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THESIS

**SOF TALENT PROFILES: HOW TO LEVERAGE
PERFORMANCE DATA FOR QUALITATIVE TALENT
MANAGEMENT**

by

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**SOF TALENT PROFILES: HOW TO LEVERAGE PERFORMANCE DATA
FOR QUALITATIVE TALENT MANAGEMENT**

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ABSTRACT

Special Operations Forces (SOF) face a talent retention problem. They currently retain significantly less than their optimal officer manning after their O-3 Key Development positions. One of the main challenges is an impersonal talent management system. SOF organizations collect large amounts of data on their personnel that can be leveraged to address this problem. During assessment, selection, and follow-on training courses, organizations collect standardized psychological, academic, and performance data on each individual.

This thesis proposes a “Talent Profile” that aggregates the assessment and training data into a succinct two-page report. This will aid in optimal billet assignment, mentorship, and personal professional development. This research does not establish any causative or predictive relationships between individual traits and success in specific SOF jobs or promotion potential. The Talent Profile relies on the psychological motivational concept of self-determination theory that seeks to address the innate human needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

The Talent Profile consists of five main components: behavioral, interpersonal relationships, physical fitness, cognitive ability, and personal biographical information. The Talent Profile should travel with recent graduates to their gaining commander, and ultimately be used for periodic key billet selection boards to better adopt a “culture of assessments.”

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

DA	Defense Analysis
DLAB	Defense Language Aptitude Battery
CPT	Captain
DOD	Department of Defense
FFM	Five factor model
CG	Commanding General
IRB	Institutional Review Board
LIWC	Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count
MARFORSOC	Marines Forces Special Operations Command
MARSOF	Marine Special Operations Forces
MG	Major General
NCO	Non-commissioned officer
OER	Officer evaluation record
SDT	Self-determination theory
SEL	Senior enlisted leader
SF	Special Forces
SOCOM	Special Operations Command
SOF	Special Operations Forces
TMTF	Talent Management Task Force
USASOC	United States Army Special Operations Command
UW	Unconventional Warfare

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Special Operations Forces (SOF) have a retention problem. They currently retain significantly less than their optimal officer manning after their O-3 Key Development positions and O-5 Command—critical retention points. One of the main challenges is an impersonal talent management system that does not conduct a thorough analysis of its people and thus does not optimize mentorship and billet assignments. SOF knows there is a retention problem, but it is unclear if SOF has a talent retention problem because talent is not easily identified.

SOF organizations collect large amounts of data on their personnel that can be leveraged to address this problem. During assessment, selection and follow-on training courses, organizations collect standardized psychological, academic, and performance data on each individual. After accession to the operational forces, the data (sometimes over 140 pages) is archived indefinitely.

The proposal of this research was to build a “Talent Profile” that aggregates the assessment and training data into a succinct two-page report. The intent is for this report to leave the ascension with each SOF operator to inform gaining commanders of an individual’s strengths and weaknesses. This could aid in optimal billet assignment, mentorship, and personal professional development.

It is dangerous to attempt to predict future success or promotions based on any profile or analysis, regardless of its breadth. This research does not establish any causative or predictive relationships between individual traits and success in specific SOF jobs, or promotion potential. Rather, it seeks to equip command teams with better information to apply in their formations. It is important to note that this initiative need not be limited to officers; far too often, “Talent Management” only concerns officers and ignores enlisted counterparts. It is equally important that SOF innovate a system that places and develops its non-commissioned officers (NCOs) as it is their officers and warrant officers.

The Talent Profile relies on the psychological motivational concept of Self-determination theory (SDT) that seek to address the innate human needs of autonomy,

competence, and relatedness. SDT has been shown to positively affect performance, relationships, and the overall satisfaction of the individual and the organization.

This research resulted in five components to the Talent Profile: behavioral, interpersonal relationships, physical fitness, cognitive ability, and personal biographical information. Behavioral (psychological profiling) describes the cognitive framework for how the operator makes decisions; interpersonal relationships captures peer review commentary and rankings; physical fitness highlights capabilities compared to the average population and consistency over time; cognitive ability captures application of learned skills in tactical and academic environments; personal biography is the subject's opportunity to highlight experiences and information not captured.

We recommend a two-track implementation. First, the Talent Profile should travel with recent graduates to their gaining commander to aid in their assignment and professional development. Second, the Talent Profile should be updated and utilized for periodic key billet selection boards in order to better adopt a "culture of assessments."

Future research should seek to refine the Talent Profile. Researchers should work with SOCOM training elements to improve data management systems to standardize collection and automate the creation of Talent Profiles.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. THE PROBLEM

Special Operations Forces (SOF) face a retention problem. It is common for SOCOM organizations to retain far less than their optimal officer manning after their O-3 Key Development positions—a critical retention point. One of the main challenges is an impersonal talent management system that does not conduct any summative analysis of its people, and thus does not develop or place them in the right positions. SOF knows there is a retention problem, but it is unclear if SOF has a *talent retention* problem because they do not know who their talent is. This should not be mistaken as SOCOM not having talent, quite the opposite, but more so a failure of the organization to understand its people on a deep enough level to manage them and affect change.

During SOCOM's respective assessment and selection and follow-on training pipeline, a host of psychological/academic/performance evaluations create a mountain of data on each individual operator. After a student graduates, this data (sometimes over 140 pages) is archived and never used again; SOF officers could go 12 years before they are holistically evaluated again for Battalion Command. This thesis proposes that SOF aggregate this data into a "Talent Profile" that aids commanders in talent placement and development, the long-term goal of which is to increase individual job satisfaction and thus retention. Numerous studies and surveys, one of which conducted by the authors, indicate that a more personalized approach to talent management would aid job performance and retention.

B. A PROPOSED SOLUTION

To make use of existing operator assessment data, this research developed a user-friendly template for a "Talent Profile" that accumulates the vast assessment, selection, and training pipeline data into five categories: behavioral (psychological profiling), interpersonal, physical fitness, cognitive, and personal biography. This profile is designed to help unit commanders place their newly-hired servicemember (SM) in the right job/team

and develop them by understanding their strengths and weaknesses as observed over a long period of time and by multiple groups of people.

Previous research suggests several reasons why talent profiles are important. Corporations such as Google, Facebook, and American Express employ talent profiles to more holistically evaluate and place their people.¹ As a result, they have seen reduced turnover rates, higher employee satisfaction and thus better performance.² Previous Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) theses offer clear implementation strategies for talent management solutions such as talent matching profiles and more holistic evaluations.³ Consistent with this research, the Department of Defense (DOD) suggests that developing more qualitative talent management systems is a future goal.⁴ The key theme among many expert recommendations is to apply more personalized talent management solutions to an organization's workforce. SOF has the most data available to best exploit this opportunity gap but has not yet built this capability in a systematic fashion. SOF is under-utilizing resources and data available that could help it better place officers in billets that would maximize their talents, increase job satisfaction and performance, and ultimately aid retention.

This thesis recommends that each pipeline graduate leaves with a) a two-page "Talent Profile" that goes to their gaining commands and b) a more in-depth Individual Development Plan that remains with the profiled servicemember as a tool to help them improve. It is important to note that this initiative need not be limited to officers; far too often, "Talent Management" only concerns officers and ignores enlisted counterparts. It is

¹ Leighanne Levensaler, "Talent Assessment and Planning at American Express," *Bersin and Associates*, 2008, <http://www.orgmetrics.com/images/whitepapers/OMITalentAssessmentandPlanningatAmericanExpress.pdf>.

² Brian S Cook, "Getting It Right: Revamping Army Talent Management" (Monterey, California, USA, Naval Postgraduate School, 2015).

³ Ian B MacGregor and Jared D Tomberlin, "Teamharmony: Employing Matchmaking Algorithms to Team-Building" (Monterey, California, USA, Naval Postgraduate School, 2017).

⁴ Matthew Donovan, "Preserving Our Competitive Advantage: Personnel and Readiness Strategy 2030" (Department of Defense Personnel and Readiness, October 2020), https://prhome.defense.gov/Portals/52/Documents/Strategy/PR_Strategy_FINAL_.pdf?ver=KY6Vacn3kT1Gd9fNxnR34w%3D%3D.

equally important that SOF innovate a system that places and develops its non-commissioned officers (NCOs) as they place and develop their officers, and this model should then be expanded to the larger DOD.

This thesis first discusses DOD's background with respect to talent management and provides an overview of key academic theories that informed talent profiling strategies. It will then detail and explain a proposed Talent Profile for implementation in SOCOM. Finally, it will provide recommendations for implementation of this Talent Profile and future research opportunities.

C. SOF TALENT PROFILE DEVELOPMENT

During development of a roadmap for the construction of the Talent Profile, we used a phased approach that included incremental interviews and surveys, followed by changes to the profile, ultimately resulting in a finalized Talent Profile and brief to the respective commanding generals (CGs) on their organization's implementation. This phased approach sought to further emphasize the trialability, observability, and low-complexity aspects of the Talent Profile, though the final product will require training software compilation.

Before any of the survey or interview process started, we completed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process to approve human subjects' research. In this, we ensured the safe handling of anonymous assessment and training data, online surveys, and in-person interviews with the command team. We compiled sanitized versions of performance "packets" from the respective training pipelines. This required support of the respective SOF schoolhouses in compiling de-identified data, appropriately protecting the information, and securely transmitting to us.

Our endeavor to condense 140 pages of data into a succinct profile required detailed analysis of what aspects go into job placement and satisfaction. Relying on vocational selection literature and theories about successful innovation adoption were critical to development of our Talent Profile. Specifically, we concentrated on principles that would aid in assigning billets based on capabilities, and in a situation where the personnel feel community with coworkers. We overlaid these domains onto the available information

collected at initial entry Assessment/Selection courses and training pipelines; though vast, it does contain several recurring themes. From this process five key data sections emerged: behavioral (psychological testing), interpersonal relationships, physical fitness, cognitive ability, and personal biographical information. In the following paragraphs we will provide an overview as to what those fields entail.

II. BACKGROUND

A. INTRODUCTION

Currently, Special Operations Forces (SOF) are retaining historically low rates of captains (O-3). This is the population most susceptible to separation due to career timelines; most officers are in years 8–10 of service, where it is still economical to leave service and pursue a civilian career with lucrative future earning potential. One needs to look no further than elite graduate school programs to see that they are actively recruiting SOF officers, who are responding to their overtures in droves.⁵ Army Special Forces (SF) Cohorts 2009–2012, for example, are between 40–50% optimal manning going into their Major (O-4) boards. This chapter will describe the problem, detail previous efforts to solve it, then highlight ongoing and future initiatives.

B. DIAGNOSIS OF THE PROBLEM

There have been many attempts to diagnose the root causes of retention issues, and rightfully so—there is no one simple panacea to fix such a complex human issue. Hacking 4 Defense⁶—a joint academic and DOD collaboration to foster solutions to complex problems—sought to further investigate talent management issues in Army Special Forces (SF) in 2018, concluding:

Our conversations with Captains have revealed that an abundance of the factors which cause individuals to leave the military are highly avoidable. Many of the individuals we talked to stated that a ‘nudge’ in the right direction, better communication, career management, career control, or more understanding of their family situation or goals would have caused them to stay. In many cases, USASOC could make simple and cost-effective

⁵ “Members of the Military,” Harvard Business School, accessed November 5, 2021, <https://www.hbs.edu/mba/student-life/campus-community/Pages/military.aspx>.

