MP-IDSA

Issue Brief

Talent Management Best Practices and HRM Concepts in the Armed Forces

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Summary

Talent management initiatives are being implemented by armies across the world. These include leadership development programmes, mentorship programmes and on-the-job training, to help officers develop the skills required to succeed in modern warfare. Data analytics and other digital tools are being exploited to make talent management decisions. The Indian armed forces can incorporate some of these best practices to effectively manage talent and maintain a competitive edge.

Talent management is an essential function of military organisations. With modern warfare becoming increasingly complex and technology-driven, the recruitment, development, and retention of highly skilled and motivated personnel has become even more critical. Some specific programmes have been adopted by armed forces worldwide to develop subject matter experts (SMEs) and carry out talent management in the last decade. Examples of such initiatives include the US Joint Officer Management (JOM)[1], the Atuda Program of the Israel Defence Force (IDF)[2] and Military Talents Program of the People's Liberation Army (PLA).[3] By understanding and incorporating some of these best practices, organisations in the Indian Armed Forces can effectively manage talent, maintain a competitive edge, and achieve success in their missions.

This Brief examines some additional programmes and concepts related to talent management adopted by other armed forces. These include the following:

- Unified Career Management Programme of UK

- Military Domain Experts Scheme from Singapore

- Israel's Magshimim programme

- Chinese Concept on TM in the Military

- Capability Life Cycle Concept from Australia

Unified Career Management System: United Kingdom

In June 2021, the UK Ministry of Defence unveiled 'Unified Career Management' (UCM), a new approach for managing the careers of members of the armed forces. The strategy was created to enhance the military's capacity to retain and train soldiers for specialised positions. The UCM programme is designed to provide personnel with the tools and resources they need to develop their careers, while also fostering the development of SMEs in key areas of expertise.

Select groups from various defence specialties are centrally managed by UCM under one Command. New and personalised career tracks will be available to employees who are managed through UCM, enabling them to further their careers while continuing in specialised jobs. In addition to formal training and development

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[1] **"DoD Joint Officer Management (JOM) Program"**, Department of Defense, United States of America, April 2018.

[2] **"Atudai Program (IDF Academic Reserve)"**, —Jerusalem College of Technology.

[3] **"Xi Jinping Asks Chinese Military to Step Up Recruitment of New Talent to Gain Ascendancy in Future Wars"**, *The Economic Times*, 29 November 2021.

opportunities, the UCM programme also encourages personnel to engage in informal learning and development activities. This may include attending conferences and workshops, reading industry publications, and participating in online forums and discussion groups.

Currently, only the 'Cyber Cadre' for Armed Forces is being managed by Strategic Command under UCM. This cadre consists of cyber experts from all branches of the Armed Forces. Over their careers, these experts will be able to take on more cyber billets within the Armed Forces, expanding their options for cyber careers, benefitting from increased career stability and honing their cyber knowledge. Those with in-demand talents will be able to land the most crucial positions thanks to UCM. Although the UCM approach is currently being used to manage cyber experts, other specialised domains are also being considered.[4]

At the heart of the UCM programme is the Career Management Information System (CMIS). This is an online platform that provides personnel with access to a wide range of training and development resources, including courses and certifications in key areas of expertise. By completing these courses and certifications, personnel can develop the knowledge and skills they need to become SMEs in their chosen fields. The UCM programme recognises that SMEs are a key asset for the UK defence forces, providing the knowledge and expertise needed to develop new capabilities and respond to emerging threats.

Military Domain Experts Scheme: Singapore

The Military Domain Experts Scheme (MDES) is a unique initiative by the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) to recruit individuals with specialised skills and expertise in various fields to contribute to the nation's defence. Under the programme, mid-career professionals can serve as military experts and use their expertise to enhance the SAF's operational capabilities. The MDES programme was conceptualised in 2006 to address the growing need for experts in fields such as engineering, information technology, cybersecurity and medical services. The scheme was announced in May 2009 by then-Defence Minister Teo Chee Hean, who was also the Deputy Prime Minister.[5]

MDES experts can be deployed in various roles, including research and development, logistics, operations planning and even as advisors to senior military leaders. These

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[4] **"Ministry of Defence Launches Unified Career Management"**, Ministry of Defence, UK, 3 June 2021.

