



How Can the Army Build Civilian Leadership Efficacy Through the
Optimization of Supervisory Interview Processes?

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Disclaimer

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Abstract

“We must overhaul our current personnel management system to attract, develop, and retain exceptional Leaders and Soldiers,” Army Strategy 2018 (Milley & Esper, 2018). America is on the brink of a major talent management crisis (Smith D. H., 2019). If the United States Army expects to maintain a competitive advantage it must make every effort to ensure the strategic plan for human capital management is stronger than ever before. In discussion with Army senior leaders, they expressed concerns relative to growing civilian leaders (Defense Acquisition University, 2017). When outlining what was needed Army Leadership felt it was clear the Army could grow civilian leadership skills. However, there was also this notion that there is a component of leadership that is innate to a specific individual. There must be a willingness to want to grow, or perhaps something even deeper, something that is so ingrained it is in a person’s DNA (Defense Acquisition University, 2017).

The question for this research paper is how to identify those people with the right skill sets and pull them in among the Army’s civilian ranks. This paper focuses on interview techniques the Army can use to identify people who have the ability to become strong leaders within their respective organizations. It reviewed current management interview processes, laws, policies and regulations in order to compare and contrast them with successful leadership hiring techniques. The findings identified multiple techniques Army leaders could use to improve the efficacy of their interviews. Further, authorities are in place to use the techniques. However, the authorities are poorly and inconsistently exercised. The analysis recommends the Army look at creating an interview techniques guide and complete a marketing/training tour with hiring authorities and human resources departments to assist with enabling and encouraging the use of recommended practices.

Introduction

“We must overhaul our current personnel management system to attract, develop, and retain exceptional Leaders and Soldiers,” Army Strategy 2018 (Milley & Esper, 2018).

“Developing leaders who are competent in national-level decision-making requires broad revision of talent management among the Armed Services,” National Defense Strategy 2018 (Mattis, 2018). America is on the brink of a major talent management crisis. In the not too distant future, China will have more children that qualify as “gifted” than we have children born in this country (Smith D. H., 2019). If the United States Army expects to maintain its military competitive advantage as a nation it must make every effort to ensure the strategic plan for human capital management is stronger than ever.

In discussions with our senior leaders, they talked about the concerns they had relative to growing civilian leaders within the Army (Defense Acquisition University, 2017). This general sense of concern is reiterated throughout our nation’s strategic plans and documentation. When outlining what was needed to minimize their concerns, the top Army leadership felt it was clear the Army could grow some civilian leadership skills. However, there was also this notion that there is a component of leadership that is innate to a specific individual. There must be a willingness to want to grow, or perhaps something even deeper, something that is so ingrained it is in a person’s DNA (Defense Acquisition University, 2017). If the Army is to fulfill the task outlined above, by their Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary of Defense, they must figure out how to identify the people who have that right “something”. The Army must find those individuals with that required innate skill set that will grow and flourish into the robust transformative leadership needed to guide them towards a successful future in what will most certainly be challenging times.

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The question for this research centers on how to identify those people with the right skill sets among the Army's Civilian ranks. Once identified how the U.S. Army will place the people in the right positions to lead the organization forward. There are many ways to approach this problem and one could attempt to evaluate the entire talent management system but that would be far too large for this level of research. The research will introduce other areas that, if explored more deeply, would further this content. In drawing down this discussion to a manageable scope this research will focus on interview techniques the Army can use to identify people with the right skill sets to become strong leaders within their respective organizations. The focus will then further down scope to Army civilian leadership at the senior management level approximately equating to an Army Colonel or General Schedule (GS) 15 employee. The intent of this research is to look at the current management interview processes across the major Army civilian commands and review the laws, policies and regulations currently in place to compare and contrast them with current successful leadership hiring techniques. This comparative analysis will offer the Army a guide for consideration as they work to refine the Talent Management Plan voiced in the Army and Nation's strategic planning documents.

Background

Problem Definition:

When reviewing climate surveys and in speaking with the general workforce one often finds a continuing theme reference the lack of leadership skills within government mid-management and leadership (Defense Acquisition University, 2017). When hiring for these leadership positions the government often unnecessarily locks themselves into very specific rubrics and methodologies leading to less than optimal hiring decisions (United States Merit

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Systems Protection Board, 2010). These rubrics are often designed for non-supervisory positions that require and focus on in-depth technical expertise. The end result is Army civilian leadership are selected not for their ability to lead or manage a group of individuals but for their technical knowledge, which may not be at all relevant to leading the future team they will be assigned to.

“Supervisory selection is often based more heavily on technical expertise than on leadership competencies. Technical skills appear to be much more strongly emphasized than are supervisory skills in both job announcements and assessments... Technical experts without an interest or aptitude in leadership are often selected for supervisory roles. Because most Federal career paths do not provide technical expert roles in which highly proficient and experienced employees are recognized with organizational status and increased compensation, technically proficient employees who have minimal interest or aptitude in managing people apply for supervisory positions. And, because the selection criteria are heavily weighted toward technical expertise, they often are selected for these positions.” (United States Merit Systems Protection Board, 2010, pp. i-ii)

Further, due to the nature of the government human resources system these individuals stay in these positions, despite the poor fit for years to decades.

Significance of Research:

The Army’s main focus for nearly twenty years has been defeating enemies while actively engaged in heavy conflict, much to the detriment of material and technology development. During those twenty years, adversaries have used this time to catch up with the U.S. relative to what was once considered unmatched capability sets. The U.S. Army now finds itself in a world where the people that were once distant peers are very near peers and we must increase that ever

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shrinking gap. The people that develop those capabilities are often not military service members. Those working the day to day tasks of developing system for the Army are largely Army civilian employees. These civilians are now being asked to make technology leaps at a pace that has never been seen before with mounting pressure from near peer enemies. In order to live up to this call Army civilian leadership must have a transformational nature. Army civilian leaders must have the abilities to lead through rapid and significant change in capability areas that have atrophied from 20 plus years of neglect. Further, Army civilian leaders must change in a strong economy where the Army must compete heavily with industry for top talent. All while the near peer competitor's physical talent pool is growing and America's talent pool is shrinking (Smith D. H., 2019).

Purpose of the Project:

The purpose of this research is to look at the current interview processes to identify how the Army is hiring civilian leadership today. This process will be compared with the current laws, policies and regulations, providing an understanding of the current status of the interview processes. The current processes will then be compared with common industry practices and research findings on interview techniques that have been found to be most effective for the general public, nationally and internationally. This comparative analysis should inform the Army on best practices and recommend adjustments to current practices to meet the needs expressed by Army's most senior leaders, as well as service and national level strategic planning documents.

Research Questions:

- What are the current Army Civilian Leadership interview practices?

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- What are the laws, policies and regulations relative to Army and industry leadership interview practices?
- What is the history and evolution of interview practices and techniques?
- What are the challenges and pitfalls in executing a successful interview?
- How can the Army employ the various interview techniques and research relative to hiring leaders to strengthen talent management concepts?

Objectives and Outcomes:

To increase the efficacy of Army Leadership by aiding in getting the right people in the right positions. The intent of the research is to look at the current management interview processes to identify how the Army is hiring civilian leadership. The research will then attempt to take a step further by using that information to provide insight into the Army's strengths relative to interviewing for leadership positions as well as areas for improvement in the interview process. If this research assists one command, in one hiring action, to select a transformational leader the ripple effect of that decision will have decades of positive impact for the Army. Currently the research has already begun to have impact. As this research progressed, differences between practices began to emerge. The inquiries enabled the linking of commands to discuss those differences. Right now SOPs are being written and success stories are being shared across regions and organizations. This cross pollination of ideas goes a long way towards meeting the objectives of this research.

Research Hypothesis

The initial hypothesis for this research was the Army, DoD or Federal Government's less than optimal hiring decisions had a causal link to ineffective interviewing techniques. Further, that the government had put in place certain boundaries and barriers that were preventing the use of more effective hiring techniques in interviews. These barriers were thought to have been what lead to poor interviewing techniques which then lead to less than optimal hiring decisions. However, the research uncovered a very different picture than anticipated. This drove the findings and recommendations in a different direction than originally anticipated. While there is still room for the Army to improve its interviewing techniques, the reason for the poor execution of those techniques is far more diverse than expected and less linked to policy and law than to cultural norms.

Research Approach/Methodologies

The approach taken to identify the sources for the paper was topically driven. In order to assess the hypothesis discussed above it was essential that the current state was defined for both the Army and industry. Further, one had to determine if there was a need for change or improvement and define what success would, or could, look like when interviewing for leadership positions. As such, a topical approach was taken to find relevant research. The approach led to a variety of searches that centered on themes from the hypothesis listed above. Further, in order to fully cover the topic, one source type could not completely address the research intent. In the initial searches little data was found specific to executive hiring. When looking further into the cause of the void the research found many of the processes and

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procedures are orally passed from human resource departments to the hiring authorities for the leadership positions discussed in this research. Due to the interview limitations placed upon this research, data had to be collected using a variety of different methods, from multiple source types, in order to draw a well-rounded picture of the topic. Therefore, the collection of literature ranges in type, from academic research to general publications and web based content, rather extensively in order to completely address all thoughts and deliberations.

Literature Review

Sources Collection:

Five scholarly databases were used to find the information for this research; ProQuest ABI Inform/Global, ProQuest Dissertations and Thesis Global, EBESCO Host Academic Search Ultimate, Google Scholar and GAO Reports. Each search engine provides different types of scholarly research that fed the body of knowledge for this research. The majority of academic sources came from ProQuest, Google Scholar and GAO Reports. However, the other sources were found to provide unique inputs.

