

**A Critical Review of the Literature on Army Talent Management with Recommendations  
to Improve Talent Management Practices Within the United States Army**

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## Abstract

While the Army references talent management and even considers it key to achieving its modernization strategy, the concept remains elusive in practice. There is an intricate relationship between talent management principles and the Army's Talent Management Model, focusing on strategies to enhance organizational effectiveness and personnel development within the military setting. As developing challenges across the Department of Defense (DoD) demand a highly skilled and adaptable workforce, the Army's Talent Management Model serves as a framework for identifying, developing, and sustaining the talent necessary for mission success. This study examines key strategies, models, terms, and concepts with special emphasis on identifying opportunities for improvement. By analyzing existing Army guidance and practices, as well as historically successful talent management concepts, this paper provides suggestions to enhance the Army's talent management approach. The findings suggest that effective talent management not only fosters individual growth but also enhances overall operational readiness and efficiency. The research highlights the importance of a responsive yet straightforward and strategic approach to talent management in the Army, ultimately contributing to a more capable and lethal force.

*Keywords:* Talent management, Army's Talent Management Model, leadership development, Army Talent Attribute Framework, Army Talent Management Strategy

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## **A Critical Review of the Literature on Army Talent Management with Recommendations to Improve Talent Management Practices Within the United States Army**

In today's rapidly evolving global economy, organizations face increasingly complex challenges in attracting, developing, and retaining top talent. The concept of talent management has emerged as a critical strategic priority for businesses seeking to gain a competitive edge. As a profession of arms in a country without conscription service, the United States Army must compete with the rest of the market to attract, retain, and develop talent. Talent management encompasses a wide range of practices, including recruitment, employee development, performance management, and succession planning (Noe, 2017). The Department of the Army identified four primary objectives to achieve talent management: acquire, develop, employ, and retain talent (2016).

Soldiers often describe talent management as vague, inaccessible, or misaligned with unit needs (McNellis, 2019; Royston & Berger, 2023). A core issue may be that people, agencies, and leaders frequently misuse talent management as a catch-all term to describe a wide range of personnel practices, including workforce planning, compensation, and assignment systems, all of which more accurately fall under human capital management or strategic human resource management (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Berger & Berger, 2018). This conflation obscures the distinct objectives of talent management, including identifying individuals with high potential, aligning capabilities with critical job assignments, and optimizing individual performance. It contributes to inconsistent implementation across the force. This literature review argues that the Army's struggle to realize effective talent management stems from conceptual confusion, which results in fragmented doctrine, inconsistent practices, and missed opportunities to strategically align talent with mission requirements.

### **Purpose of the Review**

The purpose of this literature review is to provide an examination of terms, phrases, processes, and practices categorized as talent management within the Department of the Army, highlighting key guidance, models, and programs. Specifically, the review aims to clarify foundational concepts, evaluate the Army's talent management frameworks and initiatives, and highlight contradictions, gaps, and unintended consequences. This paper will also review talent management literature about the traditional labor market to identify practices and ideas that support or contradict current Army practices. Ultimately, this study will provide actionable recommendations and areas for improvement in how the Army manages talent.

The review contributes to ongoing efforts to modernize the Army's approach to human capital by providing scholarly analysis that is both descriptive and prescriptive. The research aims to support informed decision-making for those responsible for building a future-ready force. Additionally, it answers the question: If talent truly is the Army's most valuable asset, how can it be more effectively defined, developed, and managed? The scope of this review encompasses a wide range of literature, and the research occurred with specific limitations.

### **Scope and Limitations**

Research for this review took place over five months as part of a voluntary project. The author selected their topic and problem independent of the provided focus areas. After research and drafting began, several Army publications, key to Army talent management concepts and relevant themes, became unavailable from the publishing directorate websites. Due to current restrictions, this study avoids content related to diversity, cultural perspectives, inequities, analyzing competing entities, including disenfranchised or vulnerable groups, in-group favoritism, intergroup bias, equal employment opportunity (EEO) recruitment, perceived

inequities, gender diversity, cultural and ethnic differences, age ranges, generational gaps, disabilities, and discrimination.

### **Methodology**

This literature review employs a thematic approach, beginning with foundational definitions and proceeding through various facets of talent management. The research methodology began by identifying the varying definitions of talent both within and outside the Army, recognizing that how one defines talent fundamentally shapes management practices. From there, the author surveyed existing Army guidance, strategic documents, and current practices related to talent management. Concurrently, literature from the civilian sector, such as scholarly articles, books, and corporate case studies, provided widely accepted practices and innovative ideas in talent management. The intent was to gather sources that offer a variety of perspectives: Army publications that describe past or current practices and identify capability gaps or deficiencies, as well as civilian literature that highlights best practices and challenges in talent management from a non-military viewpoint. Throughout the research process, the author emphasized identifying points of convergence and divergence between Army and civilian talent management, thereby enabling a critical analysis of where the Army's approach succeeds, where it falls short, and what the Army can adapt from broader talent management theory and practice. The author did so by reviewing a variety of sources.

### **Selection of Sources**

Articles and studies included in this literature review are scholarly journals, articles, Department of the Army publications, strategic documents, or books. The literature review comprises articles that present diverse perspectives on the field of talent management. The Department of the Army and strategic documents included in the literature review describe past

or current practices, identify capability gaps, and prove that a deficiency exists or that initial efforts never blossomed into action. The books selected for inclusion cover traditional labor market talent management practices external to the United States Army and identify similarities, recommendations, and best practices.

### **Organization of the Paper**

The review follows a thematic structure to systematically address key questions and components of talent management. Following the introduction and methodology, the literature review section encompasses major themes, beginning with definitions of talent and then examining how talent is measured, developed, and managed in both civilian and military contexts. This includes a focused examination of the Army's evolving talent management efforts and frameworks over time. Within these themes, subsections delve into finer topics, such as distinguishing between general and specialized talent, as well as the roles of skills, knowledge, and behaviors. After discussing the literature, a summary and key findings section synthesizes the insights, identifying overarching themes and contradictions. A discussion section then interprets these findings, comparing Army practices with civilian insights and addressing implications. Next, suggested solutions present actionable recommendations based on the literature analysis. Finally, the paper concludes with reflections on the path forward for Army talent management. This structure provides a logical flow from understanding the concept of talent through current practices and challenges to practical steps for improvement.

### **Reason for Writing the Literature Review**

Talent management remains a high-profile concept in Army leadership discourse and strategic guidance, yet it continues to suffer from inconsistent understanding and uneven implementation. Senior Army leaders have repeatedly designated talent as the key to building a

more agile, lethal, and adaptive force capable of operating in multidomain operations. Foundational documents such as *The Army Modernization Strategy* (Department of the Army [DA], 2022a), *The Army People Strategy* (DA, 2019), and the *U.S. Army Talent Management Strategy* (DA, 2016) recognize the importance of talent management and emphasize human capital as a central line of effort. However, despite these sustained efforts, the Army has not fully achieved the envisioned outcomes. A critical reason for this shortfall may lie in a persistent conceptual misunderstanding of talent management as a term often used interchangeably with broader personnel systems and workforce practices, as previously discussed. Not to mention the absence of assigned roles and responsibilities within the actions that qualify as talent management. This confusion leads to mismatched expectations, fragmented implementation, and the dilution of actual talent-focused practices.

This literature review examines and challenges the conceptual ambiguity of talent management, aiming to move beyond surface-level discussions to investigate whether current Army practices genuinely reflect the intent of talent management. By reviewing Army doctrine, systems, and assessments, as well as traditional labor market best practices and academic literature, this review aims to clarify what talent is, what talent management entails, and whether the Army's current approach aligns with its vision. Notably, the review highlights areas where the Army's use of the term talent management may be more accurately characterized as traditional human resources or personnel administration, suggesting that a lack of definitional precision is not merely academic but operationally consequential.

Ultimately, the review serves both diagnostic and prescriptive purposes. Diagnostically, it identifies critical gaps between the Army's stated talent management goals and the mechanisms used to achieve them. Prescriptively, it proposed actionable solutions that align talent practices

with the Army's strategic objectives while offering leaders a more transparent framework for understanding and applying the concept of talent management. By doing so, this review contributes to a more coherent, effective, and scalable approach to managing the Army's most vital assets-its people.

## **Literature Review**

### **Defining Talent**

Critical to the process of managing talent is first to define what talent means. The literature reveals considerable variation and even disagreement on this definition, both within the Army and in the broader field of talent management. A leadership core competency is identifying, attracting, and retaining talent (DA, 2019); however, different sources conceptualize talent in varying ways. The Department of the Army (2015, 2016) defines talent as the intersection of an individual's knowledge, skills, and behaviors (KSBs). Under this definition, to optimize an individual's performance, that person should be employed in a role that aligns with their unique combination of KSBs (DA, 2016). In other words, the Army's official stance has been that each Soldier has a particular set of KSBs that constitute their talent, and matching those to the right job is key to effectiveness. Gingrich expands on this by noting that in an Army context, talent identification occurs when a Soldier's skills, knowledge, and behaviors align with the Army's needs (2019). In one approach, through the Army Talent Attribute Framework (ATAF), the Army reduced the pool of applicable talents to 43, accompanied by 195 measurable KSBs (Royston, Glerum, & Amey, 2023). The list includes only those talents and KSBs of interest to the Army.