[5] **"Fact Sheet: Military Domain Experts Scheme"**, MINDEF Singapore, 7 October 2009.

individuals bring a fresh perspective to the military and help the SAF to stay ahead of the curve in terms of innovation and technological advancements. Key Features of MDES include the following:

- Enable Military Experts (MEs) to acquire comprehensive expertise and specialisation in important military domains;

- MEs permitted to work till the age of 60;

- Eight ranks, from ME1 to ME8, to accommodate various work levels and skill needs;

- The basis for constructing and integrating basic operational experience and system competences will be laid out by having a system of appointments from ME1 to ME3. Outstanding MEs will be able to advance to higher-grade appointments of ME4 and above with this foundation, which include more responsibility for leadership and greater specialisation.

Figure 1: MDES Expertise Levels

Source: https://www.mindef.gov.sg/oms/rsaf/schemes/mdes/
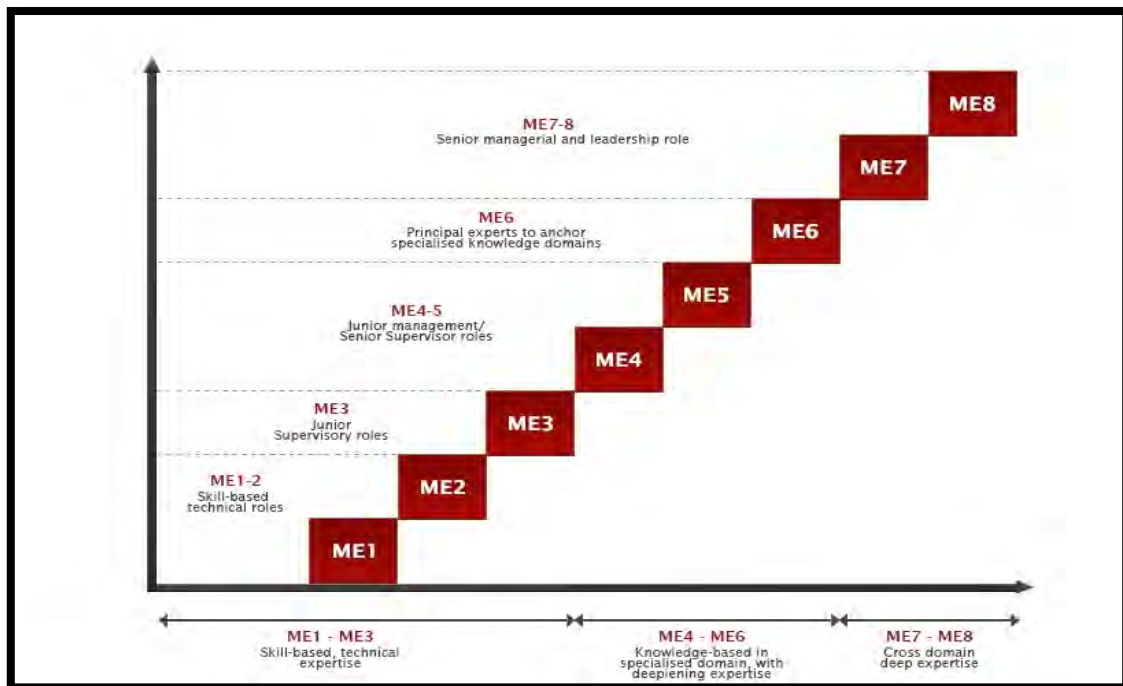
There are two primary entries at ME1 and ME4. ME1 is for those holding diploma and below qualifications while ME4 is for university graduates. Career progression is based on degree of expertise and performance. Development opportunities are given to prepare for higher appointments. Regular military courses are also offered

to develop leadership abilities and knowledge to prepare them to work as an integrated force with their SAF counterparts. These include Domain Specialisation Courses to deepen specialist knowledge as well as provision of scholarships to pursue academic courses overseas.