After reviewing academia's information, it was found that this topic required searching through discussions in sources meant for the general public. Both google search engines and Army global search engines were used to find the general public's thoughts on this topic. These searches provided information from media such as Forbes or Wall Street Journal, as well as periodicals for those in the recruiting industry. These sources proved to be very valuable in what developed into a somewhat soft skills based and culturally mired discussion. The Army databases gave access to human resource professionals as well as references for law and regulatory guidance.

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Validity of Research:

The searches revealed that sources related to executive, supervisory or leadership positions were very scarce in academic forums. However, when opening the aperture to interviews in general, the harder scientific research opened up as well. When looking at public forum sites similar results occurred. While data was certainly found on executive hiring there is considerably more discussion on the interview process relating to hiring in general than specific to executive processes. Further, a great variety of foundational research was done in the late 1990's and early 2000's and then dissipated until more recently. One could hypothesize that there may be correlation between economic prosperity and the need for this type of data but that is outside the scope of this research.

The searches were limited to no further than six years prior to the current date and were sorted by proximity to the search terms. A manual search was then done to determine the most applicable documents to this endeavor. As initial sources were reviewed each revealed additional documents with relevant discussions that were then included in the body of this study. Additionally, some data came out of informal discussions with various defense human resource professionals who shared documented processes and procedures.

Over 100 sources were reviewed in the development of this study. Their size ranged from 300 plus pages to a few paragraphs. The following are a few examples reviewed for this research: scientific academic journals, law, federal policy and regulation, congressional reports, national strategic guidance, professional publications, industry publications, professional speeches and presentations and independent organizational staff procedures.

Relevant Sources:

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Categories of the 100+ sources referenced above fit into the following nine buckets; need for change, stated requirements concerning the process, Army history, industry history, Army current practices, industry current practices, Army hiring authorities, Army success and Industry success. This section will cover the types of documentation found that supported this study for each of these categories. The following will also delve into areas where the current discussions diverge and/or contradict each other either, in nature or in practice.

The most pressing need expressions are found at the Department of Defense's most senior levels. While multiple articles were found that articulated need for stronger leadership, the strongest arguments came from Mrs. Ellen Lord, the Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment. She stated it is a number one priority is to recruit, develop and retain a diverse workforce and modernize management tools and learning (2019). This statement was then quickly followed by the director of the office of personnel management, Margret Weichert, a month later when she put out a memo that the President of the United States articulated to her that hiring assessments must be improved and increased rigor must be applied to hiring practices (2019). These views on the importance of strengthening our civilian workforce and leadership are further strengthened by the Secretary of Defense, Mark Esper, and the Chief of Staff of the Army, GEN Mark Milley, who include this discussion in the National Defense Strategy, Army Strategy and in memo's put out to the agencies (Esper, 2019) (Milley & Esper, 2018) (Mattis, 2018). This clearly expressed need is echoed by Government Accountability Office Reports with titles like "High Risk Series: Substantial Efforts Needed to Achieve Greater Progress on High Risk Areas," listing hiring civilians as an ongoing high risk concern since the early 2000's (Government Accountability Office, 2019). The reports, studies and articles that continue to corroborate this discussion were numerous. In many of the sources

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that will be discussed later, the need for improvement in this process is continually expressed.

The evidence in this case was conclusive and the discussion abundantly clear. From the highest levels to the lowest levels, clearly there was a strong desire to improve the hiring and interviewing processes amongst the Army civilian leadership ranks.

In order to add validity to the recommendation of this study, the body of research had to look at the realm of possible for the Army relative to interviewing techniques at the senior leader level. This required a dive into the law, regulation and policy. Despite the fact that at the right level that all constraints (law, regulation and policy) could be adjusted there are some foundational boundaries that will not be change. The sources pulled to describe the firmer boundaries and constraints were found in: Title 5 of the US Code in the 3300 series, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 5 and 29, Service Reform Act, Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII), Pregnancy Discrimination Act (PDA), Equal Pay Act (EPA), Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA), Rehabilitation Act of 1973 Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 (CSRA), Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA), Executive Orders 11478, 13087, 13152 and 3672, as well as Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures and Uniform Guidelines on Assessment and Testing (Pub. L. No. 95-454, 92 Stat. 1111, 1978) (Personnel Management in Agencies, 81 Fed. Reg. 89357, 2016) (29 CFR § 1607, 1978) (Employment and Training Administration, 1999) (5 U.S.C. Subpart B Chapter 33, 2020) (Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz, PC, 2020). The list may look rather comprehensive and confining but a review of the laws and regulations show them to be rather redundant in nature and not nearly as restrictive as assumed. The congruent running theme through all of the requirements is general fairness, consistency towards all interviewees and removal of bias based on age, sex, race or other minority status. Other documents such as Army

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Regulations and Standard Operating Procedures were consulted as well. However, the immobility of those requirements were deemed less firm and therefore had potential for change. These guidelines and procedures followed the same thematic cords as the laws but at times got into great detail on how to enact the requirements (Army Regulation 600-3: The Army Personnel Development System, 2019) (United States Office of Personnel Management, 2008).

In order to provide a true understanding of the how interview practices arrived at where they are today, it is paramount that one understand how hiring officials arrived at the current state. When delving into this topic, one finds hiring practice laws to be rather flexible. Less flexible are the cultural norms that seem to surround hiring and interview practices. Understanding the history of the Army civilian and how the organization managed hiring during growth and reduction is a way of understanding those cultural norms. When discussing the Army culture's ebb and flow, the statement is often the Army culture is simply a microcosm of the American culture. When looking at the resources that concerned Army civilian history and industries historic hiring practices, the Army culture is similar to the American culture (Lofgren, 2016) (Smith J. , 2015) (Weigley, 1967). As society ebbed and flowed with hiring practices the Army appears to have kept up relative to regulation and policy (Jones, 2019). During a few decades the Army maintained a forward presence that created an example for industry to follow. However, authorities and practices differ relative to culture, and the literature begins to show a divide between authorities and practices in the late 1990's and early 2000's (Government Accountability Office, 2008). This divide will be discussed in the findings portion of this study.

Sourcing current practices for the Army and industry became a bit of a challenge for differing reasons. When looking for the current Army state the first place researched was policy, regulation and law. As discussed above that information is readily available and is relatively

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clear at the federal level. Further, often agencies deferred to federal policies when information requests were sent out and little command unique written documentation was found to exist. However, as these policies are broad, it was found that many organizations developed common practices that were adopted based on culture and organizational need. Again, these common practices are rarely documented but they are frequently openly discussed in human resource arenas. However, there were a few front running agencies that were able to provide information on implementation of the federal policies (US Army TACOM Life Cycle Management Command, 2016) (Defense Acquisition University Human Capital Management, 2019) (United States Army Materiel Command G-1 Human Capital Management, 2019) (APEO Business Management & Human Capital, 2019). After reviewing this information it was decided that it was essential the information come from various agencies in multiple geographic locations. The variety of opinions towards application processes derived from flexibilities given at the national levels drove the requirement for this broader geographic scoping. As discussed in multiple GAO reports implementation techniques vary widely among different commands. In order to have a full understanding of how law and regulation are being implemented one has to take a broadly scoped review perspective.

Industry current state sources were also found to be challenging to obtain, but for differing reasons. Again it was easy to find information reference national level law and compliance with fair hiring practices. Further, information referencing interviewing techniques as a whole was readily available as well. However, when one limited the criteria to hiring executives or senior leadership positions the field was narrowed considerably. This factor narrowed the research into primarily articles from those in the recruiting fields (Armstrong, 2017) (Booher, 2017) (Menon, 2016) (Talent Acquisition Excellence, 2020). There is the

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potential that the field narrowed dramatically because very few hard science studies have been done specifically on executive hiring. There is also the potential that researchers have deemed executive and corporate level hiring techniques to differ little relative to the success of the hire so executive hiring is included in the studies but not called out specifically.

Pure research constructs relative to interviewing techniques were deemed essential for the validity of the study. Pure academic research studies were sought out regardless of if the study delimited executive level hiring variances or were simply inclusive of executive hiring as part of a larger sample within the research. The harder science documentation was found to concentrate in the late 1990's and early 2000's, with a few appearing again around 2015. This research very specifically seemed to focus on the structure and preparation for interviews and the characteristics displayed during an interview that are deemed most likely to result in a successful hire (Hersen, 2004) (Schmidt, 1998) (Shippman, 2000) (Conway, 1995) (Huffcutt, 2001) (Ingold, Kleinmann, König, Melchers, & Van Iddekinge, 2015) (Placeholder1) (Gordon, 2019). In this research, there was a temptation to throw out studies done in the 1990's and early 2000's due to age. However, when reviewing documentation on the Office of Personnel website, and many of their related tips and techniques guides, these sites commonly referenced the findings from the studies during this time making these studies very relevant to the conversation, as the studies were still clearly driving current behaviors and practices. The research was fully consistent in stressing the impact of defining the characteristics needed for the position prior to beginning the interview process. Further, these studies consistently emphasized intelligence and integrity as key factors for successful matches from the interview process.

There was considerable discussion on the structured versus unstructured interviewing techniques. For the most part the research was consistent in persisting that structured interviews

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are the most effective form of interviewing due to invoking a fair and balanced perspective from each candidate (Taylor, 2002) (Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 2019).

