

# WHITE PAPER: Talent Management in a Profession



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West Point, NY 10996  
December 2010

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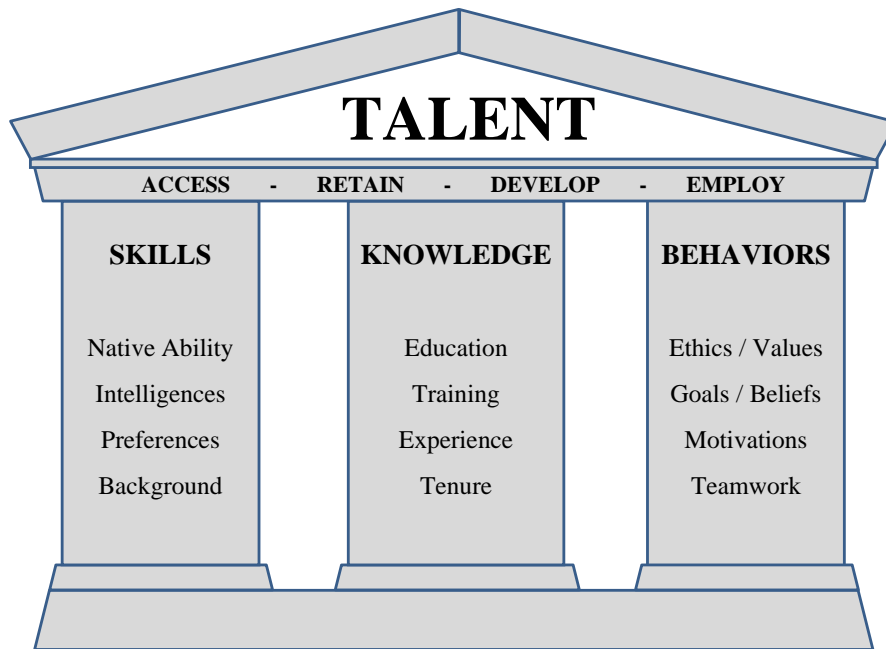
## 1. Introduction.

From 6-8 June 2010, Mr. Lamont and GEN Dempsey co-chaired the 47<sup>th</sup> Senior Conference at West Point. Titled “Towards an Officer Corps Strategy,” the conference focused participants from the Army, academia, and industry on a talent-focused officer human capital model articulated by the Army’s Office of Economic and Manpower Analysis (OEMA).

Several conferees questioned whether “talent management” and “the Army profession” were mutually reinforcing ideas or perhaps inimical to one another. As a result, the conference co-chairs asked OEMA to identify points of intersection and/or conflict between the two concepts. This paper is in response to that request.

## 2. Discussion.

During the conference, Dr. Don Snider of the U.S. Army War College made several observations that engendered thoughtful discussions on the matter. He has written extensively on the Army as a profession, on officership, and on the moral imperatives inherent in commissioned service. Snider voiced concerns that the officer talent management paradigm advanced by OEMA, and in particular, our definition of talent, lacked sufficient emphasis upon the moral component of officership. Specifically, his concerns focused upon a graphic presented at the conference (see **Figure 1**, below), one lacking references to the moral character of officers, which Snider argues is the essence of a profession.



**Figure 1. The Dimensions of Individual Talent as Presented at the XLVII Senior Conference**

While the exact words were not in the graphic, in *Talent: Implications for an Officer Corps Strategy* (Strategic Studies Institute, 2009), we described the critical behavioral dimension of talent as follows:

