Technical Report 1280

Understanding and Managing the Career Continuance of Enlisted Soldiers

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14. ABSTRACT

The U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) implemented a large research program titled "STAY: Strategies to Enhance Retention." The enlisted portion of the STAY project identified factors influencing enlisted Soldiers' career continuance decisions, developed a model of the decision process, generated an extensive list of attrition and retention interventions, and evaluated two of them. Interviews and focus groups across Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) and Forces Command (FORSCOM) were conducted during FY06 and FY07 to identify factors influential to both enlisted attrition and retention. The FY06 Trainee Inventory and Soldier Inventory were developed and administered to further inform model development. The resulting career continuance model for enlisted Soldiers accounted for growth and development of Soldiers, influential experiences, individual characteristics, and Family and organizational influences; it also drove the intervention development. A multi-phase process was used to develop and pilot-test interventions for decreasing attrition and improving enlisted Soldier career continuance. Promising interventions were identified based on feedback from ARI and Subject Matter Expert (SME) advisory panels on feasibility and potential success. Two interventions (*Soldier Transition Survey* and *Unit Retention Climate Feedback System*) were further investigated. The *Soldier Transition Survey* provided useful empirical information on factors driving career continuance decisions and demonstrated the value of alternate sources (i.e., proxies) for capturing this information. The *Unit Retention Climate Feedback System* examined shared unit-level perceptions influencing decisions to reenlist or leave the Active Army, and provides an approach for feeding that information back to unit leaders.

15. SUBJECT TERMS

Project STAY; Army enlisted retention; reenlistment; Army attrition; career continuance

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UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING THE CAREER CONTINUANCE OF ENLISTED SOLDIERS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research Requirement:

Career continuance of U.S. Army Soldiers is critical for maintaining a strong and effective volunteer force, and Soldier attrition and retention continue to be important concerns for the Army. Retaining Soldiers through their initial training and beyond their first contract term provides a number of important benefits: the Army's force level is maintained, institutional knowledge is retained, personnel costs are reduced, and a steady supply of well-trained, new leaders is prepared. The U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) and PDRI conducted a broad research initiative that was designed to improve the continuance of the Army's enlisted Soldiers and junior officers. Titled "Strategies to Enhance Retention" (STAY), this effort identified the factors influencing Soldiers' career continuance decisions, modeled the decision process, and developed and tested several career continuance interventions. The work described in the current report focuses on the enlisted portion of the STAY project.

Procedure:

The first objective of the Enlisted STAY project was to develop a Career Continuance Model by reviewing relevant literature and supplementing previously identified career continuance factors with qualitative and quantitative data collected from interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Interviews and focus groups across Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) and Forces Command (FORSCOM) installations during FY06 and FY07 were conducted to identify factors relevant for both enlisted attrition and retention. The FY06 Trainee Inventory and Soldier Inventory were also developed and administered to further identify career continuance factors and inform model development.

The second objective was to develop and pilot test interventions for decreasing attrition and improving the career continuance among junior enlisted Soldiers and junior non-commissioned officers (NCOs) in the Army. Interventions are theoretically driven, but provide realistic, feasible ways to address career continuance, or tools and information that could be employed in doing so. A two-phase process was used to identify, develop, and select a final set of candidate interventions. In Phase 1, the continuance model and results from interviews, focus groups, and surveys were used to guide the development and identification of approximately 34 potential interventions to improve enlisted career continuance. In Phase 2, we identified the most promising intervention initiatives, further developed these initiatives, and evaluated their

feasibility and potential success based on feedback from ARI and two Army Subject Matter Expert (SME) advisory panels. Based on this feedback and senior Army leadership input, the decision was made to further investigate two interventions: the *Soldier Transition Survey* and the *Unit Retention Climate Feedback System.*

The *Soldier Transition Survey* was designed to provide timely, scientifically-based information to help Army leadership understand, forecast, and manage reenlistment trends for junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs. It focuses on the individual-level factors that drive career continuance decisions, and how those factors can be influenced to increase retention. In addition, three survey forms were created to examine the feasibility of using alternative information sources, such as career counselors and Army Career Alumni Program (ACAP) Transition Services Managers (TSMs), to serve as proxies for Soldiers. The concept was that these proxy groups might provide reasonably accurate information regarding factors that influence Soldiers' reenlistment decisions.

The second intervention, the *Unit Retention Climate Feedback System,* was developed to gather information on shared unit-level perceptions influencing decisions to reenlist or leave the Army. These unit-level perceptions regarding issues such as unit leadership and unit cohesion might be measured and then reported to the unit leaders in a way that could help them identify and address unit-level issues influencing their Soldiers' reenlistment decisions.

Findings:

Career Continuance Themes. Many career continuance themes emerged from the FY06 and FY07 interviews and focus groups, reflecting a variety of reasons to stay in, as well as reasons to leave the Army. These themes, including individual difference factors, perceived alternatives to an Army career, sources of support, shocks (events that induce stress and often drive reactions), and growth experiences early in an Army career, helped inform both model and intervention development. The themes and factors are too numerous to list here; however, commonly discussed factors influencing *attrition* included pre-existing mental or physical difficulties, Family-related issues, poor adjustment to Army life, and financial problems. Examples of factors influencing Army *reenlistment decisions* included pay/benefits, reenlistment bonuses, deployment-related issues, Family support and adjustment, patriotism, job security, and educational and leadership opportunities.

Career Continuance Model. These themes and factors helped to inform the development of the enlisted *Career Continuance Model*. The model includes variables affecting continuance propensity and risk of attrition during the period from Initial Entry Training through the enlisted Soldier's mid- to later-career. It takes into account the growth and development of the Soldiers as well as challenges or "shocks" they encounter early in their careers. Thus, individual characteristics and personal resources, patriotic values, Family and organizational influences, changing contexts, and economic and societal influences are factored into the model with overall

organizational commitment as a proximal predictor of career continuance. Data from two surveys, the Trainee Inventory (i.e., receptees) and the Soldier Inventory (i.e., E–1 to E-6), were used to assess those factors included in the model at different points in Soldiers' careers. Consistent with previous research on attrition, affective, normative, and continuance commitment were significantly related to intentions to leave the Army, with affective commitment contributing to a greater percent of the variance accounting for intent to leave. Several individual difference characteristics including two personal resilience factors (i.e., resilience associated with meaningfulness of life, and resilience associated with the ability to overcome challenges), self-efficacy, internal locus of control, and positive affectivity showed positive relationships with affective commitment. Additionally, normative commitment was positively related to patriotism and perceived NCO and officer leadership quality.

Career Continuance Interventions. The *Soldier Transition Survey* is one of the two interventions developed to improve career continuance of junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs. The *Soldier Transition Survey* contained items covering 10 factors, including MOS/Assignment, Career Progression, Deployments, Unit Leadership, Peers, Unit Cohesion, Family Support/Concern, Quality of Life, Army Benefits, and Alternatives to an Army Career. Healthcare benefits, retirement benefits, and job security/stability were among the most important reasons to stay in the Active Army for recently reenlisted and in-reenlistment-window junior enlisted Soldiers and NCOs. Alternatively, for those exiting and in their reenlistment window, the most important reasons to leave the Active Army included the Army "Stop-Loss" policy, the amount of time away from Family while deployed, and the amount of Family stress. Responses on these items varied slightly by reenlistment status.

Results from the proxy groups showed a similar pattern of responses with regard to the relative importance of various factors to the career continuance decision. Junior Soldiers and NCOs who recently reenlisted in the Active Army had responses most similar to those of junior Soldiers and NCOs who were in their reenlistment window and had indicated they were likely staying in the Active Army. Likewise, responses from exiting junior Soldiers and NCOs very closely resembled responses from junior Soldiers and NCOs who were in their reenlistment window and indicated they were likely separating from the Army. Overall, the *Soldier Transition Survey* appears to be a promising and useful initiative for Army leadership to understand, forecast, and manage individual-level reenlistment trends of junior-level Soldiers and junior NCOs. Further, the proxy sample analyses identified both Soldier and expert (career counselor and Transition Services Manager) samples that can be used to closely approximate the career continuance perceptions of recently reenlisted and separating junior-level Soldiers and NCOs. These proxy groups would allow for the collection of accurate retention-related data in a timely, cost-efficient manner.

The *Unit Retention Climate Feedback System* was designed to measure the unit-level experiences and shared perceptions that influence Soldiers' retention decisions. It includes both a survey assessing unit retention climate and a unit leadership feedback report summarizing unit-

level factors influencing Soldiers' attitudes and decisions regarding reenlistment. The survey contains items covering nine content areas that may influence Soldiers' reenlistment decisions, including: Personal Factors Related to Army Retention; Army Experiences; Spouse and Family Support; Garrison and Deployed Experiences; Career Progression; Unit Cohesion & Support; Junior NCO, Senior NCO, and Officer Unit Leadership; Retention Personnel; and Reenlistment Options and Incentives. Administered at the company level, the survey results are compiled and summarized in a feedback report designed to inform unit leadership of the retention climate in their unit. The feedback report is intended to provide actionable information and guidance that commanders can use to improve their unit's retention climate and subsequently enhance unit reenlistment rates.

To evaluate the unit-level retention concept, we pilot tested the survey to determine if retention climate differed meaningfully across units. In addition to the survey results, we obtained retention mission accomplishment data for individual units. Results indicated that the six assessed companies varied greatly both in their ability to meet unit retention goals, as well as in the shared perceptions of unit reenlistment plans. Results from a pilot test of the survey demonstrated differences among companies on several dimensions, and these differences were related to unit retention outcome measures. Further, senior company leaders indicated that the survey and feedback system can serve as useful tools for unit leaders to diagnose important retention issues.

Utilization and Dissemination of Findings:

The overall goal for the project was to build on prior research and develop a model to (1) better understand the career continuance decision process, and (2) provide systematic direction for future efforts to influence those decisions though interventions and policy decisions. This model can help guide and organize future attrition and retention research efforts, minimize duplicate and disjointed research going forward, and provide a way to integrate studies done on other military institutions and in other countries. The development of the process model of the career continuance decision process constitutes an intersection of theoretical development and empirical testing. It takes into account the growth and development of the Soldiers as well as challenges or "shocks" they encounter during their careers. This dynamic approach broadens its utility in that changing contexts and economic and societal influences can be factored into understanding why Soldiers leave or stay.

Further, we refined our understanding of what impacts career continuance decisions by gathering input directly from Soldiers, NCOs, officers, and other Army SMEs. This included input from enlisted Soldiers at virtually all points over the NCO career, from receptees on their first day through E-9s. Their input came in the form of surveys, interviews, and focus groups; combining anecdotal, empirical and highly specific SME input. The interventions are theoretically driven, but provide realistic, feasible ways to address career continuance. Although this report focuses primarily on the two interventions that were pilot tested, over the course of

the project we compiled an extensive list of potential interventions to address retention and attrition at the individual and unit levels. This list provides a valuable starting point for future intervention development, as the initial explorations of feasibility and first steps are already in place. Finally, the two career continuance interventions, the Soldier Transition Survey and Unit Retention Climate Feedback System, are two products that can be used immediately or with limited adaptation by the Army to monitor and influence junior enlisted and NCO reenlistment.

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SOLDIERS

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION[1]

U. Christean Kubisiak and Mark C. Young

> *This chapter presents the project rationale and goals, and provides a general overview of the report.*

The U.S. Army requires large numbers of Soldiers who have or can develop the qualities needed for high job performance and organizational effectiveness. Recruitment of personnel into the Army is of course essential for building a force with the needed qualities (White, Young, & Rumsey, 2001). A ready force, however, also requires Soldiers who stay with the Army for significant periods of time. This places focus on Soldiers' completion of the initial service obligation and then their continuance in service beyond that obligation.

When this project began, attrition in the Army was significant in that about one in three Soldiers did not complete their first contract term (Strickland, 2005). In addition, results from an end-of-training survey showed that of those Soldiers successfully completing training, 36% reported attrition "seemed likely" sometime during their training (Sipes & Strickland, 2002). Thus, attrition was a distinct possibility for many of those who "made it," over and above those who did attrit. During the past several years, much research on the causes of first-term enlisted attrition has been conducted by the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) and other organizations (e.g., Buddin, 2005; Knapik, Jones, Hauret, Darakjy, & Piskator, 2004; Kubisiak, Lentz, Connell, Tuttle, Horgen, Borman, Young & Morath, 2005).

The retention of Soldiers *after* their first term of enlistment is also critical to maintaining the force. Retaining Soldiers with high levels of motivation and capabilities for service performance will be critical as the Army continues to move to set and balance conditions for the future. The Army needs practices and prevention strategies that address the full complexity of the factors influencing both first-term completion and reenlistment. These strategies also need to help the Army attract and retain Soldiers whose motivations and capabilities fit the emerging performance requirements of the future Army.

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[1] The work described in this report was executed by Personnel Decisions Research Institutes (PDRI), under contract with the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Socials Sciences (ARI). PDRI and ARI worked in close collaboration throughout this effort, and ARI made significant contributions to both its planning and execution. Chris Kubisiak served as PDRI's project manager, and Mark Young was ARI's contract monitor.

The Enlisted STAY Project

To help address these issues, ARI sponsored a three-year research program, titled "Strategies to Enhance Retention" (code named "STAY"). STAY was designed to improve the continuance of the Army's junior officers and enlisted Soldiers, with a focus primarily on Active Army personnel. The goals of the STAY project involved creation of a scientifically defensible conceptual model for understanding the career continuance decision process. The idea was to provide an understanding of the attrition and retention decision process in a way that would be useful for developing sustainable interventions that the Army could use to enhance the career continuance of qualified officers and enlisted Soldiers. Thus, the STAY project was action oriented, that is, intended to move beyond an identification of the underlying causes of attrition and retention and toward the implementation of interventions that would support the future Army.

The work described in this report is concerned with the enlisted portion of STAY, which was focused on enhancing first-term contract completion and the reenlistment of junior enlisted Soldiers (E-1 through E-4) and junior non-commissioned officers (NCOs; E-5 through E-6). More specifically, the objectives were to examine continuance as an evolving decision process that takes place over time and to identify relevant factors that significantly influence junior enlisted Soldiers' and junior NCOs' career continuance decisions, including both individual- and unit-level factors. This is particularly important to sustaining current troop levels and meeting the Army's future force requirements. Throughout Initial Entry Training (IET) and into the Soldier's first unit of assignment, the Army invests considerable resources in the development of qualified Soldiers.

This effort came at a time when the Army shifted from facing a number of recruiting and retention challenges to an era of economic recession and increased propensity to enlist in the general population. During this time, the Army transitioned to the "Future Force" and was engaged in the Global War on Terror (GWOT). Although challenged, the Army was meeting established goals for enlisted first-term completion and reenlistment, making this an opportune time to study career continuance.

The work described in this report transcends the current environment, as we gathered information from many sources and time periods to compile a comprehensive picture of Soldier career continuance. This was particularly important as previous research was collected under less rapid operational tempo and deployment cycles. The relationships between factors that influence Soldiers' decisions are certainly influenced by contextual factors, such as economic and labor market conditions, and we have built that into the work done here, both in the model and the points addressed by the interventions. But the benefits gained from the work should still be

valid, regardless of what changes the future brings. That is, the real utility of this project lies in understanding the interrelationships among these variables and how they can best be assessed and evaluated.

Considerable research on attrition and retention has preceded this effort, (e.g., Buddin, 2005; Knapik, Jones, Hauret, Darakjy, & Piskator, 2004; Kubisiak, Lentz, Connell, Tuttle, Horgen, Borman, Young & Morath, 2005; Strickland, 2005), and the intention of the Enlisted STAY Project was to consolidate and build on that work. That is, an overall goal for the project was to build on research that has been conducted before and develop a coherent framework that could be used to (1) better understand the career continuance decision process, and (2) provide systematic direction for future efforts to influence those decisions, whether though interventions or policy decisions. This framework would help minimize duplicate and disjointed efforts going forward, and it would provide a way to integrate studies done on other military institutions and in other countries.

The work described in this report represents a significant step forward in building on previous efforts in a number of ways. We refined the then available understanding of what impacts career continuance decisions by gathering input directly from Soldiers, NCOs, officers, and other Army Subject Matter Experts (SMEs). This included input from Soldiers at virtually all points over the NCO career, from receptees on their first day through E-9s. Their input came in the form of surveys, interviews and focus groups, combining anecdotal, empirical, and highly specific SME input. This input provided insight into how the career continuance decision process differed among Soldiers, and at different stages in a Soldier's career. Involving all of these individuals not only supported and updated the existing literature; it also created buy-in among the Soldiers who participated and enhanced prospects for the project's credibility with future audiences. Such credibility is especially important to future successful implementation of the interventions developed as part of the project.

The work described here on enlisted retention was conducted in conjunction with a parallel effort that was directly focused on officer retention (Johnson, Hezlett, Mael, & Schneider, 2009). Wherever possible, we worked together with the officer project team, and many of the data collections and meetings described in this report were conducted jointly. Further, both teams were able to leverage information gathered by the other to improve our understanding of Soldier and officer career continuance. This coordinated effort was intended to result in cohesive products and outcomes that would maximally benefit the Army and yield the most meaningful results.

Research Goals

The goal of this project was to investigate and understand Soldier first-term completion and reenlistment decisions, and to assist the Army in developing interventions to decrease attrition and increase the propensity to reenlist. That original goal was later amended to include junior NCOs, as discussed later in the report. The target group for this research included entry-level Soldiers through junior NCOs (E-5 and E-6). Overall, the intent was to build on prior research on Soldier career continuance by providing new tools to help integrate and understand those efforts. Additionally, we planned to utilize this new frame of reference to develop new methods for effectively influencing career continuance decisions.

Our first objective was to develop a theoretical model of Soldier career continuance. This model includes variables affecting continuance propensity and risk of attrition during the period from Initial Entry Training through the midpoint of a Soldier's career (i.e., at the rank of staff sergeant, E-6). Additionally, the model was intended to help guide the identification of the interventions for effective management of continuance. Our second objective was to recommend, develop, and empirically evaluate interventions for decreasing attrition rates and improving the career continuance among junior enlisted Soldiers and NCOs.

The processes undertaken to achieve these goals were to benefit from and inform each other as the work was completed. That is, information gathered to develop potential interventions was used to develop the model, and insights gained from the model development directly fed into the selection of interventions.

Project Progression and Report Roadmap

This section provides a brief overview of the steps taken to complete the Enlisted STAY project and the linkage of these steps with the report chapters.

An overview of the project's research approach and corresponding report chapters is summarized in Figure 1.1. The figure highlights the two parallel tracks that were the key feature of our research approach. These two integrated tracks were (1) the Career Continuance Model development effort, and (2) the development of career continuance interventions (see Figure 1.1, upper and lower boxes respectively). The figure also highlights the importance of data collections and expert input in supporting the work done on the model development and interventions. The primary objectives of the report chapters are summarized in Table 1.1. It may be helpful for the reader to periodically refer back to Figure 1.1 and Table 1.1 while reading the report. Figure 1.2 displays the timeline of Army personnel and subject matter expert support, which is partially described in the remaining portion of this section.

Research and Report Roadmap
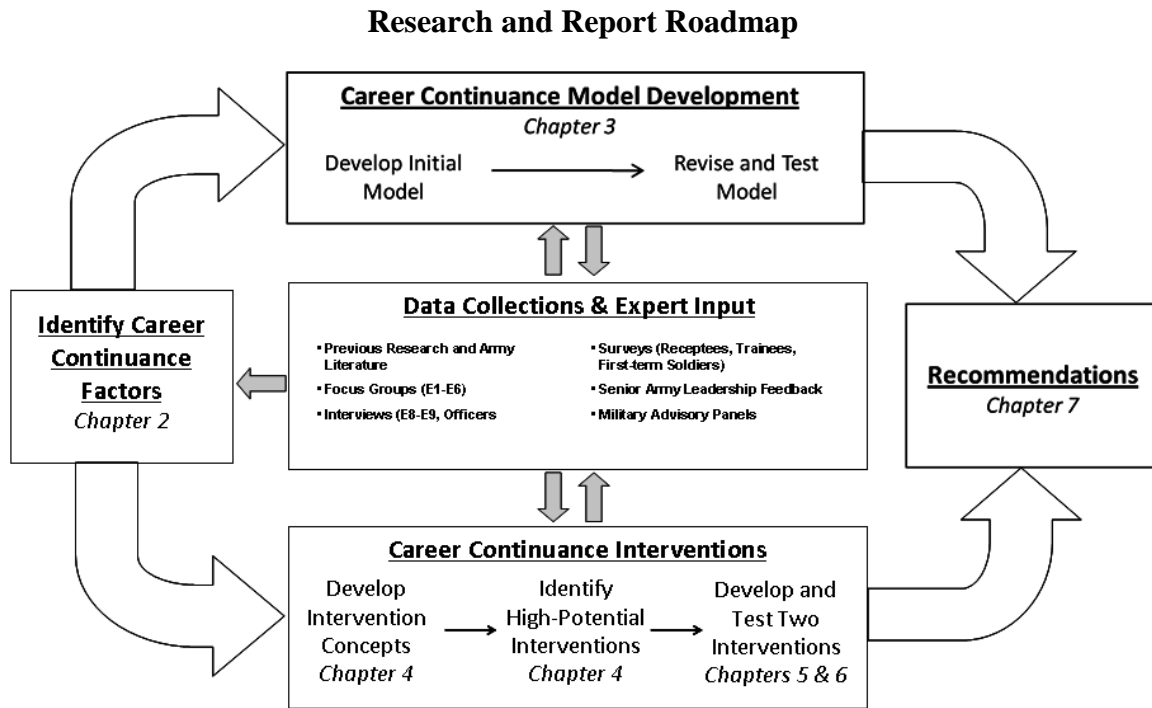
Figure 1-1. Linkage between research tracks and report chapters

Table 1-1. Report Overview

Chapter Title	Purpose
1. Introduction	This chapter presents the project rationale and goals, and provides a general overview of the report.
2. Identifying Career Continuance Factors	This chapter describes the process, including literature reviews, interviews, and focus groups, used to identify factors influencing enlisted Soldiers' career continuance decisions. We describe the continuance themes and factors that emerged for junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs. These factors were subsequently used to inform the development of the enlisted Career Continuance Model (Chapter 3) and project interventions (Chapters 4-6).
3. A Model of Enlisted Career Continuance	This chapter describes the rationale, development, and preliminary evaluation of a dynamic process model of enlisted career continuance. The model was used to help inform the selection of candidate career continuance interventions.
4. Intervention Concept Development	This chapter documents the sequential process by which candidate career continuance intervention concepts were identified, developed, and selected for preliminary testing and evaluation. The candidate intervention concepts considered over the course of the process are described, and the two that were chosen for further development and preliminary testing are more fully described in Chapters 5 and 6.
5. Soldier Transition Survey	Chapter 5 describes the development and initial testing of the Soldier Transition Survey. The immediate goal was to develop an instrument to identify the reasons that junior Soldiers and NCOs decide to stay in or separate from the Active Army. Additionally, we identified and evaluated alternative sources for collecting this career continuance information more efficiently in the future.
6. Unit Retention Climate Feedback System	This chapter describes the concept development and initial testing of a Unit Retention Climate Feedback System. The goal of this intervention is to provide feedback to commanders on unit-level retention factors within their units, and provide guidance on what they might do to enhance retention climate—and ultimately, Soldier retention.
7. Summary and Conclusions	This chapter summarizes the primary lessons learned from the project, and provides recommendations to guide the Army's efforts to manage Soldier continuance in the future.

Identifying Career Continuance Factors (Chapter 2)

We started by identifying potential factors that influence the continuance of enlisted Soldiers. We gathered as much information as possible regarding Soldier attrition and retention. This included reviews of existing literature, including published articles, papers, technical reports, previous reviews, and briefings made available to the research team by ARI and other contacts. We also gathered information from Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) in meetings and at conferences and consortia around the country. This effort yielded two reports, one on Soldier attrition (Kubisiak, et al., 2009) and one on Soldier retention (Bryant, et al., 2009). The process is described in greater depth in Chapter 2.

We used the information obtained for those reports to prepare protocols for focus groups with officers and enlisted Soldiers. The participants in these sessions represented the entire chain of command up to the brigade command level. We conducted these interviews and focus groups in order to better direct our efforts in terms of understanding the context in which Soldiers are working, what influences their perceptions of their jobs and career alternatives, and how world events were influencing the Army. The sessions were conducted at a number of Army installations around the country, as described in the chapters that follow.

Speaking directly to these individuals was crucial to the overall effort, in that we wanted to maximize the likelihood that (1) results from our literature review were still relevant and accurate; (2) although many different valid perspectives were presented, there was a sufficient degree of consensus throughout the chain of command regarding how these issues are understood; (3) our conceptualization of the factors involved were meaningful, relevant, and would be of use to the Soldiers involved; and (4) we would create buy-in and credibility by involving Soldiers, NCOs, and officers themselves throughout the process. Involving these participants in the overall framing of the career continuance issues differentiates this project from some of the prior efforts in that it provides a field test of the constructs and hypotheses that are typically investigated, and allows the end users of the research to weigh in on what matters and how it can be utilized. This useful practice was repeatedly applied throughout the course of the project.

A Model of Enlisted Career Continuance (Chapter 3)

At the same time the focus groups were being conducted, other members of the research team began work on developing the Soldier Career Continuance Model, reviewing previous literature, and attending some of the focus groups. Results of focus group sessions were shared throughout the research team, leading to the development of a survey to be administered to Soldiers to help develop an initial, working model, the development of which is described in Chapter 3. Additional background on the initial model development efforts can be found in Weiss, Ilgen & Borman (2008). The surveys created for model development purposes were

administered in the Fall of 2006. These data yielded a wealth of useful information regarding which of the initially identified factors would provide meaningful variance, and what areas of the model could be empirically verified. The survey results, the literature reviews, and the focus group results were used to develop the initial model.

We also developed a Model Testing survey that was used to empirically evaluate portions of the Career Continuance Model. This survey was administered to junior Soldiers and NCOs at various early to mid-career stages at Army installations around the U. S. These data were then used to determine whether the proposed interrelationships among the variables in the model could be verified in a large, independent military sample. The survey and its administration are described in Chapter 3, along with the model testing results.

Intervention Concept Development (Chapter 4)

Information obtained from our literature reviews, data collections (focus groups, interviews, and surveys), and the initial model were used to establish an initial set of interventions to be used to address Soldier attrition and retention. We defined "intervention" broadly, to include any behaviorally-based policy, procedure, strategy, or programs that were created to have a positive impact on enhancing career continuance. Interventions were also considered across a wide continuum regarding their stage of specification and development. At one extreme, an intervention might include a fully specified and developed program that is ready for implementation and evaluation. At the other extreme, an intervention might involve the development and evaluation of a concept for a program or strategy that could not be fully developed within the timeframe of this project. The process of intervention identification and selection is described in Chapter 4.

The identification of candidate interventions began with a focus on their general functional requirements (vs. detailed technical specifications), and the pool of candidates was deliberately made to provide as broad an array of options as possible. The next step was to evaluate the candidate interventions to determine which interventions would be viable for further development. This evaluation was done with the help of a Technical Panel of SMEs who had insight into whether the interventions were feasible in an Army context.

After the Technical Panel provided their feedback, the list of possible interventions was reduced to a smaller number of viable candidates, and these were further developed. For each intervention, we generated a description of the needs it addressed, its objectives, how it would be implemented, and plans for evaluation of its effectiveness. This pool of candidate interventions was then presented to a Military Advisory Panel and narrowed to a final set of "best bet" interventions. These "best bet" interventions also included a few newly considered concepts that were recommended by the Panel and other experts.

In response to input provided by the Army leadership, we implemented the two "best bet" interventions that are described in Chapters 5 and 6: (1) the Soldier Transition Survey, and (2) the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System. These interventions focus on retention, but also have relevance for addressing attrition. Again, the detailed description of this intervention selection process is presented in Chapter 4.

To advance the development of the two selected interventions, we conducted another round of focus groups to inform the development of the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System and the Soldier Transition Survey. These focus group sessions resulted in SME input on the content and implementation of the interventions, and are described in the chapters covering the respective interventions.

Soldier Transition Survey (Chapter 5)

The Soldier Transition Survey was designed to provide timely, scientifically-based information to help Army leadership understand, forecast, and manage reenlistment trends for junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs. Essentially, it focuses on the individual-level factors that drive career continuance decisions, and how those factors can be influenced to increase retention. In addition to providing this information, the survey meets a secondary goal of examining the feasibility of using alternative sources of information to serve as proxies for separating Soldiers. The concept here is that these proxy groups might provide reasonably accurate information regarding factors that influence Soldiers' reenlistment decisions, but from a more accessible source.

We gathered Soldier Transition Survey data from Army posts both within and outside of the continental United States. Survey data were collected from separating Soldiers, Soldiers serving in their units, and SMEs who worked with Soldiers. These data were used to address the questions of what influences career continuance decisions for junior Soldiers and NCOs, and whether the different respondents (e.g., Soldiers and SMEs) provide consistent results. The survey findings are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Unit Retention Climate Feedback System (Chapter 6)

The Unit Retention Climate Feedback System intervention was based on the following ideas: (1) that there are shared attitudes and perceptions among the Soldiers composing a unit that pertain to retention-related issues within that unit, (2) that these shared perceptions directly impact their likelihood of reenlistment, and (3) that actions directed toward influencing the shared perceptions can help to manage career continuance. Unlike the Soldier Transition Survey, it clearly focuses on unit-level factors. Retention-related perceptions can be measured and reported to the unit leaders in a way that can help them identify and address issues influencing their Soldiers' reenlistment decisions. This intervention includes a survey that assesses unit

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retention climate, and a unit leadership feedback report that summarizes unit-level factors influencing Soldiers' attitudes and decisions regarding reenlistment. After developing the survey instrument for the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System, we collected survey data, and at the same time conducted focus groups with the company commanders of the Soldiers who filled out the instrument. These sessions enabled us to prepare a draft version of the feedback report for evaluation by SMEs in a later set of workshops. Chapter 6 of this report describes the results and the lessons learned from the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System evaluation.

Summary and Conclusions (Chapter 7)

The final chapter integrates the results from the three-year Enlisted STAY project and provides recommendations for future directions in Army attrition and retention research and intervention work.

Timeline of Army Personnel and Subject Matter Expert Support

	2006												2007												2008											
	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Project STAY Kickoff Meeting			█																																	
FORSCOM Interview and Focus Group Data Collection: Identifing Career Continuance Factors				█	█	█	█	█	█																											
TRADOC Survey and Interview Data Collection: Model Development						█	█	█																												
Army Technical Panel Meeting: Intervention Development							█																													
Army Advisory Panel Meeting: Intervention Development													█																							
FORSCOM Survey Data Collection: Model Testing													█	█	█	█	█																			
TRADOC Survey Data Collection: Model Testing																█	█	█	█																	
Survey Planning Workshop with Army SMEs																	█																			
FORSCOM Interview and Focus Group Data Collection: Intervention Development & Mid-Career NCO Continuance Factors																		█																		
FORSCOM Survey Data Collection: Unit Retention Climate Survey Administration																				█																
FORSCOM Interview and Focus Group Data Collection: Unit Retention Climate Command Feedback Sessions																				█										█						
TRADOC and FORSCOM Survey Data Collection: Soldier Transition Survey																												█	█							
Army Advisory Panel Meeting: Review of Retention Results																																		█		

Figure 1-2. Project Timeline

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CHAPTER 2 – IDENTIFYING CAREER CONTINUANCE FACTORS

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This chapter describes the process, including literature reviews, interviews, and focus groups, used to identify factors influencing enlisted Soldiers' career continuance decisions. We describe the continuance themes and factors that emerged for junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs. These factors were subsequently used to inform the development of the enlisted Career Continuance Model (Chapter 3) and project interventions (Chapters 4-6).

Introduction

One of the first steps of the STAY project was to gain insight into the various factors influencing career continuance decisions among enlisted Soldiers and junior non-commissioned officers (NCOs). Specifically, our goal was to identify and understand a wide range of factors – both internal and external to the Army – that play a role in Soldiers' decisions to attrit or reenlist.

Several other research projects have investigated this topic and a wide range of career continuance factors have been identified. One of the most recent large-scale projects to examine career continuance among U.S. Army Soldiers was Project First Term (Strickland, 2005), a multi-year longitudinal examination of Soldier attrition and reenlistment. Also, a more recent report developed under the Enlisted STAY project provided additional information on enhancing career continuance. These reports focused on interventions for addressing both military attrition (Kubisiak, Lentz, Horgen, Bryant, Connell, Tuttle, Borman, Young, & Morath, 2009) and Soldier retention (Bryant, Tolentino, Borman, Horgen, Kubisiak, & Lentz, 2009).

Although the findings from Project First Term and other prior attrition and retention research efforts (e.g., Ramsberger, Legree, & Sun, 2004; see Ramsberger & Babin, 2005 for a review) provided us with a great starting point for understanding career continuance decisions and the efforts to address these continuance-related issues, we elected to supplement this knowledge with additional data collection efforts. Given the challenges facing Soldiers (e.g., high Operations Tempo or OPTEMPO, and the Global War on Terror) during the period of the STAY project, much of the research conducted earlier may not have fully captured the decision-making processes and factors that have more recently affected the decision to stay in or leave the Army. Thus, collecting additional data was necessary to verify and update the existing knowledge base.

Additionally, a major objective of the STAY project was to develop a model of career continuance. In order to fully understand the intricacies of the decision-making process and subsequently model career continuance decisions, we gathered qualitative and anecdotal

information directly from Soldiers and junior NCOs. Thus, another reason we chose to collect new data, rather than rely solely on prior research efforts, was to inform our Career Continuance Model. Similarly, our data collection efforts were instrumental to another major objective of the STAY project: to find promising interventions for addressing career continuance decisions among Soldiers and junior NCOs.

This chapter describes the career continuance themes and factors identified in our data collection efforts. Specifically, we describe the attrition-related themes and factors that emerged for junior level Soldiers, as well as the major factors influencing reenlistment decisions among both Soldiers and junior NCOs. Given the complex nature of the decision to stay in or leave the Army, we examined it as one that evolves over time, rather than an isolated, one-time event.

The career continuance factors described in this chapter helped set the stage for the remainder of the Enlisted STAY project. Specifically, the career continuance themes and factors helped inform the development of the Career Continuance Model, as well as identify potential interventions for addressing attrition and retention in the Army.

Interviews and Focus Groups

The career continuance factors and themes described later in this chapter were determined based on interviews and focus groups conducted in FY06 and FY07. The goal of the interviews and focus groups was to gather broad information associated with enlisted Soldier and junior NCO career continuance in the Army. Specifically, information was collected regarding: 1) issues that influence Soldiers' decisions to leave or stay in the Army; 2) actual and potential career continuance interventions; 3) perceived effectiveness of these interventions; and 4) suitability of these interventions for use in other Army units.

The research team developed interview and focus group protocols to ensure collection of the desired information and to maintain consistency across data collections. The interview and focus group protocols were created to elicit information around several important topic areas or themes in the career continuance decision process (e.g., reasons Soldiers join the Army, events/shocks during Initial Entry Training (IET), reasons Soldiers reenlist, perceived alternatives to an Army career). These themes were developed from literature reviews and input from the U.S. Army Research Institute (ARI).

Further, when necessary, protocols were modified for subsequent data collections to address additional themes that were generated in previous sessions. Research team members took detailed notes during the sessions. Next, the research team examined and organized the content by the major themes (i.e., discussion topic areas) and parsed out major factors (i.e., specific reasons) that Soldiers reported as influencing decisions to leave or stay in the Army, both early in training and later in their Army careers.

To gather this information and gain diverse perspectives, we met with a variety of Active Army personnel, including enlisted Soldiers, NCOs and drill sergeants, and commissioned officers. The FY06 data collection effort focused on the career continuance of junior level Soldiers, while the FY07 data collection effort focused on junior NCOs. For both data collection efforts, we focused on Active Army personnel. The information collected in the interviews and focus groups was used to: 1) inform the preliminary Career Continuance Model; 2) develop items for survey materials; and 3) inform development of potential interventions. The FY06 and FY07 interviews and focus groups are described in depth below, including a detailed breakdown of sample characteristics.

FY06 Interviews and Focus Groups

Individual interviews and focus groups were conducted across Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) and Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) installations during FY06. The goals of the interviews and focus groups were to investigate factors associated with junior enlisted Soldier career continuance in the Army, identify actual and potential career continuance interventions, document the perceived effectiveness of existing interventions, and determine the suitability of these interventions for use in other Army units. In our first effort, we focused on identifying themes and factors relevant to both attrition and reenlistment among Soldiers in their first contract term.

TRADOC

Drill sergeants were interviewed at two Army TRADOC installations. Interview sessions were held at Fort Benning, Georgia and at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri in Fall 2006. We conducted individual interviews with 23 drill sergeants, including Basic Combat Training (BCT), Advanced Individual Training (AIT), and One Station Unit Training (OSUT) drill sergeants. To protect the anonymity of the drill sergeant participants, demographic information was not recorded.

FORSCOM

Interviews and focus group sessions were held with seven Army Brigades at four FORSCOM installations in the continental U.S.: Fort Hood, Texas and Fort Riley, Kansas in Spring 2006; Fort Lewis, Washington in Summer 2006; and Fort Carson, Colorado in Fall 2006. Commissioned officers and NCOs in each Brigade's chain of command were interviewed. Specifically, commissioned officers interviewed included captains and lieutenants who served as company commanders and platoon leaders. The NCO interviews included first sergeants, sergeants first class, staff sergeants, and sergeants. We were particularly interested in NCOs who had a great deal of contact with Soldiers, such as platoon sergeants and squad leaders. To protect the anonymity of these individuals, demographic information was not recorded.

A total of 386 enlisted Soldiers participated in the focus group sessions. Of those, 139 participated at Fort Hood, 162 participated at Fort Riley, and 85 participated at Fort Lewis. The majority of participants were male (89.1%). The number of female participants ranged from 3.7% to 25.9% across installations.

Most Soldiers were between 20 and 24 years of age (65.3%), but ranged from under 20 (8.5%) to between 35 and 39 years old (1.3%). Soldiers reported their ethnicity as White (68.1%); Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish ancestry (16.1%); Black or African American (14.8%); American Indian or Alaska Native (4.9%); Asian (2.8%); or Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (0.5%). Because some participants endorsed more than one ethnicity response option, percentages exceed 100.

The majority of Soldiers who participated in the focus groups reported earning a high school diploma (65.0%), with some having one to two years of college (23.8%) and some reporting an Associate's degree (3.4%) or a Bachelor's degree (2.6%).

Table 2-1 provides the specific demographic information for those Soldiers who participated in the FY06 focus groups, including gender, age, ethnicity, and education. Results are provided for the total sample and the range of values across installations.

Table 2-1. FY06 FORSCOM Focus Group Soldier Demographic Information

	Total		Range Across Installations	
	N	*%*	*Min %*	*Max %*
Total	386	100	22.0	42.0
Gender				
Male	344	89.1	71.8	96.3
Female	39	10.1	3.7	25.9
Missing	3	0.8	0.0	2.4
Age				
under 20 yrs old	33	8.5	4.3	15.3
20-24 yrs old	252	65.3	60.0	69.8
25-29 yrs old	75	19.4	18.7	20.0
30-34 yrs old	21	5.4	2.4	7.9
35-39 yrs old	5	1.3	0.7	2.4
Race/Ethnicity				
White	263	68.1	64.0	71.8
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish	62	16.1	14.8	18.0
Mexican, Mexican American, or Chicano	30	7.8	5.9	10.8
Puerto Rican	10	2.6	1.4	3.5
Cuban	4	1.0	0.0	1.9
Other Hispanic/Spanish	18	4.7	3.7	5.8
Black or African American	57	14.8	12.9	15.4
American Indian or Alaska Native	19	4.9	3.5	6.5
Asian	11	2.8	2.2	3.5
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	2	0.5	0.0	0.7

Table 2-1. FY06 FORSCOM Focus Group Soldier Demographic Information (continued)

	Total		Range Across Installations	
	N	*%*	*Min %*	*Max %*
Highest Education Completed				
Some High School or less, but no diploma, certificate, or GED	4	1.0	0.6	1.4
High School diploma/GED	251	65.0	60.4	68.5
1 to 2 yrs of college, but no degree	92	23.8	21.0	25.9
Associate degree	13	3.4	1.2	4.3
3 to 4 yrs of college, but no degree	4	1.0	0.6	1.4
Bachelor's degree	10	2.6	1.9	3.6
A year or more of graduate credit, but no graduate degree	2	0.5	0.0	1.2
Missing	10	2.6	1.2	3.6

Most focus group sessions were divided by rank (i.e., junior enlisted versus junior NCOs). The majority of Soldiers held the rank of corporal or specialist (50.3%) or private first class (31.9%). A small number of sergeants (6.7%), and staff sergeants (0.8%) also participated. Soldiers were primarily stationed in Combat Arms units (52.8%) or Combat Support units (26.2%).

Table 2-2 shows position information for those Soldiers who participated in the focus groups, including rank and current unit. Results are provided for the total sample as well as the range of values across installations.

Table 2-2. FY06 FORSCOM Focus Group Soldier Position Information

	Total		Range Across Installations	
	N	*%*	*Min %*	*Max %*
Rank				
PV1	8	2.1	1.4	3.5
PV2	32	8.3	4.9	17.6
PFC	123	31.9	26.6	45.9
CPL/SPC	194	50.3	32.9	58.0
SGT	26	6.7	0.0	11.5
SSG	3	0.8	0.0	2.2
Current Unit*				
Combat Arms (CA)	204	52.8	40.0	63.6
Combat Support (CS)	101	26.2	20.4	42.4
Combat Service Support (CSS)	34	8.8	6.2	11.5
Allied Command	1	0.3	0.0	0.6
Other Command	11	2.8	0.0	7.9
Do not know	24	6.2	5.8	6.8
Missing	11	2.8	2.4	3.6

* At the time the survey was conducted, these labels were used to categorize units. Since that time, the categories have been renamed as follows: Combat Arms is Maneuver Fires and Effects Division; Combat Support is Operational Support Division; and Combat Service Support is Force Sustainment Division.

Table 2-3 shows Family background for Soldiers who participated in the focus groups, including marital status, number of dependent children, and Family adjustment to Army life. Results are provided for the total sample and the range of values across installations.

Table 2-3. FY06 FORSCOM Focus Group Soldier Family Background

	Total		Range Across Installations	
	N	*%*	*Min %*	*Max %*
Marital Status				
Single and never married	201	52.1	47.5	58.3
Married for the first time	141	36.5	30.2	41.2
Remarried, was divorced or widowed	10	2.6	1.2	4.3
Legally separated or filing for divorce	19	4.9	3.5	5.8
Divorced	15	3.9	3.5	4.3
Dependent Children				
None	242	62.7	58.6	69.1
One	51	13.2	9.4	16.0
Two or more	54	14.0	10.6	15.4
Missing	39	10.1	7.2	15.3
Dependent Children Currently Living With You				
None	270	69.9	66.7	74.8
One	38	9.8	7.9	11.7
Two or more	37	9.6	4.7	11.7
Missing	41	10.6	7.2	17.6
Family Adjustment				
Extremely well	35	9.1	8.6	10.6
Very Well	56	14.5	13.6	16.5
Well	70	18.1	17.3	20.0
Neither	120	31.1	29.4	33.3
Badly	42	10.9	7.9	15.3
Very Badly	21	5.4	1.2	8.6
Extremely Badly	18	4.7	3.5	6.5
Missing	24	6.2	3.5	7.2

Table 2-4 shows career information for Soldiers who participated in the focus groups, including career intentions, average time in current grade, average time spent in the Active Army, and length of service spent in the Reserve Component. Results are provided for the total sample and the range of values across installations.

The majority of Soldiers reported that they were likely to leave the Army after their current obligation (61.9%); however, approximately 38 percent of the Soldiers indicated that they were likely to stay beyond their current obligation, with 19.4 percent of the Soldiers indicating they were likely to stay in the Army until retirement.

Table 2-4. FY06 FORSCOM Focus Group Soldier Career Information

	Total		Range Across Installations	
	N	*%*	*Min %*	*Max %*
Career Intentions				
Definitely stay until retirement	20	5.2	4.3	6.2
Probably stay until retirement	55	14.2	13.7	15.3
Definitely stay beyond my present obligation but not until retirement	11	2.8	2.2	3.5
Probably stay beyond my present obligation but not until retirement	59	15.3	9.3	22.4
Probably leave upon completion of my present obligation	92	23.8	22.4	25.3
Definitely leave upon completion of my present obligation	147	38.1	30.6	41.4
Missing	2	0.5	0.0	1.2
	M	*SD*	*M$_{min}$*	*M$_{max}$*
Time in current grade (months)	19.5	16.1	16.9	21.4
Time in Active Army (months)	28.3	18.2	23.8	31.2
Time left in obligation (months)	23.3	15.0	21.9	27.7
Time in Reserves (months) ($N = 23$)	26.8	20.8	20.9	38.4
	N	*%*	*Min %*	*Max %*
No Reserve service	355	92.0	85.9	94.2
0-12 months	8	2.1	1.2	3.6
13-24 months	7	1.8	0.0	3.6
25 or more months	8	2.1	0.7	3.0
Missing	8	2.1	0.0	4.7

Note: Career-related data were missing for a total of 10 Soldiers.

Participants in the data collections varied widely across a range of attributes (e.g., age, race, rank), experiences (e.g., education, time in service, Family situation), and attitudes (e.g., Army career intentions) that are found in the Army and that likely are important to career continuance decisions.

FY07 Interviews and Focus Groups

We supplemented the FY06 data collection by conducting interviews and focus groups across seven brigades at four FORSCOM installations in FY07. Similar to the FY06 effort, the goal of these interviews and focus groups was to investigate factors associated with enlisted career continuance in the Army. However, the focus in the FY07 interviews and focus groups shifted from junior Soldiers to junior NCOs. Additionally, while the FY06 effort focused on both attrition and reenlistment, in FY07 we focused exclusively on reenlistment decisions.

An additional goal of these interviews and focus groups was to gather information to guide the development of our two selected intervention concepts. These interventions are discussed in detail in Chapters 5 and 6 of this report, so feedback pertaining to the interventions is not provided in this chapter.

Interviews and focus groups were conducted at Fort Campbell, Tennessee; Fort Hood, Texas; Fort Lewis, Washington; and Fort Polk, Louisiana in Summer 2007. Across the four installations, we conducted sessions with five Senior NCOs (sergeants major), eight career counselors, 11 reenlistment NCOs, seven first sergeants, 19 platoon sergeants, 25 squad leaders, 121 junior NCOs (sergeants and staff sergeants), and 44 junior enlisted Soldiers, resulting in a total sample size of 240. Demographic information was collected for 212 of the 240 participants. The remainder of the sample participated in individual interviews; to protect their anonymity, they did not fill out background forms.

Table 2-5 provides the specific demographic information for those Soldiers who participated in the focus groups, including gender, age, ethnicity, and education. Results are provided for the total sample, as well as the range of values across installations. The sample was predominantly male (85.8%) and either White (56.6%) or Black/African American (28.8%), with the highest level of education being a high school degree/GED (39.6%) or some college (38.7%).

Table 2-5. FY07 FORSCOM Focus Group Soldier Demographic Information

	Total		Range Across Installations	
	N	*%*	*Min %*	*Max %*
	212	100	12.7	32.1
Gender				
Male	182	85.8	80.9	89.5
Female	28	13.2	8.3	19.1
Missing	2	0.9	0.0	3.3
Age				
under 20 yrs old	6	2.8	0.0	5.0
20-24 yrs old	66	31.1	25.9	43.3
25-29 yrs old	66	31.1	26.7	35.1
30-34 yrs old	40	18.9	15.0	22.2
35-39 yrs old	22	10.4	6.7	17.5
40-44 yrs old	8	3.8	0.0	7.4
45-49 yrs old	3	1.4	0.0	3.7
50 yrs old or over	1	0.5	0.0	1.5
Race/Ethnicity				
White	120	56.6	42.1	71.7
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish	32	15.1	0.0	20.6
Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano	14	6.6	0.0	10.5
Puerto Rican	5	2.4	0.0	5.3
Cuban	2	0.9	0.0	1.7
Other Hispanic/Spanish	12	5.7	0.0	8.8
Black or African American	61	28.8	20.0	44.4
American Indian or Alaska Native	11	5.2	0.0	7.4
Asian	6	2.8	0.0	5.9
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	5	2.4	0.0	4.4

Table 2-5. FY07 FORSCOM Focus Group Soldier Demographic Information (continued)

	Total		Range Across Installations	
	N	*%*	*Min %*	*Max %*
Highest Education Completed				
High School diploma/GED	84	39.6	29.6	45.6
1 to 2 yrs of college, but no degree	82	38.7	29.4	48.1
Associate degree	20	9.4	0.0	15.8
3 to 4 yrs of college, but no degree	6	2.8	0.0	11.1
Bachelor's degree	9	4.2	3.5	5.0
A year or more of graduate credit, but no graduate degree	4	1.9	1.5	3.7
Master's degree	2	0.9	0.0	1.7
Missing	5	2.4	0.0	5.9

Most focus group sessions were divided by rank (i.e., junior enlisted versus junior NCOs). Most of the focus group participants held the rank of corporal or specialist (16.0 percent) or higher (45.3% sergeants; 25.0% staff sergeants; 4.2% sergeants first class). We also obtained adequate representation from different types of units, including Combat Arms (27.4%), Combat Support (39.2%), and Combat Service Support (22.2%). Table 2.6 provides a detailed breakdown of rank and current unit for both the total sample and the range of values across installations.

Table 2-6. FY07 FORSCOM Focus Group Soldier Position Information

	Total		Range Across Installations	
	N	*%*	*Min %*	*Max %*
Rank				
PV1	2	0.9	0.0	3.7
PV2	6	2.8	1.8	3.7
PFC	12	5.7	0.0	10.0
CPL/SPC	34	16.0	14.8	17.6
SGT	96	45.3	33.3	50.9
SSG	53	25.0	21.1	40.7
SFC	9	4.2	2.9	5.3
Current Unit*				
Combat Arms (CA)	58	27.4	0.0	49.1
Combat Support (CS)	83	39.2	31.6	51.9
Combat Service Support (CSS)	47	22.2	11.7	40.7
Other Command	7	3.3	1.8	4.4
Do not know	11	5.2	0.0	7.4
Missing	6	2.8	0.0	5.9

* At the time the survey was conducted, these labels were used to categorize units. Since that time, the categories have been renamed as follows: Combat Arms is Maneuver Fires and Effects Division; Combat Support is Operational Support Division; and Combat Service Support is Force Sustainment Division.

Family background for Soldiers who participated in the focus groups is provided in Table 2-7. Marital status, number of dependent children, and Family adjustment to Army life are provided for the total sample as well as the range of values across installations.

Table 2-7. FY07 FORSCOM Focus Group Soldier Family Background

	Total		Range Across Installations	
	N	*%*	*Min %*	*Max %*
Marital Status				
Single and never married	48	22.6	14.8	28.3
Married for the first time	95	44.8	42.1	48.5
Remarried, was divorced or widowed	30	14.2	13.2	15.8
Legally separated or filing for divorce	18	8.5	6.7	14.8
Divorced	21	9.9	8.3	11.1
Dependent Children				
None	77	36.3	18.5	43.3
One	55	25.9	23.3	33.3
Two or more	71	33.5	28.8	44.4
Missing	9	4.2	1.8	5.9
Dependent Children Currently Living With You				
None	43	20.3	13.2	48.1
One	38	17.9	7.4	22.8
Two or more	50	23.6	21.7	26.3
Missing	81	38.2	22.2	46.7
Family Adjustment				
Extremely well	18	8.5	6.7	10.5
Very Well	48	22.6	14.0	31.7
Well	31	14.6	0.0	24.6
Neither	52	24.5	22.1	29.6
Badly	24	11.3	10.0	14.8
Very Badly	18	8.5	5.9	11.1
Extremely Badly	8	3.8	1.7	11.1
Missing	13	6.1	1.8	10.3

Table 2-8 shows career information for Soldiers who participated in the focus groups, including career intentions, average time in current grade, average time spent in the Active Army, and length of service spent in the Reserve Component. Results are provided for the total sample and the range of values across installations.

Soldiers reported mixed career intentions: 47.6 percent of focus group participants reported that they were likely to stay in the Army until retirement, while 43.8 percent indicated that they were likely to leave the Army after their present obligation. Only 8.5 percent reported that they were likely to stay in the Army beyond their present obligation but not until retirement. The FY07 sample indicated they were more likely to stay in the Army until retirement (47.6%) than the FY06 sample (19.4%). This is likely due to the differences in composition between the two samples. Recall that the FY06 sample was comprised primary of junior enlisted Soldiers, while the FY07 sample consisted primarily of junior NCOs, who had more years of service invested in their Army careers.

