Title: Army Civilians of Today and Tomorrow: Implications for Future Recruitment and Development

Subtitle: Army Civilians have always been a critical, yet largely unseen, element of the total force. Whom must the Army seek today to become the future Army Civilian Corps?

Caveat: The opinions and ideas expressed in this article are the author's and do not reflect the official policy of the U.S. Army, Army University, or the Army Management Staff College.

Highlights:

- Who are Army Civilians today?
- Who will occupy jobs that don't yet exist?
- Implications for talent recruitment and development

Epigraph: "A lot of this is about awareness ... as we think about the U.S. Army, most people think about those that are serving in uniform. But what they don't know is that we have over 260,000 civilians that are actually working alongside those soldiers in regard to ensuring that we can continue to be successful in our mission."
 – BG Antoinette Gant, Chief Marketing Officer for the U.S. Army[1]

Introduction w/ thesis: As the U.S. Army faces ever evolving challenges in a dynamic operational environment, the role of Army Civilians must continue its evolution to maintain the cohort's relevance and significance.[2] To adapt to this ever-changing environment, Army leaders will need to assess talent recruitment and development strategies – i.e., how the service attracts, forms, grows, and retains quality people in a competitive job market. In this article, we examine three often overlooked aspects of recruiting and developing the talent of the Army Civilian Corps: present Army Civilian identity, future jobs and skills that do not yet exist, and key implications for the corps.

Supporting Point 1: Who are Army Civilians today?

Army Civilians have been present in the U.S. Army since its inception in 1775, and they continue to support the mission through a diverse array of talents.[3] Put another way, they are the *right* people with the *right* knowledge, skills, and abilities needed by their nation today. In the context of talent development, one could pose these ontological questions:

- What are current attributes expected of Army Civilians?
- Who decides what are the 'right' Army Civilian attributes for both today and tomorrow? With what criteria will they evaluate their choices?

- How will future Army leaders know they have adequately developed the civilian workforce?

There are no clear answers, but asking these questions is a good first step to understanding who Army Civilians are today so we can better develop them for future requirements.

What are current attributes expected of Army Civilians? The Department of Defense (DoD) recently refined the fundamental competencies its civilian workforce should exemplify in the *DoD Civilian Leader Development Framework*.[4] These competencies include agility; resilience; life-long learning; service motivated; ethical behavior; and diversity, equity, inclusion & accessibility. These competencies, in turn, support core competencies (i.e., leading change, leading people, results driven, enterprise-wide perspective, etc.) in this framework. Civilians who progress in positions of greater responsibility need to develop more leadership competencies.[5] DoD developed this continuum of leadership competencies primarily from the Guide to Senior Executive Service Qualifications.[6] The Army Management Staff College has further integrated these and other attributes mandated in Army doctrine to formulate its Civilian Leadership Requirements Map (CLRM) as a way to link each attribute to learning objectives and outcomes in its Civilian Education System (CES) courses.

Who decides what are the 'right' Army Civilian attributes for both today and tomorrow? Supervisors of Army Civilians, until relatively recently, lacked a structured system of career progression within specified fields of skills and duties. In 1978, Congress mandated in the Civil Service Reform Act that the selection of senior executives would be based upon their technical and especially leader qualifications.[7] By 2015, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) had disseminated the Federal Supervisory and Managerial Frameworks and Guidance to support systematic leadership development training and education with recurring refresher training for supervisors and managers as mandated in 5 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 412.202.[8] As a result, Army Civilian leaders are selected for their training, education, and experience and receive periodic training and education to improve performance.

