

**TALENT:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR A U.S. ARMY OFFICER  
CORPS STRATEGY**

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This monograph is the second in a series of six that analyze the development of an officer corps strategy. The first monograph was:

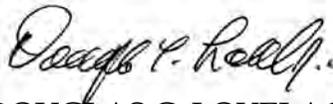
*Towards A U.S. Army Officer Corps Strategy for Success: A Proposed Human Capital Model Focused Upon Talent*, by Colonel Casey Wardynski, Major David S. Lyle, and Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Michael J. Colarusso, April 2009.

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## FOREWORD

In *Towards a U.S. Army Officer Corps Strategy for Success: A Proposed Human Capital Model Focused upon Talent*, Colonel Casey Wardynski, Major David Lyle, and Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Michael J. Colarusso made their case for the importance of accessing, developing, retaining, and employing talented leaders. In this current monograph, they go deeper and explore the differences between competent and talented leaders as well as discussing what talents the U.S. Army should seek in its officers. More importantly, they examine the consequences of failing to create an officer talent management system.

As the authors point out, the Army is competing with the private sector for the best talent America has to offer. It is therefore prudent for Army leaders to consider the principles set forth in this second in a series of six monographs analyzing the development of an officer corps strategy.



DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.  
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## SUMMARY

For years, the U.S. Army has given “competency” pride of place in its officer development doctrine. In popular usage, competent means having requisite or adequate ability, and in a labor market context, it is defined as “an enduring combination of characteristics that causes an appropriate level of individual performance.”<sup>1</sup>

Recent operational experience, however, clearly demonstrates the need for something more than adequate or appropriate individual performance by leaders. In an era of persistent conflict, Army officers must embrace new cultures, serve as ambassadors and diplomats, sow the seeds of economic development and democracy, and in general rapidly conceptualize solutions to complex and unanticipated problems.

These demands require the Army to access, retain, develop, and employ talented officers, not competent ones. This distinction is more than a mere parsing of words. In our view, *talent* is the intersection of three dimensions—skills, knowledge, and behaviors—that create an optimal level of individual performance, provided the individual is employed within his or her talent set. We believe that all people have talent which can be identified and liberated, and that they can dramatically and continuously extend their talent advantage if properly incentivized, developed, and employed.

To get optimal performance from its officers, however, the Army must first acknowledge that each has a unique distribution of skills, knowledge, and behaviors. It must also acknowledge the unique distribution of talent requirements across the force. Doing so will allow the Army to thoughtfully manage

the nexus of individual talent supply and organizational talent demand, leaving behind industrial-era assignment practices that treat leaders like interchangeable parts and creating a true talent management system that puts the right officer in the right place at the right time.

Of course, talent management is a means to an end, not an end in itself. An officer strategy focused upon talent has but one purpose: to help the Army achieve its overall objectives. It does this by mitigating the greatest risks: the cost of a mismatch between numbers of officers and requirements; and the cost of losing talented officers to the civilian labor market.

Whether it likes it or not, the Army is competing with the private sector for the best talent America has to offer. The domestic labor market is dynamic, and in the last 25 years it has increasingly demanded employees who can create information, provide service, or add knowledge. The Army cannot insulate itself from these market forces. It must change the relationship between its officers and their strength managers from one that is relatively closed, information-starved, slow-moving, and inefficient, to one that is increasingly open, rich in information, faster moving, and thus far more efficient.

We believe that thoughtful, evolutionary changes can produce revolutionary results. The Army can transform its officer management practices from an almost feudal employer-employee relationship to a talent-based model through a series of relatively low-risk efforts. Following our previous monograph and this the second one, we shall continue with four follow-on monographs for a total of six devoted to the subject of talent in the Army Officer Corps. In the latter four, we will examine in much greater detail each of

the four components of our officer labor model, viz., accessing, developing, employing, and retaining talent. We will recommend specific, low-risk, low-cost, strategically important changes. Though evolutionary in nature, they can collectively engender revolutionary effects and move the Army toward a viable officer talent management strategy. Only then will it be able to access, develop, employ, and retain the officer talent it needs to manage risk in the face of uncertain future requirements.

#### ENDNOTE

1. Lyle Spencer in Lance A. Berger and Dorothy A. Berger, eds., *The Talent Management Handbook*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004, p. 65. Our definition is derived from Spencer's.



# TALENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR A U.S. ARMY OFFICER CORPS STRATEGY

No two persons are born exactly alike. . . . All things will be produced in superior quantity and quality, and with greater ease, when each man works . . . in accordance with his natural gifts.

Plato, *The Republic*, 360 BC

## INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Army has long cherished and consistently trumpeted the need for *competent* officers. One needs to look no further than the description in *Field Manual* (FM) 6-22, *Army Leadership: Competent, Confident, and Agile*. The foreword begins with “competent,” the introduction repeats it, and by the end of the manual, the word has been used another 63 times.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, few people would tune into a television program called *America’s Got Competency*. Call it *America’s Got Talent*, however, and you have the makings of a hit show. A common dictionary definition of *talent* is a special natural ability or capacity for achievement. Competent, on the other hand, is defined as merely proficient or having requisite or adequate ability. There is nothing wrong with that, but it is little wonder that talent has greater popular appeal.