Table 2-8. FY07 FORSCOM Focus Group Soldier Career Information

	Total		Range Across Installations	
	N	*%*	*Min %*	*Max %*
Career Intentions				
Definitely stay until retirement	48	22.6	18.3	37.0
Probably stay until retirement	53	25.0	20.0	33.8
Definitely stay beyond my present obligation but not until retirement	3	1.4	0.0	1.8
Probably stay beyond my present obligation but not until retirement	15	7.1	3.7	10.3
Probably leave upon completion of my present obligation	52	24.5	17.6	31.6
Definitely leave upon completion of my present obligation	41	19.3	14.8	26.7
	M	*SD*	M_{min}	M_{max}
Time in current grade (months)	42.7	40.4	35.9	54.1
Time in Active Army (months)	80.5	52.5	70.9	99.1
Time left in obligation (months)	34.6	19.0	32.3	39.0
Time in Reserves (months) ($N = 35$)	51.1	35.4	39.7	69.3

We have organized the results of the FY06 and FY07 interviews and focus groups into two sections, attrition and retention, and have described the major themes and factors that emerged. The attrition section reflects information gathered from the FY06 data collection only, while the retention section summarizes the results from both the FY06 and FY07 interviews and focus groups. Additionally, the retention section highlights the similarities and differences that emerged between junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs. Note that the results from the interviews and focus groups have been aggregated across units and installations.

Attrition

In the following section, we describe the major attrition-related themes discussed in the FY06 interviews and focus groups, the factors influencing Soldiers' attrition decisions that emerged (see Table 2-9), as well as existing and/or potential career continuance interventions. As described previously, the interview and focus group protocols were designed to elicit information around several important topic areas in the career continuance decision process (e.g., reasons Soldiers join the Army, events/shocks during Initial Entry Training). These topic areas were developed from literature reviews, input from the U.S. Army Research Institute (ARI), and information from our preliminary Career Continuance Model.

In describing these attrition-related themes (below) we are not suggesting that they have a direct causal relationship with the career continuance among the Soldiers who were interviewed. Our intent was simply to identify and document the areas that Soldiers' discussed when asked about their career continuance decisions.

Table 2-9. Attrition Themes and Factors

Major Themes	
• Reasons Soldiers Join the Army	• Individual Differences among Soldiers
• Events/Shocks During Initial Entry Training (IET)	• Sources of Support
• Perceived Alternatives to Army Service	• Quality of Soldiers Graduating from Training
• Commitment to the Army During Initial Entry Training (IET)	
Factors Influencing Attrition	
• Mental Stability	• Deployments
• Misconduct	• Family-Related Issues
• Adjustment to Army Life	• Financial Troubles
• Adjustment to Army Rules	• Barracks Lawyers
• Army and/or MOS Not What Was Expected	

Major Themes

Reasons Soldiers Join the Army

Soldiers initially join the Army for a variety of reasons, including a steady paycheck, job security, benefits, patriotism, the desire to be a Soldier, or a history of Family members serving in the military. Additionally, Soldiers may join the Army due to a lack of alternative job options, as a way to address financial problems, or to escape something in their lives, such as a bad Family life or problems with drugs. Finally, Soldiers may enlist to obtain useful skills, technical training, money for education, or experience that could be instrumental in acquiring a more prestigious and lucrative civilian job in the future (cf. Strickland, 2005).

Events/Shocks during Initial Entry Training (IET)

Soldiers go through numerous events and experiences during training, both the predictable experiences of Army life and also the shocks that occur unexpectedly. These events and experiences serve to shape attitudes about the Army. For example, the first week of training can be a very stressful time for privates because of the general lack of sleep and adjustment to the Army culture and training schedule. We have identified general shocks during IET, including both positive and negative experiences that occur during the BCT, AIT, and OSUT training processes.

Perceived Alternatives to Army Service

Although a lack of perceived alternatives (e.g., a dead-end job at home) may play a role in the initial decision to enter the Army, perceived civilian alternatives can also significantly impact the attrition decision. Soldiers may perceive that alternatives exist in the civilian world offering better pay, additional benefits, and increased freedom compared to the Army.

Commitment to the Army during Initial Entry Training (IET)

Individual commitment levels fluctuate during the training process. Interviews and focus groups suggest that Soldiers enter the Army with an average level of commitment. During the training process, there are numerous factors, shocks, and/or events that increase or decrease commitment. For example, during the seventh week of BCT, drill sergeants report an increased level of private affective commitment because privates are building confidence and pride in themselves based upon the tasks completed and milestones reached during this time period.

Individual Differences among Soldiers

A variety of individual differences were reported as characteristics of Soldiers who attrit. Attrition is more common among individuals with physical problems that prevent them from participating in physical training (PT) or other training activities, those who have never participated in any physical activities, overweight trainees, individuals who have discipline or behavioral problems, and trainees with low levels of education. Further, Soldiers who experience difficulty working in a team environment or lack a sense of responsibility and/or belonging are

more likely to attrit. In contrast, characteristics of Soldiers who are not likely to attrit included participation in sports teams or other organized activities (e.g., cheerleading, Boy Scouts) and good organizational skills. Additionally, Soldiers with a strong social support network, either from friends, Family, or the community, are less likely to attrit, as are Soldiers with Family members in the service. Finally, although Soldiers coming from a troubled or unsupportive Family may be at greater risk for attrition, these Soldiers may perceive themselves as having something to prove and be less likely to attrit (cf. Strickland, 2005).

Sources of Support

During IET, Soldiers are unlikely to seek social support from their drill sergeants, but instead rely on their fellow recruits, their battle buddy (peer assigned during IET), or the chaplain for social support when issues pertaining to attrition decisions arise. Soldiers may also turn to older Soldiers who can share their experiences and provide useful advice. The social support among trainees and the initial bonding that occurs during IET may help prevent attrition.

Quality of Soldiers Graduating from Training

Some drill sergeants expressed concern regarding the quality of Soldiers graduating from training. Specifically, drill sergeants indicated some small percentage of graduates in a given cohort were less than fully prepared to graduate. This is attributable to a variety of factors, including issues related to recruiting practices as well as increased restrictions regarding Soldier separations. For example, trainees with several Articles 15 may still graduate as long as they meet the required standards.

Factors Influencing Attrition

Interview and focus group participants described several factors related to Soldiers' decisions to stay in or leave the Army during their first contract term. Next, we briefly describe the major factors influencing attrition that were reported during the focus group sessions.

Mental Stability

Soldiers suffering from various mental or emotional difficulties, like depression, or adjustment problems, may be more likely to attrit.

Misconduct

Soldiers with various behavioral problems, such as lack of respect for authority, drug abuse, or other mischievous conduct, are more likely to attrit.

Adjustment to Army Life

Difficulty adjusting to the structure and pressures of Army life can be a significant factor influencing a Soldier's decision to attrit.

Adjustment to Army Rules

Difficulty following Army rules and regulations can lead to a Soldier's dissatisfaction with the Army lifestyle.

Army and/or MOS Not What Was Expected

Soldiers' expectations about the Army may be unmet. In fact, some Soldiers reported perceiving the Army as disorganized, contributing to feelings of dissatisfaction and, in turn, influencing their decisions to separate from the Army. Further, Soldiers' unmet expectations about their particular Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) also contribute to their dissatisfaction with the Army. For example, Soldiers enter the Army thinking their job will consist of certain job responsibilities and tasks, other than those actually experienced.

Deployments

The increased OPTEMPO of deployments may increase thoughts of attrition among Soldiers. In particular, married Soldiers and/or those with children may especially feel the effects of constantly being away from their families. Additionally, Soldiers expecting to deploy for the first time may consider options to avoid deployment.

Family-Related Issues

Family-related issues, such as being a single parent or not having time to spend with one's Family, may negatively impact a Soldier's morale and potentially lead him or her to separate from the Army.

Financial Troubles

Soldiers with financial issues may consider separating. For example, a Soldier may not know how to properly manage his/her monthly budget, resulting in unmanageable debt. Additionally, Soldiers with these financial troubles may not know how to seek out assistance from the Army.

Barracks Lawyers

"Barracks lawyers", peers that communicate information on how to manipulate the Army's system, can influence a Soldier's decision to leave. Rather than spread a positive message about the Army, they tend to spread negative sentiments among Soldiers, decreasing morale and influencing career continuance decisions.

Retention

In the following review, we describe the major retention-related themes discussed in the FY06 and FY07 interviews and focus groups, and the factors influencing Soldiers' reenlistment decisions that emerged (see Table 2-10). As with attrition, the interview and focus group protocols were designed to elicit information around several important topic areas in the career continuance decision process (e.g., reasons Soldiers reenlist, perceived alternatives).

We discuss career continuance themes and factors for both junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs, highlighting the similarities and differences among these Soldiers. In describing these retention-related themes (below) we are not suggesting that they have a direct causal relationship with the career continuance among the Soldiers who were interviewed. Our intent was simply to identify and document the areas that Soldiers' discussed when asked about their career continuance decisions.

Table 2-10. Retention Themes and Factors

Major Themes	
• Reasons Soldiers and NCOs Reenlist	• Commitment to the Army at Unit of Assignment
• Adjustment to Army Life	• Individual Differences among Soldiers
• Events/Shocks	• Sources of Support
• Deployments	• Timeframe of Reenlistment Decision
• Promotion System	• Quality of Soldiers in the Army
• Perceived Alternatives to Army Service	• Quality of Soldiers Reenlisting

Factors Influencing the Reenlistment Decision	
• Pay/Benefits	• Day-to-Day Work/Job
• Job/Financial Security	• Quality of Life
• Educational Opportunities	• Communication
• Reenlistment Incentives	• Investments
• Career Advancement	• Patriotism/Pride
• Leadership	• Camaraderie
• Deployments	• Rewards/Recognition
• Predictability	• Perceptions of Deception
• Family Support	• Unmet Expectations
• Personal Time	• Discipline

Major Themes

Reasons Soldiers and NCOs Reenlist

Although junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs frequently reported reenlisting for similar reasons, noteworthy differences emerged. The most consistent reasons cited for reenlistment for a second contract term were financial incentives and benefits, such as reenlistment bonuses and healthcare benefits. Camaraderie among fellow Soldiers was also cited as influencing reenlistment decisions among junior enlisted Soldiers. In particular, Soldiers reported that they developed a close bond with others in their unit and reenlisted to stay close to Battle Buddies and friends.

Among junior NCOs, job security and Army benefits were most frequently cited as reasons Soldiers reenlist. NCOs reported that, compared to junior enlisted Soldiers, junior NCOs are more likely to be married and/or have children, so financial security becomes increasingly important. Additionally, they tend to be more career-oriented, causing educational benefits and career opportunities to be perceived as major reasons to reenlist. Junior NCOs cited reenlistment bonuses and unit cohesion less frequently than junior enlisted Soldiers.

Adjustment to Army Life

For junior enlisted Soldiers, adjustment to Army life emerged as another retention-related theme. Estimates of the time required to adjust to Army life ranged from two weeks to a full year. Soldiers experiencing difficulty adjusting to Army life were not likely to reenlist because they were unprepared to deal with the military lifestyle, were undisciplined, or had unrealistic expectations. On the other hand, Soldiers who have reenlisted at least once have presumably made the adjustment to the Army lifestyle, so this does not affect reenlistment decisions for junior NCOs.

Events/Shocks

Another retention-related theme, primarily relevant to those in their first contract term, is that Soldiers experience numerous events that can be perceived as shocks. For example, moving from a strict training environment to a less restrictive first unit of assignment can be a major change for a Soldier. Some Soldiers reported having difficulty adjusting to a new environment where they had to be more independent. Further, these changes that occur during the first contract term, both positive and negative, can impact a Soldier's reenlistment decision. For example, if a Soldier does not effectively cope with a negative experience, he or she will be more likely to leave the Army upon completion of the first contract term.

Although junior NCOs may face negative events as well, such as being passed over for an expected promotion or having to make a Permanent Change of Station (PCS) move to an undesirable location, they indicated that they tend to have a broader perspective on Army life. Additionally, they have often developed effective coping strategies and/or a support network to

help them through such events. Thus, negative Army experiences are less likely to be perceived as shocks and are therefore less influential to junior NCOs' reenlistment decisions.

Deployments

The increased OPTEMPO of deployments impacts reenlistment decisions for both junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs. Some Soldiers feel that the costs of leaving their families for long periods of time outweigh the benefits an Army career provides. In the time between the FY06 and FY07 data collections, deployment length increased from 12 months to 15 months. This increase was perceived unfavorably by some Soldiers and was cited as a potential reason not to reenlist.

On the other hand, some junior enlisted Soldiers, particularly single Soldiers, wanted to experience deployment and were disappointed when the opportunity was not provided. Such Soldiers expressed frustration at the perceived inequity in the distribution of deployments, and they were dissatisfied with their Army experience as a result.

Promotion System

Another retention-related theme that emerged as particularly relevant to junior NCOs is the perceived fairness of the Army's promotion system. Various aspects of the promotion system were discussed, including the rapid pace of promotion to sergeant (pay grade E5), and maturity and leadership skills of newly promoted NCOs. Some Soldiers reported that while the Army is rapidly promoting Soldiers to the rank of sergeant (pay grade E5) and, in some cases, staff sergeant (pay grade E6), opportunities at the sergeant first class level (pay grade E7) are much more limited and vary by MOS. Thus, junior NCOs may leave the Army because of the lack of opportunities for career progression.

Perceived Alternatives to Army Service

Perceived alternatives influence the reenlistment decisions of both junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs, albeit in slightly different ways. Although some junior enlisted Soldiers have plans in place once they approach their reenlistment window, the majority are unsure about career alternatives within and outside the Army. Many rely on informal communication about career alternatives from peers. Sometimes Soldiers without definitive plans, who separate from the Army after their first contract term, return after realizing that the Army was a better alternative. On the other hand, junior NCOs are often more aware of the available opportunities outside of the Army than junior enlisted Soldiers. Additionally, because they tend to be older and further along in their Army careers, they may feel that it is not worth starting over in a new career.

For both junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs, perceived alternatives varied by MOS. For example, Soldiers in certain MOSs (e.g., supply, transport, medics) are periodically contacted by civilian employers or contractors because of their technical expertise and skills,

while Soldiers in other MOSs (e.g., infantry) feel they have fewer alternatives outside of the Army.

Commitment to the Army at Unit of Assignment

A variety of factors impact commitment to the Army at the unit of assignment. Further, commitment levels fluctuate over time. In particular, factors that contribute most to affective commitment include camaraderie, leadership, deployments, and self-efficacy. Conversely, factors influencing continuance commitment include perceived alternatives and investments. When Soldiers approach their reenlistment window, they are influenced by the amount of time they've already invested in the Army. Soldiers closer to retirement reenlist based on time invested, as is frequently the case with junior NCOs.

Individual Differences among Soldiers

Individual differences were reported among Soldiers who reenlist and Soldiers who do not. For example, married Soldiers tend to stay longer than single Soldiers. Married Soldiers are in a position to take advantage of the variety of benefits the Army has to offer and are not alone in managing their lives outside their work responsibilities. Another individual difference influencing reenlistment decisions is previous work experience. Soldiers with work experience prior to the Army are more realistic in considering their alternatives, and therefore more appreciative of the benefits of Army life.

Sources of Support

Soldiers reported having many avenues of support available to them. Family plays a particularly crucial role for married Soldiers. A supportive spouse may persuade a Soldier to reenlist, while an unsupportive spouse may pressure him/her to pursue other options. Fellow Soldiers are also an important source of support, as are squad leaders (particularly for junior enlisted Soldiers) and others in the chain of command. Soldiers indicated – junior enlisted Soldiers in particular – that an unsupportive leader or peer can be as influential as a supportive one, in terms of the reenlistment decision. Conversely, an unsupportive leader is far less likely to influence reenlistment decisions for junior NCOs, given that they have a broader perspective and have likely worked with a variety of both effective and ineffective Army leaders.

Timeframe of Reenlistment Decision

Junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs differ in terms of the timing of the reenlistment decision. Junior enlisted Soldiers tend to start thinking about whether to reenlist as soon as they arrive at their first unit of assignment, though the decision generally changes over time. Peers can also influence the timing, as junior enlisted Soldiers may wait until they find out what their friends are doing before making a decision. NCOs reported that approximately half of the Soldiers have already made up their mind by the time they approach the reenlistment NCO, though few reenlist prior to their 18-month expiration of term of service (ETS) window, enabling

them to take advantage of the reenlistment options. Additionally, Soldiers who tend to be indecisive about reenlistment usually end up reenlisting toward the end of the contract term.

NCOs indicated that while junior enlisted Soldiers often wait until the last minute to make the final decision, junior NCOs tend to know much earlier in the process. Because they have reenlisted before, they are more educated about the process. They can also make a more informed decision, given that they have had more time to experience the pros and cons of Army life. Finally, peers tend to have less of an impact on the timing of the decision for junior NCOs, as compared to junior enlisted Soldiers.

Perceived Quality of Soldiers in the Army

Just as drill sergeants expressed concern regarding the quality of Soldiers graduating from training, NCOs commented on the quality of Soldiers at the unit of assignment. Some interviewees and focus group respondents reported a growing number of Soldiers who cannot meet Army standards and/or create disciplinary problems. They perceived that NCOs spend a lot of time "babysitting" such Soldiers. This perception impacts reenlistment decisions for both junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs by lowering morale and creating perceptions of unfairness among Soldiers that are meeting standards.

Perceived Quality of Soldiers Reenlisting

Although some interviewees believed that good Soldiers reenlist and bad Soldiers leave, others commented that Soldiers who end up reenlisting have no focus, have no other alternatives, or are running away from something. In focus groups conducted with officers and NCOs, participants reported their perception that high quality Soldiers tend to be older (35+) and more educated, and thus have the experience necessary to pursue alternative options. Increased monetary incentives in the civilian world were mentioned as particularly likely to draw out high quality Soldiers. Differences in the perceived quality of Soldiers who are reenlisting did not emerge between junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs.

Factors Influencing the Reenlistment Decision

Interview and focus group participants described several factors related to decisions to reenlist. We briefly describe some of the major factors below. Chapter 5 provides a more systematic analysis of the factors based on survey data.

Although many of the factors were similar for junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs, there were also some noteworthy differences. For example, some factors (e.g., job/financial security, Army benefits, deployments, and Family support) were meaningful for both groups, and other factors were more influential for junior enlisted Soldiers (e.g., unmet expectations, perceptions of deception, and discipline) or for junior NCOs (e.g., career advancement, educational opportunities).

Pay/Benefits

Army pay and benefits were among the more frequently cited factors influencing reenlistment decisions among both junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs. Particularly for Soldiers who are married and/or have children, the guarantee of a steady paycheck and Army benefits, including medical and dental coverage, disability coverage, food and housing, and time off, were perceived as positive reasons to stay in the Army. Retirement benefits were perceived as a factor influencing junior NCOs, especially those closer to the 10-year mark, but not junior enlisted Soldiers, as NCOs reported that junior enlisted Soldiers tend not to think that far into the future.

Conversely, low Army pay coupled with the perception of higher pay rates in the civilian world were cited as primary factors that negatively affect reenlistment decisions. Some Soldiers commented that they could make a lot more money as civilian contractors, doing the same work with fewer (if any) deployments. Additionally, dissatisfaction with the healthcare system (TRICARE), including difficulties in seeing a healthcare provider, was cited as a factor that adversely impacts reenlistment decisions for some Soldiers.

Job/Financial Security

Job security and the low risk of being fired were frequently mentioned as positive factors affecting reenlistment decisions. Soldiers with financial obligations (e.g., those who purchased a car or house) were particularly likely to cite financial security as having a positive impact on the decision to reenlist. Junior NCOs reported that they are more likely to be married and/or have children, and that job security is a major factor influencing their decision to reenlist.

Educational Opportunities

The availability of educational opportunities in the Army, including online courses and financial support for future schooling, was cited as a factor positively affecting reenlistment decisions. Both junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs mentioned the benefit of educational opportunities, though this was perceived as particularly influential for junior NCOs, who tend to be more career-oriented.

However, the effectiveness of educational opportunities as an incentive to reenlist was somewhat mitigated by the fact that many Soldiers reported being unable to take advantage of this benefit. Soldiers suggested that although classes are available, they are not allowed to participate in them due to lack of time and/or lack of command support. Even when command support is provided, school is frequently perceived as just more time away from one's Family, so some Soldiers are reluctant to take advantage of this benefit.

Reenlistment Incentives

To encourage Soldiers to reenlist, the Army offers various reenlistment incentives and options, many of which are particularly influential. Junior enlisted Soldiers frequently cited

reenlistment bonuses as their primary motivation to reenlist, and they often take advantage of tax-free bonuses by reenlisting while deployed. Although bonuses were also mentioned as important to junior NCOs, they were less influential, partially because reenlistment bonuses tend to be offered less frequently and in lower quantities for this group. Additionally, reenlistment options, such as a change of MOS, station of choice, and training opportunities, were also discussed as positive factors, though again, junior enlisted Soldiers tend to have more options than junior NCOs.

Career Advancement

Many Soldiers cited career advancement as a factor that positively influenced reenlistment decisions. Some junior enlisted Soldiers were excited by the prospect of being promoted to NCO, including the financial rewards associated with promotion. Career progression was cited as a primary concern among junior NCOs in particular, and many are interested in climbing the chain of command. The opportunity to gain further career-related training and skills, certifications, and licenses were also cited as positive reasons to reenlist for both junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs.

Unfortunately, some Soldiers perceived promotions as being awarded inequitably and no longer performance-related; moreover, it was believed that some individuals are promoted too quickly, while others who are deserving are passed over. Some Soldiers reported that those who are promoted too quickly are often unable to effectively handle the job requirements and responsibilities, leading to dissatisfaction for both the promoted Soldier and those in his or her unit. NCOs at the E5 level in particular were perceived as being unprepared to handle the responsibilities. Conversely, Soldiers who are not advanced in a timely manner are less likely to reenlist, as is frequently the case for junior NCOs interested in reaching the rank of E7. At this level, promotions occur infrequently, and promotion points may vary widely by MOS. Soldiers frequently cited perceived inequities in the promotional system, lack of opportunities for career progression, and problems with leadership as significant negative factors influencing reenlistment decisions.

Leadership

Although a particularly good leader can play an important role in influencing a Soldier's reenlistment decision, a poor leader can be just influential, if not more so. This is particularly true for some junior enlisted Soldiers; because of their limited experience in the Army, one poor leader can have a profound impact, skewing their views of the entire Army.

Some junior enlisted Soldiers cited poor leadership as a primary concern in their reenlistment decisions, reporting that inconsistencies across leadership make it difficult to follow rules and regulations, that NCO quality may vary across units and there may be a general lack of respect for leadership. Examples of poor leadership described by these individuals included actions by leaders who were only looking out for themselves, micromanaging, engaging in

favoritism, and taking advantage of their rank. Leadership plays a role in junior NCOs' reenlistment decisions as well, but because they have a broader perspective and a greater degree of autonomy, leadership was perceived as less influential.

Deployments

Many Soldiers, especially those who were single, described deployments in a positive light. During deployment, Soldiers may experience enhanced job satisfaction and meaningfulness, increased unit cohesion, and an overwhelming sense of pride in their service. Additionally, Soldiers enjoy the monetary incentives of being deployed. Thus, for some Soldiers, deployments can be a positive factor in the reenlistment decision.

However, the extended length and frequency of deployments are negatively influencing reenlistment decisions among both junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs. Many Soldiers cited multiple deployments and/or back-to-back deployments as adversely impacting their decision to reenlist. Further, the lack of available information regarding the timing and length of deployments can be a strain to both Soldiers and their families, and stop-loss orders can be detrimental to Soldiers' morale. Additionally, training obligations prior to deployment, which extend the period of separation between Soldiers and their families, affect attitudes toward reenlistment. On the other hand, some junior enlisted Soldiers reported frustration and negative reenlistment attitudes because they wanted to deploy and had not had the opportunity to do so.

Predictability

Lack of predictability was frequently described as a factor negatively influencing decisions to reenlist, particularly for junior enlisted Soldiers. Deployment-related information (e.g., date of departure) is often communicated to the Soldier at the last minute, and the information frequently changes. In Garrison, Soldiers are often required to work nights or weekends, with little advance notice. This negatively impacts Soldiers' personal time for plans such as education and Family vacations. This lack of predictability prevents Soldiers and their families from adequately planning their lives and preparing for deployment, which adversely impacts reenlistment decisions.

Family Support

Having a spouse who is supportive of Army service is a critical factor affecting a Soldier's decision to reenlist. Other Family members, including children and parents, play a role as well.

Family-related factors were also among the most commonly cited factors negatively influencing reenlistment decisions for both junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs. Spouses were often described as being dissatisfied with Army life, due to Soldiers' long work days, frequent deployments, and relocations that can be particularly difficult for spouses trying to manage their own career. Additionally, Soldiers cited missing seeing their children growing up

or missing an important Family event (e.g., the birth of a child) as significant factors adversely impacting their decision to reenlist. Finally, problems adjusting to life as a military family in general can be a negative factor.

Personal Time

A lack of personal time was commonly cited as a factor negatively influencing reenlistment decisions. Some Soldiers reported that they had very little personal and Family time, even when they were not preparing for deployment. The requirement to stay on post, even when
there is nothing to do, was particularly dissatisfying. Such Soldiers perceived civilian jobs to be a better alternative to Army life in this respect. This was true of both junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs.

Day-to-Day Work/Job

Many junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs complained about the long hours and weekend time required of Army life. Soldiers reported having a great deal of down time followed by last-minute tasks handed down at the end of the work day. Additionally, some focus group respondents complained that they were often unable to perform the job for which they enlisted, particularly in Garrison; instead, their days typically consisted of performing busy work (e.g., picking up trash), meaningless tasks, or tasks or missions perceived as pointless and unrelated to their MOS. On the other hand, a few Soldiers did not mind the down time and busy work, commenting that it made their jobs easy.

For junior NCOs, their jobs included leadership responsibilities. A major source of frustration for many in this group was a lack of authority to effectively manage their Soldiers, and having to spend a great deal of time supervising disciplinary cases because they lacked the authority to appropriately punish them. Such experiences negatively affected the morale of the NCO and his or her unit. On the other hand, junior NCOs enjoyed leading and mentoring the Soldiers without behavioral problems, describing this role as the most satisfying part of being in the Army. Thus, this aspect of the job can play a positive or a negative role on junior NCOs' reenlistment decisions, depending on the nature of the experiences.

Quality of Life

Some Soldiers described day-to-day problems in Army life as having a negative influence on reenlistment decisions. A number of factors affecting junior enlisted Soldiers' quality of life were mentioned, including the quality and density of housing, particularly in the barracks; the availability of recreational activities; the desirability of installation location; and the absence or presence of social problems. Additionally, some junior enlisted Soldiers complained about

having money deducted from their paycheck for meals, regardless of whether they ate in the dining hall.

Some junior NCOs also mentioned quality of life issues, stemming from a general feeling of burn-out due to high workload and scheduling. Another complaint among some junior NCOs was that single sergeants have to live in the barracks and "watch" the Soldiers, which was perceived as demoralizing and draining. Such problems can take a toll on Soldiers, preventing them from reenlisting for another term.

Communication

One of the frustrations cited by some Soldiers was poor communication throughout the chain of command. They reported that orders are often given at the last minute and that the necessary information is not effectively passed down to lower-ranking Soldiers. Additionally, some Soldiers felt that leadership did not adequately communicate reenlistment options and incentives. Although communication breakdowns affect Soldiers across the chain of command, junior enlisted Soldiers were more apt to mention this as a factor influencing reenlistment

decisions, when compared to junior NCOs. Junior NCOs are likely to receive more information than junior enlisted Soldiers, so communication breakdowns may be less problematic at that level.

Investments

Many Soldiers described feeling invested in the Army, which positively impacted their reenlistment decisions. Soldiers indicated that they had made a significant investment in the Army, so leaving would be a waste of the time they had already committed. For junior enlisted Soldiers, these feelings of investment are increased when leadership makes an effort to get to know the Soldier (e.g., squad leaders eating lunch with Soldiers) and are further supported by the camaraderie among peers. Junior NCOs, on the other hand, mentioned the positive impact of leading other Soldiers and contributing to their development. Because junior NCOs have been in the Army longer than junior enlisted Soldiers, they are more likely to feel invested in the Army, and this may influence their reenlistment decisions.

Patriotism/Pride

Some Soldiers reported that those with a genuine sense of patriotism, pride in being a Soldier, or who have a family tradition of military service may be more likely to reenlist for subsequent terms.

Camaraderie

Soldiers described unit camaraderie and cohesion as a positive aspect of Army life. Among junior enlisted Soldiers, peers commonly influence what a Soldier "says" he or she will do in terms of reenlisting, though they have less of an impact on the actual reenlistment decision. Junior NCOs tend to be less influenced by peers, both in terms of their stated intentions and

whether they actually reenlist. According to focus group respondents, this is because junior NCOs have more experience and are less impressionable than junior enlisted Soldiers.

Rewards/Recognition

Some Soldiers reported their perception that the amount of formal (e.g., Top Gun award, ARCOM Army Commendation Medal) and informal (e.g., verbal praise from leadership) recognition provided to them was inadequate. When Soldiers feel that they are not properly recognized for their contributions, they are less likely to reenlist. Although recognition may be lacking for both junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs, this was not mentioned as influencing reenlistment decisions for the latter group.

Perceptions of Deception and Differential Treatment

Some junior enlisted Soldiers reported their perception that reenlistment NCOs are not forthcoming in communicating the available reenlistment options. Specifically, such Soldiers expressed concerns that reenlistment NCOs may withhold the best incentives or provide Soldiers with "low ball" offers. Additionally, the distribution of assignments can seem arbitrary and unfair to some Soldiers, leading to perceptions of inequitable treatment. Finally, differential treatment was noted across ranks, adding to feelings of mistreatment. For example, a higher ranking Soldier is more likely to get sent home to see his sick wife versus a lower ranking Soldier. Junior NCOs were less apt to mention deception and differential treatment as factors influencing reenlistment decisions, perhaps because of their broader perspective and/or the fact that they have a better understanding of the reenlistment process, having been through it before.

Unmet Expectations

Unmet expectations can have a significant negative influence on reenlistment decisions, particularly for junior enlisted Soldiers. Some Soldiers may have unrealistic expectations of Army life based on what they believe they have heard from recruiters and the perceived unfulfilled promises by leadership or the Army (e.g., Soldiers reenlist for their station-of-choice, but the contract is not fulfilled; Soldiers are promised schooling opportunities, but leadership does not follow through). Because they have been in the Army longer, junior NCOs tend to have more realistic expectations of Army life, so they are less affected by this than junior enlisted Soldiers.

Discipline

Soldiers who have problems with the discipline required for Army service may be less likely to reenlist. Although specific instances of discipline problems were not regularly cited, Soldiers with discipline problems may be "chaptered out" before their reenlistment window opens. Also, because those with discipline problems are unlikely to reenlist for a second contract term, this factor is less applicable to junior NCOs.

Summary

In this chapter we described one of the first critical steps in the STAY project: identifying issues that drive Soldier attrition and reenlistment. We began by reviewing existing literature, technical reports, reviews, and briefings. We then met with attrition and retention experts regarding current trends and efforts to address attrition and retention in the Active Army.

We used this information to develop protocols for the subsequent interviews and focus groups with officers and enlisted Soldiers. We met with hundreds of Soldiers throughout the chain of command to build on and refine our understanding of the context in which Soldiers are working; the issues that influence their perceptions of their jobs, life in the Army, and career alternatives; the unit- and Army-level efforts to encourage career continuance; and how recent world events influence the Army and Soldiers' day-to-day lives.

These meetings provided us with the critical information we needed to understand and interpret influences on Soldiers' attrition and reenlistment decisions. Specifically, we identified issues influencing enlisted Soldiers' decisions to leave the Army during training or before the completion of their first contract term (attrition), including individual difference Solider-level factors such as commitment to the Army, reasons for joining, pre-existing behavioral or emotional difficulties, physical injuries or problems, family history of service, and ability to adjust to Army life. The qualitative data from these interviews and focus groups also appeared to support our hypothesis that contextual factors were important to Soldiers' attrition decisions. We considered such factors to include shocks and stress experienced early in training or at the first unit of assignment; deployment-related concerns; financial troubles; availability of alternative job opportunities; family time-related concerns; peer and other forms of social support; and unmet expectations regarding the Army or MOS-related duties.

We also explored issues which might potentially influence junior enlisted Soldiers' and NCOs' decisions to remain in the Army (reenlistment). Although many of the factors were similar for junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs, there were noteworthy differences. For example, some factors (e.g., job/financial security, Army benefits, quality of life, deployments, patriotism and pride in service, and Family support) were meaningful for both groups, and other factors were more salient (and potentially influential) for junior enlisted Soldiers (e.g., unmet expectations, perceptions of deception, perceptions of poor leadership, and discipline) or for junior NCOs (e.g., career advancement, educational opportunities).

Despite changes in the Army environment, the taxonomy of reasons Soldiers stay in or leave the Army is similar to findings from previous research. However, the importance of the various themes and factors may change with the recent changes in context and the current OPTEMPO. Chapter 5 presents additional detail and comparisons of the importance of the various reasons to stay in or leave the Army.

The themes and factors that emerged from the interviews and focus groups reflect complex issues that may positively or negatively influence career continuance decisions, depending on the individual. For example, NCOs may view deployments as time away from Family, or be concerned about the effects of multiple deployments (e.g., stress, potential injury, family issues). Conversely, junior enlisted Soldiers may want to deploy and may either be excited about the prospect of deployment, enjoy the deployments they have had, or even be disappointed because they have not had the opportunity to deploy. Thus, efforts to understand and manage career continuance in the Army must consider not only the factors (e.g., deployments, career alternatives), but how the other individual and contextual factors interact to influence individual decisions.

The career continuance themes and factors identified in the interviews and focus groups helped set the stage for the remainder of the Enlisted STAY project. Specifically, the career continuance factors described in this chapter were used to drive the development of the Career Continuance Model and the identification of potential interventions. The next chapter discusses the Career Continuance Model in detail, including the development process, proposed links across career continuance factors, and an initial test of model linkages.

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CHAPTER 3 – A MODEL OF ENLISTED CAREER CONTINUANCE

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This chapter describes the rationale, development, and preliminary evaluation of a dynamic process model of enlisted career continuance. The model was used to help inform the selection of candidate career continuance interventions.

Introduction

Project STAY had two overall objectives. One was to develop a model of early to mid-career enlisted continuance that could guide research and the design of interventions to enhance career continuance. The second was to develop and test a set of interventions for reducing separation and enhancing continuance.

This chapter presents the model of career continuance for enlisted Soldiers (E-1 to E-4) and non-commissioned officers (NCOs; E-5 to E-6). It is organized into seven sections. The first three comment on the functions of these types of models, existing models of continuance in the Army, and deficiencies of present approaches that the current model seeks to address. These are followed by two sections that are focused directly on the model. The first, Section 4, presents the organizing themes of the new model. Section 5 is a detailed description of the model itself. Upon detailed discussion of the model, tests of the model are presented. Finally, model generated suggestions for interventions are discussed. Section 7 addresses ways that the model can be used to evaluate potential interventions and to suggest ways to create new policies and practices aimed at enhancing the career continuance of junior enlisted Soldiers and NCOs in the U.S. Army.

Model Objectives

Before delving into the model itself, it is reasonable to ask two questions. First, what is the purpose of this model, or any model, of enlisted Soldier career continuance? Second, given a reasonably extensive body of literature on career continuance in general and military continuance in particular, why is a new model needed? We answer the first question in this section and the second question in the next section.

We believe the purposes of the model, indeed any model of human behavior with practical objectives, are twofold. To begin, the model should provide a framework for understanding the behavior or set of behaviors of interest. In most scientific uses of the term, "understanding" means placing the behavior in question within a coherent network of interrelated variables, the so-called nomological network of constructs. To be sure, this is what we endeavor to do. However, we also take this term to mean explicating the way in which the

behavior develops by describing a process of change over time in the key constructs. As such, our model is process oriented. Of course, frameworks remain entirely conceptual unless confirmed by supportive data. A good model will suggest novel empirical relationships, research to be done, and use the verification of those relationships as support.

A good theory can be a powerful, practical tool. A working model of continuance should also guide the development of effective interventions. It should suggest new interventions and make a priori predictions about existing ones. So, for example, one should be able to map any intervention onto the model, and judge whether the intervention focuses on core processes for everyone or peripheral processes relevant to only some, whether the intervention focuses on proximal processes close to the behavior of interest or on distal processes, far removed in the causal chain. Such judgments allow for predictions of intervention effectiveness and also suggest types of interventions likely to have greater impact. In addition, programs of interventions can be evaluated in terms of whether they sample broadly across the full process or whether they focus on narrow areas of the process. The latter judgment would suggest that important processes are being ignored as regions for intervention. Thus, the objectives of understanding and application are inextricably tied together.

We should hasten to add that our model does not presume to address all questions of continuance. In no way are we suggesting that all relevant variables are, or can be, included in the model or that the process describes the only paths to continuance development. Nor are we suggesting that the processes we describe are not subject to further refinement. We are suggesting that the model describes important paths, and key processes in the domain of Soldier career continuance.

The Nature of Existing Models of Separation from the Army

There is a large body of empirical work in the Armed Forces in general and the Army in particular, examining predictors of retention and separation. A substantial amount of model building has accompanied this body of empirical work.

Weiss, MacDermid, Strauss, Kurek, Le, and Robbins (2003) reviewed general approaches to the study of separation in both military and civilian research. They observed that military research has generally fallen into one of three categories. First, large-scale survey research has been conducted where the primary purpose was to investigate how numerous factors relate to or predict the retention intentions of military personnel. Sometimes these studies have been focused on retention itself. In other cases, they have involved secondary analyses of data collected for other purposes.

Second, military researchers have investigated the application of utility principles from economic models of occupational choice to the study of military retention. With respect to military personnel, the utility maximizing framework implies that individuals seek to maximize

utility by making a decision either to stay in the military or leave the military for the civilian sector. Utility in either the military or civilian sector is dependent upon the financial and non-financial factors associated with each. Financial factors are those such as military pay and perceived earning opportunities in the civilian sector. Non-financial factors are those associated with a particular occupational setting, such as work hours, time away from home and Family, preference for military service, and length of commute. Individuals seek to maximize utility by choosing the occupation in which the financial and non-financial benefits provide the highest level of actual and anticipated satisfaction (Hogan & Black, 1991; Mackin, Mairs, & Hogan, 1995; Warner & Goldberg, 1984).

Third, military research has developed various conceptual models of military separation (e.g., Kerr, 1997). These models tend to be structural models of the predictors of behavioral intentions. In some cases, they have been attempts to translate models developed in the civilian population. In other cases, they have been models unique to the military.

Each of these three strategies has provided useful information about the correlates of separation decisions. Additionally, the application of economic models has provided useful policy guidance by providing predictions of separation rates given mostly financial policy interventions.

Our intent is to build on previous work. That said, we observe that although previous research on military separation has been both rigorous and useful, it is also true that, by and large, it has been static in approach and deficient in descriptions of psychological process. We raise some of these limitations in the following section.

Deficiencies of Existing Models and Approaches

Previous attrition models suffer from a number of limitations. First, few of these models describe the processes by which individuals come to the decision to separate from the service. Instead they rely on identifying predictors of separation or separation intentions, rarely tying them to underlying psychological processes.

Second, these approaches give little attention to the role of time in separation processes. They neither discuss the way attachments to the military unfold over time, how individuals take different paths toward their separation decisions, how events at one time influence processes at a later time, nor how military experiences themselves have a time dependent structure.

Third, these approaches give no role to the nature or consequences of the military "experience," choosing instead to focus on the predictive utility of various features of the military (the pay, the leader quality, etc.). Of course these features represent important contextual features of military life, but it should not be forgotten that the experiences of Soldiers are the primary proximal influences on their beliefs and decisions.

Finally, existing models are too focused on why people leave. This is, perhaps, an odd statement. Shouldn't models of leaving focus on the problems that lead to both gradual and abrupt disengagement? Yet, a framing of the problem as continuance rather than as only disengagement requires a recognition that as a career progresses and experiences accrue, attachment may increase or decrease and individuals can change and grow in their skills and capabilities. A process-oriented approach that examines attachment over time reveals that at any time experiences may be impacting the deterioration of commitment but other events occurring at the same time or even the same events also may be contributing to strengthening commitment. Attention must also be paid to positive factors such as efficacy, resilience, maturity, the development of friendships and loyalty, and other factors that may be developing over the same time period with the potential to strengthen attraction to the Army. We need not, no should not, create models that describe a uniformly bleak journey of frustration and despair, culminating in attrition. Rather, we should recognize that there are differences in attachment and that events and experiences that affect attachment also have consequences for other relevant outcomes.

Essential Features of Our Career Continuance Model

Our overall objective is to develop a dynamic, experiential, inclusive process model of career continuance in the Army (including attrition and non-reenlistment) that can guide research, intervention development, and selection. To develop this model we have attempted to integrate information from four sources: previous work on separation conducted by and for the Army, civilian research on retention, information gathered from focus groups with Soldiers conducted over the past three years, and the Model Development Inventory described in this chapter. Note that the model is illustrated in three separate figures that are integrated to form to overall conceptualization of the career continuance decision.

As a first consequence of these efforts, we have isolated what we believe are the essential features of any useful and effective model of continuance. That is, we believe that for any model to be useful as a guide for both research and interventions, it must incorporate the elements we will outline in this section. In the section that follows this one we will provide our view about how these features come together to describe the process of continuance.

Two Paths to Continuance

Ultimately, continuance is the end product of multiple decisions reached over the course of a career to either leave or remain in the Army. It should be obvious that there are two parties included in the connection between Soldier and Army, and that the full history of continuance is the end product of decisions made by both the Soldier and the Army. We refer to the first as Soldier-driven continuance and the second as Army-driven continuance. Any full model of

continuance must contain a description of the processes which account for both sets of decisions. This is represented in the "Two Paths to Continuance" of Figure 3-1.

Note: The dotted line indicates the area of interest.
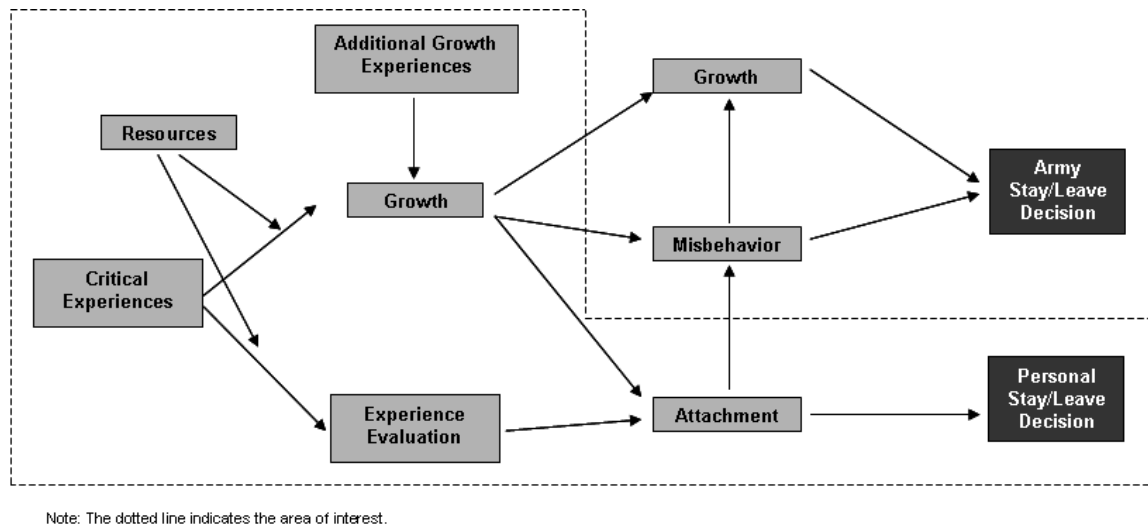
Figure 3-1. Two Paths to Continuance

It should also be obvious that a full explanation of Army decisions to retain a Soldier (i.e., extend a Soldier's contract) will contain factors well beyond the scope of this project. Here we refer to such factors as manpower requirements, MOS needs, funding, and so on. In contrast, the STAY Project is concerned with those aspects of continuance that connect to Soldiers' attitudes, behaviors, and capabilities.

Consequently, the bulk of our modeling efforts have focused on "Soldier-driven continuance". It is already clear that any Army decision about a Soldier's career takes into account Soldier behavior. It will become clear that the variables and processes that influence Army decisions intersect with the variables that influence Soldier decisions in a number of areas.

For example, we propose that certain critical experiences, such as deployment and training, create challenges to Soldiers that can increase their pride, self worth, coping skills, and maturity. These changes impact Soldiers' sense of well being, enhancing their attachment and desire to stay in the Army, while simultaneously enhancing their performance and reducing misbehavior. These latter changes increase the likelihood that the Army will desire to maintain employment (Army-driven continuance.) We will have more to say about these intersecting processes later.

Both attrition and non-reenlistment, as forms of "Soldier-driven" separation are consequences of attachment.

The delineation of Soldier-driven separation from Army-driven separation should not be confused with the typical distinction between attrition and non-reenlistment. Attrition, by definition, is separation before the end of a term of service. Such separation often looks like separation for cause, or Army-driven separation, as Soldiers are generally not allowed to voluntarily separate before the end of an enlistment term. Nonetheless, it is clear that Soldiers can and do manipulate the separation process to allow early separation.

In our judgment, Soldier-driven attrition and failure to reenlist are, for the most part, both consequences of low levels of attachment and can, therefore, be described by a single process model, albeit one that takes into account the factors that lead attachment levels to be manifest as one form of separation or the other. Stated differently, we believe attachment will predict all Soldier efforts to separate from the Army.

In organizational research, the concept of attachment is typically labeled organizational commitment. Organizational commitment is the psychological state that characterizes an employee's attachment to the organization and has been shown to have implications for the decision to continue membership in that organization (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Related concepts include identification, loyalty, and allegiance.

Theoretical and empirical work suggests that organizational commitment is structured hierarchically with a general, global commitment construct subsuming three relatively distinct sub-types: affective, continuance, and normative commitment. Global commitment is a desire to maintain one's relationship with an organization (in this case, the military). The three sub-types or dimensions represent different sources of attachment.

Affective commitment is attachment based upon how much an organization member wants to remain with the organization because he or she enjoys being a part of it, because the organization's values are consistent with the member's values, or because the member sees his or her needs as being met by membership in the organization. Continuance commitment refers to an organization member's perception of the costs and benefits associated with leaving the organization. This includes perceptions of structural constraints holding the person in the position (e.g., lack of alternatives or investments made in the organization). Finally, normative commitment refers to organization members' perceptions of moral or social obligation to the organization. These types of commitment have been characterized by Meyer and Allen (1997) as staying in an organization because one "wants to," "has to," or "ought to," respectively.

Our model, consistent with other perspectives (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Gade, Tiggle & Schumm, 2003), assumes that attachment is the proximal cause of separation behaviors and that overall attachment or commitment is best understood as a consequence of three attachment "mindsets": affective, normative, and continuance commitment.

Experiences drive change.

Although individuals enter enlistment periods with particular levels of commitment, changes in commitment are a function of experiences encountered over time. Things happen to people. They have critical experiences that shape their beliefs and attitudes. Static models focus on the predictability of features of work environments, neglecting the experiences that shape separation-related attitudes. In our judgment, any model of separation processes must account for change and in so doing specify the nature of the experiences that produce change.

For our purposes, there may be a number of ways to think about and classify relevant experiences. There are experiences that are broad (actually "baskets of experience") like a deployment, and there are experiences that are more narrow but potentially meaningful for attitude change including day-to-day hassles or positive experiences on the job. There are the predictable experiences of Army life and also the shocks that occur unexpectedly. Experiences may be benign, they may be entirely and consensually positive, or they may be stressful and challenging. As we will describe later, challenging experiences, experiences that tax both individual and family resources and threaten their happiness and longevity, are particularly important in our model.

These events and experiences, and particularly challenging experiences, serve to shape Soldiers' attitudes. They may also cause them to rethink well-established beliefs. A model of the separation process must take account of the essential features of these experiences, how people respond to them, and how they result in changes in attachment levels.

"Time" is critical.

Continuance models can be either static or dynamic. Static individual level models take features of the environment or characteristics of individuals at a given point and use them to predict either turnover intentions at that same point or future continuance behaviors. Static aggregate models examine features of units and use them to predict attrition rates across those units. Although such models implicitly recognize that the key features of both environment and individuals can change over time, they make no real attempt to account for those changes.

Dynamic models attempt to describe the continuance process. By process we mean the series of actions, events, and changes in states that occur over time and culminate in decisions related to separation. Our objective is to build a dynamic process model of continuance, describing the processes that bring about changes in commitment and attitudes about continuance over time.

Soldiers come to the Army with different levels of commitment, and these levels of commitment can and likely do change over time. The changes are the result of each Soldier's experiences interacting with his or her personal characteristics and history. These observations are also certainly true for civilian employees, but we believe that there are also some constraints imposed by special features of the military experience that provide an important organization to

those critical experiences. Specifically, Army enlistment periods are structured in explicit ways different from civilian work experience. Unlike most civilian jobs, the early enlisted military career is contingent upon a series of contracts for specified lengths of service, until or unless that individual shifts to indefinite status. In addition, at least in the early career, the experience is segmented into relatively predictable units (e.g., basic combat training, advanced training, first assignments, deployment, and reenlistment windows) with relatively common critical experiences. This temporal sequencing of enlistment periods creates a structure for attachment changes and subsequent continuance decisions that needs to be incorporated into any viable model.

An important assumption of our model is that whether and how problems of attachment become manifest as separation depends upon structural elements of the Army career experience. Early on, attachment problems can readily be manifested as attrition. However, over time, avenues for separation are reduced. Soldiers have fewer ways of separating from the Army, additional constraints such as financial pressures require them to stay in, or longer term commitments come into play. Therefore, strategies that might work early in training become less available later in the first tour, and therefore the correlation between commitment and separation weakens (Strickland, 2005). This weakening continues until that narrow window of time when Soldiers must decide whether to reenlist or not. At this point, a new and legitimate avenue of separation appears, and lack of commitment likely leads to a failure to reenlist.

Another important assumption is that experiences are more likely to lead to "recalibration" of attachment, or changes in commitment levels, when issues of attachment are salient. This may occur during the normal time structure of enlistment and re-enlistment decisions. It may also be a result of the occurrence of external events (marriage, birth of a child) when career thoughts become more relevant. Thus the same experience can have a different impact depending upon whether the Soldier motivated to rethink his or her attachment to the Army.

The structure of an Army career also suggests that for purposes of modeling continuance, the continuum of time should be organized into discrete "career units". Career units correspond to discrete blocks of common and major experiences that have a coherence and common meaning. These are key stages in Army life, stages during which commitment tends to be "recalibrated" because the Soldier is dealing with new challenges and rewards. Examples of career units are basic training, first assignment, and first deployment. We also believe that the window of time in which Soldiers must make reenlistment decisions is a particularly salient time for recalibrating commitment.

Entry characteristics and other resources influence and moderate the outcomes of experiences.

It would be a mistake to emphasize the effects of experiences at the expense of excluding the important role of Soldier characteristics. Extensive data show that personal characteristics

predict subsequent separation (Ramsberger & Babin, 2005); in particular, personal characteristics interact with experience to predict continuance behavior.

Examination of the literature and focus group results point to a number of individual characteristics of relevance. Self-efficacy (the belief that he/she will be successful in a particular endeavor), for example, seems to be relevant early on as recruits face the rigors of the Soldier job for the first time (Strickland, 2005). It also appears that entrants have different motivations for enlistment. For example, some enlist with a forward-looking career perspective, others seem to enlist to escape circumstances at home, and so on (Legree, Gade, Martin, Fischl, Wilson, Nieva, McCloy & Laurence, 2000). These motivational differences are likely to play a role in the development of commitment. Additionally, most new recruits are part of a group that developmental psychologists now call "emerging adults" (Arnett & Tanner, 2005). Emerging adults have unique values, attitudes, and viewpoints that will shape their responses to experiences in the Army. Finally, there are the normal, but important, differences in basic skills and personality that must be accounted for in the model.

These individual differences must be precisely identified and the ways in which they influence commitment should be described. Too often turnover models will simply include unspecified "personality" predictors. Such lack of specification hinders efforts to test links between individual differences, commitment, and turnover. A useful model must focus on those characteristics that make a practical difference, both in terms of prediction and explanation.

However, simply listing the known predictors of Soldier turnover and including them in a box labeled "individual differences" does not serve sufficiently well the ultimate goal of model building. Instead, it is important that individual differences connect to the processes being described. With this approach many known individual difference predictors of attrition or commitment will be excluded from consideration while others, not yet examined, will be proposed.

As we think about individual differences and their relationship to a model that focuses on experience-driven changes in attachment we suggest that individual differences are, in a real sense, resources that individuals bring to bear on critical experiences and help determine the outcome of these experiences. As such, we believe they belong in a category of personal resources. Personal resources, in turn are one of three categories of resources of relevance, the other two being social and organizational or institutional resources. Whether critical experiences have a positive impact on continuance depends upon the availability of these resources, whether they match the demands of the situation and how they are applied. We also believe in a "build and broaden" perspective to resources. Resources determine the outcomes of critical experiences but those experiences can, in turn, help develop those same resources for use in confronting new situations. The model is one of resource allocation, utilization, and development across time. Resources are viewed from the standpoint of what individuals have available at any one time and what they can take from that experience as they move through their career.