Policies such as the Civilian Implementation Plan and AR 600-100 codify this merit-based developmental process.[9] Some leaders dismiss a need for these top-qualified people, who are developed and ready to step into their positional duties based on their extant education and experience, for professional development in the institutional domain. Other Army officials see a clear requirement for developing Army Civilians throughout their careers.[10] Programs like the Civilian Education System, consistently rated at the top of periodic enterprise surveys, remain an underused opportunity for such leader development.[11]

With what criteria will they evaluate their choices? While senior leaders have identified the need to measure the readiness of Army Civilians to meet future mission requirements, metrics and policy are still nascent.[12] The CIP does identify strategic outcomes (ready for the mission, professionalism, diversity of knowledge and skills, and integrated career structures that foster mobility) that stem from pursuing priorities linked to lines of effort; however, these outcomes generally apply to civilian readiness without any specific metrics.[13] Recent efforts by the Civilian Human Resources Agency have resulted in risk levels associated with Army Civilian mission readiness according to low, moderate, significant, and high categories.[14] Still, these rubrics have not been disseminated throughout the enterprise as of this article. It is reasonable to assume these criteria will continue to be developed and refined as senior leaders and stakeholders better understand the future operational environment.

How will future Army leaders know they have adequately developed the civilian workforce? Army Civilians' professionalism and contributions have evolved and increased over time, resulting in one of the most diverse and skilled forces in history.[15] A key this success is an agile approach to recruitment and development. The Army describes *recruitment* as an activity aimed at identifying and incentivizing diverse talent needed for its mission when and where it is most needed.[16] Likewise, *talent development* involves designing career fields and paths to provide Army Civilians with optimal opportunities for education and experience to grow, progress, and broaden themselves functionally and technically throughout their careers.[17] Providing such opportunities will entail mobile delivery of engaging, interactive content that is applicable to remote workers as well as to brick-mortar resident employees at myriad points on the learning continuum.[18]

Supporting Point 2: Filling jobs that don't yet exist

The U.S. Army has begun to consider the recruitment, development, and retention of Army Civilians an important piece of its strategy, shifting its human resource management approach away from merely "distributing personnel."[19] Key to the Army's Civilian Implementation Plan of the Army People Strategy is identifying what skills are required, acquiring and developing those talents and competencies, and then utilizing them in ways beneficial to the Army and to the individual.[20] Establishing the Army Civilian Career Management Activity (ACCMA) was a significant initial step to secure resources for the professional development of Army Civilians throughout their careers in 500 occupations in 11 career fields.[21]

Army leaders, in conjunction with ACCMA and other stake holders, have spearheaded several initiatives aimed at developing and retaining the multi-talented Army Civilians in the modern work force. This has been an enterprise-wide challenge. For instance, as of 2021, fewer than half of those supervisors had attended the CES course required in AR 350-1.[22] Despite this non-compliance, the Army Management Staff College (AMSC) has made significant progress in educating the approximately 38,000 civilian supervisors in their grade-requisite courses under the Civilian Education System (CES). These efforts culminated in August 2024, when the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Manpower and Reserve Affairs) signed policy to facilitate CES course attendance through single-source quota management, automatic enrollment of new supervisors, and the elimination of equivalent credit.[23]

Future job requirements. A few years ago, McKinsey Global Institute reported some interesting findings from its research on the future of work. They concluded that jobs may become obsolete or be created based on primarily technological, social, and cognitive skill trends. Some of these required knowledge-skill-attitude requirements could include:[24]

- Increased demand for cognitive, social, and technological skills
- Interpersonal skills to enhance mobilizing systems, developing relationships, and teamwork effectiveness
- Cognitive skills particularly pertaining to critical thinking, planning, communication, and mental flexibility
- Digital skills related to digital fluency and citizenship, software use/development, and understanding digital systems
- Self-leadership in terms of self-awareness and self-management, entrepreneurship, and goal achievement

Supporting Point 3: Implications for Talent Recruitment and Development.

Having reviewed who Army Civilians are today and what their jobs may require in the future, without any clairvoyant crystal ball, one can derive some implications for recruiting and developing the future civilian workforce. Army leaders expect individual civilian employees to participate actively in their own professional development in collaboration with their supervisors.[25] Continued discussions between supervisors and their employees will contribute to a shared understanding and cultural shift required to respond to future needs. The table below presents some current competencies with future job requirements with possible implications in the right column.

