

Talent Management: Developing World-Class Sustainment Professionals

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Talent management is paramount to maintaining Army readiness, which can be achieved only through leader engagement at every level.

In recent years, the term “talent management” has gained considerable traction as a way to describe how the Army meets its vast human capital requirements. Gen. Mark A. Milley, the chief of staff of the Army, said about the Army’s priorities, “Readiness is number one, and there is no other number one.” Without question, talent management is a key component of personnel readiness and essential to the Army’s ability to win in a complex world.

Unlike many areas of commercial industry, the Army grows its talent from within. Mastery of the profession requires years, often decades, of schooling, operational assignments, and self-study. Few civilian professions can fully prepare someone for service in the military, especially at the midgrade through executive levels.

The military profession is unique, and thus certain skills can be honed only through experience within the military context. It is impossible, for example, to hire someone directly from the private sector to replace the leadership and experience of a sergeant first class with 10 years of service and combat tours in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

Attempting to replicate the technical expertise of our warrant officers (WOs) would be equally daunting. The old saying “leaders don’t grow on trees” is really true for the Army. Talent management is paramount to maintaining Army readiness and to producing the right leader for the right position at the right time.

Sustaining the Total Force

The chief of staff of the Army directed everyone to focus on the total

force (active Army, Army Reserve [USAR], and Army National Guard [ARNG]), not just on the active component. Total force integration and talent management within the sustainment community are critical given the diversity and complexity of the quartermaster, ordnance, transportation, human resources, and financial management missions across the components.

Collectively, the sustainment war-fighting function manages 51 enlisted military occupational specialties (MOSs) and 23 officer specialties that include more than 300,000 Soldiers, noncommissioned officers (NCOs), and officers. Sustainment branch schools and the Army Logistics University train more than 100,000 students at 78 different locations throughout the continental United States and overseas.

The Human Resources Command (HRC) Sustainment Branch, along with USAR and ARNG human resources professionals, manage more than 6,000 sustainment officers. At the tactical level, these processes must account for an officer’s progression through an array of functional and multifunctional companies, battalions, brigades, and developmental staff positions.

Sustainment leaders also serve in key assignments at the operational level within expeditionary sustainment commands, theater sustainment commands, Army service component commands, and combatant commands. At the strategic level, talent is managed to position leaders at the Army Materiel Command, the Department of the Army headquarters, the Joint Staff, the Defense Logistics Agency, the Financial

Management Command, interagency organizations, and other nominative positions.

While talent management of the officer corps is challenging, officers represent only 8 percent of the force sustainment population. Management of the enlisted force, which accounts for 92 percent of force sustainment, is significantly more complex.

Talent management within the USAR and ARNG presents a high degree of difficulty as well. Of the more than 300,000 sustainment troops, approximately 25 percent serve in the active component and 75 percent serve in the reserve component. Although the components' personnel management systems differ, their training is becoming more integrated.

The One Army School System initiative standardizes training at Fort Lee, Virginia; Fort Jackson, South Carolina; and remote training locations. This initiative dramatically improves the professional military education aspect of talent management. Talent across the total force is the only way the sustainment force of the future can keep pace with the demands of global unified land operations.

The Army also manages the critical skill requirements of more than 65,000 civilian sustainers. These professionals provide depth, talent, and experience to the operating and generating forces. The Army has made tremendous progress in civilian leader development and talent management.

Definition and Doctrine

So what qualities and attributes must our professionals possess? What competencies must sustainers have? And how do we provide the right combination of education, training, and experience at the right points in their careers?

Having the right systems in place to address these challenges is central to meeting Army requirements and readiness goals. Fortunately, some answers already exist.

Institutionally, the Army has already defined the overarching skills and attributes all leaders must possess. The leadership requirements model found in Army Doctrine Publication 6-22, Army Leadership, establishes the foundation for leadership using a core set of requirements and the expectations for what a leader should be, know, and do.