⁶ “About the Hacking for Defense Course,” Hacking for Defense, accessed October 27, 2021, <https://www.h4d.us/about-h4d>.

changes to fix some of the most avoidable factors which cause Captains to leave the military.⁷

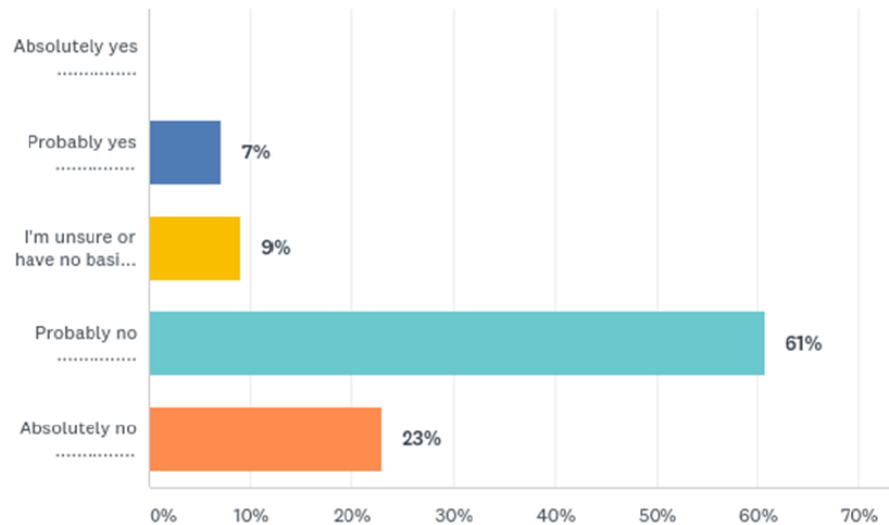
If Special Operations leaders were confident that they retained top performers, this statistic would not be alarming. For example, a population of outstanding officers, even manned at 65%, is not a significant cause for concern. But according to the study, a majority of CPTs (84%) do not believe their highest-quality peers remain to continue service.⁸ While not a scientific measure of the situation, it does clearly indicate that the “peer review” process determined that SF is not retaining the best. Worse yet, SOF has no way of verifying the survey’s results, since it does not collect or analyze the summarized performance data. With only (often subjective) evaluation reports from superiors to determine future potential, the organization cannot rigorously determine just *who* it is losing.

⁷ Dan Warner et al., “The Future of U.S. Army Special Forces Talent Management” (University of Colorado Boulder: Hacking 4 Defense, 2017), None.

⁸ A.W. Simmons, “A Special Report on SF Talent Management” (Army Human Resources Command: Special Forces Branch, July 1, 2019), None.

Q14: In your observation and experience, is the SF Regiment retaining your highest-quality peers for future service as SF Battalion Commanders and beyond?

Answered: 153 Skipped: 9



84% of respondents do not believe their most talented peers were retained

Figure 1. SF Officer Survey Results⁹

In a 2018 study with Colorado University and 10th Special Forces Group, Hacking 4 Defense recommended that:

Every Special Forces Officer is a talented and highly qualified individual who would be welcomed by other branches of the Army, outside agencies, and businesses. In the future...the Regiment would be best served not by asking which officers are the most talented, but instead what specific talents do each of their officers hold.¹⁰

All services use a similar standard evaluation form, and while a very effective tool for communicating performance and promotion potential, it often promotes those who want to stay in versus the top talent. An often-heard concern is “not wanting to waste a top rating on a person who is getting out.” The evaluation tool can then become a self-fulfilling prophecy and thus skew Command’s ability to determine exactly who it is losing. The

⁹ Simmons, “A Special Report on SF Talent Management.”

¹⁰ Warner et al., “The Future of U.S. Army Special Forces Talent Management.” 4.

Army Talent Management Task Force (TMTF) seemingly concurs, noting this metric's limitations and pushing to adopt a "culture of assessments" to augment the officer evaluation rating (OER). Major General (MG) JP McGee—director of the Talent Management Task Force—noted, "we do not know whether we're retaining talent or not because we do not know what we want to measure."¹¹ MG McGee highlights a current initiative, but in no way is this a new problem or a new research field.

C. PREVIOUS STUDIES

There is robust research literature addressing how to retain top performers in both the corporate world and the military. As early as 1997, scholars at the Harvard Business Press coined the phrase "the War for Talent."¹² More recently, the DOD has brought talent retention to the forefront of its "Force of the Future" initiative.¹³ In 2018, Congress granted sweeping personnel policy changes that allow military officers greater flexibility in their career progression and more merit-based promotion systems.¹⁴

Tim Kane provides among the most well-formed analyses of the situation. Kane, a former Air Force officer turned economist, argues in his book *Bleeding Talent* that the military is losing talented officers who could win the nation's future wars due to an obsolete personnel management system rooted in 1950s industrial practices.¹⁵ This results in disheartened officers who joined the military at the prospect of adventure but leave the service after an initial tour and a significant "brain drain." The DOD has not only been

¹¹ The U.S. Army, *Army Talent Management Leader Professional Development Briefing*, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0C8WG4Z5fTw>.

¹² Ed Michaels, Helen Handfield-Jones, and Beth Axelrod, *The War For Talent* (Harvard Business School Press, 2001).

¹³ Robert Brown, "Talent Management Concept of Operations for Force 2025 and Beyond" (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, September 2015), <https://ipps-a.army.mil/wp-content/uploads/Talent-Management-Concept-of-Operations-for-Force-2025-and-Beyond.pdf>.

¹⁴ Mac Thornberry, "H.R.2810 - 115th Congress (2017-2018): National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018," December 12, 2017, 2017/2018, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2810>.

¹⁵ Tim Kane, *Bleeding Talent: How the U.S. Military Mismanages Great Leaders and Why It's Time for a Revolution* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

fighting an internal battle of overall retention, but it struggles to keep its most talented officers. In his 2010 survey of West Point graduates from six classes over 15 years, Kane found that 45 percent of those surveyed responded that “about half of the best leave” and another 45 percent said that “MOST of the best leave.”¹⁶ In a follow-up survey, the authors found, “Of the respondents, 90 percent agreed that the best officers would be more likely to stay if ‘the military was more of a meritocracy.’”¹⁷ These results overwhelmingly indicated a dissatisfaction with the promotion system due to its lack of meritocracy and inflexibility in planning the futures of surveyed officers. He suggests that the military would be best suited to let officers return to the military to avoid the costs of “starting over” with a new cohort of recruits that require more extensive training. Kane proposes clear solutions to remedy this situation: he recommends implementing a more flexible “marketplace” solution to job placement and promotions. He suggests allowing market-based reforms that utilize flexibility as the strongest retention tool.¹⁸ Specifically, this would involve switching from the “All Volunteer Force” of the past to the “Total Volunteer Force” which emphasizes officers’ freedom to leave or re-enter service when convenient to them.

Lieutenant General (retired) David Barno and Nora Bensahel further explore these issues in a 2015 expose in *The Atlantic*, titled “Can the U.S. Military Halt Its Brain Drain?”¹⁹ They note the surprise in the defense policy community at then-SECDEF Ash Carter’s “Force of the Future” strategy focusing primarily on talent management, vice higher-profile options like cyber or new aircraft carriers. Highlighting dissatisfaction amongst the officer corps, they reveal that only 6% of survey correspondents believe the

¹⁶ Kane, 95.

¹⁷ Kane, 99.

¹⁸ Tim Kane, “Bleeding Talent: The U.S. Military’s Leadership Breakdown,” Harvard Business Review, November 17, 2010, <https://hbr.org/2010/11/bleeding-talent-the-us-militar>.

¹⁹ David Barno and Nora Bensahel, “Can the US Military Halt Its Brain Drain?,” *The Atlantic*, November 5, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/11/us-military-tries-halt-brain-drain/413965/>.

military is retaining its best officers.²⁰ They summarize the importance of focusing on talent management before all else:

His [LTG Barno] surprising logic is that winning the unpredictable next war will be less about advanced war machines and silicon chips than about out-thinking the enemy, and having a force chock-full of bright, adaptive leaders who can quickly navigate complex problems under the intense time pressures of modern combat. To Carter, winning the next war is all about talent.²¹

Tony Kochanski further investigates aviator retention issues, specifically in the Navy, as part of the U.S. Naval Institute's *Proceedings* issue of March 2018. He posits that above all else, retention is a complex issue in that it attempts to account for human factors considerations in a diverse and large talent pool. He ultimately suggests, though, that "senior Navy leaders have yet to display an understanding of the marketplace for talent...The package needs to be competitive, not just marginally improved, to compete in a "war for talent."²² Similar to Trodahl, he suggests a radical change in engagement strategy from commanders to subordinates, aiming for qualitative and individually-focused talent management strategies. By focusing on unique individuals and deliberately placing them in the organization, their satisfaction increases, and thus their retention.

In July 2020, Trodahl completed a study on aviator retention issues as part of a thesis at Johns Hopkins. Similar to other findings, when one expects to find compensation at the core of the issue, the results are more altruistic. He found that "overall job satisfaction most affected USN TACAIR aviators' decisions on whether to remain or leave the military, even more so than the state of the economy and airline hiring."²³ He similarly found that while investigating the root causes of job satisfaction, interactions with commanders and

²⁰ Bensahel.

²¹ Bensahel.

²² Tony Kochanski, "The Road to Retention Is Paved with Good Intentions," *U.S. Naval Institute's Proceedings*, no. March 2018 (March 1, 2018): 4, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2018/march/road-retention-paved-good-intentions>.

²³ Aaron Trodahl, "Re-examining the US Navy Pilot Retention Crisis" (Baltimore, Maryland, Johns Hopkins University, 2020), <https://jscholarship.library.jhu.edu/bitstream/handle/1774.2/63256/TRODAHL-CAPSTONE-2020.pdf?sequence=1>.

job placement was key. He concludes that “the data specifically illustrated that one’s experience with squadron leadership and nonflying duties affected their sense of job satisfaction.”²⁴ This further validates the notion that quality engagement and management routinely matter more than pure compensation, as it pertains to retention and job satisfaction.

D. NEW OBSTACLES TO AN OLD PROBLEM

Unfortunately, the incentives for an officer to separate before completing a full career have only increased since the publication of *Bleeding Talent*. While larger efforts remain to offer flexibility in career paths and employ retention bonuses, the challenge of qualitative talent management innovation may fall to SOCOM. As a traditional agent of innovation, SOCOM stands to pioneer personalized talent management solutions via talent profiles that can then be employed at higher service levels. Younger generations are increasingly attracted to dual-employment marriages, as the workforce continues to diversify and the constant short-duration moves of an active-duty military life challenge the modern marital work arrangement.²⁵ This system still stresses single-employment families but is especially harmful to spouses who need to maintain their professional careers. Rather than continually asking their spouse to suffer professionally, officers sometimes choose to exit the service. Compounding this is the scarcity of military bases near major metropolitan areas. Though some services have large bases near cities like Seattle and Washington, DC, a majority of assignments are in remote locations of the U.S. like Fort Polk, Louisiana or Twenty-Nine Palms, California, where spouses cannot find employment.²⁶

²⁴ Trodahl.

