

Developing a Competency-Based Organization

Applying the Navy's Uniformed Human Capital Concepts to the Civilian Workforce

Regan H. Campbell

Admiral Mullen, the chief of naval operations, stated in his latest guidance that the Navy should “drive to execution Sea Warrior and other ongoing manpower and personnel transformational efforts” in an endeavor to realize a “properly sized fleet.” To accomplish this, the CNO pointed to a desire to examine the value of a competency-based organization for both the uniformed and civilian workforce. Specifically, he stated the need for civilians to build upon the concepts outlined in the Human Capital Strategy (a human resources personnel management plan) to deliver a competency-focused manpower and personnel system. In response to the CNO’s guidance, some organizations and leaders are examining ways to optimally align civilian workforces and to measure the civilian contribution to mission execution.

There appears to be growing interest in aligning into competency-based organizations. Interestingly, this desire mirrors a recent push in the uniformed Services, where we have begun to align enlisted personnel based on their knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs). In order to achieve this alignment, the Navy instituted a new human capital strategy, which, in part, details a scientific method to determine the optimal number of sailors to execute any given task and ensures those sailors receive the necessary training. This proven method is being used to identify the KSAs of current sailors and the necessary KSAs to execute tasks and man our future ships. These KSAs can then be fed to our training community to ensure operational readiness. Could this process be applied to the civilian workforce, and would that application result in benefits to large organizations?

Optimal or Reduced Manning

Industrial/organizational psychology has long had a scientific technique for determining the KSAs necessary to perform a job. The technique is known as “job analysis.” The Navy favors perceptual and motor job design—or



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human factors job design—which enhances reliability, safety, and employee satisfaction, while reducing training and staffing requirements. This process is defined under the human capital initiative, with the following steps:

1. A mission analysis examines what the operating environment is and what the user and system must do; this is also known as a requirements analysis.
2. A user analysis examines who the users are and determines their skills.
3. A function allocation distributes the functions between the system and the user. (For a successful function allocation, one should determine what an individual does well in the mission and assign him or her those tasks. The remaining tasks should be given to the machine.)
4. A task analysis compiles the specific listing of tasks and breaks them down into key components.

From here, a job analysis diverges from a human factors design process because the outcome is different. The job analysis steps continue below:

5. Once the tasks have been determined, the KSAs associated with them can be identified. The KSAs define what someone needs to be able to do in order to execute the job.
6. The KSAs can then be used to define the training program, if necessary. In order to do that, one would execute a trainee analysis, which determines what the trainee already knows.
7. By looking at the delta between what the trainee knows and what he or she needs to know, we can determine the training interventions necessary.
8. Once the new positions are implemented, one can use metrics to determine if the allocations are correct, the workload is too high for any operator, and the training interventions were acceptable.

As used by the Navy, the process results in a list of the KSAs associated with each enlisted job, allowing us to determine what our sailors are capable of doing and what training is necessary for them to work on the various platforms or in various jobs. In addition to this application to current platforms, the job design process has been successfully implemented in the design of new ships, such as the Littoral Combat Ship: The designers began by determining the tasks for each position; from there, they determined the KSAs and assigned a person to the position; the person's skills were then compared to the KSAs, so the training requirements could be determined.

These training requirements will soon be compared to the Navy Training System Plan to ensure the correct training is being executed. The products (e.g., training and workload measures) will be validated using human performance testing. Thus, job design has been successfully applied to both existing platforms and new platforms within the Navy.