However, not everyone in the Army agrees on the components of talent. Royston, Glerum, and Amey (2023) argue that a more accurate and widely accepted definition with the

Army should not include behaviors or personal preferences. Instead, they suggest focusing on knowledge, skills, and attributes or abilities as well as other characteristics (KSAs or KSOAs) relevant to service. This viewpoint effectively replaces behaviors with broader attributes or abilities, highlighting an internal debate over terminology. Notably, the Office of Economic and Manpower Analysis (OEMA) introduced the KSB terminology in 2009 to update the older KSA concept that was prevalent at the time (Royston, Glerum, & Amey, 2023). The shift from KSA to KSB underscored an effort to explicitly include observable behaviors in what constitutes talent. Now, over a decade later, some Army researchers recommend shifting back toward KSA terminology, reflecting ongoing challenges in establishing a universally accepted definition of talent across the Army.

Outside of a military setting, defining talent is much more elusive, but Berger and Berger (2018) describe the workforce as “a portfolio of human resource assets that are differentiated based on an assessment of each person’s current and potential contribution to organization success” (p. 5). This definition emphasizes that talent lies in people’s ability to contribute value, both now and in the future, essentially framing talent in terms of potential return on investment (ROI) for the organization. Other experts similarly agree that talent includes an individual’s skills, knowledge, and behaviors, but each offers a unique perspective on what aspects of talent matter most. For example, Czarnik (2020) includes ethical values, the ability to adapt, and the capacity to learn as integral components of a person's talent, suggesting that character and learning agility are essential aspects of being talented. Charan, Barton, and Carey (2018) argue, on the other hand, that talent ultimately drives strategy. Their position on talent implies that having the right people is what enables an organization to execute its strategy successfully.

Heckman (2019) echoes the broad view by discussing how disrupting traditional people strategies (i.e., rethinking talent management) maximizes business results.

The wide variation in these definitions, even where they use overlapping terms such as skills and knowledge, demonstrates that the perceived value and use of talent can differ significantly by context. In a corporate setting, for instance, one company might prioritize adaptability and cultural fit as key talent components, while another focuses on technical expertise or creativity. In the Army's case, including or excluding aspects such as behavior or preferences in the definition has profound implications: it affects what data the Army collects on its personnel, how it assesses them, and how it determines who is best suited for a particular job. The lack of a single, unified definition of talent within the Army creates additional challenges in quantifying and managing it. If various Army documents and leaders emphasize different elements (KSBs vs. KSAs, for example), it leads to confusion about what exactly the Army is trying to optimize. Indeed, this may help explain why some well-intentioned talent management practices have not achieved uniform positive results – because they may not be targeting the same concept of talent. The literature suggests that a concept as fundamental as talent must be clearly defined upfront; otherwise, efforts to manage talent risk becoming misaligned or ineffectual. Within the discussion of talent, some authors break the concept down further into general and special talent categories.

### ***General and Special Talent***

Several scholars distinguish between general talent and special talent, a nuance that also appears in Army discussions under the concept of talent segmentation. Cascio and Aguinis (2019) and Chamorro-Premuzic (2017) both categorize talent into general and special categories. In civilian terms, general talent refers to individuals with broad, transferable skills and the ability

to adapt to various roles or environments. Special (or specialized) talent refers to individuals with deep expertise or credentials in a narrow field. The Army likewise recognizes that its workforce comprises multiple specialized segments – officers, warrant officers, noncommissioned officers, enlisted Soldiers, different branches and functional areas, and Army Civilians – which means a one-size-fits-all approach to talent management is unworkable (DA, 2016). Each segment has unique requirements and career models, necessitating tailored talent management strategies.

The debate between valuing general versus special talent is evident in the literature. Advocates for general talent (Cascio & Aguinis, 2019) argue that hiring individuals with broad capabilities creates potential for continued development and success in various positions over time. These are the utility players who can learn quickly and take on different challenges as the organization's needs evolve. Organizations prize these individuals for adaptability and a diverse skill set. Cascio and Aguinis (2019) even suggest that an organization's overall talent increases when it employs a pool of people who exhibit general talent across a range of domains. Holt and Davis (2022) add that variety in experiences, perspectives, and skills strengthens the overall talent pool of an organization.

In the Army's context, one could argue that leaders who can perform a wide array of duties (staff roles, command roles, instructional roles, etc.) and Soldiers who can adapt to rapidly changing situations and mission requirements exemplify general talent. The Army, as an institution, certainly values adaptability; indeed, the complex and unpredictable nature of military operations often demands it. The Army's stated view is that everyone has talent that requires development and proper employment (DA, 2016), which implies an institutional bias toward recognizing the potential in all Soldiers, rather than just a select few. In many ways,

continued employment in the Army, surviving the cut of retention boards and promotions, requires a degree of general talent, such as learning new skills and thriving amid frequent moves and changing duties.

On the other hand, advocates for special talent argue that deep expertise in a technical or professional field can be a greater asset for specific roles. Chamorro-Premuzic (2017) contends that special talent often breeds success within an organization because these individuals bring high proficiency and often innovation in their niche. Fields like cyber operations, medicine, engineering, or intelligence analysis rely on highly specialized knowledge and credentials. The Army recognizes this by having distinct career fields and additional pay or incentives for certain specialties, such as medical doctors and cyber career field Soldiers.

Chamorro-Premuzic (2017) also warns of a potential pitfall. By focusing narrowly on credentials or technical skills, organizations can misjudge actual talent. For example, every person who graduates from medical school earns the title of doctor. However, it would be a mistake to assume that the least proficient graduate has equal talent to the valedictorian, mainly if talent includes practical knowledge and skill application. In other words, meeting a qualification (such as a degree or certification) is not the same as demonstrating exceptional talent. The Army's recruiting for specialized roles sometimes mirrors this dilemma. Often, to fill a specialized talent position (such as a cyber operator), the first screening is whether a candidate holds the required credential or certification. That ensures a minimum standard, but once in the role, actual performance can vary widely. Promotions for these specialists then occur in competition, mainly within that cohort, which can limit opportunities for broadening or recognition outside the specialty. Chamorro-Premuzic (2017) points out that emphasizing

specialized talent can inadvertently limit promotions and professional development opportunities if organizations create siloed career tracks.

In the Army, the varying career paths between general and special talent cause tensions. A Soldier with very specialized training (recurring example: cyber network defender) might be highly valuable in that field but may find their career options limited to technical assignments, whereas a more generalized infantry or logistics officer might rise to broader command roles. The Army attempts to balance this by asserting that all individuals have talents that need proper development and employment. The Army needs both types: generalists to become versatile leaders and specialists to excel in technical domains. The key is recognizing which category each individual falls into and managing their career accordingly. The literature suggests that misjudging talent by conflating credential, with capability (as in the doctor example) is a risk. The Army should be cautious that its system for identifying talent in specialized fields goes beyond checking boxes for education or badges and differentiates levels of performance and potential among those specialists.

To summarize, general talent contributes to organizational agility and bench depth, while special talent drives excellence in critical niche roles. A successful talent management approach must cultivate and utilize both, while avoiding the trap of treating all members of a category as equal simply because they share a common credential. Not all of the reviewed literature formally recognizes talent as special or general, thus the requirement to examine the elements of a person's knowledge, skills, and behaviors as a commonly utilized method to identify talent.

### ***Knowledge***

Knowledge encompasses the information, expertise, and understanding that individuals possess. Knowledge is the foundation from which one develops skills and behaviors (Noe, 2017;

Cascio & Aguinis, 2019; Chait & Stross, 2021). In the context of talent, knowledge can refer to formal education, technical know-how, or experiential wisdom gained over time. Having a certain baseline of knowledge, including military tactics, regulations, job-specific theories, and other relevant areas, is necessary for competent performance in any role. It is not just knowing but the depth, application, and continuous growth of knowledge that distinguishes top talent.

For example, Chait and Stross (2021) note that top organizations foster cultures of continuous learning, encouraging and expecting employees to continually expand their knowledge and skills. In such environments, employees demonstrate talent by their ability to learn and stay ahead of the curve. The Army similarly values continuous learning. Army doctrine and policies promote lifelong learning for Soldiers, from structured self-development courses to civilian education programs. Understanding an organization's culture, values, and standard operating procedures is a form of knowledge critical to effective performance (Chait & Stross, 2021; Cascio & Aguinis, 2019). In the Army, this might include knowledge of Army values, ethical codes, and unit history, which helps individuals make decisions aligned with organizational expectations.

