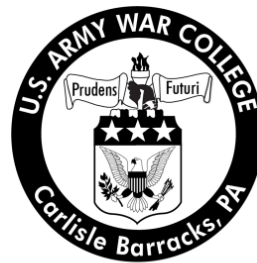


Retaining Talent for Army 2020: Overcoming Institutional Barriers

by

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United States Army War College
Class of 2012

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**RETAINING TALENT FOR ARMY 2020: OVERCOMING INSTITUTIONAL
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ABSTRACT

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The vision of Army 2020 is likely to remain as an aspirational goal in the dustbin of history, overcome by institutional bureaucratic pressures. The Army's anticipated restructure (downsizing) of the All-Volunteer force presents a challenge to ensure the retention of high potential junior officer talent in the Officer Corps for senior level positions for the Army of 2020. U.S. military leaders understand that we must balance the tension between winning the current fight with the high level of performance and creating a culture of continuous change that will help the institution sustain the competitive advantage gained through 10 years of conflict. Our most talented junior leaders have innovated in the field and displayed leadership talent that must be groomed and developed for the Army of 2020. Creating the high quality bench of strategic leaders for the future is at risk if measures are not taken to prudently address the issue. The paper highlights several best practices for talent retention from academia and business. Three specific measures offer ways over, around, and potentially through the institutional concrete that will likely stymie achieving enduring cultural change for Army 2020.

RETAINING TALENT FOR ARMY 2020: OVERCOMING INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

How can the Army break up the institutional concrete, its bureaucratic rigidity in its assignments and promotion processes, in order to retain, challenge, and inspire its best, brightest, and most battle-tested young officers to lead the service in the future?¹

—Robert M. Gates, SecDef
West Point Address 2011

What is Important

The All-Volunteer Force keeps faith with the American people by delivering high performance in a manner that is consistent with the values of the people it serves. In the context of American freedom, the talented men and women who volunteer to fight are our Nation's decisive advantage.² As organizational researchers posit, "high performance is undoubtedly a requirement for success."³ Senior U.S. military leaders understand that we must balance the tension between winning the current fight with the high level of performance and creating a culture of continuous change that will help the institution sustain the competitive advantage gain through 10 years of conflict. Our most talented junior leaders have innovated in the field and displayed leadership talent that must be groomed and developed for the Army of 2020.

Of the four domains of talent management: accessions, development, retention, and employment of officer talent, the area that represents the greatest vulnerability to the success of the future force is the area of junior officer retention. Talent retention is the best way to posture the force for meeting its strategic management challenges in the current fight as well as the future. Retaining talent may be accomplished better by illuminating institutional barriers to organizational changes and culture.

The Army is people. The U.S. Army's drawdown in 1991, which was the first time that the nation had to reduce its All Volunteer Force, received mixed reviews particularly on the retention of quality members. Noted strategist Elliot Cohen quoted then Secretary of Defense, Dick Cheney, "historically we've always gotten it wrong. We've never done it right. You can't find a time in this century when we've been through one of these cycles where we did, in fact, take the force down in an intelligent fashion."⁴ The Army lost 25.8% of its quantitative strength, from 770,000 to an end-strength of 572,000 according to the official Secretary of Defense source.⁵ Currently in 2012, "the Army is preparing to launch a five-year, nearly 50,000 soldier drawdown, using a combination of accession cuts and voluntary and involuntary separations, similar to the post-Cold War drawdown of the 1990s."⁶

In the coming years, the transition from the combat phase of war to security operations, and from abundant to constrained resources in an increasingly competitive job environment may increase the loss of high potential junior officers because of ineffective talent management. In a 2011 survey of General Officers, personnel management was considered the Army's worst performing function.⁷ The need for innovation in the Army's Human Resource Management function is widely acknowledged. In a competitive environment, relying on past slogans and patriotic messages for commitment to serve one's country may fall short of retaining sufficient numbers of the best-qualified officers.