This school of thought is reflected in current Army practices today (Office of Personnel Management, 2008). However, inconsistency begins to creep in when looking at common practices for executive hiring. When moving to that level of hiring often different individuals are given the freedom to interview independently and allow the discussion to flow in the direction of the conversation. This method then drives the research to the importance of references that emphasized training interviewers on probing questions when departing from a structured environment (Office of Personnel Management, 2008) (Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 2019).

There is also considerable discussion on situational versus behavioral questions. There is a strong argument made that situational interviewing techniques are more effective because these reflect the person's thought processes and how each would work through a challenge (Huffcutt, 2001). However, other research found when used in a structured manor, a behavioral approach to interview questions are as, or more effective than situational questions (Taylor, 2002) (Kluemper, McLarty, Bishop, & Sen, 2015). Behavioral questions focus on what an applicant has done in the past. While both approaches, situational and behavioral questioning, are found to be valid, what line of questioning is most effective appears to be an ongoing discussion with validity on both sides. The key dynamic to both arguments' success, however, depends on the structured nature of the questions and that questions are built on deliberate attempts to ensure the content centers on the key requirements for the position.

While one may correctly argue that hiring authorities fall on the periphery of this discussion, the research consistently pointed to them being a key factor in hiring struggles related

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to the Army. Commonly used as the reason behind an inability to hire qualified staff was the lack of hiring authorities. This discussion was seen in testimony, General Office of Accounting Reports (GAO) and general defense media discussion (Jones, 2019) (Government Accountability Office, 2016) (Plummer, 2002). Based on continued discussion and requests, Congress granted more lenient hiring authorities through the use of National Defense Authorization Acts (NDAA). These NDAA authorities have now migrated into law. One such example is the direct hiring authority (5 CFR Subpart B). The struggle is that once these freedoms were enacted these caveats were not being used and most agencies still rely on twenty or less authorities out of one hundred and five options (Jones, 2019). Of those twenty heavily used options, over twenty percent of the time the traditional authorities are being exercised when hiring an individual (Government Accountability Office, 2016). One can derive from this fact that less than 4% of the time is any other authority being used than the traditional construct. The traditional constructs can be found in the 5 CFR 3300 series (5 U.S.C. Subpart B Chapter 33). However, based on the discussion the challenge is to determine if the legal hiring constraints are overly constrictive or being used as an excuse for derived practices that are driving a lengthy and ineffective hiring process.

Success in this field can be rather nebulous and hard to define. How does one define fit within an organization or a successful employee? However, in early research these areas contained the most prolific responses. One could easily argue all of the pure academic research mentioned above helps to define success in this field of interviewing and hiring. Success seemed to be defined in the form of successfully completing the hiring process and selecting a candidate whose responses were consistent with the behavior one saw in the work environment. There was much discussion over the validity and reliability of candidacy responses (Office of Personnell

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Management, 2020) (Uniform Guidelines On Employee Selection Procedures, 1978)

(Armstrong, 2017). The structure of the interview and the question types discussed above feed into the ability to achieve this successful outcome.

Fully understanding the position was also a key factor found repetitively throughout the discussion. If the hiring authority does not first take the time to determine the skillset needed for the position they will not be able to craft the proper questions that drive to a qualified candidate (Graziano, 2017). The argument for spending the time to understand the position was further magnified when layered with the idea that this research focused on senior hires with heavy impacts on the organization (Office of Personnel Management, 2019) (United States Merit Systems Protection Board, 2010). The focus on executive leadership hires also changed the perspective of the research relative to the characteristics being sought. No longer was there a focus on technical skills, but instead on soft skills, potential and the ability to manage and lead through change.

“A lot of people ask questions in an interview which are absolutely useless. A typical question is: tell me about your strengths and weaknesses. What would you expect from a question like that? It is like a glorified lie where you show something that you hope the other person will interpret it as a strength which you tried to disguise as a weakness. The right interviews are interviews where you really focus on what needs to be done and you check that the person in the past has been able to do something similar that requires similar skills under similar circumstances.... In order to assess the potential right, the first thing is to know what to look for... The first indicator is curiosity, and it is obvious looking at children as to how they move from doing nothing to achieving things because they are curious. They start playing, experimenting, they learn from their mistakes. Then

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you need insights the ability to connect the dots and the ability to separate the signal from noise and to see new possibilities. The third element is engagement; you have to do all this in this tough world, with all the crises and difficulties. Fourth condition for high potential is determination and if you look at a senior executive, you don't want to run the risk of trying to develop potential - it takes time and is very costly (the opportunity cost is huge), so you rather make sure that you assess high potential when making a senior appointment," expounds Cladio Fernandez-Araoz (Sukumar, 2014, para. 4).

Fernandez was not alone in his strong feelings towards the importance of stepping out of the typical focus of technical skills to focus on other attributes. Hoobanoff talks to the importance of hiring for perseverance, grit, problem solving, honesty and potential (2019). Both focused the audience's attention on hiring leaders not executives. Each argue that technical needs will change and every time a company sees a technical leap or change a company cannot hire an entirely new technical team. Rather, companies must hire executives that have the characteristics that allow adapting and leading through change.

Research Gap:

The largest gap in the research was the striking absence of academic research on interviewing or hiring individuals for leadership positions. There was a considerable amount of research done in the late 1990's and early 2000's on how to successfully interview a candidate and the different techniques and assessments that can be done. However, researchers did not take that research further, delineating between entry level positions and leadership or executive management level positions. Further, much of the academic research on the topic seemed to dwindle significantly just post the turn of the 21st century. There is evidence that in 2015 there

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was some minor renewed academic interest in this area but most of the ground breaking work appeared to be done in the late 90's. There is the potential that this is a result of the economy, as the research seems to coincide with a strong economy. A strong economy would make it more challenging for employers to compete for the right candidates but considerably more research would need to be done to see if there is any true correlation.

Limitations of the study:

This study is just a small portion of a much bigger talent management approach. This paper does not encompass all of the topics needed to encapsulate the solutions being called for in the national strategic plans. This study only attempts to look at how to most effectively screen a candidate for leadership qualities when the candidates have reached the interview stage for a senior management position. A few of the major limitations include early candidacy reviews, succession planning and grooming and senior executive service hiring processes.

The research does not look at candidate selection process or the down selection process prior to reaching the interview process. By narrowing the search to only the interview process for leadership positions, the research does not encapsulate some of the transformational work done in the initial selection period, such as online gaming and advanced selection algorithms being used by multiple companies for entry level positions (Gee, 2017). There has been much concern expressed about the time to fill a position at the most senior levels of the Army (Esper, 2019). The early portion of the talent management process shows the greatest amount of expended time. The initial selection period is a significant portion of the hiring process that certainly warrants considerably more research in order to meet the time to fill rates established by Army leadership.

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Reviewing the automated systems, resume review panels and the associated processes are not considered in this research, but certainly have a strong impact on which candidate is or is not selected for a leadership position meriting further attention.

When looking at senior or executive leadership candidacy succession planning and grooming is often a large part of the discussion. This is a very challenging topic for the government because of specific rules and regulations surrounding fair and equal hiring practices. These rules are not levied on private industry, allowing them more leeway in grooming particular individuals for a position or clear succession planning actions. This research does not cover grooming practices or succession planning that might lead the individual to the interview or impacting the results of the interview itself.

This discussion is heavily limited by the inability of the researcher to collect interview based data. Post initial documentation exploration, research found that often when hiring at a senior leadership level neither industry or government document or publish their processes. There is the potential that industry views this process as a competitive advantage and would not want to share that information publically. However, many human resource departments were willing to discuss it in an interview format. Additionally, as the selection for senior positions are not governed by union guidance, union documentation was not available. Further, great diversity in the interview methods was found on both the government and industry side. This diversity was not found to be driven law or regulation but appeared to have a cultural organizational origin, making it important to collect data from multiple sources nation-wide to develop a well-rounded conclusion. The majority of these sources were willing to discuss their processes with the researcher in an interview format but they did not have or could not publically provide

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official documentation. The interview restriction became a significant limiting factor in the discussion.

Lastly, this research focused primarily at the General Schedule 15 or senior General Schedule 14 leader with an equivalency to an Army O6, Colonel. These individuals are not first line or entry level supervisors but would be leading other supervisors. These leaders would be equivalent to a vice president in mid-sized to large firms, depending on the firm's structure. These individuals would be considered executives outside of the government. The research stayed at this level of hiring and did not focus on senior executive service hiring practices or hiring practices that would be equivalent to a CEO, CFO, and CIO etc...of a large corporation. Senior Executive Service members certainly have great impact in leading Army civilians and a review of their hiring practices would serve the national talent management discussion but beyond the scope of this research.

Findings

History of Department of Defense (DoD) and Army Hiring and Interview Practices:

"From the earliest days of the republic to the present, Army civilians have been critical to the success of the total force, delivering "beans and bullets"; treating the sick and wounded; procuring and maintaining equipment and supplies; operating state-of-the-art technologies; managing posts, camps, and stations; and caring for families. Too often overlooked, these quiet professionals have always been a vital part of the Army profession" (Lofgren, 2016, p. 1).