Americans generally will not pay to see a competent comedian. They do not want their favorite sports franchises to sign merely proficient outfielders or quarterbacks. They are uncomfortable leaving their retirement portfolios in the hands of adequate

investment brokers, and they avoid auto mechanics with mere requisite abilities. Americans want, and in fact demand, talent.

This demand becomes even more strident in professions where anything less means life or death. Take, for example, the case of U.S. Air Flight 1549, which ditched in the Hudson River on January 15, 2009, shortly after take-off from LaGuardia Airport. This successful water landing by Captain Chesney Sullenberger saved the lives of all 155 passengers and crew and was quickly dubbed the miracle on the Hudson. Sullenberger was lionized in the press and celebrated in Washington.

Why all the fuss? It was because Captain Sullenberger's performance wildly exceeded any reasonable expectation, and he did something a merely competent pilot simply could not do. In a matter of seconds, he correctly diagnosed the ramifications of a double bird strike, calculated the distance to nearby airports, factored in altitude and population concentrations, and applied the fundamentals of physics to safely land that plane. Training alone could not have assured such an outcome. In a highly complex, fast-moving, and uncertain situation, the talented Sullenberger was able to figure it out.

The nature of their profession demands that officers be able to figure things out just as well as Captain Sullenberger did. The Army has always sought to develop technically and tactically competent leaders, and officer evaluation reports routinely assess these competencies. Recent operational experience, however, clearly demonstrates the need for something more. Officers must embrace new cultures, serve as ambassadors and diplomats, sow the seeds of economic development and democracy, and in general rapidly

conceptualize solutions to complex and unanticipated problems.

This is why America's sons and daughters must be led by talented officers. When teachers lack talent, students do not learn; when car salesmen lack talent, their showrooms stay full; but when Army officers lack talent, Soldiers die unnecessarily and the nation's security is imperiled.

## CONTEXT – HUMAN CAPITAL THEORY

A thorough understanding of talent and its implications for a U.S. Army Officer Corps strategy is grounded within the broader context of human capital theory. In his seminal book on the subject, Nobel Laureate Gary Becker argues that employees gain human capital (the ability to produce value in the workplace) through education, training, experience, and medical care, thus increasing their productivity.<sup>2</sup> This increase, however, presupposes two conditions that are not always met: first, that the employees are *good* ones focused upon being as productive as possible; and second, that the employees are working within a competency area that aligns with their human capital.

Michael Spence, another Nobel Laureate, created a useful job-market signaling model. It concludes that the first condition often goes unmet due to *bad* (unproductive) employees, highlighting the need to continuously screen, vet, and cull for talent.<sup>3</sup> This is particularly important in limited lateral entry organizations such as the U.S. Army. The second condition, the misalignment of human capital with the demands of the work place, also requires significant effort from large organizations with varied requirements like the U.S. Army. We believe that market forces

can dramatically improve that alignment and even convert many *bad* employees into *good* ones. And by *good*, we don't mean competent. We mean talented.

In most human capital literature, the concept of talent is handled obliquely at best, with contending notions regarding which employees are actually in the talent pool. One recurring argument makes talent synonymous with an organization's highest worth individuals. In their 2003 work, *The Talent Management Handbook*, for example, Lance and Dorothy Berger characterize these individuals as "Superkeepers," just 3 to 5 percent (by their estimation) of the credentialed, professional employee pool. Superkeepers merit high degrees of investment and training so that they can rise in their organizations to eventual executive leadership. In essence, this talent management concept is focused largely upon succession planning for a select few, rather than upon maximizing the performance of all employees. This approach is fairly common throughout the literature.

Less common, but also present in the literature, is the viewpoint that we advance here: that all people have talent which should be identified and liberated, and that they can dramatically and continuously extend their talent advantage if properly incentivized, developed, and employed. Underpinning this view are works such as Howard Gardner's *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (1983), or Thomas Armstrong's *7 Kinds of Smart: Identifying and Developing Your Multiple Intelligences* (1999).<sup>4</sup>

Armstrong, for example, defines intelligence as "the ability to respond successfully to new situations and the capacity to learn from past experiences."<sup>5</sup> He argues that employees can increase their market value and productivity if they identify and develop their

talents within each of several native intelligence sets first articulated by Gardner: *linguistic; spatial; musical; bodily-kinesthetic; logical-mathematical; interpersonal; and intrapersonal.*

Our definition of talent is informed by these elements, but takes a more comprehensive approach. We contribute to the existing literature on talent by introducing a new structure that captures the various dimensions of talent, seeing it as a distribution, and placing it in the context of a strategic labor model.

