



Attracting Generation Z Talent to the Army Acquisition Workforce (AAW)

Shanell S. Weissinger

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Author: Shanell S. Weissinger

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Abstract

The 2019 Army People Strategy (APS) and the 2022 Army Civilian Implementation Plan (CIP) both recognized the necessity for the Army to overhaul the talent management paradigm, from soldier to civilian. With a vision toward a digitally modernized Army beyond 2028, emerging technologies are poised to play a pivotal role, necessitating a workforce equipped with the requisite skills to drive innovation and lead change (Iyer, 2021). At the forefront of this transformation lies the Army Acquisition Workforce (AAW), comprising approximately 32,000 professionals tasked with furnishing soldiers with the necessary tools for mission success (United States Army Director, Acquisition Career Management (DACM), 2020).

This study focused on the AAW and the Army's strategy for attracting the emerging Generation Z (Gen Z) talent pool through targeted marketing and recruitment efforts. This qualitative study explored the Army's approach to attracting Gen Z to the AAW, addressing pertinent research questions regarding workplace characteristics, current recruitment strategies, target skillsets, and best practices. By delving into these inquiries, the study sought to inform Army strategists on how best to engage and enlist Gen Z talent, ensuring a workforce equipped to meet the Army's evolving needs.

Gen Z is set to constitute a substantial portion of the global labor force by 2025 (Estrellado, 2023; McAllister, 2024). Consequently, the Army must align marketing and recruitment tactics with the preferences and values of the Gen Z cohort and leverage industry hiring tactics to secure a future talent pipeline (United States Army, 2019; Defense Business Board (DBB), 2023). The study provides recommendations and strategies on how best to tailor the Army marketing and recruitment endeavors to resonate with Gen Z preferences, thereby ensuring a robust and adept workforce capable of meeting the Army's evolving needs.

Introduction

“We must put the right people, policies, and systems in place now to maintain our advantage, ensure continued access to the nation’s top talent, and achieve our vision for the Army of 2030” (United States Army, 2022, p. 1).

The 2019 Army People Strategy (APS) recognized the need for the Army to revise the talent management approach across the board from soldier to civilian. The first line of effort outlined involves acquiring talent by focusing on marketing, recruiting, and onboarding (United States Army, 2019). The Army is positioning to design a modernized and distinctly digitalized Army of 2028 and beyond. The incorporation of emerging technologies will drive the need for appropriately skilled personnel to plan, innovate, and lead change (Iyer, 2021).

The Army Acquisition Workforce (AAW) with a robust cadre of approximately 32,000 professionals was charged to provide soldiers with what is needed for mission success. The AAW mission is pivotal: to foster innovation, conceive groundbreaking designs, and transition Army requirements into tangible products and services empowering the Soldier. These professionals possess critical skillsets and competencies enabling them to design, plan, acquire, and sustain the equipment and services the Soldier needs for mission success (United States Army DACM, 2020). In this study, focused on the AAW and the strategy of attracting, through marketing and recruiting, the emerging Generation Z (Gen Z) talent pool to meet the challenges of the future Army.

Background

The world’s workforce is a multi-generational mix of diverse talent, each bringing a distinct set of characteristics. These unique attributes shape the values, beliefs, and desires for preferred workplace culture and professional relationships. Commonalities amongst individuals

allow them to be grouped together into cohorts. Merriam-Webster defines a cohort as “a group of individuals having a statistical factor in common in a demographic study” (n.d., Dictionary section). The newest generational cohort entering the workplace is Gen Z. This cohort is delineated as individuals born between 1997 and 2012 which makes the age currently 11 – 26 years old. By 2025, the Gen Z age group is expected to comprise 27% of the world’s labor force as employers seek to entice the next generation of talent (McAllister, 2024).

The 2022 Army Civilian Implementation Plan (CIP), expanding from the 2019 APS, recognizes the need to change the Army’s internal culture and to update the hiring approach for critical civilian talent. One of the strategic priorities in the CIP is to modernize civilian talent along four lines of effort (LOE). The first LOE, acquire talent, will be the focus of this research. This line of effort aims to generate an effective marketing strategy to identify and communicate with potential candidates, thereby recruiting talent with the necessary skillsets to address future gaps. The design of the CIP also seeks to pinpoint both existing and new strategies to better match talent to the Army's evolving needs (United States Army, 2022).

Acquiring the right assortment of diverse, educated, committed and cohesive professionals directly improves the lethality of soldiers and readiness of the AAW while positioning the Army for the future. Effective marketing is a key component to attracting the right talent. Marketing as, defined in the APS, is employing “innovative new techniques to increase awareness of the breadth of Army service opportunities and to shape preferences, targeting efforts against specific and diverse talent pools in the American labor market where critical talent is most likely to reside” (United States Army, 2019, p.6). After effectively marketing, comes the critical process of recruiting, which the APS defines as, “screen and select potential Soldiers and Civilians who actively respond to Army marketing efforts and seek service

with the Army” (United States Army, 2019, p.6). Matching professionals with the right skills, experience, and culture fit is crucial to selecting and hiring the best qualified candidate for the position (DeSmet et al., 2023; Hancock et al., 2022).

Problem Statement

Ensuring the AAW possesses the right human capital for acquisition is crucial as the Army strategizes for the future. Of the nearly 32,000 AAW professionals, 16% are on the brink of retirement (Sizer, 2023). In the next 3-5 years Gen Z will represent over one-quarter of the workforce, conveying unique values, perspectives, skills, and talents appealing to the Army (Estrellado, 2023; McAllister, 2024). With the changing face of the labor force, the Army's marketing and recruiting strategies warrant reevaluation. Assessing whether the current initiatives and incentives align with the new generation's aspirations is essential. Identifying skillset gaps in the AAW – resulting from attrition and evolving requirements – and understanding the professional preferences of Gen Z are key steps. This knowledge will guide AAW strategists in tailoring effective marketing and recruitment practices for the future (Hancock et al., 2022).

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the Department of the Army strategy for attracting, through marketing and recruiting, Generation Z to the Army acquisition workforce.

1. What workplace characteristics attract the Generation Z generational cohort?
2. How is the Army currently attracting the Gen Z workforce for the acquisition workforce?
3. What target skillsets is the Army acquisition workforce looking for from the Gen Z talent pool?

4. How can the Army leverage best practices to attract Gen Z talent to fill Army acquisition workforce positions?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework helps anchor the central phenomenon which the research explores and clarifies assumptions about the studied phenomenon. This study will revolve around exploring how the Army plans to fill the AAW competency gaps by marketing to and recruiting from the emerging Gen Z talent pool. The first area for investigation is the Gen Z talent group and the characteristics critical to ensure a level of work satisfaction upon recruitment. Next, the current Army strategy on marketing and recruitment of acquisition workforce talent will be examined to distinguish past effectiveness and determine the appeal to Gen Z. Then current and future forecasted skillset gaps across the AAW will be explored to establish where marketing and recruiting efforts are most critical. Lastly, best practices industry and other recruiters utilize to attract Gen Z talent will be examined for applicability to the AAW talent requirements. The diagram in Figure 1 below illustrates the conceptual framing for the central phenomenon of attracting Gen Z talent to the AAW.

Figure 1: Attracting Generation Z Talent to AAW Conceptual Framework

Significance of This Research

Early identification of needed future workforce skills is crucial for a modernized Army (United States Army, 2021). Targeting, through marketing and recruiting strategies, the Gen Z talent by leveraging competing employers' best practices may benefit the AAW in critical low density, highly sought skillset areas. A thorough understanding of the Gen Z priorities and desires for professional objectives and workplace culture could benefit the Army in formulating or adjusting strategies (Biro, 2023). The Army is committed to providing world-class capability to the soldier in the field and the AAW is a force multiplier used to achieve this (United States Army DACM, 2020).

Overview of the Research Methodology

Research for this study employs a qualitative research methodology. The central phenomenon was written as a purpose statement. Then, to help narrow the focus of the purpose, research questions were developed. These research questions were to help in the logic flow and

to be answered with supporting evidence in the study. Evidence in the form of Army and Department of Defense (DoD) documents, websites, journals, studies, and magazine and trade publication articles were collected, examined, and analyzed. During collection, various databases were utilized including ProQuest, Lawrence Technical University TechCat+, Army publication sites, Google, and Google Scholar. After a literature review of the collected supporting evidence, an analysis of the findings was presented. The information in the literature was thoroughly scrutinized, searching for patterns and themes, identifying various relationships in the information, and interpreting those patterns to address the research questions. Through reframing and restructuring the data elements, recommendations were formulated, and conclusions drawn.

Limitations of the Study

The study is qualitative and requires the interpretation of subjective written prose and data. All research was from published sources in the public realm or from Director, Acquisition Career Management (DACM) office internal distribution. This research was based only on literature review grouping all Gen Z into a definitive cohort and did not include interviews of individuals. The scope is limited to evaluating only the AAW talent and competency gaps for the future based upon evolving technologies and forecasted attrition. The study did not include other Army civilian and military personnel outside of the AAW, nor the acquisition workforce or service members from other services.

Summary

Examining the current Army's strategy for attracting Gen Z talent is prudent to determine the needed direction for future marketing and recruiting initiatives. The AAW leadership goal is to attract a cadre of the best and brightest Gen Z talent in the competitive labor market with the right skillsets to fill the vacancies or new positions (United States Army DACM, 2020). The

subsequent section provides a literature review of the current Army and AAW marketing and recruiting strategies aimed at the Gen Z talent. Also included in this review are the desires of the Gen Z cohort toward workplace characteristics and an AAW functional area skillset gap analysis. The last part of the literature review investigates the best practices of the private and defense industry competition which could be leveraged to entice the needed Gen Z talent.

Literature Review

Introduction

The Department of Army mission is “to deploy, fight, and win our nation's wars by providing ready, prompt, and sustained land dominance by Army forces across the full spectrum of conflict as part of the joint force” (United States Army, n.d., “Our Purpose Remains Constant” section). The nature of warfare is ever changing with unique challenges from global pandemics, a rise of cyber and digital threats, continued use of terrorism and violent extremism, to an escalating climate crisis and shifting global power dynamics. DoD and the Army are only as strong and capable as the people employed. The only way to react to the complex environments of the future and outthink, outmaneuver, and outfight any adversary is to attract the best talent (Army DoD DEIA, 2022). The goal of the Army is to attract the critical skills and experience essential to transform the Total Army into a multi-domain prepared force and secure our nation for years to come (United States Army, 2019).

The workforce is aging, and thousands of experienced workers are retiring daily. One-third of the U.S. labor force is anticipated to be 55 years of age or older by 2030, which presents new challenges for employers. Actions need to be taken now to successfully transfer the knowledge, skills, and expertise built up over decades with new and existing employees. This knowledge will be impossible to regain once lost. A consequence of the COVID-19 global pandemic is an acceleration in the desire to retire. Older workers who were planning to retire in the next 5-10 years are now wanting to retire sooner or even immediately. This desire to retire earlier means any new hires will not have as much time to absorb and be mentored by those leaving, thus leading to potential strategic knowledge gaps (Dennison, 2023).

Organizations have learned, because of the global COVID-19 pandemic, to become more agile and resilient to change. As the rise in retirements continue, the AAW too must take

immediate steps to prepare for the challenges posed. Initiative-taking measures to reduce the impact of this demographic shift would address the record loss of experienced professionals as well as prepare the organization for a more age-diverse workforce (Dennison, 2023). In 2024, nearly 30% of federal workers will become retirement eligible (DBB, 2023). DoD agencies have woven the potential of employee departures into the strategic blueprints and risk evaluations. Recent administrations have long sounded the alarm on the rise in retirements issue, emphasizing the importance of recruiting younger talent and ensuring robust succession planning (Bubl , 2019).

A 2022 RAND study indicates DoD, more specifically the civilian defense acquisition workforce, is positioned well with hiring replacement talent, although the effort was not as effective as possible. The defense acquisition workforce saw almost 45% growth from 2006-2021 growing to a total of 185,864 people in 2021. Of the population, 170,758 were civilians and 41,950 specifically part of the AAW (Gates et al., 2022). The reactive hiring practices in response to the exodus of the knowledgeable aged workforce would have been more effective filling talent gaps if DoD considered advances in skill needs versus strict one-for-one talent replacement. The replacement hiring, although framed by competency gap analysis and follow on training provided by the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act, was not reactive to the complex environment of knowledge advances (DDB, 2023). As of February 2022, the reevaluated Back-to-Basics (BtB) initiative launched to nurture a culture of continued learning for both current and future acquisition professionals (Woolsey, 2021).

