

Human Resources and Human Dignity: LSCO's Ethical Implications or the Human Resources Support Element of the Sustainment WFF

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Adjutant General Corps (AG) officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) have a wide variety and great number of responsibilities on their plate at any given time. Accountability and Personnel Status Reports, evaluations and awards, assignments and manning, general correspondence and so many other staff actions vie for the S-1's attention all day every day. Each of those actions are mission critical to the "customer"—the Soldier whose career and livelihood depends on those actions being completed accurately and on time. This is enough of a challenge in peacetime day-to-day garrison operations. It proved manageable enough under deployed Counterinsurgency (COIN) operations, as units generally remained on a single established operating base with infrastructure well-protected from significant enemy attack. LSCO, however, presents greater challenges as task saturation, enemy activity, and the demands of maneuver will severely degrade AG professionals' time and resources to accomplish all necessary human resources (HR) tasks.

How can an AG professional and the AG Corps as a whole complete their tasks under such dire predicted conditions? By keeping central to all actions the fact that the "H" in "HR" stands for "Human." And the reality that their particular tasks in support of warfighting both rely on and affect the fundamental reality of human dignity on a greater scale and with greater depth than perhaps any other branch (save the Chaplains and Medical Corps). Army doctrine specifies "what" to do. HR professionals must train the "why" we do it and the "how" to do it in a way that properly respects the human dignity of all persons involved in any particular action. This paper will briefly trace relevant doctrine to identify ethical concerns for certain HR functions in LSCO, focusing primarily on those that touch most directly on the fundamental principle of human dignity.

HR Support in Army Doctrine

It seems prudent to begin with a brief review of how Army doctrine defines HR support, from broad concepts down to specific HR functions. Beginning with *ADP 3-0 Operations and ADP 4-0 Sustainment*, the Sustainment warfighting function is distinguished from the other warfighting function's as "the related tasks and systems that provide support and services to ensure freedom of action, extended operational reach, and prolong endurance."¹ Personnel Services is one of the four elements of Sustainment, and encompasses HR Support.²

A quick read of *ADP 4-0* reveals a heavy emphasis on the logistics aspects of sustainment—acquiring, managing, and deploying resources. However, let it never be forgotten that resources are not only materiel, but also human. This is most evident under the principle of endurance and the necessity of reconstitution. The restoration of combat power through reorganization and regeneration is not simply about rolling stock and weapons, but also about Soldiers—the people—who operate and maintain those systems.³ Warfighting is fundamentally a human endeavor.⁴

FM 1-0 Human Resources Support establishes the AG Corps' doctrine of two HR Core Competencies, which encompass nine HR Critical Functions. The first competency, Man the Force, includes four functions: Personnel Accountability and Strength Reporting (PASR)—Who do we have? Where are they right now?, Support to Replacement Operations, Support to Casualty Operations, and Personnel Readiness Management—fill the Modified Table of Organization and Equipment (MTOE) with the right people. The second competency, Provide HR Services, includes the functions of Essential Services (awards, evals, assignments, etc); Postal Operations; Band Support; and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Programs (which encompasses American Red Cross

coordination). A third set of critical functions fall under AG Corps purview, but may be accomplished by other staff officers, such as Retention and Command Interest Programs (e.g. Voting Assistance).⁵

HR Support in LSCO

Now we can begin to see how some HR functions will naturally reduce or increase in priority and scope in the intensity of a LSCO environment. AG professionals at all echelons will address many of the challenges through increasing efficiency. Perhaps some HR functions will be more effective if outsourced. The greatest challenges, however, will not be with efficiency or effectiveness of particular functions, but with the ethics of the “why” and the “how” we conduct those functions. The “why” must always be rooted in the dignity of the human person. The “how” must always prioritize respect of the human persons involved in any HR action. The HR functions that will pose the most critical ethical questions—as measured by the effect upon persons—are those that fall under the Man the Force core competency.

Ethics Concerns in HR Services Functions

Two notes of caution should be issued before turning attention to the ethical concerns of Man the Force functions under LSCO. First, the lines between various HR functions and core competencies are not always hard and fast. Some functions under Provide HR Services overlap with Man the Force functions. Support to Casualty Operations provides the most obvious examples. Red Cross messages concerning family deaths are the inward-looking counterpart to Casualty Operations’ Primary Next of Kin (PNOK) notification of combat casualties, and must be handled with the utmost discretion and empathy.