Figure 2: MDES Expertise Levels

Source: https://www.mindef.gov.sg/oms/rsaf/schemes/mdes/
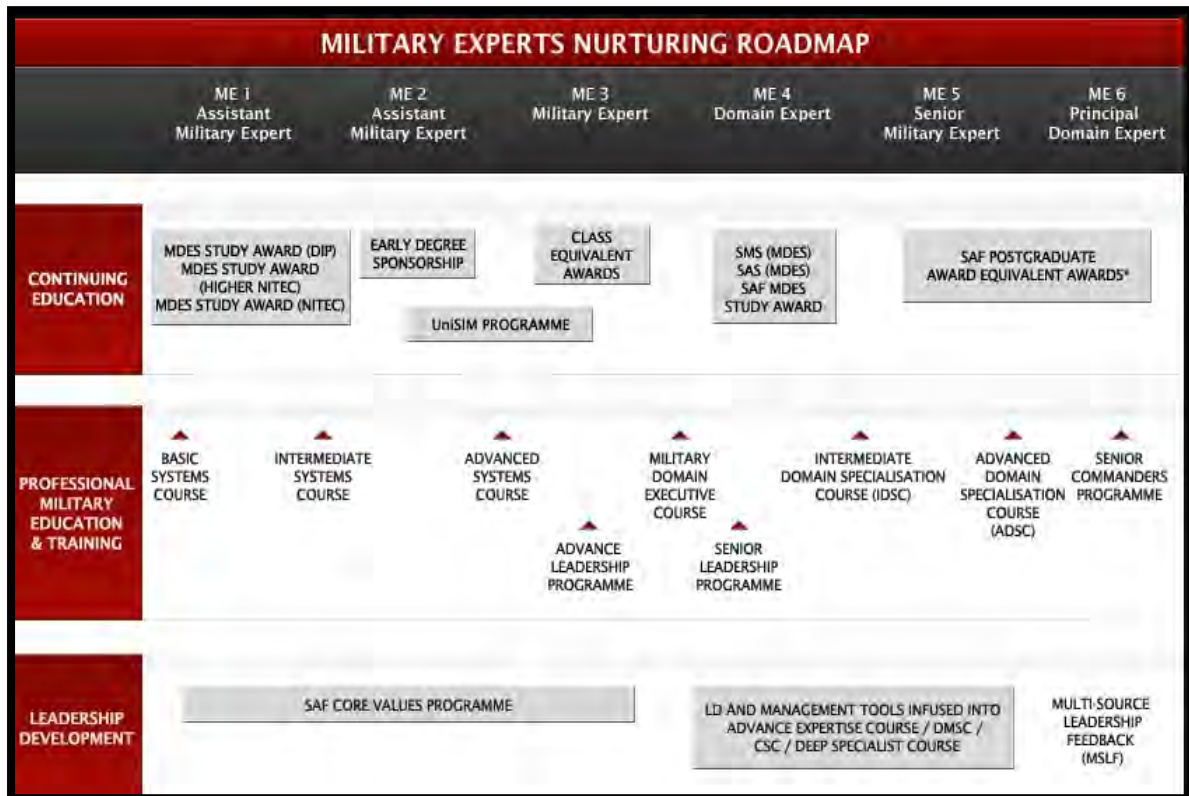
The programme has helped SAF to create a stronger and more capable military force, with a diverse range of skill-sets and expertise that can be deployed effectively in different operational environments. The MDES programme is a unique example of adapting to the changing nature of modern warfare and building a stronger and more capable military force.

Israel's Magshimim programme

The Magshimim programme of the IDF plays a crucial role in developing AI and cyber experts for the military. Recognising the growing importance of these fields in modern

warfare, the IDF has integrated specialised training and education within the programme to meet the evolving challenges of the digital age.[6]

Magshimim identifies talented high school students with a passion for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), including AI and cybersecurity. These individuals are selected based on their academic achievements and potential, ensuring that the programme recruits the most promising candidates. Once accepted into the Magshimim programme, students undergo rigorous training in AI and cybersecurity. They receive specialised courses and hands-on practical experience in these fields, delving into topics such as machine learning, data analysis, network security, and ethical hacking. The programme collaborates with leading experts in the industry and academia to provide cutting-edge knowledge and keep up with the latest advancements.[7]

Magshimim also offers access to advanced technologies and infrastructure necessary for AI and cybersecurity research. Students have opportunities to work on real-world projects and develop innovative solutions to address emerging threats. This practical experience helps them gain a deep understanding of the field and prepares them for future challenges. Furthermore, the IDF utilises the expertise of Magshimim graduates within its various units.

AI and cybersecurity specialists from the programme are deployed to key positions where their skills can be effectively utilised. They contribute to developing advanced technologies, analyse complex data, and fortify the IDF's cyber defenses. Their expertise is instrumental in detecting and countering cyber threats, ensuring the security and integrity of critical military systems.

The synergy between the Magshimim programme and the IDF's strategic needs allows for the development of a talent pipeline of AI and cyber experts. The programme identifies and nurtures individuals with exceptional potential, equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and experience required to tackle the evolving challenges in these domains.

Australian Concept of Capability Life Cycle

Australian author Robert Gibson, who studies and writes on leadership, organisational culture, human resources, and change management theory,

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[6] Josephine Wolff, **"Making a New Pipeline—How Israel is Training Teenagers from Underrepresented Groups to Work on Cybersecurity"**, SLATE, 6 July 2016.