One might argue that the first Civilians were the wives of the soldiers that traveled around with the camps in the revolutionary war cooking and caring for the men. However, these individuals

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were clearly not on the payroll and thus not hired by the U.S. Army using any sort of official process. The first official Army civilian was, Mr. Richard Peters, hired in 1776 when the

“Board of War and Ordnance was established. This board had the responsibility to provide equipment and dispatch troops; account for arms, equipment and ammunition; maintain personnel records; and disburse funds. The Board consisted of five members of the Continental Congress, clerks and a paid secretary” (Weigley, 1967, p. 46).

An interesting note, the jobs of the bulk of the Army civilians found today are similar to tasks of 250 years ago.

The size of the civilian work force has ebbed and flowed over the years depending on whether the nation was actively fighting a war or working primarily peace keeping missions. The status of the civil service corps has also regularly been impacted by current political schools of thought and leadership. The first significant change to the size of the civil service came with Thomas Jefferson in 1801. The change was not tied to war but to the ideology that standing armies could be a threat to the union. However, in 1862 as the civil war ramped up the cycle became more visible. In the 1990’s the numbers seemed to level off due to a shift in the personnel ramp up tactics. The government shifted to war time ramping through the use of contractors. Some authors argue this distorts the manpower numbers and masks the true personnel increases that occurred (Lofgren, 2016).

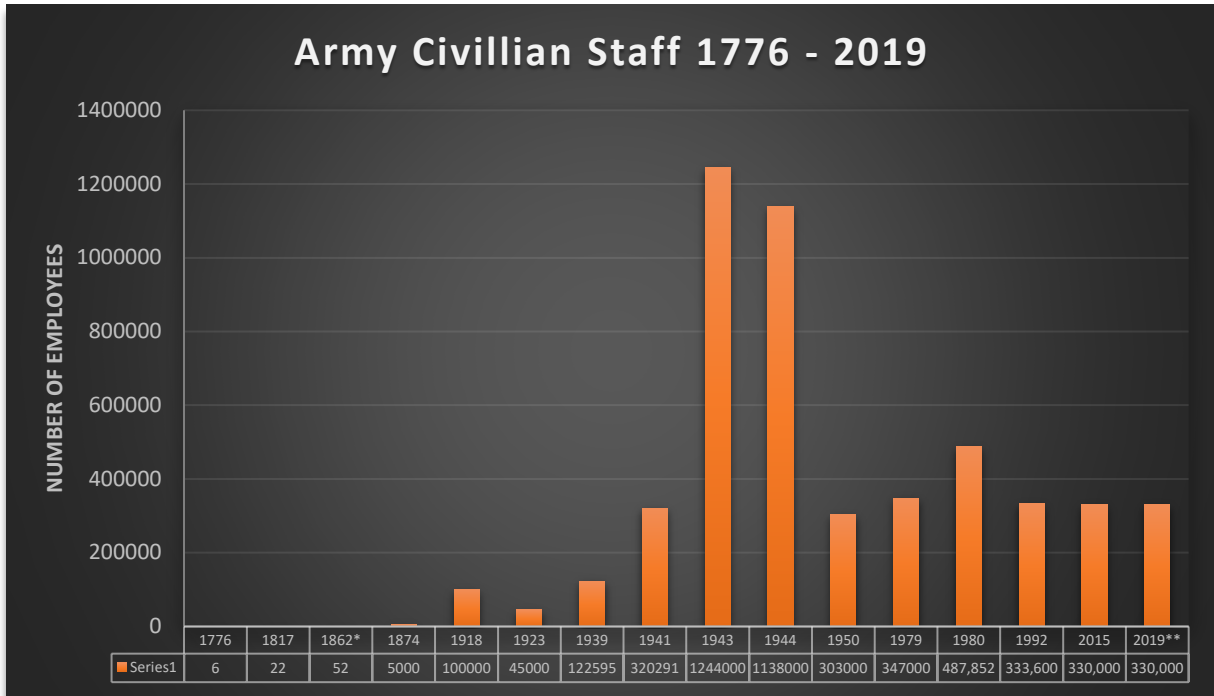


Figure 1. Army Civilian Staffing quantities from 1776 – 2019. Early number only counts clerks and does not include the women typist or other staff assisting them due to historic documentation not recording this information. The 2019 source states the amount to be more than 330K. However, for the purposes of this chart is listed at 330K. In 1947 the Air Force Separated and took 110K civilians. Adapted from “A Brief History of U.S. Army Civilians 1775-2015 CMH Pub 70-124,” by S. Lofgren and “Army Civilian Careers,” by U.S. Army.

Often the Army has found itself on the leading edge of employee standards. As one of the largest US employers there has been a seemingly innate moral obligation to be a progressive ethical organization that helps guide the nation in fair and honest hiring practices. This desire to set an example can be found as early as the 1860’s when the Army began including women among their ranks and Walt Whitman took the time to note army civilians were “earnest, mainly honest, anxious to do the right thing—very hard working, very attentive” (Lofgren, 2016, p. 14).

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War Department clerks and soldiers in front of the War Department, Washington, D.C., 1865
(Library of Congress)

Figure 2: War Department Clerks 1865. Adapted from “A Brief History of U.S. Army Civilians 1775-2015 CMH Pub 70-124,” by S. Lofgren.

Shortly thereafter the Army added African Americans to their rolls and after the civil war the Army Civilian Corps was known for assisting hundreds of former slaves in finding employment and in finding dislocated family members. In a time when corruption and nepotism ran rampant in federal government the War Department decided to remove the appearance of less than ethical actions creating the Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act in 1883 that outlined the first legal structure for federal government employment practices (Lofgren, 2016). This Act included entrance examinations for managerial positions and began the first official hiring practices for hiring Army civilian leaders.

Additional laws have certainly followed that impact DoD civilian hiring processes today. Executive Orders in the 1960's began to engrain the ideas of equality within the workforce and

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encouraged the promotion of minorities into more senior positions. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 instituted affirmative action regulation and in 1967 an executive order added sex as a discriminatory factor.

In 1978 the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) was established. OPM is responsible for providing defense wide personnel management policies, procedures and guidance. In 1978 the Civil Service Reform Act solidified these concepts and laid the foundation for the prevention of unfair and unwarranted personnel practices, many of which are the basis for today's selection and hiring practices (Government Accountability Office, 1980). In 1979 the Merit System Protection Board was established to protect federal merit systems against partisan political and other prohibited personnel practices and to ensure adequate protection for federal employees against abuses by agency management (United States Merit Systems Protection Board, 2019). The Federal Employees Pay Comparability Act of 1990 would again change the hiring process by "authoriz[ing] basic pay above the General Schedule minimum—known as advanced in-hire rates—for new employees with superior qualifications for all positions, rather than the previous limit of GS-11 and above. It also allowed recruiting, relocation and retention allowances as well as providing for locality pay adjustments" (Lofgren, 2016, p. 49).

As civil service grew and matured so did the hiring practices. Initially, civil service relied heavily on entry exams as the main form of hiring discriminators. These exams began in 1883 and are still used today, although for fewer positions. The Office of Personnel Management still refers to the resume review process as a competitive examination of candidates' qualifications (Federal Jobs, 2019). Like industry, Army examinations have evolved over the past one hundred plus years and have now moved into more current hiring practices that in many ways mirror our industry counterparts, as shown in the following section. However, the

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Army maintains stricter guidelines that have been viewed as constraining. In the following sections the research will discuss those perceptions and work towards identification of implementable interview practices for the future.

History of Industry Hiring and Interview Practices:

History credits Mr. Thomas Edison for many things but few know he is credited as the founder of the job interview. “At the turn of the last century, the once lowly telegraph operator, who attended school for only 12 weeks of his life, had risen to be head of his own wholly-owned electrical utility. And yet his toughest challenge was technical recruiting...” (Howden, 2019. para. 2). In 1921 Edison created a list of one hundred and fifty interview questions that he used to judge the general academic prowess of his applicants and to project their ability to fit cognitively and culturally into his labs.

However, Edison’s methodology for administering interview techniques and its effectiveness in hiring desirable candidates may not have been as effective as they could have been. A New York times article quotes candidates as having “beseeched Edison to remember that college graduates were people with interests other than ‘the depth of the ocean’, while another hurt and bombastic complainant invoked Socrates’ warning: “belief that because he knows one thing well he knows all things well” (Howden, 2019, para. 5). Edison’s test was even said to include a meal of soup to see if applicants would put salt and pepper in the soup before tasting it. If the applicant did he/she was disqualified because “Edison wanted people who didn't make assumptions, since assumptions tend to be innovation killers” (Haden, 2018. para. 3). While some argue that Edison was giving an intelligence test rather than doing the first

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interviews, Edison is widely known to have created the first interview as a structured and intentional in person candidate screening process.

The interesting fact about the construct Edison created is many of the techniques he employed have spawned countless research that validated and refined the interview process as a commonly used technique for hiring qualified employees. Many of the basic ideas and practices have not differed much from Edison's first concepts. The research impacts the types and numbers of questions asked during an interview. People also start to see format and demeanor ebb and flow through years of focusing on technical skill versus cultural fit. Like the Army, industry is not immune to discrimination laws and norms. Applicants start to see these laws move into private industries hiring practices around the same time frames as one saw in Army hiring practices. However, with less pressure and regulation, some industry participants are a bit slower to adopt policies that are as strict as government counterparts. On the other hand, some companies stay far ahead of the curve to either respond to or avert more robust regulation.