²⁵ Pew Research Center, “The American Family Today” (Pew Research Center’s Social & Demographic Trends Project, December 17, 2015), <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2015/12/17/1-the-american-family-today/>.

²⁶ Margaret C. Harrell et al., “Working Around the Military: Challenges of Military Spouse Employment” (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, November 25, 2005), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9056.html.

Moreover, while military officer compensation is competitive with the civilian market, the introduction of the Blended Retirement System (BRS) removes another incentive for a 20+ year career in the generous pension.²⁷ BRS offers matching contributions throughout an officer's career in exchange for a lower retirement pension percentage, but this also significantly reduces the opportunity cost of leaving mid-career and giving up one's pension.

Previous talent management systems within the DOD are based off of industrial age management. In the height of 1950s' manufacturing sectors, interoperability at all leadership positions was valued. This practice led to managers who would rise the ranks having served in all the positions underneath their current job. Unfortunately, this also led to a "one size fits all" career path that did not tolerate deviations.²⁸

This inflexible mindset can lead complex organizations like the DOD to overlook unique talent that might not fit in certain roles but excel in others. This is further exacerbated by a centralized human resource planning model that overlooked talent, even when the organization was trying its best to find them. In this model, a branch representative at the respective Human Resources Command (called a branch manager, monitor, or detailer) would look at the slate of available jobs signaled by the service's units, and then at their respective population of servicemembers, to decide who would fill each job. Detailers attempted to keep a list of the desires of the servicemembers under their scope, but were often overwhelmed and not able to properly match the servicemember to

²⁷ "Blended Retirement," Defense Finance and Accounting Service, accessed November 5, 2021, <https://militarypay.defense.gov/blendedretirement/>.

²⁸ Peter Cappelli, "Talent Management for the Twenty-First Century," *Harvard Business Review* 86 (April 1, 2008): 74–81, 133.

the right job.²⁹ This model is still used throughout the DOD, though things are changing to allow increased transparency and autonomy of officers in their assignments.³⁰

E. THERE IS HOPE—CURRENT TALENT MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES

The talent management system is not entirely lost, however. While attempts to rectify Talent Management span the DOD, the Army Chief of Staff, GEN McConville, placed it as his top priority effort.³¹ Immediately establishing a Talent Management Task Force (TMTF), its members began immediately addressing issues that Kane and others identified.³² The task force started initiatives such as the following:

1. Command Assessment Program (CAP) – prospective O-5/O-6 Commanders attend a week-long assessment that measures their leadership potential through subordinate reviews, psychological and behavioral assessments, leadership stress events, and a final board interview
2. Army Interactive Module 2.0 (AIM 2.0) - provides a “Monster for the Army” jobs marketplace that advertises all available jobs and allows officers to directly interview with units of their choice
3. Career Intermission Program (CIP) - which allows sabbaticals for up to three years.³³

²⁹ Army Talent Management Task Force, “More than Half of Officers Receive Top Choice in First ATAP Cycle,” www.army.mil, accessed October 27, 2021, https://www.army.mil/article/232041/more_than_half_of_officers_receive_top_choice_in_first_atap_cycle.

³⁰ Matthew Cox, “Here Are the Results from the First Round of the Army’s New Assignment Process,” *Military.com*, February 7, 2020, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2020/02/06/here-are-results-first-round-armys-new-assignment-process.html>.

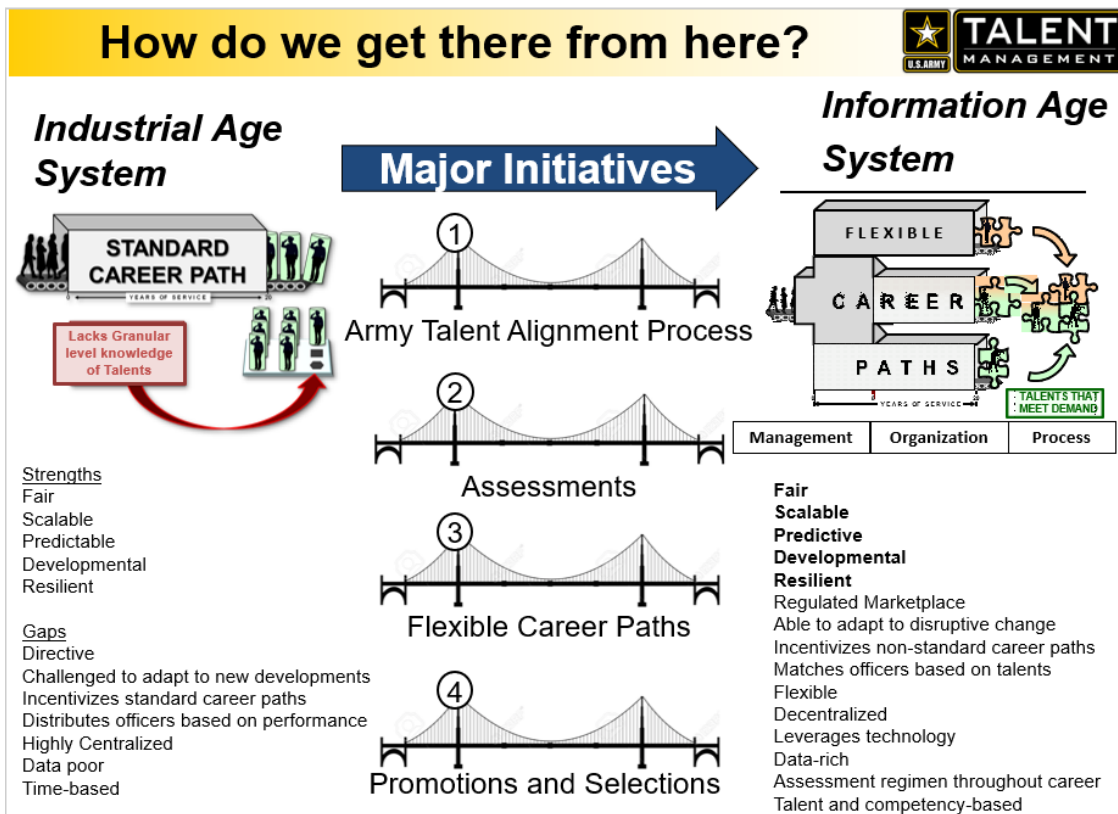
³¹ Kyle Rempfer, “New Talent Management System Starts with the Guard, Moves Soon to the Entire Force, Chief Says,” *Army Times*, September 3, 2019, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2019/09/03/new-talent-management-system-starts-with-the-guard-moves-soon-to-the-entire-force-chief-says/>.

³² “Career Intermission Program (CIP),” U.S. Army Talent Management, accessed August 27, 2021, <https://talent.army.mil/cip/>.

³³ “Commander’s Assessment Program (CAP),” U.S. Army Talent Management, accessed August 27, 2021, <https://talent.army.mil/cap/>.

4. Army Talent Alignment Process (ATAP) - a new placement system that seeks to both match knowledge, skills, behaviors and preferences (KSB-Ps)

The Army Talent Management Task Force (TMTF) describes their overall campaign plan, visualizing the move from an industrial age to information age system, below:



Moving from an Industrial Age System requires personalized assignments, a culture of assessments, flexibility in career management, and more deliberate analysis of commanders.

Figure 2. Army Talent Management Campaign Plan³⁴

³⁴ "Army Talent Management Campaign Plan," U.S. Army Talent Management, accessed November 7, 2021, <https://talent.army.mil/atap/>.

Of specific note in recent successful initiatives is the roll-out of AIM 2.0, as a means of prioritizing autonomy. Autonomy simply allows officers to apply for jobs that best suit their unique circumstances; there is no way such a large organization can capture these and make the best decision. AIM 2.0 removes the middleman who previously made decisions (Human Resources Command) and instead changes them to a “facilitator” role. Within AIM 2.0, now officers can screen the available jobs, rank preferences, and apply/interview with the gaining unit. Within this process is a more robust resume document that highlights non-traditional skillsets that benefit the unit that would otherwise not be readily available in the old system. Afterwards, both the officer and the gaining unit rank order their preferences, hoping for a “1-to-1” match. This marketplace offers a framework from which more data can be utilized, such as psychological evaluations and peer reviews, providing hiring units a more holistic picture of who they are interviewing. Yet this initiative is specific to the Army with little or no parallel efforts among the other service branches. All these efforts aim at competing for existing talent, and have good results, but generally lack the holistic personnel data to inform the nascent processes.

F. SOCOM’S ADVANTAGE

The promising news is that there are untapped resources that can be allocated to these talent management efforts, and SOCOM could lead the way in innovating new talent management products for the larger services to use. Eliot Cohen argues in “Commandos and Politicians” that SOF can “try out new doctrines, test their validity, and then spread them to the rest of the force.”³⁵ Special Operations organizations are routinely tasked with innovating for their parent service due to their small size, agile mindset, specially-selected personnel, and unique permissions.³⁶ Just as they develop tactical capabilities such as drones and software, SOF could also innovate in talent management to provide scaled solutions to their parent service. In this instance, SOCOM units could assist their respective

³⁵ Eliot Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians: Elite Military Units in Modern Democracies* (Cambridge, MA: Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 1978).

³⁶ Leo Blanken, Justin Davis, and Philip Swintek, “Special Operations as an Innovation Laboratory,” *War on the Rocks*, February 25, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/02/special-operations-as-an-innovation-laboratory/>.

parent services by compiling personalized and qualitative talent data into a profile that aids placement and development.

The respective SOF organizations are staffed with professionals such as operational psychologists, strength and conditioning coaches, cognitive performance coaches, nutritionists, and physical therapists. Both in their training pipelines and at their units, SOF elements have the tools and funding necessary to develop a qualitative look at their people through the data they already collect during years of training. During their assessment and follow-on training pipelines, a host of psychological, academic, and performance evaluations create a mountain of data on each individual operator.

SOCOM could conduct billet assignments and mentorship programs that are personalized to the individual operator at a minimal cost. SOF personnel are poised to take the next step forward in military talent management. This is vital not only for the institutional health of SOCOM organizations, but for national security in an age of increasingly demanding hybrid or gray zone warfare. Retaining and rewarding the most talented SOF personnel is critical to maintain a force suited to strategic competition.

With this in mind, SOCOM should take every available measure to holistically evaluate its people and place them in the most beneficial positions as a means of increasing satisfaction, performance, and retention. After all, happy operators make for unhappy adversaries.

III. TAKING THE RIGHT PATH

A. INTRODUCTION

The DOD personnel management system is out-of-date with many contemporary theories and innovations. Prior to attempting a massive overhaul of the current system, the DOD should understand contemporary research that can increase employee proficiency and job satisfaction. Most notably the progression of vocational assignment theories has evolved to embrace Self-determination Theory (SDT).

As shown previously, Tim Kane presented significant statistical evidence to validate the openly expressed negative sentiment towards retention.³⁷ Nearly every single service member has heard their peers say, “I can’t wait to get out,” and although everyone’s reasons are slightly different, the system can be altered to address current grievances with personnel management. In this chapter we will discuss how SDT was developed and how it can be applied to the DOD personnel management system.