One special aspect of knowledge in the Army is the idea of knowledge sharing. *The Army Talent Management Strategy* (DA, 2016) promotes knowledge sharing through mentorship programs and collaborative platforms, aiming to build a competent and agile force. Mentorship in the Army is a two-way street: senior leaders impart knowledge to junior leaders, and juniors often bring fresh ideas or technological savvy that they share upward (DA, 2022b). An organization that actively shares knowledge prevents talent silos. For instance, lessons learned in one unit (tacit knowledge) can become Army-wide knowledge through after-action reviews and knowledge management systems.

According to the literature, a key insight is that developing one's depth of knowledge through education, training, and internalizing and applying it is a hallmark of talent (Chait & Stross, 2019). A highly knowledgeable person in a field can often translate that expertise into better performance and innovation. The Army supports this by encouraging advanced schooling for officers, offering technical certification programs across the force, and broadening assignments that challenge one's knowledge beyond their comfort zone (DA, 2022b). Knowledge comes from experience and cognitive ability. Improving one's education enables a more effective extraction of knowledge from life and operational experiences. As previously mentioned, knowledge develops skills.

### ***Skills***

Skills are the learned abilities of an individual, performed competently, usually as a result of training or experience (DA, 2022b). They are a fundamental component in virtually all definitions of talent. One insight from the literature is that organizations (and leaders) often overestimate their ability to recognize skills and talent intuitively (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2017). Humans are prone to biases and often see what they expect to see, which can make intuition-based assessments of an individual's skills misleading. These biases, if unchecked by objective measures, might lead to the mislabeling of a person as highly skilled simply because they made a good impression, rather than based on verified competence. This problem exists in the Army, where subjective evaluations from superiors have traditionally played a significant role in identifying talent. To address this known issue, the Army has been developing an ecosystem of assessments with a focus on the objective evaluation of skills (DA, 2024). Having only recently published strategic guidance on the matter, it may be some time before the Army sees benefits from the proposed ecosystem of assessments.

Beyond technical proficiency, the reviewed literature, especially on the civilian side, underscores the importance of soft skills. Frequently mentioned skills include effective communication, emotional intelligence, teamwork, and adaptability, which are critical for high performers (Effron & Ort, 2018). These soft skills enable individuals not only to perform tasks but also to lead, collaborate, and innovate. In inclusive and complex organizations, skills like cultural competency and empathy can also be crucial (Holt & Davis, 2022). Historically, the Army has placed a strong emphasis on hard skills, including weapons qualification and training in military occupational specialties. However, it has increasingly recognized the value of soft skills in leadership and teamwork. The Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development System (NCOPDS) and Officer Education System now incorporate training on counseling, communication, and critical thinking, all of which build essential soft skills. Individuals manifest their skills and knowledge through their behaviors.

### ***Behaviors***

Behaviors are the observable actions, decisions, and mannerisms of individuals (DA, 2015, 2016, 2019). They reflect the application of one's skills and knowledge, and have a significant impact on an organization's culture and effectiveness. Certain behaviors correlate with high performance across fields. Chamorro-Premuzic (2017) notes that traits such as resilience and initiative often correlate with superior performance and can distinguish the most effective individuals. For example, a resilient Soldier who can remain calm and effective under pressure or a proactive officer who anticipates problems and takes initiative to solve them demonstrates talent in action.

Organizations that manage talent effectively tend to identify the behaviors most beneficial to their mission and actively encourage and develop those behaviors. In a corporate

setting, this might include behaviors such as customer satisfaction, creativity, or teamwork. In the Army, literature highlights critical behaviors such as commitment, initiative, accountability, and ethical conduct (DA, 2019). These behaviors align with Army Values and leadership principles. The Army also explicitly includes a person's ethics and attitude as part of their behavioral repertoire (DA, 2016). This means that personal character is an element of talent. Cascio and Aguinis (2019) reinforce this by noting that organizations build a reputation of trust when they uphold ethical practices and reward ethical behavior. In short, behavior ties talent to organizational culture; someone might have excellent skills and knowledge, but if their behavior is toxic or misaligned with organizational values, their talent is not truly benefiting the organization.

One interesting contradiction highlighted in the Army literature is the decision to formally include behaviors in the definition of talent. As previously discussed, Royston et al. (2023) suggest excluding behaviors from the definition, focusing on knowledge, skills, and attributes, to make talent metrics more objective. In contrast, Army publications include behaviors as a key component. This reflects a practical tension: Behaviors are crucial to performance, but they can be challenging to measure and can overlap with personal attributes. Regardless of this definitional debate, managing talent in the Army (and elsewhere) must involve observing and shaping behaviors. Leadership development programs, counseling sessions, and evaluation reports are all mechanisms the Army uses to reinforce desired behaviors, such as leadership presence, empathy, and compliance with standards, and to correct negative ones.

From a talent management perspective, identifying high-potential individuals often comes from observing behavior patterns over time and under stress. The Army recognizes the need to assess Soldiers' behavior in realistic leadership challenges. It does so through programs

such as the Commander Assessment Program (CAP) and the Sergeant Major Assessment Program (SMAP) (DA, 2015). Similarly, in corporate America, behavioral interviews and job simulations assess how candidates might behave on the job, rather than just what they claim on their resume (Cascio & Aguinis, 2019). Defining the components of talent— knowledge, skills, and behaviors —is just one part of the challenge. The next step is determining how to measure talent in individuals.

### **Measuring Talent**

The Army historically relied on a few standardized measures as proxies for talent. These included scores on the Armed Forces Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), which assesses a recruit's cognitive abilities and aptitudes, and physical fitness test scores to gauge endurance and strength (DA, 2024). Additionally, the Army Evaluation Reporting System (AERS) captured Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Reports (NCOERs) and Officer Evaluation Reports (OERs), as well as academic evaluation reports (DA Form 1059s for course completions), which assess a Soldier's performance and potential. In the enlisted promotion system, a numeric point system historically combined various factors (such as weapons qualification, fitness, awards, and educational achievements) to produce an overall score for promotion consideration. Each of these measures, in theory, addresses aspects of talent, including cognitive ability, physical capability, job performance, and self-improvement. However, the weight assigned to each area has fluctuated over time, sending mixed signals about what the Army values most at any given moment. For instance, in some periods, physical fitness might be weighted heavily in promotion points, only for policy to later shift more weight to military education or technical skills. Such fluctuations can create uncertainty among Soldiers about which talents (or achievements) are truly most important for advancement.

In 2015, recognizing the limitations of these traditional measures, the Department of the Army introduced the idea of implementing data analytics into the talent management process (DA, 2015). Corporate employers appreciate data analytics for streamlining talent management processes and saving employers valuable time during talent acquisition and recruitment efforts (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2017; Efron & Ort, 2018; Berger & Berger, 2018). This led to systems like the Integrated Personnel and Pay System–Army (IPPS-A), which aims to be a comprehensive talent management database capturing a wide array of information on each Soldier's knowledge, skills, behaviors, and even personal preferences. IPPS-A and associated initiatives, such as the Army Talent Alignment Process (ATAP), aim to bring the Army into the 21st century of talent management by leveraging data in alignment, selection, and promotion decisions. As mentioned in the exploration of behaviors, some assessment-driven programs include the CAP for officers, SMAP for senior NCOs, and the Army Talent Assessment Framework (ATAF) discussed later (Daly, 2022; DA, 2024). The Army's publication of the *Army Talent Assessment Strategy* (2024) signals the seriousness of this effort. This strategy outlines a future in which a robust assessment ecosystem will support virtually every stage of a Soldier's career.

Civilian organizations have also adopted data and analytics to measure talent. Outside the military, performance assessments, skill evaluations, and tracking developmental progress are standard practices (Noe, 2017). Employers widely regard data analytics as reliable, transparent, and efficient for managing large talent pools (Noe, 2017; Efron & Ort, 2018; Heckman, 2019). For example, companies use algorithms to screen resumes, psychometric tests to assess leadership potential, and data dashboards to monitor employee performance metrics (Berger & Berger, 2018). Thus, the Army's turn toward such tools is in keeping with broader trends.

However, both military and civilian experts offer caveats about data-driven talent management. Berger and Berger (2018) stress the importance of selecting the right data sets, warning that the use of flawed or irrelevant metrics can lead to incorrect conclusions about individuals. In other words, just because something is quantifiable does not mean it is a good indicator of talent. If an organization focuses on the wrong metrics, the predictive power of its analytics diminishes.

For the Army, the implication is that as it stands up IPPS-A and ATAP's data-rich processes, it must carefully decide what information to collect and emphasize. For example, self-reported skills in IPPS-A are one data set. If Soldiers overinflate their self-assessments (a likely scenario, as people naturally want to look as qualified as possible), then algorithms matching people to jobs could be working off unreliable data. Indeed, Phillips (2022) highlights exactly this issue when he describes officers' self-reported attributes in AIM/IPPS-A as being overinflated or under-reported, rendering those particular data points of little value. *The Army Talent Assessment Strategy* (DA, 2024) begins to address this by introducing validated assessments, such as cognitive and non-cognitive tests, as well as 360-degree feedback instruments, to ensure more objective data flows into the system.