While the basic idea of asking questions and meeting with an individual was present throughout the 1980's and 1990's, the emergence of technology also began to drastically impact the process. Technology starts to enable discussions that are not face to face and the telephonic interview emerges as a common early screening interview for positions. This widens the candidate pool allowing companies to expand leadership searches much beyond the specific city or state. As technology increases further and the internet becomes widely available this search expands even more and starts to span international borders. Initial discussions can now be held via video chat and screening includes looking at ones' social network files and internet presence.

As technology and research evolves so do assessments. Edison's 150 questions on anything and everything forms the basis for aptitude and cognitive testing for positions as part of

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the interview process. Research in the early 1980's and 1990's begins to tout benefits of testing candidate's cognitive abilities (Schmidt, 1998). At this point cognitive tests become a norm for higher level positions. This research began to fall out of fashion as industry found that cognitive ability was not always a strong indicator of job performance and industry needed to look at other attributes of a candidate. One particularly strong indicator was found to be integrity (Schmidt, 1998). Technology has enabled these types of assessments through the use of the web. Industry can select a candidate and hire a testing organization to administer the test over the web. The company will then analyze and provide the results for an individual rapidly. Technology leaps have now gotten to the point where there are a few firms that have removed the person to person discussions all together and are now using online gaming and algorithms that look at a person's accomplishments, social network presence and software's assessment of recorded responses to questions as the sole methodology for hiring their staff (Gee, 2017).

While the basic premise of looking at responses to questions to determine if a job candidate is the right fit for the company hasn't changed through the years, how those questions are asked and assessed certainly has changed. In the figure below Smith provides an excellent example of the evolution of the interview that further reiterates this progression (Smith J. , 2015).

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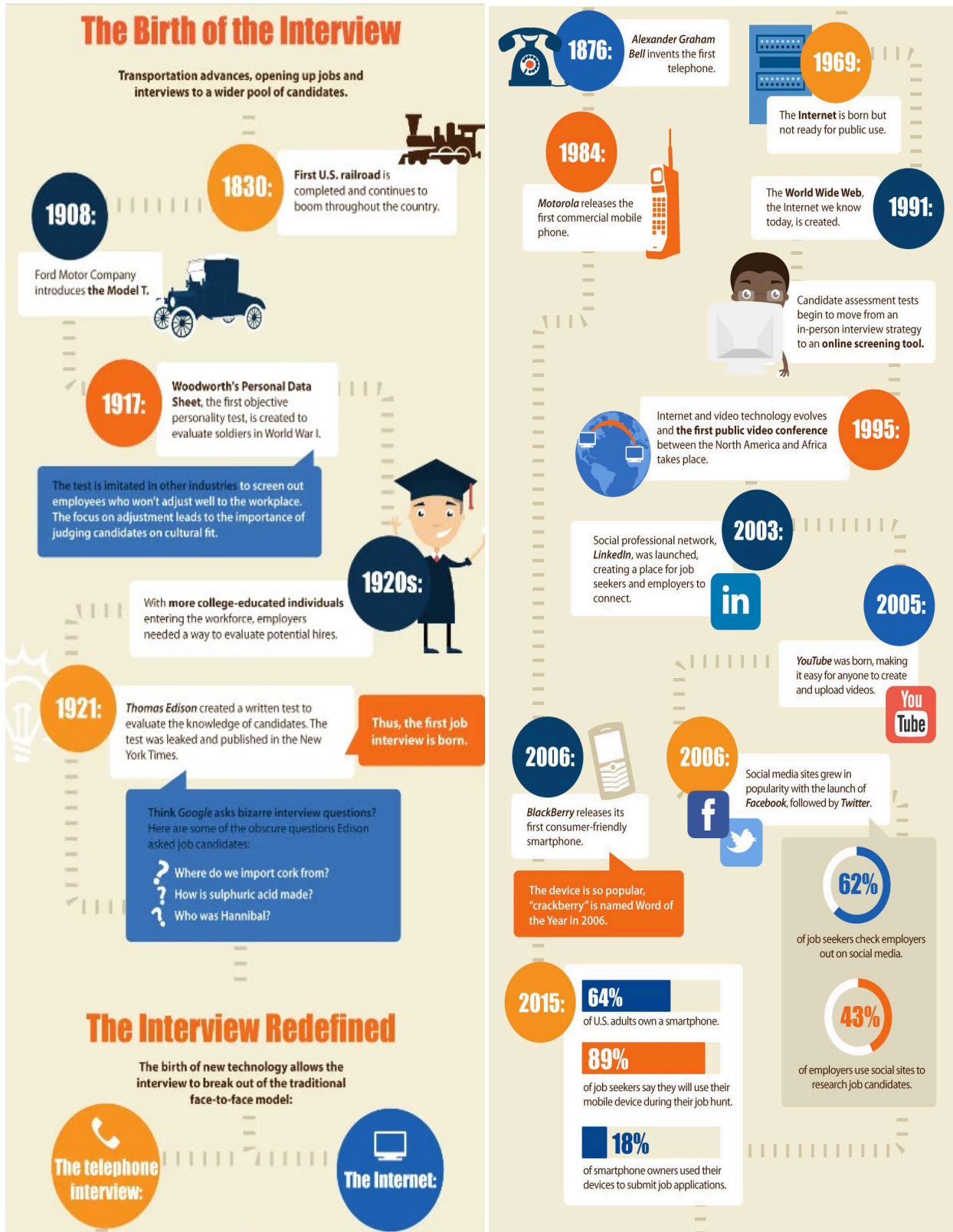


Figure 3: Describes the origins and evolution of the job interview. Adapted from "Thomas Edison conducted the first job interview in 1921 — here's how they've evolved since" by J. Smith.

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Army and Industry's Current State:

Current Army Practices:

Interview Practices

This research effort began by reaching out to multiple major Army civilian regions to understand the current operating procedures across the various major Army Civilian centers. Information was received from higher headquarters, from sustainment commands, acquisition commands and DoD entities from the North East, Midwest and south (United States Army Combat Capability and Development Command Aviation and Missile, 2019) (Defense Acquisition University Human Capital Management, 2019) (United States Army Materiel Command G-1 Human Capital Management, 2019) (US Army TACOM Life Cycle Management Command, 2016) (Department of the Army Program Executive Office Ground Combat Systems, 2019). Within the northeastern region of the country, no written documentation reference supervisory hiring practices was found. It was expressed to the researcher that these processes are given orally to the hiring official. There are many similarities in how the regions set up interviews. Within regions and/or organizations maintaining the same general laws, policies and practices is to be expected. However, differences arise that are unique to particular regions and give them an advantage or in a few cases hinder the command's hiring flexibility.

All organizations researched were found to be following a structured interview process. A structured interview process is when the questions are predetermined and each person interviewing for the position are asked the same question (Office of Personnel Management, 2008). The Army takes an extremely structured stance. Most organizations not only ask the same questions, but also create a script that is read to each candidate. The script will typically

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prescribe the welcome message, instructions, and several questions while outlining a prescribed amount of time the candidates have to complete the interview. Using this method ensures there is absolutely no difference or advantage given to one individual. This approach assists the Army organizations in ensuring each meet the legal standards for preventing discriminatory practices in hiring by giving an advantage to one candidate over the next. The average time for an interview for supervisory position at the O6 level was 30 to 45 minutes and consisted of five to seven questions. Probing questions were allowed by some agencies and discouraged or banned by others. While there was variation in the approaches to off script questions, discriminatory questions related to age or retirement planning, etc...were strictly prohibited.

When looking at the types of questions being asked both behavioral and situational questions were observed. A behavioral question asks the candidate what he/she did in a particular instance, while a situational question asks what the individual would do in a particular situation (Kluemper, McLarty, Bishop, & Sen, 2015). When reviewing the question types the Army prefers to use, you find there is great variation among the Army centers. One organization stated clearly there is no interest in hearing of previous behavior, instead the organization wants to move forward toward the future. Other organizations were adamant they didn't want hypothetical answers as to what a person would do but wanted concrete history of how the person reacted in particular situations. In contrast, all agencies researched tried to select questions that were open ended and gave the candidate an opportunity to provide answers that provided insight into what his/her future behaviors and leadership styles would be in that particular position.

All of the organizations also required a diverse panel. How this diversity was accomplished varied very slightly, in number of individuals required and whether or not a

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minority could qualify as both female and a minority. Each organization required a minimum number of individuals, three or four, and one of the individuals had to be a female and one individual had to be a minority. In some cases the female interviewer could qualify as both the female and the minority but in most cases there had to be both a female and a minority on the panel. Meaning if a panel were to have one female member of the panel she could qualify for the gender requirement but an additional person, female or other minority status, would be required to complete the panel requirement. Some agencies encourage having a panel member from outside their organization or at a minimum that department or field of practice to participate in the panel process. The agency tries to eliminate agency bias for particular candidates.

There is also considerable variation on the grade level participating in the panel. In some instances, organizations had counterparts or peers conducting the panel while in other cases superiors were the panel. There was no reasoning given for either position. The panel composition varied widely between the two poles highlighted above. In some case, there was a ban on the supervisor and/or hiring official from being a part of the panel and in other cases the organization required the hiring official participate in the interviews. In most instances, the panel members were required to be the same for the interviews for all candidates, but there was one guide that discussed the process in the event of a panel member having to be replaced or a panel change mid process. The preference was for all panel members to remain stable and unchanged throughout the process.

There was discussion as to whether or not the panel that reviewed the resumes should also continue on to conduct the interviews themselves or if that panel should be different for both parts of the process. There was no consistency found among the agencies reference review board variations. In some agencies, the resume review panel was separate and distinct from the

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interview panel in its entirety to include the hiring official not participating in either portions of the process. In other agencies the panels are identical and do include the hiring official on both panels. There are many variations in between, depending on the agency and position being hired.