B. JOB PLACEMENT THEORIES

The concept of vocational proficiency has a long history. Frank Parsons’s *Choosing a Vocation*, which was published posthumously in 1909, remains a logical starting point for any discussion.³⁸ For decades this framework was vital to career counselors and the work force, but more importantly this process sparked further research that led to John Holland’s personality model in 1959.³⁹ This personality model sorted people into six personality groups: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and

³⁷ Kane, *Bleeding Talent: How the U.S. Military Mismanages Great Leaders and Why It’s Time for a Revolution*.

³⁸ Frank Parsons, *Choosing a Vocation* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1909); David B. Baker, “Choosing a Vocation at 100: Time, Change, and Context,” *The Career Development Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (March 2009): 203. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0045.2009.tb00105.x>.

³⁹ John L. Holland, “A Theory of Vocational Choice,” *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 6, no. 1 (1959): 35–45. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0040767>.

conventional.⁴⁰ The evolution of personality models continued but Holland's model was notable because individual personality was now recognized as a very important part of job placement.

Most DOD assessment and selection programs do not use Parsons's or Holland's works because they have been superseded by a newer model pictured below in Figure 3. The personality model used by Marine Special Operations Forces (MARSOFF) is the five-factor model (FFM) developed by Robert R. McCrae and Oliver P. John.⁴¹ McCrae and John proposed a "hierarchical organization of personality traits in terms of five basic dimensions: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience."⁴² The FFM consensus is not perfect, but it has allowed increased cooperation in research and it continues to be used by SOF organizations.

⁴⁰ Patrick Ian Armstrong et al., "Holland's RIASEC Model as an Integrative Framework for Individual Differences," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 55, no. 1 (January 2008): 2, <http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.nps.edu/10.1037/0022-0167.55.1.1>.

⁴¹ Robert R. McCrae and Oliver P. John, "An Introduction to the Five-Factor Model and Its Applications," *Journal of Personality* 60, no. 2 (1992): 175, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1992.tb00970.x>.

⁴² McCrae and John, "An Introduction to the Five-Factor Model and Its Applications," 175.



Figure 3. Five Factor Model Basic Graphical Depiction.⁴³

The FFM arose from a 1961 study by Ernest Tupes and Raymond Christal that found “Five fairly strong and recurrent factors emerged from each analysis.”⁴⁴ This discovery did not immediately diffuse across personality research, but in 1990, McCrae and John demonstrated that “all five factors were shown to have convergent and discriminant validity across instruments and observers, and to endure across decades in adults.”⁴⁵ This consistency is critical for continual analysis of personalities during their careers.

The complexity of personality will continue to be debated, and the FFM will certainly be challenged and modified. No theory can explain everything, especially a model that takes on the monumental task of describing personality. But McCrae and John point out that for nearly 40 years, “personality psychology has worked to establish the validity

⁴³ Jocelyn Campbell, “5 Factor Model,” Farther to Go, last modified December 23 2017, https://farthertogo.com/diving-ocean-personality-traits/5-factor-model-graphic_001/.

⁴⁴ Ernest C. Tupes and Raymond E. Christal, “Recurrent Personality Factors Based on Trait Ratings,” *Journal of Personality* 60, no. 2 (June 1992): 225, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1992.tb00973.x>.

⁴⁵ McCrae and John, 176.

of its basic constructs.”⁴⁶ In current SOF selections and assessments, operational psychologists use the FFM likely because of what McCrae and John describe as “its long history, cross-cultural replication, and empirical validation across many methods make the five-factor model a basic discovery of personality psychology—core knowledge upon which other findings can be built.”⁴⁷

SOF personnel are some of the most heavily screened, evaluated, assessed, and trained members of any work force. This required screening is due to the uniqueness of the career skill set, the inordinate stress, and the responsibilities inherent to their operations. This intense scrutiny should not end at the initial assessment and assignment of SOF personnel. FFM assessments, when combined with performance data, offer SOF organizations a tool to apply an additional theory to personnel management. SOF organizations already have the data, wide career field capability, and organizational culture to become the leaders in employment of a new personnel management system based off another empirically validated psychological theory that offers important insights on motivation: self-determination theory.

C. A REVIEW OF SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY

Self-determination theory (SDT) is based on the satisfaction of universal psychological needs and their dramatic effects on human motivation. The research that led Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan to develop self-determination theory began nearly 50 years ago as they studied different types of motivation.⁴⁸ They proposed that the type of motivation can predict performance, relationships, and the overall well-being of the individual and the organization. In the mid-1980s, Deci and Ryan published their first comprehensive work that demonstrated the value of autonomous motivation compared to

⁴⁶ McCrae and John, 207.

⁴⁷ McCrae and John, 207

⁴⁸ R. M. Ryan and E. L. Deci, *Self-Determination Theory: Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2017), <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1521/978.14625/28806>.

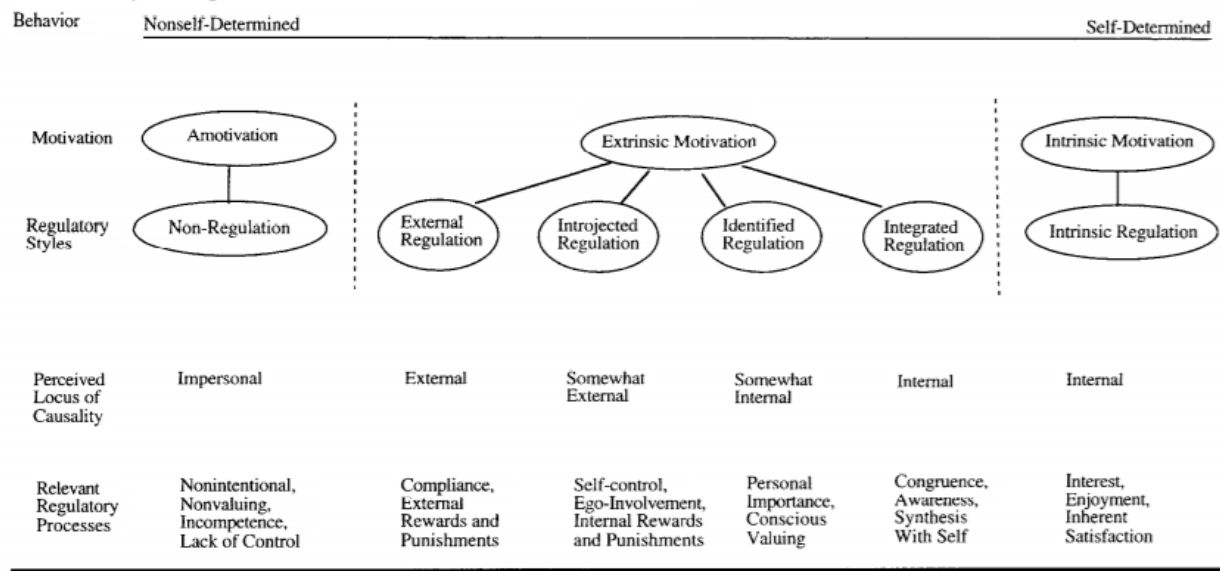
controlled motivation.⁴⁹ Since that initial publication, the field has exploded in scope and participants. SDT continues to evolve, particularly in its application, but there are constants that remain.

SDT portrays the different types of motivation as a spectrum. In reference to Figure 4 below, motivation is primarily extrinsic or intrinsic. Intrinsic motivation sparks activity due to the resulting positive feelings, while extrinsic motivation typically leverages an expectation for a reward or a desire to avoid punitive measures.⁵⁰ Interestingly, a systematic combination of over 100 experiments on this topic demonstrates that motivation through physical or financial rewards generally *decreases* intrinsic motivation regardless of “ages, activities, rewards, and reward contingencies.”⁵¹ Extrinsic rewards traditionally result in a decreased sense of autonomy, which is one of the three aspects of autonomous motivation. Regardless, to maximize SDT’s autonomous motivation requires analysis of the interplay between an individual’s extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

⁴⁹ R. M. Ryan and E. L. Deci, “Conceptualizations of Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination” in *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior* (New York: Plenum, 1985). 11–40. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4899-2271-7>

⁵⁰ R. M. Ryan and E. L. Deci, “Facilitating Optimal Motivation and Psychological Well-Being Across Life’s Domains,” *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne* 49, no. 1 (2008): 15. https://selfdeterminationtheory.org/SDT/documents/2008_DeciRyan_CanPsy_Eng.pdf.

⁵¹ Ryan and Deci, “Facilitating Optimal Motivation and Psychological Well-Being Across Life’s Domains,” 15.



The three types of motivation, regulatory styles, processes, and perceived locus of causality.

Figure 4. Depiction of SDT's Continuum of Motivation.⁵²

Ryan and Deci's development of SDT led to a distinction between two types of motivation: autonomous or controlled.⁵³ Autonomous motivation is driven via internal sources or an external motivator that aligns with a personal value.⁵⁴ In contrast, controlled motivation is primarily driven by external regulation, often through a reward or punishment, or by internal factors such as approval seeking, shame, externally based self-esteem, and other ego-driven emotions.⁵⁵ Much like the Special Operations Truth of "Quality is better than quantity" in personnel, motivation holds to a similar principle;

⁵² R. M. Ryan and E. L. Deci, "Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being," *American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (2000): 68–78. <https://doi.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2F0003-066X.55.1.68>

⁵³ R. M. Ryan and E. L. Deci, "Self-Determination Theory: A Macrotheory of Human Motivation, Development, and Health," *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne* 49, no. 3 (August 2008): 182–85, <http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.nps.edu/10.1037/a0012801>.

⁵⁴ Ryan and Deci, "Self-Determination Theory: A Macrotheory of Human Motivation, Development, and Health," 182.

⁵⁵ Ryan and Deci, "Self-Determination Theory: A Macrotheory of Human Motivation, Development, and Health," 182.

People need better motivation, not more.⁵⁶ Ryan and Deci continue to describe how dozens of experiments and decades of field studies have confirmed that “autonomous motivation has been associated with greater persistence; more positive affect; enhanced performance, especially on heuristic activities; and greater psychological well-being.”⁵⁷

So how do employers maximize autonomous motivation? By incorporating the three pillars of SDT employers can encourage autonomous motivation.⁵⁸ Maximizing autonomous motivation is a noble endeavor for individual development and for effective leaders who encourage it within the organization. Organizations should recognize that autonomous motivation comes from leveraging Ryan and Deci’s well-studied “universality of basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.”⁵⁹ An increase in autonomous motivation ultimately can have major effects on employee satisfaction, retention, proficiency, organizational innovation, and overall effectiveness. To aid in the quest for autonomous motivation, a review of the three primary components of autonomous motivation is required.

The terms of SDT are relatively easy to understand. Competence is the need for knowledge, skills, and a desire for improvement in pursuit of mastery. Relatedness is the connection to people and networks of other human beings. Autonomy is the only term that requires a more precise definition due to its common usage; “it means to act volitionally, with a sense of choice.”⁶⁰ Deci and Ryan stress that autonomy is not independence. They further elaborate that autonomy should not be feared:

⁵⁶ United States Special Operations Command, *2022 Fact Book* (Tampa, FL: USSOCOM Office of Communication, 2021), 57, <https://www.socom.mil/latest-factbook>.

⁵⁷ Ryan and Deci, “Facilitating Optimal Motivation and Psychological Well-Being Across Life’s Domains,” 17.