Growth

As we have argued earlier, it is far too easy to fall into a mindset in which Army careers follow a downward trajectory of stress, strain, disaffection, and attrition. Yet, such a mindset would be unjustified. To begin with, this is not consistent with reality. Many Soldiers create long term and satisfying careers in the Army. In addition, attrition is not always the result of disaffection. Finally, even if a majority of trajectories are more negative than positive (and we are not saying that they are) this does not mean that they have to be.

As we mentioned earlier and will describe in more detail later, successfully overcoming challenging experiences requires the presence and use of individual, social, and organizational resources. At the individual level, resilience is often used as a term that captures the constellation of these resources, and family resilience can also be described. While these resources influence outcomes at any one time, they also develop out of challenge, and new resources then become available to meet the next set of challenges. The sense of self confidence that develops out of navigating the strains of basic training is retained, even in the face of dissatisfaction, and used when the next challenge is encountered. Social relations that develop in units faced with challenge provide continued support for subsequent challenges. Skills of all sorts can develop through the same kinds of experiences that influence satisfaction and commitment. These skills are then available for other experiences and challenges.

Families matter

A significant percentage of Soldiers are married and many of them also have children. For these Soldiers, Family is likely to be important when it comes to understanding processes related to attrition and retention. Spousal attitudes are known predictors of member attitudes toward the military, and focus group participants consistently pointed to issues of work-life balance as influences on their separation intentions. Yet, the complexity of family influences on the separation process is rarely captured by models of attrition and retention.

Of course, previous discussions of Army attrition have examined the relevance of spousal attitudes and family circumstances (Burrell, 2006). Such attitudes and circumstances can influence all the subtypes of commitment. So, for example, the birth of a child can influence continuance commitment, and the unhappiness or boredom of a spouse can influence a Soldier's affective commitment. However, the depth of responses in focus groups suggests to us that these perspectives, while valid, are too limited in the way they treat family issues and separation.

In our judgment, having a spouse and children may change the unit of analysis in the continuance model. With singles, the focus is necessarily on the Soldier and his/her relationship with the Army. With many married Soldiers, the focus is on their spouse and children, and this is the unit of most importance in identifying the causes of attachment attitudes and attrition/retention.

An implication of this way of thinking is that three variables become critically important for understanding separation decisions among married Soldiers. The first is family threat. When the Family's well-being is threatened, one way of dealing with the threat (but not the only way) is to separate from the Army. Thus, for married Soldiers, such considerations as events, hassles, and strains have to be understood as they threaten the Family, and if the Family does not cope effectively, clearly this can affect commitment to the Army and retention/separation behavior.

But some families are resilient. They get through crises and they manage to do this without separation from the Army. Consequently, family resilience is the second critical variable for understanding the relationships between experiential demands, family threat, and ultimate separation from the Army.

Of course, Soldiers are likely to vary in the importance they place on the Family unit. For some, as we described, the Family is their focus of attention. For others, the Army career captures more of their attention than does Family. We suggest that this difference can be captured by our third variable of relevance, relative identity. Identity theorists (Turner, 1999; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Weatherell, 1987; van Knippenberg & Ellemers, 2003) acknowledge that people can hold multiple identities at any given time. Yet they also suggest that these identities vary in importance, a concept generally referred to as identity salience. We believe that a model of Army retention must take into account the relative importance of family versus career identities as a moderator of the relationship between family threat and separation outcomes. We also believe that the model should acknowledge that identity salience itself can change over time as a consequence of family, work, and natural maturation processes.

A Working Model of Attachment

A Summary

The overall model of attachment can be summarized succinctly. Yet to be fully understood, it must be visualized in two parts, one describing a dynamic flow over time and the other describing the processes that lead to separation decisions at particular points in time. In this section, we first provide an overview of the model. We will then describe the dynamic elements of the model (Figure 3-2) and follow with a description of the decision processes at different points in time (Figure 3-3).

To begin with, the overall dynamic structure over time can be described relative to movement or flow through a series of discrete critical experiences. Some of these experiences are unique to individual Soldiers or particular units (i.e. change in unit leadership). Others are more predictable experiences built into a normal Army career. These are such things as basic combat training, first unit assignment, and first deployment. As mentioned, we call these more regular sets of experiences career units.

There are two proximal causes of movement or separation at any time. One is the sense of attachment or overall commitment the Soldier has toward the Army as a career and a life. The other is the permeability of the exit boundary at any particular time. Permeability refers to the ease of separation or the difficulty of translating low levels of attachment into separation. Unlike most civilian jobs, Soldiers cannot simply change jobs when their level of attachment drops below some critical point. They must find a way to separate, either through attrition or non-reenlistment.

Each career unit has its own relatively unique and predictable experiences that influence overall levels of attachment at that time, but they all can be more abstractly conceptualized in terms of a few key constructs. Many experiences are mostly and consensually positive. Such experiences by and large would be expected to have a positive influence on attachment. That said, our model gives particular attention to those experiences that challenge the well being of Soldiers and, where relevant, their families. In our model, individuals and families work through these challenges with varying degrees of success and the consequences are changes in perceptions of well being, changes in perception of self and in skills that define resilience, and changes in overall attachment.

How and how well individuals and families work through these challenges is a function of personal and external resources. We believe these resources can be organized into three categories: individual and family resources, unit level resources like leadership, and organizational resources. These resources influence the outcomes of experiences, and in turn are changed (grow, develop) to become available as new challenges present themselves.

In the next section we present and elaborate on the dynamic process of the model. This will be followed by a depiction of the separation processes at particular points in time.

Time structured separation processes.

Figure 3-2 visually presents the key elements of the separation or continuance process as it evolves over time. Essentially, Soldiers move through a series of experience sets or career units. These units are common to all Soldiers, and although they have idiosyncratic elements, the experiences that comprise the set are readily identifiable by all Soldiers, are structured by the Army, and have a meaningful coherence that can be understood by all Soldiers and their families. We refer to such experiences as basic combat training, first unit assignment, and deployments.

As Soldiers pass through each of these units they are confronted by a set of experiences defined by the particular career unit. For example, the experiences of basic training are predictably different from the experiences of a first unit assignment. Other experiences are less predictably part of defined career stages. These experiences, predictable or not, influence the levels of attachment or commitment that Soldiers hold, and attachment levels are the primary determinant of efforts to separate at any particular time. Attachment levels can grow, remain

steady, or decrease as a result of these experiences, as mediated by processes that will be described in the next section.
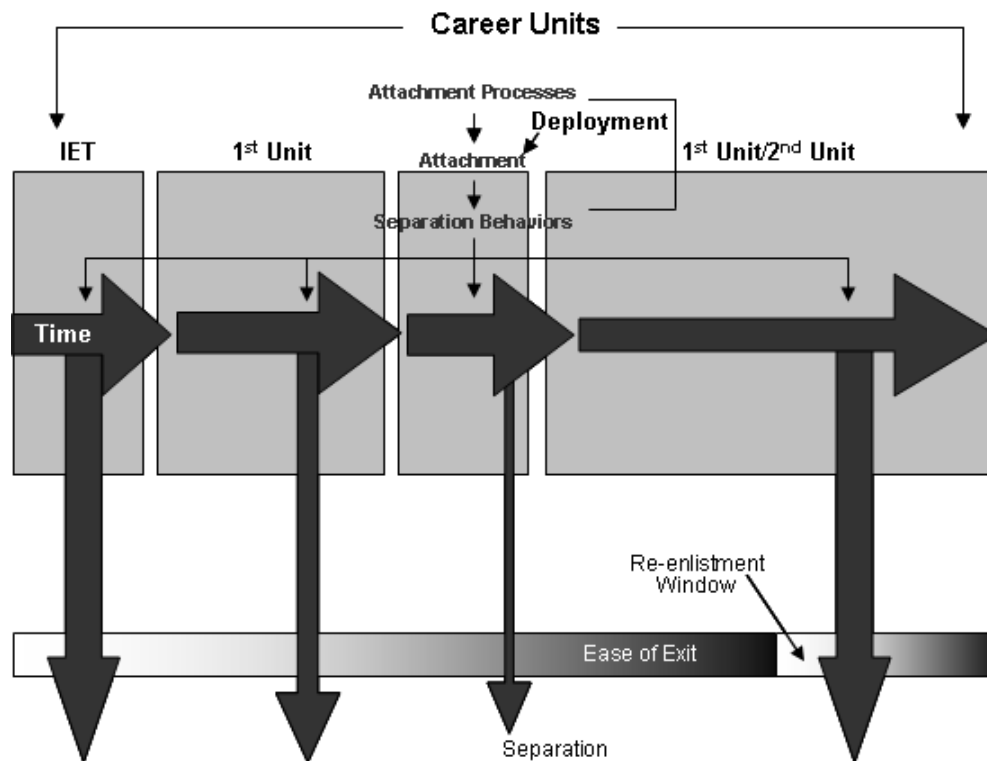
Figure 3-2. The Separation/Continuance Process Over Time

Reductions in attachment in turn lead to efforts to separate. However, desires to separate that result from reduced attachment cannot automatically lead to separation. As we have noted, the enlistment contract constrains the free translation of low commitment into separation. We have also noted that "voluntary" separation does in fact occur as Soldiers find ways to exit the system – what we have already referred to as Soldier-related attrition. However, we make an assumption about the availability of such strategies, namely that Soldiers differ in both their knowledge of viable strategies and also their willingness to engage in such strategies.

This hardening of the exit boundary continues until the period of a Soldier's reenlistment decision. Immediately prior to the reenlistment period, low attachment Soldiers change their exit strategies from attrition to non-reenlistment. During the reenlistment window the boundary opens completely, and Soldiers are free to translate low commitment into a decision to separate.

These experiences cannot be analyzed in isolation from each other. Our dynamic model posits that experiences carry over and influence the effects of experiences in subsequent career units. This occurs in a number of ways. To begin with, Soldiers learn skills, knowledge, and strategies during one period that allow them to better deal with the challenges that come in later periods. In addition, each challenging experience results in a recalibration of individual attachment levels (see below for a description of this process). But as experiences accrue, attachment levels become more stable and recalibration more difficult. Finally, the successful resolution of challenging experiences increases attachment by building one form of continuance commitment. More specifically, each time a Soldier or a Family overcomes a challenge, continuance commitment in the form of psychological investment increases.

Further, many important separation-related beliefs and attitudes carry over from one period to the next. For example, feelings of mistreatment, injustice, or pride accumulate over time and are not easily changed as a result of new experiences. Attitudes stabilize as experience increases.

Finally, Soldiers come to the Army with differing levels of commitment. Some expect to make the Army a career while others are uncertain. Changes as a result of experiences are changes from very different starting points. In addition, Soldiers come to the Army with different values, skills, expectations, personalities, enlistment motivations, and especially knowledge. These all enter into the attachment processes that will be described in the next section.

To summarize, Soldiers come to the Army with different levels of attachment. These attachment levels change as they flow through a series of discrete and particularly challenging experiences – experiences often predictable as part of a normal Army career. Lowered attachment leads to increased efforts to separate from the Army, but separation is constrained by structural factors that change over time. Finally, each experience changes the Soldier in ways that influence reactions to subsequent experiences.

Affective Based Attachment Processes

In the previous section we argued that commitment is the proximal cause of both attrition and non-reenlistment. In this section, we discuss what we believe are the processes that drive individual levels of commitment. As mentioned previously, and consistent with existing literature on organizational commitment, we will divide overall commitment into the three subcomponents: affective, continuance, and normative commitment. We assume, based upon both Army and civilian literature, that the sense of overall attachment is driven by processes related to each of these three commitment components. We also assume, based upon the same literature, that affective commitment has the largest influence on overall commitment and subsequent separation (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch & Topolnytsky, 2002). Therefore, processes related to affective commitment form the core of the model.

A visual depiction of the attachment processes we propose can be seen in Figure 3. It should be understood that the visual presents a simplified depiction of the more complete process described in the narrative.
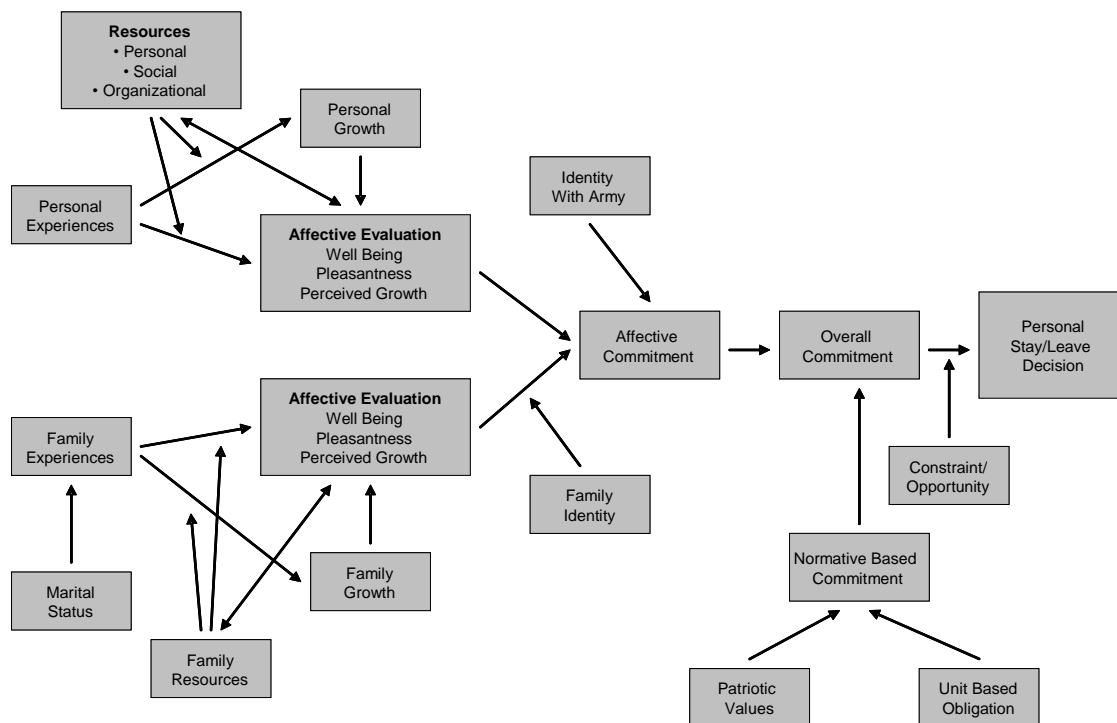
Figure 3-3. Soldier Attachment Process

As stated earlier, affective commitment is attachment based upon the extent to which a given employee "wants" to remain with the organization because he or she enjoys being a part of it, because the organization's values are consistent with his or her values, or because the member sees his or her needs as being met by membership in the organization. Our model explicitly gives the largest role to affective commitment.

How does such commitment develop? Interestingly, almost no research has been done in the military to address this question. Although more research has been done in civilian populations, much of that research reports static correlations between features of work environments (e.g. pay, leadership quality) and commitment. None of the research takes a full process perspective.

Experiences Influence Affective Commitment.

In our judgment, attachment develops as an outcome of critical experiences. We make some simplifying assumptions about such experiences that are supported in the literature. Our first assumption is that people structure their life experiences episodically (Beal, Weiss, Barros & MacDermid, 2005). That is, they recall and describe these experiences (with some degree of fuzziness) with discernable beginnings and endings and with clear labels for each experience as a unit. As examples we would list "my first deployment," "basic training," "the birth of my first child," etc. Thus, careers are a progression of discrete episodic experiences. Of particular importance in our model are those experiences that challenge the well being of Soldiers and, where relevant, families. These challenging situations are defined episodes in which resources are taxed and well being threatened. Many, but not all such situations are shared by Soldiers (e.g., deployments and basic training), and many, but not all occur at predictable points in Soldiers' careers.

Our second assumption is that these experiences, as a career unit, get tagged with overall evaluations at their conclusion. This tag is the evaluation of the episodic experience. Kahneman (1999) has noted the ubiquity of the evaluation of experiences both large and small. This evaluation is the assessment of how Soldiers feel about what they have just experienced.

Finally, as the challenge is worked through and the Soldier looks back on it, he/she can and does create an overall assessment or evaluation of the full experience. "Now that it's over, how do I feel about it?" "Now that I'm home, how do I feel about the deployment?" "Now that my location has changed, how do I feel about it?" We believe that these overall judgments of life's experiences and challenges are the basic data that people use to develop their evaluation of how satisfied they are with the Army and their consequent level of affective attachment. During each challenge, as the episode develops and is worked through, Soldiers experience a wide range of emotional states. They can feel stressed but proud, angry and happy. At any moment a Soldier could be asked to provide a sense of how he or she is feeling at that time, and that state would predict a variety of behaviors at that moment.

Yet, in making these judgments people do not merely add up or average the momentary affective experiences through the episode. Research by Kahnemann (1999) clearly shows that overall assessments of episodes are not predicted by average affective states through the episode, but by the combination of the level of peak experiences and the level of affect at the end of the experience. Kahnemann refers to this as the "peak-end rule". Although Kahnemann's research focuses on episodes of shorter time frames than we are discussing here, we believe that his insight into the process that drives episodic evaluations generalizes to this context. We would, however, add one other factor that we think influences overall evaluations.

In addition to some combination of momentary affective states, we believe that overall evaluations of experiences are influenced by a Soldier's assessment of personal growth developing from the experience. Soldiers look back on each experience and evaluate it in terms

of the pleasantness/unpleasantness of the experience itself and what has been taken from the experience. That is, they evaluate how pleasant they perceived the experience to be, and combine that assessment with an evaluation of the extent to which the experience has contributed to their desired goals and achievements, whether personal or professional. If the experience has resulted in their moving a step closer to those goals, it is evaluated favorably. If it was also pleasant, that enhances the evaluation. Note that the two outcomes are not always the same. Some experiences can be quite unpleasant, but still contribute to the individual's growth. Finally, we believe that the overall evaluation is also influenced by the assessment of the strengthening or damage done to an overall sense of positive affect and comfort.

How do these evaluations influence attachment? After each experience the overall assessment figures into a "recalibration" of current levels of satisfaction and affective commitment. Three additional points follow from this suggestion. First, recalibration becomes less pronounced as experiences accrue and attitudes gain strength and stabilize. Second, the recalibrated attitude is not so firm as to become immune to contextual factors when the attitude is assessed or attachment related decisions made. Third, the connection of the experience's overall "evaluation" to satisfaction and attachment will be moderated by attributions about the Army's responsibility for the outcome of the experience and the emotions involved.

Experience evaluations are not the only outcome of interest. We also believe that, to varying degrees, each situation provides some level of growth to essential skills and resources. Coping resources, task skills, support networks, etc. are all potentially incremented as a consequence of experiencing major challenges to well being. Such skills then become available as resources for the next challenge as well as for general job demands. We will refer to this as the "growth outcome", recognizing that each component grows in varying amounts depending upon successful outcomes and the type of challenge. It is important to recognize that these "growth outcomes" are not equivalent to the perception of growth mentioned earlier, although they are obviously related.

So, we believe that as Soldiers reflect on each challenging experience, they develop overall assessments of the experience based upon the most intense emotional states during the episodes, the affective states at the ends of the episodes, and their sense of growth from the experiences.

In Summary:

- Challenging experiences occur many times over the course of a career leading to cognitive growth and knowledge

- Different career phases are associated with different kinds of challenges (prototype challenges for each phase can be identified)

- The key outcomes of challenges for our model are: (The first can go up or down. The last can only go up.)
    - affective evaluation
    - growth
- The overall evaluation of each experience leads to a recalibration of satisfaction and attachment/commitment.
- The recalibration power of a challenge goes down as the number of challenges overcome increases and attitudes stabilize, making it harder to change commitment levels
- The recalibration power of experience depends upon whether the person is in a decision window or a period in which attachment/commitment is otherwise salient.

Affective commitment is not only the result of the large events that create major challenges for individuals and families. Research suggests that the smaller daily experiences of work, both positive and negative, can have an important influence on affective commitment (Weiss, Nicholas & Daus, 1999). Large events and challenges certainly have their effects, but so too do the daily ups and downs of life. Our model therefore incorporates daily emotional experiences as an influence on affective commitment.

Finally, research shows that although commitment is correlated with a sense of identity with the organization, commitment and identity are best understood as separate constructs (Mael & Tetrick, 1992). To this point, causal research connecting these constructs is sparse, as is research showing how identity develops over time. The difficulty in examining the connection between these constructs is exacerbated by the fact that the popular Meyer and Allen (1997) measure of affective commitment contains items that tap into shared values and identity. Nonetheless, we believe, following Mael & Tetrick (1992) that it makes sense to think of identity as distinct from affective commitment and to further consider identity as one cause of affective commitment. Although we assume that a sense of identity is fostered by activities and experiences inherent in the role of Soldier, as well as larger political and social circumstances, we are not able to develop a precise description of those processes. Consequently, it remains an exogenous variable in the model.

Social identity/social categorization theorists (Turner, 1999; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Weatherell, 1987; van Knippenberg & Ellemers, 2003) do, however, discuss the possibility of multiple identities existing in a hierarchy of priority (e.g., I'm a father before I'm a reservist). They refer to this as "identity salience." We suggest, generally, that identity salience is an influence on commitment and more specifically that marriage and family can reduce commitment to the military by reducing the salience of the military identity.

In sum, we believe that affective commitment is primarily driven by three processes. One process has to do with how individuals and families deal with the challenges they confront in

each of the discrete career units. Another has to do with emotional experiences that result from daily work activities. The third has to do with the sense of identification Soldiers have and develop with the Army.

Individual Differences and Other Resources

Our experiential approach should not be interpreted to mean that individual differences play no role in the continuance process. Certainly, the data belie that idea (see Chapter 5). Yet, the continued demonstration of associations between individual difference constructs and attrition or attrition intentions does little to develop the kind of coherent process-oriented framework we desire. Instead, an approach that begins with the explication of the underlying process and then lets that process suggest ideas for critical differences among Soldiers will be more useful here. In this section we will present key individual difference constructs that connect to our process.

We have suggested that commitment changes as the result of critical experiences. Experiences can be entirely and consensually positive or they can present challenges to the well being of individuals (and families as described below). While challenging experiences, even extremely challenging experiences, can be identified, individual outcomes to those experiences are not easily predictable. Bartone (2006) noted that few Soldiers develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after combat. In unpublished research by Weiss and colleagues at the Military Family Research Institute, it was found that critical events in the experience of Soldiers, events that predicted large changes in commitment, could be identified but the direction of those changes was not easy to predict. The same experience could produce negative consequences in some Soldiers and positive consequences in others.

Bartone (2006) has argued that an important influence on the outcomes of stressful experiences in the military is trait hardiness (Kobasa, 1979; Funk, 1992). Developing out of the stress literature as a way of understanding why stressful events produce different outcomes in people, trait hardiness has been postulated by Bartone to moderate the outcomes of military stressors such as combat experience and deployments. Bartone, working from the literature on hardiness, suggests that it is composed of four critical individual difference characteristics: a high sense of life and work commitment; a high sense of personal control; openness to change; a desire to learn and grow. Bartone has expressed the belief that the traits which define hardiness operate by influencing the ways people frame stressful situations. He said "if a stressful or painful experience can be cognitively framed or made sense of within a broader perspective that holds that all existence is essentially interesting, worthwhile, fun, a matter of personal choice, and providing chances to learn and grow, then the stressful experience can have beneficial psychological effects instead of harmful ones." (p. 141).

Although Bartone and others working in the area focus on outcomes of severe stressful events (military operations, for example), we are suggesting that it is also relevant to our model. We make this suggestion for two reasons; first, it is obvious that many of the challenging

experiences that shape continuance are stressful. We prefer to use the term challenge because we do not want to limit research to the more dramatic events of a military career. Future research will determine the kinds of events and nature of challenges that are relevant. Second, an examination of the features of hardiness, sense of control, openness to change, and so on, are generally relevant to dealing with all sorts of life challenges.

Resilience is a concept very much related to hardiness. Indeed, Bartone (2006) has used these terms together, suggesting that resilience is the outcome predicted by trait hardiness. Yet, an overlapping but relatively independent literature on resilience also exists. This literature can be traced to efforts to account for why children growing up in conditions of high risk for maladjustment do not end up maladjusted (Masten & Reed, 2002). However, since its inception it has been broadened and a literature on adult and family resilience has developed. Tugade and Frederickson (2004) represented resilience as the capacity to "bounce back from negative events."

Research on resilience points to underlying traits similar to hardiness. Such constructs as locus of control and self-efficacy are also seen as important elements of individual resilience. Recently, a good amount of attention has been paid to the contribution of positive affect on resilience (Frederickson, 2002; Ong, Bergeman, Bisconti & Wallace, 2006; Tugade and Frederickson, 2004). Research converges on the finding that positive affective states, either driven by trait positive affectivity or situational events, can buffer the effects of negative events. Ong et al. (2006) suggested multiple mechanisms for the effect of positive affectivity, including flexibility in problem solving, adaptive coping and facilitation of social support.

Independent of and related to these resilience concepts are personal variables that capture levels of behavioral regulation and self control. Challenging experiences create a continuous stream of emotional states. These states can instigate dysfunctional behavior that is not conducive to effectively working through a challenge and also that can be considered misbehavior by the Army (e.g., aggression or substance abuse). The ability to control behavior in the face of emotional instigation – self-regulatory maturity – is an important moderator of outcomes to challenging experiences. Further, it is also potentially an important part of the growth that can develop from such experiences.

Taken together, we believe that a critical constellation of individual difference variables, falling in the broad category of resilience or hardiness, will be important for determining a Soldier's reactions to challenging experiences. Without yet knowing the specific processes involved, it seems clear that personality variables like self-efficacy, personal control, positive affectivity, and regulatory capability help determine outcomes to challenging experiences.

Social resources can also influence the outcomes of challenging experiences. Bliese (2006) has described the importance of the unit's social climate in helping Soldiers deal with challenges encountered during a military career. For Bliese a critical component of unit climate is the support from the unit leader. Interestingly, Bartone (2006) reported research indicating that

leader hardiness influences unit responses to stress, presumably by influencing the unit members' interpretation of events.

Finally, the organization as a whole provides another pool of resources for responding to challenge. Here we can think in very specific terms, such things as the quality of training, flexible and well constructed policies, etc. as well as in perceptual terms like perceived organizational support (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986.)

Overall, we view responses to experiences as moderated by resources available to Soldiers. Critical individual difference variables comprise the personal resources that Soldiers bring to each experience and in many cases grow out of those experiences. Unit and organizational resources are relevant as well.

Family Experiences

A key assumption for us is that there is a qualitative difference between commitment processes for married Soldiers and for single Soldiers. As we discussed previously, marriage, and particularly family responsibilities associated with child rearing, may change the underlying processes that affect commitment. In effect, being married and/or having children may change the focus of attention of each Soldier from his/her relationship with the Army to the success, health, and prosperity of the Family. Events and experiences are interpreted relative to how they threaten or enhance the life of the Family. Separation becomes one strategy for protecting the Family. As a consequence, an important initial moderator of attachment/separation processes is whether or not the Soldier is married and has children. Of course, as mentioned previously, we recognize that there are individual differences in the importance of family.

In describing the processes for Soldiers with Families, we suggest that they are in many ways analogous to the processes described for individuals. That is, experiences drive attachment as mediated by the overall evaluation of those experiences. In this regard, a key type of experience is an experience that provides a threat or challenge to family well-being. Army careers are characterized by experiences that pose challenges to family well-being, such as separation, long hours, and changes of station. Families are confronted with these challenges and develop strategies to work through them. The frequency and severity of the challenges influence the overall affective commitment of Soldiers (and their Family members), as moderated by the families' abilities to successfully work through the challenges.

As with individuals, families bring resources to cope with these challenges. Like individuals, families vary in their resilience (Wiens & Boss, 2006). Walsh (1998) defined family resilience as "key interactional processes that enable families to withstand and rebound from disruptive life challenges" (p. 3) and "a capacity to rebound from adversity strengthened and more resourceful." (p. 4). What factors seem to contribute to family resilience? Much of the work on the topic has been stimulated by the research of McCubbin (see for example, McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson & Fromer, 1998). Walsh pointed to such factors as a positive

family outlook, spirituality, and open communication, particularly with regard to emotional expression. Resilience also develops over time. Families learn coping strategies. They get stronger as they successfully face challenges. Each challenge is faced using the resources learned and developed through previous challenges.

Spousal unhappiness is also an important threat to family well-being. Spouses have their own career interests that often conflict with Army life. Spouses can get bored and lonely. They can also develop friendships and have growth experiences. Our model suggests that spousal happiness is an important influence on Soldier affective commitment, as mediated by family threat and well-being.

Finally, as we have suggested earlier, an important moderator of this whole set of processes is the salience of the Family as part of the Soldier's identity. To the extent that the family identity is salient, these processes will play out. To the extent that family identity is low, even for married Soldiers, these processes will become less relevant.

In sum, Soldiers with high family identity salience judge each challenge in terms of its threat to the Family. The evaluation of the challenging experience results from outcomes of family interaction processes. Discussion of these processes is beyond the scope of the current effort, except to say that like the individual the family brings resources to bear on each challenge and like individuals these resources can grow as a result of working through the challenge. Finally, the family focused affective evaluation leads to recalibration of commitment and satisfaction.

Normative and Continuance Commitment

Most organizational discussions of commitment, following Meyer & Allen (1997), postulate three components of overall attachment: affective, normative, and continuance commitment. Meyer & Allen refer to them as three "mindsets", really three bases on which commitment can develop and be maintained. For turnover and continuance, research clearly points to the affective commitment as having the greatest importance. Thus, our focus is on this basis of attachment. However, any model of continuance cannot ignore the other components (see Figure 3-3).

Continuance commitment refers to the constraints that make it difficult for people to terminate relationships. Although older work on commitment tended to treat this as a single construct, research has made the distinction between two forms of continuance commitment (McGee & Ford, 1987; Jaros, 1997). One form encompasses the costs of termination, the possibility of alternative jobs and so on. Here we are talking about factors that constrain people from leaving jobs in spite of their lack of attachment. Although this has traditionally been seen as a form of continuance commitment and an influence on overall commitment, we believe it is best viewed as a moderator of the relationship between attachment attitudes and the engagement in separation behaviors. That is, we believe that perceptions of constraint in this sense inhibit

individuals from taking overt action to translate their lack of attachment to separation. As a consequence, we have included perceptions of cost/alternatives, as a moderator of the relationship between commitment and separation behaviors. Although not depicted visually, we believe that this form of commitment is the result of rational cost benefit considerations.

Commitment researchers have also discussed the psychological investments that people accumulate as a component of continuance commitment (Rusbult & Farrell, 1983). We agree with the importance of psychological investment. Our model makes two assumptions about investments. First, different from constraint, we believe investment has a direct effect on overall commitment. Second, we believe it accrues in proportion to the number and degree of challenges the Soldier has encountered and successfully negotiated. Thus, each time a Soldier overcomes the challenges in an experiential unit successfully, the sense of investment increases. In this sense, investment accumulates over time.

In the civilian literature normative commitment refers to employees' perceptions of a moral or social obligation to maintain employment in their organization. It can be the consequence of beliefs about the self such as "I'm not the type of person who easily quits a job" or it can be the consequence of a sense of obligation to the organization or co-workers within the organization. There has been an ongoing debate about the validity of normative commitment as distinct from affective commitment (Ko, Price, & Mueller, 1997; Meyer, et al., 2002) and recent Army research on commitment has focused only on affective and continuance commitment as a result (Gade, et al., 2003). However, one might expect that normative commitment would be of particular importance in the military. We believe it is premature to abandon the importance of normative commitment on overall attachment to the Army. However, in recognition of the existing research, our model gives a lesser role to normative commitment than it does to affective or continuance commitment.

In addition, we believe that the factors that influence normative commitment are relatively simple to describe. To begin with, in our view, much of normative commitment is the consequence of values that Soldiers possess when they enter the Army. In addition, to the extent that normative commitment changes over time, it is likely to do so as the result of the development of personal, within-unit relationships that create a sense of obligation to fellow Soldiers. Our model has a place for both factors.

In sum, the most proximal predictor of continuance behavior, both attrition and failure to reenlist, is overall organizational commitment, or the sense of attachment a Soldier has to the Army. Soldiers engage in separation or continuance behaviors as a function of their level of commitment but the link between commitment and separation/continuance behaviors is moderated by, especially, perceptions of employment opportunities outside the Army or loss of benefits associated with an Army career. Overall commitment is in turn a function of three specific types of commitment, affective, continuance, and normative, in that order of importance. Affective commitment is determined by a combination of: (1) person variables, including

individual differences such as self-efficacy, positive and negative affect, and identity around being a Soldier; (2) challenges that threaten the well-being of individuals and families (for Soldiers with families) and responses to those challenges as influenced by individual and family resilience; and (3) the cumulative effect of smaller day-to-day hassles and positive experiences and Soldiers' reactions to these experiences over time.

The model suggests that continuance commitment is a function of the psychological investment Soldiers perceive they have in their Army career which is in turn related to the number and degree of challenges they successfully negotiate cumulatively during their Army experience. In other words, each time a Soldier successfully works through a career unit (e.g., basic training, a deployment), the notion is that the sense of investment increases. Finally, normative commitment refers to Soldiers' perceptions of obligations to the Army and their fellow Soldiers not to leave the Army. This kind of commitment is most likely linked to values a Soldier brings with him/her, but it may also increase over time as loyalties develop with other Soldiers, units, and the Army way of life.

In addition to these linkages within the model, it is important to recognize its dynamic nature. The objective is to develop a dynamic process model of continuance, depicting the processes that bring about changes in commitment and attitudes about continuance over time.

In the following section, we describe the development of surveys to test the model. The STAY Project timeline required that we develop surveys to test the model while we continued to work on model development. Thus, there are some components of the model (e.g., growth) that were not included in the surveys.

Survey Development and Administration

The Career Continuance Model conceptualizes continuance as an evolving decision process over time, rather than as a discrete, isolated event. However, time, budgetary, and logistical constraints precluded the collection of longitudinal data, so we focused on collecting cross-sectional data from Soldiers at various stages in their careers up through becoming junior NCOs. Although this limited the extent to which influences outside the model affect the described analyses, it provided insight into how key variables change over time by providing "snapshots" of various stages in the Soldiers' early careers. Thus, we collected data from Soldiers at their unit of assignment as well as trainees in IET. In this section, we describe the data collection process for both the Forces Command (FORSCOM) and Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) installations.

Model Development Data: Content and Administration

In order to gather preliminary data on career continuance factors, we developed a Trainee Inventory (referred to here as the FY06 Model Development Inventory) and administered it to privates at reception battalions. The goal of this survey was to collect information on the

attrition- and retention-related themes/factors influencing junior enlisted Soldiers, as identified by the FY06 interviews and focus groups. By surveying receptees who had just entered the Army, we gathered baseline data on key variables, such as Army expectations and commitment, before the participants were indoctrinated into Army life. We were also interested in whether there would be observable differences on key variables between our survey results and that of prior research efforts. As such, whenever possible, we compared our findings to those reported in Project First Term, one of the most recent large-scale projects to examine career continuance among U.S. Army Soldiers.

The content of the FY06 Model Development Inventory is directly traceable to the career continuance themes and factors discussed in Chapter 2. For example, the FY06 Trainee Inventory included questions on family support (e.g., parental/spousal support for Army life), commitment to Army life, reasons for joining the Army, perceived alternatives (i.e., alternative career paths and comparison between Army and civilian life), Army expectations, and potential shocks (e.g., homesickness, deployments, and injury). We also included numerous items targeting individual differences that are thought to influence attrition and reenlistment decisions, such as family background (e.g., family members in the military), high school and personal experiences (e.g., academic achievement, participation in extracurricular activities and/or sports, thoughts of quitting school or a job), importance of core Army values, positive/negative affect, and personality variables (e.g., work locus of control and action control orientation). Additionally, participants were questioned on their Army continuance intentions, both in the short-term (i.e., whether they intended to reenlist for a second contract term) and the long-term (i.e., whether they intended to stay in the Army until retirement). The bulk of the survey content came from existing, previously validated scales developed for military (e.g., Project First Term; Strickland, 2005) and civilian (e.g., Work Locus of Control; Spector, 1988) samples. The project team supplemented existing scales with newly developed questions, when necessary.

The FY06 Model Development Inventory was administered to 2,631 receptees at two TRADOC installations: Fort Benning, Georgia and Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. The Fort Benning survey, administered in August 2006, contained 299 items and took approximately two and a half hours to complete. After the Fort Benning data collection, we made modifications to the survey based on feedback from receptees and ARI. Although most of the changes were minor, a more substantial change involved adding personality items from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP; Goldberg, Johnson, Eber, Hogan, Ashton, Cloninger, & Gough, 2006) in order to adequately cover individual difference variables. The revised survey, administered at Fort Leonard Wood in September and October 2006, had 467 items and took approximately three hours to complete.

Model Testing Data: Content and Administration

To test the Career Continuance Model, we developed two analogous surveys – the Soldier Inventory and the Trainee Inventory – for administration to Soldiers at FORSCOM posts and trainees at TRADOC installations, respectively. These surveys are referred to here as Model Testing FORSCOM and Model Testing TRADOC. The survey development process was guided by information collected from focus groups and interviews in FY06, as well as results from the Model Development Inventory. Because our goal was to develop a comprehensive framework, survey items tapped a wide range of factors thought to influence attrition and reenlistment decisions. In particular, we focused on the career continuance themes and factors described in Chapter 2.

There was a substantial amount of overlap between the Model Testing FORSCOM and Model Testing TRADOC Surveys and the Model Development Inventory. Both Model Testing surveys were divided into sections. The first section, Personal History and Experience, included questions on familiarity/experience with the military; high school experiences (e.g., sports, activities, work experience, thoughts of quitting); and career paths/alternatives considered prior to enlisting. The second section, Military Expectations, Experiences, and Attitudes, incorporated questions on expectations of Army life; comparisons between Army and civilian life; commitment to the Army; Army continuance intentions; and satisfaction with Army life, leadership, unit cohesion, and training. Individual difference variables, such as positive/negative affect, work locus of control, importance of core Army values, and personal resilience, were targeted in the third section, Personal Attitudes and Beliefs. The fourth section, Family, included questions on family background, support, satisfaction with Army life, and spouse/significant other resilience.

Although the Model Testing and Model Development surveys had very similar content, there were noteworthy differences. For example, the Model Testing surveys included a fifth section, Deployments, that asked participants about their deployment experiences (e.g., number/frequency of deployments), deployment-related stress, and satisfaction with deployments. The Model Development survey asked a few deployment-related questions as well (e.g., attitudes toward future deployments), but the questions were incorporated in the second section, Military Expectations, Experiences, and Attitudes. The Model Testing Surveys also included questions on use and quality of Army benefits, motives for reenlisting, and spouse/significant other adjustment to Army life. Finally, we modified some of the items on the survey to target the intended recipients. For example, FORSCOM Soldiers were asked, "How has your commitment to the Army changed since you completed training and arrived at your unit of assignment?" while TRADOC Soldiers were asked "How has your commitment to the Army changed since you started training?" Other items were changed from present tense (e.g., "I enjoy participating in military ceremonies") to future tense (e.g., "I think I will enjoy participating in military ceremonies") across the two surveys.

The Model Testing Survey contained 378 items, and the Model Development Inventory contained 361 items. A significant portion of these surveys overlap with the Trainee Inventory administered at reception battalions in FY06.

Sample Characteristics

Table 3-1 presents a breakdown of the three samples' demographic information, including gender, race/ethnicity, and highest education completed.

Table 3-1. FY06 Retention Inventory: Demographic Information

	Model Development		Model Testing TRADOC		Model Testing FORSCOM	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
Total	2575	100	910	100	780	100
Gender						
Male	2285	88.7	712	78.2	661	84.7
Female	253	9.8	189	20.8	117	15.0
Missing	37	1.4	9	1.0	2	0.3
Race/Ethnicity						
White	2094	81.3	738	81.1	548	70.3
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish	326	12.7	88	9.7	133	17.1
Black or African American	274	10.6	86	9.5	126	16.2
American Indian or Alaska Native	199	7.7	45	4.9	44	5.6
Asian	93	3.6	17	1.9	30	3.8
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	31	1.2	13	1.4	13	1.7

Table 3-1. FY06 Retention Inventory: Demographic Information (continued)

	Model Development		Model Testing TRADOC		Model Testing FORSCOM	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
Highest Education Completed						
Some high school	7	0.3	3	0.3	2	0.3
GED	558	21.7	195	21.4	100	12.8
High school diploma	1169	45.4	326	35.8	370	47.4
Some college	689	26.8	332	36.5	263	33.7
Bachelor's degree	74	2.9	27	3.0	27	3.5
Graduate degree	10	0.4	5	0.5	5	0.6
Other	64	2.5	14	1.5	9	1.2
Missing	4	0.2	8	0.9	4	0.5

Note that in the Model Development sample, of the 2,575 participants, the majority were incoming Soldiers that had just arrived at the reception battalion. However, 77 survey respondents were in the Physical Training Rehabilitation Platoon (PTRP), and 104 survey respondents were in a Physical Conditioning Unit (PCU). These 181 participants are included in this section for complete reporting of the sample, but were dropped from subsequent analyses.

As presented in Table 3-2, most of the participants in the Model Development and Model Testing TRADOC Surveys enlisted in the Active Army, and far fewer were in the Reserves or National Guard.

Table 3-2. FY06 Retention Inventory: Army Information

	Model Development		Model Testing TRADOC		Model Testing FORSCOM	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
Status						
Active Army	1770	68.7	513	56.4	779	99.9
Reserves	158	6.1	121	13.3	--	--
National Guard	636	24.7	271	29.8	--	--
Missing	11	0.4	5	0.5	1	0.1
Initial Entry Training (IET) Process						
BCT/AIT	--	--	--	--	518	66.4
OSUT	--	--	--	--	256	32.8
Missing	--	--	--	--	6	0.8

The majority of the three samples were single, never married with no dependent children. A detailed breakdown of marital status and dependent children is presented in Table 3-3, both for all three data sets.

Table 3-3. FY06 Retention Inventory: Family Background

	Model Development		Model Testing TRADOC		Model Testing FORSCOM	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
Marital Status						
Single and never married	2176	84.5	719	79.0	434	55.6
Married	318	12.3	154	16.9	274	35.1
Legally separated or filing for divorce	14	0.5	10	1.1	36	4.6
Divorced	54	2.1	17	1.9	30	3.8
Widowed	3	0.1	2	0.2	0	0
Missing	10	0.4	8	0.9	6	0.8
Dependent Children						
None	2138	83.0	714	78.5	555	71.2
One	204	7.9	85	9.3	108	13.8
Two	120	4.7	41	4.5	59	7.6
Three or More	51	2.0	34	3.7	33	4.2
Missing	62	2.4	36	4.0	25	3.2

Key Findings

One of the survey factors we were most interested in was Army career intentions. By gathering participants' intentions for reenlistment and retirement with the Army, we can assess attitudes toward career continuance. Table 3-4 provides a breakdown of the responses for both reenlistment intentions and retirement intentions. As the table indicates, participants were fairly positive about reenlistment, with the notable exception of the FORSCOM participants, who indicated a greater likelihood of leaving the Army. Similar results were obtained for retirement intentions; though a higher percentage of the sample indicated they were unsure about the decision or likely to leave the Army prior to retirement.

We also compared our Model Development Inventory findings to the results from the Soldier Reception Survey (SRS), administered as part of Project First Term, to determine

whether career continuance intentions differed across the two surveys and research initiatives (Strickland, 2005). The SRS was administered in 1999 to 29,004 enlisted Soldiers during their first week in the active Army. The SRS included 61 items, including an overall question on career continuance intentions. Receptees were asked to describe their Active Army career intentions, with six response options that ranged from definitely leave upon completion of my present obligation to definitely stay until retirement. Because reenlistment and retirement intentions were combined into one question on the SRS, while the FY06 Model Development data differentiated between the two, the results from the two surveys are not directly comparable. Still, we compared the results for the two ends of the SRS scale: definitely/probably leave upon completion of my first term of service and definitely/probably stay until retirement.

Compared to the results from the FY99 Soldier Reception Survey (Sipes, Strickland, & Sun, 2002), the receptees who filled out the FY06 Trainee Inventory had stronger Army career continuance intentions. While 38.4 percent of Project First Term respondents reported that they were likely to leave the Army after their current term of service, only 19.1 percent of FY06 Trainee Inventory respondents reported the same. Similarly, a larger percentage of FY06 Trainee Inventory respondents indicated that they were likely to stay in the Army until retirement (38.7% versus 29.4%). Thus, the receptees surveyed in FY06 for the STAY project tended to be more positive with regard to their Army career continuance intentions than those surveyed in FY99 for Project First Term, though given that the career continuance intentions items varied across the two surveys, results should be interpreted with caution.

Table 3-4. FY06 Retention Inventory: Career Information

	Model Development		Model Testing TRADOC		Model Testing FORSCOM	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
Reenlistment Intentions						
Strong likelihood of reenlisting	552	23.1	199	21.9	116	14.9
Probably will reenlist	514	21.5	207	22.7	106	13.6
Uncertain about decision	856	35.8	299	32.9	180	23.1
Probably leave upon completion of first contract term	272	11.4	121	13.3	114	14.6
Definitely leave upon completion of first contract term	185	7.7	75	8.2	211	27.1
DNA: Already reenlisted	--	--	--	--	49	6.3
Missing	15	0.6	9	1.0	4	0.5
Retirement Intentions						
Strong likelihood of staying until retirement	470	19.6	151	16.6	87	11.2
Probably stay until retirement	457	19.1	200	22.0	77	9.9
Uncertain about decision	931	38.9	349	38.4	215	27.6
Probably leave before eligible for retirement	299	12.5	105	11.5	112	14.4
Definitely leave before eligible for retirement	222	9.3	97	10.7	289	37.1
Missing	15	0.6	8	0.9	0	0

Another key variable that we examined was commitment to the Army. Because commitment plays a key role in career continuance decisions, we put several commitment items/scales in the Surveys, including items from Project First Term (Strickland, 2005) and the Military Member Commitment Index from the Status of Forces Survey (Weiss, personal

communication, 2008). There was a great deal of overlap among the different commitment scales (rs ranged from .31 to .84), so select results are presented in this section. Specifically, Table 3-5 presents descriptive results for three types of commitment: affective (e.g., I feel a strong sense of belonging to the Army), continuance (e.g., One of the problems of leaving the Army would be the lack of good alternatives), and normative (e.g., I would feel guilty if I left the Army). The affective and continuance commitment scales are from Project First Term, while the normative commitment scale is from the Military Member Commitment Index. Items from all three scales had five response options (1=Strongly disagree; 5=Strongly agree), with higher scores indicating stronger commitment to the Army. Factor scores were computed by averaging scale items. The mean commitment levels are presented in Table 3-5.

Table 3-5 also includes variables thought to influence commitment propensity, including Organizational Identification (e.g., When I talk about the Army, I usually say "we" rather than "they"; Mael & Ashforth, 1992), Generalized Self-Efficacy (e.g., I will adapt to Army life; Strickland, 2005), and Desire for an Army Career (e.g., I have a strong desire to be an enlisted Soldier in the Army; adapted from Lee, Ashford, Walsh, & Mowday, 1992). Response options for generalized self-efficacy ranged from 1 (Not at all confident) to 5 (Extremely confident), and response options for Organizational Identification and Desire for an Army Career ranged from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). As shown in Table 3-5, participants reported fairly high generalized self-efficacy, indicating high confidence in their ability to succeed in the Army.

Overall, participants were somewhat neutral/slightly positive with regard to organizational identification with the Army and desire for an Army career, except for the Model Testing FORSCOM data, where Soldiers were less positive.

Table 3-5. FY06 Retention Inventory: Army Commitment and Propensity

	No. of Items	Model Development		Model Testing TRADOC		Model Testing FORSCOM	
		M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Commitment to Army							
Affective Commitment	4	3.82	0.81	3.78	0.86	3.07	1.07
Continuance Commitment	5	3.09	1.06	2.73	1.06	2.52	1.13
Normative Commitment	3	3.57	1.09	3.45	1.04	2.32	1.12
Factors Influencing Commitment Propensity							
Organizational Identification	6	3.61	0.80	3.71	0.76	3.12	1.00
Generalized Self-Efficacy	5	4.19	0.82	4.19	0.60	3.57	0.49
Desire for an Army Career	7	3.55	0.84	3.05	0.49	2.70	0.50

Two of the constructs reported in Table 3-5 were also assessed on the Soldier Reception Survey used in Project First Term. Specifically, the SRS included seven "attachment" items, all of which were also included on the FY06 Trainee Inventory. Of the seven items, three assessed affective commitment and four assessed continuance commitment. To compare the results from the two research initiatives, we computed an overall commitment factor, comprised of the same items making up the attachment construct on the Soldier Reception Survey. The means across the Soldier Reception Survey and the FY06 Trainee Inventory were remarkably similar (*M* = 3.40, *SD* = .92 and *M* = 3.38, *SD* = .83, respectively; Sipes et al., 2002). The means for the other overlapping construct, generalized self-efficacy, were very similar as well (*M* = 4.14, *SD* = .86 for the SRS; *M* = 4.19, *SD* = .82 for the FY06 Trainee Inventory). The same five items were used to assess generalized self-efficacy across the two surveys.

Model Testing Results & Support for the Model

The enlisted Soldier continuance model is a process model of how attachment driven continuance develops over time as a result of experiences. Ideally, the model will require longitudinal data to test its most fundamental ideas. Clearly, the model cannot be "tested" in its entirety with the data collected for the various purposes of Project STAY. Nonetheless, data can speak to the validity of elements of the model. Thus, we now present selective examinations of some of the ideas we have presented, constrained by the limitations of cross sectional data.

The Three Faces of Commitment

The model argues that affective, normative, and continuance commitment are the proximal causes of continuance. This prediction is, of course, well established in the commitment/turnover literature, yet it is useful to verify this finding here, if only for closure. Additionally, we predict that continuance commitment, specifically the constraint element of commitment, moderates the relationship between affective commitment and turnover. That is, these constraints prevent disaffection from leading to turnover.

Data from the FORSCOM survey were used to address these predictions ($N = 778$). Exploratory factor analyses of commitment items yielded a four-factor structure. Affective and normative commitment dimensions were identified, but continuance commitment yielded two factors. One had to do with losses that might accrue as a result of leaving (e.g., benefit losses) and the other had to do with the availability of job opportunities. Scales were formed to assess these two dimensions, labeled "continuance-losses" and "continuance-alternatives." Although these scales correlated with each other fairly substantially ($r = -.42$) they were judged to be sufficiently independent to warrant separate analyses. Internal consistency reliabilities for the four commitment indices were .91 (affective) .87 (normative), .90 (continuance losses), and .85 (continuance-alternatives). In addition, three items were combined to form an Intent to Leave index (ITL) with an internal consistency reliability of .83.

To examine the importance of the commitment components for predicting continuance, the four scales were entered simultaneously into a regression predicting ITL. Table 3-6 shows the results of this analysis. First, as expected, all four commitment scales significantly and independently predicted ITL. Second, also as expected, by far the most important dimension was affective commitment. This is consistent with existing research and justifies the greater focus on affective commitment in the model. The generally negative direction of regression weights reflects higher commitment predicting lower intent to leave.

Table 3-6. Predictability of Intentions to Leave from Commitment

Commitment Source	Beta	p level
Affective Commitment	-.505	.00
Normative Commitment	-.094	.01
Continuance – Losses	-.188	.00
Continuance – Alternatives	.075	.05

To more fully understand the pattern of prediction we conducted a dominance analysis (Johnson & LeBreton, 2004). Dominance analysis provides a precise estimate of each predictor's independent contribution to variance accounted for in the dependent variable. Results of that analysis were that affective commitment explained approximately 36% of the variance, more than continuance-losses (28%), continuance alternatives (20%), and normative commitment (16%). Thus, affective commitment and both continuance commitments were significantly more influential than normative commitment. This pattern supports the greater importance of affective commitment, but also highlights the importance of constraint.

We have also suggested that constraint moderates the relationship between attachment and actual decisions to leave the military. None of the data sets have actual decisions to leave, and so we used ITL as a surrogate. In this case we conducted two separate moderator analyses using moderated regression with FORSCOM data ($N = 772$). We operationalized general attachment with the overall commitment item in the survey. Results supported our predictions. Both continuance based on potential loss and continuance based on possible alternatives moderated the relationship between overall commitment and ITL in the expected way. That is, potential for loss of benefits reduced the degree to which low commitment resulted in increased intention to leave, as did the lack of alternative opportunities. However, the increment in variance from a model without the interaction term to a model with the interaction term was fairly low (.015) suggesting that in this data set, the interaction was less important than the main effects.

Overall, we believe these data show that our premise about constraint reducing the relationship between attachment and actual continuance is partially supported. While the interaction was small it was significant. Importantly, it was significant in the context of a very strong relationship between overall commitment and intent to leave ($r = -.81$), a correlation no doubt inflated by common method variance.

Personal Resilience

The FORSCOM data allow us, in part, to test the importance of resilience. A number of resilience constructs were measured in the FORSCOM survey. These include positive affectivity,

personal resilience, self-efficacy, and locus of control. These variables, as important individual difference variables in our model, can be examined for their direct associations with commitment, as a preliminary examination of the relationships the model predicts for resilience.