The Department of Defense, the Army, and more specifically the AAW, struggled with responding appropriately to the cyclical effect of time and changes to talent requirements of the workforce since inception. One of the three priorities outlined in the Army's Human Capital

Strategic Plan (HCSP) is AAW recruiting management. This qualitative study aims to examine the AAW recruiting issue along with the marketing strategies and campaigns that attract the right talent, as both are critical to ensure a pipeline of high-quality employees (United States Army DACM, 2020). The literature review offers insights into the emerging pool of talent, focusing on traits and preferred workplace attributes. Further, the study delves into the government's branding and marketing strategies tailored for the Army acquisition workforce, pinpoints areas within the AAW where talent is deficient, and identifies specific skills and competencies needed. By thoroughly exploring these areas, effective analysis of the Department of the Army's strategy in attracting Generation Z to the Army acquisition workforce through marketing and recruitment can occur.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

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Generational Cohorts

A generational cohort refers to individuals born during a specific time frame who share common experiences (Rutledge & Rutledge, 2023). Observing variations in attitudes toward key issues among these demographic groups provides insights into generational characteristics. These cohorts are shaped by shared historical experiences, influence attitudes, behaviors, and values. Generational cohorts permit researchers to evaluate changes over time to better understand how different formative experiences shape individual's views of the world (Dimock, 2019).

Generational cohort thinking can provide reasoning on how societies have changed over time. The time periods cohort members come of age are distinguished by shared experiences and perspectives. Opportunities and attitudes cohort members experience or hold are shaped by significant events such as terrorist attacks, wars, recessions, and pandemics (Dimock, 2023; Rutledge & Rutledge, 2023). Likewise, changes in how individuals live amid significant progressive developments like desegregation, birth control, the internet and the arrival of artificial intelligence define cohort characteristics. Gen Z, Millennial, Gen X and Baby Boomer cohort characteristics and tendencies should be seen as general reference points and not scientific facts. People are individuals and not everyone is affected the same or to the same degree, thus understanding generational labels can lead to oversimplification and stereotypes is important. In this research, generational cohort lens is used to help navigate a changing world and point out typical characteristics found in a particular age group (Dimock, 2023).

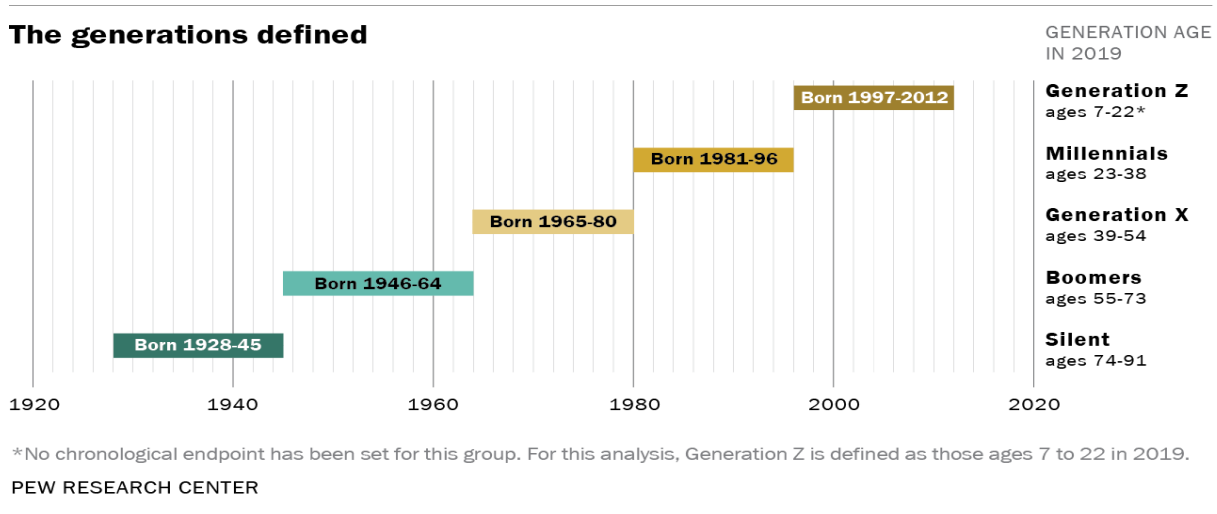
Generational cohort thinking focuses on the formative or developmental period between the age of 10 and 20. This is the influential period of life when individuals are most open to seeing and experiencing the world and where there is a shift from a child's eye-view to an adult

optic of perceiving the world. Families, friends, music, media, technology, and communities all have influence and these forces in concert create a backdrop for adulthood. During this time, values and impressions are formed, and adult attitudes and approaches solidify producing an identifiable and static generational perspective (Rutledge & Rutledge, 2023).

Generational Z Characteristics

Currently, there are five-generational cohorts present in the global workforce as shown in Figure 2. The five cohorts are comprised of Traditionalists (Silent), Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y (Millennials), and more recently, Generation Z. While the diversity of the multi-generational workforce offers robust perspectives and strengths to organizations, there are also unique challenges present among and between the cohorts. Attracting individuals with complementary attitudes, motivators, and goals is the foundation of building effective team dynamics but can be challenging when faced with a generationally diverse talent pool. Additionally, when managing workforce expectations from a multi-cultural perspective, ensuring the workforce is working toward a common goal for the organization can be challenging (Human Resource Executive, 2019).

Figure 2: The Generational Date Ranges Defined



From “Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins,” by M. Dimock, 2019, *Pew Research Center* (<https://pewrsr.ch/2szqtJz>). In the public domain.

The aging group mentioned in the introduction as retiring at a high rate now have an identity, the aging group are part of the Baby Boomer cohort. In the United States alone, there are currently over 44 million Baby Boomers still in the current workforce, with more than 10,000 Boomers retiring each day. The labor market is reshaping with this transformation of the workforce and resulting in the most substantial shortfall of workers on a percentage basis in 50 years. Organizations are looking for new knowledgeable and skilled entrants into the workforce to replenish and fill skillset shortfalls. Individuals from the GenZ cohort enter the labor market bringing with them different worldviews and perspectives on careers and how to succeed in the workplace. When looking to attract Gen Z talent, companies need to understand what influenced Gen Z views, career aspirations and working styles (Gomez et al., 2022).

The Generation Z cohort is the generation of workers born between 1997 and 2012. Generation Z is the newest young entry to the workforce. Radically different than the Millennial predecessors, the Gen Z cohort has an entirely unique perspective and definition for success in life and in the workforce (Gomez et al., 2022). The primary challenges come from expectations Gen Z holds regarding work/life balance, career growth, loyalty, authority, and motivation. The entrance of Gen Z into the workforce is causing companies to relook traditional leadership approaches and is radically shifting outlooks regarding work and learning (Human Resource Executive, 2019; Woods, 2021). Figure 3 shows some of the various attitudinal differences between the generational cohorts benefiting employers when marketing to the Gen Z cohort.

Figure 3: 2021 Generational Infographics

Generations at a glance

With so much information about the generations put out into the world over the years, keeping track of the details about each can be difficult. Below is the U.S. MONITOR's shorthand reference guide for some of the key attitudinal differences among the generations that every marketer needs to know.

| | Birth years | Also known as | Words to live by | Stereo-typed as | Raised amid | Defining idea | In pursuit of | Always after | The American Dream is: | Work | Consumption style | Digital life |
|--|-------------|-------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|---------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|
|  GEN Z | 1997-2010 | Centennials | "You do you" | Distracted techies | Unceasing volatility | Pragmatism | A purposeful life | The next iteration | A moving target | On my terms | Creation | Rewriting the rules of the game |
|  MILLENNIALS | 1979-1996 | Gen Y | "You only live once" | Entitled whiners | Booms and busts | Authenticity | An interesting life | The next moment | A sea change | A fluid situation | Curation | #winning the game |
|  GEN X | 1965-1978 | The MTV Generation | "You're on your own" | Cynical slackers | Stagnation | Self-reliance | A balanced life | The next improvement | A struggle | A difficult challenge | Compromise | Helps you get ahead of the game |
|  BOOMERS | 1946-1964 | The "Me" Generation | "Forever young" | Selfish narcissists | Post-war boom | Individuality | The meaning of life | The next new adventure | A birthright | A meaningful adventure | Choice | Keeps you in the game |
|  MATURES | Before 1946 | The Greatest Generation | "The American Way" | Docile traditionalists | Crisis and threats | Duty | The middle-class life | The next rung on the ladder | A contract | An inevitable obligation | Conformity | Keeps you in touch |

From "2021 Generational Infographics," 2023, *Kantar* (<https://monitor.kantar.com/u-s-generational-infographics/>). Copyright © 2023 Kantar.

The Gen Z cohort comprises 30% of the worldwide population and is anticipated to account for at least 27% of the global workforce by 2025. With Gen Z soon making up over a quarter of the talent in the workforce, understanding the culture and characteristics of the workers within the cohort is critical to creating a better work environment to attract the new talent (Estrellado, 2023). To understand this new generational cohort and what changes entry into the workplace will bring about, employers first need to recognize the value of the environment in which Gen Z came of age and the forces shaping the outlook (Gomez et al., 2022).

With the world changing faster than ever before, Gen Z is continuously being shaped. The rise of social media and pervasive computing continues to expand both accessibility and capability of technology. Other top factors having influenced the Gen Z cohort are the 2008 Great Recession, climate change, awareness of social inequality, gun violence, inflation,

declining middle class, and the COVID pandemic (Davis, 2016; Deloitte, 2022; Rutledge & Rutledge, 2023). With the world changing quickly and the problems manifesting in number and magnitude, the Gen Z cohort is developing a distrust for traditional institutions not moving quickly enough to solve the problems (Rutledge & Rutledge, 2023).

The Gen Z cohort has never lived in a world where the Internet did not exist. Dubbed the “digital generation” for being technologically and socially connected, 44% of the cohort feels the need to check in on social media at least hourly (Davis, 2016). As a result, global events have aggressively shaped this generation’s view of the world. The Gen Z cohort has grown up in a time of volatility with disruption and change being the norm (Tanner, 2023). Members of Gen Z are more likely to look to government for answers and solutions to problems rather than private companies and individuals. Only 29% of Gen Z individuals believe the government is too involved in problem solving and feel private companies and individuals should step up, while 70% believe the government should do more and take greater action (Parker & Igielnik, 2020).

In the United States, Gen Z is already a record breaking generation, representing the most culturally and ethnically diverse generation. The Gen Z cohort demographic holds only a slim majority (52%) of non-Hispanic white, while there are 25% Hispanic, 14% black, 6% Asian and 5% of some other race, or two or more races. Other diverse aspects found in higher percentages within the American Gen Z cohort include, 35% of Gen Z members personally knowing someone who prefers to go by gender-neutral pronouns and 50% believe society does not adequately accept those who do not identify as a man or a woman. The Gen Z cohort represents the leading edge of the country’s changing racial, gender and ethnic composition (Parker, & Igielnik, 2020).

Individuals within Gen Z value education but are not necessarily choosing the traditional higher education paths but following a personally chosen path to gain education. A recent study shows Gen Z wants short, affordable, career-connected education pathways. To get outcomes that are more equitable, sustainable, or beneficial, Gen Z has no problem pursuing non-traditional higher education pathways and education in a desired way (Tanner, 2023). Gen Z learners are proactively seeking out learning opportunities to enhance skills and preferring to learn independently via online platforms, such as online tutorials and expert led courses. The Gen Z cohort's proficiency with digital technology and platforms offers opportunities for personal and professional growth and a greater ability to acquire specialized knowledge (Gomez et al., 2022).

A study conducted by McKinsey & Company (2023) ranked the top factors Gen Z talent considered most important when taking a new job and those factors keeping them in a position, in order of preference. Table 1 clearly illustrates that even though compensation is top six in both lists, Gen Z is motivated by more than money.