Another measurement challenge is capturing less tangible aspects of talent, such as creativity, leadership presence, or resilience. The Army attempts to do this through CAP and SMAP. The literature is clear that multi-faceted measurement is necessary, and no single test score or evaluation can encapsulate a person's talent (DA, 2024). However, as both Army and civilian experts warn, the quality of data matters greatly. The Army must strike a balance between the efficiency and scope of automated systems and the judgment and context that human leaders provide. If done well, the Army could achieve a more transparent and meritocratic system of identifying talent. If done poorly, for example, by using erroneous data or overwhelming

leaders with extraneous information, shifting towards automation and data analytics could simply create new sources of frustration. The following sections on building and managing talent will further illustrate how these measurements feed into development and utilization.

### **Building Talent**

Talent encompasses one's potential as much as it includes one's performance. Rather than just identifying and measuring existing talent, this facet of talent management is about enhancing and developing that talent for the future. The literature, both military and civilian, consistently underscores that investing in the development of people yields substantial benefits for organizations (Berger & Berger, 2018; Charan, Barton, & Carey, 2018; Miller, 2018; DA, 2015, 2016, 2022a, 2022b). Building on existing talents and developing employees greatly enhances retention and can also show prospective employees how much an organization values its members. Arguably, organizations gain a competitive edge by developing people and transforming their culture into one that propels success (Berger & Berger, 2018). Across military and non-military organizations, placing people first is central to success. Charan, Barton, and Carey (2018) recommend integrating a people-first mindset into the core strategy of how companies and organizations develop their people. Miller (2018) discusses how organizations can become talent magnets by creating environments that attract and retain top talent. He highlights the role of culture, leadership, and continuous development opportunities in making organizations irresistible to top talent. When employees feel valued and sees clear paths for growth; they are more likely to contribute enthusiastically and stay long-term.

In essence, building talent is a multifaceted endeavor that requires intentional strategies and a commitment to nurturing growth. By integrating data-driven methodologies (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2017), fostering bias-free practices (Chait & Stross, 2021), and aligning talent

development with overarching goals (Charan, Barton, & Carey, 2018), organizations can create a vibrant ecosystem where both individuals and the company thrive. Building and investing in current talent is one way the Army can enhance its lethality when faced with recruiting challenges and uncertain force structure. This can be especially beneficial when changes in talent requirements occur rapidly.

The literature cautions against developing programs that are all talk and no action. Effron and Ort (2018) warn that adding complexity or programs that look good on paper (or in strategic documents) but lack implementation provides no actual value. After discussing the benefits of building talent from within, it is now time to address the management of talent.

### **Managing Talent**

Berger and Berger (2018) define talent management as a holistic approach to leveraging human capital, emphasizing the acquisition, development, and retention of high-performing individuals. In practice, managing talent involves orchestrating a series of processes, such as recruitment, training, performance evaluation, promotion, and succession planning, in an integrated manner. A key insight from the literature is that simply having talented individuals is not enough; how an organization deploys and nurtures those individuals makes the difference between mediocre and outstanding results (Charan, Barton, & Carey, 2018).

One recurring argument is that traditional methods of talent management, which often rely on subjective judgment and past practices, are no longer sufficient. Chamorro-Premuzic (2017) provocatively suggests that intuition in making talent decisions is increasingly unreliable in the face of complex data that can inform better choices. This aligns with the modern trend toward evidence-based management, aiming to eliminate the unconscious bias that affects talent management practices. As mentioned previously, the Army acknowledges that Soldiers'

performance and potential on evaluations rely heavily on the experience and intuition of the rater and senior rater to provide their subjective description of another Soldier. Likewise, the methods used to select Soldiers for promotion under the centralized evaluation system rely on board members' perceptions of a person based on an accumulation of both objective and subjective data, including evaluations, physical fitness test scores, height, and weight. Holt and Davis (2022) specifically note that unconscious bias continues to influence talent decisions in the Army, thereby undermining the objectivity that new systems aim to achieve. Managing talent effectively will require the Army to confront the perception bias that may occur due to intuition. For instance, ensuring that the new data-centric tools do not simply encode old prejudices (garbage in, garbage out).

Another theme is that the quality of the process determines the quality of the outcomes. Efron and Ort (2018) warn against four barriers to building talent: needless complexity, the creation of no new value, neglecting scientific evidence, and a lack of transparency and accountability. This critique suggests that many talent management programs fail because they are over-engineered or not effectively implemented. In a military sense, one can think of a beautifully written strategy that goes unimplemented at the unit level. Though masterfully written, this strategy has no effect. Or a complicated online talent management system that commanders find too cumbersome, so they bypass it with old methods. The Army must be mindful that some of its systems, such as ATAP with AIM 2.0, introduce complexity and require training and buy-in for practical use. Suppose field leaders find the system confusing or overly time-consuming. In that case, they might default to an older method or personal judgment to make assignments, thus negating the intended value of the new system. Transparency and

accountability in the process are also vital. If leaders are accountable for how they manage talent, they are more likely to take it seriously.

Managing talent effectively involves making systematic, fair, and informed decisions about individuals throughout their lifecycle within the organization (Berger & Berger, 2018). It requires marrying the new tools of data and analytics with a culture that values objectivity and development. The difference between a well-managed talent system and a poorly managed one can be stark: the former continuously fuels the organization's success by placing the right people in the right positions at the right times, whereas the latter results in mismatches, lower morale, and lost potential. Having identified how the literature describes talent management, it is important to review how the Army manages talent.

### **Army Talent Management**

Before assessing the Army's approach to talent management, it is necessary to clarify what it is and what it is not. Both military doctrine and civilian scholarship often use talent management ambiguously, encompassing a wide array of human resource activities. This definitional vagueness has operational consequences: when organizations conflate routine personnel management functions with strategic talent initiatives, it becomes difficult to assess effectiveness, allocate resources, or maintain strategic alignment (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). The Army has embraced talent management as a strategic priority, but many leaders too often apply the term inconsistently across initiatives that may not truly reflect talent-centric principles (DA, 2019; Royston & Berger, 2023).

Lewis and Heckman (2006) argue that the field of talent management suffers from conceptual incoherence, with organizations frequently using the term to describe traditional human resource (HR) practices, talent flow processes, or leadership development, all without a

clear theoretical boundary. Similarly, Cappelli (2008) distinguishes talent management from general human capital management by emphasizing its focus on developing and deploying high-potential individuals rather than managing the workforce as a collective asset. Berger and Berger (2018) further highlight that talent management operates at a micro to meso level, targeting specific individuals for development and placement. In contrast, human capital management and strategic human resource management (SHRM) operate at more administrative or organizational levels.

The Army often groups systems like IPPS-A, ATAP, and SMAP under the umbrella of talent management practices. However, as the following comparison illustrates, many of these programs may be more accurately described as human capital or strategic HR tools. To establish conceptual clarity and enable a critical evaluation of these programs, the table below (Figure 1) provides a synthesized comparison of talent management, human capital management (HCM), and SHRM.

**Figure 1**

*Comparative Table (talent management, HCM, and SHRM)*

Category	Talent Management	Human Capital Management (HCM)	Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM)
Definition	Focused on attracting, developing, and retaining top talent to fulfill organizational goals.	Emphasizes the value of employees as capital and managing them as assets.	Aligns HR strategies with business objectives to gain long-term advantage.
Scope	Selective – often centered on high-potential individuals or key roles.	Comprehensive – includes all employees within the organization.	Broad – encompasses all HR functions linked to strategic outcomes.
Focus	Performance management, succession planning, employee growth.	Efficiency, productivity, and workforce investment.	Alignment of HR policies with corporate strategy.
Time Orientation	Medium to long-term – career pathing and leadership pipelines.	Short to medium-term – operational needs and resource optimization.	Long-term – supports sustainable business strategy.
Integration	Moderate – connected to performance and leadership.	Low – often operational and siloed.	High – embedded in overall strategic planning.
Primary Users	HR leaders and line managers in talent-centric roles.	HR departments managing workforce logistics.	Top executives and strategic HR planners.

*Note.* Figure 1 illustrates information synthesized from Osman, Jalil, and Kabir (2022).

Talent management is a targeted approach that focuses on attracting, developing, and retaining individuals with high potential or those in key organizational roles (Osman, Jalil, & Kabir, 2022). It emphasizes building leadership pipelines and aligning employee capabilities with organizational needs. Talent management is selective in scope and often implemented by HR leaders and line managers seeking to optimize high-impact roles. In contrast, HCM is broader and treats all employees as assets who contribute value to the organization. HCM encompasses operational HR functions, including payroll, workforce analytics, and performance tracking. Its focus is on maximizing productivity and optimizing human resource investments across the entire employee base. SHRM, meanwhile, integrates human resource practices into the strategic planning process. The alignment of HR policies with the organization's long-term objectives is a key characteristic of SHRM (Osman, Jalil, & Kabir, 2022). It supports a sustainable competitive advantage by ensuring that people-related decisions directly contribute to organizational success.