Before looking at these relationships we conducted an exploratory factor analysis of the 24 item personal resilience scale. Three factors of interest were derived: resilience associated with meaningfulness in life (resilience-meaningfulness), resilience associated with ability to overcome challenges (resilience-challenge), and resilience associated with not needing other people (resilience-loner). Each was examined as a predictor of affective commitment and intent to leave, along with the other related constructs.

Examining zero order correlations, we found that all of the resilience factors, except resilience-loner, showed significant and relatively substantial associations with affective commitment. The strongest zero order correlations were found for self-efficacy ($r = .65$), positive affectivity ($r = .49$), and resilience-meaningfulness ($r = .38$). As we have described earlier, these are important parts of the resilience construct. In addition, locus of control ($r = -.25$, coded external control as high) and resilience-challenges ($r = .25$) showed significant and moderate correlations with affective commitment.

We supplemented the examination of zero-order correlations with a dominance analysis of the variables predicting affective commitment. When this was done, self-efficacy was by far the most important predictor of affective commitment. It accounted for approximately 59% of the variance, significantly more than the other predictors. After this, positive affectivity was the most important, accounting for 19% of the variance, significantly more than the remaining variables. The other variables accounted for much less variance. Thus, self-efficacy and positive affectivity, both well established components of resilience, seemed to be consistent and important predictors of affective commitment.

Normative Commitment

Normative commitment is attachment through moral based obligation. Very little research has been done on the causes of such commitment, partly due, it would seem, to the general finding that this form of commitment is the least predictive of important organizational outcomes. That minimal role was found also in our data (see above), but still it was significantly predictive of continuance related cognitions.

We proposed two factors influencing normative commitment, obligation based on patriotism and obligation based on unit commitments. To see whether these two factors did influence normative commitment we examined FORSCOM data and regressed normative commitment onto four variables: a two item measure of patriotism (alpha reliability = .85), a measure of unit cohesiveness (six items with an alpha reliability of .95), a measure of perceived unit NCO quality (4 items with an alpha reliability of .85) and a measure of unit commissioned officer quality (4 items with an alpha reliability of .84).

Results showed that patriotism was the overwhelming influence on normative commitment, while leader quality, in both forms, also influenced this form of commitment. Interestingly, when leadership was held constant, unit cohesiveness had no independent effect on normative commitment. On the other hand, when leadership quality was removed from the equation, cohesiveness had a highly significant effect (beta =.194, p < .01). It appeared that leaders were a particularly important driver of unit obligation.

Again, dominance analysis was conducted to more fully explicate these results. In this case the pattern was clear. Patriotism accounted for significantly more variance than the other three variables. NCO quality was significantly higher than the remaining two variables and commissioned officer quality was significantly more important than unit cohesiveness. The percentages of explained variance accounted for by each variable were 48%, 24%, 16%, and 13% respectively. This further supports the importance of patriotism for understanding normative commitment among Soldiers.

Table 3-7. Influences on Normative Commitment

Variable	Beta	p level
NCO Quality	.175	.00
Com Leader Quality	.114	.00
Unit Cohesion	.061	.11
Patriotism	.326	.00

Using the Model to Foster Continuance

The model presented here is that of Soldier continuance – the behaviors of Soldiers remaining with the Army as competent and involved contributors to the mission of the U. S. Army. In the development of the model, it was assumed that Soldiers enter the Army voluntarily with at least a minimal level of commitment to spending the next few years in the military and believing that doing so fulfills their personal beliefs and is in their own best interest. From that initial level of commitment, the model addresses the interaction of Soldiers' developing personal, social, and task-related competencies as they interact with day-to-day experiences over time, instilling in each of them a commitment to remain in the Army today and into the future. This understanding is the first step toward creating ways to enhance Soldiers' willingness to remain with the Army and view service in the Army over the long run as a valued personal objective.

The model will contribute to Army responses to continuance issues through an iterative process of consulting the model for guidance in designing and then evaluating the effectiveness

of actions and conditions (e.g., policies, practices, and programs) with respect to their impact on continuance behaviors. Relevant actions and conditions include initial selection of applicants, training, job assignments, and the management of experiences that impact Soldiers' lives. Information on the impact of policies and practices should be fed back to leaders and system designers as well as to those evaluating the model and its usefulness. Repeating the cycle of designing actions guided by the model, measuring and assessing continuance behaviors, and feeding back what is learned allows for updating and improving both the model and polices that relate to Soldier continuance.

Guide for Anticipating and Managing Negative Behaviors Affecting Career Continuance

The existence of a model of continuance behavior allows for the anticipation of the effects of future actions on continuance. That is, the model serves as a guide for asking "what if" questions related to continuance prior to taking some action. By exploring potential impacts of such actions in the planning stage, it is more likely that unanticipated negative effects of actions may be avoided or reduced. It is also likely that some positive effects that might have been weak or overlooked could be added if identified by the model prior to a planned implementation. Modifying the planned course of action or introducing other actions to counteract anticipated negative effects on continuance are two common ways to respond prior to introducing actions that the model predicts will impact continuance.

To illustrate the use of the model to anticipate future actions, consider the fluctuating staffing needs of the U.S. Army due to unpredictability in demands for enlistee volunteers over time. Valid staffing models exist to match recruits' knowledge, skills, abilities, and aptitudes to entry level positions in the Army. Selection criteria are established for maintaining a supply of new recruits to meet the Army's needs under assumptions about the number of new Soldiers needed and the number of volunteers available. Not infrequently, short term increases in the need for volunteers brought about by national defense needs are met by altering the requirements for entry on one or more of the selection criteria. Decisions like these are, by necessity, driven by the need to staff positions in the short run. However, these actions are likely to impact longer term issues of continuance. Therefore, the following questions should be asked: "What might the effects of the decision to make these changes have on continuance? And, assuming these likely effects, what might be done prior to making the change to reduce anticipated effects on continuance prior to putting the changes in admissions requirements in place?"

For example, given the attachment and continuance model presented in this chapter, we would anticipate that lowering educational criteria and modifying requirements related to previous incidents of misbehavior may adversely affect performance, misbehavior, and attachment levels observed in new recruits. If this occurs, we would expect effects on both the Army stay/leave decision and the personal stay/leave decision. From the standpoint of using the model for action planning to reduce attrition that might result from such a change in selection criteria, the model would suggest that focusing on performance, misbehavior, and attachment

would be useful. For example, those responsible for basic training could be involved in looking for ways to build in opportunities for success by adding experiences where success is likely, making sure that instructions are given in a way that is understood by all recruits, extending time to practice before performance is measured, praising good performance, and behaviors targeting recruit performance in ways that are likely to help the Soldier be successful.

Clearly, a process model of continuance does not offer specific solutions to every problem. It simply makes the case for likely effects of particular actions on continuance and provides the rationale for reaching those conclusions. Without having a model of continuance, the pressing need for more recruits is likely to be implemented by considering only the narrow need for more people to meet a quota without consideration of the impact on subsequent attrition. Jointly considering both the need for more volunteers and the need for reducing attrition is more likely to lead to the creation of policies, practices, and programs that, as a package, address both issues.

Guide for Diagnosing Sources Influencing Career Continuance Decisions

The model identifies important individual, interpersonal, and context factors, along with the processes that link them together in order to predict a class of behaviors related to attrition/continuance. The model is designed to capture a causal sequence of factors leading up to attrition and continuance behaviors. Therefore, by working backwards from the decision to stay or leave observed in particular contexts, one can, in theory, specify contextual boundary conditions and identify likely causes of the observed attrition and continuance behaviors, and from that suggest ways to impact continuance. In practice, the model can serve as a guide in a similar fashion. But, there are a number of limiting conditions that need to be mentioned.

The first and most important limitation is that of level of abstraction. The model identifies psychological perceptual states that influence personal decisions to stay or leave an organization. However, these states or perceptions are at a level of abstraction that is more general and about which the decision maker is less consciously aware. Consider for example, the idea that family well being affects affective attachment. While persons' perceptions of their family well being impact their attachment, in order to use this information, one is immediately faced with the fact that family well being is the result of many different factors. While challenge is the abstract concern of relevance, there are numerous specific types of challenges to consider. Many of these are common across most people (e.g, family member health, health insurance, housing, and children's schooling), but there is clearly no one simple way to impact family well being. Thus, the model does not point directly to specific ways to impact continuance but rather to clusters of activities as ways to impact it. The model is a guide for diagnosing general classes of factors that play a role in continuance behavior. The choices of actions taken to address family well being should bring to bear such factors as knowledge of the family issues common to the subset of persons being considered, and the living conditions they face at the time.

Context is the second characteristic of the model that must be addressed when it is used to diagnose the effectiveness of current practices for impacting attrition and continuance. As has been said before, the model is a dynamic process model where the behavior of interest is imbedded in organizations and functions over time. The precursors of present behavior (attrition and continuance) are the accumulation of past experiences. Those experiences and those of the present occur to the individual with particular individual characteristics and in a particular context. In the case here, we have stressed the contextual impact of the ease of exiting from the Army and argued that, depending on the stage of the Soldier's experience, it is easier or harder to exit. Thus, to use the model for diagnostic purposes to understand the impact of particular states encountered by the Soldiers, events must be considered in terms of the variables of the model they impact. Further, the career stage context must be considered, particularly the extent to which the personal choice to stay or leave is constrained. With these considerations, the model is useful for gaining understanding of attrition and continuance of Soldiers and for inferring the likely impact of particular conditions/policies/practices on attraction and continuance. The level of usefulness and the continuing evolution of the model itself require the ongoing collection of data that can speak to it and its modifications over time.

Guide for Judging the "Portfolio" of Army Approaches to Attrition and Re-enlistment

The uses of the model discussed up to this point are focused on a particular approach to continuance. One begins with the question of what would likely be the implications for attrition/continuance if some course of action were taken – a course of action that may or may not be targeting attrition or continuance. The second approach begins with a particular program or action in place or with attrition/continuance behaviors already occurring. The model then serves as a diagnostic framework for addressing the likely causes the program or action would have on attrition/continuance, or the causal analyses are explored in reverse. That is, given the observed attrition/continuance behaviors in the contexts of interest, what are the most likely causes of these behaviors and why. The model then provides a guide for following up the predicted causal sequence, with empirical work addressing the validity of the conclusions. In the case where the model informs design of future actions, the actions should be carried out in a way such that the assumptions based on the model can be evaluated empirically.

In contrast to the above two, the third approach examines the extent to which all attrition and continuance efforts under consideration or in force sample the domain of likely causes. The boxes of the model represent the content of the attrition and continuance cause domain and the lines connecting the boxes the process links in that domain. Both the process and the content is at a level of abstraction once removed from actual programs or interventions. For example, according to the theory, normative attachment includes values of patriotism and love of country as well as loyalty to unit, the Army, and Country and a feeling of belonging and being wanted by members of the unit. Interventions aimed at strengthening such attachment may target ceremonies, parades, and speeches for loyalty and team building and esprit de corps for team

building. In the language of the Soldiers, their units, and others in the Army, the general construct of normative based attachment is not part of their awareness. But, with the model as a frame of reference, one can identify such programs as addressing issues of normative attachment.

By looking at the total set of programs and interventions in force or planned and mapping them onto the model, one can discover whether the programs in force are distributed across all the regions of the model or simply bunched up in one region or another. If it is the latter case, it means that efforts to influence attrition and continuance are probably redundant with each other and, at the same time, are not addressing other areas that may be important. The model offers a way to take an overall look at what is being done and distribute resources across interventions and actions that better represent the root causes of separation and attachment.

Concluding Comments on Uses: Coming Full Circle

We began this chapter laying out the following criteria for judging a theoretical model of continuance in the Army. These were:

- Providing a structure and process for understanding continuance behavior.

- Interpreting earlier studies integrating work that here-to-fore had not been brought to bear on the continuance problem.

- Providing guidance for selecting interventions to address attrition problems and evaluating the effectiveness of these intervention solutions.

- Offering ways to interpret new continuance-related data and providing new ways of thinking about future interventions.

The model seems to meet these criteria. What is needed now is to test the model with empirical data. Ideally, a large scale longitudinal data collection would be conducted with all of the constructs in the model being measured as latent variables, at multiple occasions when appropriate. Intentions to leave the Army would continue to be measured, but in addition actual attrition and reenlistment data would also be gathered. Again, ideally, the entire model would be tested after large scale longitudinal data collections. However, an alternative model testing

strategy we have begun here is to test parts of the model with well planned, focused data collections and analyses. In this chapter, we have demonstrated how this latter strategy might proceed.

We conclude the chapter by noting that ARI and the Army now have a comprehensive, dynamic, and testable model of Soldier continuance. This should be especially valuable because we might argue that specific interventions to influence career continuance may be at least somewhat time bound, with different interventions appropriate or not under different military conditions or scenarios. However, the model should be more generally relevant and useful for generating ideas about interventions and evaluating their effectiveness under a wide range of conditions/scenarios.

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CHAPTER 4 – INTERVENTION CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

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This chapter documents the sequential process by which candidate career continuance intervention concepts were identified, developed, and selected for preliminary testing and evaluation. The candidate intervention concepts considered over the course of the process are described, and the two that were chosen for further development and preliminary testing are more fully described in Chapters 5 and 6.

Introduction

A major goal of the Enlisted STAY project was to develop and evaluate career continuance interventions. The two intervention strategies selected were (1) the Soldier Transition Survey and (2) the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System. Two phases of intervention development and evaluation were involved in selecting these career continuance interventions, and a large number of promising interventions were identified. In this chapter, we describe the process and menu of all interventions considered because the approaches and concepts may represent viable options for the Army to utilize in the future.

Phase 1 involved identifying a pool of potential intervention concepts that could address attrition and reenlistment factors to enhance career continuance. This pool of intervention concepts was presented to ARI and a Technical Panel of Army Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) for feedback regarding the feasibility of and practical implications associated with implementing each intervention concept. The feedback was in response to specific evaluation criteria provided by the project team, as well as additional information from the SMEs believed to be relevant. Accordingly, the initial pool of interventions was revised and enhanced during Phase 2 to include a more detailed and elaborate plan for high potential interventions. Based on specified criteria, a Military Advisory Panel of Army SMEs provided expert judgment and guidance on these high potential interventions. Their feedback and guidance, along with ARI feedback, helped identify "best bet" interventions. In addition to the Soldier Transition Survey and Unit Retention Climate Feedback System, these interventions represent strategies perceived by the project team, Army SMEs, and Army leadership to have a positive impact on career continuance.

Chapter 4 is broken down into four primary sections. First, the intervention concept is defined and evaluation criteria are presented. Next, the two selected career continuance interventions are described. Finally, the two phases of intervention development and evaluation processes that led up to the selection of the two interventions are presented. Each phase

summarizes the approach, criteria, and feedback that were utilized and provides a list of additional intervention concepts that were considered. The approach to narrow down the pool of interventions was not linear, and several criteria were given more weight than other criteria, given the current needs of the Army and mission requirements. Although only two interventions were selected for assessment under the Enlisted STAY project, the intervention development effort described in this chapter highlights several additional concepts that have potential for enhancing the career continuance of junior Soldiers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs).

Intervention Concepts and Criteria

For the purposes of this research, an intervention was broadly defined to include behaviorally-based policies, procedures, strategies, or programs that were created to have a positive impact on enhancing the career continuance of junior Soldiers and NCOs. Further, interventions were considered across a wide continuum regarding their stage of specification and development. In some cases, the intervention concept included a fully developed program that was ready for implementation and evaluation; in other cases, less detail was provided for concepts that could not be fully developed within the timeframe of the project.

It is also important to not overly interpret the relationship between intervention concepts and issues that may or may not be salient within the Army at a given time. The fact that an intervention concept is included in this chapter does not suggest a problem has been systematically verified as an Army-wide issue. Instead, intervention concepts identified in this chapter represent potential solutions for problems the Army may encounter to varying degrees across different cohorts of Soldiers.

We selected criteria to help guide the identification and development of career continuance intervention concepts. Although all criteria were considered throughout the process, some were given more weight than others during each development and evaluation phase. These criteria are presented in Table 4-1 and are discussed further within the context of each chapter section.

Table 4-1. Intervention Evaluation Criteria

1. There must be strong evidence that the intervention is likely to have an impact on attrition and/or retention rates.
2. Interventions should result in qualified Soldiers reenlisting or being retained.
3. The intervention should be cost-effective.
4. There should be a practical and valid way of evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention.
5. Interventions of particular interest to key stakeholders will be favored.
6. Interventions should have the potential to be deployed Army-wide in a way that balances cost with anticipated effectiveness.
7. Interventions should support the testing and refinement of the Career Continuance Model.
8. Interventions should be implemented in a way that can be standardized across locations and settings.

Selected Career Continuance Interventions

Two career continuance interventions were selected for preliminary testing and evaluation: (1) the Soldier Transition Survey; and (2) the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System. These interventions were selected based upon consideration of all evaluation criteria and were briefed to and endorsed by senior Army leadership within the Army G-1. The first intervention focuses on individual-level factors, and the second intervention addresses unit-level factors. Brief descriptions of these intervention strategies are presented next. Their initial implementation and pilot testing are described in Chapters 5 and 6.

Soldier Transition Survey

It is important for Army leadership to identify and understand the primary reasons why junior enlisted Soldiers and NCOs decide to stay in or leave the Active Army. Although there is much anecdotal and intermittent information available regarding the factors that influence the reenlistment decision, it would be useful for leaders to have access to a tool that is designed to provide this information in a systematic manner. Note that some routinely administered Army surveys (e.g., the Sample Survey of Military Personnel, SSMP) are intended to provide general information regarding personnel but are not highly focused on retention issues for separating Soldiers. Thus, an instrument designed specifically to focus on Soldier retention issues would be of value.

The primary goal of the Soldier Transition Survey was to provide timely, scientifically-based information to Army leadership for use in further understanding, forecasting, and managing the reenlistment trends of junior Soldiers and NCOs. To meet this goal, survey instruments were developed to systematically identify the broad array of factors influencing the retention decisions of junior Soldiers and NCOs. Although self-reported information was preferred, there are inherent problems associated with capturing large samples of separating Soldier data in a timely manner. Thus, this intervention effort also involved examining the use of alternative (or proxy) samples of Army Soldiers and personnel who might be more readily available sources of valid career continuance information. By examining responses from different samples, factors influencing the retention decision were identified and alternative sources for capturing this information in a more efficient manner were explored. This intervention is further described in Chapter 5.

Unit Retention Climate Feedback System

The Army currently conducts command climate surveys to help leaders better understand their units. The results may be used to establish more effective units, increase morale and unit cohesion, improve communication, and make other process improvements. However, there is

surprisingly little agreement on what an effective command climate is, how it directly benefits the Soldiers involved, and how it translates into effective unit performance. Further, the existing climate surveys are somewhat limited in scope and depth of analysis.

The goal of this intervention was to develop a new, improved command climate survey focused on issues related to career continuance decisions and offer recommendations for how to interpret and use the feedback provided. This involved reviewing the Army's current command climate survey efforts and revising or adding survey items that related to Soldiers' career continuance decisions (e.g., satisfaction with unit leadership, commitment to peers). The focus was on areas where the unit would have some influence. For example, areas such as unit cohesion and leadership were examined. The Unit Retention Climate Feedback System intervention included both a unit retention climate survey and a unit leadership feedback report summarizing unit-level factors influencing Soldiers' career continuance decisions. Together, these instruments can be used to positively impact reenlistment rates within the unit. This intervention is further described in Chapter 6.

Phase I: Development of Initial Intervention Concepts

Phase 1 identified the initial pool of potential intervention concepts that were considered for enhancing Army enlisted career continuance. These interventions were selected based on information obtained during Summer 2006, including existing interventions, officer interventions that may be applied to enlisted Soldiers, interventions suggested during interviews and focus groups (refer to Chapter 2), interventions used in other services or countries, the Career Continuance Model (refer to Chapter 3), and reviews of relevant literature as described in attrition (Kubisiak, Lentz, Horgen, Bryant, Connell, Tuttle, Borman, Young, & Morath, 2009) and reenlistment (Bryant, Tolentino, Borman, Horgen, Kubisiak, & Lentz 2009) reports developed in conjunction with this effort.

The goal of this intervention development phase was to identify interventions with potential for effective attrition and retention management. Thus, interventions that were more likely to have an impact on attrition and/or retention rates and would support the testing and refinement of the Career Continuance Model were given the highest priority (Table 4-1; Intervention Evaluation Criteria 1 and 7). Accordingly, the candidate pool was developed and organized into the following two sections: (1) Attrition Interventions and (2) Retention Interventions (Table 4-2).

These intervention concepts were presented to a Technical Panel of eight Army SMEs in Fall 2006. Panel members were carefully selected based upon their experience working closely with junior-level Soldiers and expertise related to attrition and retention issues and policy. The panel was comprised primarily of senior Army NCOs and represented G-1, U.S. Army Accessions Command (USAAC), Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), Forces

Command (FORSCOM), and Human Resources Command (HRC). The goals of the technical panel meeting were to obtain input on the criteria used to evaluate the proposed interventions and receive technical guidance regarding the value and practicality of the intervention concepts identified in this development phase. Specifically, we asked for feedback regarding the likely impact that each intervention would have on attrition and retention rates, whether the intervention would result in qualified Soldiers reenlisting or being retained, and if the intervention concept could be deployed Army-wide in a way that balances cost with anticipated effectiveness (Table 4-1; Intervention Evaluation Criteria 1, 2, and 6). Additionally, with these criteria in mind, we asked each panelist to identify their top three attrition and retention intervention concepts.

Overall, the feedback received during the panel meeting was positive. Components of each intervention concept were endorsed by at least one member of the Technical Panel. For this reason, we present brief descriptions of the intervention concepts that were reviewed by the Technical Panel, but were not selected for preliminary evaluation under the current contract. This list represents additional ideas for influencing career continuance that the Army may want to consider in the future. Further, intervention concepts that were most frequently identified as a top three attrition or retention intervention concept are marked with an asterisk and most of these concepts are expanded upon in Phase 2.

Table 4-2. Phase 1: Initial Intervention Concepts

Attrition Interventions

1-1   *Screening for Attrition

1-2   *Training and Counseling

1-3   *Train Adaptability and Resilience

1-4   *Teach Personal Support/Social Competence

1-5   *Realistic Job Preview

1-6   Appeals to Patriotism

1-7   *Leadership Strategies and Policies

1-8   Drill Sergeant Supplemental Education Initiative

1-9   Formalized Peer Support

Retention Interventions

1-10 Screening for Commitment and Propensity to Reenlist

1-11 *Incentives

1-12 Career Development Path Information

1-13 *Information Distribution

1-14 *Mentoring

1-15 *Stabilization and Predictability

1-16 Realistic Job Preview

1-17 *Increased Developmental Opportunities

1-18 *Increased Leadership Opportunities – Supplemental Education Initiatives

1-19 Spouse-Related Benefits and Incentives

1-20 *Make Retention Information Available to NCOs and Officers

1-21 *Organized Recreational Days/Activities

1-22 Promotional Exams

1-23 *The Army VALUES Soldiers

Note: Asterisks indicates intervention concepts that were most frequently endorsed by Army SMEs during the Technical Panel meeting.

Attrition Interventions

* 1-1 Screening for Attrition

The primary focus of this type of intervention is on the screening of individuals based upon attained scores on select instruments. The information obtained from using these instruments may include demographics, personal history, ability, and temperament factors that predict attrition during a Soldier's first contract term. A review of existing screening programs and current literature highlights the success of several predictors of attrition (e.g., the Army's Assessment of Individual Motivation (AIM)).

Additional predictors appear promising for predicting the likelihood that a Soldier will attrit during his/her first contract term. Information from interviews with NCOs (sergeant through first sergeant) and drill sergeants in FY06 has highlighted individual characteristics related to success in the Army. First, individual involvement in organized sports and activities prior to Army enlistment is likely related to contract completion. Specifically, enlisted Soldiers with experience in organized sports and other activities during high school tend to adjust to the discipline, structure, and team-oriented environment of the Army at a faster rate than individuals not involved in these activities. Second, individual adaptability and resilience are likely related to attrition. Information obtained from interviews suggests the extent to which Soldiers have a "flexible" disposition is related to his/her overall adjustment and possible separation from the Army.

Although not inclusive of all potential predictor measures of adjustment and socialization, this intervention strategy appears promising for reducing first term attrition. Trainees/Soldiers identified as at-risk could be directed to an intervention or other program to address the specific issue that is of concern. At a minimum, drill sergeants or others in leadership positions would be aware of their at-risk status and be prepared to assist, as needed.

* 1-2 Training and Counseling

Psychological adjustment to military life is one of the main challenges new recruits face upon entering the Army. New Soldiers may experience feelings of homesickness, lack of commitment, frustration due to unmet expectations, inexperience with time management, and family problems. Further, new Soldiers commonly question whether joining the Army was the right decision. In fact, some contemplate and seek out strategies to get out of the Army.

In order to reduce early attrition, the Army has implemented and evaluated various programs to facilitate the adjustment to military life. The most effective programs take a rehabilitative rather than punitive approach to dealing with Soldier adjustment. These programs directly address Soldier concerns, such as homesickness or understanding and managing expectations, through training and activities geared toward building Soldiers' self-esteem, confidence, values, and teamwork. Counseling sessions with licensed clinicians, chaplains, or Army leadership (e.g., drill sergeants) are also incorporated into the training.

Although various training programs and counseling services targeting Army adjustment already exist, they have not been implemented consistently across Army installations. Thus, the proposed intervention would improve upon existing Army programs. In particular, the intervention would involve leadership training (e.g., for drill sergeants, squad leaders, and platoon sergeants) designed to teach strategies to help identify Soldiers who may have trouble adjusting to Army life and offer ways to effectively counsel or at least direct them to the appropriate resources. Further, individual and group counseling sessions would be offered on all posts. Counselors would be trained to handle adjustment issues unique to each phase of a Soldier's first term. Examples include Basic Combat Training (BCT), Advanced Individual Training (AIT), and the first unit of assignment. In addition to leadership training and counseling, trainee/Soldier workshops designed to train techniques useful for adjustment, such as coping skills, problem solving, time management, cognitive reappraisal, and goal setting, would be implemented during both Initial Entry Training (IET) and the first unit of assignment. These workshops would also provide a forum for new Soldiers to discuss their own Army adjustment experiences and share suggestions on how to effectively handle these situations.

* 1-3 Train Adaptability and Resilience

Trainees frequently experience stressful events and challenges that can impact their commitment to the Army (e.g., homesickness, injury). One intervention that may mitigate these effects would be to develop adaptability and resilience skills in new Soldiers early in their Army careers. This training could take place early in IET and be integrated with the existing curriculum. The training would encourage trainees/Soldiers to use a variety of effective problem-solving and coping skills to deal with challenges they face during IET and the first unit of assignment.

Research with drill sergeants suggested that trainee adaptability was one of the most frequent problems related to attrition or being at-risk of attrition. Skills related to these important problem-solving and coping domains could be important for navigating difficult situations that may trigger thoughts of leaving the Army. This type of training could help new Soldiers insulate themselves from the stress of shocks experienced in training. These skills would not only help trainees/Soldiers deal with the stresses of IET, but would also help them in other challenging situations such as entering their first unit of assignment or deployment.

One such training intervention was developed to improve individual adaptive performance on the job among Army Special Operations officers and NCOs (White, Mueller-Hanson, Dorsey, & Pulakos, 2004). A similar training intervention could be developed for new Soldiers. This would involve a training module combining lectures to introduce trainees to the concepts of adaptability and resilience with case studies and scenario-based exercises to provide students with practical learning experiences. The classroom-based course would be tailored to provide examples of situations they may encounter later in IET. The training would focus on resilience and interpersonal, cognitive, and team-related adaptability. For example, for cognitive

adaptability, the course would focus on training new Soldiers to: (1) adjust to changes in their environment; (2) effectively switch mindsets when required; (3) use critical thinking strategies; and (4) use a variety of decision-making approaches. However, we realize the feasibility of this approach is limited by the already demanding time constraints in the current Program of Instruction (POI).

In addition, drill sergeants would be offered instruction on how to provide effective feedback to encourage resilience and improve trainees' adaptability performance throughout the training process. That is, drill sergeants could use existing training exercises that require adaptive performance (e.g., field exercises) to provide targeted feedback.

Training adaptability and resilience is further explored in Phase 2 (Intervention 2-11). Additionally, training family resilience was also conceptualized in Phase 2 (Intervention 2-8).

* 1-4 Teach Personal Support/Social Competence

Soldiers' commitment can be impacted negatively if they are not effectively socialized into their platoon or unit, and one reason for this is a lack of social competence in group settings. The construct of Contextual Citizenship performance in Industrial-Organizational Psychology refers to behavior that supports the social and psychological fabric of the organization, as opposed to contributing directly to the technical core (Borman, 2004). The intent of this intervention is to develop a training module to improve Soldiers' skills in the Personal Support dimension of contextual performance. This involves helping peers by offering suggestions, directly performing some of their tasks as appropriate, providing emotional support, and motivating and showing confidence in them. Note that all of these behaviors are consistent with current Army training and socialization. This intervention would, however, institutionalize the training of such actions. Initial plans for implementing this intervention would involve developing video based training, as well as role-play scenarios and feedback sessions in order to reinforce the desired behaviors. This concept is further explored in Phase 2 (Intervention 2-10).

* 1-5 Realistic Job Preview

The transition from civilian to military life presents a host of challenges that can impact the commitment of a recruit to his/her career in the military (refer to the major themes and factors identified in Chapter 2 of this report and the Career Continuance Model in Chapter 3 of this report for further explanation). One way to mitigate these impacts is to better prepare the recruits for what they will encounter as they make the transition.

This intervention would involve showing Soldiers a realistic portrayal of what they will experience as they begin their military careers, with the intention of countering overly pessimistic and overly optimistic expectations of life in the Army. This would be implemented by providing Soldiers arriving at the Reception Battalion video that portrays what recruits can expect to experience during their training. Viewing these experiences prior to beginning training helps establish realistic expectations in the recruits. Further, the Realistic Job Preview (RJP) can

demonstrate that many of the emotions and experiences they will encounter are not unique to them, reducing the sense of isolation and stress. Other reasons RJPs show considerable promise are because of their cost-effectiveness, minimal intrusiveness on recruits' time commitments, and positive empirical evaluations. By effectively anticipating recruits' concerns and addressing them proactively, before the recruit is 'at-risk', RJPs provide a highly effective means for reducing first term attrition.

Another RJP could be developed that would provide Soldiers with a better understanding of what they can anticipate upon transitioning from training to their first unit of assignment. Again, the key is reducing the uncertainty associated with that transition. Of course, not all of the Soldiers' experiences will be the same, and a great deal of what transpires will be dependent on the units themselves. But to the extent that there are similarities, the stress and uncertainty inherent in these situations can be mitigated.

The key point to this proposed intervention is that the previews would be based on real day-to-day operations within a variety of Military Occupational Specialties (MOSs). That is, the RJP would not present only the most exciting or intense aspects of Army life or specific MOSs. Rather, it would present a fair and accurate portrayal of what the Soldier can anticipate. It is not intended to be a recruiting tool, a skill instruction video, or team building exercise. The RJP would be strictly to provide a direct, reality-based frame of reference to assist the Soldiers in their transition (1) into the military and (2) out of training and into the first unit of assignment. Additional development is presented in Phase 2 (Intervention 2-12).

1-6 Appeals to Patriotism

Soldiers make a considerable sacrifice when enlisting, and their commitment can be increased when they see that that sacrifice is valued and appreciated by the Army and the American people. The premise underlying this intervention is that attrition can be reduced by more overtly valuing the contributions and sacrifices made by Soldiers in their career. A number of different approaches may be effective. For example, one idea is to present receptees with a video presentation that builds up their sense of patriotism and underscores the appreciation their country has for what they are doing. This can include the Soldier's creed and Army ethics, which are emphasized throughout IET. A side benefit of this intervention is that it would provide the receptees with another activity during their initial time at the Reception Battalion, traditionally a fairly inactive period under the current system.

A related idea is to establish connections to local communities where training installations are located and take trainees to local events, such as high school football games, to get them some public recognition and thanks for their commitment to the military. This allows trainees to see that they have the support of the American public and is intended to reinforce the significance of their commitment to the Army. A less ambitious, but related idea would be to take receptees to a BCT graduation ceremony and allow them to see the pride and honor inherent in becoming a Soldier.

* 1-7 Leadership Strategies and Policies

Command climate can have a major impact on a Soldier's decision to stay in or leave the Army. Leadership strategies and policies refer to initiatives implemented by officers and NCOs to help improve Soldier attrition and retention. Strategies may incorporate new lingo, slogans, and beliefs to facilitate an environment conducive to retaining Soldiers.

Specifically, this intervention involves strategies that enhance a Soldier's socialization into their first unit of assignment. The Soldier socialization process involves learning to adapt to the Army lifestyle, learning what is expected from them with regard to their role and MOS, and building interpersonal relationships within their unit. Research suggests that institutionalized socialization, a structured socialization process that encourages conformity over innovation, is linked positively to variables associated with newcomer adjustment, such as organizational commitment (e.g., Allen & Meyer, 1990) and job satisfaction (e.g., Ashforth & Saks, 1996). Thus, improving a Soldier's socialization process into his/her first unit of assignment should potentially decrease attrition. The proposed intervention would establish leadership strategies that encourage clear communication of what is expected from new Soldiers, including a specified timeframe for when events occur (e.g., a more accurate training calendar). Leaders (e.g., squad leaders, platoon leaders and sergeants) would also serve as mentors, socializing new Soldiers and providing them with the social support, counseling, and guidance needed to adjust to their first unit of assignment. These various leadership strategies should emphasize group socialization and stress the acceptance of rules and consistency.

1-8 Drill Sergeant Supplemental Education Initiative

As the first line in a recruit's socialization into the Army, drill sergeants play a pivotal role in trainees' attrition decision-making. This intervention focuses on formalizing the instruction given to drill sergeants to facilitate trainees' socialization into the Army, as well as identifying and considering those individual expectations, capabilities, and characteristics of new trainees that could place them at-risk of attrition. Furthermore, this training program would help drill sergeants in their varied roles as leader, coach, and trainer, to consider and compensate for these individual characteristics in the socialization and transition process of civilians into Soldiers. That is, drill sergeants would be taught to recognize behaviors indicative of adjustment issues and methods to assist those Soldiers with their socialization into their unit and the Army. The intervention would be designed to supplement the existing drill sergeant training and could be presented as an on-line course or a distance-learning based, interactive program. Further development of this concept is presented in Phase 2 (Intervention 2-15).

1-9 Formalized Peer Support

This intervention is designed to leverage relationships with other trainees/Soldiers to facilitate adjustment and acclimation to Army life. Given that Soldiers experience numerous events/shocks in the Army, including arrival at the first unit of assignment and preparing

for/returning from deployments, providing Soldiers with a formal peer support system may help buffer the potential negative effects of these shocks. Under this program, Soldiers arriving at their first unit of assignment would be matched with a peer who is already acclimated to Army life. The peer would be from the same unit as the Soldier, and ideally of the same gender and MOS. This intervention is unique from the Battle Buddy program in that it (1) focuses on the first unit of assignment, rather than IET; and (2) involves matching a newcomer with a more experienced Soldier in the unit, rather than pairing two newcomers. Providing peer support to Soldiers at their first unit of assignment is expected to decrease attrition rates by providing Soldiers with a source of social support and encouragement during the transition to Army life.

Retention Interventions

1-10 Screening for Commitment and Propensity to Reenlist

Although the strategy is similar to attrition screening interventions, this intervention is specifically intended to identify individual characteristics related to Soldier retention. We propose that there are sets of individual characteristics likely to be related to commitment to the Army and propensity to reenlist (refer to the Career Continuance Model in Chapter 3 of this report). For example, individuals with a family military background are likely to have higher levels of commitment to the Army and a greater appreciation for an Army career. Additionally, anecdotal information suggests Soldiers who are somewhat indecisive and hesitant with regard to their future plans are more likely to reenlist. For example, a Soldier who enters the Army with a specific plan (i.e., to serve three years and then apply for a particular job outside of the military) will likely remain focused on his/her plan and decide not to reenlist. On the other hand, a Soldier who is "on the fence" and changes his/her mind often will likely decide to reenlist towards the end of the reenlistment window.

This intervention offers a creative approach to examining retention. Specifically, we recommend a "selection for retention" strategy in which individuals exhibiting characteristics related to Army commitment and propensity to reenlist are actively recruited and perceived as quality recruits for the Army. What is most intriguing about this intervention involves identifying and examining the relationships between predictors that are often not studied in this research context (e.g., risk avoidance, lack of planning) and commitment and propensity to reenlist criteria. Screening for factors related to commitment and propensity to reenlist would provide the Army with a new framework for examining recruitment and the retention decision.

* 1-11 Incentives

First term Soldiers are currently provided with numerous reenlistment incentives. However, reenlistment rates could potentially benefit from a refinement of the existing programs, as well as offering additional reenlistment options. In the FY06 focus groups, Soldiers were particularly likely to mention choosing their MOS and/or duty station as desirable options.

However, Soldiers are often locked into their current MOS, particularly if it is under-strength. Similarly, some Soldiers are assigned other MOSs on a temporary basis that becomes long-term. Additionally, Soldiers commented on the lack of flexibility in choosing their duty station. While the current system is designed with the goal of meeting the needs of the Army, providing Soldiers with more flexibility in their MOS and/or duty station may allow the Army to retain Soldiers who would otherwise leave after their first term. Given that MOSs and locations may be differentially desirable, the Army could set up a merit-based system, whereby Soldiers who receive higher performance evaluation ratings, and/or sign up for longer terms, receive preferential treatment in choosing their MOS or duty station. The schooling incentive is another reenlistment option that could be refined. Providing more opportunities for military specialty training (e.g., airborne, ranger school) as a reenlistment option would be desirable to many Soldiers. In terms of civilian schooling, Soldiers frequently do not feel they have enough time to attend college classes while fulfilling their Army duties. Thus, the six-month college incentive could be modified to allow Soldiers time off from the military, thereby providing Soldiers with a break from Army life while simultaneously ensuring they have time for schooling.

With regard to new reenlistment options, two possibilities include priority for government housing and promotion opportunities. On-post housing is often limited, resulting in long waiting periods. Consequently, one option for Soldiers who reenlist could be increased priority on the waiting list. Another option is providing Soldiers with promotion points upon reenlistment, so they have the opportunity for quicker promotions. Soldiers also often mentioned the need for non-MOS specific incentives in order to decrease perceptions of inequity across MOSs. Specifically, offering bonuses that are standardized across MOSs may entice more Soldiers to reenlist.

In addition to the reenlistment options, more reenlistment incentives could be offered with the goal of recognizing Soldiers who reenlist. Examples include instituting more formal reenlistment ceremonies and offering Soldiers reenlistment tokens, belt buckles with their unit's insignia, and/or time off upon reenlistment. Reenlistment ceremonies are currently provided to Soldiers, but funding to support these ceremonies is not sufficiently spread out across posts. As a result, there is no standardization, and most ceremonies are small-scale. By ensuring all posts have sufficient resources for the reenlistment ceremony and formally recognizing Soldiers who reenlist, the Army sends the message that each Soldier is valued, which may increase Soldier commitment. This intervention concept is further expanded upon in Phase 2 (Intervention 2-2).

1-12 Career Development Path Information

Soldiers are well aware of the chain of command within the Army. However, it appears that many Soldiers may have little information about the career path required to progress up that chain. Additionally, misinformation, whether through "barracks lawyers" or other sources, may give Soldiers false ideas about the obligations and outcomes required for advancement in a military career.

This intervention is designed to clearly illustrate and enhance the distribution of career-related developmental information to Soldiers. The intervention would focus on educating them of what their career in the Army could be, the obligations that would be required of them to successfully achieve a higher rank/different MOS, key career path decision points, and specific outcomes of training opportunities. Such information could be made readily available to Soldiers through resources such as their Army Knowledge Online (AKO) account.

Although information pertaining to advancement within the Army is currently available through informal sources, the establishment of a specific and reliable career-related developmental information resource would greatly assist Soldiers in making a more informed decision to reenlist.

* 1-13 Information Distribution

The Army has implemented a variety of programs and initiatives to increase quality of life and retention rates among enlisted Soldiers. However, Soldiers are not always aware of the programs available to them. Additionally, Soldiers may benefit from having access to more reenlistment and career-related information. Thus, this intervention is intended to enhance the distribution of information to Soldiers so that they can better take advantage of programs the Army offers. Potential avenues for communicating information to Soldiers include websites, emails, newsletters, and training seminars.

Information about military programs and incentives is currently communicated to Soldiers during an orientation session upon arrival at their first unit of assignment. However, according to communications in Soldier focus group sessions during FY06, this may not be the most effective method of distributing the information. That is, Soldiers may experience information overload during this period, in addition to being overwhelmed by their new environment. Soldiers may benefit from receiving this information again, well after their orientation session and after they have adjusted to their unit. For example, providing Soldiers a central location, such as a website, where they can easily access information about all the available military programs, may be more beneficial.

Additionally, it may be advantageous to provide Soldiers with more reenlistment and career-related information. The Reenlistment, Extension, Reclassification, and Reserve Component Transition System (RETAIN) is an online resource that provides career counselors and reenlistment NCOs with updated information about the current slots available for reenlistment, including opportunities by MOS and location, for enlisted personnel. However, Soldiers are not provided with access to this website; they depend on the reenlistment NCOs to communicate the information. By allowing Soldiers to at least view information regarding available slots, they can develop a greater awareness of what opportunities are available at a given moment. Access to this information would make very clear how these slots are constantly changing based upon Army needs, giving the Soldiers an understanding of how dynamic the process of matching Soldiers to jobs/locations really is.

Further, other career management tools that could be provided include (1) specific details on the reenlistment options available; (2) a calculator to estimate the Selective Reenlistment Bonus (SRB) for which a given Soldier is eligible; (3) a formal side-by-side comparison of the short- and long-term economic benefits of staying in the Army; (4) specific career progression information; and (5) answers to commonly asked reenlistment- and career-related questions. Although some of this information is already available on various websites or through informal communication, providing Soldiers with a central location to access all of these tools could be more effective.

This intervention concept is further explored as two intervention strategies in Phase 2 (Interventions 2-6 and 2-7).

* 1-14 Mentoring

A mentoring relationship can be defined as an interpersonal relationship between a senior and junior-level person, such that the senior person provides the junior person with guidance, support, and advice regarding the tasks, functions, and culture of the organization (Kram, 1985). According to the Soldiers in our interviews and focus groups in FY06, they continually look to each other to gather information about the Army. Additionally, many Soldiers who view the Army negatively readily communicate their experiences to other Soldiers, thereby spreading their negativity. To counteract these influences, Soldiers would likely benefit from exposure to Soldiers who have had positive experiences in the Army. Thus, this intervention involves formally pairing first term Soldiers with more experienced Soldiers (i.e., second-term Soldiers) so that inexperienced Soldiers have the opportunity to gain insight and a positive outlook on what the Army has to offer.

Civilian research suggests one benefit of mentoring relationships is increased levels of organizational commitment. Findings illustrate that both protégés and mentors report higher levels of commitment than their non-protégé and non-mentor counterparts (e.g., Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004; Lentz & Allen, in press). Thus, this intervention would likely have a positive impact on retention for Soldiers in a variety of career stages.

Although informal mentoring is currently available through the Army Mentorship Resource Center, this intervention would formalize the process, ensuring that each new Soldier is paired with a mentor. In addition to a formal pairing system, squad leaders can also be formally trained to provide mentoring to the Soldiers in their unit. As their immediate supervisor, squad leaders play a critical role in Soldiers' socialization to the Army. Thus, it is particularly important for squad leaders to be aware of the importance of mentoring and provided with the knowledge/skills to successfully coach Soldiers. One way to enforce the mentoring role is to hold squad leaders accountable for such behavior, emphasizing it on their annual performance evaluations (i.e., NCO Evaluation Reports (NCOERs)).

As noted, this intervention concept was positively received throughout the initial developmental phase. Thus, this concept is further expanded upon in Phase 2 (Intervention 2-1).

*** 1-15 Stabilization and Predictability***

The lack of predictability within the Army is one of the most frequently cited reasons junior enlisted Soldiers leave the Army. Often, there are last minute changes to schedules or orders, preventing Soldiers from effectively planning their lives. Further, operational tempo (OPTEMPO) and back-to-back deployments can aggravate this lack of predictability.

Another factor influencing Soldiers' reenlistment decisions is the lack of stabilization. Due to the current needs of the Army and the limited number of Soldiers in specific MOSs, orders can be cancelled or changed at the last minute in order to meet the manpower requirements for missions. This is one of the reasons for the unpredictability of how Soldiers are moved from installation to installation or from one unit to another, negatively impacting the morale of both the Soldier and his/her Family. The Army has implemented Force Stabilization to resolve this issue. The program involves two initiatives: (1) home-basing and (2) unit-focused stability (also referred to as the Lifecycle). Home-basing offers Soldiers the opportunity to remain on the same installation for six to seven years, while unit-focused stability allows them to serve in the same unit for three years.

The proposed intervention provides alternative methods for improving Soldier predictability and stability within the Army. The intervention addresses two issues: (1) increasing personal/family time, and (2) improving the predictability of a Soldier's work schedule. Providing Soldiers with a certain number of personal days, where they can take the day off without obtaining an initial request or providing a specific reason, should provide Soldiers with more time to spend with their families. Based on feedback from first term enlisted Soldiers, they would find this intervention useful because it would afford them the time to take care of last-minute personal/family emergencies. Another proposal is to provide Soldiers with a "Get Out of Physical Training (PT)" pass once per week or month. This would enable Soldiers to spend more quality time with their families the night before. Still another example would involve implementing "Mandatory Leave Early Days", in which Soldiers are allowed to leave at an earlier time on designated Fridays.

The second issue deals with improving the predictability of a Soldier's work schedule. The proposed intervention would implement leadership training, where leaders are taught strategies to improve prioritization and management of delegated tasks. With improved prioritization and scheduling by leadership, Soldiers could more accurately anticipate what is expected of them at work, increasing predictability and helping them balance their work and personal lives. They would also be able to use their time more efficiently.

Based upon feedback from the Technical Panel meeting, this intervention was selected for further development in Phase 2 (Intervention 2-3).

1-16 Realistic Job Preview

This intervention would involve showing Soldiers a very realistic portrayal of what they will be experiencing as they begin their military careers with the intention of countering overly pessimistic and overly optimistic expectations of life in the Army. However, this RJP differs from the attrition-intervention RJP in that it focuses more on career development. That is, video-based portrayals of stages in the NCO career path would be presented to give Soldiers a better understanding of what opportunities are available to them. They would have a better understanding of what the day-to-day duties and responsibilities are at the different ranks, what other opportunities promotions could lead to, and what is expected of the NCO at each stage. The underlying concept is that Soldiers would have a better frame of reference for understanding what their career in the Army will be as they progress through the ranks. In addition, they would understand what is required of them to achieve this career progress and hopefully to help them better prepare themselves as they move forward in their careers.

* 1-17 Increased Developmental Opportunities

Developmental opportunities and the acquisition of specific skills/competencies were among the most commonly cited reasons for joining the Army by Soldiers participating in FY06 focus groups. Although developmental opportunities may be available, Soldiers indicated that they are often unable to take advantage of these opportunities either through a lack of time or lack of access.

The purpose of this intervention would be to provide reenlisting Soldiers with the opportunity to participate in a wider variety of developmental programs than are currently available to them. For example, developmental incentives cited as appealing included hazardous materials certification, commercial driving license (CDL) certification, and emergency medical technician (EMT) certification.

Although the Army currently has an Army Training reenlistment option, which provides Soldiers with guaranteed attendance at an available service school of their choice related to their Primary Military Occupational Specialty (PMOS), the current intervention focuses on developmental training opportunities, which could be useful to a Soldier both during his/her military career and in a civilian career. Additionally, unlike the Special MOS Alignment Promotion Program (SMAPP), which allows Soldiers to request reclassification into a selected MOS and receive a promotion, the proposed intervention simply provides a Soldier with the knowledge and skills to make additional contributions to their current MOS. With this approach, there is a risk that the Soldier receiving the training may be more apt not to reenlist because of increased job opportunities outside the Army. However, we believe that, on balance, the benefits of the program and the support this demonstrates for the Soldier and his/her post-Army life, are sufficient to offset that risk.

* 1-18 Increased Leadership Opportunities - Supplemental Education Initiatives

For a Soldier to have a long-term career in the Army, the logical progression is to take on a leadership role and become an effective NCO. However, according to our focus group feedback, some NCOs are being promoted at a pace that does not allow them to fully experience all of the important developmental opportunities required to become an effective leader.

This intervention would further institutionalize the development of new leaders by providing all NCOs with a formalized set of tools to be used in interactions with their Soldiers. Although the Army is already proficient at training new leaders, the purpose of this intervention is to provide all NCOs with a more consistent set of leadership skills targeted toward effective socialization into an Army career and the development of future NCOs.

Although the Army currently offers Leadership Skills Enhancement Courses (LSEC) provided by local community colleges, these courses are typically offered only to Soldiers and NCOs exhibiting leadership potential. The intent of the current intervention is to supplement the existing NCO training program with a resource that could be used by all NCOs, which could be presented as an educational program.

1-19 Spouse-Related Benefits and Incentives

Often, a Soldier's reenlistment decision is heavily influenced by how supportive his/her spouse is of the Army. Given that a significant portion of enlisted Soldiers are married, the Army has developed various programs assisting a Soldier's spouse. Programs include academic initiatives, employment assistance services, and social support services.

Recognizing that many Army programs targeting a Soldier's spouse are available, the proposed interventions intend to expand and improve upon existing initiatives. For example, one proposed intervention would provide an RJP for spouses prior to the Soldiers' first unit of assignment. The RJP would not only include information on what to expect at a Soldier's first unit of assignment from the spouse's perspective, but would also provide information on various spouse and family services available at that particular installation, such as Family Resource Groups, Enlisted Spouses Clubs, and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Programs. Often, Soldiers and their spouses are unaware of the various programs available to them. The RJP could also provide information on what to expect when their husbands/wives are deployed, as well as help spouses prepare for deployments, maintain communication during deployments, and find social support groups.

In addition to a Spouse RJP, programs focusing on male spouses are needed. The majority of existing Army spouse programs target female spouses. Although the number of non-military male spouses is much less than female spouses, programs targeting non-military male spouses may help husbands establish a network for either professional or social opportunities.

Additionally, the Army announced an incentive that allows for the transfer of Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) benefits to military spouses. Specifically, as of August 1, 2009, eligible Soldiers have the option to transfer unused MGIB entitlement to their spouse. In addition to this initiative, the Army has various academic programs available to spouses. However, no educational programs exist for graduate training for spouses. Thus, another possibility would be to supplement existing programs by providing spouses with financial support for graduate training. Additionally, a network of colleges and universities offering transferable graduate course credits could be established to address the issue of frequent relocations. Further, similar to what is already being offered to Soldiers, college courses could be offered on-post to military spouses.

*1-20 Make Retention Information Available to NCOs and Officers

Although career counselors and reenlistment NCOs perform a critical role in providing Soldiers with reenlistment information, it may be worthwhile to more formally provide NCOs and officers with tools and information to supplement the work of the reenlistment NCOs. That is, this intervention would provide NCOs and officers with a set of information resources and tools that are similar to what the career counselors and reenlistment NCOs have. Essentially, this would make the NCOs and officers an extension of the reenlistment NCO. This resource would be tailored to provide specific information to NCOs and officers, including recommended activities/talking points to be used in conversations with Soldiers so that the Army would present a more consistent vision throughout the posts/chain of command regarding reenlistment opportunities.

Similar to what was described in the Information Distribution intervention, a web-based system would be designed to include updated information about the current reenlistment opportunities, including opportunities by MOS and location, and specific details on the reenlistment options available. Additionally, other career management tools could be made available, albeit in a more limited scope than what the career counselors and reenlistment NCOs use.

This intervention concept was selected for refinement in Phase 2 (Intervention 2-4).

* 1-21 Organized Recreational Days/Activities

Organized recreational days and activities are designed to build morale and increase camaraderie among Soldiers, thereby enhancing their commitment to the Army. Although some installations currently implement such activities, the general consensus among Soldiers in our sample was that these programs occur too infrequently, if at all. Additionally, the organized recreational events that are held generally occur during Soldiers' limited personal time, making it difficult to mandate attendance.

By holding events at a time when Soldiers would otherwise be working, the positive impact of these activities on morale is expected to be stronger. Although there are a variety of organizational activities that could be implemented, some specific ideas are detailed below.

Organized recreation days provide a social context for Soldiers and their families to gather and bond. These events may include activities such as sports events, raffle drawings, and barbeques. In addition to building camaraderie among Soldiers, this intervention has the added benefit of enabling Army spouses to interact, potentially enhancing their social ties and commitment. Although organized recreation days were previously held on a regular basis at some posts, Soldiers perceive the frequency with which they currently occur as insufficient, suggesting that they be held approximately every six months. Additionally, while organized recreation days may involve the entire post, similar activities could be held at the platoon-, company-, battalion-, or brigade-level. Further, to enhance commitment among single Soldiers, FY06 focus group participants suggested implementing Single Soldier Days as well, which could also include a barbeque and sports events.