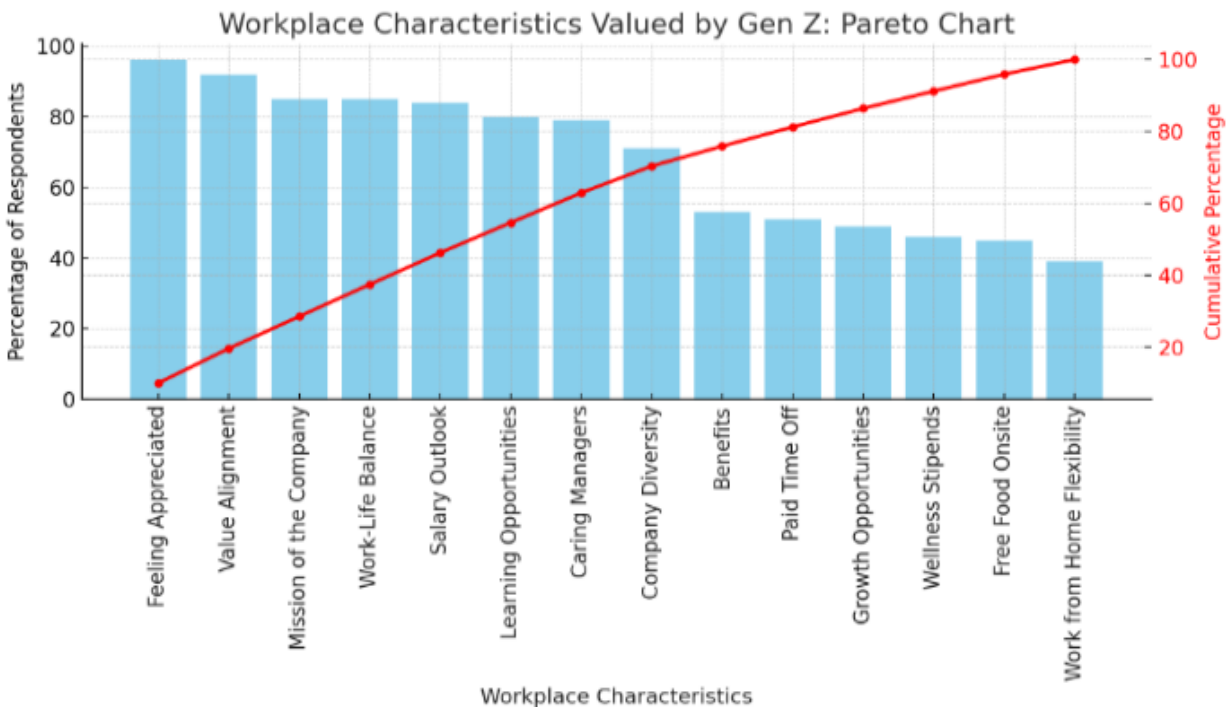
Table 1: GenZ Job Priorities

| GenZ's Job Priorities | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Factors When Taking a New Job | Factors for Staying in a Job |
| 1. Career Development & Advancement | 1. Workplace Flexibility |
| 2. Adequate Total Compensation | 2. Career Development & Advancement |
| 3. Meaningful Work | 3. Meaningful Work |
| 4. Workplace Flexibility | 4. Reliable & Supportive People |
| 5. Reliable & Supportive People | 5. Safe Work Environment |
| 6. Safe Work Environment | 6. Adequate Total Compensation |

Adapted from “Gen What? Debunking Age-Based Myths About Worker Preferences,” by A. DeSmet, M. Mugayar-Baldocchi, A. Reich, and B. Schaninger, 2023, *McKinsey & Company*, (<https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/gen-what-debunking-age-based-myths-about-worker-preferences>)

Data shows the Gen Z talent, which was found to be the generation most likely to consider leaving a job, viewed compensation and meaningful work equally when considering a new position. With the emerging Gen Z cohort craving the attractive compensation packages vice just an adequate paycheck, organizations must explore offering multiple elements when making proposals to current and potential employees. Early Gen Z talent decisions suggest a craving for complete work experiences and the opportunity to develop and advance. Gen Z want to start building careers, but the future ability to advance is a critical characteristic in the mind of the Gen Z talent. Career development is at the top when considering staying or moving on to new positions. The lack of these growth and advancement opportunities is the top reason to leave a job (DeSmet et al, 2023; Gomez et al., 2022).

A study conducted by Thought Exchange (2022), provides some survey data on Gen Z workforce talent employed full-time in the United States. Characteristics that are important to Gen Z talent in the workplace include rewards, benefits, and personal needs, along with the typical salary outlook. The Pareto chart in Figure 4 depicts the study's findings on what Gen Z values in the workplace. It ranks workplace characteristics from most to least important based on the percentage of respondents who value each. The cumulative percentage line (in red) highlights the most significant factors, emphasizing where efforts can have the greatest impact on Gen Z's employment satisfaction and decisions (Thought Exchange, 2022).

Figure 4: Pareto Chart of Workplace Characteristics Valued by Gen Z

Adapted from “Gen Z At Work: Defining Workplace Expectations of the World’s Most Populous Generation,” by *Thought Exchange*, 2022 (<https://thoughtexchange.com/guide/gen-z-at-work/>)

Gen Z talent look for enthusiastic employers advocating for environmental, social, and political causes while striving to be catalyst for change in the workplace. The Gen Z workforce will not arbitrarily function in ways disruptive to work-life balance or harmful to the environment simply because something has always worked that way in the past or the organization is averse to change. Companies and organizations like the Army, will need to adapt policies and processes to ensure value is added to attract and recruit the best new talent (Thought Exchange, 2022).

Diversity is the catchphrase for the Gen Z cohort. Gen Z, more than past generations, prioritizes diversity across race, gender, and orientation. As a result, organizations embodying

the full range of differences in marketing, increase the likelihood for diversifying talent pipelines with Gen Z talent. Another valuable finding was, 77% of Gen Z respondents give preference to social activism and working for organizations holding values reflecting their own (Gomez et al., 2022). As highly socially responsible individuals, 93% of Gen Z talent claim an organization's societal impact is a determining factor and weighs on the decision to work there (Davis, 2016). An organization's diversity, ethics, practices, and social impact are more important than ever. When looking to attract Gen Z talent, organizations need to demonstrate an effort to be good global citizens.

Marketing and Recruiting Awareness

Marketing for talent is critical and must be strategically focused for the digital age. Recruitment marketing involves using a wide range of marketing tactics to attract, engage, and hire top talent. Recruitment marketing is all about finding effective and inviting ways to promote job opportunities while aligning the AAW culture and competing with others in the industry to rise to the top as the most desired employer (Bailey, 2023). The marketing world moves at the speed of relevance, just like the Army, and is vital to staying ahead and maintaining a sense of relevance. In today's competitive job market, 77% of organizations find filling certain job rolls difficult, magnifying the criticality of recruitment marketing strategies that enable organizations to stand out as employers and compete for talent (Bump, 2022).

Marketing campaigns are intentional efforts intended to promote specific company goals. The campaigns are how an organization deliberately promotes awareness of the organization brand and persuades customers to make certain decisions or choices. Marketing campaigns often involve a blend of media. This blend can involve a range of various options to include email,

print advertising, television, radio advertising, pay-per-click, and social media. As a business grows marketing complexity grows (Decker, 2022b).

A successful recruitment marketing strategy takes candidates on a journey through the organization's recruiting process as illustrated in Figure 5. During the recruitment marketing phase, the focus is on the top of the funnel (Awareness, Attraction, Interest). However, the actual recruitment process continues to the second half and the bottom of the funnel (Application, Evaluation, Interviewing, and Hiring). During the Awareness stage, companies craft shrewd content marketing strategies, such as blogs, videos, and live online events that highlight company culture and overall employee experience (Bailey, 2023). By utilizing all the marketing channels and tools the target audience is known to respond to, companies spread word of job opportunities to attract high-quality candidates. Recruitment marketing tactics in the attraction stage include consistent messaging about the company, employer brand, and the company roles in the right places to get potential candidates to consider applying. In this stage, interested candidates actively research and evaluate a company to decide whether to apply or not. Companies are now optimizing the interest and application experience with the help of artificial intelligence (AI). Using friendly chatbots or virtual assistants to guide candidates and answer any questions 24/7 can help close the deal and help convince candidates to apply. A successful recruitment marketing funnel is a continuous process delivering value by attracting and engaging qualified candidates and turning them into applicants (Bailey, 2023).

Figure 5: Recruitment Marketing Process

From “Mastering Recruitment Marketing: What You Need to Know in 2024,” by G. Bailey, 2023, *Academy to Innovate HR* (<https://www.aihr.com/blog/recruitment-marketing/>). In public domain.

The Army CIP (2020) looked to update the human resource and management processes associated with Army civilians. In response to this plan, a proponent for Army human capital initiatives in the form of the Army Civilian Career Management Activity (ACCMA) was created. This allows for a less siloed or stove piped approach to new employee recruitment creating a more enterprise-wide approach to recruitment. Instead of a command or organization coordinating specific one-off recruitment efforts, consolidation of efforts into a larger overarching event could occur. The Army is planning to build civilian recruitment into future public marketing campaigns. In August of 2021, ACCMA held the first recruitment event and had another 50 planned for fiscal year 2022. The recruitment endeavor was the first time the Army has mapped out service-wide strategies to attract new civilian employees (Serbu, 2021).

The Defense Business Board (DBB) (2023), established in 2002 as an advisory board for the DoD to examine topics of interest, provided an assessment and recommendations on building a civilian talent pipeline. The first area examined in the study was recruitment, the lifeblood of the modern organization. The DoD civilian recruiting program was defined as “scattered.” The Defense Civilian Personnel Advisory Service (DCPAS) maintains a webpage that provides a wealth of content including policy, plans, and programs for recruiting, but execution beyond the DCPAS office is extemporary (DBB, 2023). DoD has about 15,000 people working full time to recruit members of the military. Of that number, only about 100 have the primary job to recruit civilians, with an estimated half working for the Air Force alone (Serbu, 2023).

Unlike the Army, recruiting in the private sector is a key focus area with nearly all industry employers having programs with specialized teams with roles such as talent sourcer, recruiting coordinator, and recruiters. For comparison, Union Pacific, with a workforce of 32,000 full-time employees (equivalent to the current size of the AAW) employs more than 50 recruiters to identify talent worldwide (DBB, 2023). “Without the aid of dedicated civilian recruiters, most applicants are stuck navigating the hiring process alone. The USAJOBS’ hiring process is complicated, time-consuming, and often frustrating for the user” (DBB, 2023, p. 18). DoD’s current average time to hire civilians is 81 days. The department has not made progress in reducing the number of days any further (Serbu, 2023).

Branding gives an organization an identity, making the identity memorable which helps the organization stand out against competitors, brings employees pride, and builds credibility and trust. The branding process delivers materials supporting the brand, like a logo, tagline, visual design, or tone of voice. Brands are an effective way for companies to communicate a held vision and clarify for what a company stands (Decker, 2022b). Brand identity is what a firm

wants customers to think and feel about the firm and the products offered. Both marketing and branding are essential and must work in accord for a business to succeed and grow, or in the case of the Army, attract and retain the right people skills (Decker, 2022a; Orvis et al., 2022). Figure 6 displays the differences side-by-side between branding and marketing. The key takeaway is that branding is a company or organization’s identity, and marketing is how the identity is communicated to the public (Decker, 2022a).

Figure 6: Comparison of Branding versus Marketing Objectives

Branding vs. Marketing

| Branding | Marketing |
|--|---|
| Develops the brand identity | Develops campaigns that connect the brand to products, mission, and goals |
| Builds customer trust with story | Builds customer trust with actions |
| Strategies and tactics to support identity and story | Strategies and tactics to support products and campaigns |
| The story about why your company exists | Supports brand story with specific initiatives |
| Focus on how an audience feels about your company | Focus on what an audience does with your company |

From “What is Branding? Understanding its Importance in 2023,” by A. Decker, 2022, *Hubspot* (<https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/branding>). In the public domain.

Just as marketing and branding are different, branding has two elements, brand image and brand identity. The customer’s perspective is the essential difference between brand image and brand identity. Brand image is how the consumer perceives the product, or in this case the Army career field. Image is the public or individual’s opinions, ideas, associations, and emotions regarding that particular entity. Brand identity, on the other hand, is how an organization wishes customers would view offered products and services. Specifically in terms of the Army, how the

Army wants customers, or potential employees, to think and feel about the organization and offered products and services. Controlled by brand owner decisions, brand identity expresses how the organization wants the brand to be acknowledged (Brand Trust, n.d.; Orvis, et al., 2022).

The Army brand identity will attract potential applicants to Army employment and can encourage those already employed to remain. How the Army brand identity resonates with Army civilian applicants is not clear. To successfully leverage or influence brand identity, the Army must gain a better understanding of what individuals, both applicants and employees, currently think about the brand. Determining what brand identity elements resonate with potential applicants and managing any negative issues held is critical. Assessment of the Army civilian brand image occurred in a 2022 RAND study. Findings showed the marketing strategies for civilian jobs for the Army were failing, as awareness of Army civilian career opportunities was low in the external market. Only 40% of students and younger professionals and about 60% of older professionals had any awareness or knowledge that civil-service jobs existed within the Army (Orvis et al., 2022).

In the same RAND study, potential applicants aware that the Army had civilian positions held erroneous concerns regarding Army civilian employment. Significant among those concerns was the belief in forced involuntary transfers or moves, the requirement to live in undesirable places, being put at risk of injury or death, and receiving a low non-competitive salary. Requiring civilians to transfer is possible with a signed mobility agreement, although moving is seldom required. Totally refuting the salary concern is not possible. Army salaries, as compared to the private sector, for many occupations are lower. While Army salaries are not completely outside of the acceptable range, the total compensation for Army occupations is often better than those of private sector counterparts. These erroneous concerns are reality, and the misconceptions

existence is what Army marketing and branding efforts must aim to change and overcome (Orvis et al., 2022).

The RAND report also looked at branding strategies with comparable results. During the study, awareness of the lack of a shared recognizable Army civilian brand image occurred. Only a handful of individuals surveyed understood that Army civilian job opportunities existed. Only through chance word-of-mouth by a friend, family member, or colleague was the knowledge of Army civilian jobs brought to awareness. Incumbents acknowledged and reinforced what human resource managers and others involved in the recruiting process claimed, that most potential applicants thought that working for the Army meant enlisting. Feedback from external audiences confirmed this impression. Awareness of an Army civilian brand was lower than the already extremely limited awareness of Army civilian employment opportunities. Incumbents consistently struggled to articulate an Army Civilian brand, or even to express potential elements of one (Orvis et al., 2022).