Talent management in the United States (U.S.) Army has unique characteristics that differentiate it from civilian sector talent management. Army talent management focuses on productivity, organizational agility, readiness, and the ability to inflict deadly outcomes on the enemy (DA, 2021). Due to the Army's rank structure and promotion methods, talent management spans the spectrum from matching the talents of entry-level personnel to managing talent throughout an entire career (DA, 2021).

The U.S. Army's approach to talent management has undergone significant evolution over the past decade, transitioning from a traditional personnel management system to one that emphasizes individual attributes, preferences, and potential (DA, 2021). Foundational

documents, such as the *Talent Management Concept of Operations for Force 2025 and Beyond* (DA, 2015) and the *U.S. Army Talent Management Strategy* (DA, 2016), define talent as the intersection of knowledge, skills, behaviors, and preferences (KSB-Ps) that are unique to each individual. This definition underpins recent initiatives previously mentioned, like the ATAP and IPPS-A (DA, 2024). These efforts aim to modernize the Army's personnel assignment process by utilizing data-driven tools to match Soldier talent with organizational needs. Despite these initiatives, critics argue that implementation has been uneven. For instance, Gingrich (2019) and McNellis (2019) note that cultural resistance, reliance on outdated performance metrics, and bureaucratic inertia have hindered the effectiveness of these reforms. Holt and Davis (2022) further highlight that unconscious bias continues to influence talent decisions, undermining the objectivity the new system intends to promote. Thus, while the Army articulates a forward-thinking vision, practical and institutional barriers complicate the full realization of a truly talent-driven system.

The previously mentioned strategies, dated 2015 and 2016, outline the Army's plan for managing talent in the future; however, few current regulations, publications, or documents provide definitive steps outlining what this process entails in the interim. The Army views talent management as a holistic approach to optimizing human capital and "a way to enhance Army readiness by maximizing the potential of the Army's greatest asset- our people (DA, 2016, p.7)". The Army is piloting its most current talent management strategies among the warrant officer and commissioned officer segments. At the same time, the enlisted labor pool has seen only limited progress in talent management initiatives.

The most recently published field manual, which describes Army human resource support, outlines talent management as the Army Talent Alignment Process (ATAP),

operationalized through AIM 2.0 (DA, 2021). The ATAP aligns Army talent supply with Army talent demands through three phases: setting the market, executing the market, and clearing the market (DA, 2021). Based on its use, it is unclear if the intent is to add talent alignment to the list of synonyms for talent management or if talent alignment will be one of the many actions that fall under talent management. Currently, enlisted Soldiers do not participate in the ATAP.

Phase I, setting the market, involves identifying unit position vacancies and officers available to relocate. This phase is complete once Human Resources Command (HRC) validates the vacancies and movers. During this time, the movers update their resumes while units ensure their vacant positions have detailed descriptions. This validation maximizes efforts for talent management (DA, 2021). Detailed descriptions are the key in this phase of the talent management process. Identifying the required skills for a position enables the future implementation of automation by pairing a mover's listed execution with the list of skills required for a vacant position.

Phase II, execute the market, begins and ends based on times and dates published by HRC. HRC relies on units to submit their mission-essential vacancies for inclusion in the ATAP cycle. Once validated, units can view available movers and engage in dialogue with those interested, conduct interviews, and select officers (DA, 2021). Currently, the skills disclosed on a Soldier's talent profile are self-reported. The interview process adds a human dimension to talent management, allowing for the inclusion of important attributes that are currently unmeasured.

Phase III, clear the market, ends with movers receiving their assignment instructions. The determining factors for assignment matches include officer and unit preferences, professional development, and any input from senior leaders (DA, 2021). The publication, with this guidance,

alludes to developing talent management processes for a modern talent management program; however, the force is still awaiting the implementation of these changes.

As previously mentioned, current written guidance, which focuses on placing the right person in the right job at the right time— a common understanding of Army talent management —applies to officers and warrant officers. The Army must differentiate between workforce segments out of necessity and law, with each having its specialized requirements, thus justifying the need to manage them differently (DA, 2016).

In 2021, the Army Talent Management Task Force (ATMTF) provided insight into several initiatives aimed at addressing talent management among the Army's enlisted population, which comprises over 80% of its personnel (Payton, 2021). The initiatives included assessment programs for first sergeants and sergeants major, the Assignment Satisfaction Key – Enlisted Module (ASK-EM) marketplace, and IPPS-A. The SMAP currently affects only sergeants major who wish to fill command sergeant major positions at the brigade level or nominative positions. The First Sergeant Assessment Program remains local at the installation level, and the ASK-EM marketplace applies to Soldiers in the ranks of staff sergeant to master sergeant. Here, KSBs and the Soldier preference process are guided through an algorithm to reduce bias in generating their next assignment (Fontaine, 2021). The creation of current systems aimed at improving earlier frameworks used by the Army to manage talent.

### **Early Frameworks**

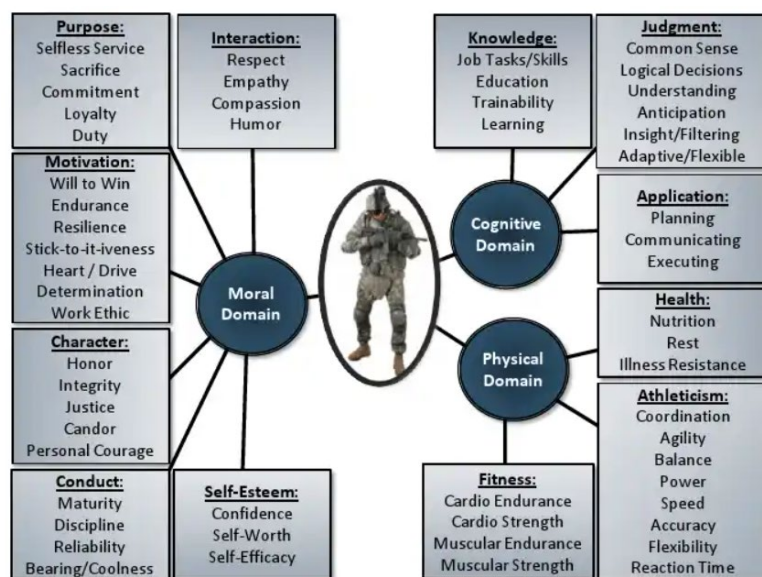
As demonstrated throughout this literature review, the Army has struggled for decades to effectively manage its talent. This was the case even before the creation of any of the talent strategies (*Talent Management Strategy, People Strategy, Human Dimension Strategy, Talent Assessment Strategy*) or the focus on applying a deliberate process to manage the unique

attributes exhibited by each Soldier in the ranks. In 2010, Dees et al. sought to solve a critical problem of their time. The Army did not have the means to describe what made a quality Soldier. Dees et al. (2010) utilized a mathematical methodology to present a model depicting a holistic view of a Soldier known as WholeSoldier Performance, which identified three domains: moral, cognitive, and physical. The intended outcome was to facilitate decisions on recruiting, assessing, assigning, promoting, and retaining Soldiers (Dees et al., 2010). The theories and concerns of 2010 are now referred to as talent management and still confuse to this very day.

In their studies, Dees et al. discuss the problems associated with using the term "quality" to describe a desirable Soldier. The Army simply wanted someone to meet the indicators of military enlistment success, which also posed a problem because this had a negative connotation associated with their quality of service. After much debate on what qualities or attributes made a person a good or quality Soldier, Dees et al. (2010) provided the WholeSoldier Performance Attributes Model (Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

*WholeSoldier Performance Attributes Model*

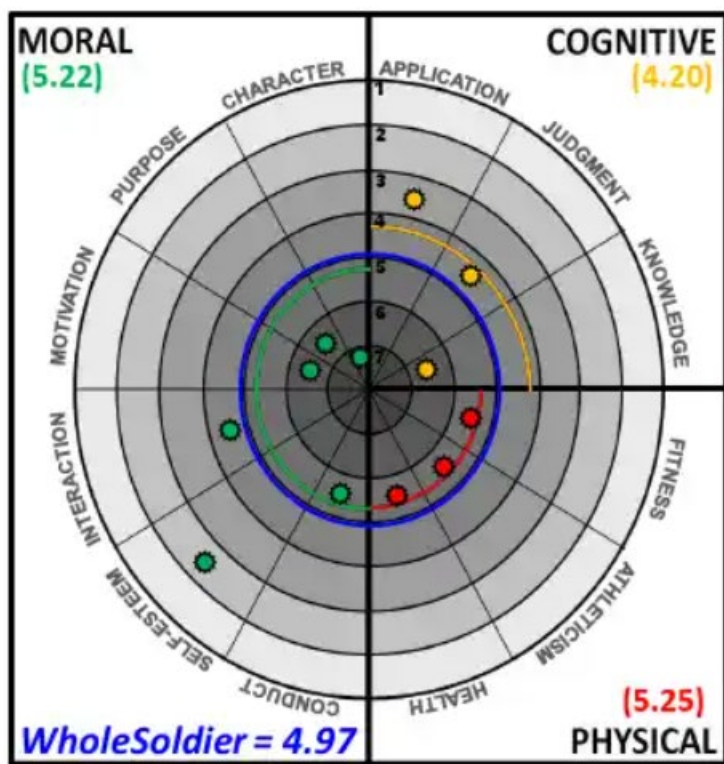


Note. Figure 2 comes from Dees et al. (2010).