All Army leaders must possess the three fundamental attributes of character, presence, and intellect and display the three Army leader competencies of “leads, develops, and achieves.” According to Army Doctrine Publication 6-22, talent management must also account for an individual’s talents, skills, behaviors, and potential.

Core Competencies

The Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) recently published the Sustainment Leader Development Implementation Plan, which describes the specific competencies sustainment leaders must possess. There are six core sustainment competencies.

Understanding joint combined arms maneuver. Understanding combined arms maneuver allows the sustainment leader to assist in shaping operations by enabling the maneuver commander to consider sustainment estimation within the overall concept of operations.

Total force sustainment integration. Sustainment leaders must know how to integrate all components of total force sustainment during all phases of planning and execution.

Expeditionary sustainment. Leaders must prepare themselves and their units to maintain readiness for deployment. Once operations commence, they must be able to perform their roles in an expeditionary environment.

Unified action partner integration. In order to provide effective and efficient sustainment to the force, sustainment leaders must understand how Army sustainment fits into the context of unified land operations.

Strategic sustainment enterprise operations. Sustainment leaders must understand strategic capabilities and how the links work across the three levels of war.

Sustainment information systems. Army sustainers should understand what enterprise resource planning systems are, why the Army is moving toward them, what kinds the Army has, and how they are integrated.

Additional Competencies

In addition to understanding these core competencies, the Army must manage talent to build competence in several areas highlighted in the Deputy Chief of Staff, G-4, Logistics Strategic Planning Guidance. The Army defines some of these skills as follows.

Force projection. The ability to project the military instrument of national power from the United States or another theater, in response to requirements for military operations. It is a demonstrated ability to alert, mobilize, rapidly deploy, and operate effectively anywhere in the world.

Force reception. The initial step in introducing combat power, force reception can determine success or failure of the reception, staging, onward movement, and integration operation. Reception from strategic lift is implemented at or near designated air and seaports of debarkation, normally under the control of the geographic combatant commander.

Onward movement. A joint and multinational effort that uses the capabilities and organizational structures of other services, allies, host nations, and other governmental entities. It is an iterative activity in which units advance from one line of communication node to another. Onward movement occurs when units move from ports to theater staging bases or forward to the tactical assembly area. Three primary factors affecting onward movement are movement control, transportation infrastructure, and security.

Distribution management. The function of synchronizing and co-

Attributes		
Character	Presence	Intellect
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Army Values • Empathy • Warrior Ethos/Service Ethos • Discipline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Military and Professional Bearing • Fitness • Confidence • Resilience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Agility • Sound Judgment • Innovation • Interpersonal Tact • Expertise
Competencies		
Leads	Develops	Achieves
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leads Others • Builds Trust • Extends Influence Beyond the Chain of Command • Leads by Example • Communicates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates as Positive Environment/Fosters Esprit de Corps • Prepares Self • Develops Others • Stewards the Profession 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gets Results

Figure 1. Leader attributes and competencies adapted from the Army leadership requirements model found in Army Doctrine Publication 6-22, Army Leadership.

ordinating a complex system of networks (physical, communications, information, and finance) and sustainment functions (logistics, personnel services, and health service support) to achieve responsive support for operational requirements.

Material management. Directing, integrating, synchronizing, prioritizing, and optimizing the function of supply, to include maintenance and transportation functions that support supply, to provide uninterrupted support to the deployed force.

Institutional Talent Management

Talent management actually begins before a Soldier begins his or her career. The number and variety of MOSs, officer specialties, and WO specialties within the sustainment branches provide a wide range of opportunities for prospective officers and enlisted Soldiers. Each specialty, however, requires a great deal of continuous talent management.

For officers who receive their commissions through the Reserve Officers' Training Corps, the talent management process starts with the Cadet Command's Cadet Talent Management Program. The Cadet

Command provides a web-based platform for cadets to explore potential career opportunities within the active Army, ARNG, and USAR. Cadets can research various branches and specialties to assess how their individual talents and interests match the needs of the Army.