The DoD and Army need to focus on building a civilian “employer brand,” and better communicate the Defense mission along with the wide breadth of positions available amongst the civilian workforce (Serbu, 2023). When deciding where to apply for a job, 84% of applicants say an organization’s employer reputation is important. The DBB (2023) assessment found the perception of DoD, particularly Armed Services, as an instrument of “bad” wars impacted how people in potential candidate pools perceived the DoD. Confidence in the military had fallen and candidates may question whether the government will use inventions, software, or intellectual capital as tools to wage wars when disagreements occur. The negative perception could have a trickle-down effect to the Army Civilian Corp and more specifically the AAW (DBB, 2023).

Americans need to be made aware of the humanitarian missions the DoD and specifically the Army is responsible for, and the frequency DoD and Army civilians contribute to those missions (DBB, 2023). There are potential synergies to be realized when considering aligning the Army brand with an Army civilian brand (Orvis et al., 2022). Research shows less than half of Americans do not know civil service jobs exist in the DoD, let alone the Army. Of the 58% that are aware civil service jobs exist, many associate the work with disputed wars, or hold to the stereotypical belief that government workers are incompetent or corrupt. Establishing a unique defense civilian brand and modifying by service is an opportunity to change perceptions and communicate the DoD and service missions and the extensive range of position prospects throughout the civilian workforce (Serbu, 2023).

DoD and Army Strategies

There are many strategies, plans and campaigns that flow down to provide overarching guidance for marketing and recruiting the AAW talent. The guidance starts with the President's National Security Strategy and then DoD's National Defense Strategy. These top-level strategies are accessed, scrutinized, and used to build service specific and eventually command or organization strategies (Heffington et al., 2019). The lower-level strategies in turn, address the critical need to recruit new talent and provide guidance for attracting the right talent.

The Federal Workforce Priorities Report (FWPR) (2022), issued by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), is a quadrennial report that conveys key government wide human capital priorities intended to inform agency strategic and human capital planning. This report addresses as the second priority initiative recruitment, succession planning, and knowledge transfer. This priority was outlined for the first time in the 2018 report as priority number one. Replaced as top priority now only by the rising need to focus more on leveraging

technology and modernizing information technology processes. The traits emphasized and critical to the recruitment and succession planning priority are technology training, implementing phased retirement, next-generation workforce recruitment, competency assessments, skills inventories, and leadership skills and capabilities training. The report further stresses the criticality facing agencies to build and maintain a multi-faceted succession plan. In this plan, the valuable knowledge and insights of current employees should be recognized and transferred to new and retained employees, thereby creating, and exploiting a multi-generational knowledge and leadership pipeline (Office of Personnel Management (OPM), 2022).

The United States Army Combined Arms Center (CAC) recognized the critical need for a systems approach to talent management as early as 2015. A concept of operations for developing talent for the Army force for 2025 and beyond was identified and designed by the CAC. In this strategy, the environment was analyzed, challenges and impediments to change were identified, and principles and core functions for a framework to integrate an Army talent management enterprise was drafted (United States Army CAC, 2015). The framework, objectives, and actions that were outlined in the CAC strategy are obvious in more current strategies, as key objectives still requiring action.

The Army Strategy (2018) “articulates how the Total Army achieves its objectives defined by the Army Vision [2018] and fulfills its Title 10 duties” (United States Army, 2018, p. 1). The strategy’s primary inputs are the National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and National Military Strategy. The Army Campaign Plan, part of the Army strategy, “is the governance and assessment process to ensure synchronized implementation of the Army Strategy. The Army Campaign Plan will designate organizational leads for supporting strategic efforts, develop intermediate objectives, track progress, and assess risk” (United States Army,

2019, p.5). The four lines of effort implemented through the Army Campaign Plan are build readiness, modernization, reform, and strengthen alliances and partnerships (United States Army, 2019).

The Army People Strategy (APS) (2019) is a foundational document guiding the management of the Total Army in multi-domain operations. The strategy provides guidance for managing the talents of both soldiers and civilians. The APS addresses things like quality of life and taking care of the individual along with the critical elements of readiness, modernization, and reform efforts. The goal of the strategy is to outline a strategic approach, taking the emergent trends described in both the National Defense Strategy and the Army Strategy, to achieve cohesive teams for the Joint Force (United States Army, 2019).

The Army People Strategy- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Annex (APS-DEI) (2020) further emphasized how leveraging diversity will ensure the Army maintains a competitive advantage in the war for talent. The APS-DEI stresses building the total force while valuing and integrating diverse cultures, backgrounds, and talents. “Diversity is the Force. Equity is the Goal. Inclusion is the Way” (United States Army, 2020b, page after cover).

The Army Modernization Strategy (AMS) (2021) describes how the Total Army, made up of regular Army, National Guard, Army Reserve, and Army civilians, is transforming into a multi-domain ready force by 2025. By accomplishing transformation, the enduring responsibility “to provide for the defense of the United States and retain its position as the globally dominant land power” (United States Army, 2021, p.1) will be met. To achieve the desired final state by 2025, “the Army will modernize how we fight, what we fight with, and who we are” (United States Army, 2021, p.1). The third element of “who we are” relies upon highly trained individuals. Talent management principles focused on transforming “personnel systems to

maximize individual knowledge, skills, behaviors, and preferences” (United States Army, 2021, p.8) will help soldiers and civilians reach full potential.

The Army Digital Transformation Strategy is the Army’s plan to use innovative and transformative technologies, processes, and people to create a digital Army that can deliver over match through joint multi-domain operations (MDO) by 2028. The Army’s people and relationships with allied partners are vital to achieving the goal to dominate in MDO. Objective three of the strategy is people & partnerships. The objective emphasizes the need for robust recruiting and selection, training programs, digital career models, and partnerships with academia and industry (Iyer, 2021). “People drive success” (Iyer, 2021, p. 12).

The Army People Strategy- CIP (2020 & 2022) addresses the need to “Modernize Civilian Talent Acquisition” through the objectives of marketing civilian service and recruiting top talent. There are tasks for each objective with specific intended outcomes and an expected timeline. The 2020 CIP led to the creation of the ACCMA designed to enhance the effectiveness of civilian career programs, to adjust the organizational construct to improve integration, defining the career field more broadly, and probably most important, creating efficiencies through centralization (United States Army, 2020a; United States Army, 2022).

The Army Acquisition Workforce HCSP (2017 & 2020) helps to establish goals, objectives and strategic initiatives supporting the development of a professional AAW. Outlined in the HCSP are four goals, addressing workforce planning, professional development, leadership development, and employee engagement along with three enablers, communication and collaboration, resources, and data analytics. Each goal and enabler are equally important to ensuring success (United States Army, 2022). The DACM, “has the mission to shape and develop the AAW’s capabilities through superior support and development of world-class

acquisition professionals. The Army DACM Office works to identify talent early and provide a wide range of training, education, and leader development opportunities” (United States Army Acquisition Support Center, 2019).

Other items critical to marketing and recruiting are the Army webpages and job posting locations. These tools inform and promote the government and the Army to the public (Orvis et al., 2022). Specifically, USAJOBS (<https://www.usajobs.gov/>) is a critical site for job applicants wanting to know about position openings. Created in 1996, the USAJOBS website now houses almost all federal job postings and announcements. There are from 6,000 to 10,000 openings available for applicants, with some positions receiving a thousand plus responses (Bur, 2020). If applicants were not aware of the USAJOBS website and simply googled, “Army jobs,” the U.S. Army (<https://www.goarmy.com>) page would result. The GoArmy page is predominantly for Soldiers. The Army Civilian is mentioned once on the website but is not obvious and an applicant interested in civilian career opportunities would need to be searching diligently to locate the call-to-action button to take (<https://www.goarmy.com/careers-and-jobs/find-your-path/army-civilians.html>). The GoArmy site is not where a job seeker looking for an Army civilian opportunity should go. Potential applicants must “pull” information from the websites. The degree to which Army organizations can “push” information to jobseekers in different occupations is unclear. Army and job website information is useful mainly to those who are already aware of, interested in, and actively seeking Army civilian career opportunities (Orvis et al., 2022).

Once at USAJOBS, learning to navigate the system begins. At the bottom of the page under account and help are several options to get things started along with account set up guidance. All applicants must create a profile which will then allow them to input personal

information, upload or build a resume and eventually apply for positions. Frequently asked questions and instructions for each step of the process are easy to access and attempt to anticipate potential questions. Each step of the hiring process is addressed from setting up an account to a final job offer (Bur, 2020).

Current employees who have succeeded in navigating through the hiring process, have described the process as slow and cumbersome. These characteristics are likely to remain a challenge that Army hiring managers will have to overcome. The fundamental elements established in the innate legislation governing the civil service, the merit system principles (5 USC Part III; 5 CFR Part 332), make the hiring process complex. There may be little that the Army can do about the complex hiring process without systemic changes to federal regulation with an Act of Congress or streamlining the application process with changes to the USAJOBS website. Almost a decade has elapsed since OPM initiated a major effort to streamline the entire hiring process (Orvis et al., 2022).

Recruiting talent able to demonstrate the knowledge and skills needed in the civilian workforce is critical. Executive Order 13932 issued in June 2020 recognized that competencies and abilities were more valuable than traditional education and degrees. The order directed, merit-based reforms that will replace degree-based hiring with skills- and competency-based hiring and will hold the civil service to a higher standard—ensuring that the individuals most capable of performing the roles and responsibilities required of a specific position are those hired for that position—that is more in line with the principles on which the merit system rests. (Exec. Order No. 13,932, 2020, p. 39,458).

An assessment-based model is replacing the degree requirement model to enable a true evaluation and demonstration of experience and capabilities (Bur, 2020).

OPM allows federal agencies to bypass the more challenging requirements of the hiring system when utilizing direct and expedited hiring authorities (DHA/EHA) (United States Department of the Interior, 2021; Orvis et al., 2022). DHA allows federal managers to hire applicants as quickly as private-sector employers do, at least when certain conditions exist. Managers can fill vacant positions with the first or best-qualified candidate found. EHA resembles normal competitive hiring processes but expedites those processes (Orvis et al., 2022). Specifically, these authorities allow for modified or exemption from public notice requirements, eliminate traditional rating and ranking procedures, and modify or exempt the application of veteran's preference. Using these authorities reduces the time and energy required to gain qualified employees, and the current EHA includes the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields that make up the AAW (Cisneros, 2023; Defense Civilian Personnel Advisory Service, 2020).

Skill Gaps and Competency Requirements

Companies make talent management a priority in the private sector. Managing talent is how companies remain viable and compete in the business space. Private companies do not just fill vacancies based on the skills the employee has now, instead private companies hire talent with the potential for growth, with an eye to the future (Ram & Fuller, 2022; Serbu, 2023; Woods, 2021). Hiring knowledgeable yet capable talent and being able to grow them to fill future innovative positions is what the DoD and Army need to strive. The talent management that drives the DoD civilian workforce is behind the times relative to the private sector, according to a DDB (2022) study. Leveling the playing field by employing HR data analytics tools that allow employees to take control of knowledge development and chart their own future. The same study claimed that the DoD is not tracking civilian employee capabilities, nor does the

DoD have a solid process to forecast capabilities required for the future. There is no DoD enterprise-wide system to allow the employee and supervisor to discuss career development and career-broadening opportunities. The military side of the Army has the recently fielded Integrated Personnel and Pay System-Army (IPPS-A) to manage talent data and support the talent management infrastructure to help in remedying this need. (DBB, 2022). For the AAW workforce segment, both military and civilian, the United States Army Acquisition Support Center has provided a tool, the Career Acquisition Management Portal (CAMP), housing all the Army DACM applications. Within CAMP resides the Career Acquisition Personnel and Position Management Information System (CAPPMIS) providing a system allowing for the creation of the workforce members Individual Development Plan (IDP). The IDP allows planning, coordination of continued education and training. The IDP application allows both the employee and supervisor access to the plan to identify and track career objectives, as well as, claim, award, and track functional area, mandatory, and leadership training and continuous learning points (United States Army DACM, 2023). There is still no solution for the Army civilian workers not associated with the AAW.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development predicts approximately 1.1 billion jobs will be transformed by technology and automation in the next decade. In the United States, there is a talent gap with just under 10 million job openings and only 6 million reported unemployed workers in March of 2023 (as cited by Garibaldi, 2023). There is a mismatch between the available jobs and qualified applicants. Leaders are facing an urgent issue and talent problems that will only grow. Technological transformation will result in more jobs being created versus jobs being eliminated. Reskilling and upskilling will be required as workers

will be working alongside and with rapidly evolving technologies. This reskilling and upskilling essential to ensure the current skills mismatch does not amplify in the future (Garibaldi, 2023).