The study created focus groups that only generated qualitative results such as good, bad, and neutral (Dees et al., 2010). The team then worked to establish a numeric scale to correspond with these responses and a questionnaire to gather the results. The qualitative questioning translated to quantitative data. These data points came from the supervisor's assessment of their subordinate across each grouping of attributes. The WholeSoldier target captures the results (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

*WholeSoldier Target Example*



Note. Figure 3 comes from Dees et al. (2010).

The WholeSoldier Performance Framework provided a counseling form that addressed each of the domains, accompanied by a visual model in the form of a target (Figure 3), to ensure both the Soldier and the leader had everything needed to identify and develop the desired

qualities of performance (Dees et al., 2010). The WholeSoldier Performance Framework appeared in the Department of the Army's (2015) *Talent Management Concept of Operations for Force 2025 and Beyond* as a promising lead and gained traction with the Chief of Staff of the Army after a concept pitch at the 2015 Solarium Conference (Vergun, 2015). After some piloting programs and a final push for Army-wide adoption, the WholeSoldier Performance Framework came to a standstill. The Army needed a framework that outlined talent attributes. With this need came the development of the Army Talent Attribute Framework.

### **The Army Talent Attribute Framework (ATAF)**

Literature underscores the interconnectedness of skills, knowledge, and behaviors in effective talent management. Organizations that strategically develop these areas create a robust talent pool capable of driving success. Civilian literature emphasizes data-driven approaches, continuous learning, and fostering welcoming and accepting cultures (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2017; Efron & Ort, 2018; Chait & Stross, 2021). Similarly, the Army recognizes the crucial role of these components in building a competent and agile force, though challenges remain in identifying and measuring them (Department of the Army, 2024; Holt & Davis, 2022).

As previously mentioned, IPPS-A will play a significant role in how the Army manages talent. To ensure proper use and support policies that utilize the new features, the Army established the ATAF. This framework is the first of its kind within the Army to summarize the key elements of talent (Royston & Berger, 2023). The ATAF is a solution to one of the leading causes of confusion when attempting to measure or manage talent in the Army. The ATAF standardizes the knowledge, skills, and behaviors required by Army personnel by providing a uniform list. This eliminates the perplexity caused by decades of different organizations creating their definitions and terminology for the same attributes and behaviors (Royston & Berger,

2023). While the reviewing committee recommended an update to identify behaviors as abilities, the ATAF maintains KSBs, not KSAs, as the attributes by which Soldiers' talents compare.

The ATAF charts talents into three tiers: Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3. To assist with the identification and management of talent, Tier 1 lists Talent Domains, Tier 2 lists Talents, and Tier 3 consists of measurable KSBs (Royston & Berger, 2023). Currently, the ATAF is in the pilot phase within IPPS-A and AIM 2.0, with plans to update it annually based on stakeholder feedback (Royston, Glerum, & Amey, 2023). The Department of the Army operationalized the ATAF in its recent release of the *Army Talent Assessment Strategy (2024)*. This framework shows promise for removing the fog that many leaders struggle with in identifying, measuring, or managing talent and opens the door for a more automated and efficient approach to the process.

Figure 4 presents an illustration of the ATAF.

**Figure 4**

*The Army Talent Attribute Framework (ATAF) FY24*



*Note.* The inner circle contains Tier 1 Talent Domains, the outer circle contains Tier 2 Talents, and outside of the circle are Tier 3 measurable KSBs. The author modified Figure 4 from Royston, Glerum, and Amey (2023). See appendix B for an enlarged image.

The introduction and operationalization of the ATAF are a step in the right direction for implementing positive changes in Army talent management. Having a consolidated reference of terms simplifies a complex process and creates a common language for talent attributes across all leaders and organizations (Royston, Glerum, & Amey, 2023). The ATAF is a bright spot in Army talent management, but challenges still plague the process.

### **Challenges**

The Army continues to face several challenges in talent management. Leaders across the Army unintentionally fail at talent management because Army talent management guidance is almost as hard to follow as it is to find (McNellis, 2019). The components of talent are hard to measure, and leaders use talent management as a blanket term for a myriad of other HR functions.

The integration of new technologies, such as IPPS-A, requires significant effort and resources. According to the Department of the Army (2024), the effective implementation of an assessment ecosystem is crucial for 21st century talent management. Heckman (2019) adds that disrupting traditional people strategies through technology can maximize business results, highlighting the need for continuous technological adaptation. The challenge lies in striking a balance between automation and the human aspects of talent management. Balance is the goal as IPPS-A becomes fully operational in the talent management process. As previously mentioned, officers and warrant officers must still interview with the leaders at a vacant position before the market closes, and the current method of identifying a Soldier's skills and attributes relies on

self-reporting. While automation stands to significantly improve the efficiency and thoroughness of talent management, full automation requires adjustments to current practices. Leaving one to ask if IPPS-A is truly a talent management tool or simply a human capital data system.

Additionally, balancing the needs of the Army with those of its Soldiers' personal and professional aspirations is a delicate task. Cascio and Aguinis (2019) emphasize the importance of understanding and addressing the psychological aspects of talent management to create a supportive environment. Gingrich (2019) highlights the challenges of aligning individual contributions with organizational goals, stressing the need for a flexible approach. Phillips (2022) provides further insight into the challenges in AIM 2.0. The system requires human input at several critical points in the process that, if done incorrectly, defeats the entire purpose of the automated system. He reports common deficiencies, such as outdated duty descriptions or incorrect identification codes, which fail to align KSBs with job postings (Phillips, 2022). Flaws in the systems created to improve the talent management process create great difficulty in balancing the Soldier's needs and desires with those of the mission without compromising readiness or lethality.

The Army identifies its challenges in talent management, including impediments to change, capability gaps, and the need for transformation (DA, 2015). Most notably, the Army struggles to overcome the bureaucracy involved in implementing new programs or changes to existing processes. The Army published strategies to drive talent management transformation in 2015, and ten years later, a fully implemented, acceptable solution does not yet exist. The Army delivered several aspects of the concepts, but in the ten years of work, some of the early cornerstone publications are no longer available on Army websites, or an updated version now exists. For example, the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) rescinded *the Army*

*Human Dimension Strategy* in 2019. This strategy played a crucial role in the initial development of the *Army's Talent Management Strategy* and, at the time, served as the overarching Army policy for managing human capital (DA, 2016). The Army has not published an updated talent management strategy to direct practices within the initiatives launched since 2016. To identify an Army talent management initiative, one must locate the original strategy, reference the concept of operations mentioned within, visit the Human Resources Command website, or conduct a Google search, and prepare for hours of cross-referencing and extensive reading.

Soon, talent management will face another challenge. With the sunset of the lead task force for all things talent management-related (U.S. Army Talent Management Task Force), five existing departments will absorb the prevailing initiatives and programs. In the coming months, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Army for Personnel, the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, and the U.S. Army Human Resources Command will all adopt portions of the task force's mission (Cavallaro, 2024). The Department of the Army identified that a single lead agency would be a requirement to ensure the successful implementation of its strategy (2015). The current conditions go against previously identified acceptable courses of action. Considering the challenges discussed, it is essential to consolidate the findings from the literature review.

### **Summary and Key Findings of Literature Review**

The literature reveals that while the Army has made considerable efforts to modernize its approach to talent management, significant challenges still exist. Army talent management lacks a universal, consistent definition of talent. Instead, the rarely observed ATAF provides those who can locate the framework an extensive list of talents and KSBs that the Army identifies as

applicable (DA, 2024; Royston, Glerum, & Amey, 2023). As Chait and Stross (2021) note, even civilian organizations fail to provide simple, concise definitions of talent. Current frameworks aggravate the existing challenges with conceptual confusion and inconsistent implementation. A recurring theme is the confusion of talent management with HCM and SHCM practices (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Osman, Jalil, & Kabir, 2022). This misunderstanding creates problems in identifying roles in the talent management process, resulting in inaction and dysfunctional initiatives.