### Our Definition of Talent.

We define *talent* as the intersection of three dimensions – **skills, knowledge, and behaviors** – that create an *optimal* level of individual performance, provided the individual is employed within their talent set. Figure 1 illustrates how the many views of talent boil down to these three key dimensions.

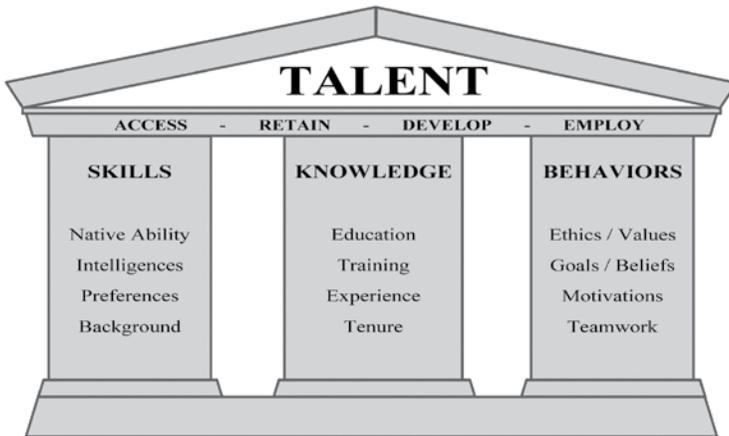


Figure 1: The Dimensions of Talent

Moreover, we espouse the critical concept that each person's talent set represents a unique distribution of skills, knowledge, and behaviors, and that each organization in turn has a unique distribution of individuals. For an illustration of this concept, consider Figure 2, whose inset shows one individual with relative breadth of skills, depth of knowledge, and both depth and breadth of behaviors. Next, look at the graph for the entire organization, which has a distribution of individuals from A to Z. Person A, with a higher curve, has greater depth of talent, while Person Z, with a wider curve, has greater breadth of talent. By seeking a distribution of officer talent with varying breadth and depth, the Army essentially buys an insurance policy against the uncertainty of future requirements.

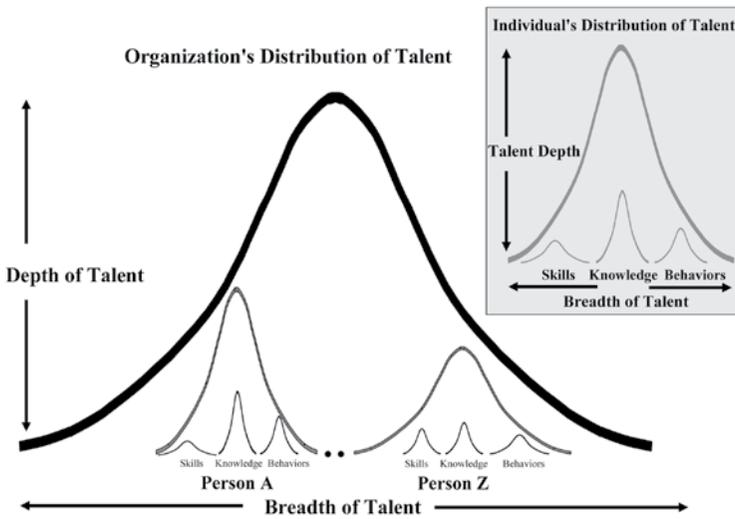


Figure 2: Distributions of Talent

Furthermore, carefully managing the intersection of these distributions can dramatically enhance organizational efficiency and success. Integrating this talent

concept throughout strategic-level efforts to access, retain, develop, and employ people can create incredible synergy. It is as if the team suddenly gets smarter, faster, and more cost-effective, and productivity zooms.

Although our views have been formulated within the context of the Army's officer labor model, we believe our distillation of talent into three equally important dimensions, distributed across both individuals and organizations, is widely applicable. Understanding how organizations can integrate these concepts into their own human capital strategies requires a deeper examination of the three dimensions of talent.

*Skill.* In our previous work on the subject, we describe skill as ranging from broadly conceptual or intuitive to deeply technical. We place a premium upon aptitudes for rapid learning and adaptation, reason, perception, and discernment, plus the ability to conceive solutions to unanticipated challenges.<sup>6</sup> We also argue, however, that people manifest these aptitudes most powerfully *in the fields to which their intelligences draw them.*

For example, people with a high degree of *logical-mathematical* intelligence may be drawn to civil engineering, where they will be able to think conceptually, learn rapidly, and respond effectively to unanticipated challenges, just as those with highly developed *linguistic* intelligence might perform in the field of journalism. Ask two such people to exchange professions, however, and their productivity may plunge as the journalist wrestles with structural tension and the civil engineer struggles with split infinitives.

As Bruce Tulgan writes in *Winning the Talent Wars* (2001), the unique talent of every employee highlights the need for "creating as many career paths as you

have people.”<sup>7</sup> No two people possess an identical talent distribution, and as a result employees cannot simply be treated like interchangeable pegs to slot anywhere. Each person’s talent set is unique and multidimensional, more like a jigsaw puzzle piece than a peg. While it takes longer to fit the puzzle piece into its proper position than it does to stick the peg in a hole, the up-front effort is worth it. Puzzle pieces are interlocking, creating powerful bonds within a cohesive whole (see Figure 3).

