

# The Role of US Army Warrant Officers in Re-Establishing Trust in Army Processes

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One of the moments I cherish most from my time as a Warrant Officer and in the Army was my first interaction with a Brigade Commander. Despite being in the unit for 90 days, I had not met much of the leadership because of a deployment. When they returned, I was summoned to Brigade headquarters by the Brigade Commander. After a quick introduction, he asked me about the verbiage needed for an evaluation. I gave him the answer, and he responded, "Thank you, Chief." I replied, "Thank you for trusting me." He then said, "Chief, I trust you unequivocally."

I often reflect on this encounter when discussing what it means to be a Warrant Officer. His trust in me was not solely about me as an individual but the legacy of over 100 years of Warrant Officers being the standard-bearers of trust. We are trusted with sensitive conversations, trusted to deliver bad news to prevent worse outcomes, and trusted to accomplish the most challenging missions because we have the necessary experience. Today's Army needs the Warrant Officer to stand at the forefront of re-establishing trust in the Army's processes.

## **Current State: Erosion of Trust In Government Institutions**

Trust is the foundation of effective operations, mission success, and cohesive leadership. Over the years, there has been a growing concern over the erosion of trust in government institutions, including the Army. According to a 2021 survey by the Pew Research Center, only 24% of Americans trust the federal government to do what is right "just about always" or "most of the time." This lack of trust extends to the military, where Soldiers have increasingly expressed concerns about transparency and the consistent application of Army processes. According to research, the main reasons for declining trust in military organizations are poor communication, a perceived lack of transparency, and inconsistent application of policies and processes (Williams, 2017). For example, Soldiers may feel disillusioned by opaque promotion systems or decisions related to deployment and assignments, leading to inequality. An Annual Army Senior Leadership Survey found that only 25% of surveyed Soldiers felt senior leaders were transparent in their decision-making (Vie et al., 2021). These figures highlight the need for a systematic approach to restoring trust—something Warrant Officers can uniquely address. How many complaints and stories do we see on popular social media pages due to failures to follow the Army processes?

The continued loss of trust in Army processes is dangerous and can have far-reaching consequences, including decreased morale, reduced unit cohesion, and a decline in overall mission effectiveness. When Soldiers feel that processes are not applied consistently or fairly, they become disengaged and less likely to commit to their duties, creating a trust deficit. Trust deficit is a significant lack of trust between parties, arising when one party perceives that the other has failed to act in a reliable, transparent, or ethical manner, leading to skepticism, doubt, or a general unwillingness to rely on or cooperate with that party. This trust deficit can lead to increased turnover as Soldiers seek opportunities in environments where they feel their concerns are addressed and their trust valued.

In July 2021, President Biden issued Executive Order 14036 to address these trust issues by promoting transparency, accountability, and ethical behavior across federal agencies. This order mainly focused on economic competition but recognized the importance of rebuilding trust in government institutions, including the military. In December 2021, President Biden issued another executive order, 14058, titled

“Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government.” The key objectives of this order are to enhance the quality of services provided by federal agencies by improving service delivery, measuring customer experience, enhancing transparency and accountability, and cross-agency collaboration. Each of these orders mandates the US Army and all federal agencies to recommit and improve processes.

With our unparalleled technical expertise, deep understanding of Army operations, and commitment to common sense, Warrant Officers are uniquely positioned to restore, reinforce, and improve trust in Army processes. Our role is vital to ensuring that Army procedures are innovative and transparent, thus regaining the confidence of both Soldiers and the public.

## **Warrant Officers as Guardians of Army Processes**

Warrant Officers play a critical role in Army processes because our technical expertise makes us the go-to leaders for ensuring that processes are carried out efficiently and consistently. Unlike commissioned officers, who often rotate through different commands and assignments, Warrant Officers typically remain within their specialty for extended periods. This continuity allows the Warrant Officer to develop a deep knowledge of the processes within their domain and to build strong, trusting relationships with the Soldiers they lead.

As the technical and tactical experts in our fields, Warrant Officers are often responsible for implementing and overseeing key processes within the Army. Whether in logistics, intelligence, aviation, or human resources, Warrant Officers ensure that processes are followed correctly and that any deviations are addressed promptly and transparently. Our role as enforcers of standards is essential to maintaining the integrity of Army processes.

Warrant Officers can lead initiatives to improve transparency in decision-making processes, ensuring Soldiers understand how decisions are made and impact the organization. Due to our unique role as trusted agents, we can also advocate for the consistent application of processes across the Army, addressing concerns about favoritism and fair treatment. Warrant Officers can help restore trust in Army processes and the institution by aligning our efforts with broader strategic initiatives.

## **The Way Forward**

Last year, I served as an Army Training With Industry (TWI) fellow with Deloitte in Rosslyn, VA. The first project I had the opportunity to work on was in Human Resources Transformation, specifically as a member of the consulting team for the Navy’s Customer Experience (CX) section. The CX team is tasked with improving Navy HR by going further than if a Sailor’s pay was corrected. Instead, they measure the sailors’ experience in correcting it by asking questions about their interactions with service agents. This section’s data drives training and strategic communication and identifies process shortfalls. With the help of the Deloitte team, the Navy HR team has identified how to measure trust and improve it over time. As Doerr (2018) highlights in his book, *Measure What Matters*, they have identified the correct key performance indicators to drive decision-making, leading to an organization that is more transparent, committed to processes, and, thus, more trustworthy.