Despite the Army adopting the language of talent (through the ATAF), many of the reforms, such as IPPS-A and AIM 2.0, remain transactional. Rather than focusing on differentiated development and precise alignment to individual capabilities (talent management), the Army often defaults to managing its entire workforce or entire cohort population uniformly. Such practices exist among enlisted populations. This is an HCM practice, not talent management (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Osman, Jalil, & Kabir, 2022).

In 2015, the Department of the Army published a concept of operations followed by a strategy (2016) directing talent management for force 2025 and beyond. The key cornerstone of talent management, derived from the now-rescinded *Human Dimension Strategy*. The Department of the Army published *The Army People Strategy* in 2019, which then became the cornerstone concept behind the *Who We Are* priority of the Department of the Army's *Army Modernization Strategy* (DA, 2022a) and any further Department of the Army talent management publications to include the most recent *Army Talent Assessment Strategy* (DA, 2024).

One of the primary initiatives in the modernization of Army talent management was the integration of web-based technology in the form of IPPS-A (DA, 2015). This update created the

need to measure KSBs and other talents. To mitigate difficulties in identifying and measuring talent, the Department of the Army developed the ATAF (Royston & Berger, 2023). The Department of the Army (2024) released *The Army Assessment Strategy*, which operationalizes talent management through the Army Talent Assessment Framework (ATAF), Command Assessment Programs (CAP), the Soldier Talent Profile (STP), and the Sergeant Major Selection Program (SMAP), among other assessment programs.

Main efforts towards piloting and implementing modernized talent management practices occur among commissioned and warrant officer cohorts, utilizing AIM cycles and IPPS-A. Efforts to improve talent management processes among the enlisted corps lag behind (Fontaine, 2021). Enlisted talent management occurs using the ASK-EM system for staff sergeants through master sergeants. Talent management assessments occur sporadically among the first sergeant population, typically limited to installation-level assessments and then officially for sergeants major seeking to qualify for a brigade or nominative position, and attend the Sergeant Major Assessment Program (SMAP) (Fontaine, 2021).

Additional challenges to Army talent management practices identified throughout the review of literature include difficulty in locating consolidated guidance on the topic, impedance to change, capability gaps, and the need for transformation (DA, 2015; McNellis, 2019; Phillips, 2022). Additionally, the implementation of automated systems, such as IPPS-A, is resource-intensive and may compromise the ability to manage certain human aspects of talent management. Lastly, the lead agency for the Army's transformation of talent management recently dissolved its mission across five separate offices and departments. This dissolution conflicts with the initial rationale for creating the task force, as it removes clear accountability

and governance, or standardized mechanisms to oversee the implementation of change (DA, 2015).

### **Discussion**

The fundamental observation emerging from this review is that the Army is not a business. Thus, talent management in the Army cannot be a mirror image of talent management in the corporate world. This has both advantages and drawbacks. In the private sector, increased sales and other tangible outcomes justify talent management initiatives (Chat & Stross, 2021). The Army's bottom line comprises intangibles, such as national security and readiness. Successful talent management is difficult to measure in the Army. External factors, such as global conflicts and economic conditions, impact recruiting and retention goals. These complex variables in the environment make it challenging to launch and isolate successful talent management strategies.

It is also possible that the Army has swung the talent management pendulum too far and has attempted to implement too many initiatives with excessive complexity. Effron and Ort (2018) speak to the benefits of simplicity in talent management strategies. They identify four barriers to building talent: creating needless complexity, adding no new value, neglecting the science, and lacking transparency and accountability (Effron & Ort, 2018). There is an argument to that the Army rolled out a multitude of programs (CAP, SMAP, ATAP, AIM 2.0, IPPS-A, etc.) in a relatively short time, potentially overwhelming units in the field. Introducing too many initiatives at once can result in confusion, fatigue, and poor execution.

A notable observation in the literature is the potential for initiative fatigue. The Army talked about talent management for years without tangible benefits that Soldiers could see. Great ideas that never fully materialize can breed disengagement (Effron & Ort, 2018). Problems also

arise when new talent management programs make grand promises but fail to deliver promptly or require extensive training for the user to see results (i.e., IPPS-A). Great leaders do not wish to fail, and many just need clear instructions on how to use a new system or process. The more complex or bureaucratic a new system is, the more likely it is to fail.

### **Suggested Solutions for Successful Army Talent Management**

Continuous assessment and improvement of talent management practices are necessary to keep pace with evolving demands (DA, 2024). The Department of the Army (2015) outlines the concept of operations for talent management, emphasizing the need for regular evaluation and adjustment. Noe (2017) emphasizes the importance of ongoing training and development in enhancing the skills and competencies of personnel, thereby ensuring that talent management practices remain effective. Training and developing entities and individuals directly involved or responsible for managing talent are key to effective practices. Leaders and managers of talent must shift from time-based promotions and implement merit-based selections for positions of increased responsibility (McNellis, 2019). Assessing the right things is also important. Phillips (2022) cautions that, particularly in AIM 2.0, officers self-report overinflated or underreported attributes which renders them virtually valueless as assessed attributes, simply because the individual is assessing themselves.

In addition to creating an environment of constant assessments, the Army must follow the plans outlined in several strategies intended to improve talent management practices. One such priority elicits programs and policies that support talent management and leader development practices (DA, 2015; DA, 2016). It is critical to note that no single Army publication consolidates the roles and responsibilities of talent management, from the individual to HRC. Identifying who is responsible for what and providing any additional relevant guidance will hold

individuals and organizations accountable for specified tasks. A leadership manual or guide can easily render these relationships via a single chart. The creation of a single chart that displays who performs what talent management actions inserts accountability into this process, and clearly defined roles allow ownership of responsibilities. In addition to the quick reference chart, a detailed narrative should accompany each participant in the talent management process. This information in its entirety does not exist anywhere for the Army. Strategies exist to establish an urgency for talent management, but clearly defined, consolidated roles and responsibilities are lacking. See Figure 5 for a suggested example of such a chart.

### Figure 5

*Example of a Proposed Talent Management Roles and Responsibilities Chart*

Who	What	When	Why
Human Resources Command (HRC)	Reviews IPPS-A data to place the right person in the right position at the right time based on vacancies in the applicable manning documents.	Designated manning cycles and out-of-cycle moves as required	Provide personnel service and support to the force
Commanders	Talent Management (see para XXX); Report AIM vacancies; develop	Prior to AIM cycles, during counseling	Ensure local manning is met and talent is managed

	subordinates (see para XXX); develop self		
Commissioned Officers	Talent Management; develop subordinates; develop self	Prior to AIM cycles, during counseling	Ensure local manning is met and talent is managed
Warrant Officers	Talent Management; develop subordinates; develop self	Prior to AIM cycles, during counseling	Ensure local manning is met and talent is managed
Command Sergeant Major (CSM)	Enlisted Talent Management; develop subordinates; develop self	As needed by the organization or the Soldier	Ensure local enlisted manning is met and talent is managed
Sergeant Major (SGM)	Fulfills role of CSM in their absence (Enlisted Talent Management); develops subordinates; develops self	As needed by the organization or the Soldier	Ensure local enlisted manning is met and talent is managed
Enlisted Commandant	Talent Management; develop self	As needed by the organization or the Soldier	Ensure local enlisted manning is met and talent is managed

First Sergeant (1SG)	Talent Management; develop subordinates; develops self	As needed by the organization or the Soldier	Ensure local enlisted manning is met and talent is managed
Master Sergeant (MSG)	Talent Management; develop subordinates; develop self	As needed by the organization or the Soldier	Ensure local enlisted manning is met and talent is managed
Noncommissioned Officer (CPL-SFC)	Report the talents of their Soldiers up to MSG/1SG; develop subordinates; develop self	Regularly; when information is requested; when necessary; counseling; NCOPDS	To allow for successful talent management
Soldier (PVT-SPC)	Develops own talents; receives development from leaders; updates IPPS-A information to allow talent management	On-going; select milestones such as Basic Leader Course (BLC)	To allow for successful talent management

With clearly established roles and responsibilities, the Army can then mandate training at appropriate levels of professional military education to ensure the identified parties are competent in their assigned tasks. For Soldiers, training can and should occur at each level of the noncommissioned officer professional development system (NCOPDS) to bring attention to how

one's role changes as they progress in rank. For example, the SGM/CSM employs a different level of talent management than a 1SG.

Army doctrine and the literature paint a complex picture of both ambition and ambiguity in the Army's approach to talent management. The issues are not merely semantic; they directly affect how the Army recruits, develops, assigns, and retains its people. As the discussion has shown, resolving these conceptual and structural gaps is crucial for developing a talent management system that fosters readiness, trust, and lethality (DA, 2022a). The following conclusion synthesizes these findings and outlines implications for future Army leadership.