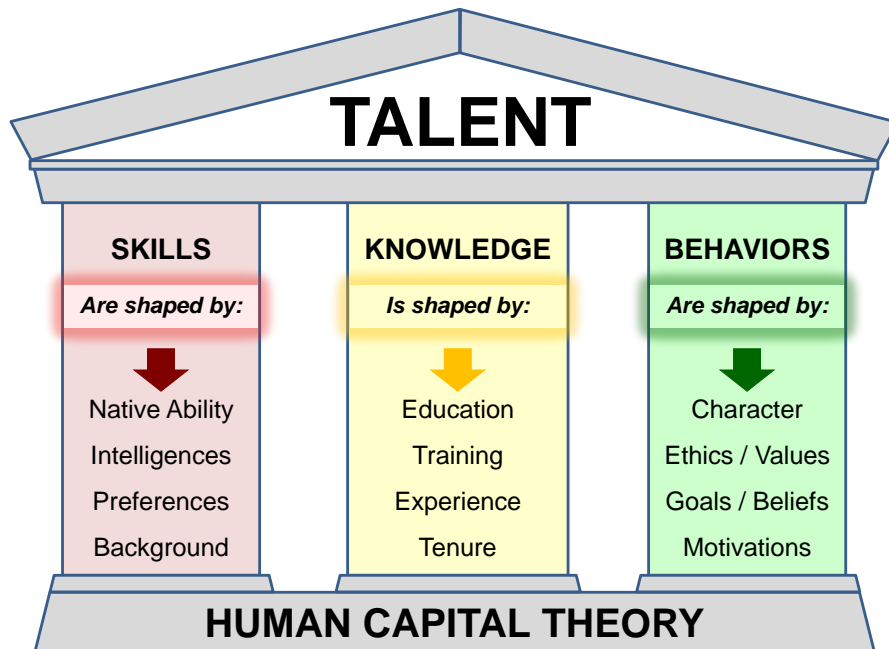
Effective organizations hire not merely for technical and cognitive skills, but also for *values*, attitudes and attributes that “fit” their culture. The U.S. Army has certainly developed and sustained

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a powerful organizational culture. Its seven “official” values...are the most visible, but the Army ethic demands dozens of other personal attributes (will, tolerance, compassion, caring, *character*, candor, punctuality, sobriety, faithfulness, fiscal responsibility, accuracy, courtesy, etc.). *For Army service, particularly commissioned officer service, these attributes are essential.*

Our intent was to make clear that moral character is critical to the talent set of an Army officer, and that officers without it are not suited to the profession. As Dr. Snider and others have helped us to understand, however, both our language and our graphics may have been too imprecise to convey this. To redress this, we have taken two steps.

The first is to revise the “Talent” graphic (see Figure 2, below). In this figure, we have attempted to clarify that our definition of talent rests upon a foundation of sound human capital theory and that the behavioral pillar represents that dimension of an officer where character resides. Regardless of an officer’s skills and knowledge, if they are immoral, if they lack character, if they are not trustworthy, and if the Army’s values are in conflict with their own, then they lack a suitable talent distribution for the profession.



**Figure 2. The Dimensions of Individual Talent (Revised)**

The second and more important step we have taken is a consideration of talent management within the context of the Officer Corps. To do so, we have relied heavily upon Dr. Snider’s writings. In *Dissent and Strategic Leadership of the Military Professions* (Strategic Studies Institute, 2008), for example, Snider refers to Eliot Friedson’s argument that “all societies generally organize their productive work under one of three ideal models — business, bureaucracy, or profession.”<sup>1</sup>

Building upon this, Snider argues that a business enterprise generally operates within the intersection of markets and is motivated by profit, which in turn engenders efficiency in the delivery of goods or services (i.e. “value”).<sup>2</sup> In contrast, he describes a bureaucracy as guided not by market incentives, but instead by the principle of efficiency in repetitive production. He points out that all large, complex