[7] **"The 2023 Magshimim AI Program Has Been Launched"**, Israel National Digital Agency, 17 November 2022.

propounded the Capability Life Cycle Concept of Talent Management. Gibson contends in a piece he wrote for the *Cove Team*, an Australian Defence Forces professional development website, that the 'military's greatest capability, it's people, needs to be managed through the capability life cycle as a "cradle to grave" system, similar to how we manage the acquisition of other capabilities'.[8] The management of employee talents, therefore, from the beginning to the end of their careers, should be a priority.

Gibson further states that we must view Human Resource Management (HRM) expertise as a crucial talent. Australia's most recent investment in expanding long-term educational alternatives and university curricula to include the Master of Strategic People Management goes some way towards ensuring that the Army has competent human resource managers in the future. Gibson emphasises that though some organisations hire HRM professionals from outside the company, Armed Forces must develop this skill internally. There is a need to produce both HRM specialists with in-depth knowledge of HRM and generalists with a broad understanding of the field.

Gibson recommends the following actions in order to manage people as a capability effectively:

- HRM training must include civilian recognised HRM training for leaders at every level to generate HR knowledge;

- Managing careers will require doubling or tripling the staffing within career management agencies by supplementing them heavily with HRM specialist Defence civilians;

- Increased HRM oversight will allow for talent management to occur at a much greater level thereby increasing retention. HRM structure should have similarity to talent scouts model found in professional sport;

- Use Performance Appraisal Reports (PARs) as a development tool, not a measure of success—PARs having a detrimental impact on military capability due to focusing on measuring people rather than developing them. Need to change the focus of the PAR;

- Increasing programmes that allow for temporary employment in the civil sector with a Return of Service Obligation at the completion of the programme.

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[8] Robert Gibson, **"Managing Our People through the Capability Life Cycle"**, The Cove, 17 December 2020.

This allows Army to gain additional human capital from an external provider for no cost.

The Australian Concept of Capability Life Cycle argues that Army needs to review how to manage people and invest in systems that support the management and retention of critical human capital. Towards this, HRM must become a critical capability that Army uses. Finally, it identifies key actions that can be taken to more effectively manage Army's people capability by creating a Capability Life Cycle system to build capability and generate mass as an Army.

Chinese Concept on TM in the Military

China has a large army, like the Indian Army, and hence espouses special interest on the issue of TM. However, not many PLA specific documents or literature is available in the open domain. References to Talent Management started emerging in sporadic Chinese newspaper reports and White Papers post the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012. In November 2021, President Xi Jinping delivered a speech at a supplementary CMC conference specifically on the issue of Talent Management.[9]

The highlights of the speech which could be inferred to be the Chinese concept of talent management are listed are listed below:

- Talent holds the key to advancing the high-quality development of the PLA;

- Need to cultivate a new type of high-quality and professional military personnel. Xi stressed on the need to uphold the absolute leadership of the CPC over the military in the whole process and all aspects of talent-related work;

- Called for great efforts to improve military personnel's scientific literacy and technological know-how to improve their ability to win modern wars;

- Flagged the importance of accelerating the building of first-class military schools and training of first-class military personnel;

- Need for precise and effective allocation of military human resources for ensuring the cultivation and development of military talent for the following:

  o Joint Operations Command

  o New combat forces

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[9] **"Xi Stresses Strengthening Military Talent Cultivation"**, The State Council, People's Republic of China, 29 November 2021.

      o   Scientific and technological innovation

      o   High-quality strategic management

Broadly speaking, there seems to be a stress on the importance of fostering an optimised atmosphere of using whole-of-nation approach, with the CCP supporting and showing concern for talent in the armed forces.

Conclusion

It is apparent that there are a wide range of talent management initiatives being implemented by armies across the world. These initiatives include leadership development programmes, including formal courses, mentorship programmes and on-the-job training, to help officers develop the skills they need to succeed in modern warfare. To keep pace with rapidly changing technologies and threats, armed forces are placing a greater emphasis on continuous learning and professional development for their officers. In order to ensure that military organisations have the leadership talent they need for the future, some armies are implementing career paths and succession planning programmes to help officers understand their options for advancement and plan for their future careers.

A growing number of armies are using data analysis and other digital tools to inform their talent management decisions, including identifying high-potential officers, tracking officer performance and evaluating the effectiveness of leadership development programmes. These initiatives reflect the need for armies to stay ahead of the curve in an ever-changing global security environment, and to have the right mix of skills, experience, and leadership to meet the challenges of modern warfare.

About the Author

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