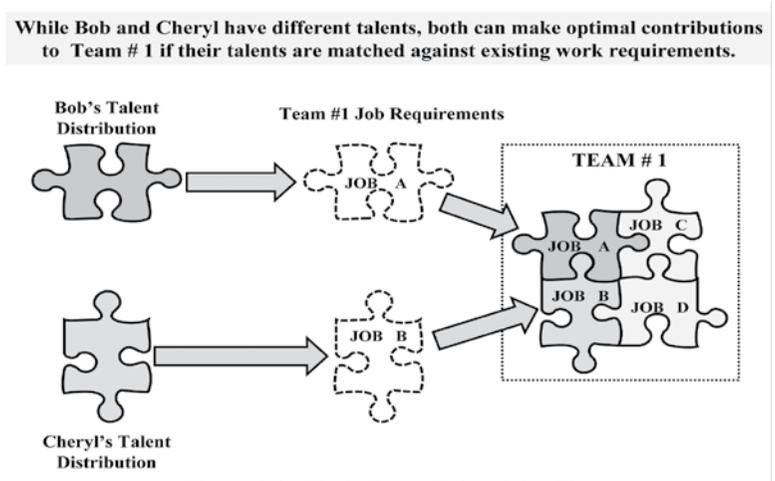


Figure 3: Work-Force Talent Matching

The size and scope of the U.S. Army workforce make it a complex puzzle indeed, and to accomplish its mission, it needs a broad distribution of talent. Breadth affords the Army the flexibility it needs to adapt to an environment with ever-changing requirements. Breadth is only one dimension of talent, however. Organizations require depth as well. Take, for example, Mariano Rivera of the New York Yankees, one of baseball’s preeminent relief pitchers, and Albert Pujols of the St. Louis Cardinals, power hitter *extraordinaire*. Each has

a unique distribution of talent that must be aligned against his team's requirements. Other than being consummate professionals, they bring fundamentally different talents to bear—Rivera could no more lead the league in home runs than Pujols could in saves. Each of these athletes possesses highly specialized and developed talents that are central to the success of their organizations.

While each professional baseball club clearly needs specialization, each also needs broadly talented utility players. Imagine the results if a team fielded nine specialists like Rivera and Pujols, or nine utility players. Such an approach would land them squarely in last place. To make a run at the pennant, a team needs a rich distribution of talent, both deep and broad, and the management strategy to fit the puzzle pieces together correctly.

This talent distribution concept is somewhat foreign to the Army's officer management culture. Standardized training and promotion gates are designed largely to create officers of one type. Given the uncertain requirements of the future, however, the Army needs a rich distribution of broad *and* deep talent.

*Knowledge.* The acquisition of knowledge represents the further development of a person's several intelligences, and is thus an extension of their talent advantage. While some knowledge is, of course, acquired via training and life experience, education provides the most important source of knowledge because it also bolsters mental agility and conceptual thinking. It allows people to extract MORE knowledge from their life experiences. Education teaches people **how** to think, not **what** to think. They more rapidly assess unanticipated situations and formulate courses

of action leading to desired outcomes. They gain decisionmaking courage stemming from increased confidence in their own cognitive abilities. In other words, one of the best defenses against uncertain future requirements is an educated labor force.

Consider, for example, an emergency in which a person requires immediate medical assistance, yet only a veterinarian is available. The vet is likely to be *logical-mathematical*, with a talent advantage extended by years of education. His medical talents might not be ideal for the situation, but his ability to conceptualize medical problems and extrapolate solutions to unanticipated circumstances could save the day. Seem far-fetched? Tell that to Ian Bennett, an English farmer recently saved by his veterinarian, Dr. Ed Bulman, after suffering a heart attack while the two of them tended to a flock of alpacas on a remote farm.<sup>8</sup>

Popular culture abounds with stories showing the impact of education and knowledge acquisition upon a person's talent set. A useful example is the Adam Sandler movie, *Happy Gilmore*. In the film, Happy is drawn toward several jobs requiring *bodily-kinesthetic* intelligence because he possesses it in good measure. After striking out as a janitor, gas station attendant, plumber, and construction worker, his innate intelligence eventually draws him toward hockey. He fails to make the team, however, and ends up moving in with his grandmother while contemplating his next career step.

An accidental encounter with two lazy moving men helps Happy to finally discover one of his abilities – he is a talented golfer and can drive a ball farther and truer than anyone on the PGA tour. Despite this, Happy does not become an above average performer until

he begins working with a former professional who educates him in the rules of the game. The pro also teaches Happy how to putt, dramatically extending his talent advantage in golf and making him a top earner.