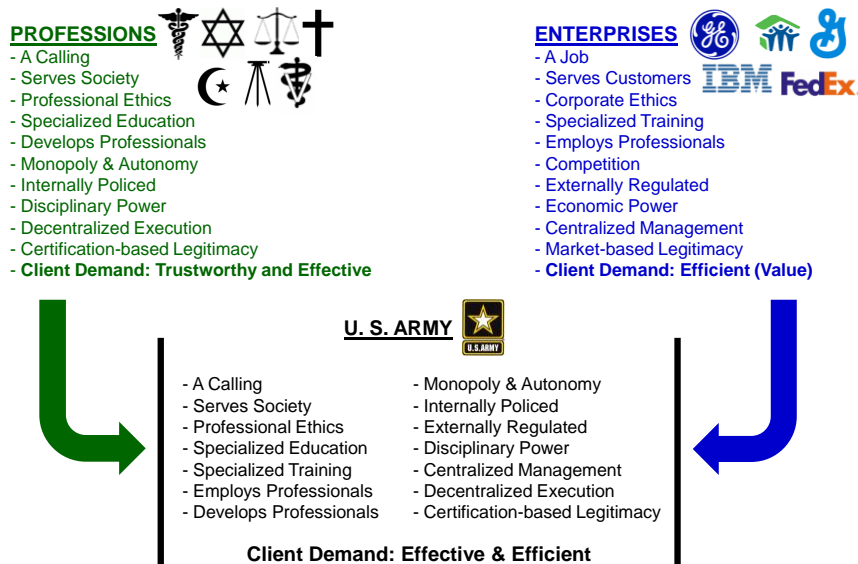
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organizations have bureaucratic tendencies which are necessary in certain sectors, as they provide administrative efficiency. Other key characteristics of bureaucracies, however, include a focus on process rather than people, a relatively lower level of human capital investment, and a workforce that is correspondingly more vocational than professional in composition.<sup>3</sup>

Lastly, Snider identifies “expert work” as the central organizing feature of a profession, work that cannot be done elsewhere within a society. He argues that such work is fundamental to life and security and is essential if the society is to flourish.<sup>4</sup> He also posits that professions require years of education and apprenticeship. In his view, “effectiveness,” not “efficiency,” is at the heart of a profession – to provide health, security, etc., regardless of the cost. In other words, the professional ethic is built upon *trust*, not value - clients know that within a particular jurisdiction, a professional will deliver the most expert and effective work possible.

The work of several other scholars reinforces this view, particularly that of Andrew Abbott, who argues that a profession’s standing in society stems from its control over expert knowledge in a particular jurisdiction (i.e., the profession successfully solves the problems confronting it). If it appears inexpert, the profession loses legitimacy in the society and becomes merely an occupation. Abbott also points out that professions create and expand knowledge, whereas bureaucracies simply apply it.<sup>5</sup>

According to Snider, the jurisdiction in which the Army creates, expands, and effectively applies knowledge is “land combat.”<sup>6</sup> He goes on to explain that in common with other professionals, officers must exercise discretionary judgment in life-or-death situations, synthesizing abstract *knowledge* gained via education or experience with their *skills* and *behaviors* (values, beliefs, motivations, character), to make moral decisions leading to desired outcomes. This is wholly consistent with our arguments about the dimensions of talent and its criticality in life and death situations. In sum, we find Dr. Snider’s views compelling and we agree with them.



**Figure 3. The Army Embodies Aspects of Both a Profession and an Enterprise**

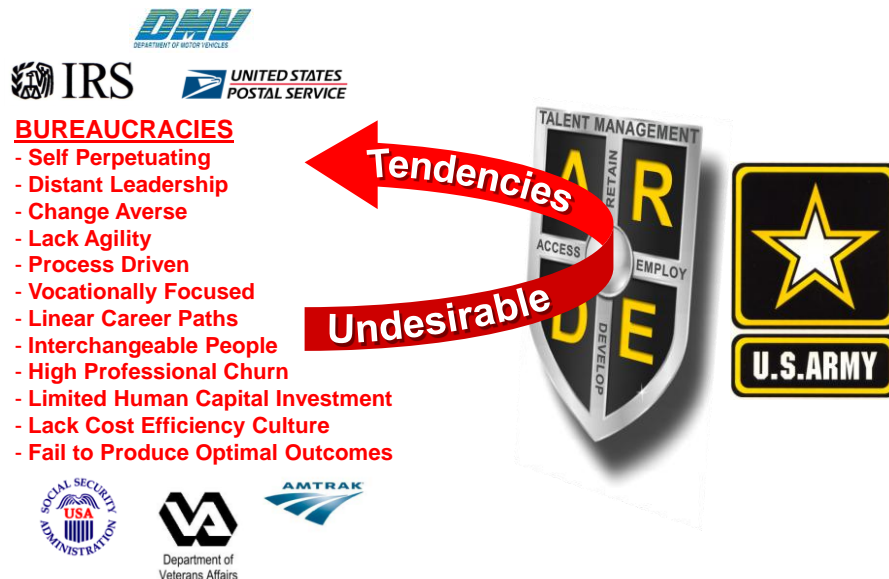
It is clear, however, that the Army embodies aspects of both a profession *and* an enterprise (see **Figure 3**, above). Consider, for example, the medical profession versus the Army profession. Both possess unique expertise in areas of profound human concern. Both have moral imperatives at their