General Raymond Odierno, the current Chief of Staff of the Army stated, "the future of conflict is about leaders. We're going to need people who can think differently."⁸ Experts in Army Human Resource Command expect that with the pending

drawdown of end strength through 2016, officers should anticipate slower promotions and reduced selection opportunity for rank advancements.⁹ This suggests a clear appreciation of the need for identifying and developing different strategic attributes of personnel for the uncertain future beyond the current narrow career paths. Creating the high quality bench of strategic leaders for the future is at risk if measures are not taken to prudently address the root causes of the lack of talent retention.

Trust is an issue because of the junior officer's perception of senior officer lack of commitment to their career development and potential. What is known is that the Army has recognized that it must adopt effective personnel policies to help minimize the quantity of high quality junior officers leaving the force for the civilian sector because they do not trust the institution to fully utilize their potential. To be clear, however, this is more than a personnel policy issue. Talent retention is a leadership imperative of stewardship of the Army and duty to the American people.

General Martin E. Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in his Strategic Direction for the Force guidance identified one of his four priorities as "developing today the Joint Force our Nation will need in 2020."¹⁰ Taking action to plan the future force is our duty as stewards of the profession of arms. Several studies identify best practices in talent retention in business and public service domains for competitive advantage. The Army 2020 aspirations to retain the most competitive junior officers in the active component after their active duty service obligation are likely to fail if the status quo prevails.

This paper argues that the strategic end state requires that the most talented junior officers of today see their commitment to serve matched by institutional action

that empowers career autonomy in a manner that values their potential. In light of fiscal constraints, three 'big ideas', 1) decentralized control, 2) force distribution, 3) careers across components, are 'ways' to penetrate the cultural concrete and institutional barriers that inhibit retention success of high performing junior officers.

There are caveats to these solutions. According to 30 years of organizational research by John Kotter, "seventy percent of transformations fail because of lack of a holistic approach to change."¹¹ The best practices in talent retention are likely to fail without the application of John P. Kotter's model for organizational change and Edgar H. Schein's approach to organizational culture and leadership. Enduring changes in behavior requires cultural change, a process that may take decades to take root, if at all. The natural constriction of ideas during times of less abundant resources does not bode well for implementing institutional change. To underestimate these cultural factors is a natural response; to address them requires tremendous persistence and sustained organizational momentum. The quality of the future strategic leaders of the All Volunteer Force is at stake.

Ends, Means & Ways

The Army fights and wins the nation's wars as part of the decisive arm of the joint force. The ends of the Army's service to the nation need not change. The means by which the institution is afforded will be significantly constrained in the current fiscal environment. Therefore, the ways employed to achieve the Army 2020 cannot continue to operate as if the force were still in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War. The innovation of the ways must include options or approaches that go around, under and over bureaucratic obstacles. It is unlikely that the obstacles will be removed fast enough for revolutionary change. A bold approach to change is to include multi-

component service and flexibility to serve without future prejudice in multiple components. The Army should consider making expandability and retraction of the Total Force of a high quality leadership bench the focus rather than retention primarily for the active component service.

In a fiscally-constrained environment the Army 2020 aspirational goal to retain significant high potential and high performing junior officers in the active component after their active duty service obligation is likely to fail in the short term. This anticipated outcome is not a result of lack of leadership vision or recognition of the problem in strategic guidance for developing the force. As the force downsizes and right-sizes, the Army has identified the attributes it wants to retain for the strategic challenges of 2020. Statements of vision and identification alone are no match for overcoming bureaucratic resistance to change.

Kotter's eight stage process of leading major change are 1) establishing a sense of urgency, 2) creating the guiding coalition, 3) developing a vision and strategy, 4) communicating the change vision, 5) empowering broad-based action, 6), generating short-term wins, 7) consolidating gains and producing more change, and 8) anchoring new approaches in the culture. Of the eight stages, two stages are significant hindrances towards realizing Army 2020 -- stage 5) empowering broad based action and 8) anchoring new approaches in the culture.¹²

Empowering broad based action includes three significant actions, getting rid of obstacles, changing systems or structures that undermine the change vision, and encouraging risk taking and nontraditional ideas, activities, and actions. Anchoring new approaches in the culture includes three significant actions, creating better performance through customer and productivity oriented behavior, more and better leadership, and more effective management, articulating the connections between new

behaviors and organizational success, and developing means to ensure leadership development and succession.¹³

Efforts to identify new approaches are not new. Several Army studies identified best practices and measures to implement to address retention and leadership development for the 21st Century.¹⁴ However, the most important aspects of behavior change have still not been embedded in the organizational culture. For example, the practice of seeking assignments in the tactical Army in a narrow discipline is a well-worn avenue for promotion (success). This part of the Army general-purpose force culture resists early broadening assignments and pentathletic skills. As scholar Charles Allen posited, changing culture is difficult.