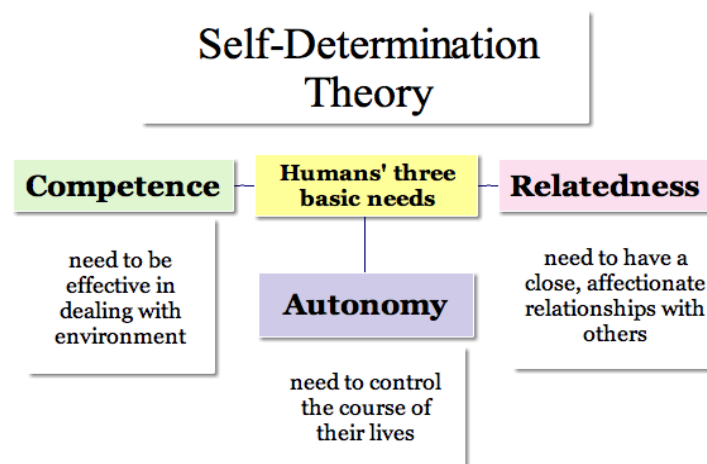
⁵⁸ Ryan and Deci, “Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being,” 72.

⁵⁹ Ryan and Deci, “Facilitating Optimal Motivation and Psychological Well-Being Across Life’s Domains,” 18.

⁶⁰ Ryan and Deci, “Facilitating Optimal Motivation and Psychological Well-Being Across Life’s Domains,” 15.

People have often feared autonomy because they have equated it with individualism. But because humans are not just individuals, but rather social creatures who seek competence and relatedness, their nature is not, in its most integrated forms, selfish. It is a synthesis of self with others. Thus, ultimately the most integrated persons are not those who act only on their own behalf but also with others in mind. We are, at our best, a synthesis of autonomy and relatedness.⁶¹

Independence is at odds with the three psychological human needs. Understanding autonomy in this manner may help alleviate reasonable concerns from leaders who fear independence in an organization that requires high degrees of relatedness. Author and psychology researcher Courtney Ackerman provides a useful visual depiction of SDT's basic needs below.⁶²



The Three Pillars of SDT reflect human beings' three basic needs for job satisfaction.

Figure 5. Self-Determination Theory Depicted Graphically.⁶³

⁶¹ Ryan and Deci, *Self-Determination Theory: Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness*, 648.

⁶² Courtney E. Ackerman, "Self-Determination Theory of Motivation: Why Intrinsic Motivation Matters," PositivePsychology.com, last modified, June 21, 2018, <https://positivepsychology.com/self-determination-theory/>.

⁶³ Ackerman, Self-Determination Theory of Motivation: Why Intrinsic Motivation Matters."

Autonomous motivation is the foundation of SDT. SOF personnel already are highly motivated individuals, especially during the assignment immediately following their accession into the community. The question remains of how to continue to sustain this motivation past their initial graduation and first assignment. SOF can improve personnel management by leveraging SDT throughout the duration of an operator's career.

D. SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY IN SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

In SOF, autonomous motivation is accentuated relative to that of conventional forces. Most SOF units satisfy two of the three basic human needs, particularly during their initial assignments. Whether Marine Raiders, Green Berets, Navy SEALs, or SOF pilots, everyone completes an immense amount of assessment and specialized training to build competence. This competence is reinforced and increased on their initial team assignment throughout pre-deployment training and advanced specialty courses. In addition to competence, SOF personnel often experience a high degree of relatedness, especially during initial training and assignment. The shared hardship of the qualification courses and pre-deployment training exercises develop a camaraderie unique to the career field. Although these experiences can vary, the overall mentality of a team is a powerful framework. From a macro perspective, shared experiences across the organization help to develop relatedness writ large. Additionally, symbols such as the physical green beret, required common training experiences, and interconnectedness of the organization can reinforce relatedness amongst a large group of personnel.⁶⁴

As SOF personnel progress through their career, personnel can experience a decline in autonomy which can have a negative effect on job satisfaction.⁶⁵ It is uncommon for personnel to have a high degree of control over their career path, and those personnel who

⁶⁴ Thomas Adams, "The Creation of Army Special Forces," U.S. *Special Operations Forces in Action* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 54–77.

⁶⁵ Spencer Everingham, "Special Operations Officer Retention Survey," United States Marine Corps Command and Staff College, unpublished data, September 7 2020.

have consistently exercised control attribute their path to timing and luck.⁶⁶ Even these outliers doubt the continuance of the pattern. From an organizational optics perspective, this is a clear failure in mid-career assignments.

Beyond the initial assignment, SOF personnel may not have an opportunity to maximize competence and relatedness, which can drastically change based off their billet. This time-period represents an opportunity to design a new personnel management system for SOF. An SDT based system would seek to assign people based on their FFM assessment and previous demonstrated performance. A holistic evaluation of each service member and the requirement of the assignment could align capabilities, thus increasing the likelihood of competence. Further, by giving individuals a choice between the available jobs (that could result in increased competence), then the individual will begin a new billet with greater autonomy. Relatedness can also be improved through this choice because personnel may select a billet where they already have productive personal and professional relationships. Increased autonomous motivation in future assignments would still not be guaranteed, but at least the initial environment could be conducive to SDT. Regardless, research suggests conducting an assignment process that acknowledges the SDT three universal needs may improve overall motivation and thus retention.

E. OBLIGATION TO CHANGE

Innovation in military personnel management systems is not a new concept. For years, survey data and anecdotal interviews have clearly demonstrated systemic disappointments across the DOD.⁶⁷ Kane's heavily researched critique was published over a decade ago, and the services have unsuccessfully spent considerable time and financial resources attempting to research and correct these antiquated processes.⁶⁸ The greatest accomplishment has been the U.S. Army's successful implementation of the new

⁶⁶ Brian Kerg, "The Accidental Marine Corps Commander," *Proceedings*, October 27, 2020, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2020/october/accidental-marine-corps-commander>.

⁶⁷ Everingham, unpublished data, September 7, 2020.

⁶⁸ Everingham, unpublished data, September 7, 2020.

Commander Assessment Program (CAP). The CAP utilizes a list provided by the previous system to conduct a weeklong assessment process of the O-5, Lieutenant Colonels. The candidates are holistically evaluated and placed into command billets based off their likelihood to succeed as Battalion Commanders. Due to its initial success, additional screening systems are currently under development for other senior leadership positions. While this incremental innovation is notable, it also highlights a disturbing truth: CAP is the first thorough assessment conducted on conventional officers. Even for Special Forces Officers, CAP represents only their second legitimate assessment, nearly a decade after their initial SOF assessment. Undoubtedly CAP represents progress, but it clearly demonstrates the massive roadblocks to innovation adoption.

Kane's work, endless anecdotes, and the more recent statistical analysis from Major Everingham's "Special Operations Officer Retention Survey" clearly demonstrate an obligation to change.⁶⁹ SDT, aided by the FFM assessment, could aid in an increased focus on assigning service members to appropriate billets. Notably, it could increase talent retention, drive innovation, and result in a more proficient force that could continue to increase its selectiveness for future personnel. If SOF is expected to continually serve as the tip of the DOD's proverbial spear, then the most talented members must be retained.

Current talent management initiatives, such as the AIM marketplace, aid in satisfying one of the three SDT pillars: autonomy. The proposed Talent Profile seeks to support the other two pillars of SDT, competence and relatedness. By placing individuals according to their demonstrated capabilities, we seek to increase the perception of competence. Further, with the collaboration of capable operational psychologists to match complimentary behavioral profiles, the Talent Profile can be leveraged to increase the likelihood of greater feelings of relatedness.

In summary, vocational selection has been researched heavily for over a century. The use of personality tests and leveraging of psychological theories appears to have positive effects on personnel's proficiency and job satisfaction. As the DOD turns specifically towards a revamp of talent management and personnel systems it is incumbent

⁶⁹ Everingham, unpublished data, September 7, 2020.

upon planners to acknowledge and leverage SDT. SOF are an ideal population, due to their size and agility, to experiment. Despite these advantage in comparison to larger conventional forces, there are still obstacles that must be overcome. The following chapter examines the principles of innovation adoption and likely challenges to implementation.

IV. TALENT PROFILE ADOPTION

A. INTRODUCTION

An understanding of innovation adoption principles aids in the development of a successful implementation strategy for any innovation. While reviewing relevant economic literature we discovered some common psychological obstacles to innovation adoption and then examined the Talent Profile through five agreed upon factors: complexity, compatibility, trialability, observability, and relative advantage. This chapter will review the obstacles common to adoption of innovations and explain how the Talent Profile can overcome these obstacles. By conquering these obstacles, the Talent Profile can be classified as an “easy sell” by behavioral marketing expert John T. Gourville.⁷⁰

Innovation adoption within the DOD faces understandable challenges and demonstrated reticence to change.⁷¹ Michael Horowitz’s book, *The Diffusion of Military Power*, offers a useful perspective on military innovation through his development of an adoption-capacity theory. Adoption-capacity theory breaks down into two distinct hypotheses: financial intensity and organizational capital.⁷² The financial capital hypothesis posits that the greater the financial intensity required to implement, then the slower the diffusion and decreased chances of system-wide adoption.⁷³ Organizational capital hypothesis is similar: increased organizational capital requirements result in greater impediments. However, it is difficult to measure organizational capital, and unsurprisingly, innovators run into the predictable *status quo* bias and classic endowment affect, where

⁷⁰ John T. Gourville, “Eager Sellers & Stony Buyers,” *Harvard Business Review* 84, no. 6 (June 2006): 98–106. <https://hbr.org/2006/06/eager-sellers-and-stony-buyers-understanding-the-psychology-of-new-product-adoption>

⁷¹ Eric Schmidt, “Statement of Dr. Eric Schmidt” (House Armed Services Committee, April 17, 2018), <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS00/20180417/108132/HHRG-115-AS00-Wstate-SchmidtE-20180417.pdf>.

⁷² Michael C. Horowitz, *The Diffusion of Military Power: Causes and Consequences for International Politics*, Course Book (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 33, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400835102>.

⁷³ Horowitz, *The Diffusion of Military Power: Causes and Consequences for International Politics*, 34.

organizations over value an existing product. Within SOF organizations, the financial capacity hurdle is mitigated because the data is already available and data analysts are already under contract. The main problem will be organizational capital expenditure and overcoming the human psychological obstacles to adoption.

B. PSYCHOLOGICAL OBSTACLES AND ROGERS'S FIVE FACTORS

First, innovations must overcome the psychological costs of the consumer and the organizational leadership. In “Eager Sellers and Stony Buyers: Understanding the Psychology of New-Product Adoption,” Gourville details the “psychological costs associated with behavior change.”⁷⁴ In order to appropriately evaluate a proposed innovation Gourville points to two key concepts that must be confronted: the endowment effect and status quo bias.⁷⁵ In “Anomalies: The Endowment Effect, Loss Aversion, and Status Quo Bias” behavioral economists Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler elaborate on these concepts.⁷⁶ The endowment effect changes the psychological preference of an individual for something they already own which ironically does not “enhance the appeal of the good one owns, only the pain of giving it up.”⁷⁷ *Status quo* bias simply states that individuals will always have a strong tendency to remain with the status quo “because the disadvantages of leaving it loom larger than advantages.”⁷⁸ An aversion to loss runs throughout both of these concepts and, according to Gourville, it results in individuals overvaluing their current product or system by a factor of three.⁷⁹ This error is further compounded by the innovation’s creators overvaluing their product by a similar factor

⁷⁴ Gourville “Eager Sellers and Stony Buyers: Understanding the Psychology of New-Product Adoption,” 100.