Processing of casualties’ mail is a Postal Services function, but it has clear implications for Casualty Operations. DD-93 and SGLV 8286 (Servicemembers’ Group Life Insurance Election and Certificate) updates are essential services, but they provide information that drives the Casualty Notification and Casualty Assistance processes. In these instances, it is imperative that all HR professionals remember that even their most mundane tasks—sorting mail, data entry, and the like—can have a significant impact on the human level for Soldiers and their Families. This answers the “why” for those tasks’ existence, and can therefore inspire excellence for the “how” those tasks are completed routinely.

Second, a focus on the ethical considerations of Man the Force functions does not imply that Provide HR Services functions are without ethical concerns. These functions are certainly critical, but efficiency and effectiveness of operations in support of a LSCO mission may permit deferred timelines and/or adjusted standards to ethically fulfill their intent. Some functions may even be outsourced (or are already outsourced) to other staff officers or agencies. Insofar as these efficiencies can be gained while still respecting all human persons involved, then the ethical “why” is satisfied. The question then becomes “how?” For example, processing awards and decorations may be delayed until the Operational Tempo slows, and proofreading might adjust to tolerate the errant comma or non-capitalized word. The Soldier will still be recognized for his accomplishments (why), but on an adjusted timeline within standards that also respects the urgency of combat (how).

Ethics Concerns in Man the Force Functions

Man the Force functions in a LSCO environment have ethical concerns that must be considered across multiple echelons. These functions might seem routine, mundane, or even insignificant at the tactical echelon, but they inform life and death decisions made at operational and strategic echelons. The ethical concern, then, is that these HR functions be executed with a view to both the “why” (which is human dignity) and the “how” (which is for the benefit to those human persons affected).

Personnel Accountability and Strength Reporting

PASR provides an example of these concerns perhaps readily understandable by those outside of the HR profession. PERSTAT and accountability is a tedious and thankless task even in the uncontested garrison environment, subject to frequent abuses, especially at the tactical echelon. Soldiers out of ranks might be

reported as present for duty without a leader actually checking on them.

It is one thing for squad, platoon, and company leaders who are not AG Corps HR professionals to do this—they are assuming risk mostly only for themselves. It is a greater offense when HR professionals commit or permit such practices by “pencil-whipping” PERSTAT reports. As reports are aggregated up echelons, the inaccuracy is multiplied to the effect that leaders at operational and strategic echelons receive grossly inaccurate data about the human resources available for mission.

Such practices simply cannot be tolerated in a LSCO environment, and training for LSCO must begin in garrison. HR professionals cannot blindly hope that sloppy garrison disciplines will self-correct for LSCO. It is mission-critical then that all leaders at all echelons take responsibility for providing accurate reporting, and that HR professionals take ownership of verifying the data that will drive decision-making at higher echelons. The solution is to understand and promote the “why” of PASR as accounting for human souls that are bound to our own by our common oath—much more than a simple admin task. Once again, even the most mundane tasks can have a significant impact on the human level for Soldiers and their Families—and in the case of PASR, to the operational campaign. This can drive the “how” to focus on completeness and accuracy in reporting.

Support to Replacement Operations & Personnel Readiness Management

Support to Replacement Operations and Personnel Readiness Management may be taken together as it concerns ethics. Both involve assigning actual people to allocated positions. From a staff perspective this is a very data and numbers driven process. Units’ combat strength is tracked and reported as a percentage of available and assigned against required and authorized. It can quickly be forgotten in the administrative shuffle of IPPS-A, PowerBI, Excel, and PowerPoint that those numbers and percentages are actually human souls.

AG Corps leaders must themselves remember, and perpetually remind their teammates, that they are not managing mere datapoints. Rather, every number in the loss column is a deceased person—our teammate who made the ultimate sacrifice, and whose death their Family back home will grieve in sorrow. Every number in the gains column is a human soul who will soon be exposed to same very real dangers as he backfills a Soldier in the losses column.