At the United States Military Academy, officers are assessed over a four-year period and assigned branches based on overall performance and talent. The Army Officer Candidate School assesses candidates based on their previous military experience, their performance during the course, and the needs of the Army.

Talent management continues for all lieutenants when they arrive at their respective basic officer leader courses. Talent management starts early and continues throughout an officer's career.

Talent management for the enlisted force is equally active. Initial efforts begin through the Army Recruiting Command. Recruiters match the talents and desires of prospective Soldiers with specific MOSs. The MOS that a Soldier qualifies for is based largely on the

Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery.

One important aspect of talent management that sustainment professionals should understand is the relationship between HRC and TRADOC. Most people are aware that HRC executes the assignments process. HRC interfaces with officers, NCOs, and Soldiers and assigns them to positions at various posts, camps, and stations. HRC also orchestrates the numerous promotion and selection boards for the Army.

What is not commonly understood is that the centers of excellence and branches under TRADOC actually write the doctrine and establish the requirements for each enlisted MOS and officer specialty. The Combined Arms Support Command (CASCOM) is the center of excellence that represents the sustainment community.

The CASCOM Logistics Branch Proponency Office and quartermaster, ordnance, transportation, adjutant general (AG), and financial management (FM) representatives work with HRC to marry the needs of the Army with the professional and technical development

needs of individual Soldiers.

CASCOM and the branches, in conjunction with Army staff proponents (G-1, G-4, and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Financial Management and Comptroller) and HRC, write the sustainment-related chapters of Department of Army Pamphlet (DA PAM) 600-3, Commissioned Officer Career Management. The Army staff sections are a critical link in the policy chain for sustainment talent management and career development. They write the policies that govern career management for sustainment professionals.

DA PAM 600-3 applies to officers and WOs in both the active and reserve components. Under Force Sustainment, Chapter 35 covers career development for each of the logistics branches, and Chapters 36 and 37 address career development for AG and FM officers, respectively. It is impossible to discuss talent management of officers without an understanding of the contents of this foundational document.

The enlisted branches are governed by DA PAM 600-25, NCO Professional Development Guide. The requirements for each career management field are described and updated through a continual dialogue between the HRC Enlisted Personnel Management Directorate and representatives from each branch.

In both examples, talent managers align each individual's needs and talents with the strategic objectives of the Army. The relationship between CASCOM and HRC for sustainment professionals is critical.

While the active and reserve components are governed by the same DA PAMs, USAR and ARNG talent management processes differ somewhat from the active component. Geographic and organizational constraints, as well as limited available training days, dictate different approaches to talent management.

For sustainers, it is common for elements of a single command to reside in five or more states. At the

expeditionary sustainment command and theater sustainment command levels, the span of control can easily touch 20 states.

Sustainment professionals in the reserve component must routinely balance the demands of a civilian profession with the professional development and talent management requirements of an Army career. Many Soldiers travel vast distances for key developmental opportunities. It is quite common for reserve component Soldiers to reside in Georgia and report to a headquarters in Louisiana, New York, or California. This is particularly true at higher level commands.

Further, ARNG Soldiers must also train to meet missions mandated by the states to which their units are assigned. These conditions affect talent management and pose challenges to maintaining personnel readiness. Although they are different than active component processes in several ways, both the USAR and ARNG systems consistently produce strong sustainment professionals capable of supporting the full range of military operations.

Maximizing Talent Management

As important as the institutional aspects of talent management are, assignments within the operational Army are more decisive to the success of overall talent management efforts. During a typical 20-year career, a sustainment officer will likely spend 60 to 75 percent of his or her time in operational assignments.

Successful NCOs and WOs will trend closer to spending 75 percent in these assignments, serving 12 to 15 years in tactical and operational units and two to three years in military schools. The remaining time will likely be served in career broadening assignments away from the operational Army. Thus, talent management within the operational force will continue to play the dominant role in growing the types of sustainment leaders the Army demands.