[t]he cultures of muddy boots, anti-intellectualism and egalitarianism hinder the effective development of senior leaders. The muddy boots culture rewards troop time, rarely permits off-track assignments and results in a narrow experience base. The anti-intellectualism culture shows itself in the focus on warfighting competence and the disdain for intellectual pursuits, whether for self-development or toward professional military and civilian education. And the egalitarian culture, while essential to providing opportunity for all members, sometimes gets in the way of supporting the further development of high performers who show potential for senior leadership.¹⁵

There is a significant time component associated with changing culture as well. It often takes a long time. Cultural change only occurs when people's actions have produced a group benefit over time. People have to see a connection between their actions and outcomes. Culture is elusive and usually takes place in the last stage of John Kotter's eight-stage model rather than the first.¹⁶ This insight would suggest that the leadership surveys over a decade ago could lay the foundation for potential real change if resourced for execution and institutional adaptation. Making suggestions to reform personnel management and leader development has a cyclic tendency coupled with slow glacial-like adaptation.

The Army Review of Education Training and Assignments for Leaders Task Force, (RETAL), report recommended three adjustments for the Officer corps: “expand competency to full spectrum...broaden non-kinetic expertise, broaden to a full spectrum culture and finally address gaps: mental agility, cultural awareness, governance, enterprise management/strategic leadership in order to grow Army leaders for the future operating environment.”¹⁷ The three ways in this paper, decentralized control, force distribution, and component parity take these broad adjustments and pulls them forward to specifically address actions that may overcome institutional concrete. The goal is the retention of high performing junior officers for strategic leadership positions in the future. These are “ways” ahead in order to win.

Big Idea 1: Decentralized Control

The personnel management policy that broke faith with junior officers in the Army was the consequence of over accessions, which decreased time in developmental positions (i.e., as platoon leader (Figure 1)).¹⁸

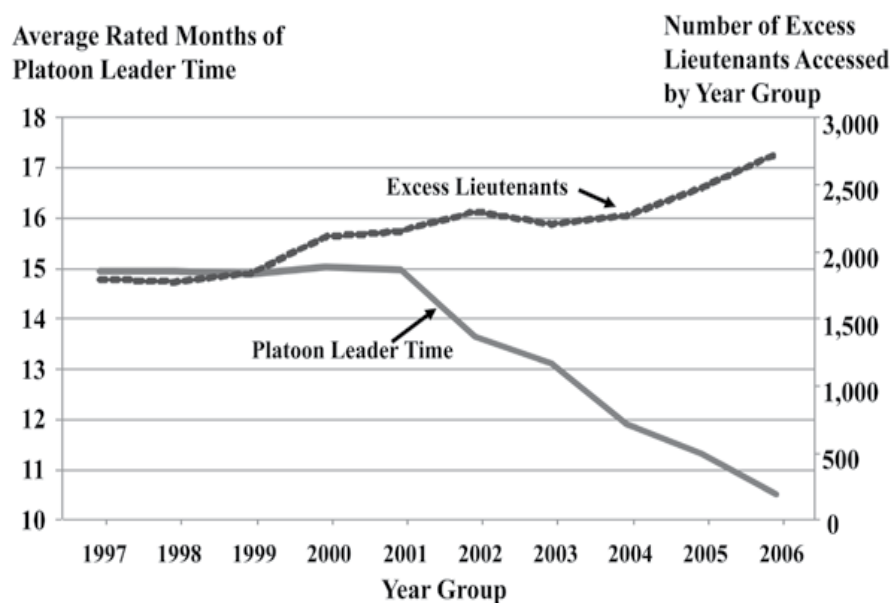


Figure 1. Reduced Developmental Opportunities.