⁷⁵ Gourville “Eager Sellers and Stony Buyers: Understanding the Psychology of New-Product Adoption,” 101.

⁷⁶ Daniel Kahneman, Jack L Knetsch, and Richard H Thaler, “Anomalies: The Endowment Effect, Loss Aversion, and Status Quo Bias,” *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 5, no. 1 (1991): 15, https://scholar.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/kahneman/files/anomalies_dk_jlk_rht_1991.pdf.

⁷⁷ Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler, 197

⁷⁸ Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler,” 197.

⁷⁹ Gourville “Eager Sellers and Stony Buyers: Understanding the Psychology of New-Product Adoption,” 103.

which can result in a new product's need to demonstrate an advantage near nine times the existing product.⁸⁰

Everett Rogers's *Diffusion of Innovation* remains a bedrock of the study of innovation diffusion.⁸¹ Rogers identifies five factors to innovation: evaluate relative advantage, complexity, observability, compatibility, and trialability. Importantly, no distinct blueprint guarantees success of an innovation. Gourville summarizes these factors particularly well in his analysis of Rogers's work.⁸² In review, Rogers' five factors are compatibility, complexity, trialability, observability and relative advantage. When examining an innovation each of these factors must be considered. Compatibility examines the similarity to the previous product and the consumer's personality compatibility.⁸³ Does the innovation align with value and beliefs? Complexity simply asks if the product is difficult to understand, and if it is overly complex can simple education reduce the perception of complexity.⁸⁴ Trialability and observability are closely related but slightly different. Trialability is allowing individuals to experiment with the innovation on a limited basis prior to adoption while observability evaluates the ease of which the innovations results are visible.⁸⁵ Finally relative advantage examines if the innovation is "better" than the product it replaces.⁸⁶ Although this factor is not the penultimate, it does weigh heavily on whether an innovation is adopted.

⁸⁰ Gourville, 103.

⁸¹ Everett M. Rogers, *The Diffusion of Innovation* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1995).

⁸² John T Gourville, "Note on Innovation Diffusion: Rogers' Five Factors." (Harvard Business School Background Note 505–075, May 2005 (Revised April 2006), 6), <https://store.hbr.org/product/note-on-innovation-diffusion-rogers-five-factors/505075?sku=505075-PDF-ENG>.

⁸³ Gourville, 4.

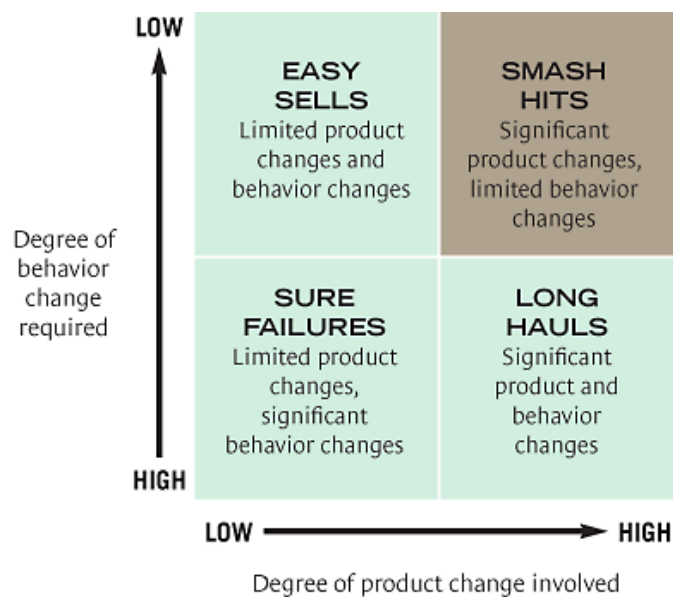
⁸⁴ Gourville, 4.

⁸⁵ Gourville, 4–5.

⁸⁶ Gourville, 3.

C. AN “EASY SELL” BASED ON THE FIVE FACTORS

While constructing the Talent Profile we attempted to satisfy many of the most obvious problems with each of Roger’s Five Factors and minimize the psychological biases associated with loss. To more fully understand the psychological effects Gourville describes, a conceptual scale of innovation adoption pictured below in Figure 6.⁸⁷ An innovation can be classified into one of four categories based on the degree of change in the product compared to the degree of change required in the behavior of the consumer.



Classification of innovations based on the degree of change required in the behavior of consumers and degree of change in the product.

Figure 6. Gourville’s Classification of Innovations.⁸⁸

The DOD can often appear as an organization that is incapable of easily accepting “Smash Hits” due to the high degree of product change involved. Some of this has to do with culture, but much of it is associated with existing rules, regulations, and laws. For this reason, we sought to build our product with certain characteristics that place it more as an

⁸⁷ Gourville, 105

⁸⁸ Gourville, 105.

“easy sell” than a “smash hit.” The degree of product change for our product is low to moderate but the degree of behavior change required is low, thus seeking to minimize the effect of the status quo bias and endowment effect. To reinforce this easy sell characterization, we recommend a strategy that that has high compatibility, improved trialability, low complexity, improved observability, and at minimum, moderate relative advantage in comparison to the existing system.

The Talent Profile is primarily built from an existing product within the SOF organizations. The data managers at each command can build this profile using existing software tools that are already in their possession and used regularly. In initial discussions, the Talent Profile is unlikely to incur significant additional cost for the adopting organizations. Further, to increase compatibility we recommend the Talent Profile be applied as another tool for commanders, like personal provided biographies and official records. Its application as a tool could also be provided to existing billet assignment and promotion boards systems. It is not designed to remove or replace anything in the current system, including current career management personnel.

Simplicity is one of the greatest strengths of the Talent Profile. It is built from a particularly complex 140-page document and distills this data to a quickly digestible product. If individuals desire a deeper level of information, then the large document should still be made available to commanders. The Talent Profile is designed to be simple and easy to read. It does not require additional education or training for utilization.

To maximize trialability, we recommend an initial roll out of the product through two routes. The first path is to prepare the Talent Profile for the most recent graduates of their respective pipelines. This profile then travels with them upon graduation to their gaining commander. Ideally this will aid in the initial billet assignment. After several iterations, the effectiveness of the Talent Profile can begin to be captured through this trial. The second path that should be pursued concurrently is to prepare the Talent Profile for mid-career officer selection boards for promotion and key billet assignments. These Talent Profiles would be another tool for the reviewal of every board member. Since board members are consistently previous and current commanders, this path could provide a much quicker opportunity for widespread trialability and observability. Additionally, this

path may provide an opportunity for senior officers to become key stake holders and advocates for the Talent Profile, an important aspect for successful adoption within the DOD.⁸⁹

Observability is a weakness of most existing DOD talent management systems, and our product is not necessarily an exception. Aside from the insight gained through initial commander feedback, it will be difficult to observe the success of our innovation in a short period of time. There are many metrics that can be used but none of them are immediate and most take years to achieve an accurate sample of data. Nonetheless, we have a simple suggestion to improve observability. Everyone should have easy access to their own Talent Profile. Recently graduated operators would feel more confident in their assignments when they know their commander has seen the same profile.

Relative advantage is also hard to initially evaluate due to the subject; it may take several years for the relative advantage to be fully demonstrated. As covered previously regarding SDT, following implementation of the Talent Profile concept we expect an increase in job satisfaction and proficiency. The secondary effects are rather broad reaching and too many to discuss, but there are a few we wish to highlight. The first is improved mentorship capability. A commander armed with a Talent Profile has the ability to tailor an individualized plan to improve his subordinates' demonstrated weaknesses. Additionally, self-improvement would become an easier endeavor if an individual clearly understood their weaknesses. This greater self-awareness would not only aid in self-improvement but may also lead to a more accurate choice of career path, thus enhancing autonomy. This would potentially feedback into a positive effect on one of the most pressing issues for SOF officers: retention.

Retention has been covered *ad nauseum* in many different theses and papers written by DOD members and some outside observers.⁹⁰ It is a complicated problem that is

⁸⁹ Stephen Peter Rosen, "New Ways of War: Understanding Military Innovation," *International Security* 13, no. 1 (Summer 1988): 134–68. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538898>

⁹⁰ Jim Perkins, "The Military Needs Reform, Not a Raise," *War on the Rocks*, last modified March 6, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/03/military-needs-reform-not-raise/>; Kane, *Bleeding Talent: How the U.S. Military Mismanages Great Leaders and Why It's Time for a Revolution*.

difficult to fully grasp, but perhaps that's because it is such an individualized and personal choice. The Talent Profile does not aim to resolve the major retention issues that SOF commands currently face, but it may help in two ways. First, increased job satisfaction could result in higher retention. Second, the Talent Profile is another step towards treating high performing SOF operators as individuals, who cannot be easily replaced. This also adheres to the SOF Truth that "Humans are more important than hardware."⁹¹ If the choice to stay in the military (retention) is recognized as a highly personal issue, then the Talent Profile may provide a small demonstration that the organization is attempting to treat operators as an individual and the organization actively wants to retain them. Autonomy, as one of the pillars of SDT must be maximized during the implementation of the Talent Profile. Greater career control through the expanded understanding of an individual would be a positive for any talent management program.

In summary, our Talent Profile was designed to have high compatibility and low complexity. We recommend an implementation that will maximize senior leader trialability which may allow for rapid adoption, or at least additional feedback on the profile. Observability remains a weakness but no more than the current system. Finally, the expected relative advantages are numerous, and the follow-on utilization of a Talent Profile concept has great potential, especially if implemented with a keen eye towards enhancing autonomous motivation. Although the Talent Profile does not fully maximize Rogers's Five Factors of relative advantage, complexity, observability, compatibility, and trialability, very few innovations do. Based off the analysis above, the Talent Profile clearly falls somewhere between an Easy Win and Smash Hit. In the DOD this incremental innovation represents an initial Easy Win that could become a Smash Hit across the force.