With the rapid pace of change, 77% of businesses reported difficulty finding the skilled talent needed in 2023. Organizations with technology intensive positions, to include the Army with an acquisition workforce, must look at investments and address specific skillset gaps (Garibaldi, 2023). As inferred from the Army Modernization Strategy (2021) and more specifically addressed in the Army Digital Transformation Strategy (2021), the Army must change to implement digital transformation for mission effectiveness more easily. With this goal in mind, an organic digital workforce – heavy in automation, innovative technology, and artificial intelligence skills and knowledge – with the tech savvy to be operationally effective is critical (Iyer, 2021).

Rapid technological advances affect the current security environment. The first country to understand and adopt emerging technologies will have the advantage. New advancements from artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to advanced manufacturing and advanced analytics will require employees to adapt and adjust along with the tools used in daily work (DBB, 2022; Woods, 2021). The advancements may become a problem in the U.S. due to declining enrollment in STEM programs. While the pace of technology development is advancing exponentially, the supply of technologically skilled talent has faded. By 2030, there is estimated to be a shortage of over 6 million tech workers in the United States, and 85 million globally (DBB, 2022; Luckenbaugh, 2023). This shortfall in tech workers will be felt in the AAW which are STEM heavy positions.

Technology transformation emphasizes the criticality of organizations, to include Army organizations, to effectively generate methods of creating career mobility and career pathways

for the workforce into the roles of tomorrow. If no action is taken, organizations face serious risks — from falling behind, to lost productivity to a disengaged workforce (Garibaldi, 2023). Established in October of 2020, the ACCMA is making strides in the way the Army manages the civilian workforce. The ACCMA restructured and consolidated the Army’s 32 career programs into 11 broader career fields allowing for greater flexibility, movement, and growth among positions within the broader fields (ACCMA News, 2021). Taking guidance from the CIP, the ACCMA strived to attain new ways to forecast civilian corps requirements, assisted with the transition from the current state of “career programs” into a streamlined career field construct, and created a robust talent marketplace incorporating not only knowledge and skills, but also behaviors and preferences of the civilian corps. The planned deployment of the Defense Civilian Human Resources Management System (DCHRMS) and the exploration of the IPPS-A, which will match “best fit” assignments for Army Civilians based on demand for talent (ACCMA News, 2021). The fit will be determined by the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and preferences (KSB-P) input. Currently, KSB-P are tracked by individuals and used for promotions on the Army’s military side and used in job announcements on the civilian side, but not tracked to the individual. The new systems, once both are deployed, will allow for the same tracking, data points, and metrics on the civilian personnel side, by the individual. KSB-P analysis will be critical in identifying talent gaps across the workforce, which then allows Army senior leaders to make decisions regarding strategic workforce planning (Lockhart, 2020).

The three-level certification system, established by DoD thirty years ago, led to certified AAW members, but not necessarily qualified members. A competency model with clear career paths was absent within the system and could help workforce members identify a desired career trajectory and gain the skills to follow the chosen career path. The three level acquisition

workforce titles of apprentice, journeyman, and expert were not meaningful or representative of actual knowledge. Each occupation required varying degrees of expertise as related to mission tasks and each set of tasks represented an array of minimum proficiency standards. Performance of mission-related tasks at the appropriate mission-related proficiency standard should be how individuals move to the next tier (Report of the Advisory Panel on Streamlining and Codifying Acquisition Regulations, 2019).

The BtB answered the concerns put forth regarding the antiquated Defense Acquisition Workforce Act (DAWIA) certification program which was deemed time consuming for training found not to be relevant for the work. The response was arrived at by working with the different services and components to modernize the certification structure and severely reduce the hours spent on required training. The BtB structure allowed individual learners, the ability to choose classes and different modules which pertained to current job positions or targeted positions desired in the future, no longer would everybody be taught everything. The goal now is to limit required training to only a core curriculum applying to everyone in each career field. A principle of modern organizations is empowerment. The new DAWIA BtB structure gives the power to the individual for training and development. The decisions about what is needed to succeed today and grow for tomorrow is tailored to the individual's motivation and plans (Woolsey, 2021).

With the BtB transformation, elective learning is key. BtB puts learning into the hands of the individual by empowering workforce members to choose assignment-specific, job-relevant training for professional growth. DoD has introduced additional opportunities to develop skills in specialty or emerging areas to meet evolving needs through the Defense Acquisition Credential Program. By converting from a traditional schoolhouse focused on classroom training to a

modern learning platform that can occur anywhere, the acquisition workforce is connecting to the tools, resources, and knowledge needed to succeed, now and in the future (Bistarkey & Howard, 2022).

The Defense Acquisition University (DAU) furthers its purpose towards building a diverse workforce by supporting the Department's Public-Private Talent Exchange (PPTe) along with exploring new ventures such as the creation of a Defense Civilian Training Corps (DCTC) (Bistarkey & Howard, 2022; Dickson-Kozloski, 2023). By establishing a Reserve Officer Training Course (ROTC)-like program for civilians at universities across the country, the DCTC program aims to strengthen the pipeline of acquisition professionals, particularly in STEM curricula, and incentivize DoD service after graduation (Bistarkey & Howard, 2022). The program works to instill core values and capabilities in preparation for future civil service employment.

The first cohort of the DCTC was launched in August 2023 and included roughly 80 students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, Purdue University, the University of Arizona, and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. The students were working toward degrees in majors such as business, finance, computer science, engineering, and public policy. During the summer students worked in paid summer internships with DoD participating organizations thereby gaining both classroom and real-world experience to undertake complex challenges and drive innovation. Upon graduation, direct hire authorities will allow the DoD to quickly onboard the cohort participants. Investing in DCTC demonstrates DoD's commitment towards building a modern, agile, and adequately skilled civilian acquisition workforce for the future. (Dickson-Kozloski, 2023).

PPTE is an enduring endeavor that is still relevant in fostering knowledge sharing between government and the private sector. PPTE provides selected acquisition workforce employees the opportunity to complete a six-month specialized assignment with a private sector organization. Participants gain new skills through several types of direct learning experiences that can be valuable and insightful to typical employee training. PPTE promotes improved communication between government and industry, permits participants to better understand industry's business operations and challenges, and enables the sharing of innovative best practices (United States Acquisition Support Center, n.d.; Bistarkey, 2022).

There is an Army specific pathway for STEM opportunities aimed at attracting and developing the next generation of talent called the Army Educational Outreach Program (AEOP). The desire for innovative solutions to protect the Army Soldier and improving STEM literacy are the drivers behind the AEOP. Through leveraging the Army assets of scientists, engineers, and research facilities, AEOP offers youth and teachers opportunities to engage in real world STEM experiences and internships. The continuous development of STEM literate individuals and developing the next generation of STEM talent is critical for the U.S. Army (Blouin, n.d.; Army Educational Outreach Program, n.d.).

There is a war for the best and brightest talent to work for the U.S. Army. For success in this war on talent, the Army must refine talent management practices and methods to attract and recruit ready state Army Civilians to support the multi-domain forces during competition, crisis, and conflict. Effective talent management integrates all aspects of human resources, from recruitment through to succession planning. Successful talent management can generate a positive effect on organizational outcomes and leverage an individual's KSB-Ps for the shared benefit of both the Army and the individual (Adams, 2022).

Achieving all-out readiness is dependent upon how the Army effectively uses civilians, each of whom possess unique KSB-Ps. The Army has numerous means by which to measure the ready state of Soldiers. Not until recently, has the Army recognized the value of measuring the same readiness maturity of the civilian workforce. The recent introduction of an initiative to assist with collecting, analyzing, and harnessing data enables Army human resource managers and supervisors to identify and make immediate decisions to manage internal civilian talent. Ensuring organizations look thoroughly at everything from individual position descriptions to organizational structures is critical to ensure proper alignment, thereby matching the right people with the right skills required for every position (Adams, 2022).

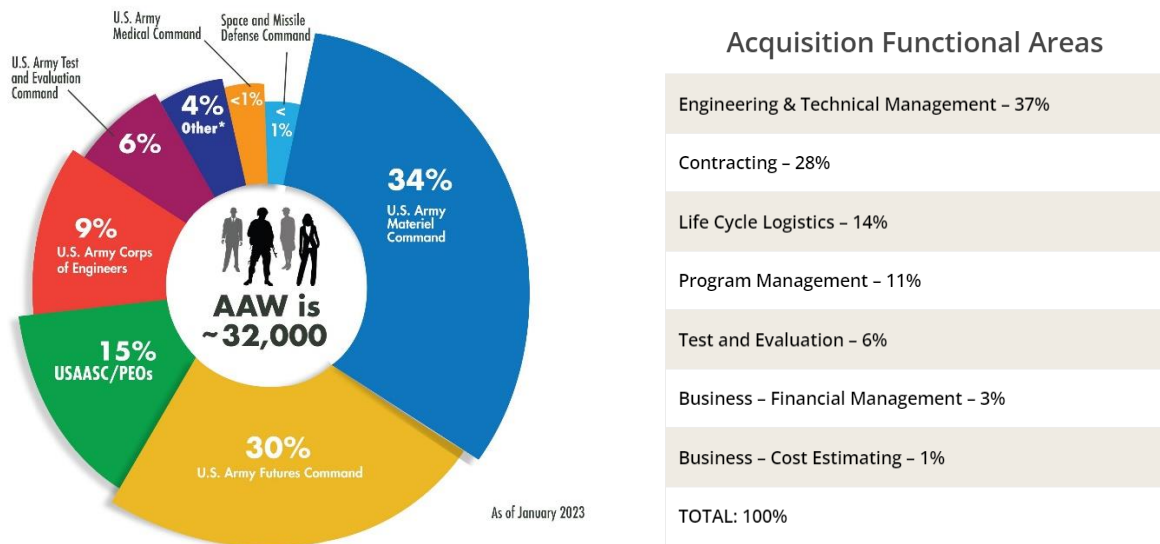
Army Materiel Command (AMC), which has nearly 96,000 Army civilians, has taken the lead in merging the Army priorities and tenants from the strategies and plans to create a tool to assess civilian employees and provide insight into professional development opportunities. The Ready Army Civilian (RAC) program was first evaluated within AMC HQ in 2019 and launched to AMC major subordinate commands and then further to other organizations within the AMC enterprise in fiscal year 2023. The RAC promises a workforce of high caliber employees who are educated and trained to address multifaceted and strategic situations. Results are prepared employees who possess the job skills and experiences to manage and lead in a complex ever-changing atmosphere (Adams, 2022; Hawkins, 2021).

Using the RAC tool, employees measure the readiness level of personal tangible and intangible skills in relation to the requirements for the job position held currently or desired for advancement. Supervisors perform the same assessment on each of the employees. Intangible “soft” skills include traits like character, attitude, time management, critical thinking, conflict resolution, loyalty, team collaborative ability, communication and listening skills, and work

ethic. Tangible “hard” skills include degrees, certifications, specialized training, experience, leadership responsibilities, the capability to travel, the ability to obtain a security clearance and to pass a drug test (Hawkins, 2021). Employees and supervisors then come to an agreed upon evaluation after assessing the individual assessment determinations. Potential gaps are acknowledged and a decision on which skills, education, training, or developmental opportunities employees need to increase personal knowledge maturity levels for a current position or to position employees for advancement in the future is made (Adams, 2022).

Figure 7 shows the composition of the AAW and where the employee’s work. AMC is the biggest Army employer of AAW personnel. The AAW is made up of approximately 32,000 professionals of which 95% are civilian. With AMC employing 96,000 civilian employees, which means approximately 11% of AMC civilians are AAW members. The civilian acquisition workforce is found in all six functional areas: program management, life-cycle logistics, contracting, engineering & technical management, business financial & cost estimating, and test & evaluation. Most of the acquisition functional areas fall into the STEM discipline with the remaining functional areas having a very close relationship with the STEM fields. The Army utilizes a lifelong learning model to continuously provide opportunities to ensure the civilian workforce is well-educated, well-trained, and agile to maintain the highest level of quality in the support of Soldiers and to ensure readiness (United States Acquisition Support Center, 2023). The model is only effective if the workforce is motivated to pursue those opportunities. The Army realizes that changes in the world environment require changes in workforce talent. By offering this lifelong learning model and choices in growth opportunities, the Army strives to keep the AAW relevant in the technological arena (Iyer, 2021).

Figure 7: Army Acquisition Workforce Breakout of Employers and Functional Areas



From “About the AAW,” 2023, United States Army Acquisition Support Center (<https://asc.army.mil/web/career-development/about-aaw/>). In the public domain.

To build a workforce for the future, organizations making practical investments in education programs targeted at STEM disciplines is self-serving. Some such investments are through tuition reimbursement and scholarship programs. Organizations in the private sector are making investments like these to succeed in an increasingly competitive marketplace aiming to attract highly skilled employees. Private organizations are creating direct lines of communication to influence curricula and articulate the skillsets desired. The top three competencies that are currently key for developing the workforce for the future of the AAW and defense industry partners are engineering skills, science and analytics, and leadership. Others that are in demand, and only slightly less important, include computer skills, cybersecurity, adaptive skills, digital skill sets, and manufacturing. Developing a workforce strategy and plan to ensure necessary talent and skills to match future business needs is critical to sustain through this looming talent shortage (Ram & Fuller, 2022).