These positions are designed to challenge, assess, and develop leadership experience. Therefore, with limited time to demonstrate core leadership competencies and talents, coupled with the removal of block checks on Officer Evaluation Reports (OER), the Army essentially lost its ability to distinguish merit among its officers. The Army had delayed making hard choices in assessments and reduced its ability to discern talent and hence cull the force of lower quality performers. With this lack of opportunity, the institution broke faith with its junior officers regarding their potential. It could not identify, inform, then target leaders for development of the best. Talent was underutilized and some officers sought opportunities elsewhere in the belief that their skills would be appreciated and rewarded.¹⁹

According to the 2012 U.S. Army Posture Statement, the timing of this emphasis on high quality talent retention related directly to the leadership experience of 10 years of combat engagements, the complexity of operations, and the acknowledgement that the most valued officers operated at the junior officer level. Understanding that the Army is its people, the junior officers represent key terrain for senior level development.

Our challenge in the coming years is not just about attracting and selecting the best available candidates to be Army professionals. We must also engage and develop our quality, combat experienced leaders so that we keep them, and they in turn, train the next generation of Army professionals. During the last decade of war, we have given our young leaders unprecedented flexibility and authority to operate effectively on the battlefield. We will prepare for tomorrow by building on that investment and ensuring that opportunities for creativity, leadership and advancement exist throughout the Army.²⁰

To meet this challenge the Army should decentralized control of personnel assignments from the Army Human Resource Command in favor of measures that place more career autonomy with the individual officer. This idea is supported by research studies like the 2010 Harvard University Junior Officer Retention survey and

the 2007 INSEAD: Business School for the World paper on *Global Talent Management: How Leading Multinationals Build and Sustain the Talent Pipeline*.²¹ This idea, however, has been met by institutional resistance in the Army due to the entrenchment of centralized human resource management. An example of this resistance has been the circumstance of the “Green Pages” project.

Green Pages is a web enabled career database talent management tool that empowered the individual and immediate supervisor to view opportunities much like the Monster.com resource for civilian job hunting. Moving towards more of a market-based approach, the U.S. Army is “experimenting with a collaborative tool of officer management called “Green Pages” to better harmonize the interests of the institution and to better understand and manage the diverse talents within the Army.”²² The concept was beta tested in 2011 and was well received by both junior officers and the senior leadership at the pilot installation of Fort Leonard Wood Missouri (home of the Army Engineers). Using this tool, officers could submit applications to jobs they were interested in during an assignment cycle. Units would then have access to the profiles of all officers who were interested and be able to prioritize them based on desired talents and skills. The Army Human Resources Command (HRC) assignment managers reported in Engineer and other branch magazines the advantages and disadvantages of the tool for junior officer career development.²³ Preference selection based upon location was the overwhelming outcome of this decentralization to the detriment of more broadening jobs in both the operating and generating force. This is where informed leaders at the lowest level have the responsibility to coach, mentor and educate junior officers based upon assessment of their potential and performance.

The 2010 Center for Army Leadership Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL) reported on eight findings concerning the quality of leadership, contribution of actions and character to leadership, effects of unit climate and situational factors on leadership, and quality of leader development. A key take-away concerning retention found that although leadership quality continues to be considered strong in the force, the quality of leader development is mixed. Specifically, the study identified a deficiency in the strategic leader's competency in developing others.²⁴ This assessment relates directly to what several other studies have found to be central to success in talent retention--flexibility in careers and trust in leaders to develop them. It is not enough to have a development plan for high potential junior officers. What makes the positive impact on retention is the faith that this plan has support from the direct supervisor and that it is likely to be supported by the institutional Army.

Green Pages should not be viewed as a threat, but rather an opportunity to move from top-down management towards self-management and development. Self-management and development is the optimal state for an innovative, agile and adaptive force that has the capability to out think and perform its opponents. Having autonomy in career decisions is an intrinsic motivator for high performance.²⁵ Within the context of mission command this concept is consistent with our leadership doctrine as well.²⁶ With this concept in mind, the next way ahead is an indirect way to incentivize targeted career opportunities to select groups of junior officers based upon their demonstrated performance level. One of the key findings from the Harvard study on Junior Officer Retention stated "the services' inability to identify their top and bottom performers makes it much more difficult to tailor personnel policies to retain them."²⁷ This

differentiation of opportunity for retaining the most competitive is an integral part of force distribution.

