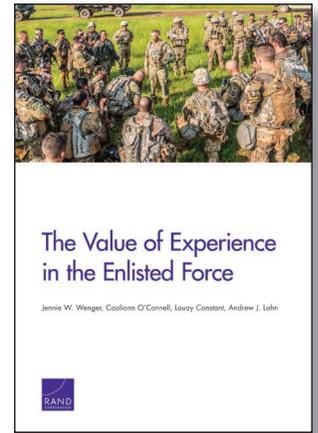




The Value of Experience in the Enlisted Force

Jennie W. Wenger, Caolionn O'Connell, Louay Constant, Andrew J. Lohn

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Past research has placed little emphasis on how to value the experience of U.S. Army noncommissioned officers (NCOs). The authors of this report examine the relationships between the tenure, experience, and productivity of key NCO leaders and the performance of the junior soldiers they lead, with a focus on maintaining or improving leadership quality and soldier performance, as well as reducing personnel costs.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do NCO leaders influence their soldiers?
- Are junior soldiers led by NCOs with key types of experience more likely to remain in the Army? Are they more likely to be promoted quickly?
- Is the Army's promotion process capturing and retaining effective leaders



KEY FINDINGS

- Junior soldiers have lower first-term attrition when their senior enlisted leaders possess key types of experience, but more experience is not always valuable.
- Rough calculations suggest that the increased costs of leaders with typical levels of experience (versus those with the least experience) are outweighed by savings related to lower attrition among junior soldiers.
- Junior soldiers have higher levels of first-term attrition when their senior enlisted leaders have recently joined the unit.
- Three themes emerged in interviews with soldiers describing effective leaders: leaders who cared about their soldiers, leaders who effectively trained their soldiers, and leaders who were knowledgeable. These themes are well aligned with Army doctrine.

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- The NCO education system does a better job than the promotion process of including and assessing the relevant attributes and competencies relevant to Army leadership.
- None of the factors considered in the promotion point process explicitly captures the extent to which an NCO is successful at mentoring and training his or her soldiers.
- The Army is likely failing to identify soldiers with leadership potential early in their careers.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Army should explore providing additional training or support to the least-experienced senior enlisted personnel selected for unit leadership.
- The Army should seek to maintain continuity during senior enlisted leaders' transitions between units, with the goal of improving the performance of junior enlisted personnel.
- The Army should consider altering the point allocation in the promotion process to capture desired leadership qualities. Doing so would likely help to identify soldiers with leadership potential.
- Leadership likely has additional effects not detected in our analyses. For example, senior leaders' influence may work partly through influence on junior NCOs. Also, the match between leaders and followers on key characteristics may matter. Learning more about these effects could help to improve performance and lower attrition, resulting in decreased personnel costs.