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Factors to Consider in Blending Active and Reserve Manpower Within Military Units

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Summary

A 2002 Department of Defense (DoD) report stated that the military services developed or adopted many innovative approaches to unit structures and organization as force size changed and operational tempo increased.[1] The report suggested that organizational concepts leading to a more flexible, capable force must be implemented more broadly to better capitalize on the capabilities and strengths of the reserve components. In particular, such organizational concepts include "blending" active component (AC) and reserve component (RC) workforces in military units. We define *blending* as any arrangement or event that brings active and reserve manpower together within organizations for a common purpose. At the organizational level where mission work is actually done, there is interest in *workforce integration* between the components.

RAND was asked to examine existing organizational designs that facilitate integration of the reserve and active workforces and to ascertain whether changed personnel management practices are needed to help implement the organizational designs. To answer these questions, we reviewed service reports and directives and other relevant literature on the subject, including the organizational change literature, and we interviewed service officials and subject matter experts.

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[1] Department of Defense (2002), p. 14.

Common Purposes

If seamless workforce integration of active and reserve component is the strategy, what are the goals? The defense leadership has enunciated goals that improve readiness and others that work to reduce costs. The ultimate goal of the strategy, of course, is to improve the accomplishment of missions. At the efficiency level, there are two goals: better use of human capital and lower cost including better capital asset utilization.

Other considerations are not explicitly included as goals. One must recognize that the states have a stake in the process, especially with regard to National Guard units and workforces. One must also recognize that components and units have rich histories and cultures that merit consideration.[2]

Our interviews and literature reviews suggest that workforce integration efforts aimed at improving operational accomplishment of mission, balancing operations tempo, and increasing capital asset utilization would be more successful than efforts aimed at other goals.

Examples of Workforce Integration

In the military, the paths toward workforce integration are not similar among the armed forces, and movement along the paths is not occurring at the same rate. For example, the Air Force has blended units from two components into a single wing with a single commander. Traditionally, the Air Force has integrated workforces using associate units. The Coast Guard believes it has fully integrated its components operationally, organizationally, and administratively. The Navy has had associate units in one functional area but is using the concept in a limited way. The Army has chosen to integrate at the unit level (battalion and below) and at some headquarters in multi-component units.

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[2]   We define *culture* as the General Accounting Office (GAO) (now the Government Accountability Office) defines it: "[T]he underlying assumptions, beliefs, values, attitudes, and expectations shared by an organization's members" that "affect the behavior of its members" (GAO, 1992).

The Marine Corps assigns AC personnel to RC units to assist in training and preparedness.

Enabling and Constraining Factors

Based on our reviews and interviews, we have outlined a set of factors that we hypothesize affect workforce integration within units. These factors are associated mainly with organizational structure or work content.

Factors

Table S.1 shows how certain factors might govern formation of units with operationally and organizationally integrated workforces in a peacetime environment. (For some units, mobilization or deployment might significantly change the effect of the factors.) These factors should apply to all the services equally. While certain functions (e.g., transportation, medical) might seem to be more amenable to integration than others (e.g., infantry), it may be because these factors affect those functions differently and not because the functions cannot be inherently integrated.

We categorized the factors as being important for workforce integration, useful for workforce integration, and/or difficult for workforce integration.

Factor Relationships

Some of these factors overlap with others or are correlated with each other. For example, job-sharing fits well with individual/small team tasks focused on operational output. Particular factors may work together to favor or hinder integration. Being able to deploy or be employed on similar timelines is an example of a factor that, combined with another factor, makes integration possible.

Table S.1
Factors Affecting Workforce Integration

Factor	Important for Workforce Integration	Useful for Workforce Integration	Difficult for Workforce Integration
Work schedule	Continuous (24/7) or intermittent schedules		Fixed (weekday or weekend) schedules
Job-sharing	Job-sharing possible		Job-sharing not possible
Complementary jobs		Reserve military job fits civilian occupation	
Operational value of work	Operational output		Training output
Focus of work		Capital-intensive; platform-centric	Unit-centric
Nature of work	Individual/small team tasks; aggregated effort		Group tasks; collective effort
Command authority		Single source of power/authority	
Workforce interactions		Vertical coordination	Horizontal coordination
Deployment and timing	Can deploy (be employed) on same schedule		Different deployment schedules or lengths
Location of unit		Geographically proximate	Geographically distant
Equipment ownership and commonality	Shared, common equipment	Separately owned, common equipment	Separately owned, different equipment
Unit size		Small, noncomplex units	Large, complex units
Workforce experience		Workforce experience is high and homogeneous	Workforce experience is low or heterogeneous
Nature of association	Routine, frequent association	Periodic, frequent association	One-off, infrequent, or rare association
Workforce identity		Weak or changeable identity and culture	Strong identity and culture
Training standards/ training status	Same standards; individuals qualified or qualifications achievable with minimal training	Same standards; progress toward qualifications	Different standards; some individuals unqualified

It is not apparent that any one factor by itself can lead to favoring integration. Instead, an accretion of factors leads toward integration or hinders it. The best example of this may be the Coast Guard, where continuous 24/7 schedules, job-sharing, operational output, aggregated effort, common employment schedules, geographically proximate workforces, and a changeable identity allowed creation of a new culture around "Team Coast Guard," that service's name for its integrated active-reserve force.