Big Idea 2: Force Distribution

Jack Welch, former Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of General Electric (GE) is lauded in most journals as being extremely successful in producing a surplus of top-level quality talent for the business community by implementing force rankings. According to business magazines “under his leadership GE developed the deepest bench of executive talent in American business.”²⁸

CEO Welch required every manager to become a mentor, no exceptions. In addition, a force ranking system called the 20-70-10 rule required that the bottom 10 percent of the force be culled each year to improve the level of production and quality in the organization. Critics have referred to this practice negatively as ‘rank and yank’ and cautioned that this creates a “manager-dependent environment which encourages employees wait to receive ideas for improvement from their managers before making any significant changes in performance. This environment creates more fear and less innovation.”²⁹ Depending upon the culture of the organization this assessment may have great merit. GE’s new CEO, Jeffrey R. Immelt, has since modified the implementation of the 20-70-10 rule to allow more flexibility with direct supervisors for implementation.

The Army must cull the force in order to retain high performing officers. Battalion commanders must be better educated on how to identify and develop diverse talent for Army 2020. According to former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, “a more merit-based, more individualized approach to officer evaluations could also do much to combat the risk-adverse, zero-defect culture that can take over any large, hierarchical

organization.”³⁰ Centralized boards are limited in their ability to recognize talent with the current OERs, which does not sufficiently address other skills officers may have developed outside the scope of performance evaluations. The critical challenge is identifying talent, adequately accessing potential and prudently moving the bottom 10 to 20% out of the force. It is important not to just move officers along to another component of the force. This is a cultural imperative for the Army in particular regarding esprit among active, and reserve forces. Upholding different standards for performance among components will only diminish the collective gains in professionalism gained through a decade of fighting together as a total force. In order to retain high quality talent, Army leaders have to cull the ranks in a merit based rank structure.

During the height of the build up of forces in the Global War on Terrorism, which later became Overseas Contingency Operations, the institution stopped the practice of rank distribution among junior officers. The primary concern was retention of the quantity of Captains to fill the ranks. A finding from the Harvard study stated “today’s captains are the generals of the next generation; the inability to weed out the worst leaders and promote the best is a critical vulnerability.”³¹ The Harvard researchers recommended a 10-80-10 force ranking to help the Army institution clearly identify its top and least potential for strategic leadership development. A complaint from junior officers has been the lack of differentiation in rates of promotion for high and low performers for the last eight years. The Army OER is designed to help identify attributes for 12 percent of the strategic leadership requirements for command.³² The performance evaluations have been deemed insufficient by the Harvard survey respondents in identifying broadened skills, experiences, and talents needed for the

force in 2020. In accordance with Military Personnel (MILPER) message number 11-282 issued 16 September 2011, the Army has recently adopted a return of force distribution rankings for Junior Officers.³³

The 2010 Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) six-part Officer Corps Strategy Monograph Series is a comprehensive examination of how the Army accesses, develops, retains, and employs officer talent. The third volume in the series addresses retaining talent. The authors provided a business case for a retention policy that specifically addresses the historically low return on investment characterized by the “exodus of highly educated, high-performing leaders, those the Army had invested the most in and whose talents align well with critical employment requirements.”³⁴ The authors posited that the data would suggest that West Point and the Reserve Officer Training Corps’ (ROTC) 3 and 4-year scholarship officers have remained in the Army at about two-thirds to half the rate of Officer Candidate School (OCS) officers from the ranks and ROTC officers without scholarships.