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center, long periods of apprenticeship, and other professional characteristics. There are significant differences, however:

- Much like other multi-disciplined enterprises, the Army employs not just “land combat” professionals, but a variety of others (doctors, lawyers, academic faculty, clergy, etc.). Some of these professionals are produced outside the Army and move laterally into the Officer Corps.
- Unlike doctors, who can choose either private practice or employment by several different healthcare enterprises over their careers, professional Army officers have no self-employment option and are not readily employed elsewhere as “land combat” professionals. They are produced solely by *and* for the U.S. Army, a large, complex, centrally managed enterprise. While there are certainly academic and defense related domains in which former or retired officers can create and expand land combat expertise, they cannot *apply* that knowledge in land combat – they are no longer practitioners within the profession, but alumni working on its periphery instead.
- Officership, unlike other professions, is tied directly to vestment in a defined benefit plan. Officers “retire” from their profession (and simultaneously from the Army enterprise) in their forties and fifties and go on to productive work elsewhere, whereas doctors, lawyers and other professionals generally remain practitioners within those jurisdictions for a lifetime, even as their employment circumstances change. Consider too that former or retired officers do not forfeit the intrinsic value of service in a time-honored and revered profession when they leave the Army, whereas doctors or lawyers who leave their professions at middle-age or earlier most certainly do.
- In a poor economic climate, and given the tremendous share of national resources allocated to the Army, the public increasingly expects it to deliver effective AND efficient service, efficiency remaining a significant facet of “trustworthiness.”

Uniquely, then, officers find themselves working at the confluence of a profession with an enterprise, one possessing necessary bureaucratic tendencies yet simultaneously battling against undesirable ones, some of which Snider identifies in his work. <sup>7</sup> **Figure 4**, below, highlights the undesirable bureaucratic tendencies that both enterprises and professions must guard against if they are to retain their effectiveness, efficiency, and thus legitimacy within the society they serve.



**Figure 4. Talent Management Shields Enterprises from Undesirable Bureaucratic Tendencies**

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Thoughtful officer talent management protects the Army from such tendencies, making it more professional and less bureaucratic. The model we articulated in our SSI monograph series was built upon sound human capital theory and validated via the piloting of several initiatives. It:

- Places greater emphasis upon continuing higher education for officers
- Acknowledges the unique talents of every professional
- Rests upon a behavioral pillar embodying moral character and ethical decision-making
- Calls for tailored career paths rather than a “one-size-fits-all” professional development approach
- Optimizes both employment productivity and developmental learning
- Includes retention programs that emphasize the intrinsic factors of honorable service while acknowledging that extrinsic factors must be thoughtfully managed as the Army competes for professionals in the American labor market
- Makes the Army much more agile in its ability to respond to crises with the right professionals, because it can finally “see” the officer talent it possesses
- Makes the Army more efficient as personnel churn and rework costs are dramatically lowered
- Makes the Army more effective because its professionals are employed optimally
- Focuses upon productive outcomes rather than process

**3. Conclusion.** Officer talent management is not inimical to the maintenance of a professional Officer Corps, but is in fact critical to maintaining and deepening that professionalism.

Please direct questions on this white paper to MAJ David Lyle at david.lyle@us.army.mil or Mr. Mike Colarusso at michael.colarusso@us.army.mil.

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<sup>1</sup> Eliot Friedson, *Professionalism—The Third Logic: On the Practice of Knowledge*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001, in Snider, *Dissent and Strategic Leadership of the Military Professions*, (Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle, PA), 2008, p.9.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.10.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.11.

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Abott, *The System of Professions: an Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p.8.

<sup>6</sup> Snider, p.10.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp.10-11.