Another class of recreational activities specifically targets PT time. A common complaint among Soldiers in our focus groups was that PT time is boring, draining, and uninspiring. Morale boosters during PT would help alleviate these complaints. Specifically, occasionally implementing sports activities among Soldiers, possibly competitive games between NCOs and Soldiers of lower rank, may have a positive impact on morale and cohesion.

This intervention concept is discussed further in Phase 2 (Intervention 2-5).

1-22 Promotional Exams

Currently, the Army utilizes administrative (i.e., promotion) points and a promotional board for selecting Soldiers eligible for promotion to sergeant and staff sergeant NCO ranks. Soldiers receive administrative points for accomplishments such as duty performance, military awards and decorations, and completion of military training and civilian education courses. Additionally, eligible Soldiers appear before a promotion board and are rated on several facets, such as personal appearance, oral expression, and knowledge of basic Soldiering. A Soldier is deemed eligible for promotion based upon a minimum number of administrative and promotion board points, as well as a final vote of eligibility by the board.

Anecdotal information from focus groups in FY06 suggests sergeants and staff sergeants play an integral role in the day-to-day operations of enlisted Soldiers. Moreover, our findings revealed that during times when there are shortages at certain NCO levels, some Soldiers may be perceived as being promoted to these grades prematurely, subjectively, and lacking essential knowledge for successful job performance. This might result in NCOs being perceived as poor role models for enlisted Soldiers and may actually be a source of frustration that contributes to reduced levels of commitment toward the Army. For this reason, we recommend improvements to the current promotion process involving sergeants and staff sergeants.

One strategy to improve the promotion process is to implement a promotional examination to determine eligibility for sergeant and staff sergeant advancement. In addition to administrative and promotion board points, a content-valid promotional examination could objectively assess knowledges, skills, and abilities (KSAs) required at time of entry into the sergeant and staff sergeant ranks. As part of the content validation approach, special emphasis would be given to defining and measuring critical KSAs, such as unit and MOS knowledge and leadership skills. From the perspective of the promotional candidates, part of this strategy would emphasize the importance of candidates putting effort and time into learning the KSAs required to be successful NCOs prior to beginning NCO training. From the perspective of the enlisted Soldiers, the use of promotional examinations would likely improve morale and respect within the platoons and contribute to perceptions of fairness and competence of NCO leadership.

* 1-23 The Army VALUES Soldiers

The Army's AURA (Acceptance, Understanding, Recognition, and Appreciation) initiative is a current command program introduced to increase training retention. The basic premise is that if a Soldier feels significant and valued as an individual, he or she is less likely to attrit during initial entry training (IET). The effectiveness of this initiative was highlighted during an opening address at the U.S. Army Accessions Command (USAAC) Accessions Research Consortium (VanAntwerp, 2005), with AURA being credited as a significant influence on the decrease of attrition rates. We argue that a similar strategy focused on valuing the contributions of Soldiers throughout his/her first contract term would likely increase overall commitment to the Army and have a positive impact on reenlistment decisions.

A recurring theme across focus groups conducted in FY06 was the perception that Army leadership does not care about the sacrifices and contributions a Soldier makes on a daily basis. For example, although education opportunities are available (e.g., eArmyU), many Soldiers felt that leadership was not supportive of them pursuing these opportunities. Additionally, there were reports of too much downtime, such that Soldiers were sitting around doing nothing past working hours when they could be at home spending time with their families. Circumstances such as these appear to be related to perceptions that Army leadership does not value the enlisted Soldier and his/her time. Further, these circumstances were often cited as factors related to a Soldier's decision not to reenlist.

This intervention is intended to expand upon the AURA initiative. Specifically, the purpose would be to provide a formal program for officers and NCOs to recognize, understand, and appreciate the sacrifices and efforts that a Soldier makes at his/her first unit of assignment. Although the needs of the Army will always take priority, this intervention emphasizes the importance of valuing Soldiers' contributions.

Phase 2: Expansion of Promising Intervention Concepts

The goal of Phase 2 was to expand upon the most promising interventions from the initial pool of concepts (Phase 1) and provide new concepts, as needed, based upon feedback from the Technical Review Panel and the resources described in Phase 1. During this phase, specific attention was given to interventions that would positively impact attrition and/or retention rates and result in qualified Soldiers being retained, whether there was a practical and valid approach for evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention, and if the intervention concept would support the testing and refinement of the Career Continuance Model (Table 4-1; Intervention Evaluation Criteria 1, 2, 4, and 7).

Accordingly, Table 4-3 presents the intervention concepts that were identified and refined during Phase 2. For each of the promising intervention concepts, we developed a more detailed explanation of why these interventions were needed along with a plan for how the interventions could be implemented and evaluated.

Table 4-3. Phase 2: Expansion of Promising Intervention Concepts

2-1 Formal Mentoring Toolkit (derived from Intervention 1-14)

2-2 Reenlistment Recognition Program (derived from Intervention 1-11)

2-3 Increased Personal Time and Predictability in Garrison (derived from Intervention 1-15)

2-4 Enhanced Involvement of NCOs/Officers in Retention Information Distribution (derived from Intervention 1-20)

2-5 Recreational Days/Activities (derived from Intervention 1-21)

2-6 *Online Reenlistment Information Toolkit (derived from Intervention 1-13)

2-7 www.ArmyGoogle.mil (derived from Intervention 1-13)

2-8 *Family Resilience Training (new)

2-9 Teach Life Skills (new)

2-10 Personal Support/Social Competence Training (derived from Intervention 1-4)

2-11 Adaptability and Resilience Training (derived from Intervention 1-3)

2-12 *Realistic Job Preview (derived from Intervention 1-5)

2-13 Empowerment Training (new)

2-14 Leadership Trailing Program (new)

2-15 *Training for Drill Sergeants (derived from Intervention 1-8)

Note: Asterisks indicates intervention concepts that were most frequently endorsed by Army SMEs during the Military Advisory meeting.

The interventions described would likely positively influence Soldier career continuance and should be feasible within the technical and contextual constraints presented by the Army environment. However, there are inherent challenges within each of the intervention concepts that warrant further consideration. In order to gain additional insight into these challenges, a Military Advisory Panel consisting of five Army SMEs was organized in Winter 2007 to review each intervention concept and implementation plan. These panelists were each selected because of their influence and expertise related to Army policies and practices pertaining to junior Soldier and NCO career continuance (i.e., attrition and retention). The Panel was comprised primarily of Army officers (O - 6 level) and represented G-1, USAAC, TRADOC, and FORSCOM.

The goals of this panel meeting were to (1) help the project team narrow the list of intervention concepts to a smaller set of "best bet" interventions; (2) obtain guidance in moving high priority interventions toward implementation; and (3) create buy-in for intervention implementation. To meet these goals, the Military Advisory Panel was asked to evaluate each promising intervention based on interest to key stakeholders, implications for deploying the intervention Army-wide in a way that balances costs with anticipated effectiveness, and the need for interventions that could be implemented in a standardized manner across locations and settings (Table 4-1; Intervention Evaluation Criteria 5, 6, and 8).

The next section describes the promising intervention concepts that were presented to the Military Advisory Panel. Similar to Phase 1, this section contains initiatives that were all positively received, but were not pursued further under the STAY project. Again, panelists were asked to identify their top three concepts; those that were most frequently cited in the top three were identified as additional "best bet" interventions and are marked with an asterisk.

2-1 Formal Mentoring Toolkit (derived from Intervention 1-14)

Needs Assessment. The first unit of assignment is often described as what "makes or breaks" a Soldier. Squad leaders and platoon sergeants play a critical role in a Soldier's socialization to their first unit. Thus, it is particularly important for squad leaders and platoon sergeants to understand the importance of providing guidance, support, and counseling to junior Soldiers. Equally important is for Soldiers to perceive squad leaders and platoon sergeants as developmental resources. To varying degrees, these NCOs are already providing mentoring behaviors on an informal basis to Soldiers. To maximize this relationship, squad leaders and platoon sergeants can be formally trained to provide mentoring to junior Soldiers in their unit.

Military research suggests a need for more mentoring in the Army. Steinberg and Nourizadeh (2001) examined mentoring relationships in the Active Army. Their findings suggest 30% of privates, 27% of privates first class, and 24% of corporals/specialists surveyed have not had a mentor but would like to have one. Additionally, the authors highlight a need for more mentors for privates and privates first class who are currently in the Army. NCOs such as squad leaders and platoon sergeants would be ideal mentor candidates for these junior enlisted Soldiers.

Objectives. This intervention has multiple objectives:

- Provide squad leaders and platoon sergeants with the tools to effectively mentor junior Soldiers within their unit

- Train squad leaders and platoon sergeants to provide career-related mentoring to Soldiers that focuses on promoting the growth and advancement of a Soldier

- Train squad leaders and platoon sergeants to provide psychosocial mentoring to Soldiers that focuses on enhancing a Soldier's sense of competence and identity

- Highlight the opportunities for squad leaders and platoon sergeants to develop interpersonal relationships with junior Soldiers

- Emphasize the importance of junior Soldiers perceiving squad leaders and platoon sergeants as crucial resources and sources of information

 Implementation Plan. This intervention involves training junior Soldiers, squad leaders, and platoon sergeants to perceive their interactions with each other as formal mentoring relationships. In doing so, squad leaders and platoon sergeants need to have the tools, resources, and training to be effective mentors. Similarly, junior Soldiers need to recognize these NCOs as sources of support. Accordingly, the implementation of the mentoring toolkit would involve multiple phases.

 First, squad leaders and platoon sergeants would need to be provided with the tools to be effective mentors. Specifically, these NCOs would be instructed on the importance of being role models and sources of support and guidance for junior Soldiers. In general, training is recommended in order to enhance the amount of mentoring provided and improve the quality of the mentoring relationship (Allen, Eby, & Lentz, 2006). Research suggests mentors provide two types of support: career-related support and psychosocial support (Kram, 1985). Career-related support focuses on the advancement and promotion of the mentee, with specific mentor behaviors involving coaching, protection, and providing opportunities for the mentee to interact with more experienced individuals. Psychosocial support is related to the interpersonal relationship between the mentor and mentee, with the mentor setting a good example of desirable attitudes and behaviors, as well as providing counseling and support when the mentee needs to talk openly about personal concerns and anxieties. Squad leaders and platoon sergeants would be instructed on the importance of providing both types of support to junior Soldiers. We suggest incorporating this training into the NCO Education System (NCOES) lesson plan and coursework. The training would highlight the developmental relationship between the NCOs and junior Soldiers, clarify the parameters of the relationship, and provide opportunities for the NCOs to practice effective mentoring behaviors. One strategy for doing this would be to include role-play exercises in which different scenarios involving common interactions between NCOs and junior Soldiers are acted out.

The trainer would then demonstrate effective mentoring techniques and reinforce positive aspects of NCO behavior. These behaviors would then be transferred and used by squad leaders and platoon sergeants in their unit.

The second phase would involve emphasizing opportunities for junior Soldiers and NCOs to develop an Army appropriate interpersonal relationship. Generally speaking, squad leaders and platoon sergeants are typically the first NCOs to interact with junior Soldiers upon their arrival to the unit. Further, junior Soldiers spend most of their time working side by side with these NCOs. Although we do not recommend increasing the frequency of interaction, we do suggest improving the quality of interaction between Soldiers, squad leaders, and platoon sergeants. For example, an hour of downtime might be a good opportunity for a platoon sergeant to converse openly with junior Soldiers, discussing the importance of goal-setting or attaining current promotion requirements. This is also a good time for these NCOs to open the lines of communication when junior Soldiers express concern or anxiety about the Army environment. These types of interactions are likely contingent upon senior leadership support, with leadership support improving the quality of time that squad leaders and platoon sergeants spend with junior Soldiers.

Finally, Soldiers would need to continuously view squad leaders and platoon sergeants as sources of support. One strategy for meeting this objective is for these NCOs to reiterate their continued support throughout a Soldier's career. Specifically, Soldiers need to recognize squad leaders and platoon sergeants as individuals they can count on for career guidance, encouragement, and respect. And, when a Soldier does turn to a squad leader or platoon sergeant for support, he/she would not feel looked down upon or perceived negatively by other Soldiers, NCOs, or officers. Thus, the mentoring provided by the squad leaders and platoon sergeants would be positively reinforced and frequently sought out.

Evaluation Plan. An experimental design would be used to assess the effectiveness of the formal mentoring toolkit. For initial assessment, the intervention could be pilot tested during a FORSCOM umbrella week. The pilot test would involve implementing the mentoring toolkit lesson plan during a four-hour session with squad leaders and platoon sergeants from a specific battalion. Towards the end of the session, squad leaders and platoon sergeants would be asked to role play and act out several scenarios, switching roles between the mentee and mentor. During this exercise, session leaders would coach participants on how to provide effective mentoring and how to avoid ineffective behaviors. If possible, we would spend one hour with the squad leaders' and platoon sergeants' junior Soldiers. During this session, we would have an open discussion with Soldiers regarding the importance of perceiving their squad leaders and platoon sergeants as sources of support. Finally, we would ask permission to follow-up with the squad leaders, platoon sergeants, and junior Soldiers within the battalion.

Specifically, we would like to survey these NCOs and junior Soldiers on several criteria approximately three months after the mentoring toolkit lesson plan. These responses would be compared to a battalion that did not receive the mentoring toolkit lesson plan (control group).

Several criteria would be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the formal mentoring toolkit. Specifically, positive outcomes for both the mentee (junior Soldier) and mentor (squad leader and platoon sergeant) could be evaluated. Civilian research suggests mentoring is related to positive outcomes for mentees and mentors. For example, Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, and Lima (2004) provided evidence that mentees report higher levels of affective commitment, career and job satisfaction, and greater expectations for advancement than individuals who were not mentored. Military research has also recognized the importance of mentoring. Prevosto (1998) examined mentoring outcomes for company grade U.S. Army Reserve nurses. Results suggested nurses with a mentor reported more job satisfaction and higher intent to stay in the Army Reserves than their non-mentored counterparts. It is likely that this intervention would have a positive impact on the mentors (squad leaders and platoon sergeants), as well. Recent civilian research suggests mentors also benefit from participating in mentoring relationships. For example, Lentz and Allen (in press) compared mentors and non-mentors on several career-related outcomes. Findings indicated mentors reported higher job satisfaction, more affective commitment, fewer turnover intentions, and lower perceptions of job content plateau compared to individuals without mentor experience. These findings suggest the NCOs providing the mentoring behaviors would also perceive this relationship as rewarding. Taken together, junior Soldiers, squad leaders, and platoon sergeants from both the experimental and control groups would be surveyed on several relevant career-related outcomes, such as satisfaction, commitment to the Army, and reenlistment intentions.

Squad leaders and platoon sergeants play a critical role in socializing junior Soldiers into their first unit of assignment. Formally training these NCOs to be effective sources of support and role models should have a significant impact on the commitment, satisfaction, and overall adjustment of Soldiers to Army culture. Inevitably, some NCOs would be better mentors than others. However, providing a standardized toolkit of knowledge and guidance of how to be an effective mentor would likely improve upon the overall quality of mentoring provided. Thus, the formal mentoring toolkit would likely be related to several positive outcomes for both members of the mentoring relationship, including propensity to reenlist.

2-2 Reenlistment Recognition Program (derived from Intervention 1-11)

Needs Assessment. A Soldier's decision to reenlist signifies his/her continuing commitment to the Army. Thus, reenlisting represents a defining moment in a Soldier's career, providing an ideal opportunity for the Army to formally acknowledge the service and commitment of Soldiers. However, our research revealed that Soldiers often receive little or no formal recognition for reenlisting after their first term. Additionally, the recognition that is provided is not standardized across units, and varies considerably by battalion/brigade.

During the technical panel meeting conducted in FY06, the consensus was that these differences are a result of different leadership priorities. Specifically, leaders vary in the importance they place on reenlistment, and that impacts the degree of recognition provided to reenlisting Soldiers. Per the technical panel's recommendations, the Army could benefit from standardizing the process by which Soldiers are recognized after first term reenlistment, and one way to achieve this goal is through a leadership initiative.

Objectives. This intervention has the following objectives:

- Heighten leaders' awareness of the importance of reenlistment and providing formal recognition following reenlistment decisions

- Formalize the recognition process, in order to standardize the degree to which reenlisting Soldiers are acknowledged

- Communicate to Soldiers that the Army values their time and commitment by formally recognizing their decision to reenlist

Implementation Plan. Although the ultimate purpose of this intervention is to standardize the reenlistment recognition process across the Army, the immediate goal is to standardize the process within a particular unit or subset of units. After identifying the unit(s) in which the intervention would be implemented, the first step, as with most of the interventions in this report, would be to obtain buy-in at the brigade commander level.

After obtaining the Brigade Commander's support, a phone meeting would be scheduled to discuss, in-depth, the nature of the intervention. While it is important to standardize the amount of acknowledgement that Soldiers receive following reenlistment, we feel that the particular method of recognition should be at the unit's discretion. This enables each unit to tailor the recognition process to the needs and wants of those particular Soldiers, in addition to maintaining the unit's autonomy. Although the Brigade Commander would be encouraged to develop and implement whichever recognition process he/she sees fit, we would also provide him/her with sample ideas, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Reenlistment ceremonies, for both the Soldier and his/her Family

- A luncheon or other gathering held regularly to honor those who reenlist, with key personnel invited to attend

- Reenlistment parades

- Provide reenlisting Soldiers with a belt buckle (or other paraphernalia) with the unit insignia

Whenever possible, recognition would be provided to the Family members of reenlisting Soldiers as well, in order to foster their support and involvement. For example, Soldiers' spouses could be invited to attend a reenlistment luncheon, spouses could be provided with a reenlistment certificate, and Soldiers' children would be included in the reenlistment parades.

Once the Brigade Commander has been fully briefed on the nature of the intervention, he/she would be asked to involve the battalion commanders and career counselors. Because of their increased contact with the first term Soldiers, these individuals may be in a better position to determine the type of recognition that would appeal to the Soldiers in their unit. The battalion commanders and career counselors could also help plan and implement the recognition processes that are chosen.

Given the critical role of the battalion commanders and career counselors to the success of this intervention, they would be held accountable for implementing the recognition process. In the long-term, the Officer Evaluation Report (OER) could be modified to include statements regarding the officer's successful implementation of a formal recognition system for first term Soldiers. However, for the purpose of the intervention, the Brigade Commander would be responsible for overseeing and ensuring the cooperation of battalion commanders and career counselors.

This plan describes the process for implementing the intervention in a unit that does not currently have a reenlistment recognition program in place. However, if possible, a more economical approach could be utilized that takes advantage of units that already engage in such practices. Specifically, brigade commanders would be contacted and asked what their unit currently does to formally recognize Soldiers who reenlist. The technical panel would also be asked if they are aware of such units. After units with existing programs were identified, the brigade commanders would be contacted to ask if they are willing to participate in the evaluation phase of the project. This would allow us to evaluate the effectiveness of recognition programs in a cost-effective manner.

Consideration of how this intervention would be implemented Army-wide is important, given that the intervention's ultimate purpose is to standardize the recognition process across units. To facilitate standardization, each Brigade would be provided with funding, available solely for the purpose of recognizing reenlisting Soldiers. The amount of funding provided to each unit would be influenced by factors such as the size of the unit and the number of first term Soldiers who typically reenlist. Thus, the amount may need to be modified periodically to account for gross changes in these factors. Each Brigade would be responsible for keeping detailed records of how the funds were allocated, to ensure that the money is being used for its intended purpose.

Evaluation Plan. To evaluate the success of this intervention, a quasi-experimental design would be implemented. Units that formally recognize reenlisting Soldiers (either currently or following the implementation of the intervention) would be compared to units that do not. Control groups could be chosen via a matching strategy, such that the comparison unit is at the same or similar post as the experimental group and/or is composed of Soldiers with similar MOSs.

To maximize the information gained, multiple control groups and/or experimental groups could be utilized. The feasibility of multiple experimental groups is enhanced if units with existing recognition processes were willing to participate.

The commitment levels and propensity to reenlist of first term Soldiers in the experimental and control groups, as well as perceived leader support and the extent to which they feel valued by the Army, would be assessed. We would then compare responses across the units to determine the effect of the recognition process. However, we would have to consider factors to include as control variables, given the high potential for confounding variables. Confounds are of particular concern if all experimental groups are chosen on the basis of having formal reenlistment recognition programs in place. These units may systematically differ from other units in ways that could be responsible for differing levels of commitment and reenlistment. Thus, if possible, we would also gather archival data regarding reenlistment rates before and after the implementation of the recognition program to assess whether a change occurred. Pre- and post-data would also be collected for any experimental groups that implemented a recognition program as part of this intervention.

Immediately following the reenlistment recognition event (e.g., reenlistment parade, ceremony, or luncheon), participating Soldiers would be surveyed regarding their reaction to the event. To the extent possible, retrospective accounts of whether it impacted their commitment to the Army and decision to reenlist would also be collected. If the recognition event involved Family members, we would attempt to gather their feedback as well. Soldiers would be provided with surveys to give Family members and a pre-paid envelope to mail it back to the research team.

This intervention is expected to increase reenlistment rates by communicating to Soldiers that they are valuable assets to the Army and that their decision to reenlist is not unappreciated. Enhancing leadership awareness of the importance of recognizing reenlistment decisions, as well as standardizing the acknowledgement process, should improve retention.

2-3 Increased Personal Time and Predictability in Garrison (derived from Intervention 1-15)

Needs Assessment. Some Soldiers in focus groups complained about the lack of personal time and predictability associated with Army life, particularly while in garrison. In addition, some Soldiers reported frustration with the frequency with which they have to work evenings and weekends, often with no advance notice. Some Soldiers had also reported that they had cancelled vacations and other plans, contributing to the dissatisfaction experienced by both the Soldier and his/her Family.

According to some SMEs, the lack of predictability and personal time stemmed from problems with leadership. Thus, it is important to target leaders throughout the chain of command in addressing these concerns. The Army could also benefit from policy and cultural changes that allow for increased personal time and predictability while in garrison.

Objectives. The following goals are associated with this intervention:

- Provide leadership with the knowledge and tools to increase Soldiers' personal time and predictability while in garrison

- Heighten awareness among leaders regarding the extent to which lack of personal time and predictability negatively impact Soldiers and the Army as a whole

- Establish a cultural shift, in which personal time and predictability are highly valued throughout the chain of command

- Teach leaders strategies to improve prioritization and management of delegated tasks

- Implement policies that ensure increased personal time and autonomy for Soldiers in garrison

     Implementation Plan. For evaluation, the intervention would be implemented in one or two units on a trial basis. Deployment schedules are important in determining which unit(s) would receive the training. Because this intervention targets behaviors in garrison, the unit must not deploy in the few months following the intervention, to ensure adequate time to evaluate its effectiveness.

     This intervention includes two major elements: a leadership initiative and policy changes. The leadership initiative, described first, would be implemented during umbrella week in the

form of a training program. Because the problem may stem, in part, from an organizational culture that does not prioritize work-life balance, it is important to target leaders throughout the chain of command in implementing this initiative.

     Initially, leaders, both NCOs and officers at all levels, would be made aware of the issue. This would begin with examples of problematic situations, including requiring Soldiers to cancel vacation plans, calling Soldiers in on the weekend for non-emergency tasks, and giving out non-critical assignments late in the work day. The training program would emphasize the negative impact that these behaviors have on Soldier morale, family support, and retention. Additionally, leaders would be encouraged to examine how their current leadership style supports or impedes their Soldiers' work-life balance. Due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter, the trainers would be instructed to approach the topic with sensitivity and care, in an attempt to minimize the extent to which leaders feel angry or threatened.

     After increasing awareness of the problem, the next step would be to provide leaders with the tools to make improvements. Officers and NCOs would be taught skills related to prioritization and time management. Training modules would be developed by borrowing from courses in the civilian domain and modifying them to meet the Army's needs. Multiple modes of presentation would be utilized, including lecture, group discussion, and interactive exercises. An in-basket technique could also be incorporated that focuses on training such skills as personal time management, prioritization, and delegation of authority (Brannick, Michaels, & Baker,

1989). To maximize the program's effectiveness and relevance to the Army, critical incidents would be gathered from subject matter experts (i.e., Soldiers, NCOs, etc.) and incorporated into the training module. To the extent possible, leaders across the chain of command would be included in the same training session, in order to establish that a cultural shift requires action from leaders at all levels.

The success of this intervention depends largely on the degree of support demonstrated by top leadership. Before and after the training is implemented, the Brigade Commander should emphasize the importance of the initiative and the training program. Additionally, to encourage transfer of training, leaders should be sent reminder emails periodically, ideally from the Brigade Commander, encouraging them to utilize the skills learned in the training program. Although not feasible in the pilot test, subsequent Army-wide implementation would require that leaders be held accountable for taking steps to ensure predictability and enhanced personal time among Soldiers in their unit. This would include incorporating such behaviors into the NCOER and OER, and subordinate feedback could help guide evaluation ratings in this domain. The evaluation would also include the degree to which the leader adhered to the second part of this intervention, the policy changes described next.

Although the training program is intended to increase predictability and personal time indirectly via leadership behaviors, the following policy changes are designed to more directly address the problem by providing Soldiers with increased scheduling freedom and autonomy. One example is the initiation of "Mandatory Leave Early Days." This mandates a specific time for Soldiers to be dismissed from work on a given week day, except in an emergency or special situation. Commanders would be responsible for verifying the implementation of this policy and ensuring that Soldiers are being sent home at the appropriate time.

The exact details for implementation would need to be discussed with the Brigade Commander, including the most feasible days/times for Mandatory Leave Early Days. To minimize the extent to which these days interfere with unit readiness, it may be helpful to implement a rotation system, such that the Mandatory Leave Early Day varies within and/or across units. This ensures that a subset of Soldiers is available throughout the work week. Again, the Brigade Commander would be consulted to discuss the viability of a rotation system. For the program to be successful, it would also be necessary to establish a system whereby leaders can recant the Mandatory Leave Early Day in the event of mitigating circumstances. In these situations, whenever possible, leaders would receive approval from the Commander and provide Soldiers with as much advance notice as possible.

Other policy changes could include providing Soldiers with "Get Out of PT" passes and personal days. For example, Soldiers who are consistently meeting the PT requirements could be allowed to miss PT once or twice a month, providing them with more personal time. The availability of these passes is intended to give Soldiers a greater sense of autonomy and decision-making. Additionally, each Soldier could be given a certain number of personal days, whereby

he/she could take a day off without going through the formal approval process or providing a specific reason. This is analogous to many paid time off (PTO) programs in the private sector. To ensure that personal days do not provide needless disruption, commanders could reserve the right to "black out" dates that are particularly essential for Soldiers to work. These may include days scheduled for field exercises or other vital events. The details of these policies would be clearly communicated to both leaders and Soldiers.

Evaluation Plan. To evaluate the effectiveness of this intervention, multiple criteria would be assessed. Following the leadership training, participants could fill out reaction surveys, assessing whether they felt the training was useful and informative. Leadership behaviors could also be evaluated through both self and subordinate ratings. Specifically, subordinates could rate their NCOs and officers regarding the extent to which they respect Soldiers' personal time, encourage work-life balance, allow for predictability on a daily basis, abide by the policies associated with this intervention, and other relevant behaviors. NCOs and officers could rate themselves on these factors as well. Additionally, first term Soldiers would be surveyed on variables related to the Career Continuance Model, including personal well-being, family well-being, satisfaction with work schedule, work-life balance, commitment to the Army, and reenlistment intentions. If possible, spouses could self-report information on their own well-being and satisfaction with their partner's work schedule. To access this information, each Soldier could be given a survey for his/her spouse to fill out, along with a pre-paid envelope in which to mail the completed survey back to the research team. To determine whether a change occurred following the intervention, these variables would be assessed both before the training (up to two weeks prior) and after the training (ideally multiple times, including approximately two weeks later and three to six months later). Data would also be collected from control groups matched by post and/or MOS.

Given the widespread complaints among Soldiers regarding the unpredictability and lack of personal time associated with Army life, this intervention is expected to have a significant impact on retention rates. However, the success of this intervention is dependent on a cultural change in the unit, which is often a slow and difficult process. Thus, this intervention will probably be more successful in units with commanders that already value work-life balance.

2-4 Enhanced Involvement of NCOs/Officers in Retention Information Distribution (derived from Intervention 1-20)

Needs Assessment. Information regarding reenlistment is not universally distributed among leaders. For example, the Reenlistment, Reclassification, and Assignment System (RETAIN) is currently only accessible to career counselors and some reenlistment NCOs. As a result, Soldiers frequently lack awareness of available reenlistment opportunities and other career-related information. Further, Soldiers sometimes perceive reenlistment NCOs as gatekeepers, who purposely withhold information about the availability of various reenlistment options.

In order to improve information distribution and create a climate of trust, it may be beneficial to provide NCOs and officers with greater access to retention information and resources.

Objectives. The objectives of this intervention are as follows:

- Provide the Soldier with a "team" of reenlistment experts that can offer information and guidance; the career counselor and reenlistment NCO(s) are key components of this team

- Actively involve NCOs and officers in the reenlistment decision, by providing them with a set of information resources and tools

- Increase Soldiers' access to receive up-to-date information regarding their reenlistment options and other career-related information

- Increase Soldiers' trust in the reenlistment NCOs' motivations and reasons for withholding information

  Implementation Plan. Implementing this intervention would involve several steps, including developing reenlistment tools, expanding access to the RETAIN system, empowering and training NCOs and officers on reenlistment- and career-related issues, and developing a system that holds NCOs and officers accountable for their roles in the process. Prior to these steps, it would be important to involve the career counselors and reenlistment NCOs. Specifically, there would need to be clearly defined boundaries and expectations regarding their roles and those of the NCOs and officers. Reenlistment NCOs and career counselors would retain their current duties, and NCOs and officers would assist them by providing Soldiers with additional sources of information. This would help ensure that the career counselors and reenlistment NCOs do not feel marginalized by the intervention. Additionally, this intervention would have to be implemented in such a way that the officers and NCOs do not perceive it as yet another responsibility/burden.

  Reenlistment tools are resources designed to assist the reenlistment "team" in distributing retention- and career-related information to Soldiers. Several potential reenlistment tools are described in the "Information Distribution" section, including a Selective Reenlistment Bonus (SRB) calculator, economic comparison charts, and career progression information. Additionally, publications and/or online resources could be developed to provide NCOs and officers with guidance regarding how and when to use these tools. The Career Continuance Model highlights stages and shocks associated with the first contract term, including adjustment to the first unit of assignment, deployments, and entering the reenlistment window. Providing Soldiers with support and career-related information at these transition points may be particularly valuable. For example, Soldiers are likely to benefit most from career planning tools toward the beginning of their first unit of assignment. NCOs and officers can facilitate this process by providing new Soldiers with information on career progression paths and educational

opportunities within the Army. Conversely, an SRB calculator and economic comparison chart may be more useful to Soldiers entering the reenlistment window, as they begin to consider their options inside and outside of the Army.

In addition to these reenlistment tools, NCOs and officers should have limited access to the RETAIN system. This would help Soldiers more efficiently obtain information regarding reenlistment options. Further, Soldiers would have the opportunity to approach multiple people about the available slots, including those they already know well and trust, minimizing the perception of reenlistment NCOs as gatekeepers. However, reenlistment NCOs would still be ultimately responsible for filling the slots, so NCOs and officers should be given the equivalent of "read only" access.

The next step would be to empower the NCOs and officers to more formally deal with reenlistment-related issues through some supplemental training. This would fulfill multiple objectives, including (1) heightening the NCOs/officers' awareness of the importance of retention; (2) highlighting the crucial impact that NCOs/officers can have in Soldiers' reenlistment- and career-related decisions; (3) clearly communicating the expectations and role of NCOs/officers in the process and how it differs from that of the career counselors and reenlistment NCOs; and (4) educating the NCOs/officers on the available retention tools and the RETAIN system. If possible, the career counselors and reenlistment NCOs would help run the training session during umbrella week.

Evaluation Plan. This intervention would ideally be implemented in several units, depending on accessibility and command support. Comparison groups from the same or similar post, and/or composed of Soldiers with similar MOSs as the experimental group, would be identified. The evaluation would involve the assessment of pre- and post-data for both the experimental and comparison groups. Specifically, first term Soldiers would rate their NCOs and officers on their willingness and ability to provide retention-related information. Self-ratings of commitment to the Army and reenlistment intentions would also be collected. Further, Soldiers in their reenlistment window would rate the accessibility of accurate and efficient information about reenlistment slots.

The effectiveness of specific reenlistment tools would be evaluated, as well. NCOs and officers would be given reaction surveys to administer to Soldiers immediately following the use of a reenlistment tool. For example, after showing a Soldier an economic comparison between Army and civilian life, the NCO or officer would provide the Soldier with a survey to fill out and mail back to the research team. The survey would include questions regarding the perceived usefulness of the tool.

Finally, the NCO and officer training program would be assessed via reaction surveys. These surveys would be administered immediately after the training session so that NCOs and officers could provide feedback regarding the perceived utility of the training, the overall intervention, and each reenlistment tool.

This intervention is expected to impact reenlistment rates by providing Soldiers with a team of reenlistment experts, each armed with the information and tools to address retention- and career-related issues. By increasing the efficiency with which information is distributed and actively involving NCOs and officers in the reenlistment process, this intervention is likely to enhance Soldiers' trust of the system, perceptions of leader support, and awareness of the benefits of staying in the Army. This, in turn, could positively influence first term retention.

2-5 Recreational Days/Activities (derived from Intervention 1-21)

Needs Assessment. During our focus group sessions, Soldiers frequently described Organization Day as an enjoyable experience that provides Soldiers and their families with an opportunity to build morale and enhance camaraderie. However, Soldiers had complaints about the way that Organization Days are currently implemented. Specifically, these days are generally held during off-duty hours, so Soldiers perceive them as another mandatory requirement that cuts into their personal and family time. Soldiers also commented that such events are held too infrequently. Thus, there is a need to modify Organization Days to address these concerns.

Soldiers also commonly wished that physical training (PT) was more engaging and exciting. Given that PT is a daily requirement, Soldiers should ideally see it as a productive, or at least a positive, experience. A modification of PT could help improve the positive impact of PT on Soldier affect.

Objectives. This intervention would be intended to fulfill the following goals:

- Enhance the morale, camaraderie, and commitment of Soldiers by providing regularly scheduled recreational activities during Army time

- Increase Soldier morale and decrease Soldier stress by offering Soldiers a break from their regularly scheduled work

- Provide Soldiers with opportunities to interact with other Soldiers in a fun environment, thereby increasing unit cohesion

- Provide a means for the Army to show its appreciation for Soldiers

- Increase the social embeddedness and commitment of Army Family members

- Foster social ties among Family members, providing them with a social support network and increasing their commitment to the Army

- Provide a means to integrate Army families into Army life

- Decrease the negative day-to-day impact that PT has on Soldier morale

- Make PT a more enjoyable experience

- Foster unit cohesion by incorporating team sports into PT time

Implementation Plan. Two different types of recreational activities would be included in this intervention: Organization Days and PT Morale Boosters. The proposed implementation of each is described in this section, starting with Organization Days.

The most cost-effective manner of implementing this intervention is to find a post that currently has plans for an Organization Day and determine whether leadership is willing to hold the event during Army time. If at all possible, this approach would be utilized. However, if no such posts could be located, we would help implement an Organization Day in one or more units. Additionally, we would solicit feedback from Soldiers regarding what they liked about previous Organization Days, and Soldiers and their families would be encouraged to join a planning committee for the event. The Organization Day would be advertised to both Soldiers and their families via postings, emails, and letters. Upper-level leadership must emphasize the importance of the event down the chain of command to ensure Soldier attendance.

Although the activities to be held during the Organization Day are at the planning committee's discretion, sample activities include a barbeque, sporting events, and raffle drawings. Activities should cater to all ages, as well as potential sub-groups, such as single Soldiers. Raffle prizes could be selected that are likely to increase Army identification and/or community involvement. Examples include Army/unit paraphernalia and gift certificates to theme parks, restaurants, sporting events, or other local activities/attractions.

The second part of this intervention involves incorporating morale boosters into PT. After identifying a few units in which to implement the intervention, feedback would be solicited from first term Soldiers, as well as the individuals who are in charge of PT. Specifically, they would be asked to provide ideas that they would like to see implemented, and the optimal schedule for implementation (e.g., How often should morale boosters be incorporated?; Are there specific days, such as Fridays, that they should be implemented?). This information would help guide the execution of the intervention. Sample ideas include incorporating sports activities into PT, such as team-oriented sports to facilitate unit cohesion and/or competitive sports between NCOs and junior-level Soldiers. The activities could be designed to mirror the exercises that PT would otherwise provide; for example, jogging could be replaced by a running-intensive sport. Furthermore, such events could be provided as an incentive for satisfying various PT goals, or as a regular weekly activity. Although these ideas would be provided to those who are in charge of PT, ultimately they would be empowered to make specific decisions regarding how the intervention is implemented. The intervention could last for a period of weeks or months, during which morale boosters are incorporated approximately once a week.

Evaluation Plan. A quasi-experimental design would be utilized to evaluate the effectiveness of both the Organization Days and the PT morale boosters. Whenever possible, units that already engage in such practices would be used as experimental groups, and matched control groups would be selected. To evaluate the Organization Day, survey data would be collected a few weeks before and after the event. Relevant variables to measure include positive

and negative affect, personal well-being, family well-being, unit cohesiveness, social ties or embeddedness, attitudes toward the Army, commitment, and intention to reenlist. Reactions to the event itself would be collected from surveys distributed during the Organization Day, and raffle tickets could be provided as an incentive for returning completed surveys. Soldiers and their Family members could be asked to participate. This survey would ask respondents about their attitudes toward the intervention, its perceived utility, and other questions regarding the event.

A similar approach would be used to evaluate the PT morale boosters. Soldiers would be assessed before and after the implementation of the intervention on such variables as commitment, satisfaction, and morale. If possible, it would also be informative to track the Soldiers for approximately a week, including days that PT morale boosters are implemented, as well as days in which they are not. The Soldiers' daily mood, satisfaction, attitudes toward PT, and commitment would then be assessed to determine if the morale boosters have had an impact. NCOs who are not leading PT could also provide information on their Soldiers' affect. Furthermore, Soldiers and NCOs in the experimental group would be surveyed regarding the perceived utility of the intervention.

Both Organization Days and PT morale boosters are expected to have a positive impact on unit morale, cohesion, and commitment. Further, Organization Days have the added benefit of involving Family members, which could positively affect family well-being and support for Army life. Thus, providing Soldiers and their families with organized recreational activities during scheduled work hours could result in improved retention among first term Soldiers.

* 2-6 Online Reenlistment Information Toolkit (derived from Intervention 1-13)

Needs Assessment. Information about military programs, options, and incentives is currently communicated to Soldiers during an orientation session upon arrival at their first unit of assignment. However, according to Soldiers, this is not the most effective method of distributing such information. That is, Soldiers may be exposed to too much new information during this period, in addition to being overwhelmed by their new environment. Further, information regarding reenlistment is not consistently communicated to all Soldiers. Career counselors themselves reported being too busy to meet individually with each Soldier who enters their reenlistment window, and noted that Soldiers simply do not seek them out to get the needed information. Consequently, Soldiers reported difficulty in acquiring current and accurate information regarding available reenlistment opportunities and other career-related information.

Soldiers may benefit from receiving this information again, well after their orientation session and after they have adjusted to their unit, giving them a better frame of reference for understanding the information. Providing Soldiers with access to a centralized location, such as a website, where they can access information about all of the available military programs and policies regarding reenlistment may be beneficial.

Objectives. This intervention intends to fulfill the following objectives:

- Enhance the distribution of information to Soldiers and their spouses/Family members so that they can be more thoroughly informed as to their reenlistment options/alternatives

- Provide a central repository of information and resources regarding reenlistment options/alternatives to standardize the information distribution process

- Facilitate reenlistment by providing accurate, relevant information to Soldiers and their spouses on a timely basis

- Assist reenlistment NCOs and career counselors with the distribution of reenlistment information

- Facilitate contact between Soldiers in their reenlistment window and reenlistment NCOs and career counselors

   Implementation Plan. The proposed intervention could be incorporated into a recently introduced Army program. The Assignment Satisfaction Key (ASK) Program, operated through HRC, enables Soldiers to log-in to an online resource and select preferred assignments. Soldiers are pre-qualified and can select an assignment that is sent to their branch manager, who does a manual input to lock the Soldier in.

   The ASK program is especially useful for Soldiers who have already made their reenlistment decision. However, the proposed intervention would give those Soldiers who have not yet made their reenlistment decision tools to help inform that decision. Therefore the proposed intervention, which focuses on providing reenlistment information and useful reenlistment tools to Soldiers, would be most useful for Soldiers as a first step before they select an assignment using the ASK system.

   First, the proposed intervention would provide Soldiers with a detailed inventory of the current slots available for reenlistment, including opportunities by MOS and location. In addition to providing reenlistment information tailored to the Soldier's current MOS, the proposed

intervention would allow viewing reenlistment information available to other MOSs. If a Soldier would like to reenlist but is interested in a change of MOS, being able to see what opportunities exist in different MOSs may be helpful.

   Next, specific details on the reenlistment incentives available would be provided. Although systems like Sergeant Star provide general information as to what types of reenlistment bonuses are available, specific incentives (or values of incentives) are not provided. A comprehensive list of all incentives available and the requirements to obtain each incentive would be provided. By clearly identifying each incentive and its eligibility requirements, much of the confusion and suspicion surrounding the administration of reenlistment incentives would be alleviated.

Third, a calculator to estimate the SRB for which a given Soldier is eligible would be provided. Although most Soldiers are aware of the generous bonus amounts that their colleagues have received, providing a specific tool that would calculate the exact bonus that he/she would obtain for reenlisting could be useful. Specifically, the SRB calculator could be created to allow a Soldier to enter the length of time he/she would reenlist for, the specific conditions under which he/she would reenlist (e.g., while deployed), as well as any other useful information (e.g., MOS). The resulting bonus amount would provide each Soldier with a personalized estimate of their SRB. This estimate would be conditional upon the Soldier satisfying the conditions required for the bonus, and a disclaimer would emphasize that it is an estimate.

Next, the website would provide a formal side-by-side comparison of the short-term and long-term economic benefits of staying in the Army. This tool would be similar to the chart that career counselors currently use to demonstrate the costs and benefits associated with a civilian career as opposed to a military career. It would also include a comparison of the cost of housing, insurance, benefits, salary, and more.

Fifth, specific career progression information would be provided. Although this information is currently available through AKO and/or branch web-pages, providing the material (or a link to the material) would provide the Soldier immediate access.

Finally, a list of answers to commonly asked reenlistment- and career-related questions would be provided. This resource, which could be assembled through the use of focus-groups, would provide answers to practical questions that are commonly posed by Soldiers at various stages in the reenlistment decision process.

Additionally, this system would be designed to facilitate contact between Soldiers and career counselors/reenlistment NCOs. The system would automatically e-mail a Soldier who enters his/her reenlistment window. These e-mails could provide useful reenlistment information to each Soldier, and would request that they visit with their career counselor or reenlistment NCO (or other such information). The system would also be designed to send a similar e-mail to the career counselors and/or reenlistment NCOs informing them of each Soldier who enters their reenlistment window.

Evaluation Plan. This intervention would be made available to two select units that would be matched in size and MOS with control units who would not have access to the system. For both treatment and control units, a questionnaire would be administered to assess initial levels of Soldiers' knowledge of reenlistment policies, procedures, and incentives, their commitment to the Army, and reenlistment intentions. For those units selected to utilize the new system, the Reenlistment Toolkit would be introduced via informational sessions as well as through e-mails (which would include a link to the Toolkit, as well as information pertaining to the benefits and capabilities of the system). After the system has been introduced, on-line surveys would be administered to users to assess initial ease of use and the overall value of the information provided.

The specific reenlistment tools would also be assessed using online surveys (administered after a Soldier navigates away from a specific tool). For example, after a Soldier uses the SRB calculator, the computer could display an online survey that asks the Soldier his/her perception of the usefulness of the calculator, other useful information the calculator could provide, and its impact on his/her reenlistment decision.

Additionally, several months after the introduction of the Reenlistment Toolkit, a follow-up survey would be administered to the units that had access to the system, and to those control units that did not have access. For both treatment and control units, a questionnaire would be administered to assess Soldiers' levels of knowledge of reenlistment policies, procedures, and incentives, their commitment to the Army, and reenlistment intentions. Additionally, for those units that had access to the Reenlistment Toolkit, a questionnaire could be administered assessing which reenlistment tools they used, the perceived usefulness of each one, and the impact the specific reenlistment tool and the entire Reenlistment Toolkit had on their reenlistment decisions.

Army-wide implementation of the new system could be relatively straight-forward. An e-mail with a link to the Toolkit, as well as information pertaining to the benefits and capabilities of the new system, could be sent to all Soldiers. A long term evaluation could assess the number of Soldiers who use the system and decide to reenlist as compared to those not using the system. Because Soldiers are required to log-in to the ASK system, tracking this information would be feasible.

The proposed intervention directly targets the reenlistment decision. If Soldiers are provided with a clear, concise, and easily accessible central repository of tools and information to assist them, increased reenlistment could be likely. Additionally, the possibility of building on the ASK platform could ease implementation of this new resource.

2-7 ArmyGoogle.mil (derived from Intervention 1-13)

Needs Assessment. Soldiers overwhelmingly exhibited a lack of knowledge regarding the variety of programs and initiatives the Army has implemented to increase their quality of life and the quality of life of their families. They indicated that they would have greatly appreciated and benefited from these programs, however they often did not know about the programs until the need had passed. Additionally, although some Soldiers were aware of specific programs offered by the Army, others serving at the same installations were aware of entirely different programs; still others were unaware of any of the programs discussed. Apparently, there is still great variability in the knowledge of specific programs and initiatives available to Soldiers.

Objectives. This intervention is intended to fulfill the following objectives:

- To enhance the distribution of information to Soldiers and their spouses/Family members so that they can better take advantage of the programs and initiatives the Army offers

- To provide a searchable index of information/resources to standardize the distribution of information across the Army

    Implementation Plan. This intervention proposes the creation of a searchable index of information/resources, such as "www.armygoogle.mil" or a similar type of search engine. Although a current resource, "Sergeant Star", available at http://www.goarmy.com/ChatWithStar.do, makes a significant attempt at addressing this concern, this intervention would be designed to supplement the capabilities of Sergeant Star.

    Through the Sergeant Star program, any individual can enter a question into the intelligent agent. Sergeant Star provides a brief answer to the question, as well as several links to additional information that may be appropriate. Although Sergeant Star is a very useful program, the capabilities are currently limited by the specific questions posed by its users, as well as the answers programmed into the system. Based on the responses that the Sergeant provides, the system appears to be designed to provide general responses to general questions, as opposed to the very specific information required by individual specific questions.

    The proposed intervention is based on the premise that if Soldiers and their families were provided with a clear and concise repository of information, they would be more likely to take advantage of the many programs and initiatives the Army has implemented, and therefore, would be more likely to remain in the Army. A centralized search engine, like "ArmyGoogle", may be a cost-efficient way to provide Soldiers with much needed informational resources.

    This intervention would create a centralized index search-engine resource. This index would be designed to provide the location of all existing Army programs. The categorization of information would include all programs and resources available to Soldiers and their families. This initial effort would involve identifying specific programs/resources available to Soldiers and their families (e.g., a Family Readiness Group (FRG)), documenting the location of the website for the specific program (e.g., http://www.armyfrg.org) and specifying the contents that can be found at each location. This information would:

- be displayed/searchable by post

- be restricted to only display Army-based or Army-approved websites

- only be accessible to Soldiers or Family members of Soldiers

    For example, if a Soldier at Fort Benning wanted to know about job related programs available for his wife at Fort Lewis, he could "ArmyGoogle" job assistance for spouses at Fort Lewis. The database would provide results that were relevant to all Army programs regarding job assistance, as well as those programs that were specific to Fort Lewis.

    Although civilian search engines currently access public-access military websites, the glut of information provided by "Googling" an Army program is overwhelming. Additionally, those Army programs that are installation specific, or that may not currently be available on

public-access websites, are not available to Soldiers who simply attempt to "Google" them. Therefore, the proposed intervention would be especially useful in allowing a Soldier or his/her Family to "ArmyGoogle" specific information. Instead of returning thousands of superfluous links, the "ArmyGoogle" system would return a concise and Army-approved listing of useful information, presented in a convenient and clear manner.

The implementation of this intervention would require the assistance of an internet-based search engine company in order to index the wealth of information that is currently available. It is possible that a company like Google.com or Ask.com may be willing to donate/subsidize the required resources to complete this project as a patriotic gesture.

Evaluation Plan. To evaluate the effectiveness of this intervention, a pilot test of the system would be implemented. The website would be made available to two units, which would be matched in size and MOS with control units who would not have access to the system. For those units selected to utilize the new system, "ArmyGoogle" would be introduced via informational sessions as well as through e-mails. Sometime after the system had been introduced, on-line surveys would be administered to users of the system to assess frequency and ease of use, value of the information provided, and the impact the information had on their lives. It would also be helpful to conduct a pre/post-test comparison regarding Soldiers' knowledge of Army programs and satisfaction with, and commitment to, the Army.

Army-wide implementation of the new system could be relatively straight-forward. An e-mail could be sent to all Soldiers that includes a link to the new system, as well as information describing the benefits and capabilities of the new system. A long term evaluation could assess the percentage of Soldiers using the system that decide to reenlist as compared to those not using the system. Because Soldiers would be required to log-in to the system, tracking this information would be feasible.

* 2-8 Family Resilience Training (FRT) (new)

Needs Assessment. Family-related factors were among those most commonly cited as influencing Soldiers' reenlistment decisions. Spouses were often described as being placed under enormous stress, as well as being unsupportive of Army life due to Soldiers' long work days, frequent deployments, and relocations. Additionally, Soldiers cited missing seeing their children growing up or missing important family events (e.g., the birth of a child) as significant factors adversely impacting their decision to reenlist. Finally, problems adjusting to life as a military family in general can be a negative factor influencing reenlistment decisions. This intervention is geared toward training Soldiers and their Family members to cope with these and other challenges and shocks associated with Army life.

According to the National Network for Family Resiliency (1995) family resilience is a family's ability to meet the challenges of (Army) life. Resilience consists of protective factors (e.g., family celebrations, family hardiness, family health, family time and routines, and family

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traditions) and recovery factors (e.g., a sense of family togetherness, family and community support, optimism about family situations, and a sense of control; McCubbin, McCubbin, Thompson, Han, & Allen, 1997).

Recently, the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research introduced a resilience initiative, referred to as Battlemind (Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command, 2007). The Spouse/Couple Battlemind initiative attempts to maintain family well-being by training resilience and strength during separation and transition periods. Where the Battlemind initiative attempts to improve mental health issues, the FRT intervention is more narrowly intended to sustain and improve commitment towards the Army through building family resilience.

Objectives. This intervention is intended to fulfill the following objectives:

- Provide family resilience training to Soldiers, their spouses, and their Family members

- Provide Soldiers, their spouses, and their Family members realistic expectations of Army life and direct them to available assistance resources

- Implementation Plan. Given the overlap with the Battlemind initiative, we propose collaborative efforts toward understanding the important role resilience training can have on a Soldier's well-being. Rather than exhaust FRG resources, we propose evaluating some aspects of Battlemind training using commitment criteria.

Evaluation Plan. To evaluate the success of the Battlemind program, surveys could be administered to participants at the end of the training program to assess their perceptions of the usefulness of training materials and the value of information presented. Names and e-mail addresses of training participants would be collected voluntarily and used to conduct a follow-up survey. Those Soldiers and their families who were willing to participate would be sent a survey assessing perceptions of Army life, commitment to the Army, thoughts of reenlistment, and family resilience.

Further, a control group would be employed to assess the effectiveness of Family Resilience Training (Battlemind) in increasing family resilience. An FRG at another post that is comparable in size and deployment activity would be administered surveys that assessed perceptions of Army life, commitment to the Army, thoughts of reenlistment, and family resilience. These surveys would be administered at two time points to coincide with the surveys being administered in the treatment groups.

A Family Resilience Training program could provide beneficial outcomes, not only with regard to mental health, but also in that resilient families should be more supportive of their Soldiers and more successful adapting to Army life. Furthermore, the strong support network suggested in the resilience training could be instrumental for new Army families. Family resilience is central to a Soldier's psychological investment in the Army. As discussed earlier, if a

Soldier has an unsupportive spouse/Family, the likelihood of reenlistment decreases significantly. By improving resilience in Soldiers and their families, those families could be more readily equipped to deal with stressful situations and events, and more likely to support a Soldier's continued commitment to the Army.

2-9 Teach Life Skills (new)

Needs Assessment. One of the many things the Army does remarkably well is train Soldiers in a variety of skills that prepare them for their military careers. In fact, developmental opportunities and the acquisition of specific skills/competencies were among the most commonly cited reasons for joining the Army among focus group participants. While developmental opportunities may be available, Soldiers indicated that they are often unable to take advantage of these opportunities because of a lack of time or lack of access due to their unit's priorities. Further, the Army could do a better job of preparing Soldiers to deal with aspects of their life outside the military, both during and after their enlistment.