Lessons Learned

Change is accelerating so fast for businesses about 375 million individuals globally will need new skills within the next two years to remain relevant. The acceleration of change is being called an age of hyper-disruption and all organizations will need to drive knowledge growth or will die in place. Companies must recognize skill gaps and take action to address the problem both short-term and long-term. At a minimum, companies will need to push to upskill more than 100 million total employees in the next ten years to position organizations for the economy of the future (Garibaldi, 2023).

The Aerospace and Defense Industry is on target to reach \$790 billion by the end of 2023. The enhancement of four critical areas to support a move toward digitalization is the industry's focus. These four target areas are: autonomy, connectivity, manufacturing, and smart mobility (Draup, 2022). The top industry players in the defense and aerospace sector include Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, Raytheon Technologies, Boeing, General Dynamics, Honeywell, L3Harris, and Thales. The defense and aerospace industry have recognized workforce challenges regarding skill gaps and talent competition. Some initiatives being employed include:

- Recruiting early-career talent- the emerging group of young ambitious individuals proficient with tech skills that can be the backbone of this industry in the next decade.
- Next generation recruitment- uses talent intelligence tools and platforms which help avoid recruitment bias, transform traditional processes, and develop a talent pipeline.
- Improving Diversity, Equity & Inclusion- lack of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion across the industry is preventing quality talent from entering the workforce without bias. (Draup, 2022; Ram & Fuller, 2022)

In response to the loss of over 220,000 jobs in the defense and aerospace industry globally, these companies are offering benefits such as flexible work frameworks, overtime pay, recognition and career growth opportunities, and appealing retirement packages to attract and retain talent.

Industry growth and innovation in the coming years will be critically dependent upon the efforts taken to attract and retain valuable talent (Draup, 2022).

In the world situation of rapid progression and complex environments, a Future Fit Workforce is the prerequisite. A Future fit Workforce embodies adaptability, resiliency and innovation and has the capability and flexibility to adapt and quickly change in the face of technological advancement (Draup, 2023; Kuckenbaugh, 2023; Woods, 2021). The technical industry's hunger for innovation has birthed cutting-edge skillsets such as Data Science, Business Intelligence, DevOps, and Big Data. These new talents have emerged as the cornerstone skills for staying ahead in the current digital era. Incorporating these cornerstone skills, Figure 8 lists specific talents that both the Aerospace and Defense industries are hoping to attract and recruit for the future. To thrive in this era of dynamic technological change, organizations must actively integrate these new skills into talent management strategies (Draup, 2023; Luckenbaugh, 2023).

Figure 8: Aerospace & Defense Industry Talent Needs

Adapted from “Aerospace & Defense Industry Talent Overview,” 2022, *Draup*

(<https://draup.com/talent/infographics/aerospace-defense-industry-talent-overview/>). In the public domain.

A variety of strategies are being used by companies in the tech industry that demonstrate progressive thinking and foresight. Here are seven innovative strategies for acquiring the needed skills from the eligible Gen Z talent pool:

- **Skill-based Hiring:** Recognizing the significance of skills over traditional work history, companies are adopting skill-based hiring practices. This approach enables them to tap into a broader talent pool, fostering diversity and expertise.
- **Reskilling:** As roles morph in response to technological advancements, companies are investing in retraining their existing workforce. This strategy bridges the gap between legacy roles and emerging responsibilities, ensuring a seamless transition.

- **University Partnerships:** Collaborations with universities are yielding mutually beneficial outcomes. Organizations are tapping into the potential of upskilling undergraduates with emerging tech skills, ensuring a steady influx of adept talent.
- **Partnering with Bootcamps & Academies:** These partnerships are instrumental in molding fresh talent to meet the demands of cutting-edge technology. Bootcamps and academies prepare candidates with hands-on skills that resonate with industry requirements.
- **Partnering with Learning Platforms:** Learning platforms are facilitating the development of bespoke learning programs that cater to an organization's unique needs. This customized approach fosters ongoing learning and growth among employees.
- **Hiring Through Apprenticeship:** Apprenticeships offer a dual advantage of learning and contribution. Companies are hiring professionals for apprenticeship roles, nurturing them into full-fledged positions while addressing specific business needs.
- **Apprenticeship for Employees:** Forward-thinking companies are introducing 6-12 months apprenticeship programs for their existing workforce. This approach allows employees to acquire new skills aligned with organizational goals, enriching their careers while bolstering the company's capabilities. (Draup, 2023, para. 3)

Industry Marketing Strategies

Recruiting and recruitment marketing are different. Recruiting attracts talent to jobs or positions, whereas recruitment marketing attracts talent to employing organizations. Industry online marketing strategies involving tactics aimed at reaching the widest pool of qualified

applicants on websites where the talent spends the most time are most advantageous. With different methods for candidates to conduct research and more selections to choose from when coming into the position pool, standing out and having a presence in the places top talent is searching is important of an organization (Heitman, 2022).

Website optimization is essential. A website is the first impression for most job searchers of an organization. Website should clearly identify the vision, mission, purpose. Easy navigation options leading to additional information regarding career opportunities and peeks at potential cultural characteristics is also beneficial. With 60% of recruiters investing in company career websites, a career website or page is geared toward prospective employees with areas for communication of benefit details and positions opening (Heitman, 2022).

Influencer marketing will progress into a common marketing tactic, even for work opportunity searches. Celebrity sway used to be highly sought in advertised marketing. That has changed with influencers considered “every day” people. Influencer audiences are more likely to trust the influencer’s opinions and recommendations over that of a harder to relate to celebrity. If an influencer vouches for a company’s culture or purpose, Gen Z is likely to listen (Bump, 2022).

Video marketing which utilized short-form video will keep content short. By design, short-term video is meant to be small pieces of content, usually less than two minutes in length, which are easily scrolled through and viewed several at a time. Over 80% of individuals desire viewing content from brands that are purchased or engaged in. Research shows that individuals retain 95% of the messages watched in a video. Video marketing can be used to highlight company culture, educate organizational purpose, and portray employee testimonials (Heitman, 2022).

Social media is a customer service tool and when utilized effectively enables candidates to learn about the organization and company culture. Organizations can showcase employer brand, particularly the culture, on social media to attract potential employees. Research shows that leads developed through employee social media activities produce results seven times more frequently than other leads (Heitman, 2022). In addition, 20% of Gen Z and 25% of Millennials have contacted a company on social media for customer and employee information in the past, and those numbers are rising (Bump, 2022).

Search-engine optimization (SEO) services to concur search traffic will be leveraged by more businesses. The cost of SEO service varies with the average being \$2,500 to \$7,500 monthly. Current predictions indicate 88% of marketers who apply a SEO strategy will increase or, at a minimum, maintain the investment in 2023. Specifically, geo fencing is a strategy that uses location-based technology to target prospective candidates and send ads or messages to users on this fence. For example, talent scouts may create a geofence around a college campus to reach recent college graduates. Targeting students preparing for post-graduate careers results in applications from top candidates (Bump, 2022).

When looking to find and attract top talent, identifying the right mix of tactics to make recruitment marketing a success is critical in an effective recruitment marketing strategy (Heitman, 2022). Organizations have begun to adapt social media strategies to focus more on inclusive initiatives, promotions, and offerings. Organizations are taking action to highlight the company supported causes and missions to attract and target individuals that will “fit” into the organization’s workplace culture. Demonstrating a sense of social responsibility is thoughtful and effective (Bump, 2022; Simon et al., 2023).

Summary

This chapter provides a literature review on Army strategy for attracting Gen Z to the Army acquisition workforce. The review provides insight into traits of the Gen Z talent and the characteristics sought in an ideal job and employer. Examining literature to better grasp the differences between marketing, recruiting, and branding demonstrate how each could be used to attract the Gen Z talent to the AAW. The past and current strategies, plans, and reports from DoD and Army were examined to understand the rationale and relationship towards attracting the right talent to the DoD, Army, and more specifically, AAW. The literature review continued by considering how skill and competency gaps are identified and future forecasts are made for hiring actions in succession planning. Finally, lessons, regarding marketing and recruiting strategies incorporated in successful talent acquisition, learned from industry competitors could be useful to the Army to attract and target the right mix of talent to the acquisition workforce. The next chapter will discuss the research methodology supporting this study.

Research Methodology

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the Department of the Army strategy for attracting, through marketing and recruiting, Generation Z to the Army acquisition workforce.

1. What workplace characteristics attract the Generation Z generational cohort?
2. How is the Army currently attracting the Gen Z workforce for the acquisition workforce?
3. What target skillsets is the Army acquisition workforce looking for from the Gen Z talent pool?
4. How can the Army leverage best practices to attract Gen Z talent to fill Army acquisition workforce positions?

Research Methodology

A qualitative research methodology was utilized. Qualitative research was used to explore and better understand a central problem using broad questions to guide the direction of data collection (Creswell & Gutterman, 2019). The central problem in this research was addressed by exploring DoD and Army policies and strategies, workforce characteristics desired by Gen Z, and best practices of industry regarding attracting Gen Z talent into the AAW. A literature review was conducted to examine the topics and the general questions related to the central problem. The literature review is a written summary of documents and periodicals providing both past and current state knowledge about the central problem (Creswell & Gutterman, 2019).

Literature sources were obtained using multiple databases to include Google, Google Scholar, the Defense Acquisition University library, and Lawrence Technical University TechCat+. Search terms included “Army Acquisition marketing and recruiting,” “Army Acquisition workforce,” “Army Acquisition workforce attracting Generation Z,” “Generation Z workplace traits,” “hiring and recruiting in 2023,” and “marketing and branding for Gen Z talent.” DoD and Army strategy and plans were looked at in the holistic federal, DoD, or Army workforce scope and then narrowed, where possible, to the more specific AAW to address the specific range of this research. In some areas researched, like Gen Z characteristics and traits, there were a considerable number of sources that were reduced to the most relevant information to answer the research question.

The research was framed by the research questions into four principal areas of review. The new Gen Z talent pool was studied to examine what behaviors and characteristics are sought in a workplace. Then, the current Army marketing and recruitment strategy initiatives were scrutinized to determine the adequacy for attracting the new generation of talent, GenZ, to the AAW. Next, the desired skillset and competency gaps of the AAW were examined to see if the marketing and recruiting strategy was targeting the right Gen Z talent. Finally, research was collected to contrast how the industry competition for talent is successfully marketing and recruiting Gen Z talent and what are some best practices the Army could utilize that are not already being leveraged. Patterns were observed in the literature, were broken into smaller key topics and interpreted to address the research questions, and then the elements reframed and restructured to formulate recommendations and draw conclusions.

Summary

The research was conducted using a qualitative research methodology. The literature review yielded extensive data collection revolving around the topics in the research questions developed in support of the central problem. Once all the data was collected, “the researcher interprets the meaning of the information, drawing on personal reflections and past research. The final structure of the final report is flexible, and it displays the researcher’s biases and thoughts” (Creswell & Gutterman, 2019, p. 627). No interviews or surveys were conducted during the research process. All data was obtained through public domain, published sources and through DACM briefings. There were 74 sources utilized, incorporating websites, policies, articles, reports, briefings, videos, and studies. Literature covering the relevant question topics was collected to determine the effectiveness of the current Army strategy for attracting the Gen Z cohort talent to the AAW. The following section provides the findings generated through analyzing and interpreting the literature collected.

Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents analysis from the information and data collected during the literature review. The purpose and research questions were the model for the literature review and are restated to guide the analysis. The marketing and recruiting strategies of the Army for attracting talent, specifically Gen Z talent, to the AAW are analyzed by a thorough review of the literature. The conclusion for this chapter summarizes the findings from the literature review. Research predicts, through an analysis of the literature, that the Army will soon adopt an Army civilian specific brand, take steps to build and grow a recruiting cell specific for civilians, and reassess and amend statues and policies to remove legal and organizational challenges ensuring relevance.

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Results

Gen Z Characteristics

Attracting knowledgeable workers is vital for executing the complex Army missions of the future. For the AAW to be able to attract the newest knowledge worker cohort, Gen Z, AAW leaders need to understand what characteristics the Gen Z cohort desires in the workplace. The Gen Z workforce is growing exponentially and will be the largest pool from which to harvest new talent by 2025 (Biro, 2023; Estrellado, 2023). Entering the college or early career stage of life, the Gen Z cohort is readying to work. Gen Z are the newest target group for recruiters and talent scouts. The Army and more specifically the AAW, need to also target the new group to remain competitive in the talent management arena. Gaining insight regarding Gen Z desires in a workplace and the dynamics sought can help appeal to the Gen Z talent (Luckenbaugh, 2023; Woods, 2021).