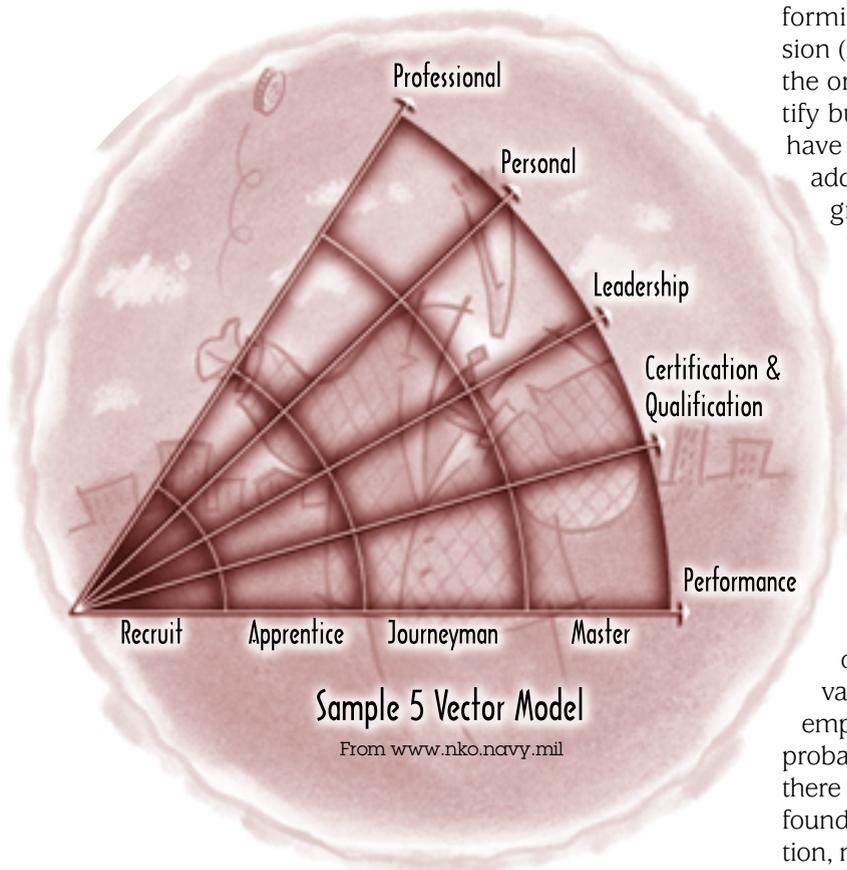
The Process and the Civilian Workforce

Navy senior leadership is clearly concerned to ensure that the workforce is competency-aligned in order to better support the mission. Can the Navy's uniformed human capital process be applied to the civilian workforce of a large organization? Yes, indeed. (In fact, it could be an easier transition than the transition required for the uniformed Services because there are likely to be fewer KSAs—a recent survey categorized civilian jobs into 10 job families.) The steps would be:

1. Determining what missions the civilian workforce is required to execute (for example, systems engineering, logistics, technical authority). This task is completed for the most part, although there would likely be some discussion about whether all business areas are truly "Navy" needs or core business areas.
2. Determining the composition of the civilian workforce. This task has been completed at many commands.
3. Identifying the tools available to reduce the workload—specifically, examining the various commands to see how they complete their missions, then identifying and applying those tools that are of value to the entire enterprise. This effort can make use of the Lean initiative that is already in place to identify and correct areas where there is overlap or redundancy between commands.
4. Breaking down the missions into tasks. Complete a task analysis for all tasks requiring human intervention to determine the key components and KSAs necessary. For many missions in a large organization, the required KSAs will likely be similar. For example, a business financial manager in a program executive office exercises similar KSAs as one in a different PEO or matrix-support office.
5. Grouping the KSAs into competencies or skill set groups. This can be done scientifically using a factor analysis or just by viewing the results and grouping them.
6. Defining the training program for new employees or employees who do not have all of the required skills. This would require examining the delta between what the trainee knows and what he or she needs to know.
7. Measuring results to determine if the allocations are correct, the workload is too high for any employees, and the training interventions were acceptable.

Benefits to the Civilian Workforce

Although the process appears to be quite complex, it would provide a large organization with substantial benefits: It would allow members of the workforce to be more mobile between programs or commands because they have the same skill sets; it would also simplify the promotion, bonus, and training structure because each employee within a core group would be directly comparable with another in that group. This would simplify the National Security Personnel System implementation and allow comparison between headquarters and field activities.



Sample 5 Vector Model
From www.nko.navy.mil

Another benefit of this method would be to allow civilians to use five-vector models, as the Navy military service does. Five-vector models show dynamic occupational, leadership, and personal development continuums. They show career roadmaps and allow employees to make choices about their futures. For civilians, a five-vector model could detail what employees need to know, when they need to know it, and how to acquire that skill, if they are interested in promotion. By building in incentives (for example, bonuses, awards, promotions, additional paid college credits, telecommuting, job sharing, and additional vacations), any large organization could ensure that motivated and talented employees are willing to do the necessary training to move through the career roadmap. A sample five-vector model is shown in the graphic on this page. In an actual model, a civilian would see dots on each vector indicating his or her progression, as well as what remaining milestones must be achieved to qualify for the next level.

From a leadership perspective, perhaps the most important benefit to adopting this method for our civilian workforce is the ability to adequately size the workforce and understand where we are spending our money. In recent years, this has been a major focus of the senior leadership as they try to determine what metrics are appropriate to measure the size and productivity of the workforce. By adopting this type of job design, senior leadership could directly measure what tasks their workforce is per-

forming and how those tasks are supporting the mission (i.e., measure outputs and outcomes). In addition, the organization would be able to more effectively justify budget needs or point to specific tasks that would have to be eliminated if there were budget cuts. This additional oversight would provide the Navy and Congress with more knowledge about fiscal matters within the organization.

Challenges for Implementation

As with any new initiative, there would likely be considerable resistance to moving toward a competency-based alignment, so it's possible that the organization could lose a percentage of the workforce not interested in change. However, because the leadership of the Navy strongly supports a competency-based alignment, it behooves the civilian leadership to examine ways to implement one. To do so would take considerable buy-in from the leaders of the organization, as well as a great deal of work. The various competencies would have to be defined, and employees aligned within these competencies. It would probably take several years to accomplish. In addition, there will be employees within the organization who are found to be not aligned with the goals of the organization, necessitating substantial retraining or lay-offs/transfers, and a defined process would have to be developed to deal with such employees. In the short term, this type of change might also result in additional expenses, both in process development and training, as the organization establishes the process to align employees and trains them to meet the minimum qualifications of the respective competencies. These issues will have to be addressed before tackling this type of reorganization; however, the benefits appear to outweigh the costs.

Recapitalizing the Navy

This type of reorganization could transform commands and allow us to execute the types of "recapitalization" on which the Navy has focused in recent years. Through these changes, commands could solve a number of the issues they face, including aligning in terms of competencies, sizing the organization correctly, identifying the core business areas, reducing costs, and providing metrics for defining the workforce. It would also provide evidence to Navy leadership and Congress that the organization is committed to and actively engaged in supporting the mission of the Navy. And finally, the transformation would allow commands to more accurately reflect the direction of the fleet, while ensuring we are able to take advantage of their lessons learned.

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