The purpose of this intervention would be to provide reenlisting Soldiers with the opportunity to participate in a wider variety of developmental programs than are currently available to them. For example, developmental incentives may include hazardous materials (HAZMAT) certification, commercial driving license (CDL) certification, and emergency medical technician (EMT) certification.

Although the Army currently has an Army Training reenlistment option providing Soldiers with guaranteed attendance at an available service school of their choice related to their PMOS, the intent of the current intervention focuses on developmental training opportunities, which could be useful to a Soldier both during his/her military career and in civilian life after the military career. Additionally, unlike the Special MOS Alignment Promotion Program (SMAPP), which allows Soldiers to request reclassification into a selected MOS and receive a promotion, this intervention provides a Soldier with the knowledge and skills to make additional contributions to their current MOS. With this approach, there is a risk that the Soldier receiving the training may be more apt not to reenlist because of increased job opportunities outside the Army. However, we believe that, on balance, the benefits of the program are sufficient to offset that risk.

Objectives. This intervention is intended to fulfill multiple objectives:

- Provide Soldiers with training in skills that would help them both during and after their military careers

- Impress upon Soldiers the importance of life skills beyond the relative security provided on-post and within the constraints of the Army lifestyle

- Impress upon Soldiers the interest that the Army has in seeing Soldiers be successful both during and after their military careers

- Provide Soldiers with another incentive to stay in the Army

Implementation Plan. The primary focus of this intervention is to provide Soldiers training that goes beyond what is required for the primary MOS. We would begin by conducting a brief needs analysis to determine the most beneficial training areas. These may include financial responsibility and awareness, time management skills, technical certifications, or other topic areas. The goal is to select content that Soldiers would find useful, that would directly enhance their lives in and outside the Army, and that would convey the message that the Army is concerned about their well-being. By preparing Soldiers for lives outside the military, this intervention should improve their quality of life, and provide an incentive for them to stay in the Army longer. That is, in addition to providing the technical skills the Army always has, it can incent Soldiers to stay in the Army longer to improve their other life skills.

After the topic areas are determined, we would develop a training curriculum, divided into discrete units, or modules, that could be presented to Soldiers with minimal intrusion on their already limited time. That is, sessions would be designed so that they are brief, deliverable on varying time schedules, and possibly in multiple formats. The actual time and methods for delivery would, of course, vary with content, but the goal would be to maximize the efficiency, and utility to the Soldiers.

Phase two of the implementation would involve delivering the training to a sample of Soldiers. Units would be selected to participate based on availability and command support of training initiatives. Sessions would be conducted with groups of 20 to 30 Soldiers, depending on the availability of participants and the nature of the courses in question. This would likely occur during an umbrella week or some other time that the Soldiers are available.

Evaluation Plan. An experimental design would be used to assess the effectiveness of the training. Initial assessment of Soldiers in the training sessions would include baseline measures of their satisfaction with the Army, perceptions of the Army's concern for their well being, and propensity to reenlist, among others. After the training is complete, similar measures would be administered to determine whether these perceptions change, and a follow-up measure would be conducted three to six months later, to assess the stability of those effects.

Similar measures would be given to a control group of Soldiers in a unit that receives other training courses targeted strictly at MOS-relevant skills. This would allow us to assess the effectiveness of the developed training contents impact on Soldiers' continuance decisions beyond typical Army training. To summarize the evaluation, both the experimental and control groups would be surveyed on several relevant career-related outcomes, including satisfaction, commitment to the Army, and reenlistment intentions, in addition to satisfaction with and feedback regarding the training programs themselves.

Army-wide implementation of the program would simply involve expanding the training sessions to additional posts/units as needed. Additionally, a system would have to be developed whereby Soldiers can self-select into courses when offered. With regard to long-term implications, new content would have to be developed and the initial curricula would have to be updated periodically. However, given the Army's proficiency in training, neither of these issues presents a serious challenge to the success of this program.

2-10 Personal Support/Social Competence Training (derived from Intervention 1-4)

Needs Assessment. Through conversations with Soldiers, we found that some of them have been very limited in their social interactions with culturally diverse populations (e.g., come from small towns or schools, have been sheltered, or haven't experienced being in situations with a lot of people from diverse backgrounds). A lack of experiences in varied social settings can often lead to feelings of isolation and a sense that there is limited personal support for Soldiers in culturally diverse situations.

Furthermore, some Soldiers in our focus groups noted that they would benefit from additional personal support or assistance from their peers and/or leadership. They remarked that their fellow Soldiers or NCOs would often stand by and watch them work as opposed to helping them by offering suggestions, directly performing some of their tasks, providing emotional support, or motivating them by showing confidence in them. This lack of personal support can be demoralizing and can lead to decreased commitment. Additionally, due to recent initiatives, such as Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) that focuses on a structured progression of increased unit readiness over time, Soldiers may remain with the same unit for a period of three years, increasing the need for improved social competence during within unit interactions.

Army-wide implementation of a Personal Support/Social Competence training program could be implemented during IET. Although IET provides an exemplary socialization mechanism, an initial emphasis on increased personal support and social competence during IET would likely increase the socialization of new Soldiers, thus increasing the probability of commitment. Socialization processes, such as initial entry training programs, have consistently been related to increased organizational commitment, (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Ashforth, Saks, & Lee, 1998; Baker, 1992; Jones, 1986; Laker & Steffy, 1995; Mignerey, Rubin, & Gorden, 1995), and job satisfaction (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Baker, 1992; Mignerey et al., 1995), and related to decreased intentions to quit (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Ashforth et al., 1998; Jones, 1986), and turnover (Allen, 2006).

Objectives. This intervention should fulfill the following objectives:

- Improve Soldiers' skills in the Personal Support dimension of contextual performance. Personal Support (Contextual Citizenship performance) includes behaviors that support the

social and psychological fabric of the organization, as opposed to contributing directly to the technical core (Borman, 2004) such as:

- directly performing a fellow Soldier's tasks, helping a fellow Soldier perform their tasks, or volunteering to carry out tasks that are not formally a part of the assigned job;

- teaching a fellow Soldier useful knowledge or skills, or informing a fellow Soldier of events he/she should know about;

- showing consideration, courtesy, and tact in relations with fellow Soldiers, providing emotional support to fellow Soldiers, and motivating and showing confidence in fellow Soldiers;

- helping and cooperating with fellow Soldiers by offering and accepting suggestions;

- persisting with extra effort when necessary to complete tasks successfully; and

- endorsing, supporting, and defending Army objectives and following Army rules and procedures even when they are personally inconvenient.

- Improve Soldiers' skills in Social Competence. Social Competence includes socially effective behavior which is influential in helping people realize goals that are social in nature (Schneider, Ackerman, & Kanfer, 1996)

- Teach effective ways to use Personal Support and Social Competence to motivate battle buddies/fellow Soldiers

- Improve Soldiers' commitment to the Army by more effectively socializing new Soldiers

Implementation Plan. The proposed intervention targets new recruits during their IET process. Building on the current Army focus on the personal values of Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage, the current intervention proposes that recruits need to learn the value of Personal Support and incorporate it into their daily lives as Soldiers. To that end, a multimedia presentation would be developed using clips of popular films that exemplify the aspects of personal support discussed above. These clips would be spliced together to provide several specific examples of effective personal support behaviors. Interspersed between movie segments would be brief instructional presentations explaining the definition of, and relevant information about, the specific aspects of Personal Support being presented. Although this presentation would be informative, it would use comedy and action movie clips to maintain the interest of the recruits. Copyright issues would be investigated and considered in the selection of film clips.

A Personal Support/Social Competence training program could be pilot tested during FORSCOM umbrella week. A group of Soldiers could be requested to participate in the Personal Support/Social Competence training program.

For this pilot test, a pre-training survey would be administered to assess current levels of social competence and personal support skills, among other items. Then, they would see the multimedia presentation.

Evaluation Plan. To evaluate the success of this intervention, surveys would be administered to participants at the end of the training program to assess their perceptions of the usefulness of the training materials, the value of information presented, and to test Soldiers on newly acquired knowledge.

Additionally, control groups would be used to assess the effectiveness of the Personal Support/Social Competence training program. A group of Soldiers would be administered a pre-training survey that would include assessments of social competence and personal support skills, among other items. This control group would receive a training program unrelated to personal support and social competence. A post-training assessment would be administered to measure their perceptions of the usefulness of the training materials, the value of information presented, and to test Soldiers on newly acquired knowledge. If the Personal Support/Social Competence training program is effective, those Soldiers participating in the program would demonstrate higher scores on those items than the control training group. If possible, a follow up should be conducted to collect peer ratings of social competence in the experimental and control groups.

Increasing attention to personal support behaviors during the IET process should result in a boost to Soldiers' commitment. The demonstration of increased Personal Support, through the supportive behaviors explained above, could likely lead to increased unit cohesiveness, in turn resulting in greater normative commitment.

2-11 Adaptability and Resilience Training (derived from Intervention 1-3)

Needs Assessment. New Soldiers undergo many shocks early in their career both during IET and at their first unit of assignment. For example, during IET Soldiers frequently experience events or emotions that may have a negative impact on their commitment to the Army (e.g., homesickness, injury, etc,). Those Soldiers who are able to better cope and adjust to these shocks have a better chance of successfully completing their training and are more likely to have positive experiences at their first unit. Thus, adaptability and resilience are important skills for new Soldiers.

Previous research with the Army has demonstrated that adaptability is an important component of Soldier performance (Pulakos, Arad, Plamondon, & Kiechel, 1996; Pulakos & Dorsey, 2000). In addition, our recent focus group research with drill sergeants suggested that trainee adaptability was one of the most frequent problems related to attrition or "near-attrition".

Resilience, a related concept, refers to an individual's ability to positively adapt to situations of adversity. Some researchers regard resilience as a dynamic process that may vary with context and can be learned (e.g., Flach, 1980). Combining these two concepts into a training program for developing adaptability and resilience skills would provide an important skill-set for new Soldiers while helping them adjust and cope with some of the stressful experiences that may cause them to separate from Army.

Objectives. This intervention is intended to fulfill multiple objectives:

- Provide Soldiers with the tools and strategies to develop adaptive and resilient cognitions and behaviors

- Provide drill sergeants with the knowledge and tools to follow-up Soldier training with additional coaching and feedback

- Train drill sergeants to recognize opportunities in existing training exercises for Soldiers to demonstrate adaptable and resilient behaviors

- Train drill sergeants to provide targeted feedback to Soldiers regarding effective resilient and adaptive behaviors

Implementation Plan. The primary focus of this intervention involves training Soldiers on the knowledge and skills to adapt to stressful and challenging events they will face during their early Army career. Drill sergeant instruction is also a critical piece of this intervention because drill sergeants can reinforce the concepts during IET. Thus, the training intervention would be implemented in two phases.

The first phase would involve training new Soldiers about the concepts of adaptability and resilience. In 2004, White, Mueller-Hanson, Dorsey, and Pulakos developed a training intervention to improve individual adaptive performance on the job among Army Special Operations officers and NCOs. The course was designed to prepare students to handle job-specific situations that required them to adjust their cognitions or behaviors. The training was a 3 ½ day course developed as part of the Special Forces Qualification Course.

A similar, condensed version could be developed for Soldiers in IET. Specific topics addressed may include learning about mental adaptability, or changing cognitions to effectively deal with new situations, interpersonal adaptability, or changing behaviors to effectively interact with others, and intrapersonal resilience, or developing strategies to effectively cope with a variety of stressors. Other important aspects of adaptability may also be identified. Soldiers could participate in a classroom, lecture-style training session, where they would be introduced to the general concepts through background information, examples, and brief exercises. In addition, Soldiers would participate in role-play scenarios to practice the strategies and techniques that would help them implement the lecture material in their daily lives. We suggest incorporating this material early in IET, perhaps during down-time at the Reception Battalion.

The second phase of this intervention involves training drill sergeants about the concepts so they understand and can reinforce the concepts the Soldiers learn. This session would be a more concise version of the training and would focus on the general concepts, case studies tailored to the training environment (e.g., BCT, AIT), and examples of how drill sergeants can reinforce the training in existing exercises with little additional effort.

The idea here is to provide drill sergeants with tools and strategies so that they can provide targeted feedback regarding Soldiers' behaviors. This training could be incorporated into the Drill Sergeant Training School or as an add-on to some existing post-specific training for drill sergeants.

Evaluation Plan. An experimental design would be used to assess the effectiveness of the adaptability and resilience training. For the initial assessment, drill sergeants at a training post would participate in a two-hour training session, and their Soldiers would participate in two, two-hour training sessions. An alternative would be to pilot test the intervention during a FORSCOM umbrella week. Instead of implementing the training with drill sergeants and Soldiers in IET, the training could be conducted with first term Soldiers and their squad leaders and platoon sergeants from a specific battalion.

Several criteria could be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the training. Specifically, we would consider four levels of outcomes: (1) participant reactions; (2) knowledge acquisition; (3) behavior change; and (4) impact on organizational-level results (e.g., training mission accomplishment, poor behavior incidents, and attrition). Participant reactions are typical in training evaluations and provide general descriptive information regarding participants' perceptions of the usefulness of the training. Knowledge acquisition could be measured with a simple pre/post-test within group comparison and a post-test between group comparison (with the control group) to determine if the training improved knowledge about the general concepts and strategies presented in training. Behavioral change may be difficult to assess, but could be measured by comparing peer and drill sergeant ratings of adaptable and resilient behaviors with the control group. Finally, we would follow-up at the end of the training cycle to gather administrative criteria such as incident reports, graduation rates, and sick calls.

Adaptability and resilience involve cognitions and behaviors that can be learned and developed. These skills are important for Soldiers learning to adjust to the Army, as well as first term Soldiers who must adapt to everything from the day-to-day frustrations of Army life to the high-stress of repeated deployments. Training these Soldiers to practice effective coping strategies may have a significant impact on their overall adjustment, and subsequently on their satisfaction and commitment to the Army.

*** 2-12 Realistic Job Preview (derived from Intervention 1-5)**

Needs Assessment. Transitioning from civilian to military life can be a shock to new Soldiers. One way to mitigate this is to provide Soldiers with an accurate portrayal or an RJP of

what is expected from them as they begin their Army careers. RJPs are traditionally used as a recruitment tool in the private sector to convey both positive and negative aspects of the job, contributing to more informed decision making by applicants (Breaugh & Billings, 1988). Additionally, research suggests that RJPs can have an impact on reducing attrition (McEvoy & Cascio, 1985; Premack & Wanous, 1985).

Based on feedback from IET drill sergeants, some recruits enter the Army with unrealistic expectations about the military and experience difficulty adjusting to IET. Additionally, according to the technical advisory panel, an RJP would be effective if implemented at the first unit of assignment. Thus, offering new Soldiers an RJP at two points during their first term, once at the Reception Battalion and once at their first unit of assignment, would reduce misconceptions and encourage realistic expectations about the Army.

The National Guard's "Recruit Sustainment Program" (RSP) conducts a pre-IET training program intended to introduce future Soldier to the military environment and prepare them for training with a variety of classroom and field exercises. The goal of this program is to begin to develop Soldiers' sense of commitment to the Army, prepare the Soldiers both mentally and physically for IET, and thus reduce attrition. Although the RSP is more comprehensive than what we propose, there are areas of overlap that would likely benefit the Active component.

Objectives. This intervention aims to fulfill the following objectives:

- Ease the transition from civilian to Army life

- Provide new Soldiers with a realistic portrayal of what to expect during IET and during their first unit of assignment, including day-to-day operations

- Reduce uncertainties and eliminate the potential for unmet expectations

 Implementation Plan. We recommend working with the National Guard to provide the Active Army with an RJP that has content similar to what is taught to Soldiers in the RSP. The RJPs would consist of video-taped vignettes of positive and negative aspects of Army life experienced during IET and a Soldier's first unit of assignment. The videos would be developed by the research team with guidance from key SMEs who have experienced similar situations. Additionally, representative SMEs from the recruiting command, TRADOC, FORSCOM, and the National Guard's RSP would be solicited for feedback regarding the content for the RJPs. In addition to providing valuable content information, this would also promote buy-in from key stakeholders.

 More specifically, the proposed RJP video would include typical situations encountered during IET (e.g., PT, formation, classroom training) and the first unit of assignment (e.g., equipment maintenance, field exercise, preparing for deployment, last minute tasking, etc.). Additionally, it would incorporate testimonials from Soldiers who have recently successfully

completed IET and Soldiers approaching the end of their first unit of assignment, again, making sure to realistically address both positive and negative aspects of Army life.

Once the RJP content is solidified, a support staff could be recruited to assist with the technical aspects of filming the RJP videos. Thus, the research team and the technical staff could work closely with key stakeholders to identify those installations most appropriate for filming, to select Soldiers to be interviewed for the testimonials, and to clarify technical and logistical issues. These may include determining the length of the video, developing the soundtrack, and obtaining consent to be video-taped.

IET RJP Video Implementation. Implementation of the RJP videos would take place as a pilot study at select TRADOC and FORSCOM installations. A logical choice might be to pilot test the RJP videos at installations involved in the initial filming and development. The IET RJP video would be presented to receptees upon arrival at the Reception Battalion (within 24 to 48 hours). There, recruits experience considerable idle time while being processed into the Army. During this idle time, drill sergeants would present the IET RJP video to recruits.

First Unit of Assignment RJP Video Implementation. Soldiers would view the first unit of assignment RJP video upon initial arrival. The first unit of assignment RJP video would be incorporated into the initial orientation for new Soldiers that typically occurs within the first week of arriving to the unit.

Evaluation Plan. A quasi-experimental design would be employed to evaluate the effectiveness of the RJP intervention. Within each participating TRADOC installation, groups of recruits using the IET RJP video would be compared to groups of recruits who do not see the RJP video. More specifically, at the end of IET, as the Soldier approaches graduation, a survey would be administered by the research staff to both the treatment and control groups assessing the recruits' expectations, satisfaction with IET, satisfaction with leadership, commitment to the Army, intentions to stay, and other variables related to attrition. Likewise, among each participating FORSCOM installation, units incorporating the first unit of assignment RJP video into their initial orientation would be compared to units not using the video. To assess the effectiveness of the RJP video, surveys would be administered by the research staff six months after the initial implementation of the RJP. Similar to the IET evaluation, the survey would measure the Soldiers' expectations, satisfaction (with the unit, leadership, assignment, and installation), intentions to stay, and other variables relevant to attrition. Additionally, attrition statistics would be collected after the implementation of the intervention for the experimental and control groups during the same time period. Ideally, several experimental and comparison control groups should be used in the evaluation to more accurately assess the effectiveness of the RJP.

Providing new Soldiers with realistic expectations through RJP videos could lead to a decrease in attrition, based on findings from private sector research. Soldiers would know from the beginning what to expect in IET and in their first unit of assignment, reducing anxiety

regarding unknowns or disappointments due to unmet expectations. Soldiers can use this information early on to identify ways to proactively cope with negative expectations. Additionally, the development costs for the RJP videos are quite reasonable when compared to the financial investment in recruiting and training a new recruit (well over $50,000).

Furthermore, costs associated with expanding the RJP video intervention are minimal due to low costs associated with producing multiple copies. Thus, the RJP can be considered a cost-effective intervention aimed at reducing attrition.

2-13 Empowerment Training (new)

Needs Assessment. Promotion to the NCO level (E5 and above) is the natural progression for enlisted Soldiers planning on making the Army a full-time career. In some situations, rapid promotions will occur in order to meet Army personnel requirements. In such cases, NCOs experience a limited amount of development time to establish the technical and leadership expertise necessary to be effective in higher positions. As a result, junior-level NCOs may experience difficulties transitioning into leadership roles and obtaining the respect of their Soldiers. One way to boost NCO experience is to empower junior-level NCOs, as described below. Providing senior leadership with the skills necessary to empower their junior-level NCOs, while simultaneously teaching junior leadership to take a more proactive role, could result in more effective leadership development. Increasing junior-level NCOs' sense of autonomy and responsibility would provide NCOs with the experience required to successfully manage their Soldiers.

Empowerment. Empowerment can be viewed from either a psychological or an organizational practice perspective. Psychological empowerment is defined as the intrinsic motivation to engage in certain behaviors (Conger & Kanungo, 1988) and consists of the following four cognitive dimensions: (1) meaning or the value placed on work goals; (2) competence or personal mastery; (3) self-determination or autonomy; and (4) impact or perceived influence on outcomes (Spreitzer, 1995). In essence, individuals are psychologically empowered if they have meaning in their work, do their job well, have the freedom to make decisions, and influence their work outcomes.

From an organizational practice perspective, empowerment is "a practice, or set of practices involving the delegation of responsibility down the hierarchy so as to give employees increased decision-making authority in respect to the execution of their primary work tasks" (Leach, Wall, & Jackson, 2003, p.28). This type of empowerment focuses on the actual procedures employed within an organization. For example, one organization may provide employees only with the opportunity to offer suggestions, while another organization may offer direct participation in the management of the work unit.

Civilian research suggests that mid-level supervisors with high levels of empowerment are viewed by their subordinates as more innovative, upward influencing, and inspirational

(Spreitzer, De Janasz, & Quinn, 1999). Based on this finding, fostering psychological empowerment in addition to employing organizational practices that facilitate empowerment could result in an increased respect for junior NCOs, potentially improving the leadership climate and, in turn, positively impacting retention rates. To summarize, the overall purpose of the intervention is to provide a psychological empowerment training program, targeting junior and senior-level NCOs to foster a leadership environment that encourages autonomy, decision-making authority, and ownership, to improve the perception of leadership by enlisted Soldiers.

Objectives. This intervention intends to fulfill the following objectives:

- Provide adequate background on psychological empowerment to junior-level NCOs and senior leadership

- Train senior leadership to increase information flow and delegation of responsibility to junior-level NCOs

- Provide junior-level NCOs with the skills necessary to take a more active, rather than passive, leadership role

- Facilitate an exchange between senior leadership and junior-level NCOs to effectively distribute decision-making authority and increase empowerment at the junior level

Implementation Plan. In order to maximize the likelihood of positive results from the empowerment training, changes to the leadership climate are required. Junior-level NCOs would have difficulty feeling empowered if their senior-level NCOs are neither delegating decision-making authority, nor providing an environment conducive to increased autonomy and responsibility. Therefore, the empowerment training would target NCOs at the junior and senior-level (E5 to E8) in order to provide both levels of leadership with the tools to effectively develop an empowered leadership force.

Training content would be developed by the research team and would include background information on psychological empowerment, organizational empowerment practices, empowered behaviors, and leadership. To facilitate learning, role plays between junior and senior-level NCOs would be conducted.

After the empowerment training is developed, the research team could pilot test the training at select FORSCOM installations during umbrella week. Participating installations would be selected based on focus group feedback, which identified posts experiencing rapid promotions of enlisted Soldiers to the junior NCO level.

Evaluation Plan. Spreitzer's (1995) psychological empowerment scale would be administered to junior-level NCOs as a pre-training questionnaire to assess their initial levels of empowerment on the four dimensions. Sample items include "The work I do is meaningful" (meaning); "I am confident in my ability to do my job" (competence); "I have significant

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autonomy in determining how I do my job (self-determination); and "My impact on what happens in my department is large" (impact). An additional pre-training questionnaire would be administered to senior-level NCOs assessing the existing organizational practices that encourage empowerment within the specific leadership climate (e.g., decision-making latitude, open-door policy, etc.). To evaluate the success of this intervention during the pilot testing, the research team would administer surveys assessing participants' initial reactions immediately upon completion of the training. Specifically, participants' feedback on the strengths and areas for improvement, the perceived utility of the training, the length of the training, and the use of multimedia would be collected. To evaluate transfer of training, Spreitzer's (1995) psychological empowerment scale would be re-administered to junior-level NCOs three to six months after training implementation. Additionally, questions addressing existing organizational constraints that may hinder junior-level NCOs' feelings of empowerment would also be measured. Finally, enlisted Soldiers would be surveyed to assess their overall satisfaction with junior leadership.

Empowering junior leadership is expected to result in increased job satisfaction of junior-level NCOs, which should result in more positive evaluations of the leadership climate by their enlisted Soldiers. Because satisfaction, trust, and respect for leadership are critical factors influencing enlisted Soldiers' retention decisions, improving the leadership climate is one avenue for encouraging reenlistment decisions of first term enlisted Soldiers.

2-14 Leadership Trailing Program (new)

Needs Assessment. As mentioned previously, NCOs are being promoted rapidly in order to meet the Army's manpower needs. More specifically, certain NCO positions are currently understrength, often resulting in rapid advancement into junior-level NCO positions. As a consequence, junior-level NCOs may feel ill-prepared for their leadership roles. One possible solution would be to provide high-potential or recently promoted junior-level NCOs with high-quality leadership experiences to feel better prepared for the NCO role. These high-quality leadership experiences would involve exposure to the NCO role in a controlled environment where junior-level NCOs can learn and practice leadership strategies employed by successful senior-level NCOs.

The purpose of the proposed intervention, the Leadership Trailing Program, is to provide participants with the opportunity to serve in an NCO role for a brief period of time while being supervised to become familiar with the position. In essence, a junior-level NCO would "trail" or follow a seasoned, senior-level NCO to observe and practice leadership skills. A senior-level NCO, would, in turn, serve as the "Trail Guide" by providing constructive feedback to help the junior level NCOs or "Trailers" enhance their leadership skills. Additionally, providing a formal avenue for obtaining leadership experience prior to the NCO role would increase junior-level NCOs' feelings of self-efficacy and confidence in leadership positions, further defining their leadership styles.

Objectives. This intervention intends to fulfill the following objectives:

- Provide high-potential and recently promoted NCOs with the opportunity to experience and practice serving in a leadership role

- Provide a safe environment for potential and recently promoted NCOs to exercise their leadership capabilities

- Increase the self-efficacy of potential and recently promoted NCOs regarding their leadership skills

Implementation Plan. The Leadership Trailing Program would be implemented in three phases: (1) the development phase; (2) the training phase; and (3) the implementation phase. The first phase, the development phase, involves collecting information from key SMEs to establish the program's guidelines and to develop handbooks for the "Trail Guides" and "Trailers."

Focus groups would be conducted with junior and senior-level NCOs to identify specific activities, leadership experiences, and rules and regulations that would be useful for successful implementation of the Trailing Program.

The second phase, the training phase, requires participation from targeted FORSCOM installations selected based on feedback from prior data collections. Specifically, FORSCOM installations with leadership climate issues would be invited to participate in the initial pilot testing of the Leadership Trailing Program. Brigade commanders would be asked to identify top senior NCOs to participate in the initial pilot testing of the Leadership Trailing Program in addition to high-potential, or recently promoted, junior-level NCOs. Research staff would provide Leadership Trailing Program training to the pilot participants. Content of the training would include a general overview of the Leadership Trailing Program, strategies for giving and receiving constructive feedback, and Trailing activities to facilitate learning of leadership strategies.

Once the pilot program participants have completed training, trailing assignments would be scheduled, leading to phase three of the intervention. During the implementation phase, Trailers would participate in leadership positions for at least one week. Trail Guides would involve the Trailers in various leadership activities, offering advice and effective leadership strategies along the way. At the end of the week, Trail Guides would provide Trailers with constructive feedback on their leadership skills and abilities, identifying specific strengths and areas for improvement.

Evaluation Plan. After initial implementation of the pilot program, surveys would be administered to program participants assessing the overall satisfaction with the Leadership Trailing Program and identifying areas for improvement. Furthermore, six months after participating in the Leadership Trailing Program, Trailers would be surveyed to determine their

perceptions of preparedness for their future or current leadership roles. Their survey results would be compared to a matched sample (e.g., similar experience, MOS, unit, installation) of junior-level NCOs not involved in the Leadership Trailing Program.

By improving the leadership climate, the Leadership Trailing Program could indirectly impact retention decisions for first term enlisted Soldiers. Specifically, providing new leaders with early opportunities to experience leadership roles in a "safe" environment would increase their confidence and help define their leadership styles. Accordingly, developing effective leadership could impact followers' perceptions and result in an increased respect for leadership, and, perhaps, an increased probability of reenlistment.

* 2-15 Training for Drill Sergeants (derived from Intervention 1-8)

Needs Assessment. One of the initial challenges new Soldiers face upon entering the Army is adjustment to the Army lifestyle. Because of the difficulty of this transition, some Soldiers experience some level of homesickness or frustration. Moreover, research suggests that most individuals experience heightened levels of stress and increased mood swings when transitioning into a new life situation (Martin, Williamson, Alfonso, & Ryan, 2006). Although research suggests that recruits learn to adjust to basic training as evidenced by reduced levels of anxiety and depression at the end of training (Martin et al., 2006), leaders can further enhance a recruit's adjustment by providing effective supervisory support and recommending existing Army counseling programs.

As they adjust to Army life, Soldiers experience the process of socialization into the Army culture. Specifically, Soldiers learn to identify and accept the Army's customs, language, attitudes, and values as their own. Drill sergeants play an integral role in this socialization process (Katz, 1990). They contribute to the new Soldiers' first impressions of the Army while teaching them fundamental skills, and functioning as role models. Private sector research suggests that improved socialization contributes to positive organizational outcomes, such as enhanced organizational commitment (Adkins, 1995; Bauer, Morrison, & Callister, 1998; Fisher, 1986; Haueter, Macan, & Winter, 2003; Hellman & McMillin, 2001; Louis, Posner, & Powell, 1983), job satisfaction (Bauer et al., 1998; Fisher, 1986; Louis et al., 1983), decreased intentions to quit, reduced turnover (Bauer et al., 1998; Fisher, 1986; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000), decreased role conflict (Slaughter & Zickar, 2006), and decreased work withdrawal (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003).

Thus, the Training for Drill Sergeants program is designed to provide leaders with the tools necessary to facilitate a climate that eases the adjustment and socialization process of new Soldiers.

Objectives. This intervention aims to fulfill the following objectives:

- Enhance a Soldier's adjustment and socialization to Army life

- Provide leadership with information on how to identify new Soldiers who may have difficulties initially adjusting to the Army

- Provide leadership with information on available Army counseling resources (e.g., Army OneSource; Army Family Team Building)

- Teach leadership about group socialization and stress the acceptance of rules and consistency

- Introduce an internet-based resource through NCOnet for leadership to exchange best practice information

Implementation Plan. The training program would involve designing and implementing changes to the current Drill Sergeant Candidate curriculum, addressing both psychological adjustment and socialization issues. The goal would be to establish a curriculum more focused on the relationship between the drill sergeant/leader and the Soldier, rather than just focused on skill refinement. Example adjustment content areas may include individual differences in psychological adjustment, coping skills, identification of warning signs, and information related to available Army counseling programs. The socialization segment of the training could cover topics such as institutionalized socialization tactics, effective social support, and effective mentoring strategies.

Additionally, examples of effective and ineffective drill sergeant behaviors would be documented as part of a "best practices" training tool. A critical incident approach would be used to create a body of scenarios or vignettes that demonstrate the most effective behaviors organized around dimensions of drill sergeant performance (e.g., training, counseling). The "best practices" training tool would be available to all drill sergeants and would demonstrate effective drill sergeant behaviors related to retention in IET.

After the training program is developed, the research team would pilot test it with drill sergeants at a selected TRADOC site. If a TRADOC site is unavailable, it would also be possible to conduct a pilot test at a FORSCOM installation during umbrella week with unit NCOs.

More specifically, the training program would be delivered face-to-face and would incorporate multiple instructional methods, such as role plays, partner exercises, and video clips. Furthermore, the program could be supplemented with an on-line information-sharing component, a resource for leadership to exchange additional "best practices" behaviors. The on-line message board would allow NCOs to exchange thoughts and ideas on socializing new Soldiers into the Army and offer additional examples of effective/ineffective drill sergeant

behaviors. Additionally, to encourage participation, each seasoned drill sergeant offering suggestions for best practice would have a "spotlight" posted on-line. The spotlight would feature a brief biography documenting the drill sergeant's accomplishments and awards.

Evaluation Plan. In order to identify improvements in new Soldier adjustment and socialization, research staff would administer a survey to the participants' subordinates prior to the training and three to six months after the training. The survey would include measures of stress, depression, anxiety, socialization, leadership satisfaction, and commitment to the Army. Improvements from pre- to post-test training would suggest that the training program was successful in meeting its main objectives. In addition, pilot training participants would be administered a survey assessing initial reactions to the training, relevance to their MOS, strengths of the training, and areas for improvement.

Facilitating the adjustment of new Soldiers to the Army may decrease feelings of stress and anxiety, leading to reduced attrition from basic training. Further, improving the socialization process of new Soldiers into the Army could increase feelings of unit cohesiveness, thereby leading to improved retention and decreased unit attrition.

Summary

As part of the Enlisted STAY project, the Soldier Transition Survey and Unit Retention Climate Feedback System were selected for preliminary implementation and evaluation. Based on consideration from several sources, these interventions were chosen for their potential to positively influence the retention of junior Soldiers and NCOs in the Active Army. The process of selecting the interventions was extensive, and several promising intervention concepts were identified and highlighted throughout. We described this process and the additional intervention concepts in an effort to promote future research and initiatives that may further impact career continuance decisions.

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CHAPTER 5 – SOLDIER TRANSITION SURVEY

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This chapter describes the development and initial testing of the Soldier Transition Survey. The immediate goal was to develop an instrument to identify the reasons that junior Soldiers and NCOs decide to stay in or separate from the Active Army. Additionally, we identified and evaluated alternative sources for collecting this career continuance information more efficiently in the future.

Introduction

The Soldier Transition Survey is the first of two interventions developed as part of the STAY project to improve the career continuance of junior Soldiers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs). This survey was designed to help the Army better understand the reasons junior-level Soldiers and NCOs decide to stay in or leave the Active Army upon contract completion. Whereas the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System explored unit-level factors (discussed further in Chapter 6), the Soldier Transition Survey focused on individual-level factors that influence career continuance decisions.

One goal of the Soldier Transition Survey was to provide timely, scientifically-based information to help Army leadership understand, forecast, and manage the reenlistment trends of junior Soldiers (E1-E4) and NCOs (E5-E6). Specifically, the primary reasons that Soldiers and NCOs consider when making the decision to stay in or separate from the Active Army were explored and identified. Given the inherent difficulties associated with capturing Soldier data in a timely manner, we also examined the feasibility of using alternative sources of information as proxies for Soldiers. The idea was that these proxy groups might be able to provide valid information regarding the reasons Soldiers decide to stay in or separate from the Army and may be a more accessible source of information.

The following sections describe the development of the Soldier Transition Survey, data collection design, instrument and proxy sample evaluation, and implications for future use of the Soldier Transition Survey.

Survey Development

Survey Content

The content of the Soldier Transition Survey was developed from several sources. First, we conducted interviews and focus groups in FY07 to gather information to guide the development of the Soldier Transition Survey, including reviewing the factors associated with first term enlisted Soldier and junior NCO career continuance in the Army. Next, we reviewed the factors and constructs within the Career Continuance Model. This review included examining the content of the Model Development and Testing Surveys that were used to inform the model. The interview and focus group participants and resulting themes and factors are discussed in detail in Chapter 2 of this report; the Model Development and Testing Surveys and the Career Continuance Model are discussed in Chapter 3 of this report. Thus, in this chapter we focus only on the information relevant to the development of the Soldier Transition Survey.

These sources identified a broad array of themes and factors related to the decision to stay in or leave the Active Army. As we noted in Chapter 2, many of the factors were similar for junior Soldiers and junior NCOs. However, several differences between the two groups were identified. For example, some factors (e.g., job/financial security, Army benefits, deployments, and family support) were important for both groups, while others were more influential for junior Soldiers (e.g., unmet expectations, perceptions of deception, and discipline) or for junior NCOs (e.g., career advancement, educational opportunities). Thus, as we developed the Soldier Transition Survey, we included items relevant to both junior-level Soldiers and NCOs, allowing us to examine these group differences more closely during data analyses.

We identified 10 content areas that appeared to be related to the career continuance decisions of junior Soldiers and NCOs. These content areas included: MOS/Assignment; Career Progression; Deployments; Unit Leadership; Peers; Unit Cohesion; Family Support and Concern; Quality of Life; Army Benefits; and Alternatives to Army Career. We developed two sets of items for these 10 content areas, as some of the items were neutrally-worded and might have different meanings for different Soldiers. The first set of items asked Soldiers to indicate their satisfaction/dissatisfaction with different aspects of these 10 content areas, and the second set of items asked Soldiers to indicate how important those items were to their decision to leave or stay in the Active Army. Both sets of items utilized a 9-point response scale. For the satisfaction/dissatisfaction scale, responses ranged from "Extremely Dissatisfied (1)" to "Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied (5)" to "Extremely Satisfied (9)". Similarly, for the importance scale, responses ranged from "Extremely Important Reason to LEAVE (1)" to "NOT an Important Reason to LEAVE or STAY (5)" to "Extremely Important Reason to STAY (9)".

In addition to the items on the 10 content areas, we included demographic and background items, and items pertaining to deployment experience (e.g., months deployed, number of times deployed), number of reenlistments, time left in contract, and career intentions (i.e., reenlistment decision).

We also added a 9-item Army commitment scale. Finally, we asked Soldiers and NCOs to indicate the extent to which certain incentives (e.g., reenlistment bonus, choice of duty location, opportunity to change MOS, opportunities for increased training) would increase their desire to remain in the Active Army.

Data Collection Design

As noted earlier, the Soldier Transition Survey intervention initiative was developed for two purposes: (1) to examine the reasons junior Soldiers (E1-E4) and junior NCOs (E5-E6) decided to leave or stay in the Active Army upon completion of their contract term; and (2) to evaluate and compare the results from the Soldiers and NCOs to potential proxy groups. To accomplish these goals, we developed three forms of the Soldier Transition Survey: (1) a General Form; (2) an Exit Form; and (3) a Manager Form.

General Form. The General Form of the survey was developed for junior Soldiers and NCOs who were in their reenlistment window (i.e., within 24 months of completing their current service obligation) or had recently decided to reenlist (i.e., reenlisted within the last 0 – 3 months). This form included all of the items described in the survey content section.

Exit Form. The Exit Form was developed for junior Soldiers and NCOs who were actively out-processing at the Transition Centers. Because exiting Soldiers are likely less motivated to complete a lengthy, in-depth survey, this form focused on a subset of the background and demographic items, as well as a subset of items for each of the content areas asking the importance to the Soldiers' leave/stay decision. It did not include the satisfaction/dissatisfaction set of items, the commitment scale, or incentives items.

Manager Form. To further explore the use of proxy samples and whether individuals who work closely with Soldiers could provide useful information regarding the reasons that influence continuance decisions, we created a Manager Form. The intent of the Manager Form was to collect data from experts who work closely with junior Soldiers and NCOs as they make decisions about their career plans, such as Army Career Alumni Program (ACAP) Transition Services Managers (TSMs) and career counselors. TSMs are responsible for managing the ACAP services that support Soldiers who are transitioning out of the Army. Career counselors are NCOs who have special duties in the area of retention management and fall under the Army's human resources system. If surveying these individuals yield comparable information to that obtained from the Soldiers themselves, future assessments may be able to utilize them as a more efficient proxy sample. Thus, the Manager Form consisted of all the items that were included on the General Form with the exception of the demographic, background, and experience items and the commitment scale. Further, the instructions on this form differed slightly, as the TSMs and career counselors were asked to rate how most separating junior-level Soldiers and NCOs would respond to the items. In addition, we added a 'don't know' response option, so that the TSMs and

career counselors could indicate if they were uncertain about how Soldiers would respond. Additionally, career counselors were asked to provide assessments of the reenlistment performance of their units.

On two separate survey items, they indicated whether their units had failed, met, or exceeded initial and midcareer reenlistment goals that had been set for their units for the previous quarter.

To summarize, all three survey forms focused on the same 10 content areas, but the number and types of items varied to some extent. Whereas the General and Exit Forms collected self-report data, the Manager Form collected informed judgments from expert samples. Where possible, anchor items in all three forms were used to make comparisons and examine patterns of responses across the different samples. Table 5-1 provides a comparison of the content of the three surveys. Additionally, the survey forms are available in their entirety in Appendices 5-1, 5-2, and 5-3.

Table 5-1. Soldier Transition Survey Content Comparisons

Item Content	General Form — Soldiers in Reenlistment Window and Soldiers who Recently Reenlisted	Exit Form — Exiting Soldiers at Transition Center	Manager Form — Transition Services Managers and Career Counselors
Demographics & Military Experiences	25	11	N/A
Commitment Scale	9	0	0
Reenlistment Incentives	10	10	10
Satisfaction Items[A]	65	0	65
Importance to Stay/Leave Decision[B]	65	38	65
Most Important Reasons to Stay	2	0	2
Most Important Reasons to Leave	2	0	2

[A] These items asked respondents to indicate level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction within each content area.

[B] These items asked respondents to indicate importance to the decision to leave or stay in the Active Army within each content area.

Intervention Testing and Development

Survey Administration

Response Rate

  General Form. During Spring and Summer 2008, the research team sent the General Form of the Soldier Transition Survey to career counselors at four Army posts, along with specific instructions on how to select Soldiers for participation in the survey. Career counselors were asked to obtain data from junior Soldiers and NCOs who were in their reenlistment window and eligible to reenlist (i.e., within 24 months of completing their current service obligation) or had recently decided to reenlist (i.e., reenlisted within the last 0 – 3 months). The career counselors were responsible for gathering the completed data and sending it back to the project staff for data entry and analysis. In addition, the project team conducted a data collection at one Army post with a large sample similar to the one described above. In total, 1425 Soldiers and NCOs completed the General Form of the Soldier Transition Survey.

  Exit Form. In a timeframe similar to the General Form, the research team sent Exit Form surveys to Transition Center Managers at 14 posts throughout the continental United States, along with specific instructions to hand out surveys to junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs as they complete their out-processing paperwork. The Transition Center Managers sent the surveys back to the project staff for data entry and analyses. A total of 656 exiting Soldiers and NCOs completed the Exit Form of the Soldier Transition Survey.

  Manager Form. Additionally, the research team sent Manager Form surveys to TSMs and career counselors in and outside the continental United States. Each survey packet included a letter describing the purpose of the effort and requesting their participation. Additionally, 10 career counselors participated during an on-site data collection at one large Army post. In total, responses were collected from 65 career counselors and TSMs at 31 installations, including seven installations outside the continental United States (OCONUS).

Data Cleaning

  As with the other databases, we used several steps to clean the paper-and-pencil surveys and eliminate poor-quality data from the database. Most of the surveys (i.e., General and Exit Forms) were scanned directly into a computerized database. A project staff member checked the scanned data against the paper-and-pencil survey for a subset of the sample (approximately 10%). All items coded as "blank" by the scanner were also manually checked. When available, missing data were hand entered. For the Manager Form, data were hand entered by two project members, and data were examined for consistency. Project team members also manually entered responses to open-ended questions for all three survey forms. All ambiguous responses and unusual cases were flagged in the database.

  All flagged cases were manually checked and addressed by applying the decision rules used for the other databases.

We also checked the data for impossible values, inappropriate handling of the skip pattern (for the Manager Form only), random responding, lack of variance in responding, and missing data.

General Form. Of the 1425 Soldiers who took the General Form, 242 cases were dropped, including 16 cases with a large portion of missing data, 163 cases flagged during data entry for random responding, and 8 cases with lack of variance in response patterns (i.e., six or more survey pages with no variance in responses). Additionally, 52 cases were dropped because they were not part of our target sample (i.e., they had more than 10 years of Army service and/or a rank higher than E-6), and 3 cases were dropped because of missing data on key variables (ETS date and/or reenlistment status). This resulted in a total of 1183 sets of responses on the General Form. Although the General Form was initially intended for two cohorts – those in their reenlistment window and those who recently reenlisted – we also received survey data from a third cohort: junior Soldiers and NCOs who were not eligible to reenlist at the time of survey administration because they were more than 24 months from completing their service obligation. A total of 321 cases fell into this category.

Exit Form. Of the 656 out-processing Soldiers and NCOs at the Transition Centers who completed the Exit Form, data from 161 participants were deleted from the database. Specifically, 80 cases were flagged for deletion during data entry due to random and/or uniform responding; 5 cases were deleted because of a significant amount of missing data; 47 cases were identified as lacking variance in responding based on a standard deviation of zero across several sections of the survey; and 29 cases were not part of our target sample (i.e., they had more than 10 years of Army service and/or a rank higher than E-6).

Manager Form. A total of 65 TSMs and career counselors filled out the Manager Form of the Soldier Transition Survey. Data from ten of them were dropped from the database during data cleaning. Six cases were flagged for uniform responding, based on three or more survey sections having no variance, and data from 4 cases were deleted because respondents were not identified as being TSMs or career counselors.

Thus, the final, cleaned datasets used in subsequent analyses included survey responses from 1733 Soldiers, including (1) 1183 Soldiers and junior NCOs who recently reenlisted in the Active Army ($N =189$) or in the Reserve Component of the Army ($N =27$), were in their reenlistment window ($N =646$), or were outside their reenlistment window ($N =321$); (2) 495 enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs who were exiting the Army; and (3) 55 TSMs and career counselors.

Sample Characteristics

Sample characteristics by survey form are provided in Tables 5-2, 5-3, and 5-4. The General Form included a larger number of Soldier demographic items, resulting in more information on the characteristics of this sub-sample than for participants completing the Exit or Manager Forms.

Table 5-2 presents information on final sample sizes, gender, age, Hispanic declaration, and race/ethnicity. Table 5-3 highlights sample characteristics related to term of service, rank, and type of unit. Table 5-4 provides career information for Soldiers completing the General and Exit Forms, including the number of prior deployments and reenlistments, if the Soldier was ever under "stop loss" orders, and the average time spent in the Active Army.

Table 5-2. Demographic Characteristics of Samples

	General		Exit		Manager	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
Sample Size	1183	-	495	-	55	-
Gender						
Male	977	82.6	422	85.3	-	-
Female	204	17.2	69	13.9	-	-
Missing	2	0.2	4	0.8	-	-
Age						
Under 20	76	6.4	-	-	-	-
20-24	636	53.8	-	-	-	-
25-29	312	26.4	-	-	-	-
30-34	100	8.5	-	-	-	-
35-39	44	3.7	-	-	-	-
40-44	9	0.8	-	-	-	-
Missing	6	0.5	-	-	-	-
Hispanic Declaration						
Yes	208	17.5	-	-	-	-
No	967	81.7	-	-	-	-
Missing	8	0.8	-	-	-	-
Race						
American Indian or Alaska Native	22	1.9	-	-	-	-
Asian	38	3.2	-	-	-	-
African-American	191	16.1	-	-	-	-
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	29	2.5	-	-	-	-
White	736	62.2	-	-	-	-
2 or more selected	68	5.7	-	-	-	-
Missing	99	8.4	-	-	-	-

Table 5-3. Participant Position Information

	General		Exit		Manager	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
Term of Service						
Initial Contract	642	54.1	371	74.9	-	-
Mid-Career	538	45.5	119	24.0	-	-
Missing	3	0.3	5	1.0	-	-
Rank						
PV1	13	1.1	30	6.1	-	-
PV2	56	4.7	15	3.0	-	-
PFC	170	14.4	44	8.9	-	-
SPC/CPL	579	48.9	216	43.6	-	-
SGT	296	25	162	32.7	-	-
SSG	67	5.7	25	5.1	-	-
SFC	0	0	0	0	-	-
Other	0	0	0	0	-	-
Missing	2	0.2	3	0.6	-	-
Unit Description						
Combat Arms[A]	400	33.8	-	-	21	38.2
Combat Support[A]	356	30.1	-	-	3	5.5
Combat Service Support[A]	212	17.9	-	-	3	5.5
Other Command Units	89	7.5	-	-	5	9.1
Multiple Types	-	-	-	-	22	40.0
Do not know	113	9.6	-	-	-	-
Missing	13	1.1	-	-	1	1.8

[A] At the time the Soldier Transition Surveys were administered, these labels were used to categorize units. Since that time, the categories have been renamed as follows: Combat Arms is Maneuver Fires and Effects Division; Combat Support is Operational Support Division; and Combat Service Support is Force Sustainment Division.

Table 5-4. Participant Career Information

	General		Exit		Manager	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
Number of Deployments Within Last 5 Years						
0	342	28.9	127	25.7	-	-
1	564	47.7	181	36.6	-	-
2	221	18.7	151	30.5	-	-
3	43	3.6	24	4.9	-	-
4+	11	0.9	9	1.8	-	-
Missing	2	0.2	3	0.6	-	-
Number of Times Reenlisted						
0	642	54.3	371	74.9	-	-
1	386	32.6	85	17.2	-	-
2	111	9.4	21	4.2	-	-
3+	41	3.5	13	2.6	-	-
Missing	3	0.3	5	1.0	-	-
Under Stop-loss Orders						
Yes - ETS date did not change	92	7.8	94	19.0	-	-
Yes - ETS date changed	39	3.3	123	24.8	-	-
No	1046	88.4	273	55.2	-	-
Missing	6	0.5	5	1.0	-	-
Years in the Active Army						
Mean	3.57		4.41		-	
Standard Deviation	2.08		2.00		-	

Preliminary Analyses

Before addressing the primary research objectives and goals of the Soldier Transition Survey effort, several preliminary analyses were conducted with the pilot test data. Specifically, these analyses involved assessing the convergence between satisfaction and importance items, examining the underlying factor structure of the survey forms, and identifying potential response pattern differences between junior enlisted Soldier and junior NCO responses. Each set of preliminary analyses is briefly reviewed next.

Satisfaction vs. Importance

For the General and Manager Forms, the surveys included parallel sections of neutrally-worded items. The first set of items asked participants to indicate the level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with each item. The second set of items asked participants to indicate how important each item was in the decision to leave or stay in the Active Army. Because of administrative constraints regarding how certain content areas could be addressed in the survey forms, it was determined that both sets of items were needed for response interpretation. Thus, before examining the reasons junior Soldiers and NCOs were staying in or separating from the Army, we assessed the degree of convergence between these two sets of parallel items. Tables in Appendix 5-4 present the means and standard deviations for both the satisfaction and importance item responses for the General and Manager Forms.

To assess item convergence, we computed an average item-level satisfaction and importance score. This item-level score represented the mean of all participants for each satisfaction and importance item. Next, for each form, we computed the correlation between the satisfaction mean and importance mean. If participants tended to respond differently to the satisfaction and importance items, we would expect a low correlation coefficient. On the other hand, if participants typically responded the same to the item stem, regardless of whether satisfaction or importance was being assessed, the correlation between the satisfaction and importance means would be high.

For the General Form, the relationship between satisfaction and importance items was strong ($r = .95$, p < .001). Similarly, the item format convergence for the Manager Form was equally high ($r = .95$, $p < .001$). These results suggest a high level of convergence between the use of the satisfaction and importance response scales for the majority of survey items[2]. As the focus of the STAY project was on Soldiers' decisions to leave or stay in the Active Army,

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[2] We also examined item format convergence at the item-level for General and Manager Forms, examining correlations between each of the 65 satisfaction and importance items. The item-level correlations between the satisfaction and the importance items ranged from .16 to .70, with an average correlation of .58 (*N*s ranged from 724 to 1205). Only two items, current opportunities in the civilian job market and peer pressure to ETS, had low correlations (.16-.18). The remaining items correlated between .43 and .70 across the two item formats.

subsequent analyses focused on data obtained using the importance response scales on the General, Exit, and Manager Forms.

Factor Structure

The 10 survey content areas (MOS/Assignment, Career Progression, Deployments, Unit Leadership, Peers, Unit Cohesion, Family Support and Concern, Quality of Life, Army Benefits, and Alternatives to Army Career) were rationally identified using literature and data collected through interviews and focus groups throughout the chain of command (as discussed in Chapter 2). Major themes from the interviews and focus groups were consistent with and supported our preliminary Career Continuance Model. Additionally, survey form content areas were factor analyzed using principle axis factoring to empirically examine the factor structure.

Because the Exit Form included approximately half the number of items of the other two forms, and these items assessed only 9 of the 10 content areas, separate analyses were conducted with each survey form. Further, only the importance items were included in the analyses.

For the most part, results of the factor analyses provided support for a 10-factor solution (General and Manager Forms) and 9-factor solution (Exit Form), supporting the original content area structure. The factor structure, number of items within each factor (content area), and internal consistency estimates are presented in Table 5-5. Factors ranged from 3 to 16 items for the General and Manager Forms, and 2 to 6 items for the Exit Form. Internal consistency estimates (alpha) were within the acceptable convention (>.70) for all three survey forms.

Given these results, we computed factor scales for subsequent analyses at the factor-level. For each factor, we averaged the Likert-scaled items within each content area.

Table 5-5. Career Continuance Factors

Content Area/Factor	General Form		Exit Form		Manager Form	
	# of Items	Alpha	# of Items	Alpha	# of Items	Alpha
MOS/Assignment	16	.94	6	.81	16	.93
Career Progression	3	.86	3	.85	3	.88
Deployments	8	.92	5	.88	8	.87
Unit Leadership	6	.91	4	.89	6	.95
Peers	6	.88	4	.83	6	.87
Unit Cohesion	4	.93	2	.90	4	.92
Family Support & Concern	9	.94	5	.89	9	.87
Quality of Life	5	.83	4	.72	5	.77
Army Benefits	3	.79	-	-	3	.78
Alternatives to Army Career	5	.89	5	.87	5	.79

Junior Soldier & Junior NCO Response Comparisons

In order to assess whether junior Soldier and junior NCO survey responses could be aggregated within survey forms, we examined response pattern differences between the two cohorts for General and Exit Forms. More specifically, we examined factor-level differences for the two groups by computing a series of t-tests, as well as by plotting factor-level means that could be visually explored for response pattern characteristics. Again, these factor means were computed by averaging the Likert-scaled items within each content area.