Warrant officers can harness and communicate data to enhance transparency and accountability, essential for building trust. For instance, by analyzing performance metrics and operational outcomes, warrant officers can identify patterns and areas for improvement, ensuring that decisions are driven by data rather than subjective judgment (Akain, 2024). This data-driven approach improves the accuracy of

decisions and demonstrates a commitment to fairness and objectivity, reinforcing trust among Soldiers. Relying on data identifies if the process is working or needs improvement. Due to the expertise of the Warrant Officer, we know the KPIs to measure, the KPI standard, the skills necessary to reach the KPI standard, and often the best processes and training to achieve proficiency in those skills.

Transparency is a crucial component of trust; data sharing can significantly contribute to this aspect. Warrant officers can implement data-sharing practices that inform Soldiers about mission objectives, progress, and outcomes. Just like a physician who shares test results with a patient before they agree with a treatment plan, warrant officers can empower soldiers with knowledge by providing access to relevant data, reducing uncertainty, and fostering a sense of inclusion in the decision-making process (Krist et al., 2017). For example, during training exercises, warrant officers can share performance data with their units, allowing soldiers to understand their strengths and areas for development. Commanders can use this information to justify additional training events and provide achievable goals. Incorporating data into the decision-making process displays openness. This openness builds trust and promotes a culture of continuous improvement and mutual respect.

Transparency may be the hardest of all the areas to improve upon to build trust, but it has the opportunity to make an immense impact. Think of the things that Soldiers care about and the level of transparency in those processes. My last permanent change of station move was one of the most difficult for my family because of the availability of on-post housing. However, when someone presented me with the data that reflected occupancy percentages, projected move-out dates, and how the wait list worked, it improved my trust in the system even though I did not get the news I wanted. While many may not be fans, nobody can argue that the Assignment Interactive Module (AIM) did not improve the assignment system because of its transparency. For the most part, officers can see all available positions and get information about them. More can be done to improve transparency within AIM; however, with the data reflecting that more than 80% of officers received a position in their top 10% (Kimmons, 2020), how can you argue that this process is not more trusting than its predecessor? While proponents do a fantastic job of sharing board data that includes education and position data, so much more data and feedback can be given from these boards. How much more trust would Soldiers have in the Army if they were given readily available access to their Manner of Performance (MOP) score, how their MOP score ranks amongst their peers, or got the same level of individualized feedback from centralized boards as is given from decentralized board? How many more personnel would enroll in college, make different preferences for assignments, and take advantage of another professional improvement if they truly knew how they are ranked and seen amongst their peers through data? Again, openness builds trust and promotes a culture of continuous improvement and mutual respect.

## **Challenges and Considerations**

Restoring trust in Army processes is paramount to protecting our national interests. Improving trust makes selling the Army to the public, future Soldiers, and current Soldiers easier. The entrepreneur Vusi Thembekwayo explains that the one way to sell anything to anyone is by building trust through commitment and communication. This path will present the Army and Warrant Officers with numerous challenges and considerations.

While leveraging data presents many opportunities for building trust, warrant officers must navigate challenges such as data security, privacy concerns, data education, and the potential for information overload. However, all stakeholders must stay committed through this process. The commitment begins with Warrant Officers being willing to lead data education, specifically data literacy. Yes, we need to show others how to leverage the tools we build, but we also must communicate what the visuals mean and their connection to processes. This submission is not a rallying cry for every Warrant Officer to create a business intelligence dashboard. Our lust for information-overload dashboard visuals may

hurt overall data literacy and storytelling data, but I will save that for another article. However, it is a rallying cry to improve data literacy and incorporate data into Army processes to strengthen trust. As renowned data intellect Jordan Morrow (2024) stated, “Not everyone needs to be a data scientist, but everyone needs to be data literate.”. Commitment begins with education and continues with expectation and open-mindedness. There should be an expectation at every element of command that data is integrated into the decision-making process. As leaders identify what needs to be on the long-range training calendar or how many hours are devoted to lessons in institutions, there should be a conversation about what the data says should be there or take up most of the time. This data should be a mix of measured performance and feedback from those trained and expected to execute these tasks. Commitment also includes open-mindedness because there will be times when the data does not support historical processes. In these cases, an honest assessment has to be given to whether those historical processes produce the required result and if the organization is genuinely committed to solving the problems.

Warrant officers must balance data-driven approaches with the human element, recognizing that trust relies on interpersonal relationships and effective communication (Hreha, 2024). The data is going to present several hard pills for Soldiers to swallow. It may present that several more field exercises are required to support Large Scale Combat Operations (LSCO) correctly logistically. The data may show that significant and unexpected personnel distribution measures must be enacted for a unit to meet operational requirements. Warrant Officers can help coach leaders to communicate these challenges and decisions respectfully and empathetically instead of press releases and memorandums. By addressing these challenges thoughtfully, warrant officers can effectively use data to enhance trust without compromising other critical aspects of leadership.

## **Conclusion**

Warrant Officers are crucial to re-establishing trust in Army processes. Our technical expertise, continuity within specialties, and relationship with data make us indispensable in ensuring that Army operations are conducted consistently and transparently. As the Army continues to confront challenges related to trust, both within its ranks and in the eyes of the public, the role of Warrant Officers will only grow. By serving as guardians of these processes, Warrant Officers can help to rebuild trust and ensure that the Army remains a trusted and respected institution.

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