### **Conclusion**

The Army has published numerous strategies that prioritize improvements to talent management practices. The lines of effort and objectives identified to make progress are robust, expensive, labor-intensive, bureaucratic, and contain vague indicators of success. This study provided several suggested solutions to improve Army talent management, including cultivating an environment of continuous assessment, following the implementation plans already written, and consolidating and listing the roles and responsibilities of talent management from the individual level to HRC. These proposed solutions aim to enhance the effectiveness, user-friendliness, and sustainability of talent management in the Army. This will enable the Army to meet its modernization goals and effectively utilize the talents of its personnel.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Executive Summary**

In today's rapidly evolving global economy, organizations face increasingly complex challenges in attracting, developing, and retaining top talent. The concept of talent management has emerged as a critical strategic priority for businesses seeking to gain a competitive edge. As a profession of arms in a country without conscription service, the United States Army must compete with the rest of the market to attract, retain and develop talent. Talent management encompasses a wide range of practices, including recruitment, employee development, performance management, and succession planning (Noe, 2017). The Department of the Army (2016) identified four primary elements to achieve talent management, which are acquire, develop, employ, and retain talent. Properly employed talent management optimizes Soldier performance and cultivates an Army ready for the uncertainties of multidomain operations.

### **Discussion**

Critical to the process of managing talent is first to define what talent is. Identifying, retaining, and attracting talent is among a leader's competencies (Department of the Army [DA], 2019). Department of the Army (2015, 2016) defines talent as an intersection of an individual's skills, knowledge, and behaviors (KSBs). To optimize an individual's performance, they must be employed within their talents (DA, 2016). Once leaders can successfully identify what talent is, they can manage and develop it in their subordinates and themselves.

In 2015 the Department of the Army published a concept of operations followed by a strategy (2016) directing talent management for force 2025 and beyond. The now-rescinded Human Dimension Strategy served as the cornerstone of initial talent management efforts. The Department of the Army published *The Army People Strategy* in 2019, which then became the

cornerstone concept behind the *Who We Are* priority of the Department of the Army's *Army Modernization Strategy* (DA, 2022a) and any further Department of the Army talent management publications to include the most recent *Army Talent Assessment Strategy* (2024).

One of the primary initiatives in the modernization of Army talent management was the integration of web-based technology, specifically the Integrated Personnel and Pay System-Army (IPPS-A) (DA, 2015). The introduction of information technology created the need to measure KSBs and other talents. To mitigate difficulties in identifying and measuring talent, the Department of the Army developed the Army Training Assessment Framework (ATAF) (Royston & Berger, 2023).

The Army has initiated numerous talent management-related initiatives with excessive complexity and inadequate consolidated guidance on execution and implementation. Senior leaders responsible for key actions in the Assignment Interactive Module (AIM) unknowingly sabotage the benefits of the new system due to confusion (Phillips, 2022). Officers in a move cycle are unable to efficiently complete selections for their next assignment also due to difficulties with the system. At the same time, units fail to update the KSBs and job descriptions for the posted positions (Phillips, 2022).

### **Recommendations**

Continuous assessment and improvement of talent management practices are necessary to keep pace with evolving demands (DA, 2024). In addition to creating an environment of constant assessments, the Army must follow the plans outlined in several strategies intended to improve talent management practices. One such priority elicits programs and policies that support talent management and leader development practices (DA, 2015; DA, 2016). It is critical to note that no single Army publication consolidates the roles and responsibilities of talent management,

from the individual to the Human Resources Command (HRC). Identifying who is responsible for what and providing any additional relevant guidance will hold individuals and organizations accountable for specified tasks. A chart within a leadership manual or guide can easily exhibit these relationships. The creation of a single chart that displays who performs what talent management actions inserts accountability into this process, and clearly defined roles allow ownership of responsibilities. In addition to the quick reference chart, a detailed narrative should accompany each participant in the talent management process. This information in its entirety does not exist anywhere for the Army. The strategies exist to establish an urgency for talent management, but the missing component is clearly defined and consolidated roles and responsibilities.

### **Conclusion**

The Army has published numerous strategies that prioritize improvements to talent management practices. The lines of effort and objectives identified to make progress are robust, expensive, labor-intensive, bureaucratic, and contain vague indicators of success. This study provided several suggested solutions to improve Army talent management, including cultivating an environment of continuous assessment, following the implementation plans already written, and consolidating and listing the roles and responsibilities of talent management from the individual level to HRC. These proposed solutions aim to enhance the effectiveness, user-friendliness, and sustainability of talent management in the Army. This will allow the Army to meet its modernization goals and truly leverage the talents of its people

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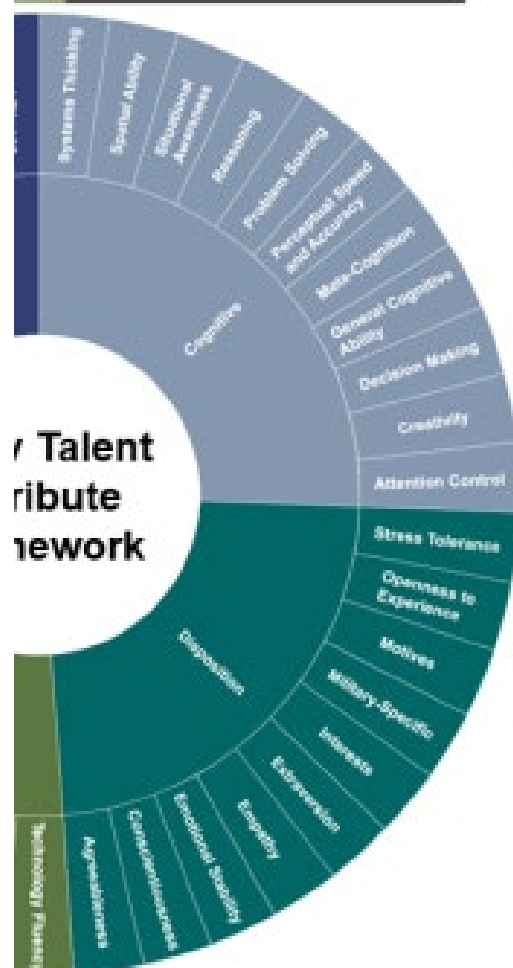
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## Appendix B

Figure 4 ATAF



**Consolidation of:**  
**1. 21 Talents**  
**2. ADP 6-22**  
**3. ATMTF Attribute List**



#### General Fitness

- Health And Fitness Orientation
- Physical Endurance
- Physical Strength
- Physically Fit
- Swimming

#### Psychomotor Ability

- Balance
- Flexibility
- Control Precision
- Physical Coordination
- Reaction Time

#### Attention Control

- Attentiveness
- Focus
- Problem Sensitivity

#### Creativity

- Cognitive Flexibility
- Creative Problem Solving
- Innovation

#### Decision Making

- Decision Making
- Mental Agility
- Sound Judgement

#### General Cognitive Ability

- General Cognitive Aptitude
- Information Ordering
- Memory
- Multi-Tasking
- Perceptive
- Processes Information & Data

#### Meta-Cognition

- Analyzes and Organizes Information to Create Knowledge
- Awareness Of Cognitive Biases
- Reflective Thinking

#### Perceptual Speed & Accuracy

- Pattern Recognition
- Perceptual Speed & Accuracy
- Response Orientation

#### Problem Solving

- Problem Solver
- Structured Problem Solving
- Troubleshooting
- Unstructured Problem Solving

#### Reasoning

- Active Learning
- Analytical Thinking
- Analyze Data or Information
- Assessing And Mitigating Harm
- Critical Thinking
- Quantitative Reasoning
- Verbal Reasoning

#### Situational Awareness

- Situational Awareness

#### Spatial Ability

- Spatially Intelligent
- Spatial Orientation
- Spatial Visualization

#### Systems Thinking

- Strategic Thinking
- Systems Thinking

#### Agreeableness

- Affiliation
- Consideration
- Cooperation
- Humility
- Selflessness

#### Conscientiousness

- Achievement Orientation
- Dependability
- Detail-Focused
- Discipline
- Introspective
- Non-Delinquency
- Orderliness
- Persistence
- Prudent Risk-Taker
- Self-Management
- Virtue

#### Emotional Stability

- Adjustment
- Even-Tempered
- Optimism
- Resilience
- Self-Control

#### Empathy

- Empathy

#### Extraversion

- Assertiveness
- Attention Seeking
- Enthusiasm
- Initiative
- Sociability

#### Interests

- Artistic Interests
- Conventional Interests
- Enterprising Interests
- Interest In Leadership
- Investigative Interests
- Realistic Interests
- Social Interests

#### Military-Specific

- Army Values
- Commitment To Serve
- Military And Professional Bearing
- Warrior Ethos

#### Motives

- Autonomy
- Learning Orientation
- Internal Locus of Control
- Self-Efficacy

#### Openness to Experience

- Curiosity
- Innovative
- Intellectual Efficiency
- Tolerance
- Tolerance for Ambiguity
- Adaptability

#### Stress Tolerance

- Stress Tolerance