soldiers who need jobs). These picks are based on officer and enlisted record brief data and relationships that are built within the logistics community.

Because the draft process is transparent and inclusive, logistics needs across the formation are easy to identify. This

creates a shared understanding, and the battalion commanders do not compete with one another for the stronger inbound Soldiers. The commanders and CSMs see and understand the big picture. They see the need for the talent management process and its benefit to the logistics community and the Army profession as a whole.

### **Phase III**

The final phase in this process is concurrence from the other brigade commanders and the commanding general. A final recommendation memo is transmitted to each brigade commander for their concurrence based on the board's feedback.

The final recommendation is forwarded through the G-1 for the division commander's approval. Once all moves are confirmed, the unit S-1s and the division G-1 work together to complete the moves, process orders, and ensure all associated administrative tasks are completed correctly.



Talent management is a critical process that directly affects individual career progression by factoring in all aspects of officers' and NCOs' performance and potential. It not only benefits the Soldiers who are assessed and placed but also the organization and the Army as a whole. The process starts with understanding the art and science needed to perform operational talent management.

---

First Lt. Shelby L. Phillips is a student in the Adjutant General's Captain's Career Course at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. She wrote this article while she was the strength manager for the 4th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade at Fort Carson, Colorado. She holds a bachelor's degree in communication studies from Christopher Newport University, and she is currently pursuing a master's degree in human resources management through Webster University. She is a graduate of Adjutant General Basic Officer Leader Course.

*Continued from page 45.*

## **Quarterly Meetings**

During quarterly talent management meetings, the commanding general establishes priorities based on mission sets. Business practices are announced in advance, and battalion commanders and command sergeants major provide input and comments. Each battalion command team assesses its officers and NCOs using a colored-chip assessment. These assessments, combined with the Soldiers' records, provide a 360-degree perspective of the leaders' past performance and future potential.

The quarterly talent management meetings allow the 4th ID Sustainment Brigade to discuss with battalion-level leaders potential company command team challenges. The talent management team can then look across the installation and find the right match for both the commander and first sergeant positions.

The talent management program enables NCOs to diversify their experience. An NCO can start out in a forward support company, move to a brigade support battalion, and eventually move to a sustainment brigade. This allows NCOs to experience all three levels of tactical sustainment within the division. Placing master sergeants and sergeants major in key developmental positions expands their capacity and makes the Army stronger.

The program also identifies NCOs who are excelling so that leaders can continue to foster their development and encourage broadening assignments through the Human Resources Command.

Because the 4th ID is the Army's only balanced division (with a Stryker BCT, infantry BCT, armored BCT, sustainment brigade, combat aviation brigade, division artillery, a Special Forces group, and several separate organizations on the installation), the 4th ID Sustainment Brigade has an advantage in its ability to rotate senior NCOs around the division to gain experiences from a variety of units. A sustainment NCO assigned to 4th ID leaves the installation well-rounded with a sound foundation for future assignments.

Today's noncommissioned officer is asked to be, know, and do more than ever before, so senior leaders must establish programs that will help manage, cultivate, and foster talent in the Army. Leaders should also establish key developmental positions for certain grades. NCOs will benefit from having opportunities to acquire knowledge of the operational and strategic levels of the Army without losing their mastery of tactical-level skills.

The 4th ID is managing the talent of all its senior logisticians. Through this process, the division will continue to build competent Soldiers of character that are committed to the Army and are great logisticians. We owe it to our Soldiers to take a vested interest in their development.

---

Command Sgt. Maj. Jacinto Garza is the senior enlisted Soldier in the 4th ID Sustainment Brigade. He holds a bachelor's degree in health sciences from American Military University with a concentration in sports management. He is a graduate of the Sergeants Major Academy, Primary Leadership Development Course, Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course, Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course, First Sergeant Course, Drill Sergeant School, Squad Designated Marksman Course, and the Airborne, Air Assault, and Ranger Schools.