D. CROWD SOURCED SUPPORT

During our research, we conducted a survey of SOF students at NPS. We utilized 12 questions approved by the NPS IRB and received 49 responses. The population we

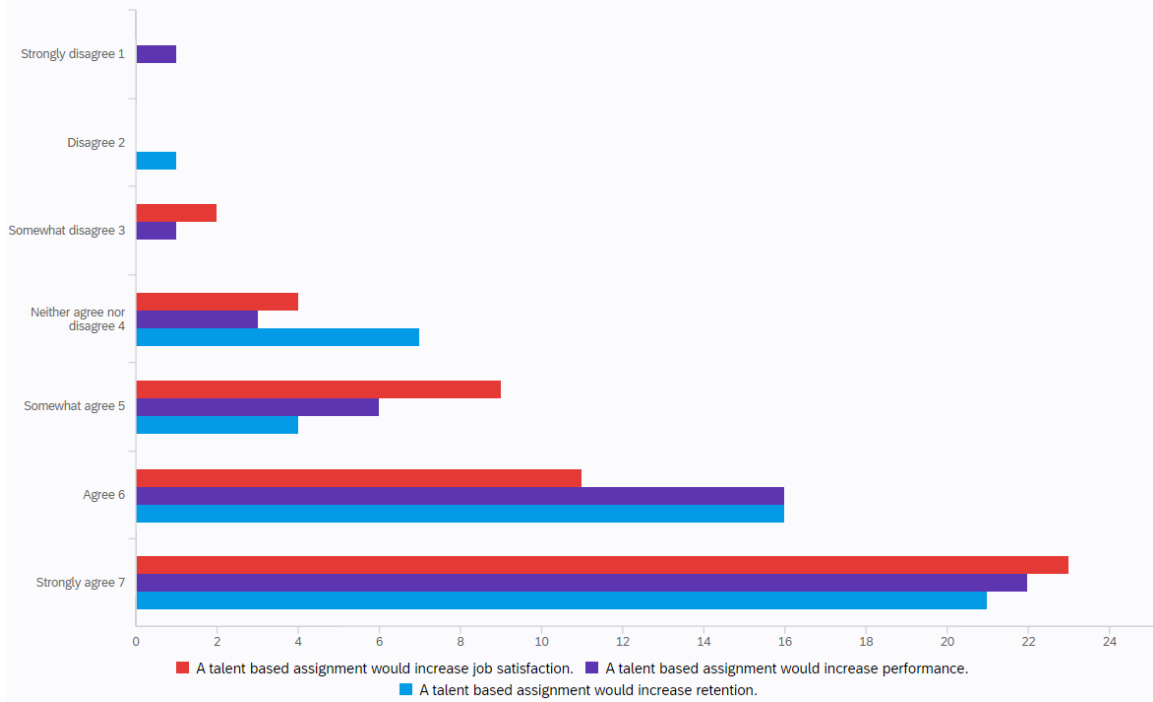
⁹¹ United States Special Operations Command, *2022 Fact Book*. 56.

surveyed clearly believe that billet assignments based off capabilities and personalities will increase job satisfaction, performance, and retention.

In October of 2021, we analyzed the 49 responses from an anonymous survey of the NPS Defense Analysis (DA) department's SOF students. The average student within the DA department is a junior-field grade officer who has completed over 10 years of service with most of their career working within the SOF communities. Notably, the population has passed the first of the key retention points at 10 years and most will likely to continue to serve at minimum until the 20-year retirement benchmark, due to military obligation after graduating from NPS.

The survey consisted of multiple-choice questions predominantly with seven-point scales where one was the lowest negative score, four was neutral, and seven was the highest positive score. Also included were five free text response questions related to the multiple-choice questions that allowed the population to provide context to their scaled responses. Overall, the survey results were encouraging. Forty-nine SOF personnel responded to the survey and provided quality information. Within this specific population, positive sentiments were higher than expected. Nevertheless, a clear majority supports implementation of a process that uses individual talent to inform assignment personnel and commanders.

Over 69% (mean of 6.00) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that a personalized assignment based on individual talent data would increase job satisfaction. Over 77% (mean of 6.04) agreed or strongly agreed that it would increase performance and over 75% (mean of 5.98) agreed or strongly agreed that it would increase retention. In free text responses, respondents consistently identified the strong connection between the three characteristics. Individual experiences vary but this clearly demonstrates a desire from SOF personnel for a more personalized billet assignment system as demonstrated in Figure 7.



Survey response results that depict the expected impact of a personalized assignment based on talent.

Figure 7. Support for Talent Based Assignments

Conclusions from the rest of the scaled questions data were less obvious. Overall, most of the population somewhat agreed or agreed that they were previously placed into billets that aligned to their talents (mean of 5.35), that their commander put thought into their job placement (mean of 4.88), and that they tried to collection pertinent information for job placement (mean of 5.16). The most common information they wish their previous commander had prior to billet assignment focused on more personal information; personality tests, career goals, life experiences not in a military record, and some even desired a personal interview. Similar free text responses were gathered in a follow-on question on what previous commanders had missed when conducting assignments. The negative free text responses indicated that personal information was not always considered in assignments but generally the responses were not overly negative.

Overall, this population felt that previous commanders' billet assignment strategy had a neutral to slightly positive impact on job performance (mean of 4.54) and job satisfaction (mean of 4.36). Interestingly, they also felt these same strategies had a neutral

to **slightly negative effect** on retention (mean of 3.89). When asked generally about commanders' ability to evaluate talent (mean of 4.28), proficiency (mean of 4.36), and performance (mean of 5.04) the population again expressed slightly positive sentiments. Due to the limitations of this survey's population these responses are likely more positive than a survey of the full force to include recently transitioned service members. The population clearly believed that being placed in right job will affect their future job satisfaction (mean of 6.06), while a lesser amount expressed confidence that their current available information would inform their future job placement (mean of 4.40).

Generally, the survey responses indicate a strong desire for an individualized billet assignment that requires additional personal information to be provided to commanders and billet assignment personnel. These responses also indicate that an innovation in talent management, that emphasizes decisions based on individual talent data, will have a positive impact on job satisfaction, job performance, and overall retention. Our additional research offers an initial solution in the form of the Talent Profile.

V. TALENT PROFILE PROTOTYPE

A. INTRODUCTION

The goal of this initiative is to develop a succinct report that captures nuance and contextual conclusions from a vast library of personalized data collected in the various SOCOM training pipelines. This ultimately aids commanders and their senior enlisted leaders (SEL) in placing personnel in their organization. Further, it provides quantitative and qualitative data on operator weaknesses that can be addressed with the help of existing SOCOM staff such as operational psychologists or physical training staff.

One of Hacking 4 Defense’s key findings was the lack of meaningful counseling within the formation. One Special Forces Captain noted, “I’ve received no mentorship during my time as an 18A [SF Officer]. I’ve never received an OER counseling from my senior rater.”⁹² While one cannot force leaders to counsel their formations, this profile can help provide data points to enable meaningful and productive interactions. Commanders will thus not have to start from scratch to draw conclusions about their personnel.

Lastly, this initiative helps create individual development plans for individual SOCOM operators to better understand their strengths and weaknesses when facing new situations. For instance, knowing that they can sometimes be perceived as aggressive helps when entering an already-hostile negotiation, a data point they may not otherwise be informed on and can thus seek development from unit psychologists.

B. A WORD OF CAUTION—WHAT THIS IS NOT

Before we debut the prototype Talent Profile, it is important to highlight what it does *not* do. This talent profile is not predictive of success. The data does not currently exist to make causal inferences. It would be dangerous to assume that this profile can predict success at an individual level for one single job, as each position comes with many variables and context. It is especially dangerous to ask to predict future success or promotions based on this qualitative data. There are many different profiles of successful

⁹² Warner et al., “The Future of U.S. Army Special Forces Talent Management.”

leaders, all with different weights in these realms, and thus we caution organizations to resist the urge to type-cast its members into “leadership material” in the absence of rigorous research. While our research does not establish any causative relationship between these observed traits and success in specific SOF jobs or promotion potential, it does equip command teams with better information to apply to their unique organizations and apply in their own talent management strategies.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the expert personnel compiling and handling profiles represent an integral part in the evaluation process. To maximize accuracy, requisite operational psychologist personnel are needed to analyze and interpret talent profile data for the gaining command teams. One of the major successes in SOCOM personnel management policies to this point is the use of expert psychological professionals in helping assess and select its personnel; it is imperative that this trend continue as we place and develop them in the organization. The operational psychologist summary analysis is first in the profile, intentionally so, due to its important context and nuance. These professionals are the only experts trained to collate the variable data collected and safely draw conclusions to provide to the commander.

C. SOF TALENT PROFILE—THE PRODUCT

1. Behavioral Overview

The first field includes an operational psychologist’s expert assessment of the individual, collating observational data from their colleagues, peer reviews, cadre feedback, direct interviews, and self-reported traits via psychological profiling tests.⁹³ This 1–2 paragraph summary provides a “BLUF” on the operator’s psychological profile. It pertains such criteria as facing new experiences, personal relationships, handling adversity, cultural understanding, and emotional intelligence. This qualitative analysis will then be paired with a quantitative review of open-source traits for SOF personnel such as dependability, physical fitness, interpersonal skills, etc., on a “bulls-eye chart” depicted in

⁹³ For reasons of data and operational security, we will not review the psychological assessment tools used by SOCOM psychologists, but this development is done in close coordination with/approval of resident Command psychologists.

Figure 7 below. This will help Command teams understand where the operator falls in relation to the average population, a recurring theme for the Talent Profile. The goal of this overview is to help the gaining unit operational psychologist inform the commander about any key personality observations that would help place them on the right team and/or mission. For instance, traits that might suggest an austere embassy assignment with fluid cultural interactions vs a high-stress kinetic operation.

Behavioral - Operational Psychologist Analysis

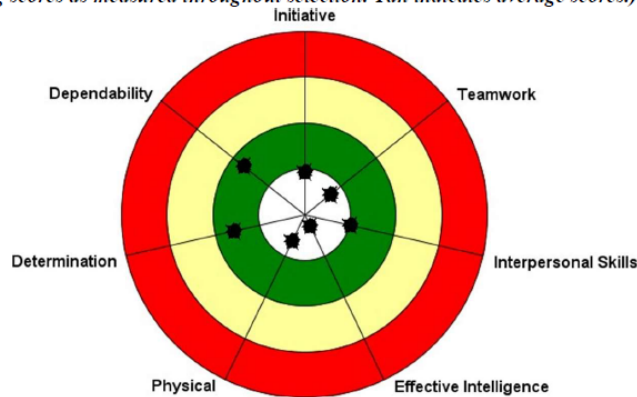
Mental Ability - Candidate X demonstrated significant cognitive potential across the battery of intelligence and achievement tests, placing his intellectual abilities in the above average range for the population and somewhat above the average SOF officer. Quick decision speed also presents him as taking the initiative on solving problems. He sees issues rapidly and was moving to deal with them often when the rest of the team was just figuring out there was an issue.

Social Intelligence - Candidate presents with an extroverted social style, engaging and upbeat. To some, the Candidate comes off cocky at times, but this in part probably reflects a high degree of self-confidence. This candidate appeared very ready to take on the course and was probably not struggling nearly as much as most of his peers. He preferred a logic-based influence style assisted by use of interpersonally anchored approaches. He demonstrated effective social intelligence throughout most of the scenarios.

Personality - Candidate possesses a positive attitude, demonstrating competency and confidence as a means of inspiring others to follow his lead and attitude towards tasks. There were no incidents suggestive of any significant behavior or judgement problems with this Candidate.

Attributes as measured in Selection

(White indicates outstanding scores as measured throughout selection. Tan indicates average scores.)



Operator's psychological profile summary narrative written by operational psychologist, and attributes as measured in Selection as depicted by the "Bull's eye."

Figure 8. Behavioral Overview

2. Interpersonal Skills

Following this psychological analysis is an overview of the operator's interpersonal skills. This section compiles peer reviews, cadre feedback, and psychologist scenario-based observations into how they deal with teammates in stressful situations. Peer and

subordinate reviews are regarded as effective measures to capture the unfiltered observations of someone while their “guard is down” from cadre or psychologist observers.

On average, SOF candidates have 10,000–13,000 words written about them by their peers, as well as 12–15 different peer rankings administered in different groups of people. The potential observations available from this data are legion. Caution, nuance, and context should be applied to the conclusions drawn from these data though. It is imperative that this profile be presented under the advisement of an operational psychologist. For instance, an Officer (who is expected to lead and be the face of the team) consistently ranked low is much different than a young, enlisted member (who is expected to follow and maintain a low profile) ranking low in a group of peers.