Although factor score comparisons suggested significant differences for 7 of the 10 career continuance factors, these effects were small. Closer examination of item and factor means suggested junior Soldiers and NCOs exhibited similar response patterns to these sets of items. The elevation differences are a function of junior Soldiers using the lower end of the response scale to rate item importance. That is, the same items were highlighted as the most important in the decision to stay in or leave the Active Army, but junior Soldiers typically responded more negatively than junior NCOs.

To clarify the response differences across factors, means were plotted in Figure 5-1. Again, although small differences were noted for 7 factors, the response pattern for junior Soldiers and junior NCOs is clearly similar.

Given these results, presenting separate results for junior Soldiers and NCOs is not warranted for the purposes of this report. Thus, subsequent analyses will combine these two cohorts when examining the primary reasons for staying in or separating from the Active Army.
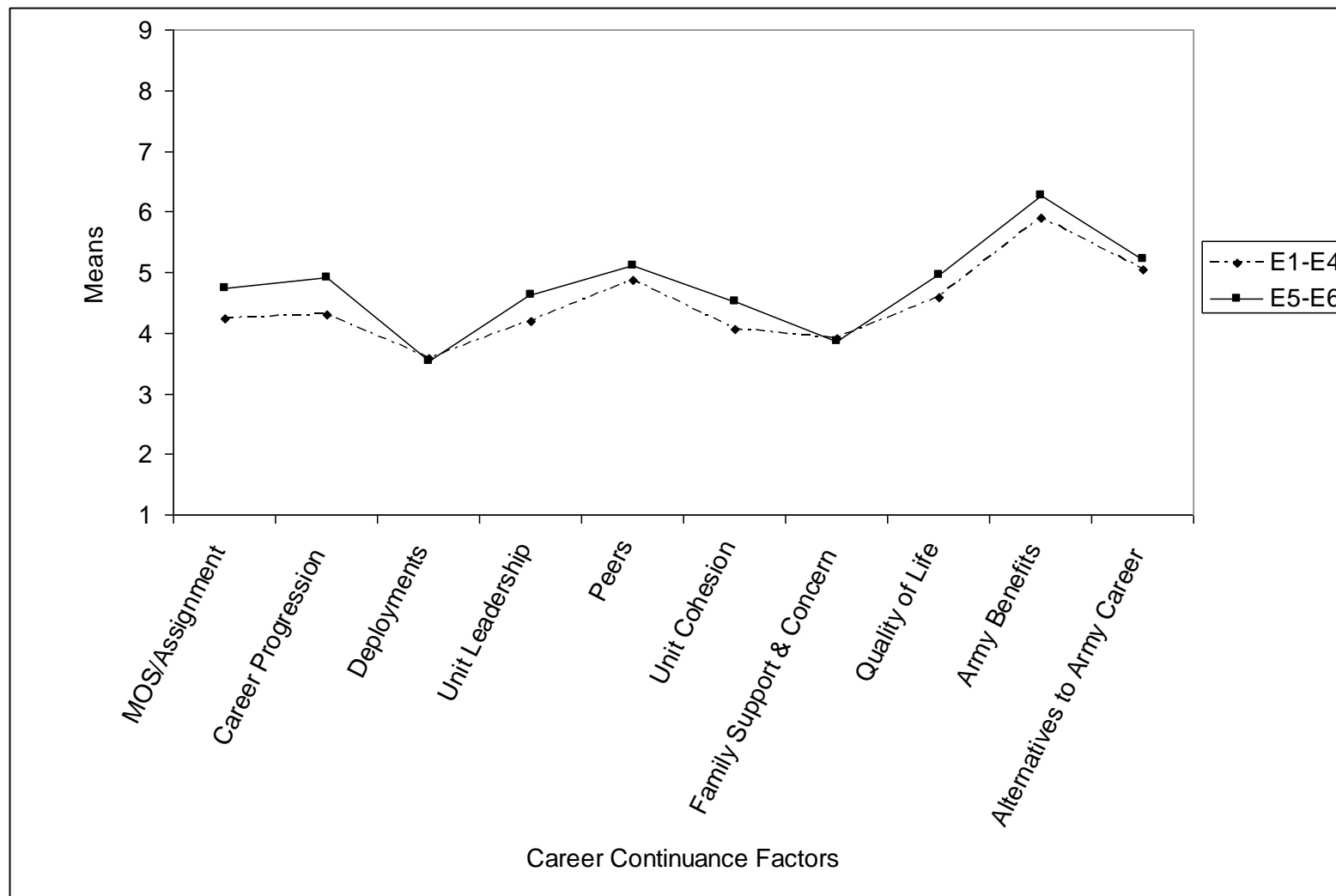
Note. *N* = 802–1111 for E1-E4 Soldiers; *N* = 355–544 for E5-E6 NCOs. Responses ranged from "Extremely Important Reason to LEAVE(1)" to "NOT an Important Reason to LEAVE or STAY(5)" to ""Extremely Important Reason to STAY(9)".

Figure 5-1. Mean Comparisons across Survey Factors for Junior Soldier and Junior NCO Responses

Soldier Transition Survey Analyses – Reasons to Stay/Leave

The Soldier Transition Survey analyses included an examination of the 10-factor importance item-level means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions for each target sample. Because the goals of this intervention effort focused on identifying the primary reasons that junior Soldiers and NCOs decide to stay in or leave the Active Army, the samples used for these analyses included Soldiers and NCOs who either recently made the decision to stay in or leave the Active Army, or were in the process of making this career continuance decision. More specifically, only junior-level Soldiers and NCOs who were separating from the Active Army, had recently decided to reenlist in the Active Army, or were in their reenlistment window at the time of survey administration were included. Soldiers who were either not within their reenlistment window or had not recently reenlisted ($N = 321$; General Form) were excluded; Soldiers who recently reenlisted in the reserve component of the Army ($N = 27$: General Form) were also excluded. Thus, these survey analyses included response comparisons from 1330 junior-level Soldiers and NCOs who (1) were actively out-processing at the Transition Center ($N = 495$; Exit Form); (2) were in their reenlistment window ($N = 646$; General Form); or (3) recently reenlisted in the Active Army ($N = 189$; General Form).

MOS/Assignment Items

A total of 16 items pertaining to MOS or Assignment-related Army characteristics were included in the General Form. This factor was condensed to six anchor items for the Exit Form. Accordingly, Table 5-6 provides means and standard deviations for MOS/Assignment importance items for each target sample. As expected, the lowest item-level means were observed for Soldiers and NCOs who were exiting the Active Army; the highest item-level means were obtained from Soldiers and NCOs who recently reenlisted in the Active Army. Across all three samples, length of working hours was rated as the most important reason for leaving the Active Army (Exiting $M = 3.62$, $SD = 2.35$; Reenlistment Window $M = 3.64$, $SD = 2.38$; Recently Reenlisted $M = 4.42$, $SD = 2.50$). Job security and stability was rated as the most important reason to stay in the Active Army by Soldiers and NCOs who were in their reenlistment window ($M = 5.64$, $SD = 2.34$) and recently reenlisted in the Active Army ($M = 6.53$, $SD = 2.19$). Although job security and stability are also likely perceived positively by exiting Soldiers and NCOs, this item was not included in the Exit Form. Instead, exiting Soldiers rated quality of training to perform their job as the most favorable MOS/Assignment-related item ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 2.41$).

Figure 5-2 illustrates the percentage of respondents who indicated the item was a very important or moderately important reason to leave, not an important reason to leave or stay, or moderately to very important reason to stay. These comparisons further highlight the response pattern similarities and differences across the three samples. For length of working hours, a large percentage of exiting (55%), reenlistment window (55%), and recently reenlisted (42%) Soldiers and NCOs responded unfavorably to this item, illustrating similarities in response patterns across samples. However, examination of other items demonstrates key differences in response patterns.

For example, amount of enjoyment and fulfillment from job was rated more favorably by recently reenlisted Soldiers and NCOs (45% indicated important reason to stay) compared to less favorable responses from exiting Soldiers and NCOs (56% indicated important reason to leave). A similar pattern was also observed for duty station location (40% of recently reenlisted Soldiers and NCOs indicated important reason to stay compared to 53% of exiting Soldiers and NCOs indicated important reason to leave). Finally, considerable response differences were also found for current job assignment/mission (30% of recently reenlisted Soldiers and NCOs indicated this was an important reason to leave the Active Army compared to 54% of exiting Soldiers and NCOs). These results suggest that some items/reasons, such as enjoyment/fulfillment from job and duty station location, might play a more influential role in the individual career continuance decision process (i.e., a reason to stay for reenlisting Soldiers but a reason to leave for exiting Soldiers) than other items that are rated consistently favorable or unfavorable by all samples.

Table 5-6. MOS/Assignment Importance Items

Item	Exiting at the Transition Center		In Reenlistment Window		Recently Reenlisted in Active Army	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
1. Day-to-day tasks in my current MOS	-	-	4.03	2.20	4.80	2.22
2. Current job assignment/mission	3.67	2.43	4.10	2.34	5.06	2.48
3. Current rank	-	-	4.46	2.10	5.24	2.21
4. Control over tasks/duties in assignment.	-	-	4.17	2.15	5.16	2.09
5. Amount of enjoyment/fulfillment from job.	3.84	2.74	3.91	2.57	5.27	2.57
6. Amount of challenge from job.	-	-	4.48	2.29	5.20	2.23
7. Quality of training to perform in job.	4.35	2.41	4.48	2.18	5.28	2.19
8. Availability of training to perform in job.	-	-	4.52	2.15	5.19	2.26
9. Quality of equipment to perform in job.	-	-	4.28	2.20	5.31	2.24
10. Availability of equipment to perform in job.	4.17	2.30	4.18	2.20	5.15	2.15
11. Quality of leadership training to perform in current rank.	-	-	4.50	2.23	5.27	2.16
12. Availability of leadership training to perform in current rank.	-	-	4.53	2.12	5.25	2.08
13. Use of skills and abilities on the job.	-	-	4.63	2.33	5.62	2.24
14. Length of working hours.	3.62	2.35	3.64	2.38	4.42	2.50
15. Job security/stability	-	-	5.64	2.34	6.53	2.19
16. Duty station location	3.77	2.62	4.44	2.62	5.23	2.71

Note. $N = 489–495$ for Exiting; $N = 632–635$ for Reenlistment Window; $N = 184–186$ for Recently Reenlisted. Responses ranged from "Extremely Important Reason to LEAVE(1)" to "NOT an Important Reason to LEAVE or STAY(5)" to "Extremely Important Reason to STAY(9)".

Exiting at the Transition Center — Important Reason to Leave ← → Important Reason to Stay

In Reenlistment Window — Important Reason to Leave ← → Important Reason to Stay

Recently Reenlisted in Active Army — Important Reason to Leave ← → Important Reason to Stay

Item	Exiting at the Transition Center					In Reenlistment Window					Recently Reenlisted in Active Army				
1. Day-to-day tasks in current MOS						29	14	39	10	6	19	10	43	15	12
2. Current job assignment/mission	40	14	31	7	8		14	33	13	8	20	10	33	16	20
3. Current rank						20	16	43	11	8	14	12	37	20	16
4. Control over tasks/duties in assignment						26	17	37	12	6	13	11	42	21	12
5. Amount of enjoyment/fulfillment from job	42	14	19	12	14	37	17	20	14	11	20	11	23	22	23
6. Amount of challenge from job						24	12	37	16	9	14	12	35	22	15
7. Quality of training to perform in job	26	18	32	12	12	21	15	39	14	9	13	13	33	23	16
8. Availability of training to perform in job						21	14	41	13	9	14	14	32	21	16
9. Quality of equipment to perform job						25	16	38	12	8	14	13	28	26	17
10. Availability of equipment to perform job	28	17	36	9	10	27	15	38	11	7	14	12	33	26	13
11. Quality of leadership training to perform in current rank						22	15	39	13	10	11	15	34	23	15
12. Availability of leadership training to perform in current rank						20	15	43	12	9	11	17	34	22	14
13. Use of skills and abilities on the job						22	11	37	17	11	11	10	28	31	20
14. Length of working hours	40	15	30	9	7	39	16	27	9	7	29	13	24	22	11
15. Job security/stability						12	6	35	21	24	6	4	25	23	40
16. Duty station location	41	12	27	7	12	30	10	30	14	15	21	8	28	16	24

Note. $N = 489–495$ for Exiting; $N = 632–635$ for Reenlistment Window; $N = 184–186$ for Recently Reenlisted. Responses collapsed to "Very Important Reason to LEAVE(1-2)" to "Moderately Important Reason to LEAVE (3-4)" to "NOT an Important Reason to LEAVE or STAY(5)" to "Moderately Important Reason to STAY (6-7)" to "Very Important Reason to STAY(8-9)".

Figure 5-2. Percentage of Responses for MOS/Assignment Importance Items

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Career Progression Items

Three items were used to assess career progression and opportunities on both the General and Exit Forms. Table 5-7 provides means and standard deviations for the Career Progression importance items. Across all three samples, the most influential career progression reason for leaving the Army concerned perceptions relating to the level of fairness of promotion decisions (Exiting $M = 3.81$, $SD = 2.63$; Reenlistment Window $M = 4.12$, $SD = 2.46$; Recently Reenlisted $M = 4.96$, $SD = 2.63$). Availability of career development opportunities was rated the most favorable by Soldiers and NCOs who were in their reenlistment window ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 2.45$) and recently reenlisted in the Active Army ($M = 5.86$, $SD = 2.36$). For exiting Soldiers, availability of promotions was rated most favorably ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 2.69$). Although these were the highest rated means within the Career Progression factor, the interpretation of the response scale indicates these items tended to fall around or below the response scale midpoint (5=NOT an Important Reason to LEAVE or STAY).

Figure 5-3 illustrates the percentage of respondents who indicated the item was a very important or moderately important reason to leave, not an important reason to leave or stay, or a moderately to very important reason to stay. Key response pattern differences were also observed across samples for this set of items. For example, availability of career development opportunities was rated favorably for reenlisting Soldiers and NCOs (57% indicated important reason to stay) compared to exiting Soldiers and NCOs (47% indicated important reason to leave).

Table 5-7. Career Progression Importance Items

Item	Exiting at the Transition Center		In Reenlistment Window		Recently Reenlisted in Active Army	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
17. Availability of career development opportunities (training, education)	4.07	2.47	4.62	2.45	5.86	2.36
18. Availability of promotions	4.29	2.69	4.50	2.39	5.32	2.60
19. Fairness of promotion decisions	3.81	2.63	4.12	2.46	4.96	2.63

Note. $N = 493\text{-}494$ for Exiting; $N = 632\text{-}634$ for Reenlistment Window; $N = 184$ for Recently Reenlisted. Responses ranged from "Extremely Important Reason to LEAVE (1)" to "NOT an Important Reason to LEAVE or STAY(5)" to "Extremely Important Reason to STAY(9)".

Item

	Exiting at the Transition Center	In Reenlistment Window	Recently Reenlisted in Active Army
1. Availability of career development opportunities (training, education)	33 | 14 | 32 | 11 | 10	24 | 10 | 35 | 14 | 14	11 | 9 | 20 | 32 | 25
2. Availability of promotions	34 | 9 | 30 | 11 | 15	24 | 13 | 35 | 13 | 12	19 | 13 | 21 | 22 | 23
3. Fairness of promotion decisions	41 | 11 | 28 | 8 | 12	32 | 13 | 31 | 12 | 10	22 | 15 | 24 | 16 | 20
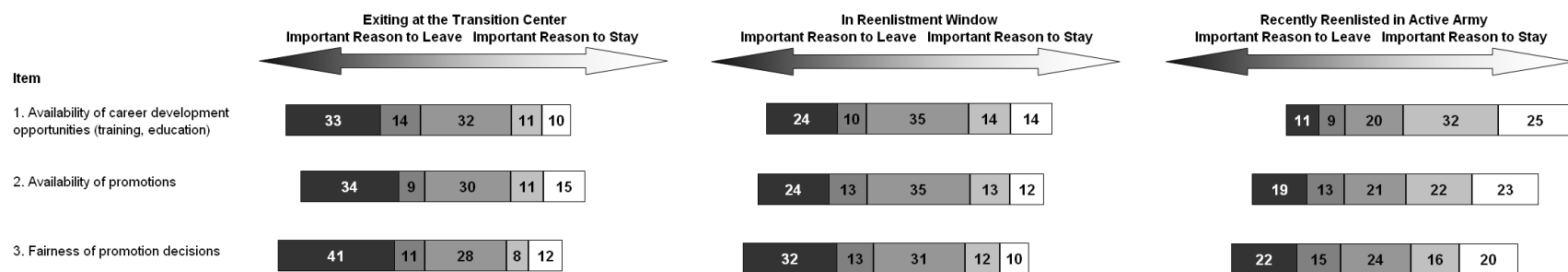
Note. *N* = 493-494 for Exiting; *N* = 632-634 for Reenlistment Window; *N* = 184 for Recently Reenlisted. Responses collapsed to "Very Important Reason to LEAVE(1-2)" to "Moderately Important Reason to LEAVE (3-4)" to "NOT an Important Reason to LEAVE or STAY(5)" to "Moderately Important Reason to STAY (6-7) to "Very Important Reason to STAY(8-9)".

Figure 5-3. Percentage of Responses for Career Progression Importance Items

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Deployment Items

The General Form assessed attitudes about Army deployment characteristics with a total of eight items. This factor was reduced to five items for the Exit Form. Across samples, means were consistently low for all items within the Deployment factor (Table 5-8) indicating that they represented important reasons to leave the Active Army. The Army "Stop-Loss" policy was the most important reason to leave the Active Army across all participants (Exiting $M = 2.67$, $SD = 2.13$; Reenlistment Window $M = 2.53$, $SD = 2.06$; Recently Reenlisted $M = 3.32$, $SD = 2.29$). Experiences during deployments was consistently rated the most favorable across all samples (Exiting $M = 3.95$, $SD = 2.48$; Reenlistment Window $M = 4.17$, $SD = 2.46$; Recently Reenlisted $M = 4.88$, $SD = 2.37$).

The percentage of respondents indicating the importance of the item in the decision to leave or stay in the Active Army is illustrated in Figure 5-4. Because all participants tended to rate these items as important reasons to leave, large differences in response patterns were not observed. The largest difference between exiting and recently reenlisted Soldiers and NCOs was found for the experiences during deployment item (46% compared to 29% indicated an important reason to leave).

Table 5-8. Deployment Importance Items

Item	Exiting at the Transition Center		In Reenlistment Window		Recently Reenlisted in Active Army	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
1. Number of deployments	3.49	2.35	3.47	2.21	4.24	2.38
2. Length of deployments	3.09	2.30	3.07	2.20	3.84	2.36
3. Time between deployments	3.32	2.31	3.38	2.16	4.21	2.33
4. Predictability of deployments	-	-	3.47	2.17	4.22	2.38
5. Training for deployments	-	-	4.03	2.14	4.84	2.14
6. Communication regarding scheduling/timing of deployments	-	-	3.62	2.15	4.35	2.26
7. Experiences during deployments	3.95	2.48	4.17	2.46	4.88	2.37
8. Army "Stop-Loss" policy	2.67	2.13	2.53	2.06	3.32	2.29
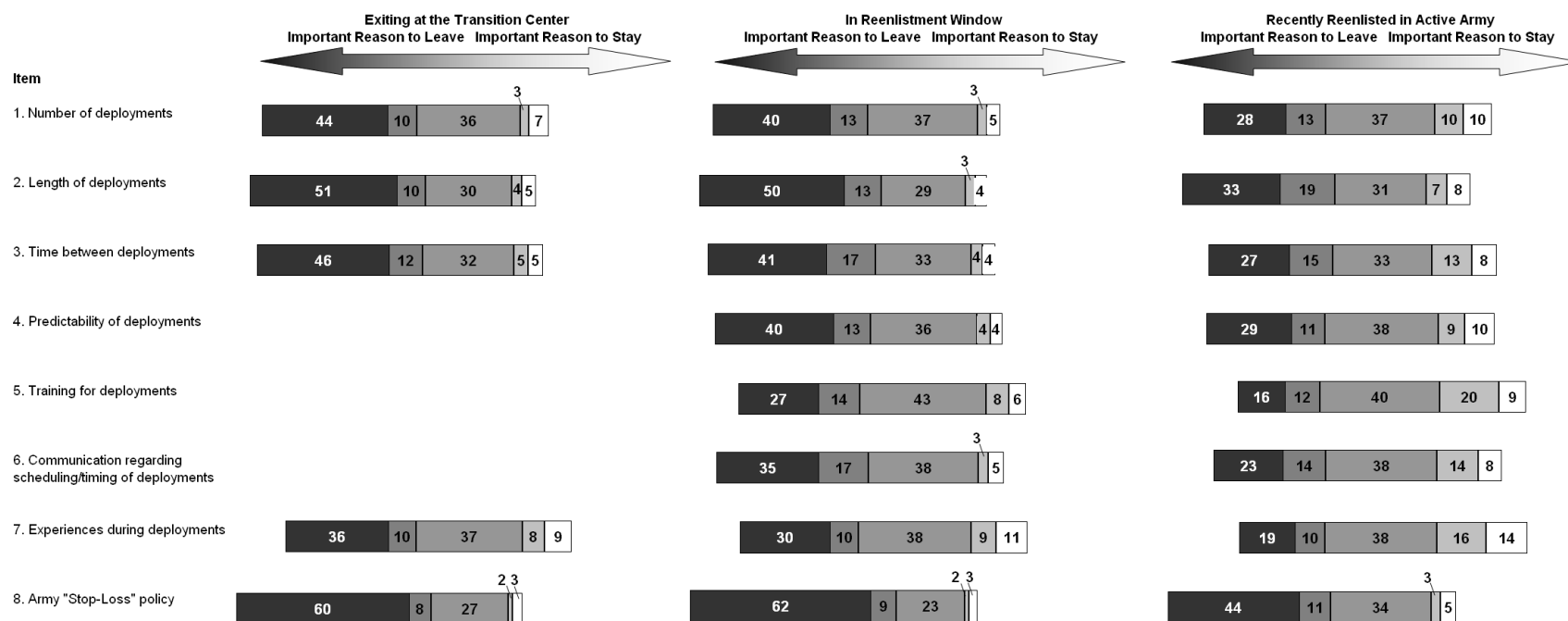
Note. $N = 491$–494 for Exiting; $N = 632$–636 for Reenlistment Window; $N = 182$–184 for Recently Reenlisted. Responses ranged from "Extremely Important Reason to LEAVE (1)" to "NOT an Important Reason to LEAVE or STAY(5)" to "Extremely Important Reason to STAY(9)".

Figure 5-4. Percentage of Responses for Deployment Importance Items

Note. *N* = 491–494 for Exiting; *N* = 632–636 for Reenlistment Window; *N* = 182–184 for Recently Reenlisted. Responses collapsed to "Very Important Reason to LEAVE(1-2)" to "Moderately Important Reason to LEAVE (3-4)" to "NOT an Important Reason to LEAVE or STAY(5)" to "Moderately Important Reason to STAY (6-7) to "Very Important Reason to STAY(8-9)".

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Unit Leadership Items

Attitudes about unit leadership were assessed with six items on the General Form, while four anchor items pertaining to the influence of leadership characteristics on reenlistment intentions were included on the Exit Form. Table 5-9 provides the means and standard deviations for the Unit Leadership importance items. Across samples, unit leader support of family and personal time was assessed as the most important reason to leave the Active Army (Exiting $M = 3.55$, $SD = 2.63$; Reenlistment Window $M = 4.06$, $SD = 2.44$; Recently Reenlisted $M = 4.86$, $SD = 2.44$). Effectiveness of immediate supervisor was rated the most favorable by Soldiers and NCOs who were in their reenlistment window ($M = 4.81$, $SD = 2.43$) and recently reenlisted in the Active Army ($M = 5.43$, $SD = 2.50$). Although effectiveness of immediate supervisor is also likely important to exiting Soldiers, this item was not included in the Exit Form. Instead, exiting Soldiers rated quality of officer leadership in the unit as the most favorable Unit Leadership item ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 2.57$); however, based on the response scale, this favorable rating should still be interpreted as an important reason to leave the Active Army.

The percentage of respondents who indicated whether the item was very important, moderately important, or not at all important in the decision to leave or stay in the Active Army is depicted in Figure 5-5. Across this set of items, the largest differences were observed for unit leader support of and respect for Soldiers (58% of exiting Soldiers and NCOs indicated an important reason to leave the Active Army compared to 43% of recently reenlisted Soldiers and NCOs indicated an important reason to stay in the Active Army).

Table 5-9. Unit Leadership Importance Items

Item	Exiting at the Transition Center		In Reenlistment Window		Recently Reenlisted in Active Army	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
1. Quality of NCO leadership in unit	3.60	2.68	4.16	2.40	4.87	2.45
2. Quality of officer leadership in unit	3.87	2.57	4.45	2.34	5.18	2.19
3. Effectiveness of my immediate supervisor	-	-	4.81	2.43	5.43	2.50
4. Unit leader support of and respect for Soldiers	3.67	2.61	4.26	2.33	5.19	2.41
5. Unit leader support of family and personal time	3.55	2.63	4.06	2.44	4.86	2.44
6. Unit leader encouragement of reenlistment	-	-	4.64	2.02	5.26	2.08

Note. $N = 494$ for Exiting; $N = 634–636$ for Reenlistment Window; $N = 184–186$ for Recently Reenlisted. Responses ranged from "Extremely Important Reason to LEAVE(1)" to "NOT an Important Reason to LEAVE or STAY(5)" to "Extremely Important Reason to STAY(9)".

Exiting at the Transition Center
Important Reason to Leave   Important Reason to Stay

In Reenlistment Window
Important Reason to Leave   Important Reason to Stay

Recently Reenlisted in Active Army
Important Reason to Leave   Important Reason to Stay

Item	Exiting	In Reenlistment Window	Recently Reenlisted
1. Quality of NCO leadership in unit	46 12 21 8 12	30 16 29 14 9	21 15 26 21 16
2. Quality of Officer leadership in unit	39 14 25 11 10	26 11 37 15 10	14 15 32 22 15
3. Effectiveness of my immediate supervisor		21 11 37 13 16	15 14 23 20 25
4. Unit leader support of and respect for Soldiers	43 15 22 9 11	27 14 35 13 9	18 10 26 26 17
5. Unit leader support of family and personal time	46 13 23 7 11	33 13 32 11 10	22 14 24 24 15
6. Unit leader encouragement of reenlistment		18 7 56 10 8	12 7 46 19 14
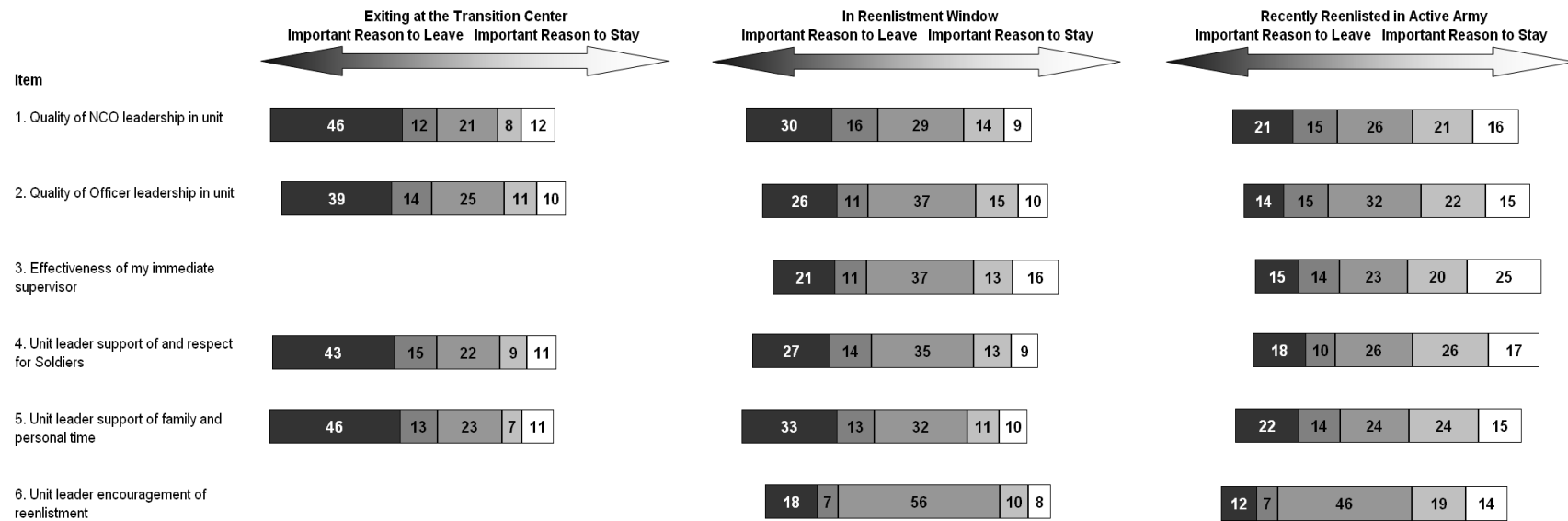
Note. *N* = 494 for Exiting; *N* = 634–636 for Reenlistment Window; *N* = 184–186 for Recently Reenlisted. Responses collapsed to "Very Important Reason to LEAVE(1-2)" to "Moderately Important Reason to LEAVE (3-4)" to "NOT an Important Reason to LEAVE or STAY(5)" to "Moderately Important Reason to STAY (6-7) to "Very Important Reason to STAY(8-9)".

Figure 5-5. Percentage of Responses for Unit Leadership Importance Items

Peers Items

The Peers factor was assessed with six items on the General Form and four items on the Exit Form. The means and standard deviations of the Peer importance items are presented in Table 5-10. Responses to each item were fairly consistent across samples. Trust in fellow Soldiers was rated as the most important reason to stay in the Active Army by exiting Soldiers and NCOs ($M = 5.47$, $SD = 2.58$), reenlistment window Soldiers and NCOs ($M = 5.02$, $SD = 2.32$), and recently reenlisted Soldiers and NCOs ($M = 5.66$, $SD = 2.27$). Peer pressure to ETS was rated the lowest by exiting ($M = 4.64$, $SD = 1.68$) and recently reenlisted ($M = 4.76$, $SD = 1.91$) Soldiers and NCOs; Peer pressure to reenlist was rated the lowest by reenlistment window Soldiers and NCOs ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 1.77$).

The breakdown of response options by item is illustrated in Figure 5-6. Because the target samples responded similarly, large differences between exiting and recently reenlisted Soldiers and NCOs were not observed for the Peers items.

Table 5-10. Peers Importance Items

Item	Exiting at the Transition Center		In Reenlistment Window		Recently Reenlisted in Active Army	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
1. Trust in fellow Soldiers	5.47	2.58	5.02	2.32	5.66	2.27
2. Quality of Soldiers in unit	-	-	4.69	2.26	5.17	2.29
3. Technical competence of fellow Soldiers	4.85	2.41	4.75	2.10	5.26	2.11
4. Help and support given by fellow Soldiers	5.00	2.42	5.00	2.15	5.56	2.15
5. Peer pressure to reenlist	-	-	4.59	1.77	4.96	1.68
6. Peer pressure to ETS	4.64	1.68	4.72	1.86	4.76	1.91

Note. $N = 492–493$ for Exiting; $N = 635–637$ for Reenlistment Window; $N = 184–185$ for Recently Reenlisted. Responses ranged from "Extremely Important Reason to LEAVE(1)" to "NOT an Important Reason to LEAVE or STAY(5)" to "Extremely Important Reason to STAY(9)".

Exiting at the Transition Center
Important Reason to Leave   Important Reason to Stay

In Reenlistment Window
Important Reason to Leave   Important Reason to Stay

Recently Reenlisted in Active Army
Important Reason to Leave   Important Reason to Stay

Item

1. Trust in fellow Soldiers

16	11	31	15	26
17	12	37	17	16
12	9	26	29	22

2. Quality of Soldiers in unit

20	16	35	16	13
16	13	26	26	16

3. Technical competence of fellow Soldiers

20	13	35	16	16
16	15	42	15	11
12	13	31	25	16

4. Help and support given by fellow Soldiers

19	11	36	15	18
14	12	43	18	12
10	10	31	29	19

5. Peer pressure to reenlist

15	8	63	7	5
9	8	60	13	7

6. Peer pressure to ETS

14	5	72	4	5
14	6	65	6	8
15	7	57	10	9

Note. *N* = 492–493 for Exiting; *N* = 635–637 for Reenlistment Window; *N* = 184–185 for Recently Reenlisted. Responses collapsed to "Very Important Reason to LEAVE(1-2)" to "Moderately Important Reason to LEAVE (3-4)" to "NOT an Important Reason to LEAVE or STAY(5)" to "Moderately Important Reason to STAY (6-7) to "Very Important Reason to STAY(8-9)".

Figure 5-6. Percentage of Responses for Peers Importance Items

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Unit Cohesion Items

A total of four items pertaining to Unit Cohesion were included on the General Form. This factor was reduced to two anchor items on the Exit Form. Table 5-11 provides means and standard deviations for the Unit Cohesion importance items for each target sample. Across samples, (poor) unit morale was rated the most important reason to leave the Active Army (Exiting $M = 3.66$, $SD = 2.63$; Reenlistment Window $M = 3.81$, $SD = 2.37$; Recently Reenlisted $M = 4.70$, $SD = 2.57$). Unit support for reenlistment decision was rated the most favorable by reenlistment window ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 2.02$) and recently reenlisted ($M = 5.00$, $SD = 2.19$) Soldiers and NCOs. Unit teamwork was rated the most favorable by exiting Soldiers and NCOs ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 2.59$).

Figure 5-7 provides the percentage of respondents who indicated the item was a very important or moderately important reason to leave, not an important reason to leave or stay, or moderately to very important reason to stay. The largest difference between exiting and recently reenlisted Soldiers and NCOs was observed for unit teamwork (48% compared to 30% indicated important reason to leave the Active Army, respectively).

Table 5-11. Unit Cohesion Importance Items

Item	Exiting at the Transition Center		In Reenlistment Window		Recently Reenlisted in Active Army	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
1. Unit morale	3.66	2.63	3.81	2.37	4.70	2.57
2. Unit teamwork	4.00	2.59	4.15	2.27	4.95	2.46
3. Unit support for reenlistment decision	-	-	4.38	2.02	5.00	2.19
4. Team spirit in unit	-	-	4.09	2.27	4.75	2.40

Note. $N = 493$ for Exiting; $N = 630–632$ for Reenlistment Window; $N = 185–186$ for Recently Reenlisted. Responses ranged from "Extremely Important Reason to LEAVE(1)" to "NOT an Important Reason to LEAVE or STAY(5)" to "Extremely Important Reason to STAY(9)".

Item	Exiting at the Transition Center Important Reason to Leave / Important Reason to Stay	In Reenlistment Window Important Reason to Leave / Important Reason to Stay	Recently Reenlisted in Active Army Important Reason to Leave / Important Reason to Stay
1. Unit morale	45 10 24 10 11	36 13 32 10 8	24 14 25 21 15
2. Unit teamwork	37 11 29 11 12	28 14 36 12 7	21 9 29 25 14
3. Unit support for reenlistment decision		22 7 54 8 6	16 7 46 18 12
4. Team spirit in unit		29 11 38 12 7	22 10 33 21 12

Note. *N* = 493 for Exiting; *N* = 630–632 for Reenlistment Window; *N* = 185–186 for Recently Reenlisted. Responses collapsed to "Very Important Reason to LEAVE(1-2)" to "Moderately Important Reason to LEAVE (3-4)" to "NOT an Important Reason to LEAVE or STAY(5)" to "Moderately Important Reason to STAY (6-7) to "Very Important Reason to STAY(8-9)".

Figure 5-7. Percentage of Responses for Unit Cohesion Importance Items

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Family Support & Concern Items

Perceptions of family support were assessed using nine items on the General Form, with five of the items serving as anchor items on the Exit Form. For this set of items, respondents were also given the option to select "Not Applicable" (N/A), which was treated as missing data. This resulted in smaller sample sizes for this factor compared to other career continuance factors. Table 5-12 and Figure 5-8 provide means and standard deviations for the Family Support and Concern importance items and the percentage of respondents who indicated the item was a very important or moderately important reason to leave, not an important reason to leave or stay, or moderately to very important reason to stay, respectively.

Overall, participants indicated that the amount of time away from Family during deployments was the most important reason to leave the Active Army (Exiting $M = 2.88$, $SD = 2.41$; Reenlistment Window $M = 2.85$, $SD = 2.19$; Recently Reenlisted $M = 3.93$, $SD = 2.41$). For exiting and recently reenlisted Soldiers and NCOs, the most favorably rated item was family support of the reenlistment decision ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 2.38$; $M = 5.85$, $SD = 2.34$, respectively). Soldiers and NCOs currently in their reenlistment window rated quality of family support services the most favorable ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 2.29$).

Similar to other factors, exiting and reenlistment window Soldiers and NCOs tended to rate the items lower than recently reenlisted Soldiers and NCOs. The largest difference between the target samples was observed for family support of the reenlistment decision (Figure 5-8). Approximately 36% of recently reenlisted Soldiers and NCOs indicated the item was an important reason to stay in the Active Army compared to 10% of the exiting Soldiers and NCOs.

Table 5-12. Family Support & Concern Importance Items

Item	Exiting at the Transition Center		In Reenlistment Window		Recently Reenlisted in Active Army	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
1. Quality of family support services (e.g., FRG)	-	-	4.51	2.29	5.26	2.40
2. Opportunities for spouse/significant other's career	4.21	2.30	4.16	2.18	5.01	2.45
3. Amount of time with Family while in garrison	3.48	2.56	3.31	2.39	4.70	2.65
4. Amount of time away from Family while deployed	2.88	2.41	2.85	2.19	3.93	2.41
5. Amount of family stress	-	-	2.95	2.16	3.98	2.35
6. Family enjoyment of Army life	-	-	3.53	2.36	4.95	2.32
7. Family support of reenlistment decision	4.37	2.38	4.22	2.43	5.85	2.34
8. Family support for future deployment(s)	3.59	2.51	3.76	2.46	4.62	2.52
9. Unit-level concern for Family members during deployments	-	-	3.78	2.34	4.76	2.34

Note. $N = 305–339$ for Exiting; $N = 388–450$ for Reenlistment Window; $N = 130–138$ for Recently Reenlisted. Soldiers selecting Not Applicable to these items are not included in the analyses. Responses ranged from "Extremely Important Reason to LEAVE(1)" to "NOT an Important Reason to LEAVE or STAY(5)" to "Extremely Important Reason to STAY(9)".

Figure 5-8. Percentage of Responses for Family Support & Concern Importance Items

The figure presents diverging bar charts for three groups: **Exiting at the Transition Center** (Important Reason to Leave / Important Reason to Stay), **In Reenlistment Window** (Important Reason to Leave / Important Reason to Stay), and **Recently Reenlisted in Active Army** (Important Reason to Leave / Important Reason to Stay).

Item	Exiting at the Transition Center	In Reenlistment Window	Recently Reenlisted in Active Army
1. Quality of family support services (e.g., FRG)		15, 6, 28, 7, 7	11, 8, 21, 17, 13
2. Opportunities for spouse/significant other's career	17, 7, 28, 4, 6	17, 6, 27, 7, 4	14, 6, 23, 14, 12
3. Amount of time with family while in garrison	32, 9, 16, 5, 7	33, 10, 16, 5, 5	19, 11, 15, 15, 13
4. Amount of time away from family while deployed	38, 6, 15, 2, 4	38, 7, 16, 2, 4	24, 11, 17, 11, 5
5. Amount of family stress		37, 11, 15, 2, 4	24, 12, 21, 6, 6
6. Family enjoyment of Army life		28, 10, 20, 6, 4	13, 8, 20, 20, 8
7. Family support of reenlistment decision	16, 5, 30, 3, 7	20, 6, 27, 6, 7	7, 6, 23, 16, 20
8. Family support for future deployment(s)	28, 6, 22, 3, 6	27, 7, 23, 5, 6	17, 9, 22, 12, 10
9. Unit-level concern for family members during deployments		25, 9, 24, 6, 5	14, 9, 25, 12, 9

Note. *N* = 305–339 for Exiting; *N* = 388–450 for Reenlistment Window; *N* = 130–138 for Recently Reenlisted. Soldiers selecting Not Applicable to these items are not included in the analyses. Responses collapsed to "Very Important Reason to LEAVE(1-2)" to "Moderately Important Reason to LEAVE (3-4)" to "NOT an Important Reason to LEAVE or STAY(5)" to "Moderately Important Reason to STAY (6-7) to "Very Important Reason to STAY(8-9)".

Figure 5-8. Percentage of Responses for Family Support & Concern Importance Items

Quality of Life Items

A total of five items pertaining to quality of life in the Army were included on both the General and Exit Forms. Table 5-13 provides means and standard deviations for the Quality of Life importance items. Stability/predictability of Army life was rated the most important reason to leave the Active Army by exiting (M = 3.48, SD = 2.59) and reenlistment window (M = 4.10, SD = 2.46) Soldiers and NCOs; Quality of living quarters was rated the most important reason to leave the Active Army by recently reenlisted Soldiers and NCOs (M = 4.95, SD = 2.55). Across all three samples, the opportunity to serve their country was the most important reason to stay in the Active Army (Exiting M = 6.37, SD = 2.54; Reenlistment Window M = 5.69, SD = 2.20; Recently Reenlisted M = 6.12, SD = 2.18). Interestingly, exiting Soldiers and NCOs rated this item more favorably than reenlistment window or recently reenlisted Soldiers and NCOs.

Figure 5-9 illustrates the breakdown of responses for Quality of Life items. The largest difference between exiting and recently reenlisted Soldiers and NCOs was observed for stability/predictability of Army life. Approximately 60% of exiting participants indicated that (lack of) stability/predictability was an important reason to leave the Active Army compared to 26% of recently reenlisted Soldiers and NCOs.

Table 5-13. Quality of Life Importance Items

Item	Exiting at the Transition Center		In Reenlistment Window		Recently Reenlisted in Active Army	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
1. Stability/predictability of Army life	3.48	2.59	4.10	2.46	5.21	2.37
2. Number/impact of PCS relocations	4.19	2.11	4.18	2.10	5.04	2.08
3. Quality of your living quarters (on- or off-post)	-	-	4.14	2.42	4.95	2.55
4. Opportunity to serve country	6.37	2.54	5.69	2.20	6.12	2.18
5. Overall quality of Army life	4.18	2.61	4.31	2.48	5.48	2.33

Note. N = 489–490 for Exiting; N = 635–636 for Reenlistment Window; N = 184–186 for Recently Reenlisted. Responses ranged from "Extremely Important Reason to LEAVE(1)" to "NOT an Important Reason to LEAVE or STAY(5)" to "Extremely Important Reason to STAY(9)".

Item	Exiting at the Transition Center Important Reason to Leave — Important Reason to Stay	In Reenlistment Window Important Reason to Leave — Important Reason to Stay	Recently Reenlisted in Active Army Important Reason to Leave — Important Reason to Stay
1. Stability/predictability of Army life	47 · 13 · 20 · 9 · 10	33 · 12 · 30 · 14 · 10	16 · 10 · 33 · 21 · 18
2. Number/impact of PCS relocations	26 · 8 · 52 · 6 · 7	25 · 14 · 45 · 9 · 6	14 · 8 · 47 · 17 · 13
3. Quality of your living quarters		31 · 13 · 31 · 13 · 9	20 · 17 · 23 · 20 · 19
4. Opportunity to serve country	10 · 5 · 30 · 12 · 42	10 · 5 · 43 · 17 · 23	7 · 4 · 32 · 25 · 29
5. Overall quality of Army life	33 · 15 · 25 · 13 · 13	30 · 11 · 29 · 17 · 11	15 · 7 · 29 · 26 · 20
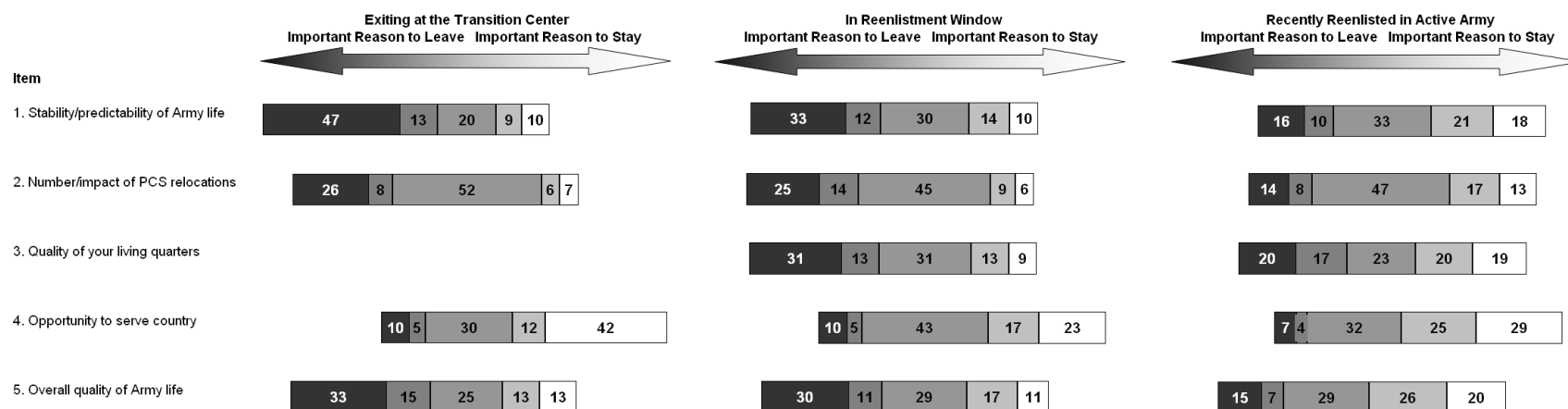
Note. *N* = 489–490 for Exiting; *N* = 635–636 for Reenlistment Window; *N* = 184–186 for Recently Reenlisted. Responses collapsed to "Very Important Reason to LEAVE(1-2)" to "Moderately Important Reason to LEAVE (3-4)" to "NOT an Important Reason to LEAVE or STAY(5)" to "Moderately Important Reason to STAY (6-7) to "Very Important Reason to STAY(8-9)".

Figure 5-9. Percentage of Responses for Quality of Life Importance Items
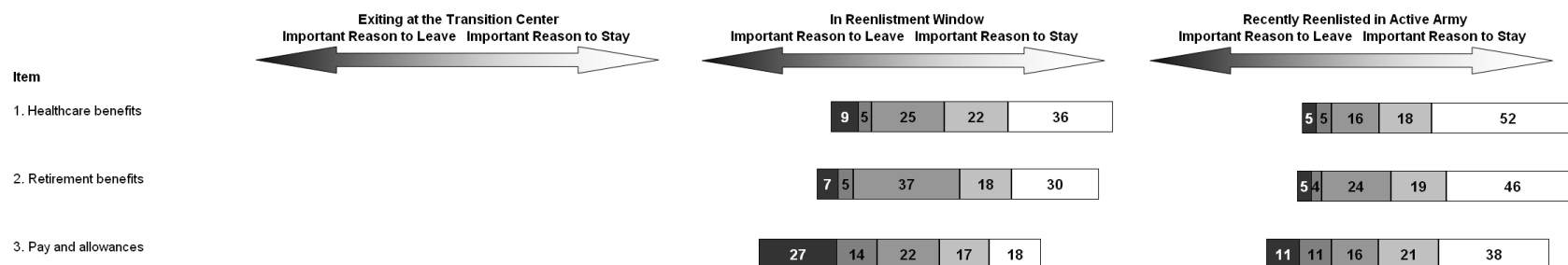
Army Benefits Items

Attitudes related to Army benefits were assessed with three items on the General Form. This factor was excluded on the Exit Form. Table 5-14 provides means and standard deviations for the Army Benefits importance items. The percentage of respondents indicating these items were a very important or moderately important reason to leave, not an important reason to leave or stay, or moderately to very important reason to stay, is illustrated in Figure 5-10.

Overall, items in the Army Benefits factor were favorably rated, with Healthcare Benefits rated as the most important reason to stay in the Active Army (Reenlistment Window $M = 6.31$, $SD = 2.40$; Recently Reenlisted $M = 7.12$, $SD = 2.22$). However, pay and allowances were perceived as much more favorable for recently reenlisted Soldiers and NCOs ($M = 6.18$, $SD = 2.58$) compared to reenlistment window Soldiers and NCOs ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 2.70$). This difference is also demonstrated in Figure 5-10. Approximately 59% of recently reenlisted Soldiers and NCOs indicated that pay and allowances were an important reason to stay in the Active Army. In contrast, only 35% of reenlistment window Soldiers and NCOs indicated that pay and allowances were an important reason for them to stay.

Table 5-14. Army Benefits Importance Items

Item	Exiting at the Transition Center		In Reenlistment Window		Recently Reenlisted in Active Army	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
1. Healthcare benefits	-	-	6.31	2.40	7.12	2.22
2. Retirement benefits	-	-	6.09	2.21	6.84	2.18
3. Pay and allowances	-	-	4.65	2.70	6.18	2.58

Note. $N = 632$–633 for Reenlistment Window; $N = 182$–184 for Recently Reenlisted. Responses ranged from "Extremely Important Reason to LEAVE(1)" to "NOT an Important Reason to LEAVE or STAY(5)" to "Extremely Important Reason to STAY(9)".

Exiting at the Transition Center
Important Reason to Leave   Important Reason to Stay

In Reenlistment Window
Important Reason to Leave   Important Reason to Stay

Recently Reenlisted in Active Army
Important Reason to Leave   Important Reason to Stay

Item

1. Healthcare benefits

In Reenlistment Window: 9 | 5 | 25 | 22 | 36
Recently Reenlisted: 5 | 5 | 16 | 18 | 52

2. Retirement benefits

In Reenlistment Window: 7 | 5 | 37 | 18 | 30
Recently Reenlisted: 5 | 4 | 24 | 19 | 46

3. Pay and allowances

In Reenlistment Window: 27 | 14 | 22 | 17 | 18
Recently Reenlisted: 11 | 11 | 16 | 21 | 38

Note. *N* = 632–633 for Reenlistment Window; *N* = 182–184 for Recently Reenlisted. Responses collapsed to "Very Important Reason to LEAVE(1-2)" to "Moderately Important Reason to LEAVE (3-4)" to "NOT an Important Reason to LEAVE or STAY(5)" to "Moderately Important Reason to STAY (6-7) to "Very Important Reason to STAY(8-9)".

Figure 5-10. Percentage of Responses for Army Benefits Importance Items
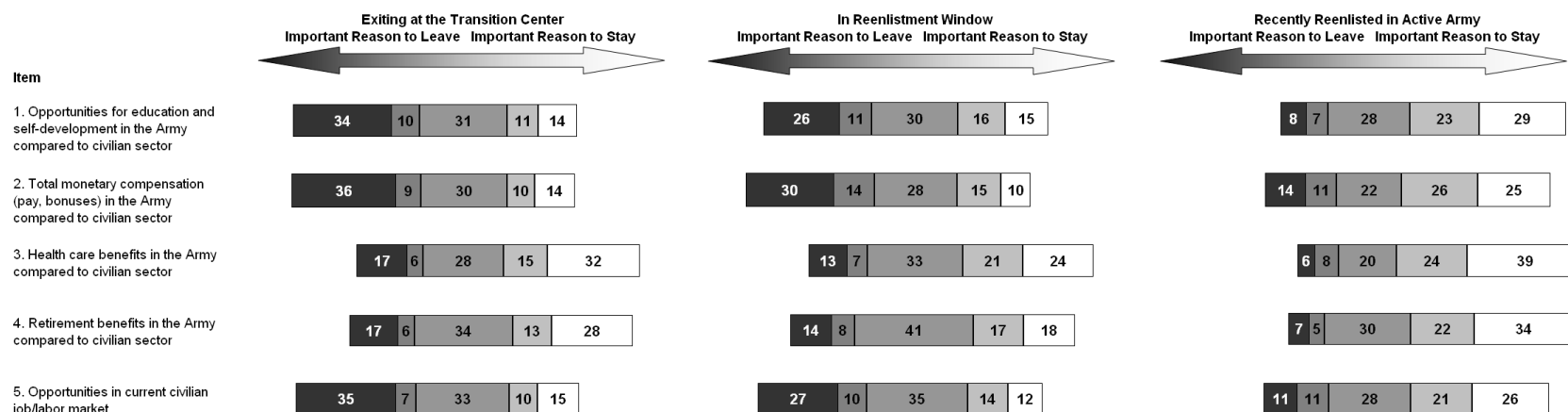
Alternatives to Army Career Items

The Alternatives to Army Career factor was assessed with five items on both the General and Exit Forms. For these items, participants indicated the importance of the quality and availability of Army benefits and opportunities compared to the civilian sector in the reenlistment decision. Table 5-15 provides the means and standard deviations for these items. Across all three samples, total monetary compensation in the Army compared to the civilian sector was rated as the most important reason for leaving the Active Army (Exiting $M = 4.12$, $SD = 2.64$; Reenlistment Window $M = 4.21$, $SD = 2.45$; Recently Reenlisted $M = 5.60$, $SD = 2.51$). However, the mean for recently reenlisted Soldiers and NCOs was slightly above the response scale midpoint (5=NOT an Important Reason to Leave or Stay). Similar to the favorable item-level responses observed for the Army Benefits factor, healthcare benefits in the Army compared to the civilian sector were rated as the most important reason to stay in the Active Army by all participants (Exiting $M = 5.73$, $SD = 2.75$; Reenlistment Window $M = 5.61$, $SD = 2.41$; Recently Reenlisted $M = 6.54$, $SD = 2.27$).