It is imperative that HR professionals be always cognizant of this human dimension of their task. Doing so will motivate the “why” of their daily operations, and inform the “how” they go about those duties. This can and should inspire excellence. On the other hand, such an acute awareness of the human toll of their work might lead some to compassion fatigue or even moral injury. What resources are available to assist HR professionals understand the deep ethical considerations of their field, and the ethical considerations of their routine actions?

Support to Casualty Operations

HR Support to Casualty Operations is the function that touches most deeply on human dignity and the value of life. Whereas many of the challenges in the Army’s pivot from COIN to LSCO will be addressed as straightforward logistics challenges, the very oversimplified formula of “generate materiel faster than it is depleted” provides the broad solution. However, when this formula is expressed in terms of human capital, “recruit Soldiers faster than they are attrited” (i.e. killed, wounded, captured, etc.), the ethical concerns are made apparent. This point has already been made above vis-à-vis Replacement Operations.

War brings death, and LSCO will bring death on a scale that very few Americans can recall. We must look beyond the obvious questions such as, “How do we properly handle so many bodies?” and, “How do we handle bodies of enemy and civilian dead?” Those are primarily logistics questions. The HR professional must be concerned with the administrative burden that death on such a scale will bring.

As with PASR, how might the overwhelming number of casualty packets to process affect our HR technicians at the tactical and operational echelons? There is both an individual and a collective concern here. The ethical dissonance of handling death on such a large scale has potential to exhaust HR professionals, and perhaps to exhaust even entire shops overwhelmed by the burden.

A final consideration for this paper is the mechanics of the casualty notification process. Years of COIN, where communications were relatively fast and uncontested, have conditioned our leaders to expect casualty notifications within a matter of hours. Communications in the LSCO environment will most certainly be obstructed by enemy action, and will therefore be slower and less reliable. That only concerns the delay in communication of a casualty between theater and appropriate Casualty Assistance Center (CAC). Will each CAC have the bandwidth to perform vastly more notifications than for which they are currently staffed, and the ability sustain those operations for an extended duration? The “why” of how we do casualty notification is rooted in the fundamental human dignity of the deceased Soldier. That informs the “how” we currently notify, which is quickly and in person.

The sheer volume of casualties in LSCO will certainly challenge such regulatory requirements as, “Notification duty takes precedence over all other responsibilities,” and “A uniformed Service representative in Army Service Uniform will make personal notification,” and

“CNO must notify the PNOK within 4 hours of the time the CAC receives the [mission].”⁶

AG professionals at the highest echelons must find creative ways to respect the “why” of casualty notifications while adapting the methods and standards of “how.” This must be done in a way that ensures Americans—civilian and military—of the fundamental dignity of the deceased Soldiers and respect for the ultimate sacrifice they made in battle. Anecdotally, this tension has been illustrated in pop culture in the movie, *We Were Soldiers*, as taxi drivers were unwittingly tasked to notify Families by telegram of their Soldiers death, prompting the wives to assume the mission for one another.

Conclusion

As we can see, HR Support’s Man the Force functions, and the HR Services functions in a somewhat lesser degree, will generate ethical concerns in a LSCO environment that must be considered across multiple echelons, to include the civilian front back home. The Army’s doctrinal framework explains clearly “what” HR professionals must do. It is up to leaders at each echelon to specify and train the “how” to do it. This “how” must be informed by a “why” that is firmly rooted in the fundamental dignity of every human person. After all, the “H” in “HR” stands for “Human,” and war is fundamentally a human endeavor.

Endnotes

1 *Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, Operations*, 31 July 2019; section 5-19. See also *ADP 4-0, Sustainment*, 31 July 2019; p.1-1.

2 *ADP 3-0, 5-22; ADP 4-0, 1-52ff.* Sustainment also includes Logistics, Financial Management, and Health Services Support. Personnel Services also includes Legal Support, Religious Support, and Band Operations.

3 *ADP 4-0, 3-92ff.*

4 *ADP 3-0, 1-26.*

5 *Field Manual (FM) 1-0, Human Resources Support*, 25 August 2021; section 1-19ff.

6 *Army Regulation (AR) 638-8, Army Casualty Program*, 7 June 2019; paragraphs 4-4.a, b, and d, respectively.