Challenges to Workforce Integration

Challenges created by workforce integration arise in other areas. Among them are command and control, operational availability, readiness reporting, component-specific funding, deployment availability, geographical dispersion, training availability, operations tempo (OPTEMPO) funding, equipment modernization and compatibility, property accountability, command opportunity, work scheduling, career and job expectations, personnel performance evaluations, and supporting pay and personnel information systems.

We particularly examined personnel management policy differences among the active and reserve workforces to determine if they created barriers to workforce integration. We reviewed active and reserve component officer management and selected private-sector organizations.

Table S.2 summarizes some of the AC and RC workforce differences in the broad processes of entering (the component as well as a first or subsequent unit), developing and training, promoting, and transitioning.

Do personnel management differences between the component workforces need to be resolved to achieve workforce integration? Our review of workforce integration in multiple instances leads to the observation that they do not. There are many instances in which members of different workforces integrate operationally and organizationally to serve mission needs, but not administratively and without impact on mission.

Table S.2
Generalized Workforce Differences

Personnel Function	Active Component	Reserve Component
Entering	Hires nationally	Hires locally
	Closed system; no prior experience preferred	Open system; prior experience preferred
	Trains upon entry	Trains over extended period
	Assigns qualified personnel to duty positions	Assigns qualified and unqualified personnel to duty positions
	Distinct hiring and placement	Simultaneous hiring/placement
Developing	Time-based; "push" system	Event-based; "pull" system
	Both horizontal and vertical rotational assignments	Local on-the-job training; few or no rotational assignments
	Periodic training and education at fixed intervals	Episodic training and education as available
Promoting	Rank-in-person system: fungible across jobs	Generally a rank-in-job system: job-dependent
	Service-wide promotion vacancies	Promotion to local position
	Up or out	Up or stay
Transitioning	Time-based	Event- (points) and time-based
	Defined-benefit retirement	Different defined-benefit retirement
	Transition to RC complex	Transition to AC complex

Although there are differences in personnel management policies both within and across the services, our research and interviews with reserve and active authorities did not uncover problematic challenges that impede workforce integration if other factors align. Changes in personnel management policy and practice may be warranted for other reasons, but our review led us to the conclusion that those different practices are not barriers that must be overcome to achieve workforce integration. Instead, they must be understood and accommodated. In essence, the issue is training and education rather than a barrier per se. Where there are difficulties in administering different personnel management systems in one unit, those difficulties are more a function of the administrative information management systems than a function of personnel policy. Thus, there could be more than one set of per-

sonnel management policies operating within a blended organization, each serving its own constituency.

Summary Observations

The forms of workforce integration that are used by the armed forces have counterparts in the private sector. Just as different forms are used in the private sector to fit environment and needs, no one form fits all situations in the military. There are structural and work content and context factors that assist in governing the choice as to whether to blend workforces within units in a certain way or to keep workforce-pure units.

Several other observations about these factors emerge from our assessment. First, where organizational factors align, personnel management does not appear to be a significant problem. Second, where organizational factors do not align to favor integration, personnel management changes will not achieve integration. Finally, there are political challenges in integrating National Guard and federal units. Governors have strong interests in their National Guard units, and employment of those units for state active duty or in Title 32 status is problematic in integrated units.[3] However, workarounds exist to address these limitations.

Recommendations

We have three recommendations. First, adapting what works within a service to other functional areas in the service is a better near-term workforce integration strategy than replicating forms of integration across services. In essence, the goal should be to adapt within rather than to force organizational change from without.

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[3] Guard troops in Title 32 status are under the control of the governor but are federally funded.

Second, moving toward the future, during their force structuring (organizational design) processes, the services should provide policy guidance that makes workforce integration (e.g., multi-component and associate units) a consideration given certain factors of the type outlined above.

Third, the services should consider performing more evaluation of workforce integration against the objectives for it that have been asserted (see Chapter Two for a discussion of these objectives). Is effectiveness actually higher and are costs actually lower? Evaluation against the goals asserted for workforce integration could be performed by measuring attitudes and outputs (mission accomplishment) as a result of change. Increased understanding of the actual effects of workforce integration within units can to lead greater emphasis on the respective strengths of the workforces, and more efficient use of resources.