Some notable characteristic findings regarding the Gen Z cohort and growing talent pool included:

- Gen Z is a diverse generation and seeks a work environment that reflects this quality. An employer that appears diverse and inclusive appeals to Gen Z.
- Gen Z workers want to feel valued and empowered at work and do not want to be stove piped. Workers rather explore and try various roles and skills in a work environment, so a company needs to foster this type of culture.
- Gen Z talent considers the social responsibility exhibited, and the company's values and mission important. Respected companies which resonate with the Gen Z talent are the workplaces sought (Davis, 2016; Gomez et al., 2022; Parker & Igielnik, 2020; Thought Exchange, 2022)

Then there are the specific work environment aspects to consider. Gen Z workers find salary relatively important, but there are several other workplace characteristics that run just as high. Specifically, Gen Z looks for: 1) work-life balance, 2) growth opportunities, 3) paid time off, 4) remote work flexibility, and 5) benefits packages (DeSmet et al., 2023; Gomez et al., 2022). Having a competitive work package that contains many of these incentives would attract Gen Z talent to the AAW above other defense industry organizations.

Army Efforts

The current Army strategies that flow down all the way from the President's National Security Strategy each have a section dedicated to recruiting personnel resources in some way or form. The Strategy filters down further to the Army Acquisition Workforce Human Capital Strategic Plan, which specifically targets the development of the AAW. One of the primary goals is workforce planning of which an objective is specifically to develop civilian recruiting strategy. The Army even created a Human Capital Strategic Plan Council and AAW Advisory Board, all up under the authority of the Executive steering committee.

More importantly, the Army DACM Office is the advocate for all training, educating, and developing for members of the AAW. The office's role is to proactively identify trends and challenges and to take action to counter those challenges. The Army recognized the importance of the AAW and took the initiative to identify a proponent to specifically address AAW talent issues. In addition to the DACM, in 2019, the Army Acquisition Workforce Recruitment & Sustainment Center of Excellence (AAW R&S COE) was stood up with a mission to recruit, hire, sustain, and retain talent to meet AAW requirements (United States Army DACM, 2017; United States Army DACM, 2020). Based upon the literature review, the primary focus of this

office to date is reducing the time to hire. No information was found on any notable actions AAW R&S COE has done regarding recruiting AAW since creation in 2019.

There does not seem to be much action regarding attracting talent through recruitment initiatives from any of these AAW focused organizations as many of the same strategy initiatives identified as early as 2015 are still repeated in more current strategy documents as current objectives (United States Army, 2019; United States Army, 2021; United States Army 2022; United States Army CAC, 2015; United States Army DACM, 2020). Most actions are focused on developing the current workforce vice bringing in new knowledge talent (Bistarkey & Howard, 2022). From the literature review, recruitment and attracting talent is being examined at the higher DoD level in detail as demonstrated in the Defense Business Board studies of 2022 & 2023 (DBB, 2022; DBB, 2023). The studies are focused on DoD civilians in general instead of narrowly focused on the AAW, but there is some attention being given to the recruitment of the AAW line of effort. One Army specific study conducted by the RAND corporation as recent as 2022 was found to specifically include the AAW. The study provided relevant information and evidence calling for the need to build an Army civilian market strategy and brand image, as well as highlighted worker preferences and perceptions to include those of Gen Z aged participants (Orvis et al., 2022).

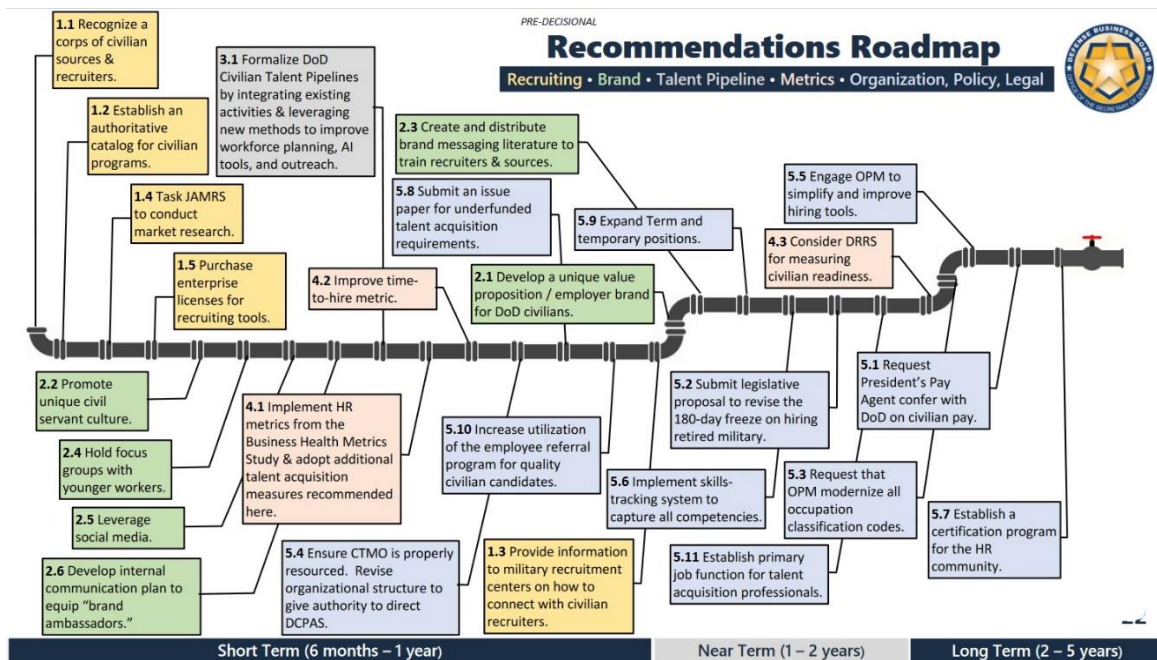
The most recent DBB (2023) study on *Building a Civilian Talent Pipeline* specifically showed that the DoD level is aware of the lack of civilian branding and that recruitment and recruiting strategies for civilian talent need some work to attract the best Gen Z talent to the DoD and by association the Army. One area of significance captured in the report that both the DoD and the Army need to address is bureaucratic barriers or what the report called “legal, policy, and organization challenges” (p. 46) reform or removal. Outdated and irrelevant documents often

provide barriers to smart hiring and recruiting practices. Getting rid of unneeded steps and hurdles will also allow for a more responsive talent management pipeline when coming to the recruitment line of effort.

The DBB (2023) aligned all the strategies and reports and examined industry competitor’s best practices to produce a cohesive recommended roadmap to build the DoD civilian talent pipeline. This roadmap can easily be exploited and furthered to develop an Army specific civilian pipeline benefiting the future AAW. After addressing the obstacles and weaknesses that are currently inhibiting success in hiring the evolving highly skilled talent into civil service, the roadmap proposes actions and solutions that could put things back on track.

Figure 9 below details the five key areas of the DBB recommendation.

Figure 9: Building a Civilian Talent Pipeline



From “FY2023 Assessment of the Department of Defense- Building a Civilian Talent Pipeline” [Slides], 2023, Defense Business Board

<https://dbb.defense.gov/Portals/35/Documents/Meetings/2023/March%2017%202023/Talent%20Pipeline%20Slide%20Deck%20as%20of%20MAR%2017.pdf>). In the public domain.

The yellow LOE deals with formalizing the civilian recruiting function and is the first LOE. There are several recommended steps to this line, specific to the DoD. The first step is to “formally recognize a corps of civilian sourcers and recruiters to source, assess, cultivate, and recruit talent” critical to posturing the AAW for the future (DBB, 2023, p. 123). Also, gaining a better understanding through market research of the population’s perspective on the culture and desirability of working for the Government and how job searches are performed will enable the DoD to better position themselves with the right recruiting messages and proper recruiting tools. As indicated in Figure 9, these actions could be completed within a year (DBB 2023).

The second LOE is indicated with green in Figure 9 and pertains to establishing a DoD civilian service brand. An associated change that would need to occur along with this LOE is changing or promoting the culture of the civilian servant. One way to improve perceptions of the Army civilian culture and appeal to Gen Z talent desires for a workplace social awareness is by promoting humanitarian efforts and highlighting Army civilian heroes and heroines from the past and present. Demonstrating how civilian jobs further national security and support the common good by contributing to economic, energy, environmental, and cyber security measures can help illustrate the variety of positions available in the Army civilian workforce. Articulating the growth potential in a civilian position and how those positions are diverse and inclusive is critical to attracting Gen Z talent. Marketing is part of this LOE as marketing is how the brand image is spread. Utilizing literature, social media, and brand ambassadors are all marketing strategies (DBB, 2023).

The third LOE in the DBB (2023) recommendations roadmap in Figure 9 only has one action. This LOE relates to building the civilian talent pipelines. This means maximizing pipelines already being used or revitalize those that may have diminished. A key requirement for this LOE is using and exploiting artificial intelligence and data analytics to identify where the best qualified talent originates from and targeting those areas. The AAW is currently benefiting in this area with the new DCTC, that although offered at the DoD level, caters to STEM majors and those individuals could easily become AAW members (Dickson-Kozloski, 2023). There is also the PPTE which is also offered at the DoD level but is applicable to AAW civilians as well (United States Acquisition Support Center, n.d.-b).

Continuing to follow Figure 9, LOE 4 is in the orange-red color and has to do with instituting talent acquisition metrics. There are three lanes in this line all dealing with measuring certain aspects of the talent pipeline and then having the ability to compare with other public and private industry organizations. Applying these metrics some or all would show areas for future improvement for the DoD and Army (DBB, 2023).

The last LOE indicated in blue in Figure 9 deals with removing legal, policy, and organizational roadblocks. This LOE will take the most time as changing documents and cutting through red tape takes time. This LOE, once fully implemented, should provide improved hiring tools and an enterprise-wide skills tracking system to capture and track all competencies an employee has, desires, and needs (DBB, 2023). Having a tool to effectively track KSB-P is critical for workforce readiness and identifying where skill gaps reside within the organization (Adams, 2022).

Desired Skills

The AAW structure was reorganized to six basic Functional Areas representative of acquisition and now concentrates on individuals who develop, acquire, and sustain operational capability. These individuals merit the Army's highest investment priority. The six AAW functional areas are all in the STEM arena (Sizer, 2023). The 2022 DAWIA BtB framework allows individuals to earn broadening credentials in addition to the required functional areas giving more control over an individual's career and future. This concept leads back to the #2 workplace characteristic Gen Z talent desires in a potential workplace, growth opportunities (Bistarkey & Howard, 2022).

The Army already possesses a tool to partially satisfy the fifth LOE in Figure 9. AMC deployed the RAC for tracking the civilian workforce's professional development. Being able to track and monitor an employee's tangible and intangible skills to determine skill gaps at-a-glance is beneficial. Also, could potentially allow a supervisor to see across the workforce to identify and best fit employees from the current workforce to fill up-coming vacancies (Adams, 2022; Hawkins, 2021).

Industry Best Practices

Private industry offers several tools that have brought success, which the Army has just begun to or has yet to leverage. The two predominant tools are the campus pipeline and the critical skilled talent pipeline. Under the campus pipeline younger talent can be fostered, grown, and targeted. The options include partnering with learning platforms, partnering with bootcamps & academics, and University partnerships. With the critical skilled talent pipeline, there are two subbranches, but both aim to meet the more immediate critical skills needs of organizations

through demographic-focused partnerships or role specific relationships such as apprenticeships (Draup, 2023; DBB 2023)

Summary

This chapter provides findings from the literature review conducted to examine the adequacy of the Army strategy for attracting AAW Gen Z talent through marketing and recruiting. The findings from this research provide answers to the research questions and suggest some areas for future research. The findings supporting the current Army strategy for marketing are not adequate, but recent studies and recommendations from those studies, could have both the DoD and the Army postured with adequate strategy implementation in 2-5 years. The DBB (2023) study outlines all the required steps in detail in various appendices for the DoD. The Army can exploit the DoD study and apply the study at the Army service level, along with the findings from the RAND (2022) report that provided applicable Army specific civilian workforce data and recommendations. By leveraging defense industry successful strategies and appointing an accountable champion to act, the Army and, by association, the AAW can soon be on the way to attracting, through marketing and recruiting, highly skilled Gen Z talent into the workplace.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter contains research conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions for areas of future research. The conclusions and recommendations are derived from the literature review and are driven by the research questions. The questions that compelled the conclusions and recommendations were:

1. What workplace characteristics attract the Generation Z generational cohort?
2. How is the Army currently attracting the Gen Z workforce for the acquisition workforce?
3. What target skillsets is the Army acquisition workforce looking for from the Gen Z talent pool?
4. How can the Army leverage best practices to attract Gen Z talent to fill Army acquisition workforce positions?