In general the hiring process for leadership at the O6 level is one tiered for Army organizations. This means interviewers are conducting one 30 to 45 minute interview with three to ten candidates who matriculated through the resume review process. There were two instances where agencies were actively pursuing multi-tiered interview processes. The first agency used the second tier interview as a way to further differentiate between top candidates and often included work sample briefing as part of that process. The second agency used a work sample brief as a final senior leader screening process for the selected candidate. Other than that one instance there was no evidence Army agencies are regularly using work sampling as part of the interview processes.

The U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) was particularly concerned with how defense agencies are weighting the competencies for hiring the supervisory positions. “Supervisory selection is often based more heavily on technical expertise than on leadership competencies. Technical skills appear to be much more strongly emphasized than are supervisory skills in both job announcements and assessments” (United States Merit Systems Protection Board, 2010, p. i). This is a comment that was repeated time after time when discussing this project with various leaders. Clearly when defining the core competencies for a leadership position there is a heavy lean on technical skills rather than supervisory skills. This fact is a stark contrast to information found later in current industry practices. Also noted, there are few senior technical positions therefore if a subject matter expert wants to increase his/her

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salary or move up in the chain he/she must apply for a supervisory position. Frequently he/she have little to no interest in supervising or managing but are selected for the position because of the lean toward technical expertise noted above. This de-emphasis on leadership skills in the selection process has had an impact on the efficacy of leadership overall to include a significant impact on union negotiations and complaints, “Bad managers are great for unions....one bad manager can generated 100's of litigations and generations of hostility” (Swedzewski, personal communications, 2019).

Labor Union Influences

Of particular interest was the influence of the labor unions on the hiring practices. While the positions covered in the scope of this research do not fall under the purview of the labor unions the research showed, in particular regions, a significant influence over the hiring practices (Repa, 2019). In most locations, there was a clear delineation between a hire for a non-supervisory bargaining unit hiring position and a non-bargaining unit position. Therefore, there was no focus on union contracts in the hiring discussions with those locations. However, there is significant evidence that the Army interview process for leadership varies very little from the processes for non-supervisory positions (United States Merit Systems Protection Board, 2010). In other words, the Army interviews and selects using the same methods no matter the position type. In this way, and for what was noted in the singular region above, the union discussion becomes very relevant.

In reviewing the various union contracts it was found very little that indicates there is any union based contractual impact on the interview process itself. In one instance, the contract articulated that one could not “test” an individual as part of the selection process. When

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discussing this example with other agencies, they held similar discussions but the language was left out because of a need to test certain skills for wage grade workers. This inability to test has an impact on the interview process discussed because recent research recommends certain types of testing as part of the interview or selection criteria. It is important to reiterate that per the labor laws supervisors are not covered by bargaining union agreements (National Labor Relations Board, 2019). However, if the practices for non-bargaining unit employees carry forward to supervisory positions the formats of the interviews are effected. In some instances, because the employees applying for the positions are covered by bargaining unions, there was concern expressed by human resource representatives that unions would argue they could represent non-selected employees. Human resources representatives argued this was a possibility because when the applicant applied for the position they were still covered by the bargaining unit.

Laws, Policies and Regulations

The laws, policies, and regulations the Army is following mirror that of OPM. The Army is complying with Title VII, Executive Order 11246, Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Equal Opportunity Act of 1972, 29 CFR Part 1607 Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures 1978, Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 American Disabilities Act of 1990 and Civil Rights Act of 1991, among others (Pub. L. No. 95-454, 92 Stat. 1111, 1978) (Uniform Guidelines On Employee Selection Procedures, 2019) (29 CFR § 1607, 1978). Most of these laws and regulations have similar purpose in that each are attempting to create a process that is as fair and non-discriminatory as possible for all applicants. The

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practice of ensuring the government agencies stays above reproach has foundations in the Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act of 1883.

“War Department civilians would be in the forefront of the professionalization of the civil service in the United States at a time when nepotism, cronyism, and corruption were common in state and municipal governments. Abuses of the political patronage system, whereby elected politicians installed supporters in government positions, generated a movement to create a more meritocratic and transparent government hiring process” (Weigley, 1967).

This act began the famous civil service exams and the laws noted above that in large part drive the panel diversity and highly structured interview processes seen today.

Industry Current State:

Interview Practices

An important note is that the responsibilities and scope of the Army’s civilian workforce workload for a GS-15 or O6 level supervisor equates to a senior level position in industry. For industry, hiring of this nature would be considered executive hiring. While the research does not look at Senior Executive Service hiring for the Army, industry would have considered the hiring referenced throughout out this paper as executive or senior hiring practices. The research that will be referenced in these findings focused on the practices that are occurring for executive candidates within industry.

When looking at industry practices relative to interviews one sees a considerably more variable approach to interviewing. Often a longer interview process than the Army would use, 30-45 minute panel interview per candidate. Industry begins the process with initial phone

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interviews and or video interviews to save on cost and time for candidates that are out of region or are engrossed in other responsibilities and are not able to break away at that time. One must keep in mind that only 30% of the pool is actively looking for a position but so often industry is actively engaging individuals, companies call passive talent, rather than the applicants coming to them (Patel, 2018). When those interviews denote further action the candidate is asked to come out to the firm's location, often at the expense of the firm, where the firm spends one to two days having various departments or individuals interview the candidate (Bates, 2016). If unfamiliar with the candidate, as part of the process it is not uncommon to ask the applicant to give a sample presentation or present an idea on a topic the team is working (Armstrong, 2017). Like Edison, industry may have a meal with applicants to see how they interact in a more social setting and relaxed setting (Florea, 2016). Over that day to two days industry is likely to do both individual interviews with leadership and team interviews to help ensure a strong cultural fit. These team interviews may include asking the applicants to work through a problem or have a brainstorming session with the team they are likely to spend the most time with (King, 2016). This allows the company to get a strong assessment of not only how the candidate works through problems but also how well he/she melds with the team and if he/she will have issues with norming into that organization's ethos.

Did you know that . . .

- 41% of employers test job applicants in basic literacy and/or math skills.
- 34% of job applicants tested in 2000 lacked sufficient skills for the positions they sought.
- 68% of employers engage in various forms of job skill testing.
- 29% of employers use one or more forms of psychological measurement or assessment.
- 20% of employers use cognitive ability tests
- 8% of employers use interest inventories.
- 14% of employers use some form of managerial assessments
- 13% of employers use personality tests

Figure 4 Percentage of the time hiring assessments are used by various employers. Adapted from "Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology."

Industry puts a heavy focus on ensuring the individual fits within the culture of the organization (Feintzeig, 2016). There are plenty of applicants that qualify for a job but when they begin work the company finds the applicant's social norms, beliefs and values do not align with the organization they were hired to lead. This incongruence in values drastically stifles success. When interviewing for an executive position, industry wants to ensure the cultural fit is as strong as the employee's written qualifications.

"Though employment experts warn that fuzzy criteria such as culture fit may permit bias in the hiring process and result in a lack of diversity, companies say culture often determines who succeeds or fails in their workplace... 'People work long hours,' says Margaret Spear, who oversees hiring and talent at the Austin, Tex., company. "Who do you want in the trenches with you? You want someone you enjoy spending time with" (Feintzeig, 2016. para 5).

While the research acknowledges focusing on cultural fit has the potential for creating a challenge relative to diversity of thought industries using these techniques also know that fifty percent of new hires fail (Menon, 2016). When you couple the high failure rates with the impact

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an executive can have on a company's bottom line it is essential that industry eliminate as much risk as possible. Industry appears to have accepted there are aspects of the interview process as a soft science where the benefit outweighs the risk. "Rick Jordan, who leads talent acquisition for the nearly 1,500-person company, says longtime employees sometimes have a 'gut feeling' about who is likely to succeed. About 1 in 8 don't make the cut, he notes. 'People who are true fits to the culture and believe what we believe -- they'll do anything for the business.'" (Feintzeig, 2016).

Hiring an executive is an expensive venture, on average costing 1/3 of the executives loaded salary or around a \$100K flat fee (Armstrong, 2017). Once narrowed down companies have the expense of getting the individual to the interview and taking the time to conduct the session. If the candidate is successfully hired and fails, the cost grows again. After all of these factors studies show:

- The Corporate Leadership Council, nearly 40% of CEOs fail outright in the first 18 months
- Harvard Business Review, between 40 and 60% of management new-hires fail within 18 months
- Gallup, 82% miss the mark on high managerial talent (Menon, 2016)

The frustration is multiplied by the fact that the industry is seeing the market for highly qualified executives tighten as the world becomes more global and the labor pool is spread over a larger community.

Laws

Industry is bound by the same laws as the Army. However, industry applies these laws in a significantly different way. Industry is looking to be fair and equitable but have not created the

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same norms the Army has imposed on themselves in this arena. Companies seek out individuals for these positions and often actively participate in succession planning. Further, firms are not as tied to as structured a process as the Army. There is more flexibility in the company's approach and the companies experience considerably less fear associated with perceived unfairness as many Army organizations appear to bear. Perhaps this is because the complaint mechanisms that are in place within the Army which can cause undue hardship for the government organization are simply not in place with their industry partners. Despite the reasoning behind the differences, the laws that govern industry are the same laws that govern the Army. The processes derived from those, however, are significantly divergent.

