

Success in a Joint Environment

Identifying Attributes for Air Force Accessions

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ISSUE

Strengthening joint leaders and teams is a top Air Force priority. One area of interest among Air Force leaders is whether it is possible to place more emphasis on joint participation at the earliest stages of an airman's career—in particular, during recruiting and accession. Researchers from RAND Project AIR FORCE investigated whether the Air Force could improve its ability to recruit joint leaders and team members and whether current practices are aligned with this goal.



APPROACH

To carry out this research, we

- conducted discussions with Air Force stakeholders to understand current Air Force recruiting processes—including marketing—and accession programs
- performed a literature review of materials related to formal assessments used during recruiting and accession
- developed an approach to identify attributes from joint development requirements that might signal joint potential in accession candidates
- examined various dimensions of proposed attributes that might be a short-term focus during recruiting and accession.



FINDINGS

We found the following:

- No comprehensive set of attributes or other requirements was relevant to identifying joint potential.
- Some current processes collect information that is related to attributes, but information either is not collected or is collected but not used to assess airmen attributes in a systematic way.
- The methodology we developed identified 22 attributes for attributes that would position candidates for success in a joint environment (Figure S.1). Because this was a first look at identifying attributes, further research will be required before these attributes are incorporated into Air Force planning.



OBSERVATIONS

We developed the following overarching considerations to guide Air Force efforts to strengthen joint leaders and teams:

- Establish official joint development guidance. The Air Force needs a clear statement of goals to guide policy actions aimed at improving the joint proficiency of airmen.
- Target a segment of the force. It might be more effective for the Air Force to prioritize developing joint proficiency in a portion of the force.
- Formalize a method to identify attributes. Codify a process by which the Air Force can select and update attributes. The approach used by the study team offers a starting point.

We developed the following considerations to help the Air Force identify attributes that indicate joint potential during recruiting and accession:

- Systematically and uniformly collect and track attribute data. Ensure that significant opportunities to gather information from accession candidates in a uniform way are not missed.
- Leverage existing opportunities to assess for attributes, including formal assessment tools and information-gathering during interviews with potential recruits.
- Consider whether attributes should be emphasized in marketing. In developing future marketing efforts, the Air Force needs to consider whether and how attributes should be included.

We developed the following attribute-specific observations:

- Focus on the “low-hanging fruit”—the attributes that are prominent in joint requirements, are more difficult to develop, and can be assessed with existing tools. Examples include self-control, openness to experience, integrity, and motivation to succeed.
- Consider a pilot program to identify and track attributes. Include the development of milestones and measures of performance for a targeted set of airmen in the pilot program.
- Evaluate additional testing tools. We identified other tools (such as recognized tests for specific attributes or structured interview protocols) that might be appropriate for this purpose and that the Air Force can draw on in evaluating alternative methods.
- Consider revisions to the foundational competencies. Consider adding to the foundational competencies attributes not aligned with them and using the single merged list for development, recruiting, and accession.

ATTRIBUTES FOR SUCCESS IN JOINT ENVIRONMENTS



Disposition

A habit, a preparation, a state of readiness, or a tendency to act in a specific way

- Agreeableness
- Altruism
- Assertiveness
- Conscientiousness
- Creativity
- Empathy
- Humility
- Integrity
- Intellectual risk-taking
- Openness to experience
- Orderliness
- Self-awareness
- Self-control
- Self-efficacy
- Tolerance for ambiguity



Cognitive ability

A level of functioning in intellectual tasks demonstrating the capacity to control and planfully apply one's own mental skills

- General mental ability
- Numeracy
- Spatial awareness
- Verbal expression



Attitude

An individual's predisposed state of mind regarding a value

- Motivation to learn
- Motivation to succeed



Physical health

The ability to remain healthy and uninjured

- Physical fitness

NOTE: The research team defined *attribute* in an accession context as a characteristic, quality, or feature of an individual and identified 22 attributes that could indicate joint potential in new recruits. All but the following six align with Air Force foundational competencies: self-awareness, humility, numeracy, physical fitness, spatial awareness, and self-efficacy.



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