Presently, HRC assigns Soldiers

and leaders directly to brigades. It is imperative that sustainment leaders take an active and coordinated role in managing talent within their organizations. Yes, this pertains to all officers, WOs, and NCOs.

The process begins with understanding the developmental needs of the Soldiers assigned to the unit. For final position determinations, leaders must use DA PAM 600-3 and DA PAM 600-25, their informed knowledge of Soldiers' past assignments and performance, and an understanding of career paths for future developmental requirements. This goes beyond merely placing a round peg in a round hole; it requires knowledge of the Soldiers and their developmental needs.

For example, a brigade support battalion commander must make deliberate decisions about the placement of captains arriving from a captains career course. Leaders must work closely with the brigade S-1 and brigade commander to influence this process as much as possible for AG captains as well. Within the FM community, leaders must work closely with the division G-8 to ensure proper placement and use of brigade S-8s.

This same level of engagement is required for enlisted talent management by first sergeants and command sergeants major across the sustainment community. WO talent management is equally important. Senior warrant advisors in particular must take an active role in advising commanders on the placement and developmental needs of WOs across the force.

Another area of intense discussion is low-density MOSs and specialty talent management. Often low-density populations are not managed, trained, or coached as well as the more common specialties.

Sergeant's time training for low-density officers and enlisted MOSs is one effective method of addressing the specific training and talent management needs of these specialties. This constant process of



New York Army National Guard recruiters set up new Soldiers for success by going over military basics on Nov. 5, 2016, at Camp Smith, New York, during an event for members of the Recruit Sustainment Program. (Photo by Spc. Jonathan Pietrantonio)

talent management better ensures that a leader will be in the right position at the right time.

In addition to proper assignment management, sustainment leaders at all levels must coach and mentor junior leaders by providing routine formal counseling and accurate evaluations that will continue to build future talent within the sustainment community. It is the responsibility of all leaders to grow the bench of the Army and groom junior leaders to become the best sustainers and leaders.

Leader professional development sessions should include not only the basic tenets of Army leadership; for sustainers, they should also include the sustainment core competencies outlined in the Sustainment Leader Development Implementation Plan. A deliberate mentorship, counseling, and development program will create holistic, successful sustainment leaders for the future Army.

Leaders should use the talent management process to identify sustainers for career broadening positions after their key developmental posi-

tions. Understanding the sustainment career timeline in DA PAM 600-3 and DA PAM 600-25 is a must for all leaders to nominate the right Soldier for a broadening or nominative assignment, such as at a combat training center, as a small-group instructor for professional military education courses, and for Training With Industry, Advanced Civil Schooling, and fellowship and internship opportunities.

Assignments as recruiters, drill sergeants, advanced individual training platoon sergeants, and division and corps-level staff members are also considered broadening assignments. One common myth is that broadening assignments are inherently away from troops. This simply is not true; fellowships and internships are not the only way to achieve a broadening experience.

Combat training center assignments, for example, are equally valuable and provide Soldiers with the doctrinal knowledge required to mentor other leaders and the lessons learned of each rotating unit.

It is through these various broadening assignments, in addition to key developmental assignments, that we will continue to grow our leaders to be the best trained, most knowledgeable, and most effective sustainers in our force.

Talent management is key to the readiness of our force. The size and complexity of this task for the sustainment community is enormous. The challenges are numerous in both the active and reserve components for enlisted and officer specialties across our force.

The fact is that we will continue to require a dedicated and consistent effort to achieve success. The only way to collectively achieve Army personnel readiness objectives is through leader engagement at every level in the process.

Sound institutional processes are in place. However, the talent management battle will be won or lost at the individual leader level, such as when squad leaders take care of Soldiers in the squads and when commanders and senior enlisted leaders take the time to teach, coach, and mentor.

Sustainment leaders are up to the challenge. We always have been, and we always will be. We must maximize the potential of our greatest asset: our people.

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