Labor Union Influences

Labor union influences on the executive hiring process were relatively nonexistent in the research reviewed for this discussion. This was to be expected as industry interviews for executives do vary from that of those individuals within their organizations that would fall under union protections. There is the possibility an organization that regularly negotiates with large and highly influential unions may consider a candidate's history with union negotiations as an important skill or attribute for a job and be included as part of the questioning or work samples. However, there is no indication in the research that union influences alter the interview practices or techniques.

Defining Success:

The definition of success was found to be rather similar for both the Army and industry. Relative to factors that create a successful hire, both the Army and Industry are looking for individuals with strong leadership characteristics that can propel their organizations forward into

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the future. Both are looking for leadership that is technically competent but more than that leadership hires can ebb and flow with the changes in the business process, expectations and direction being given at the most senior levels. Further both are looking for people with soft skills and potential (Hoobanoff, 2019) (Sukumar, 2014). Both are looking for someone that will create a great fit within the organization, attain a strong following and be able to lead change.

Relative to a successful interview both industry and the Army are looking for validity and reliability within their processes (Office of Personnel Management, 2020). Both are looking for a process that allows them to accurately assess each candidate and their fit. The process should be repeatable and garner quality executives that perform in the manner anticipated based on the assessments done in the interview process.

Lastly, Army and Industry are looking for a timely process. During the interview process, most often, the organization has an empty seat that needs filling and others in the organization are having to carry more than their fair share or work items that are not in their area of expertise, putting the organization at risk. An executive hire commonly takes six months in industry (Armstrong, 2017). Once those employees are in place it can then take another six months for them to be fully functional employees (Shellenbarger, 2016). That means the company is down a significant body for nearly a year. This experience is shared on the government side. Secretary Esper has placed a heavy focus on time to hire in a recent memo that talks about taking the time to hire down to 60 days (2019). However, this discussion must be caveated. Industry is concerned about the timeframes but not at the expense of a quality hire because companies understand the impact a poor match can have at the senior level. Industry is aware of the potential and react strongly to the dramatic effects of a bad hire even though firms have more freedom to dispel themselves of a bad match. While time to hire is significant to

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Secretary Esper, he caveats his recommendations in a couple of ways (2019). He uses the caveat of, “not in every selection,” indicating for some selections multiple panels and extended time is warranted (2019). Further, he concludes the discussion by saying “I ask that as you look to hire the right person to fill your ranks, you do so both judiciously and expeditiously” (Esper, 2019. para. 4). In other words the Army too understands the significance of the decision and while time is of the essence, the potential for significant impact cannot be ignored.

Analysis

A guide to how to execute a perfect interview was not found despite extensive research. Further, there is very little current research that directs the average business person to a series of best practices that would build a perfect process. The scientific journals certainly address bits and pieces of an interview and give ideas, as if one were to use one small technique he/she may reliably get a predictable response. However, the research is contradictory in nature if one was trying to decide for example, “Do I exclusively use situational questions or behavioral questions?” the answer would not be in anyway conclusive. What can be derived from this process is it most certainly delves into the human psyche of individuals and the varying cultures or the jointly developed ethos of thousands of organizations. These individual people and organizations are all different and therefore the best way to determine fit is different too. What one can learn from this research is success comes in many forms and there is simply not one answer or one mechanism that if employed provides the perfect hire.

While comprehensive hard research is relatively scarce, this topic is one that is heavily debated and widely discussed in trade and industry journals. The hiring and interview processes something that is as pertinent and pressing for industry as it is for the Army.

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“Many defense contractors, particularly those in the services industry, say they're intensely focused on their hiring practices and benefits as the market for the workers they need tightens. Karen Wheeler, the chief human resources officer at Science Applications International Corp., told Inside Defense last month that it's getting 'harder and harder' to find the right talent” (Censer, 2019. para. 1).

The concern is so great that industry is willing to spend six figures to ensure hiring the right person, a luxury the government and many of our defense contractors do not have (Censer, 2019). Various companies have responded by creating processes that include many of the different techniques found in the paper. The intent is if companies create a comprehensive approach when all the information is put together they can get valid and repeatable results that drive them to a strong selection.

While some companies are exploring new and ground breaking approaches to interviewing, like using “cute” robots to conduct first round interviews or online gaming, these techniques are being applied to new hires and entry level positions rather than executive hires (Tarling, 2016) (Gee, 2017). There is a possibility that these new techniques could be used with executives in the future but evidence points more towards industries top executive hires being passive applicants that require searching out and would be less likely to participate in time required when using such impersonal methods. However, the lack of willingness to engage may not hold as true with Army selections as the target audience is used to impersonal methods in the name of fairness but in general the evidence of the effectiveness of these new techniques is limited and certainly a high risk scenario for use with leadership hires.

There does appear to be evidence that industry is rather happy with their current practices because of the lack of interest in radical change to their processes. While companies admit

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finding individuals is a challenge their conglomeration of techniques over a multiday period does not seem to have changed much in the past fifty plus years. One could argue that video conferencing is a new add but the actual techniques and approaches have remained quite similar. The Army appears to find themselves in a similar situation. However, with the Army the stagnancy is magnified because the techniques do not vary among rank or level either. The interview techniques and processes remain the same from the entry level college applicant to an individual leading a couple hundred people who is responsible for millions, if not hundreds of millions, of dollars. Perhaps industry is satisfied with the results of their process but the Army is clearly not as satisfied.

There is the potential this stagnation of the hiring process falls into the category of the “OK Plateau” (Trader, 2013). The concept of the OK Plateau was first developed in the 1960’s when researchers began looking at the learning process. The research found there were three stages to learning; cognitive, associative and autonomous (Popova, 2013). In other words people have to think about how they are thinking about what it is they are about to learn and constantly intentionally press for increased knowledge. Next researchers found when people start to really learn a process and errors are reduced, making them better at what they are doing. Finally, the process is known so well people stop thinking about it, executing almost on autopilot. In this situation there is a strong possibility human resource managers have hit the OK Plateau and see the process as safe and good enough.

“The OK Plateau can be incredibly costly... and sometimes even fatal. A commitment to relentless improvement is what takes you to new heights mentally, emotionally and financially. The personal evolution mindset helps you endure challenges and rise above setbacks. A commitment to get better is a commitment to win” (Trader, 2013. para. 6).

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The OK Plateau is a dangerous place to be because the world does not stop or stagnate and the best practices, behaviors and attitudes are evolving along with the skillsets and demands on the desired executives.

Best Practices:

While exploring best practices most guides and recommendations included a considerable amount of metacognition. In order to be successful, people must be thinking about how they are thinking, reviewing their bias and the impacts they have. According to research, the key to creating a successful interview is preparation. The significance of completing a well-rounded job analysis was an underlying current that ran through the vast majority of the documentation and discussion surrounding this topic. In order to craft strong interview questions and scenarios the organization must understand the key characteristics required for the job (Office of Personnel Management, 2020). Unfortunately, this type of analysis is not being done. Whether or not the OK Plateau is the root cause is unclear. Army organization commonly use dated position descriptions as the basis for skills needed for a position or focusing on technical skills because these are easier to concretely measure than the less discrete leadership skills that are required. The Army however, is not alone in this challenge as articles touting hire leaders not executives (Hoobanoff, 2019). In order to hire a candidate that fits smoothly into the jigsaw puzzle the organization must fully research and understand its needs.

Executive hiring is not a short process. Hiring the right person in the position is paramount, particularly with the government which has a harder time removing someone that turns out to be a bad fit. “Most of my exec[utive] searches have taken between 6–12 months” (Armstrong, 2017. para. 83). The Army seems to feel the processes are bogging down the hiring process and this must change. Relative to early entry or midlevel hires this may be true but in

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the case of the leadership level the timelines are on par with industry. The timeline itself may be frustrating because six to twelve months is a long time to have an open position but the government is not alone in actuality. While there is certainly room to attack this timeline and create improvement change must be done with an understanding of the risk and significance of the selection.

Once a company has spent the time to create a solid understanding of the characteristics needed for a job, it is essential that they ensure the person they hired has those characteristics. This means properly employing various techniques to create a mature and repeatable understanding of the candidate's qualities. This is done successfully by using multiple instruments to assess the candidate to see if his/her responses have consistency and to ensure all needed characteristics are addressed. Successful instruments include:

- Using both structured and unstructured interviews on the same candidate
- Asking both situational and behavioral questions
- Meeting with the candidate in a team setting as well as an individual setting
- Asking the candidate to work through an issue or create a plan with their projected team
- Asking for written and oral work samples
- Gaining input from outside and inside the department for well-rounded perspective
- Value and leadership skill assessments

Success relative to best practices can be many things for many different organizations but success is not a singular event or test from which the final decision is made.

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Risks and Barriers associated with changing Army practices:

When beginning this study the researcher anticipated the highest risks and barriers to enacting change was going to be the extensive legal and regulatory environment. Instead, research found that the legal and regulatory environments provide great latitude in tactics as long as these are consistent with the ideals of fairness and morally upright hiring. Moreover, that the legal boundaries levied on government agencies differ very little from those experienced by industry. The interpretation of how to enact those laws at each organizational level has created the constraints and tendencies towards hiring individuals with higher technical proficiency than leadership quality. This may have occurred for multiple reasons, perhaps the apathy or OK Plateau discussed above. However, this study found that when it comes to government hiring officials the reason for their lack of divergence in process is largely related to fear. “Recent feedback from Commands indicates managers are becoming overly cautious in the selection process due to concerns of potential complaints or investigations by individuals not selected for positions for which they applied” (Esper, 2019. para. 2). Union thoughts and opinions are entangled in supervisory hiring actions not because of want, need or requirement but because of the fear based decisions referenced above.