Throughout all assessment, selection, and training pipeline programs, these observations provide both a quantitative and a qualitative analysis tool. For instance, the peer rankings tell us the average rank a person is given in a large group, and the comments provide a deeper insight into what others think of that person. Our Talent Profile captures the commentary in a word cloud adjusted to highlight key words and character traits, while also numerically averaging the frequent peer rankings to show where that operator falls in a group of a similar population.

After this, we applied the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) analysis tool to analyze the text of peer commentary across various psychometric assessment metrics.⁹⁴ The LIWC is a “computerized text analysis program that quantifies spoken and written responses in 80 categories by calculating the percentage of content-laden words associated with those corresponding categories (e.g., thinking styles, attentional focus, emotional states, social relationships, etc.).”⁹⁵ We sought to capture three categories that are conceptually related to this thesis: authenticity, positive emotions, and negative emotions in the vast text. Authenticity measures whether respondents were guarded or open in their

⁹⁴ James W Pennebaker et al., “The Development and Psychometric Properties of LIWC2015” (Austin, TX: University of Texas at Austin, 2015).

⁹⁵ Shannon Houck et al., “Cognitive Complexity in Political Contexts” (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University, August 2020).

responses, while positive and negative emotions capture the sentiment of responses. We compared these scores to the established average, which allows us to show commanders how their people compare to the average population when their peers speak about them.

Below is a word cloud and a psychometric linguistic analysis of all peer review comments

Peer Rankings

Category	Rank	Team Size	Percentile
Selection	3	12	76%
Garrison	4	17	76%
Tactical	3	17	82%
Total Average	3	15	78%

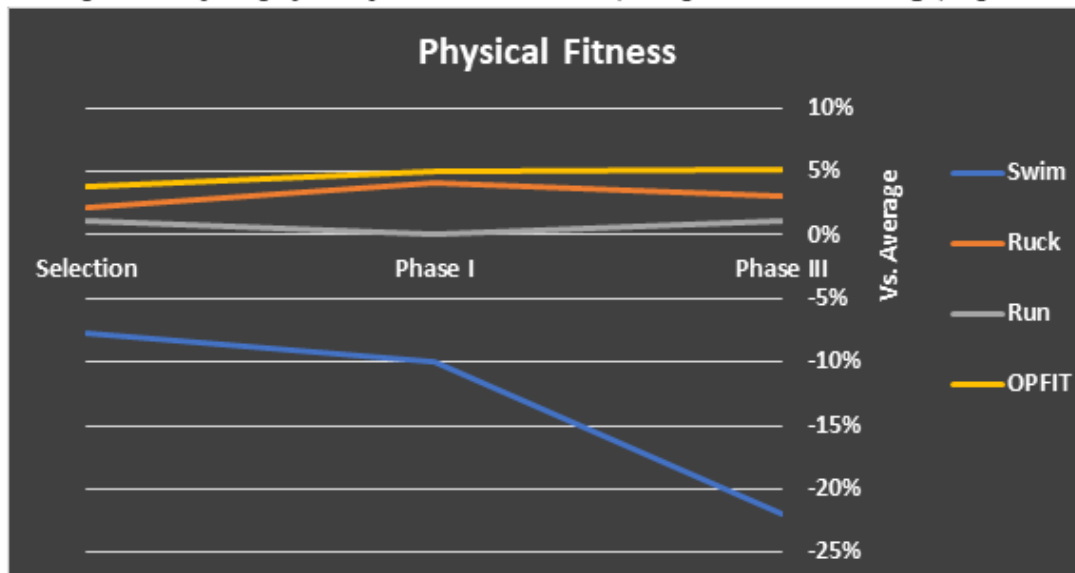
A word cloud of peer evaluations, LIWC analysis, and an average peer ranking in three different environments.

3. Physical Fitness

endurance) and grades well on special reconnaissance evolutions could be a match for an available reconnaissance team. Presenting this information saves commanders time investigating a candidate and raises the probability of them using the information in a productive manner. Again, none of this data can predict success, as each unit has its own unique nuanced mission, but it can better inform Commanders' decisions.

Physical Performance

A compilation of all physical fitness events tested, compared to the average, repeated across time.



Physical fitness scores over time compared against the population average depicted in percentages above and below the mean.

Figure 10. Physical Fitness Comparative Analysis

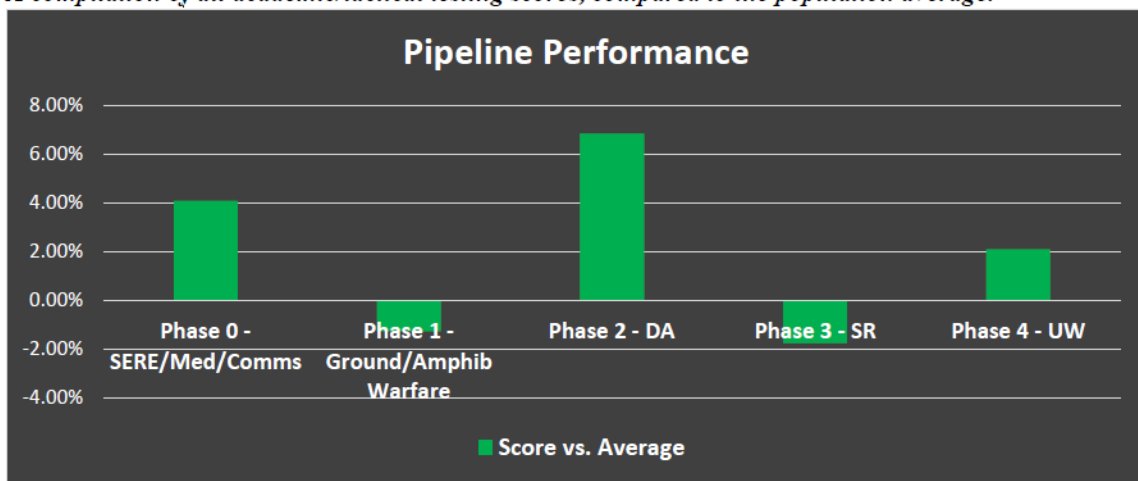
4. Cognitive

After physical fitness we preview cognitive aptitude, defined as a candidate's ability to process new information and then apply it in an academic or tactical setting. This also includes any IQ or intelligence testing that assessment courses administer. Raw intelligence is important, but ideally this highlights military-focused strengths and weaknesses of the operator. By comparing scores in specific tactical evolutions against the average, Command teams can better place operators based on the team's needs, area of operations, and specific mission set. Further, the conclusions such as ability to process

complex data can help place operator into non-traditional mission sets. For example, an operator with above-average Unconventional Warfare (UW) tactical grades, strong interpersonal skills, and high language or DLAB scores could be given a more complex interagency assignment. The chart below shows an example of a training pipeline’s evolutions and the operator’s grades compared to the class average, highlighting specific capabilities and weaknesses.

Cognitive

A compilation of all academic/tactical testing scores, compared to the population average.



Phase specific numerical grades compared against the population average depicted in percentages above and below the mean

Figure 11. Cognitive Performance Analysis

5. Personal Biography

Lastly, we recommend a personal biography written by the individual operator to highlight information that might otherwise be unavailable to the Command team. This is not only a chance for an operator to share important information with their Command; it is a chance for the Command to draw conclusions on the candidate—a SOCOM take on civilian cover letters. This section is designed to satisfy two factors of self-determination theory: autonomy and relatedness. By allowing individual operators the chance to offer personalized information directly to their Commands, they gain a chance to informally influence their career path by highlighting specific information. They also increase the

chances of connecting (established “relatedness” from SDT) with their leaders by sharing personal information. Command teams will be able to process otherwise-unavailable information such as time spent abroad, family considerations, or unique skillsets that do not show up in traditional military recordkeeping.

Personal input

(Tell us about yourself and anything not readily available you want your Commander to know about you):

I was born in southern XXXX and grew up in a nuclear family with both my parents and # sisters. I spent most of my youth working on a family farm and playing sports, particularly soccer. I performed well in high school and attended xx University with a major in Political Science with minors in Arabic Language and International Relations. I studied Arabic language for two years and lived abroad for a semester in Cairo, Egypt. I have studied the Arab culture and Islam extensively. I also have traveled individually throughout many Middle Eastern and African countries. I have extensive experience in planning and executing small unit tactical operations in training and in combat. I am married and expecting my first child next month.

Operator input limited to one paragraph with a focus on personal details not readily available in an official record.

Figure 12. Personal Biography

D. CONCLUSION

SOCOM units collect a veritable gold mine of personal performance and psychological data that is rarely used in current talent management ecosystems. The potential uses of this vast pool of data is not limited to just Talent Profiles. The implementation of a Talent Profile, or similar concept, is one small solution that requires no special funding or permissions, though it could have a large impact on job performance, satisfaction, and ultimately retention. The data management and compilation software already exists, the respective pipelines already capture this data, and the expert personnel such as operational psychologists are already on staff. Given the wide range of career talent management initiatives across the DOD, this Talent Profile could easily serve as a “living document” that develops over the length of the service members career, with new inputs at periodic junctures.

Since the data is currently unused, most solutions utilizing this data are better than the status quo. That said, there are concerns to be addressed in implementing this solution. First, resident schoolhouse operational psychologists must approve of the generated

reports, and unit psychologists should receive the profiles to help commanders understand the nuance of the data. Further, data must be presented as a comparison versus the average, and in the most neutral manner possible, as opposed to merely highlighting failures – this prevents the profile from presenting a negative view of personnel. Lastly is the concern that toxic commanders might misuse or abuse this data. In our research, the only solution to toxic commanders abusing data is to keep them from assuming a billet as a commanding officer. Quite simply, the wrong commanders will do the wrong thing, regardless of mitigation attempts.

The Talent Profile is a preliminary product that can evolve with additional research and initial adoption. Although each training organization collects different data this provides a template by which units across SOCOM, and potentially in the DOD in the future, can begin to embrace qualitative talent management solutions. The good news is that the raw information, and expert personnel required to analyze it, are already on-hand. This specific individual solution and its merits are clearly outlined, but the implementation of such an idea is a complex task. The desire for this concept is evident and the benefits are clearly shown. Initial adoption and implementation must start soon. Further refinement will be required but the Talent Profile prototype cannot become useful if we try to craft the perfect product prior to adoption. Initial implementation cannot be delayed.

E. FUTURE RESEARCH

When discussing the Talent Management system, it is important to remember that the problems are complex, and thus the solutions are not only complex but varied – there are no panaceas. Talent Profiles alone will not “solve” talent management issues, they are merely an attempt to better equip our command teams to make more informed, and thus better, decisions. On such a vein, the future research opportunities are numerous and varied.

As these data points are collected and stored on increasingly smart networks, future researchers should endeavor to establish connections between the traits of people successful in specific jobs. This would allow them to better coach operators towards career paths that make them successful within SOCOM – fulfilling autonomy, competence and

relatedness on the SDT pyramid. With the implementation of Talent Profiles, researchers should work with SOCOM schoolhouses to better develop performance data management systems, such as GIDEONSOFT, to standardize collection and automate qualitative outputs. As data are standardized and stored, they can be better analyzed, and in turn, more sound relationships can be drawn and commanders can better forecast the needs and performance of the force.

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