The conclusion and recommendations demonstrate the importance of the research problem by providing a foundation for the study through the summation of the significant ideas in the literature (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Conclusions

The primary conclusion, from this study, is recognizing that the Army should adopt the recommendations from the recent DoD studies and other studies, such as RAND and apply them to the Army civilian arena. The Army should work toward creating an Army specific civilian brand to attract and market to the public and the newly emerging Gen Z talent, thereby targeting the skill needs of the AAW specifically. The Big Army has made a point to prioritize and recognize people in every strategy and marketing campaign for decades. The Army civilian, more specifically for this research the AAW civilian, should be just as highly prioritized. The

RAND Corporation in a 2022 report and most recently the Defense Business Board in 2023, identified the lack of a DoD civilian brand. Developing a civilian brand would garner interest and provide an awareness that there is a DoD civilian workforce.

To entice the right Gen Z talent to the Army civilian acquisition workforce, marketing and recruiting efforts need to target the right skilled individuals. The appropriate message should leave the perception that the Army Civilian Corp is a desirable workplace and entice them to want to work a civilian AAW job within the Army. The DoD and Army have worked to leverage technology and have made investments into other incentives to both attract and recruit the Gen Z cohort. Utilizing the already on-boarded or acquired Gen Z talent to gather knowledge on both popular and new little-known job search platforms and sites to advertise AAW civilian positions could benefit attracting targeted talent. There is adequate data, sources, and research for improvement and recommendations to follow, but action is needed. The first action is to recognize that the civilian differs from the military soldier. There is an Army brand, but why is there not a civilian brand to promote the opportunities that exist outside the military?

In this study, the literature confirms that the Army is aware of the need to attract the specialized talent. Some even show the newest Gen Z talent. There are strategies and plans in place and available to resolve some issues facing the Army civilian and the AAW. The Army and the organizations tasked with supporting the AAW need to leverage opportunities and learn from industry best practices for attracting the needed talent. Marketing and recruiting are still truly relevant issues that need to be improved upon to attract the best emerging Gen Z talent.

Recommendations

In researching, how to attract Gen Z to the AAW, there four recommendations:

Recommendation #1 is establishing an Army Civilian Brand. Developing a distinct brand for Army civilians is essential for leadership to develop. While a broader Army brand exists, a specialized brand focusing on the civilian workforce would significantly enhance marketing efforts and elevate the visibility of Army civilians within the Total Army framework. This clear distinction between uniformed service members and civilian Army employees would refine the marketing strategy for AAW civilians, as well as acknowledge and celebrate the unique contributions brought by civilians to the Army's mission.

Creating a civilian-specific brand will foster greater recognition and appreciation for the critical roles that civilian personnel play, further integrating civilians into the Army's identity and culture. This initiative will aid in attracting top talent and retaining the skilled professionals already contributing to the Army's success.

Recommendation #2 is implementing operational plans with clear responsibilities. Following the development of any strategy, establishing an operational plan that specifies responsibilities is crucial. This plan should clearly assign each task, identified in strategies, reports, or plans requiring action, to a specific organization or individual for execution. Designating someone responsible and accountable for each task is essential, especially when progress stalls or actions fail to materialize.

The entity responsible for drafting the operational plan must outline clear milestones and assign responsibility for the oversight and completion of actionable items detailed within the plan. Despite the existence of numerous AAW strategies, plans, and reports that outline tasks and actions, a common shortfall is the lack of designated individuals or organizations accountable for their execution, leading to minimal action being taken. Addressing this issue by assigning clear

responsibility and accountability will ensure that strategic plans are both drafted and effectively implemented, driving meaningful progress, and achieving desired outcomes.

Recommendation #3 is establishing a centralized portal for all AAW developmental opportunities. The DACM or the AAW R&S COE should establish a centralized portal for all AAW developmental opportunities. This unified platform should serve as a public website or location that comprehensively lists and describes all scholarship programs, internships, partnerships, educational opportunities, and rotational assignments available across the DoD.

The creation of such a centralized location is essential to ensure both potential and current employees have easy access to the full spectrum of opportunities. Currently, the decentralization of these opportunities leads to many being overlooked or missed. A central hub would significantly enhance visibility and accessibility, ensuring that the Army maximizes the potential of its talent development initiatives.

This approach will streamline finding and applying for various developmental opportunities within the AAW and DoD at large, reducing the risk of valuable programs being underutilized. By making developmental opportunities easier for both prospective and current members of the Army Acquisition Workforce to discover and engage, the Army can improve talent acquisition, retention, and development. This centralized strategy will support the Army's mission by fostering a highly skilled and well-prepared workforce equipped with the training and experience to meet the challenges of modern defense and warfare.

Recommendation #4 is enhancing Army capabilities through STEM talent acquisition. To address critical skill shortages and propel its technological and scientific endeavors forward, the Army should increase investments in STEM talent acquisition programs. The initiative should be

led by the DACM and the ACCMA, focusing on integrating these STEM and capability-focused talent acquisition programs at a centralized location for better coordination and impact.

A promising model for part of this initiative is the adaptation of the DCTC approach. By customizing the program to fit the Army's specific requirements, this model could provide comprehensive support to Army participants. Support, including full tuition scholarships, summer internships, and direct entry into Army acquisition careers, fostering a pipeline of highly skilled professionals specifically for the Army.

Expanding the AEOP internships is another potential step. By broadening these opportunities, the Army can lay a solid foundation for nurturing future talent in science and engineering research, benefiting students and educators alike.

Implementing this recommendation would allow the Army to cultivate a highly skilled workforce adept in STEM disciplines, which are vital for maintaining technological superiority and addressing the demands of modern warfare and defense technologies. This strategic investment in STEM talent acquisition not only prepares the Army for future challenges but also reinforces the Army's stance as a leader in technological innovation and professional development.

Areas for Future Research

Acquiring new employees is a recurring cyclical issue within the Army and the AAW. As the workforce ages out, new hires are required. The challenge is keeping the strategy aligned with the talent's changing workplace requirements and the Army organization's desired knowledge needs. Army strategy for civilians should be focused on appealing to the new generation of workers and investing in and influencing the education curricula to meet the AAW future needs.

An area for future research could be examining the return on investment in some of the recently implemented recruiting initiatives. After a couple of years of the initiative being in action, check for feasibility and whether the initiative was successful in meeting the objective. For example, investigate the DCTC attendees a few years after the course of study completion and workforce participation, did any become part of the AAW. How long did participants stay with the organization placed? What percentage, if any, left to go to industry? Determine if the return of investment was worthwhile.

A second area for recommended future exploration is the RAC tool used by employees to “assess the readiness level of personal tangible and intangible skills” (Adams, 2022, para. 8) compared to the requirements for held or desired positions launched in 2019. Specifically, determine if the tool realized full implementation and intent. Was the RAC tool effective? Were other skill-based systems replaced or is there a requirement to use RAC as well as others? Being able to catalog all tangible and intangible skills and abilities in one place adds value, but to have duplication of effort and an additional requirement is a hinderance. The AAW currently has the Career Acquisition Management Portal to track training and career growth. Other systems are likely available with the same capabilities and there may be an option to combine multiple systems into one overarching “best” system to track all.

A third critical area for future inquiry and research involves examining hiring policies and regulations to identify barriers inadvertently create barriers to the recruitment and attraction of talent. This inquiry could focus on streamlining existing policies and regulations, thereby encouraging potential candidates to apply and progress through the recruitment pipeline. Determining whether certain policies remain relevant and necessary by scrutinizing the rationale behind those policies and the efficacy in achieving the intended objectives is vital. Additionally,

the study should consider the feasibility and benefits of expanding certain policies, such as DHA and EHA, to streamline and enhance the recruitment process under suitable conditions.

Examining and identifying policy and organizational challenges that contribute to inefficiencies in recruitment and hiring processes is essential. Including assessing the impact of bureaucratic hurdles, excessive documentation requirements, and cumbersome approval processes on the recruitment timeline and candidate experience. The key purpose of the research should advocate for policy reform and organizational change aimed at streamlining hiring procedures, eliminating redundant steps, and removing barriers that deter qualified individuals from pursuing AAW employment opportunities. This may involve revising outdated policies, revisiting risk-averse practices, and implementing innovative approaches to talent acquisition and retention.

Lastly, several of the studies mentioned in this qualitative study were DoD wide studies. From them, the Army and AAW specific data was extrapolated and analyzed to answer the narrowly focused research questions pertaining to this study. A future area for research would be to reevaluate and explore how the other forces, Air Force and Navy, are managing hiring and recruiting the Gen Z talent. Are the other forces facing the same issues? How is the Air Force's marketing and branding for civilian talent affecting recruiting? The Navy's? Are the strategies of the other forces working or are the same issues observed? If the other forces find the same results or have the same issues with attracting Gen Z talent, the DBB 2023 study framework to establishing a talent pipeline may be of benefit.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the adequacy of the current Army strategy for attracting the Gen Z talent to the AAW through marketing and recruiting. This

chapter provides the study's conclusions, recommendations with implementation plans for a variety of audiences, and areas for future research. This research concludes the Army strategy, although adequate, needs to be acted upon. The latest DoD DBB study considered each of the research questions posed in this study at the DoD civilian level and recommended a roadmap. The Army need only adopt the same roadmap at the Army level to have an adequate workable strategy to attract the Gen Z talent to both the Army and the AAW.

Attracting the Gen Z talent to fit the AAW culture and knowledge-based gaps within the various Army organizations is becoming critical in the age of relevance and hyper-change. Armed with an Army civilian brand, employing innovative marketing strategies, and leveraging best practices learned from industry competitors on how to target specific talent, the AAW should have no issue with attracting the emerging Gen Z talent needed in the future. The Army's ability to attract the right people to the AAW to meet the future operational requirements is how the United States will win future skirmishes and provide the best equipment and services to the Army soldier.

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Appendix A – Glossary of Acronyms

| | |
|--------------|--|
| AAW..... | Army Acquisition Workforce |
| ACCMA..... | Army Civilian Career Management Activity |
| AEOP..... | Army Educational Outreach Program |
| AI..... | Artificial Intelligence |
| AMC..... | Army Materiel Command |
| AMS..... | Army Modernization Strategy |
| ALT..... | Acquisition, Logistics, and Technology |
| APS..... | Army People Strategy |
| ASA..... | Assistant Secretary of the Army |
| BtB..... | Back to Basics |
| CAC..... | Combined Arms Center |
| CAMP..... | Career Acquisition Management Portal |
| CAPPMIS..... | Career Acquisition Personnel and Position Management Information System |
| CIP..... | Civilian Implementation Plan |
| DACM..... | Director, Acquisition Career Management |
| DAU..... | Defense Acquisition University |
| DAWIA..... | Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act |
| DBB..... | Defense Business Board |
| DCHRMS..... | Defense Civilian Human Resources Management System |
| DCPAS..... | Defense Civilian Personnel Advisory Service |
| DCTC..... | Defense Civilian Training Corps |

DHA.....Direct Hiring Authority
DoD.....Department of Defense
EHA.....Expedited Hiring Authority
FWPR.....Federal Workforce Priorities Report
Gen Z.....Generation Z
HCSP.....Human Capital Strategic Plan
IDP.....Individual Development Plan
IPPS-A.....Integrated Personnel and Pay System- Army
KSB-P.....Knowledge, Skills, Behaviors, and Preferences
LOE.....Line of Effort
MDO.....Multi-Domain Operations
OPM.....Office of Personnel Management
PPTE.....Public-Private Talent Exchange
RAC.....Ready Army Civilian
ROTC.....Reserve Officer Training Course
R&S COE.....Recruitment & Sustainment Center of Excellence
SEO.....Search Engine Optimization
STEM.....Science, Technology, Engineering, & Math
USAASC.....U.S. Army Acquisition Support Center

Appendix B – Author Biography

Mrs. Weissinger assumed her current duties as Aviation and Missile Command (AMCOM) Field Maintenance Directorate (AFMD) Production Division Chief on May 2019. Since her assignment to AFMD she has successfully monitored execution and managed cost, schedule, and performance of complex multibillion dollar Aviation Field Maintenance contracts that



enable Army Aviation unit and equipment readiness worldwide. She leads three Regional Support Teams in technically evaluating all contract actions and serves as the liaison between both Army Contracting Command and Industry. Her focus is planning contract strategy and enabling contract actions that allow for seamless Aviation maintenance and logistical support to supported Army and other DoD supported units.

Mrs. Weissinger earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Accounting from Albany State University, Albany, Georgia; a Master of Business Administration degree from Texas A&M-Texarkana; and is Defense Acquisition University advanced level trained in Life Cycle Logistics and achieved advanced level in the Civilian Education System in 2017.

Mrs. Weissinger entered the government in 2002 as an Army Materiel Command Fellow as part of a 5-year workforce revitalization program. She continued her public service career upon graduation first with the Theater Aviation Sustainment Manager-Europe in Germany and later with the Aviation Logistic Center's Field Support and Readiness Directorate at Redstone Arsenal in Alabama. She was awarded the Commander's Award for Civilian Service in 2014 and 2010 and received the Secretary of Defense Medal for Global War on Terrorism in 2010 for her service as the AMCOM Liaison Officer in Iraq.