The intent behind this discussion is not to erode the validity of this fear because the fear has evolved for a reason. Human resource professionals are tasked with filling vacancies and they are being pushed hard to do it faster and faster in an environment that is clearly getting very competitive. Added restrictions in the types of incentives they can use to compete for talent exacerbates the challenge. Couple that with the perceived misconception that they are also limited in their ability to recruit passive talent. Their task is formidable. Organizations just want their human resource officers to get people to fill positions so they can accomplish their daily

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tasks. Ignoring the threat of investigation or complaint and its impact on timelines would to them seem like an ill-informed decision. Hiring officials hesitate to tailor the process and accept the added risk they perceive for limited return.

Unlike the hypothesis anticipated at the start of this endeavor, the risk and barriers to change are tied to cultural based decisions spread across hundreds of organizations. These processes are informed by everything from commodity needs, to local cultural traits, to implied or known fear of timeline challenges. This finding is a much more complex situation to address than the original hypothesis that overly burdensome law is hampering the government's ability to progress their interview processes. While law would have appeared to be the heaviest burden to change, the findings of cultural and fear based process decisions demand a much more formidable solution set.

Recommendations

Recommended changes to the Army process:

The analysis clearly shows the current processes for identifying candidates with strong leadership traits is lacking in current Army hiring processes. Based on the findings of this paper this challenge is not impossible to remedy. In order to do this however, the Army must expand their expectations for this process and be willing to increase their investment to insure hiring the right person for these significant positions. This means the Army must consider expanding to a series of interviews with one candidate. The Army needs to allow for and encourage probing questions. The Army needs to take the time to select and administer characteristic assessments and include work sampling requirements within the hiring processes. Fundamental cultural shifts must occur that allow the community to steer clear of the threats of the OK Plateau and

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significant effort put into making fruitful and fitting hiring decisions for these highly impactful decisions.

While industry certainly has expressed a challenge in recruiting top leadership in their executive ranks they are not metaphorically screaming from the mountain tops when it comes to finding new techniques for hiring their executives. There are tried and true techniques that are to be highly effective for industry as long as they do their due diligence relative to the job analysis and figuring out what candidate characteristics are needed for the position. The Army should consider expanding the current processes and adopting these readily available techniques.

Finding the right person with the right skill set is going to take a more in depth assessment. When hiring for a GS-15/O6 level position the Army should consult OPM on the various online assessments and work sampling tools available for use. OPM has a variety of tools in place and available for use by federal agencies to help assess leadership skills and traits of an individual (Office of Personnel Management, 2020). These assessments range from personality and leadership characteristics testing to pre-developed individual, group and team work sampling activities. The OPM has gone out and looked for, or created, reliable and verifiable assessments that would be defensible against complaints or actions. Awareness and use of these tools and resources can assist the Army in better identifying applicants with the leadership skills for the position and provides easy access to the tools their industry partners are already using.

A fundamental shift must occur in the understanding of the significance of this type of hire and an effort needs to be put forth to begin to select these individuals with more due diligence than previously occurred. A completely scripted thirty minute interview with three panel members based on a significantly out of date or overly generic job description is not

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enough to determine if that individual has the leadership traits to guide a multimillion dollar organization. The tools are available and accessible, the organizations must be informed these exist and encouraged to use them to drive a process shift.

Identify risk and mitigation planning:

The above recommendations appear to be in conflict with the Esper (2019) memo quoted throughout this paper because at face value the recommendation above would appear to add considerable time to the process. However, when reviewing the memo in depth, Secretary Esper is asking his leadership is to find quality leaders and to do it in a way that makes sense. If using procedures that create delays for positions that are less impactful then stop and re-evaluate. In that reevaluation period, consider what does and what does not mandate extra attention. This research contends that in the case of leadership positions the Army would rather a comprehensive decision be made to improve the efficacy of their organization than a hasty one to meet an arbitrary timeline.

Further, when discussed with industry and Army agencies both expressed the interview is not where the bulk of the time is spent in this process. Research indicated group interviews may add five to seven days to the process (Shellenbarger, 2016). One must keep in mind this is a six month process, even for industry, making interviews a very small part of the whole. Online assessments and work sample requirements can be provided prior to the interview adding only the additional time of reviewing those documents. Products that take more time for review should only be used when the field is narrowed down to a few select applicants. While moving from one interview, with one panel, to two to three interviews admittedly will be more time consuming the extra two to three hours of review for three to five candidates is a minor hindrance. When one considers the consequences of making a bad decision from a thirty minute

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first impression the minor hindrance becomes a worthwhile endeavor. Further, the thirty minute single interview methodology is completely unparalleled in industry.

Fear of investigation or complaint is certainly an aspect of this recommendation that must be addressed. First and foremost human resource professionals must have the backing of their leadership. They must know that in an instance where they are questioned for using a new technique they can present solid findings as to why they used that technique and that their leadership will reiterate those conclusions. This research indicated that the various organizations were simply not aware of the research and recommendations from OPM. If the Army organizations are made aware of the research backing found in this documentation it would assist in reducing these fear based reactions. In those instances where unions were impacting or driving supervisory hiring decisions the law regarding who they cover and how that applies must be reemphasized. Hiring for a senior supervisory position simply cannot be indistinguishable from a hiring process for an entry level position because the two positions denote considerably different skillsets and behaviors with far different impacts. This understanding must be made clear to all those involved in the hiring and interview process. With this backing, delineation and emphasis, fears can be overcome and change can occur.

Culture Changes Requirements; messaging, socialization, education and policy change:

In alignment with the discussion above in order to successfully implement these recommendations socialization is going to have to occur. Unlike what was anticipated, national level policy and law does not seem to be in great need of change. In need of change is the, largely undocumented, processes being exercised at the ground level of organizations. In order to create the safety net required for those organizations to climb down off that plateau and enable

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change, they are going to need support. The support should come in the form of a socialization plan on the part of the OPM and the Army. Senior Leaders have been asking Congress and OPM for relief for decades. When that relief was granted it was simply not exercised. The findings of this research do not indicate mal intent or that the maintenance of the status quo interview is because the organizations do not see a need or are being obstinate. Informal discussions indicated that instead the authorities and options given to them are not being communicated at the ground level. The Army needs to look at creating an interview techniques guide and complete a marketing/training tour with hiring leadership and human resources departments to assist with enabling and encouraging the use of these proven practices.

Conclusion

"Too little attention is being given to identifying civilians with potential for advancement or to systematically determine the skills . . . needed to prepare such high caliber individuals for progressively more responsible positions.... The Army is not guiding the . . . development of its future civilian managers in ways which assure most effective and efficient accomplishment of the Army goals" Civilian Personnel for the Army 1984 (Van Hoose, 1999. para. 4). This statement was made thirty six years ago and yet the findings of this research show the Army to be in the same predicament today. The reasoning given then was "Army leaders are failing to provide effective leadership to the ... Army civilians.... Their concern is primarily for the soldier, not the civilian member of the Army Team.... Commanders don't understand the civilian personnel system; most would prefer not to deal with it; and . . . they often aren't willing to learn" the Army Inspector General (Van Hoose, 1999. para 1).

While research indicates there is a congressional and Army senior leader desire to see change and a renewed focus on improving the leadership skills within the civilian workforce, that desire does not seem to have been impressed upon its supporting organizations. Leaving organizations in the same position as outlined above thirty some year ago. Those organizations are still struggling with the constructs of the 1980's, where other priorities are taking precedence, leading to sub optimization of the workforce and an inability to execute assign tasks due to struggling leadership. With so many of the Army's national level strategic discussions making statements like "We must overhaul our current personnel management system to attract, develop, and retain exceptional Leaders and Soldiers," and listing increasing leadership skills as one of its highest priorities, the need for change is clear (Milley & Esper, 2018. para. 3.c).

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This research focused on resolving some of the above concerns by leveraging interview techniques the Army can use to identify people who have the ability to become strong leaders within their respective organizations. This study reviewed current management interview processes, laws, policies and regulations in order to compare and contrast them with successful leadership hiring techniques. In contrast to the original hypothesis, the issue was not in the form of federal law or regulation.

The reasoning for the restrictive and ineffective processes was found to be culturally based and to vary widely depending on the local policies and procedures developed at each ground level organization. There are a few organizations on the forefront of the Army who are incorporating the successful techniques their industry partners practice, such as tiered interviews and work sampling. However, these were found to be the minority.

The findings identified multiple techniques the Army could use to improve the efficacy of their interviews such as: multi-tiered interview sessions, differing question types, skill assessments and work sampling. Further, authorities are in place to use these techniques. The Army must begin emphasizing the importance of leadership skills in the hiring process, encourage the use of these various techniques, and create an interview techniques guide. The Army should also complete a marketing/training tour with hiring leadership and human resources departments to assist with enabling and encouraging the use of these proven practices. This research concludes the lack of incorporation of proven interview techniques is more due to lack of awareness than any form of malicious intent. Ultimately, the intent of this discussion is to further the implementation of successful interview practices within in the Army's civilian leadership ranks. Once adopted, the above recommendations will further that endeavor.

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