While the movie has a happy ending (of course), employers should definitely try to avoid the Happy Gilmore effect for two reasons. First, Happy discovered his talent set accidentally, whereas employers must systematically develop people to their fullest potential and against specific requirements. Second, Happy's full potential as a golfer went unrealized because he could not conform to the sport's required behavior, as evidenced by his club throwing and shouting obscenities. Happy's experience illustrates that the right proportion of skills, knowledge, AND behavior are critical to creating and maintaining a person's talent advantage.

*Behavior.* Effective organizations hire not merely for technical and cognitive skills, but also for values, attitudes, and attributes that fit their culture.<sup>9</sup> The U.S. Army has certainly developed and sustained a powerful organizational culture. Its seven official values (*Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage*) are the most visible, but the Army ethic demands dozens of other personal attributes (will, tolerance, compassion, caring, character, candor, punctuality, sobriety, faithfulness, fiscal responsibility, accuracy, courtesy, etc.). For Army service, particularly commissioned officer service, these attributes are essential.

Screening for behavioral fit is more than just values and attribute matching. Officers who live the Army Values, graduate at the top of their class, and can "shoot, move, and communicate with the best of them" will be far less effective leaders if they are conceited, inflexible, go-it-alone types. Put another way, when an

organization seeks behaviors that fit its culture, it is also seeking teamwork behavior, marked by the respectful sharing of goals and knowledge with others.

Jody Hoffer Gittell, a professor at Brandeis University, defines teamwork behavior as relational competence—the ability to relate effectively with others.<sup>10</sup> By others, she is referring not only to fellow employees, but to an organization's partners and customers. In the U.S. Army's case, others obviously include fellow Soldiers and the American citizenry, as well as host nation populations and joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational partners.

Gittell describes teamwork behavior as critical to relational coordination, a “mutually reinforcing process of interaction between communication and relationships carried out for the purpose of task integration.”<sup>11</sup> This process is particularly critical in an age of increasingly complex, highly interdependent tasks. In other words, the right behaviors lead to timely, accurate, and problem-solving communication which, when coupled with the right skills and knowledge, creates higher-performing organizations.

Gittell developed and tested her relational coordination theories in the context of health care, long-term assisted-living care, and the airline industry. The test case perhaps most useful to our discussion is her study of Southwest Airlines. This company of over 31,000 employees enjoys industry-leading success in workforce quality (measured via profitability and customer satisfaction) and workforce retention (measured via annual turnover rates). It is a talent-focused organization looking for highly skilled and knowledgeable employees, yet it routinely screens out highly credentialed applicants lacking relational competence. It does this not simply because It wants

a happy workforce, but because it wants an efficient and productive one. Southwest believes it is difficult to make up for hiring mistakes in the training process—team players are needed.<sup>12</sup>

As teamwork has always been a core component of the Army's institutional culture ("I will never leave a fallen comrade"), it is critical to access, develop, employ, and retain officers with behavior that fits the Army. By fit, we emphatically do not mean an Army of clones who behave identically and with robotlike efficiency. Shared values and teamwork behavior still leave plenty of room for individual styles and personalities.

Aligning the right mix of skills, knowledge, and behavior against each work requirement can shift the production possibility frontier of an entire organization up and out. Figure 4 shows how the Army can increase its production of firepower and humanitarian assistance with no increase in costs. Conversely, by aligning talent with requirements, the Army can continue to maintain humanitarian assistance and firepower along the old frontier, but with cost savings.<sup>14</sup>

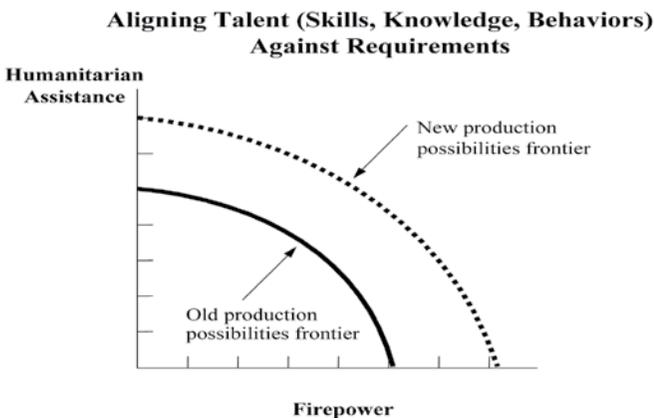


Figure 4: Talent Management Can Lead to Increased Production

We can summarize our discussion of talent thus far as follows:

1. Talent is the intersection of skills, knowledge, and behaviors, and everyone has it.

2. Each individual has a unique and evolving distribution of talent (his/her talent set)—some deep and some broad.

3. Optimal production occurs when organizations thoughtfully manage depth and breadth of talent over time.

## MANAGING TALENT

Assuming that an organization is doing a good job of bringing in talented people, those making significant contributions are most likely working in the right positions on the right tasks. Those who are producing less are probably in the wrong place, doing the wrong things. Instead of disposing of them, the organization may benefit by finding a better fit for them. Getting the right person in the right place at the right time is not an end in itself, however. Talent management has but one purpose: to help an organization achieve its overall objectives.<sup>15</sup>

Leading management scholars argue that the fundamental challenge facing employers in today's economy is the misalignment of talent supply and demand and the risks associated with it. Peter Cappelli, a professor at the Wharton School, describes the problem in terms of cost:

The greatest risks in talent management are, first, the cost of a mismatch in employees and skills (not enough to meet . . . demand or too much, leading to layoffs) and, second, the cost of losing your talent development investments through the failure to retain employees.