It is my assessment that high potential equals high performance in their study because of the focus on the accessions of West Point and ROTC Scholarship cadets. The SSI authors stated that “we are not arguing that scholarship officers are more talented than others, nor are we interpreting these data to say that individual OCS and ROTC non-scholarship officers cannot perform optimally in these jobs.”³⁵

What we are saying is that as a population, the performance data for scholarship officers is significant enough to predict their success in jobs the Army deems critical. They are not being retained in sufficient numbers, however, creating talent gaps that simply cannot be fielded in just in time increases in accessions or changes in the accessions mix.³⁶

The SSI Study provided an examination of two personnel management policy initiatives used to address the retention challenge. The first policy, called the Critical

Skills Retention Bonus (CSRB) was inconsistent with industry best practices because it was not specifically tailored to retain quality. The policy was intended to retain specific critically skilled officers in a specific range of year-groups. It did not target the top performing officers for an exclusive incentive. The policy was designed to retain quantity, which resulted in most officers in a band of year groups taking increments of \$25,000, \$30,000 or \$35,000 in exchange for 3 years of additional service. The Army had no way of knowing if high performing officers were incentivized to stay by accepting the bonus. In the future, methods must be in place to identify high performers and differentiate the incentives for the top 10 percent, the middle 80 percent, and remove the bottom 10 percent from all components.

In contrast, the SSI Study's assessment of the Officer Career satisfaction Program (OCSP), which specifically targeted pre-commissioned West Point and ROTC Scholarship officers. OCSP offered an opportunity to select a branch, post location, or civilian graduate school for an additional service obligation, which commits high potential officers to 10 years of service. The 10-year service milestone has consistently been the benchmark for increasing the likelihood of continued service to a 20-year career. This commitment to an additional service obligation adds predictability, and a greater sense of autonomy for the officer in career development.

Several experts contend that if the source of retention information is credible and the interpersonal skill of the junior officer's first company commander is good, the commander is likely to play an influential role in stay or leave decisions.³⁷ Retention information included an analysis of opportunities and officer marketability in the civilian sector. The 2011 RAND study is consistent with the SSI study concerning the use of a

career counselor strategy. Both studies found that this strategy specifically improved retention of USMA and ROTC scholarship graduates, which helped maximize the return on the Army's investment in these individuals before they receive their commission.³⁸

According to the Army G-1 website, for increasing the return on investment dollars, the OCSP has already delivered improvements in the retention of junior officers with over 7500 participating cadets and officers as of July 2011.³⁹ The caution is offered from Kotter's organizational change framework--that initial acceptance may not lead to sustained organizational behavioral change, especially as the nature of service evolves. Declaring victory may be premature for anchoring change to this policy over time. The policy is consistent with best practices in the sense that multinational corporations tend to look for high potential talent from universities that have high selectivity for their applicants.

The nuance, however, is that high performance rather than high potential should be the litmus test for development and engagement in our meritocracy based institution. This point must not be lost in our Army's efforts to improve retention of high potential based upon source of commission. If and when the urgency of this topic is reduced to an acceptable level by the policy improvements, rather than focus on tracking attrition level by source of commission, the institution should track by performance level (i.e., how many by force ranking are being retained (top 10%, solid 80%, and bottom 10%)). This practice would be transparent and consistent with the manner of performance being the centerpiece again for selectivity, accelerated promotions, and broadening opportunities.

Big Idea 3: Component Careers

The talent challenge of demand and supply is compounding the scope of the retention problem. In 2007, INSEAD researchers identified three declining supply trends that will make the retention of high quality talent harder: demographics, pickier workforce, and increased job mobility.⁴⁰ Demographic trends drive a quantitative shortage of talented people. According to leading business consultant MacKinsey & Company, they “projected that the number of workers aged 35-44 years in the U.S. will decline by 15% between 2000 and 2015, with no significant countervailing trends.”⁴¹ The more selective workforce seeks more work life balance. This trend also aligns with generational shifts in work expectations between the Boomers, Millennial and Generation Yers. The generational trend is the rise of boundaryless careers.⁴² The “company man” employment practices of the industrial age is incompatible with the changing culture of an information age society that competes for the same junior talent the Army develops.⁴³ The 20-year commitment to one corporation is becoming less attractive in a society that values speed and change. This is the milieu in which the Army must retain talent.

