

The Sustainment Leader for the Army of 2020

By Major General Larry D. Wyche

As highlighted in the Army Posture Statement of 2012, our Army is in the middle of an unprecedented transition as we “rebalance force structure and make investment decisions that will shape the Army of 2020.” Key to this transition is remaining an agile and capable force that incorporates the lessons learned over the last 11 years of combat while looking toward future missions but not fighting the last war. Thus, the sustainment community must also transition in order to support the Army of 2020.

With changes in force structure and future mission sets tied to the new National Defense Strategy, sustainment leaders must be more agile and capable of understanding all elements of tactical, operational, and strategic sustainment across the logistics, personnel, and health services support domains. This article reexamines the skills and attributes required of sustainment leaders as we move toward the Army of 2020.

Sustainment Leader Requirements

Without question, we have the best trained and most experienced tactical and operational sustainment leaders in the Army’s history. We have battle-tested professionals, experts in their crafts, who ensure that warfighting commanders have what they need to sustain the fight. However, we must continue to expand our knowledge in order to provide the full range of sustainment support needed for the Army of 2020. We must build on this foundation and create sustainment leaders who understand the impacts of decisions across the various levels and their ordered effects.

The sustainment leader of 2020 must be able to effectively plan and operate in the joint, interagency, and multinational environments and know how to leverage the Army and national provider industrial base. We must inculcate throughout our ranks that sustainment is more than just logistics at the tactical level and work toward fully understanding all aspects of sustainment and how to leverage the nonlogistics sustainment capabilities at the Army, Department of Defense, and national provider levels. Through this understanding and integration of the full suite of sustainment capabilities, we will create a sustainment force equipped with the business acumen needed to effectively and efficiently manage the multibillion dollar Army enterprise, which effectively supports the joint force and combatant commanders.

Leader Development

To create the sustainment leader of 2020, we must look beyond the “one size fits all” career map of the past and stress the importance of talent management. We must see ourselves differently. Leaders must receive relevant training and education across the lifelong learning continuum that complements their experiences to gain a broader

understanding of the Army and joint sustainment environments. This will require us to capitalize on leaders with specific knowledge, skills, abilities, and interests and provide them with opportunities that are beneficial to both the Army and the individual leader. These opportunities may be in the form of various education and leader development programs and broadening assignments within the Department of Defense, other Government organizations, or corporate America.

Multiple training and education programs are available to expand sustainment leaders’ knowledge and provide the experiences necessary for developing those leaders. Courses such as the Theater Logistics Planners Program (TLog) at the Army Logistics University, the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) at the Army Command and General Staff College, the Major General James Wright Master of Business Administration Fellowship Program at the College of William and Mary Mason School of Business, and the Defense Comptrollership Program (DCP) at Syracuse University as well as a multitude of fellowship and training with industry opportunities are good examples. These courses arm leaders with a complementary set of management skills geared toward solving complex problems through critical thinking and creative solutions. Students’ activities include developing strategic plans



in SAMS, solving theater-level logistics problems in TLog, implementing cost-informed decisionmaking practices that allow for effective budgetary management in DCP, and solving complex human resource management, financial management, or supply chain management issues in senior service colleges or fellowships. All of these educational activities are designed to teach leaders *how* to think and not *what* to think. The Army's return on its investment will be through strategic placement of leaders in positions that allow it to make the best use of these skills.

A number of educational intern and fellowship programs, such as the White House and Congressional Fellowship or Joint Chiefs of Staff, Office of the Secretary of Defense, and Army Staff Intern programs, will provide our sustainment leaders with an understanding of the complexities of the various organizations and their relationships within the Government. Additionally, training with industry programs allow sustainment leaders to spend time in the civilian sector to gather best practices from industry leaders. Each of these programs exposes leaders to an environment outside of traditional Army assignments that allows them to gain knowledge and experiences that can be used later to improve policies, procedures, and practices within the Army.

Assignment Management

The final component of building the sustainment leader of 2020 is broadening assignments. We can no longer afford to have sustainment leaders remain only at the tactical level for most of their careers. We need sustainment leaders of 2020 to see the bigger Army and joint picture, and part of that growth is through a career management assignment process as opposed to a distribution management assignment process.

The sustainment leader of 2020 must strike a balance between tactical and enterprise Army assignments to gain the knowledge, skills, and experiences needed to become a sustainment leader in 2020 and beyond.

Today's sustainment leaders must encourage broadening assignments and reward those who take the assignments outside of their comfort zones in order to become better leaders. Promotion boards must reflect this new reality. This includes full exposure to and depth of knowledge of all branches that make up the sustainment warfighting function. Future sustainment brigade commanders of all branches must understand all aspects of sustainment to include the nonlogistics domains in order to fully integrate these functions into the overall sustainment concept of support.

Talent management is fundamental to developing

the sustainment leader for 2020. The key to talent management is leader involvement and engagement. Talent management should not be addressed solely by branch managers at the Army Human Resources Command as they are primarily responsible for distributing and balancing the force. Rather, talent management is an individual commander and senior leader responsibility. Although the Army Human Resources Command has a role in facilitating talent management, success requires leaders at all levels to engage their subordinates. Sustainment leaders must assess their personnel for the appropriate knowledge, skills, and abilities for each specific branch and grade and cultivate this talent through mentorship and coaching throughout their careers to ensure they have the experience and talent needed to be the sustainment leaders of 2020 and beyond.

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The Army sustainment leader of 2020 must be an expert in tactical operations while having knowledge of operational and strategic sustainment across logistics, personnel, and health service support domains. As sustainment leaders, we are responsible for developing the sustainment leaders of the future. We will accomplish this by being engaged leaders and properly managing the Army's sustainment talent through assignment and educational opportunities. These sustainment leaders will understand the strategic impact of tactical decisions and be as comfortable operating in Army and joint enterprise assignments as they are in a brigade combat team. Our leaders will be agile, capable, and ready for the sustainment challenges of 2020 and beyond.

Major General Larry D. Wyche is the commanding general of the Army Combined Arms Support Command and Sustainment Center of Excellence at Fort Lee, Virginia.