These risks stand in the way of the ability of your organization to meet its goals.<sup>16</sup>

Over the last 2 decades, the Army's Officer Corps has certainly confronted these two risks, the former during the draw-down period of the 1990s and the latter from the late-1990s to today.<sup>17</sup> The Army still relies upon talent pipelines to develop organization men and women who will remain with the Officer Corps for their entire careers (see Figure 5). This practice is increasingly difficult in today's labor market, however. As the last decade has clearly shown, talent pipelines designed to take officers from company grade to general officer level will inevitably leak talent, sometimes severely.

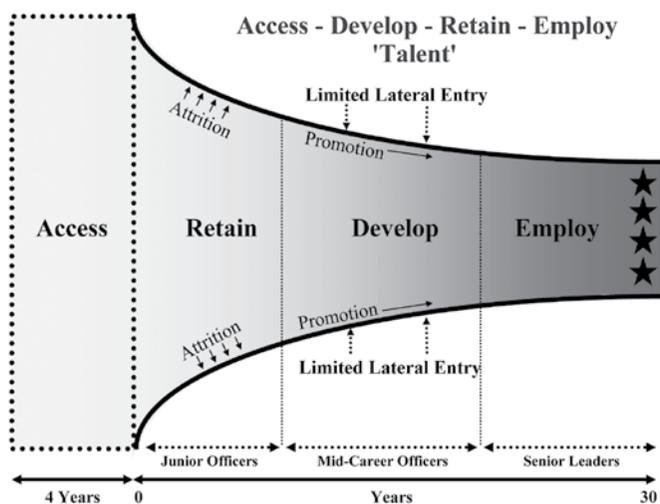


Figure 5: Army Officer Human Capital Model

Of these risks (overproduction, underproduction, and leakage), Cappelli identifies talent overproduction as most dangerous. In his view, overproduction fills an organization's bench with employees who become

increasingly disgruntled and seek opportunities to get in the game *elsewhere*, creating a negative work environment that depresses productivity *everywhere*. In other words, overproduction can create talent leakage that becomes contagious within the workforce. The Army may have experienced this phenomenon with the recent over-accession of lieutenants, as shown in Figure 6. As lieutenants receive less time in key and developmental jobs such as platoon leader, they are more apt to find employment outside of the Army where their talent sets will be valued.

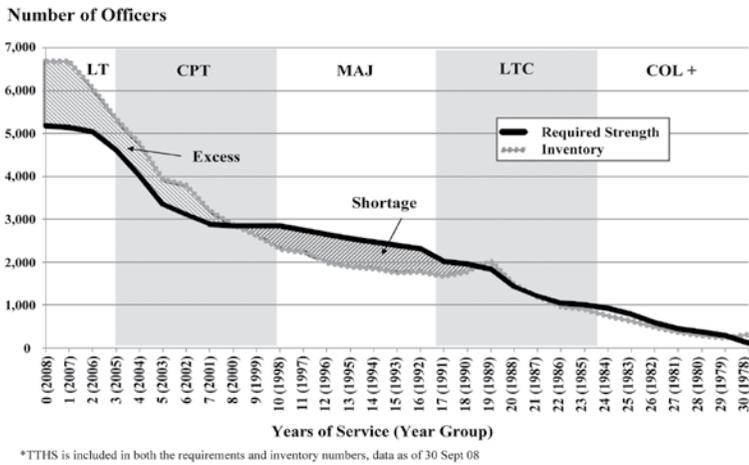


Figure 6: Authorized Strength and Inventory for All Officers

Cappelli feels that underproduction, also a genuine risk, is a lesser evil, as companies can always turn to free agent talent to fill labor gaps (in short, poaching talent from other organizations, or buying talent). He concludes that in the current labor market, organizations can mitigate risk in two ways: first, by combining internal talent development and just-in-time talent buying to fill unexpected gaps; and, second, by becoming far better at forecasting talent demand.

Of course, the Army's competitive category officers cannot be purchased from outside because the very nature of the profession makes lateral entry to its core competencies infeasible.<sup>18</sup> General Electric and International Business Machines are not producing rifle platoon leaders or cavalry troop commanders that the Army can hire into its ranks. Faced with this reality, the Army turned to internal talent poaching, pulling more and more senior noncommissioned officers (NCOs) into the Officer Corps via Officer Candidate School (OCS), with a potentially deleterious effect upon both its NCO Corps and its Warrant Officer Corps.<sup>19</sup> The Army has recognized this problem and is actively taking steps to end its over-reliance upon internal talent poaching.