Today's Army Civilian Competencies [26]	Future Job Requirements [27]	Implications of the Gap
- Agility - Resilience - Life-long Learning - Service Motivated - Ethical Behavior - Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility	- Hybrid-work-capable with digital delivery (mobile, in-person, or virtual) - Can learn in short time periods spread throughout workdays - Individualized career paths - Open to retraining & adapting to new technology - Comfortable wearing more than one hat of responsibility concurrently - Interpersonal skills to enhance systems & teams - Cognitive skills - Digital skills with proficiency especially in software and digital systems - Self-leadership skills	- Redesign professional development to provide them knowledge and skills they need now, particularly in self-leadership and interpersonal areas. - Continue to research in professional education. Learning will remain critical but what and how it's delivered to new generations will be a key consideration. - Adjust adult education programs to address high-demand knowledge, skills, and attributes of the future workforce – e.g., self-leadership.

These implications for talent recruitment and development, while inchoate, provide some context for senior leaders to adjust continuing professional learning programs to better meet requirements of the future workforce.

Conclusion

In summary, three aspects of recruiting and developing the talent of the Army Civilian Corps offer some insights into the needs of the future workforce. Understanding the present Army Civilian identity and culture provides context to future workforce shaping decisions. Considering future jobs and skills that do not yet exist helps frame anticipated challenges which, in turn, indicate some key implications for the corps. Regardless the outcome of ongoing strategies for Army Civilian recruitment and development, future civilians will likely remain a key component of the total Army force.

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[1] Temin, 2024, p. 1.

[2] Army People Strategy – Civilian Implementation Plan (APS – CIP), 2020/2022.

[3] Cavaleri, D., & Knolton, D. (2021). One profession, two communities, and the third rail we cannot ignore. *Military Review*, March-April, pp. 23-32. Retrieved on 21 OCT 24 at https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/March-April-2021/Knolton-Third-Rail/linkId/114266825/. See also CIP, 2020/2022 and Lofgren, S. (Ed.). (2016). *The highest level of skill and knowledge: A brief history of U.S. Army civilians 1775-2015*. Center of Military History.

[4] Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 1430.16, 2022, Figure 1.

[5] DoDI, 2022, Figure 2 – e.g., lead self, teams/projects, people, organizations/programs, and institution.

[6] Office of Personnel Management (OPM), 2012.

[7] DoDI, 2022, Introduction.

[8] The U.S. Congress last updated 5 CFR 412.202 on October 11, 2024.

[9] CIP, 2020/2022 and Department of the Army (HQDA). (2024, June 13). Army Regulation (AR) 600-100, *Army Profession and Leadership Policy*.

[10] CIP, 2020/2022.

[11] Army University. (2024, May). *Survey of the Army Learning Enterprise (SALE)*, Technical Report 2024-01. Mr. Wenzel, AMSC Director, estimates approximately 37% of Army supervisors, required to attend their grade-requisite CES course as per AR 350-1 (2017), have completed CES in compliance with policy.

[12] CIP (2022). See Figure 9 of the Army CIP Framework that links lines of effort to key priorities to achieve strategic outcomes.

[13] CIP, 2020/2022, Figure 9.

[14] Civilian Personnel Readiness Assessment Dashboard (Beta version), retrieved on 23 OCT 24.

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[16] CIP, 2020/2022, p. 14.

[17] CIP, 2022, pp. 23 & 35-36.

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[19] Cavaleri & Knolton, 2021, p. 23.

[20] HQDA, 2022.

[21] ACCMA, 2024; HQDA, 2022; Serbu, 2021.

[22] Serbu, 2021.

[23] Schaefer, A. (2024, August 12). Army civilian education system (CES) policy updates. ASA(M&RA).

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[26] DoDI, 2022, Figure 1, DoD Civilian Leader Development Framework.

[27] Kotter, 2023. See also WEF, 2021.