The junior officers that the institution most ardently seeks to retain in this process are the ones who have demonstrated the highest potential for strategic leadership for the uncertain future of 2020. According to General Martin E. Dempsey, the current Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, “to be credible representatives of the profession of arms, strategic leaders must be warriors. This is and will remain the essence of our profession.”⁴⁴ The problem with this myopic statement is that it is unnecessarily limiting. For example, Maxwell Taylor was a strategic leader who had a wide variety of assignments to include foreign area specialist, a division command, Superintendent of

West Point, and ultimately Chairman of the Joint Chiefs.⁴⁵ The institutional Army has to be renewed with viable, innovative and promising opportunities to continue to develop high performing junior officer talent. Innovation in the institutional force can be increased with the integration of components.

The technical skills tract for retaining high performing officers for Army 2020 is designed with a different operating philosophy. The up or out promotion system is incompatible with technical skills development. An up and stay system for officers similar to the National Security Personnel System (NSPS) for civilians, would retain high potential talent by using a skill-for-pay reward system. Technical expertise development requires dedicated time on task to obtain expert status. This concept is not antithetical to the current culture with the use of functional area selection.

The Army of 2020 should consist of a force that recognizes and values innovative talent in career fields that do not necessarily lead to promotion to the highest level of senior leadership. Highly talented administrative, cyber, intelligence, foreign area and civil affairs junior officers need to be groomed for strategic level responsibility that relies heavily on their years of world-class skill rather than leadership development. Some principles like differentiation apply, however, with a significant change. Rather than measuring success through rank, these officers are rewarded with opportunities to obtain advance degrees and specialized education to challenge the best talent to stay and contribute to innovative teams. Analytical talent should be recognized and rewarded with the opportunity to become an expert in a chosen field of study that the institution needs.

Strategic leaders must demonstrate trust by listening to junior officer aspirations and through mentorship develop a plan that enables them to reach their fullest potential. The resulting leadership development plan must be realized by demonstrating institutional flexibility with future assignments and educational pursuits. General Martin Dempsey, as Commander of Training and Doctrine Command highlighted the importance of leader development in a 2011 article in the *Armed Forces Journal*.

Successful strategic leaders will have to remain committed to the development of other leaders within the profession. They must embrace the responsibility to develop the future leaders of the profession of arms and remain committed to stewardship of the profession for the society it serves.⁴⁶

The retention of high-potential senior Captains (6-8 years from Commission) for the key leadership positions for the Army's future force of 2020 is critical.

According to the researchers at INSEAD, "there are no guaranteed recipes or instant solutions for retaining high-potential employees, though our research and other studies suggest several ways companies can deal with the problem."⁴⁷ After years of study on this topic, Professor Charles Allen's stated "the solutions at best may represent a possible picture of a potential future, like a mosaic rather than a piece of a puzzle to fit in a defined place and solution."⁴⁸ We really do not know if this way ahead, like a puzzle piece, will fit because we cannot truly know the precise shape of the future with all its uncertainty and complexity. Certainly, it is an ill-structured challenge in the sense that experts can disagree on the way ahead. However, "the role of leadership is to turn challenges into opportunities" and this exploration seeks to illuminate the opportunities to retain the most vulnerable high quality officers for the future strategic force-today's high potential junior officers.⁴⁹ This is important because the quality of Army strategic leaders in the institution is predicated on the continued service of talented volunteers.

Conclusion

The vision of Army 2020 is likely to remain as an aspirational goal in the dustbin of history, overcome by institutional bureaucratic pressures. With pending fiscal constraints there is an opportunity to use the necessity for change as a catalyst to better prepare the Army as an All Volunteer Force to win in the uncertain future. First, decentralize control of careers of the most valuable asset in the formation, the high performing junior officer. Second, demand that first line supervisors (battalion commanders) prudently cull the force, as stewards of the profession. Third, redefine officer careers across components by incentivizing continued service for life. Retaining high performing junior officers does not have to be narrowly focused on active duty exclusively, the Army must change the paradigm of what it means to serve and expand the context. These three measures offer ways around, over, and through the institutional concrete concerning careers of the best junior officers. Achieving enduring cultural change is elusive, difficult and unlikely. Now is the time to innovate and overcome the institutional barriers for retaining the best future strategic leaders for Army 2020.

Endnotes

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