The quandary remains, however—if the Army overproduces officer talent, it risks engendering job dissatisfaction that accelerates talent flight. If it underproduces, it is again short of talent with nowhere to turn. Therefore, the Army must attack its talent management risks with a thoughtful and effective mitigation strategy that keeps its talent supply and demand in careful balance at all times. Beyond relying on education and broad talent sets to mitigate risk, the Army must also make significant changes in officer management policy, practice, systems, and culture.

## **REVOLUTIONIZING THE ARMY OFFICER CORPS**

We believe that thoughtful, evolutionary changes can produce revolutionary results. The Army can transform its officer management practices from those of an almost feudal employer-employee relationship to a talent-based model through a series of relatively low-risk efforts.

First, the Army needs to create an *internal* officer talent labor market. In our follow-on papers in this series, we will provide specific recommendations on how the Army can meet this need. Second, the Army's human resource culture must change. It should stop managing officers as interchangeable parts, acknowledging that each possesses unique talents suiting them to a particular position at a particular time. Embracing this concept requires the Army to move away from its current industrial-era rotational employment concepts. It must develop flexible management practices that capitalize upon the unique skills, knowledge, and behaviors of each officer rather than expecting each officer to adapt to the constraints of an inflexible system.

These changes cannot take place until the Army accurately determines which skills, knowledge, and behaviors currently reside within its officer corps. To do this, new information technology systems are needed to capture very granular insights into each officer's talent set, which in turn will reveal the distribution of officer talent across the Army. Current personnel data systems may be able to tell us that an officer attended Notre Dame and studied anthropology, but they do not reveal that while in college, the officer also participated in a semester abroad program in Saudi Arabia and wrote a thesis on tribal ancestries in Middle Eastern countries. Furthermore, current Army information systems contain scant information on an officer's skills, knowledge, and behaviors.

Cataloging available talent is not enough, however. The Army must also know what its current and future talent requirements are. While requirements forecasts are never going to be foolproof, the Army has to try to make them far better than what others have done,

that is, to forecast talent demand dynamically and accurately, and to keep supply in sync with that demand. As Cappelli has pointed out, dynamic forecasts, which are continuously updated, have a smaller margin of error than long-range forecasts. Information technology solutions, accompanied by the appropriate changes in operational policy, can do much to create both accurate forecasting and a robust internal market. When forecasts are wrong, as they inevitably will be, previous investments in education will help the organization adapt quickly to fill gaps.

Once the Army finally knows the talent it possesses, it must continuously assess it. An effective mix of skills, knowledge, and behaviors is not static in individuals nor in organizations. The theoretic construct of screening, vetting, and culling for talent, introduced by us in the first monograph,<sup>20</sup> plays a central role in this continuous process. It provides the Army with a mechanism by which it can continually prune its talent to meet evolving requirements. Such a mechanism for continuous assessment is particularly necessary in the Army's Officer Corps for at least three reasons.

First, many of the skills, knowledge, and behaviors that make lieutenants most productive will not be sufficient to make them talented colonels or generals later in their career. For example, colonels and generals (the Army's *strategic talent* segment) require a greater breadth of competencies than field grade (*core talent* segment) or company grade (*requisite talent* segment) officers. In one of the follow-on monographs, we shall discuss ways to develop talent across the continuum of a career.

Second, the global operating environment is dynamic, continuously demanding new competencies from the Army's Officer Corps at all levels of employment. An equally dynamic domestic labor market

compounds the challenge. The last 25 years have witnessed a dramatic increase in the U.S. demand for employees who can create information, provide service, or add knowledge. The Army cannot insulate itself from these changes. It must convert the relationship between its officers and their strength managers from a “relatively closed, information-starved, slow-moving, and inefficient relationship to one that is increasingly open, information rich, faster moving, and thus far more efficient.”<sup>21</sup>

Third, the way that each generational cohort learns and performs, as well as what it values and how it behaves, is as distinct from the one preceding as it is from the one following. As officers rise to leadership within the Army’s strategic talent segment of colonels and generals, they will successfully manage the talents of their junior officers and Soldiers only if they understand, and make adjustment for, these generational differences.<sup>22</sup>

If the Army first understands the dynamic nature of the changing market for officer talent, it can thoughtfully decide which developmental programs best fill the gap between the talent it has and that which it requires. In so doing, the Army can begin to employ its talent with an eye towards productivity and future development of every individual’s talent set.

## CONCLUSION

We believe that talent is something possessed by everyone. It is the intersection of three dimensions—skills, knowledge, and behaviors—that can optimize the performance of every individual, *provided* they are employed within their talent sets. Each organization has a unique distribution of individuals who in turn

possess a unique distribution of skills, knowledge, and behaviors (their personal talent set). Achieving optimal organizational performance entails managing talent so that the organization attracts the right talent, develops it, retains it, and employs it most efficiently.

In a series of four follow-on monographs, we will examine each component of our officer labor model in much greater detail: *accessing*, *developing*, *employing*, and *retaining* talent. We will recommend specific, low-risk, low-cost, evolutionary practices that can collectively engender revolutionary change. Such change is necessary to move the Army from industrial-era personnel practices to information-age talent management practices.

Whether it likes it or not, the Army is competing with the private sector for the best talent America has to offer. Remaining competitive in this labor market requires an Officer Corps strategy that can access, develop, employ, and retain the talent the Army needs to confront future uncertain requirements.

## ENDNOTES

1. *Field Manual (FM) 6-22, Army Leadership: Competent, Confident and Agile*, Washington, DC: Department of the Army, October 12, 2006.

2. Gary Becker, *Human Capital*, Third Ed., Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993, pp. 40-41.

3. Michael Spence, *Signaling in Retrospect and the Informational Structure of Markets*, Nobel Prize lecture, December 8, 2001, pp. 410-413, available from [nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/economics/laureates/2001/spence-lecture.pdf](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/economics/laureates/2001/spence-lecture.pdf). Spence posits that because educational credentials send a positive signal to employers (generally viewed as correlating to higher ability), *bad* employees will occasionally seek and gain educational credentials. While the

credential itself may do little or nothing to increase an employee's productivity, the opportunity costs of obtaining the credential are significantly lower for *good* employees, and therefore education retains its usefulness as a positive signal of employee potential—more *good* employees will have it.

4. For a comprehensive overview of Gardner's work, see his "Multiple Intelligences after Twenty Years," a paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL, April 21, 2003. See also Thomas Armstrong, *7 Kinds of Smart: Identifying and Developing Your Multiple Intelligences*, New York: Penguin Group, 1999.

5. Armstrong, p. 8.

6. In *Winning the Talent Wars*, New York, W. W. Norton & Co., 2001, p. 37, Bruce Tulgan argues that a wealth of these conceptual or intuitive powers creates "the brain's killer app[lication] — judgment." He refers to judgment as "the new gold standard for talent," because there is no technology other than the human brain which can exercise it.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

8. "Vet Saves Farmer's Life After Collapse," available from [www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/3689578.Vet\\_saves\\_farmer\\_\\_\\_s\\_life\\_after\\_collapse/](http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/3689578.Vet_saves_farmer___s_life_after_collapse/), July 23, 2009.

9. Edward L. Gubman, *The Talent Solution*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998, p. 63.

10. Jody Hoffer Gittel, *The Southwest Airlines Way*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003, p. 5.

11. Jody Hoffer Gittel, "Relational Coordination: Guidelines for Theory, Measurement and Analysis," June 22, 2009, p. 3, available from [www.jodyhoffergittel.info/content/download/Relational\\_Coordination.doc](http://www.jodyhoffergittel.info/content/download/Relational_Coordination.doc), July 27, 2009.

12. Gittel, *The Southwest Airlines Way*, p. 99.

13. A production possibility frontier depicts the feasible outputs given inputs, thus showing the trade-off between varying outputs given resource constraints. Expanding the frontier occurs when inputs are made more efficient, or when there is an increase in overall inputs.

14. As described by Becker, there is another dimension that can virtually “zero out” the talent advantage of an employee—poor health or physical fitness. The efficacy of the Army’s health care system is beyond the scope of this monograph.

15. Peter Cappelli, *Talent on Demand*, Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2008, p. 5.

16. *Ibid.*

17. For a detailed statistical analysis of these problems, see the previous monograph by Casey Wardynski, David S. Lyle, and Michael J. Colarusso, *Toward a U.S. Army Officer Corps Strategy for Success*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, April 2009, available from [www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/download.cfm?q=912](http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/download.cfm?q=912).

18. “Competitive Category” officers in the U.S. Army are those comprising the majority of the Officer Corps in specialties organized around conducting or supporting direct combat operations. These include branches such as Infantry, Armor, Field Artillery, Engineers, Aviation, Military Police, Military Intelligence, and many others whose core competencies are gained via a high proportion of military education and training. Such training and education are normally not available outside of the Armed Forces. Officers in this category all enter the Army as second lieutenants and have reasonably consistent career trajectories across their branches. Non-Competitive Category officers, a relatively small proportion of the Officer Corps, are in highly specialized or technical fields that do permit lateral entry into the Army and whose professional competencies are often obtained outside of the Armed Forces. These include doctors, lawyers, and chaplains. Their promotion criteria and timing differ significantly from that of “Competitive Category” officers, hence the reference to them as “Non-Competitive Category” officers.

19. Wardynski, Lyle, and Colarusso, pp. 7-10.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Tulgan, pp. 23-25.

22. For a thoughtful discussion of generational differences, see Neil Howe and William Strauss, *The Lifecourse Method*, available from [www.lifecourse.com/mi/method.html](http://www.lifecourse.com/mi/method.html). For an examination of generational differences specific to the Army's Officer Corps, see Leonard Wong's *Generations Apart: Xers and Boomers in the Officer Corps*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2000, available from-- [www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/download.cfm?q=281](http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/download.cfm?q=281).