Figure 5-11 illustrates the breakdown of participant responses to this set of items. Large differences between exiting and recently reenlisted Soldiers and NCOs were observed for three of the five Alternatives to Army Career items. The largest difference was observed for opportunities for education and self development with 44% of exiting Soldiers and NCOs indicating that this was an important reason to leave the Active Army compared to 52% of recently reenlisted Soldiers and NCOs indicating that this was an important reason to stay in the Active Army. Similar patterns were found for total monetary compensation (45% of exiting Soldiers and NCOs indicated that this was an important reason to leave the Active Army compared to 51% of recently reenlisted Soldiers and NCOs indicating that this was an important reason to stay in the Active Army) and opportunities in the current civilian job/labor market (42% of exiting Soldiers and NCOs indicated that this was an important reason to leave the Active Army compared to 47% of recently reenlisted Soldiers and NCOs indicating that this was an important decision to stay in the Active Army). These results suggest specific perceptions of Army career alternatives play a critical role in the individual career continuance decision process.

Table 5-15. Alternatives to Army Career Importance Items

Item	Exiting at the Transition Center		In Reenlistment Window		Recently Reenlisted in Active Army	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
1. Opportunities for education and self-development in the Army compared to civilian sector	4.18	2.64	4.61	2.54	6.03	2.27
2. Total monetary compensation (pay, bonuses) in the Army compared to civilian sector	4.12	2.64	4.21	2.45	5.60	2.51
3. Health care benefits in the Army compared to civilian sector	5.73	2.75	5.61	2.41	6.54	2.27
4. Retirement benefits in the Army compared to civilian sector	5.58	2.65	5.25	2.28	6.33	2.25
5. Opportunities in current civilian job/labor market	4.24	2.68	4.42	2.48	5.72	2.43

Note. $N = 487–488$ for Exiting; $N = 632–634$ for Reenlistment Window; $N = 181–184$ for Recently Reenlisted. Responses ranged from "Extremely Important Reason to LEAVE(1)" to "NOT an Important Reason to LEAVE or STAY(5)" to "Extremely Important Reason to STAY(9)".

Item

Exiting at the Transition Center
Important Reason to Leave   Important Reason to Stay

In Reenlistment Window
Important Reason to Leave   Important Reason to Stay

Recently Reenlisted in Active Army
Important Reason to Leave   Important Reason to Stay

1. Opportunities for education and self-development in the Army compared to civilian sector

| 34 | 10 | 31 | 11 | 14 | | 26 | 11 | 30 | 16 | 15 | | 8 | 7 | 28 | 23 | 29 |

2. Total monetary compensation (pay, bonuses) in the Army compared to civilian sector

| 36 | 9 | 30 | 10 | 14 | | 30 | 14 | 28 | 15 | 10 | | 14 | 11 | 22 | 26 | 25 |

3. Health care benefits in the Army compared to civilian sector

| 17 | 6 | 28 | 15 | 32 | | 13 | 7 | 33 | 21 | 24 | | 6 | 8 | 20 | 24 | 39 |

4. Retirement benefits in the Army compared to civilian sector

| 17 | 6 | 34 | 13 | 28 | | 14 | 8 | 41 | 17 | 18 | | 7 | 5 | 30 | 22 | 34 |

5. Opportunities in current civilian job/labor market

| 35 | 7 | 33 | 10 | 15 | | 27 | 10 | 35 | 14 | 12 | | 11 | 11 | 28 | 21 | 26 |

Note. *N* = 487–488 for Exiting; *N* = 632–634 for Reenlistment Window; *N* = 181–184 for Recently Reenlisted. Responses collapsed to "Very Important Reason to LEAVE(1-2)" to "Moderately Important Reason to LEAVE (3-4)" to "NOT an Important Reason to LEAVE or STAY(5)" to "Moderately Important Reason to STAY (6-7)" to "Very Important Reason to STAY(8-9)".

Figure 5-11. Percentage of Responses for Alternatives to Army Career Importance Items

Most Important Reasons to Stay in or Leave the Active Army

We also examined item-level importance means across **ALL** career continuance factors, including items, to identify the primary reasons junior Soldiers and NCOs decided to stay in or leave the Active Army. In identifying the top reasons to stay, we compared the responses of Soldiers and NCOs who recently reenlisted in the Active Army ($N = 189$; General Form) or were in their reenlistment window ($N = 646$; General Form). For the top reasons to leave, the responses of Soldiers and NCOs who were actively out-processing at the Transition Center ($N = 494$; Exit Form) or were in their reenlistment window ($N = 646$; General Form) were examined. These groups were selected because each respondent had either recently made the decision to stay in or leave the Active Army, or were in the process of considering and/or making this career continuance decision.

Top Reasons to Stay in the Active Army. Table 5-16 presents the rank-order, means, and standard deviations of items that were identified by participants as the most important reasons to stay in the Active Army. Based on our survey results, these items represent the top 15 reasons junior Soldiers and NCOs, who recently reenlisted in the Active Army or were in their reenlistment window, decided to stay or are considering staying in the Active Army.

Across groups, the first and second most important reasons to stay related to healthcare benefits (Overall $M = 6.49$, $SD = 2.39$; Recently Reenlisted $M = 7.12$, $SD = 2.22$; In Reenlistment Window $M = 6.31$, $SD = 2.40$) and retirement benefits (Overall $M = 6.26$, $SD = 2.23$; Recently Reenlisted $M = 6.84$, $SD = 2.18$; In Reenlistment Window $M = 6.09$, $SD = 2.21$), respectively. In addition to items focusing on these military benefits, comparisons to civilian alternatives, patriotism, peers, and MOS also emerged as important considerations in the decision to stay. These results highlight the benefits, job security, and camaraderie the Army offers Soldiers.

Top Reasons to Leave the Active Army. The rank-order, means, and standard deviations of items that were rated as the most important reasons to leave the Active Army are provided in Table 5-17. These items represent the lowest means provided by junior Soldiers and NCOs who were exiting the Active Army or were in their reenlistment window. Because this group comparison involved item-level examination across General and Exit Forms, both anchor and non-anchor items were considered. As a result, a few items that appeared as primary reasons to leave for reenlistment window respondents are not listed for exiting respondents (anchor and non-anchor item convergence is discussed further in the next section).

The first and second most important reasons to leave concerned the Army's "Stop-Loss" policy (Overall $M = 2.59$, $SD = 2.09$; Exiting $M = 2.67$, $SD = 2.13$; In Reenlistment Window $M = 2.53$, $SD = 2.06$) and the amount of time away from Family while deployed (Overall $M = 2.86$, $SD = 2.29$; Exiting $M = 2.88$, $SD = 2.41$; In Reenlistment Window $M = 2.85$, $SD = 2.19$).

Further, additional reasons to leave across groups primarily focused on deployment and Family-related items, highlighting the influence of deployments and family well-being in the decision to separate from the Active Army. Additionally, unit morale (low or poor) was also cited as an important reason to separate from the Active Army.

Table 5-16. Most Important Reasons to Stay in the Active Army - Top 15 Items

Item	Recently Reenlisted and In Reenlistment Window			Recently Reenlisted in Active Army			In Reenlistment Window		
	Rank	*M*	*SD*	Rank	*M*	*SD*	Rank	*M*	*SD*
Healthcare benefits	1	6.49	2.39	1	7.12	2.22	1	6.31	2.40
Retirement benefits	2	6.26	2.23	2	6.84	2.18	2	6.09	2.21
Job security/stability	3	5.84	2.34	4	6.53	2.19	4	5.64	2.34
Health care benefits in the Army compared to the civilian sector	4	5.82	2.41	3	6.54	2.27	5	5.61	2.41
Opportunity to serve country	5	5.78	2.20	7	6.12	2.18	3	5.69	2.20
Retirement benefits in the Army compared to the civilian sector	6	5.49	2.31	5	6.33	2.25	6	5.25	2.28
Trust in fellow Soldiers	7	5.16	2.32	12	5.66	2.27	7	5.02	2.32
Help and support given by Soldiers in my unit	8	5.12	2.16	15	5.56	2.15	8	5.00	2.15
Pay and allowances	9	4.99	2.75	6	6.18	2.58	13	4.65	2.70
Effectiveness of immediate supervisor	10	4.95	2.46	17	5.43	2.50	9	4.81	2.43
Opportunities for education and self-developments	11	4.93	2.55	8	6.03	2.27	17	4.61	2.54
Availability of career development opportunities	12	4.90	2.48	9	5.86	2.36	16	5.86	2.36
Technical competence of fellow Soldiers	13	4.86	2.11	23	5.26	2.11	10	4.75	2.10
Use of skills and abilities on the job	14	4.85	2.35	13	5.62	2.24	15	4.63	2.33
Quality of Soldiers in unit	15	4.80	2.28	34	5.17	2.29	12	4.69	2.26

Note. *N* = 815–822 for Recently Reenlisted and Reenlistment Window; *N* = 181–186 for Recently Reenlisted; *N* = 632–637 for Reenlistment Window.

Table 5-17. Most Important Reasons to Leave the Active Army - Top 15 Items

Item	Exiting and In Reenlistment Window			Exiting at the Transition Center			In Reenlistment Window		
	Rank	*M*	*SD*	Rank	*M*	*SD*	Rank	*M*	*SD*
Army "Stop-Loss" policy	1	2.59	2.09	1	2.67	2.13	1	2.53	2.06
Amount of time away from Family while deployed	2	2.86	2.29	2	2.88	2.41	2	2.85	2.19
Amount of family stress	3	2.95	2.16	-	-	-	3	2.95	2.16
Length of deployments	4	3.08	2.24	3	3.09	2.30	4	3.07	2.20
Time between deployments	5	3.36	2.22	4	3.32	2.31	6	3.38	2.16
Amount of time with Family while in garrison	6	3.39	2.47	6	3.48	2.56	5	3.31	2.39
Predictability of deployments	7	3.47	2.17	-	-	-	7	3.47	2.17
Number of deployments	8	3.48	2.27	7	3.49	2.35	8	3.47	2.21
Family enjoyment of Army life	9	3.53	2.36	-	-	-	9	3.53	2.36
Communication regarding scheduling/timing of deployments	10	3.62	2.15	-	-	-	10	3.62	2.15
Length of working hours	11	3.63	2.37	11	3.62	2.35	11	3.64	2.38
Family support for future deployment(s)	12	3.69	2.48	9	3.59	2.51	12	3.76	2.46
Unit morale	13	3.74	2.48	12	3.66	2.63	14	3.81	2.37
Unit-level concern for Family members during deployments	14	3.78	2.34	-	-	-	13	3.78	2.34
Stability/predictability of Army life	15	3.83	2.54	5	3.48	2.59	20	4.10	2.46

Note.   *N* = 445–1129 for Exiting and Reenlistment Window; *N* = 318–495 for Exiting; *N* = 436–634 for Reenlistment Window.

Proxy Sample Analyses: Refining Survey Methods

Another goal of this effort was to examine the feasibility of using alternative sources of information as proxies for junior Soldier and NCO responses. The purpose of these analyses was to evaluate the validity of the survey instrument and investigate whether other individuals could provide meaningful and valid information regarding the reasons junior Soldiers and NCOs decide to stay in or separate from the Active Army.

For these analyses, the focal point was junior Soldiers and NCOs who either recently reenlisted in the Active Army ($N = 189$; General Form) or were actively out-processing at the Transition Center ($N = 495$; Exit Form). Soldiers who were in the process of making their reenlistment decision, as well as individuals who work closely with Soldiers during the decision process, were considered as potential proxy sources. Thus, the proxy samples included factor- and item-level response comparisons from (1) Soldiers in their reenlistment window who indicated they were likely staying in the Active Army ($N = 115$; General Form); (2) Soldiers in their reenlistment window who were undecided about staying in or leaving the Active Army ($N = 175$; General Form); (3) Soldiers in their reenlistment window who indicated they were likely leaving the Active Army ($N = 310$; General Form); (4) career counselors ($N = 26$; Manager Form); and (5) TSMs ($N = 29$; Manager Form).

Proxy Sample Comparisons – Factor-Level Analyses

To evaluate the feasibility of using proxy samples, we examined responses across all three survey forms. To do so, an anchor-item mean importance factor score was computed that allowed for closer examination of all common items across General, Exit, and Manager Forms. These factor scores were computed by averaging the Likert-scaled values for the common (anchor) items within each content area. Table 5-18 illustrates the number of common items that were included in each mean importance factor score.

Table 5-18. Anchor-Item Importance Factor Scores

Factor	# of Common Items
MOS/Assignment	6
Career Progression	3
Deployments	5
Unit Leadership	4
Peers	4
Unit Cohesion	2
Family Support & Concern	5
Quality of Life	4
Alternatives to Army Career	5

Table 5-19 provides the anchor-item factor means and standard deviations for the target and proxy samples. As illustrated in Figure 5-12, anchor item factor mean scores followed a similar pattern across most factors. Focusing on important reasons to stay in the Active Army, junior Soldiers and NCOs who recently reenlisted indicated items pertaining to the Alternatives to Army Career Factor were most important ($M = 6.04$, $SD = 1.91$). This factor was also the highest rated factor among reenlistment window Soldiers and NCOs who indicated they were likely staying in the Active Army ($M = 5.86$, $SD = 1.94$) or were undecided about their reenlistment decision ($M = 5.29$, $SD = 1.93$). For exiting Soldiers and NCOs, items on the Peers Factor were rated the highest ($M = 4.99$, $SD = 1.87$). This pattern was also observed for reenlistment window Soldiers who indicated they were likely exiting ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.74$), as well as for career counselors ($M = 6.09$, $SD = 1.49$) and TSMs ($M = 6.30$, $SD = 1.46$).

For important reasons to leave the Active Army, all samples indicated items on the Deployments Factor were the most influential. Specifically, the lowest factor scores were observed for junior Soldiers and NCOs who recently reenlisted ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.91$), were in their reenlistment window and indicated they were likely staying in the Active Army ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 1.87$), were in their reenlistment window and were undecided about their reenlistment decision ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.84$), were in their reenlistment window and indicated they were likely exiting ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.64$), and were actively out-processing at the Transition Centers ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.91$). This was also the lowest factor score for the career counselor ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.43$) and TSM ($M = 2.19$, $SD = 1.37$) samples.

Further examination of anchor-item mean scores suggest junior Soldiers and NCOs who recently reenlisted in the Active Army were the most similar to junior Soldiers and NCOs who were in their reenlistment window and indicated they were likely staying in the Active Army. Likewise, responses from exiting junior Soldiers and NCOs very closely resembled responses from junior Soldiers and NCOs who were in their reenlistment window and indicated they were likely separating from the Army.

Findings also provide support for using career counselors and TSMs to approximate junior Soldier and NCO responses. Although these responses were not as similar as the Soldier proxy samples, the data suggest these samples provide valid information regarding the reasons junior Soldiers and NCOs stay in or separate from the Active Army based on their expert experiences.

Proxy Sample Comparisons – Item-Level Analyses

We also examined responses across all three survey forms at the item-level. To do so, we computed average item-level importance scores for the target and proxy samples. These item scores represent the mean of all participants within the target and proxy groups for each survey item. Table 5-20 presents the correlations between the target and proxy sample item-level means.

Responses across all Soldier samples were highly related, with the proxy groups who had reenlistment intentions most similar to the target groups representing the highest correlations.

For example, means were most highly correlated between junior Soldiers and NCOs who recently reenlisted and those who were in their reenlistment window and indicated that they were likely staying in the Active Army ($r = .96$), compared to those who were in their reenlistment window and indicated they were undecided ($r = .93$), or likely exiting ($r = .84$). Similarly, means were most highly correlated between exiting junior Soldiers and NCOs and those who were in their reenlistment window and indicated they were likely exiting ($r = .92$), compared to those who were in their reenlistment window and indicated they were undecided ($r = .87$), or likely staying ($r = .81$).

Again as expected, results provide support for using career counselors and TSMs to approximate junior Soldier and NCO responses. As illustrated in Table 5-20, career counselors and TSM responses correlated significantly with recently reenlisted Soldier and NCO responses ($rs = .76$ and .81, respectively) and exiting Soldier and NCO responses ($rs = .75$). Further, when aggregating the expert sample (career counselors and TSMs combined), the correlations between individuals who work closely with Soldiers who recently reenlisted or exited was high ($rs = .88$ and .84).

Taken together, item-level results also illustrate that proxy Soldier samples serve as an excellent source of career continuance information. Additionally, the data suggest expert samples provide valid information. This finding is important because it demonstrates that Army career counselors and TSMs, by virtue of their daily experiences with separating Soldiers, develop understandings, knowledge and expertise regarding the career continuance decisions of Soldiers. And by virtue of their expertise, their collective judgments are very accurate regarding the motives of reenlisting and exiting Soldiers. Finally, convergence across all samples provides additional evidence to support the validity of the survey content and results.

Table 5-19. Anchor-Item Importance Factor Means and Standard Deviations for Target and Proxy Samples

Factor	Recently Reenlisted in Active Army (Target Sample)		Reenlistment Window Likely Staying (Soldier Proxy Sample)		Reenlistment Window Undecided (Soldier Proxy Sample)		Reenlistment Window Likely Exiting (Soldier Proxy Sample)		Exiting at the Transition Center (Target Sample)		Career Counselors (Expert Proxy Sample)		TSMs (Expert Proxy Sample)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
MOS/Assignment	5.07	1.83	5.03	1.83	4.35	1.75	3.58	1.55	3.90	1.79	4.63	1.83	5.20	1.72
Career Progression	5.38	2.26	5.40	2.31	4.67	2.04	3.86	1.95	4.06	2.27	5.13	2.09	6.15	1.84
Deployments	4.08	1.91	4.32	1.87	3.66	1.84	2.71	1.64	3.30	1.91	2.43	1.43	2.19	1.37
Unit Leadership	5.03	2.07	5.07	2.24	4.55	1.94	3.74	1.94	3.67	2.28	5.18	2.09	5.19	2.43
Peers	5.31	1.68	5.32	1.75	4.97	1.63	4.68	1.74	4.99	1.87	6.09	1.49	6.30	1.46
Unit Cohesion	4.83	2.42	4.80	2.47	4.20	2.28	3.61	2.02	3.83	2.49	5.79	2.28	5.41	2.28
Family Support & Concern	4.89	2.07	4.88	1.89	3.78	2.09	3.01	1.68	3.59	2.13	3.25	1.56	4.13	1.89
Quality of Life	5.46	1.77	5.66	1.65	4.85	1.77	3.99	1.73	4.55	1.83	5.22	1.30	5.64	1.77
Alternatives to Army Career	6.04	1.91	5.86	1.94	5.29	1.93	4.16	1.84	4.77	2.16	5.35	1.79	6.02	1.65

Note. $N = 189$ for Recently Reenlisted; $N = 115$ for Reenlistment Window Likely Staying; $N = 175$ for Reenlistment Window Undecided; $N = 310$ for Reenlistment Window Likely Exiting; $N = 495$ for Exiting; $N = 26$ for career counselors; $N = 29$ for TSMs.
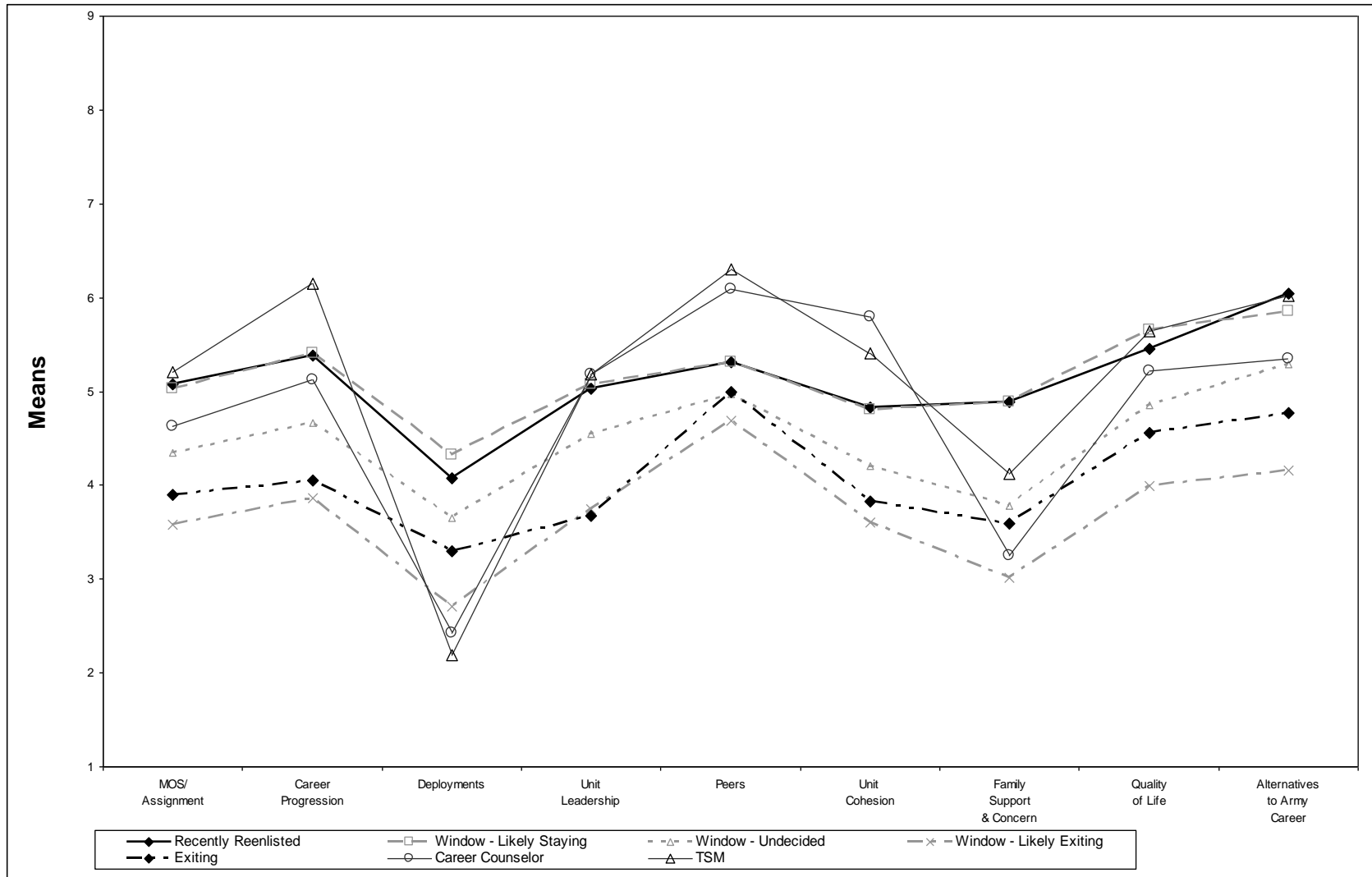
Note. *N* = 189 for Recently Reenlisted; *N* = 115 for Reenlistment Window Likely Staying; *N* = 175 for Reenlistment Window Undecided; *N* = 310 for Reenlistment Window Likely Exiting; *N* = 495 for Exiting; *N* = 26 for career counselors; *N* = 29 for TSMs. Responses ranged from "Extremely Important Reason to LEAVE(1)" to "NOT an Important Reason to LEAVE or STAY(5)" to ""Extremely Important Reason to STAY(9)".

Figure 5-12. Anchor-Item Importance Factor Mean Comparisons for Target and Proxy Samples

Table 5-20. Correlations Between Target and Proxy Sample Importance Item-Level Means

Sample	Recently Reenlisted in Active Army	Reenlistment Window Likely Staying	Reenlistment Window Undecided	Reenlistment Window Likely Exiting	Exiting at the Transition Center	Career Counselors	TSMs	Aggregated Career Counselors and TSMs
	Target Sample	Soldier Proxy Sample	Soldier Proxy Sample	Soldier Proxy Sample	Target Sample	Expert Proxy Sample	Expert Proxy Sample	Expert Proxy Sample
Recently Reenlisted in Active Army	-							
Reenlistment Window Likely Staying	.96	-						
Reenlistment Window Undecided	.93	.93	-					
Reenlistment Window Likely Exiting	.84	.83	.93	-				
Exiting at the Transition Center	.81	.81	.87	.92	-			
Career Counselors	.76	.72	.83	.86	.75	-		
TSMs	.81	.77	.80	.82	.75	.90	-	
Aggregated Career Counselors and TSMs	.88	.85	.89	.90	.84	.92	.98	-

Note. $N = 65$ for all samples except Exiting at the Transition Center ($N = 38$). All correlations are significant ($p < .01$).

Quality of Career Counselor Responses

To further examine the use of expert samples, we were able to gather and compute additional information for the career counselors who had completed the Manager Form ($N = 26$). More specifically, career counselors were asked to respond to two separate survey items which assessed whether their units had failed, met, or exceeded initial and midcareer reenlistment goals for the previous quarter. These performance criteria were used to examine individual differences with regard to the quality of career counselor judgments made within the survey.

The quality of career counselor judgments was indexed by correlating the responses of each career counselor with their collective standard to compute C-scores. Analyses demonstrated substantial correlations between career counselor C-scores and their success in meeting retention missions for first term ($r = .41$, $p < .05$) and mid-career Soldiers ($r = .39$, $p < .10$). Moreover, correlations corrected for attenuation of measurement reliability were very high for the first term ($\rho = .50$) and mid-career ($\rho = .39$) criteria.

These results show that more knowledgeable career counselors are more successful at retaining Soldiers. It follows that these scales could be used to select Soldiers for career counselor positions or career counselor training programs. In addition, the results suggest Soldier retention trends could be successfully managed and tracked by carefully surveying and documenting career counselor judgments regarding Soldier retention.

Non-Anchor Item Interpretation based upon Anchor Item Convergence

As demonstrated in the proxy sample analyses, there is a high degree of convergence between target and proxy sample responses. Given this, participants who completed the longer General Form potentially provided insight into how participants who completed the shorter Exit Form might have responded to non-anchor items.

For example, proxy analyses suggest exiting junior Soldier and NCO responses very closely resembled responses from junior Soldiers and NCOs who were in their reenlistment window and indicated they were likely separating from the Army. Referring back to Table 5-17, "amount of family stress" and "predictability of deployments" were rated as important reasons to leave by Soldiers and NCOs likely exiting, but Soldiers exiting at the Transition Centers were not asked these non-anchor items. However, since there is a high level of convergence across anchor items between these two samples, we can infer that exiting Soldiers would have likely also rated these items as important reasons to leave. Further, we could use values from the proxy samples to impute non-anchor item values for the target sample. Thus, proxy sample responses to non-anchor items on the General Form may provide richer description of the reasons exiting Soldiers decide to leave the Active Army.

To summarize, the proxy sample analyses revealed that both the junior Soldier and NCO reenlistment window samples and individuals who work closely with Soldiers and NCOs are valid, alternative sources of information for recently reenlisted and exiting Soldiers. This finding

has several practical implications for the Army. First, in situations where acquiring access to Soldier data in a timely manner may be difficult (i.e., capturing separation motives of exiting Soldiers), the Army may be better served using alternative Soldier and NCO samples who can provide similar information.

Additionally, if Army leadership needs quick, provisional answers to career continuance issues, experts such as career counselors and TSMs may be able to provide prompt responses without requiring the labor-intensive resources that would be involved in obtaining a large, representative sample of Soldier and NCO responses.

Finally, the high degree of convergence across anchor items suggest Soldier and NCO responses to non-anchor items can be used to interpret how exiting Soldiers would have responded if also asked these non-anchor items. This finding has important implications for sampling participants who may have limited amounts of time. For example, a shorter version of a survey could be used for one sample compared to a longer version of a survey for another sample. The results from the longer version could be used to provide additional information and results that were not asked of participants completing the shorter version of the survey.

Supplemental Analyses

Because one objective of the Soldier Transition Survey initiative was to develop an instrument that could provide Army leadership with timely, scientifically-based information to help forecast and manage the reenlistment trends of junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs, we needed to ensure the survey instrument adequately covered the large domain of factors that play a role in the career continuance decision. Thus, several open-ended items were included in the surveys, and qualitative methods were used to provide further evaluation of survey content. Additionally, the content of and recent results from the Sample Survey of Military Personnel (SSMP) were reviewed.

Content Analysis of Open-Ended Responses – General and Manager Forms

For the General and Manager Forms, participants were given the opportunity to provide additional reasons junior Soldiers and NCOs may decide to stay in or leave the Active Army. Responses to these items were content analyzed by two project team members, and common themes identified. Overall, the majority of responses pertained to content already addressed by the 10 survey factors and items. Exceptions to this included a few responses that are further described under each item's discussion.

Question 1: Besides the reasons listed above, there may be other major factors that are influencing your decision to LEAVE or STAY in the Army. If so, please describe them.

Reasons to Leave – General Form. A total of 595 junior-level Soldiers and NCOs responded to this item for a 50.2 percent response rate. Although the vast majority of open-ended responses

were categorized into one of the 10 original survey factors (approximately 96.0%), three new themes emerged: Mission (1.4%), General Negative Feedback (1.1%), and Changing Army (1.0%). Mission refers to dissatisfaction with, or a lack of support for, the current Army mission, particularly with respect to deployments and the Global War on Terror. General Negative Feedback includes comments expressing overall dissatisfaction with the Army as a whole. Finally, the Changing Army refers to dissatisfaction with changes Soldiers have observed or heard about over the past several years.

Reasons to Leave – Manager Form. A total of 22 career counselors and TSMs responded to this item for a 35.6 percent response rate. All of these responses were categorized into one of the original survey factors. The theme most frequently cited was Deployments (33.9%), followed by Family Support (28.6%), Unit Leadership (12.5%), and Alternatives (8.9%). Comments related to Benefits and Quality of Life were both cited by 3.6 percent of responses. Fewer than 10 percent of the responses addressed the remaining factors. The comments provided on the Manager Form were similar to those provided on the General Form.

Reasons to Stay – General Form. A total of 413 junior-level Soldiers and NCOs responded to this item for a 34.8 percent response rate. Responses were divided into the same themes as the "Reasons to Leave" portion of this question, including new Mission (0.4%) and General Positive Feedback (2.5%) themes. Also, a number of responses indicated hypothetical changes to their situation in the Army that would influence their choice to stay, rather than stating their current situation (2.5%). Of the original survey themes, the theme most frequently mentioned as a reason to stay was Army Benefits (22.1%), followed by Quality of Life (19.2%). Responses that were categorized under Quality of Life expanded the content to include honor and pride, civilian respect, fulfillment of personal goals, enjoyment of overall Army life, opportunity to travel and meet new people, time off (e.g., weekends, holidays), and food/dining. MOS/Assignment (17.1%) was the third most frequently mentioned theme, followed by Alternatives to Army Career (14.3%), which was expanded to include the poor state of the current economy. Fifth was Family Support (7.6%). The remaining themes combined were mentioned in less than 10 percent of responses.

Reasons to Stay – Manager Form. A total of 19 career counselors and TSMs responded to this item for a 32.2 percent response rate. The theme most frequently cited as a reason Soldiers stay was Alternatives to Army Career (22.9%), followed by MOS/Assignment (18.8), Benefits (16.7%), Quality of Life (12.5%), Family Support (10.4%), Unit Leadership (6.3%), Career Progression (4.2%), and Unit Cohesion. Similar to the responses to the "Reasons to Leave" open-ended item, the Manager Form comments were similar to those provided by the junior Soldiers and NCOs who filled out the General Form.

Question 2: Identify the first and second MOST important reasons for your STAYING or thinking about STAYING in the Active Army.

Respondents were provided with a list of 13 options, which included the 10 survey themes, as well as three additional response options: "Reenlistment Incentives," "Does not apply; I am not eligible to reenlist," and "Other reason; please specify." Participants who selected the last response option were asked to specify their reason for staying in the Army. Because the question asked for the first and second most important reasons for staying, respondents had two opportunities to respond with "Other reason." Descriptions of responses to this item are presented next.

General Form. A total of 115 participants (9.7% of respondents) selected "Other reason" and provided a written response. As the response rate to this question was low, meaningful themes were mentioned infrequently when considering the total response sample. The most commonly mentioned new themes were Hypothetical Options (7.4%) and General Positive Feedback (0.7%). The remaining responses could be categorized into existing survey themes. The most common reason for staying in the Army was Quality of Life (21.5%). The second most frequently mentioned reason was Alternatives to Army Career (20.0%) and MOS/Assignment (20.0%), followed by Benefits (11.1%), Family Support (10.4%), and Career Progression (3.7%).

Manager Form. Five career counselors and TSMs responded to this item for a response rate of 8.5 percent. The most commonly mentioned theme was Alternatives to Army Career (60%), followed by MOS/Assignment (20%) and Quality of Life (20%). These three themes represent the original survey themes.

Question 3: Identify the first and second MOST important reasons for your LEAVING or thinking about LEAVING the Active Army.

Response options to this item were similar to those described for Question 2.

General Form. A total of 98 participants (8.3% of respondents) selected "Other reason" and provided a written response. Again, as the response rate for the "Other response" option was low, meaningful themes were also mentioned infrequently. The most frequently mentioned reasons to leave the Active Army, however, were categorized under Family Support (20.4%), Alternatives to Army Career (18.6%), Quality of Life (16.8%), MOS/Assignment (14.2%), Unit Leadership (8.8%), and Deployments (5.3%). The remaining categories combined were mentioned in less than 10 percent of responses. New themes that emerged were similar to content mentioned in previous items: General Negative Feedback (6.2%), Mission (0.9%), and Changing Army (0.9%).

Manager Form. Five career counselors and TSMs responded to this item for a response rate of 8.5 percent. All of these responses fit into the previously established survey content area categories. The most commonly mentioned theme was Alternatives to Army Career (50%), followed by Family Support (16.7%), MOS/Assignment (16.7%), and Quality of Life (16.7%).

Summary. The open-ended questions on the General and Manager Forms were intended to identify additional factors influencing the decision to stay in or leave the Army that were not adequately captured through other survey items. However, as the above review indicates, the vast majority of responses could be categorized into one of the 10 factors on the Soldier Transition Survey. A few additional themes emerged, including Mission and Changing Army, but only a small number of the responses fit into these categories. These findings further validate the content domain of the Soldier Transition Survey. Thus, although the open-ended responses identified a few areas in which the current Soldier Transition Survey could be modified and expanded, overall, the responses supported the comprehensiveness of the survey factors and items.

Content Analysis of Open-Ended Responses – Exit Form

Exiting Soldiers and NCOs were given the opportunity to provide open-ended responses to one item. For this form, respondents were asked if there were incentives/bonuses/benefits or other changes the Army could make that would have influenced them to stay in the Army. These responses were also content analyzed by two project team members, and common themes were identified.

Respondents appeared to take slightly different perspectives on how they approached this question. Some respondents answered the item as it was intended, stating changes the Army could make that would have influenced that Soldier to stay. Others, however, did not write how the Army could change, but rather what was wrong with the Army. We treated these responses as an identification of what the Army needed to change and included them in the same categorization as the other responses.

Question 1: Are there any other incentives/bonuses/benefits or other changes the Army could make that would have influenced you to stay in the Active Army?

Exit Form. A total of 123 junior-level Soldiers and NCOs responded to this item for a response rate of 24.8 percent. The theme most frequently cited was Unit Leadership (18.7%), followed by MOS/Assignment (17%), Deployments (16.5%), Alternatives (13.5%), Career Progression (8.3%), Quality of Life (7.8%), Family Support (7.0%), and Peers (3.0%). The remaining themes combined were mentioned in less than 10 percent of responses.

Summary. The open-ended question on the Exit Form provided exiting junior Soldiers and NCOs an opportunity to state, in their own words, what the Army could have done to influence them to stay. Several themes emerged as particularly important, including Unit Leadership, MOS/Assignment, and Deployments. The respondents' comments can help the Army identify potential areas for improvement and highlight incentives that may be particularly promising for retention. This sample is in a unique position to provide insight on promising incentives or changes, given that they were actively out-processing at the Transition Center at the time of survey administration.

Review of the Sample Survey of Military Personnel (SSMP)

To further assess the Soldier Transition Survey content, design, and methodology, the Sample Survey of Military Personnel (SSMP) was reviewed (U.S. Army Personnel Survey Office, 2006). The SSMP gathers information on a broad array of issues important to Active Army policy and Soldier and Family well-being. It is an instrument that is administered semi-annually to Active Army personnel by the Army Personnel Survey Office to help guide and inform Army policies, programs, and services.

There are noteworthy similarities between the Soldier Transition Survey and SSMP. First, although the target population for the SSMP is more extensive, both survey efforts require participation from Active Army Soldiers and NCOs. Many of the items in both surveys assess similar content areas such as deployments, family, quality of life, and job/assignments. Thus, comparison of SSMP content to Soldier Transition Survey content demonstrated some consistencies across surveys.

However, there are also differences between the two initiatives. As a result of these differences, the presentation, organization, and item-level content vary. Since the goal of the Soldier Transition Survey is to capture career continuance decision information, the items provide more detail and coverage within certain content areas. Moreover, the SSMP provides reports of aggregated self-report data and does not utilize any type of proxy sample design and methodology. Accordingly, the review of the SSMP did not identify significant gaps or areas that needed further coverage and consideration within the Soldier Transition Survey.

Overall, this comparison again supports the depth of coverage of the Soldier Transition Survey and does not identify additional survey items or content that would provide additional information beyond its current form and design.

Intervention Evaluation & Recommendations

The Soldier Transition Survey concept appears to be a promising initiative for Army leadership to use to understand, forecast, and manage the individual-level reenlistment trends of junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs. To conclude, we briefly summarize the merits of the intervention concept, discuss potential challenges to implementation, and offer suggestions to guide similar future research efforts.

Intervention Evaluation Summary

The survey results indicate that the Soldier Transition Survey provides useful empirical information regarding the reasons junior Soldiers and NCOs decide to stay in or leave upon completion of their contract term. Further, the survey content appears to adequately capture the broad array of factors that play a role in the career continuance decision.

In addition, proxy sample analyses identified both Soldier and expert samples that could be used to closely approximate the career continuance perceptions of recently reenlisted and separating junior-level Soldiers and NCOs. This has several important implications for collecting valid information in a timely manner. For example, separating Soldiers are likely less motivated and accessible to provide key insight into reasons they decided to separate from the Active Army. This point is illustrated by examining the response rate from participants completing the Soldier Transition Survey. During our survey administration, the percent of data lost to potential "low motivation" of respondents was: Exit Form 20%; General Form 13%; and Manager Form 9%. Thus, utilizing proxy samples offers both a high degree of convergence with the target sample and expends fewer resources due to non-response.

Taken together, preliminary evaluation of the intervention suggests the Soldier Transition Survey instrument and research design offers Army leadership the tools to collect timely, accurate retention data while reducing the costs and resources associated with capturing this type of critical and potentially time-sensitive information.

Challenges to Implementation

Although quantitative and qualitative results of this intervention effort are promising, there are several challenges to implementation that must be addressed before the concept is widely utilized.

One important issue relates to obtaining Army-wide acceptance and "buy-in" for the intervention concept. Not only is it important for Soldiers and NCOs to perceive their responses and feedback on the survey as meaningful information, it is equally important for Army leadership to value the retention information that is being captured on the Soldier Transition Survey. This may be particularly challenging given the current Army mission and environment.

For example, deployments were cited as a primary reason Soldiers and NCOs were making the decision to separate from the Active Army. Although deployments are an Army policy issue, having a greater understanding of these issues should enable retention personnel to more effectively deal with Soldiers as they make their reenlistment decisions, as well as inform retention policy about incentives that may mitigate some deployment experiences or perceptions.

Another important issue relates to survey length. Our analyses offer several solutions for shortening the final survey instruments. For example, the high degree of convergence between importance items and satisfaction items suggest only one set of items is required to understand and evaluate survey responses. This finding is particularly important because keeping one set of items would reduce the General and Manager Forms by approximately half the number of items. Thus, we propose removing the satisfaction/dissatisfaction set of items from the final survey instruments to minimize completion requirements. In doing so, some neutrally worded individual items may need to be reworded to ensure that responses can be meaningfully interpreted.

Somewhat related, given the content and scope of the survey, the forms will likely need to be updated periodically, as the issues impacting reenlistment decisions may change over time. One recommendation for continuously evaluating survey content is the inclusion of open-ended items (similar to items on the current forms) that allow respondents to identify additional factors influencing the career continuance decision. Another recommendation would be to periodically conduct sensing sessions in which participants are able to provide feedback and suggest changes to the survey forms as needed.

Finally, and perhaps most important, is the question of how to utilize the results of the survey. Given the challenges the Army is currently facing, the results of the current survey likely reflect circumstances that will fluctuate over time. That is, the primary factors and content areas may be consistently identified by Soldiers, but the weight and influence each Soldier gives each factor may change with time and circumstances. If the Army truly wishes to forecast and manage reenlistment trends, leadership must be proactive in conducting these assessments, accurately interpreting the results, and taking action accordingly.

Future Research

Further research is needed to more fully explore the feasibility and usefulness of the Soldier Transition Survey instrument, concept, and research design. To begin with, additional data should be collected on the General, Exit, and Manager Forms to see if survey results are replicated. The additional survey responses would provide additional evidence of validity and offer further support for the survey content. Additional Soldier Transition Survey data might also be useful for further refinement and testing of the Career Continuance Model. For example, individual differences identified within the model could be further explored and identified by examining separation motive data gathered within the Soldier Transition Survey.

Future research is also needed to further demonstrate the usefulness of the proxy sample research design and methodology. Our initial analyses suggest proxy samples are valid, alternative sources of information for our survey content. This finding has very important implications for sample participation in future retention research. For example, it may not be necessary for the Army to invest the time and resources required to collect information from exiting Soldiers. Instead, expert samples could be more efficiently utilized. Thus, in order to maximize the usefulness of the Soldier Transition Survey tool, larger expert samples (i.e., career counselors and TSMs) should be collected to further investigate the convergence of Soldier and proxy sample responses.

Finally, we recommend the development and implementation of this type of survey instrument for other target groups within the Army. Although the scope of the current work focused on junior enlisted Soldiers and NCOs, we believe this concept has merit for other groups such as senior NCOs and commissioned officers. These groups are also likely experiencing changes in retention behavior and the Army would benefit from developing similar survey instruments to better understand and manage retention trends.

References

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CHAPTER 6 – UNIT RETENTION CLIMATE FEEDBACK SYSTEM

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This chapter describes the concept development and initial testing of a Unit Retention Climate Feedback System. The goal of this intervention is to provide feedback to commanders on unit-level retention factors within their units, and provide guidance on what they might do to enhance retention climate—and ultimately, Soldier retention.

Introduction

The Retention Climate Feedback System is the second of the two interventions developed as part of the STAY project to increase reenlistment rates of junior enlisted Soldiers and junior non-commissioned officers (NCOs). While our previously-described efforts examined retention issues at the individual-level level of analysis, this intervention was designed to focus on retention at the unit- or company-level of analysis. This chapter describes the intervention requirement, the development of the Unit Retention Climate Feedback instruments, pilot data collection, analyses to refine the instruments and evaluate the concept, and reactions from Soldiers and company leaders regarding the instruments.

Results reported in previous chapters of this report indicate that many Soldiers enter the Army with the intention to stay. And, as the results from the Soldier Transition Survey (Chapter 5) indicate, poor unit morale is one of the top reasons Soldiers leave the Army. Further, trust in, and help and support from, fellow Soldiers was rated as one of the top reasons to stay in the Army. These results are consistent with the Career Continuance Model. This model includes unit-level experiences and resources as important features that influence attachment and commitment to the Army. Unit-level resources, such as leadership, influence the perceptions and outcomes of Soldiers' experiences. Clearly, both the Career Continuance Model and the Transition Survey results indicate that unit-level factors impact individual reenlistment decisions. Unit commanders can influence some of these unit-level factors as well.

The Unit Retention Climate Feedback System was designed to measure unit members' shared experiences, perceptions, and attitudes that influence retention decisions within their unit. Units commonly differ in their cohesion, morale, and satisfaction with communication and leadership. Accordingly, monitoring the unit members' perceptions in these areas can help inform the unit leadership of the need for actions to enhance retention. "Unit retention climate" refers to the shared perceptions of the Soldiers composing a unit, pertaining to issues related to retention and reenlistment.

The Retention Climate Feedback System includes both: 1) a survey, assessing unit retention climate; and 2) a unit leadership feedback report, summarizing unit-level factors influencing Soldiers' attitudes and decisions regarding reenlistment. The 224-item pilot survey contains items covering nine content areas that may influence Soldiers' reenlistment decisions, including: Personal Factors Related to Army Retention; Army Experiences; Spouse and Family Support; Garrison and Deployed Experiences; Career Progression; Unit Cohesion and Support; Junior NCO, Senior NCO, and Officer Unit Leadership; Retention Personnel; and Reenlistment Options and Incentives. Administered at the company level, the survey results are compiled and summarized in a feedback report designed to inform unit leadership of the retention climate in their unit. The feedback report is intended to provide actionable information and guidance that commanders can use to improve their unit's retention climate and subsequently enhance unit reenlistment rates.

Requirement for Unit Retention Climate Feedback System

A brief review of Army surveys indicated that existing unit-level instruments were created for a variety of reasons, but none of them were designed specifically to measure and provide feedback regarding retention issues at the unit level. The Unit Retention Climate Feedback System was created to fill this need by focusing on the unit-level issues that directly influence Soldiers' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes regarding reenlistment.

Currently, the Army has several operational climate surveys that may be used by company commanders: (1) the Unit Climate Profile (DA Pam 600-69); (2) the Command Climate Survey (AR 600-20); and (3) the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute's (DEOMI) Organizational Climate Survey (www.deocs.net). Additionally, a fourth survey, the National Guard Citizen-Soldier Survey, is used to provide information to the National Guard Bureau (NGB) regarding Guard Soldiers' and Family members' Guard experiences. We provide a brief overview of each of these surveys below, to distinguish them from the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System.

The Unit Climate Profile is an 81-item survey that measures 21 "climate areas", including leadership effectiveness, unit cohesion, morale, and satisfaction with various aspects of Army life (Unit Climate Profile Commander's Handbook, DA PAM 600-69). Surveys are administered in paper-and-pencil form by the unit commander. Unit commanders score the surveys themselves by tallying the results for each item. The results are for the commander's use only, and are not required to be reported up the chain of command. There are no requirements to administer the Unit Climate Profile.

The Command Climate Survey is a 24-item survey measuring unit cohesion, leadership effectiveness, morale, unit preparation, and incidents of sexual harassment and discrimination (Command Climate Survey Commander's Guide, n.d.). Surveys can be administered online, via

the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences' (ARI's) website, or in paper-and-pencil form. The online administration program compiles the data, analyzes the results, and produces bar charts and tables of output. The results are for commanders' use only, and are not reported up the chain of command. Company commanders are currently required to administer the Command Climate Survey within 90 days of taking command of a unit and annually thereafter.

The Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute's (DEOMI's) Organizational Climate Survey is a 63-item survey that primarily measures discrimination issues (DOEMI Organizational Climate Survey, n.d.). It also contains 8 organization commitment items, 12 work group effectiveness and cohesion items, and 5 job satisfaction items. The DEOMI website reports that the survey measures 14 climate factors: eight equal opportunity factors and six organizational effectiveness factors. Commanders have the ability to add up to 10 additional items of their choosing. It is available for administration using paper-and-pencil as well as online forms. DEOMI processes the results and provides a report that can be accessed online. Results are compiled and used by DEOMI to track trends in equal opportunity issues. Participation in the survey is voluntary.

The National Guard Citizen-Soldier Survey is a 72-item survey that assesses several factors relevant to unit climate and retention (Army National Guard Citizen-Soldier Survey, n.d.). Specifically, Guard members are asked to rate how influential various factors are on their desire to stay in or leave the National Guard, including benefits and compensation; unit climate and leadership; promotions, advancements, and training; Guard job; military service and culture; balancing Guard service with civilian/family life; and mobilizations. The Citizen-Soldier Survey also includes questions related to unit leadership and work climate (e.g., communication and trust, leader support, leadership skills, reward/discipline, fairness, equipment, unit cohesion/morale), mobilization experiences, friend/Family attitudes toward the Guard, and comparisons between actual Guard experiences and initial expectations. This survey is intended for officers and enlisted members in the National Guard who have completed initial entry training. It is typically administered to unit members as a group, generally at the company level, at the unit commander's initiative. The Army National Guard StayGuard Survey Series website provides links to download the survey and order blank surveys. Surveys are then scanned, and commanders can upload company-level data and request "push reports" that present key survey findings.

The four surveys described above were created for purposes not directly related to retention. Only the Unit Climate Profile and the National Guard Citizen-Soldier Survey address retention to some extent. The National Guard Citizen-Soldier Survey, while comprehensive and well-developed, specifically targets Guard members and is not well-suited for Active Army Soldiers. The Unit Climate Profile is intended for Active Army units, but it only includes one question regarding how Soldiers feel about reenlisting in the Army. In 2007, Pam 600-69 was

being updated to integrate the Command Climate and Unit Climate Profile surveys (LTC Reed, personal communication, 2007). It is unclear how the DEOMI survey fits into this effort.

In summary, although several company-level climate surveys have been developed by the Army, none specifically address Active Army Soldier retention. The current effort is focused on those aspects that most directly influence Soldiers' decisions to reenlist in the Active Army. Given the nature of the content and the number of items required to measure the unit-level retention, it was impractical to modify or add on to existing surveys. Another important aspect of our effort is the feedback provided to unit leaders. The feedback system is designed to provide unit leaders with a clear, easy-to-understand picture of the retention climate in their unit.

Item Development

The content of the survey portion of the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System was based on several sources of information. The interviews and focus groups conducted in FY07 served as our primary source. One of the goals of the FY07 interviews and focus groups was to gather information to guide the development of the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System, including reviewing the factors associated with first term enlisted and junior NCO career continuance in the Army. Additionally, we asked participants to describe the climate in their current unit regarding reenlistment, unit-level factors that influence unit climate (e.g., unit leadership, unit cohesion), and the extent to which their peers and unit leaders influenced their reenlistment decisions. Finally, we asked Soldiers about their reactions to a unit-level retention climate survey (e.g., topic areas to include, usefulness of survey, how to administer the survey, appropriate unit level to target (company or battalion)). The FY07 interview protocols and focus group participant demographics are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2 of the present report.

In addition to the FY07 interviews and focus groups, we reviewed existing Army and military surveys, such as the climate surveys described in the previous section, and the Sample Survey of Military Personnel (SSMP). Finally, we reviewed the content of the Model Development and Model Testing Surveys, as well as the Career Continuance Model (Chapter 3) for additional survey content.

Content Areas

We examined the information collected from the FY07 interviews and focus groups, existing Army and military surveys, Model Development and Model Testing Surveys, and the Career Continuance Model and found that there were several frequently mentioned themes that fell logically into retention-related content areas. We identified nine content areas that first term and junior NCOs indicated were important to their career continuance decisions and/or influenced the overall unit climate regarding reenlistment. These content areas included Personal Factors Related to Army Retention; Army Experiences; Spouse and Family Support; Garrison

and Deployed Experiences; Career Progression; Unit Cohesion and Support; Unit Leadership; Retention Personnel; and Reenlistment Options and Incentives.

As we developed the survey content, we remained cognizant of how the results would be used in the feedback report developed for company commanders. We identified some content areas outside the direct control of company commanders, such as deployment scheduling or career progression policy. However, Soldiers indicated that these issues do influence their reenlistment decisions and unit-level communication and management of some of these issues are important. For example, commanders may not be able to adjust the unit's deployment schedule, but they can maintain an open line of communication with unit members regarding schedule changes. Commanders need to understand how Soldiers perceive these factors as they attempt to improve the retention climate in their units.

The 224-item pilot survey consisted of items corresponding to the nine content areas, as well as demographic and Army background items (e.g., time in service, Expiration of Term of Service (ETS) date, reenlistment intention). Most survey items were scored on a 1 to 5 Likert scale. For example, Soldiers responded to a Unit Cohesion item, "Soldiers in my unit look out for each other", from 1=strongly disagree through 5=strongly agree. Additionally, seven open-ended items were included to gather additional information regarding family concerns, deployments, and retention personnel. ARI experts reviewed the survey and provided feedback regarding the survey content.

A brief summary of the topics covered in each content area is presented below:

Personal Factors Related to Army Retention

This topic area includes basic Army background items; the length of U.S. Army active and reserve component service; the length of a Soldier's current contract term; the number of times a Soldier has reenlisted; reenlistment intentions; and Army career intentions.

Army Experiences

This topic area includes items pertaining to a Soldier's Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) and unit; perceptions of current chain of command and post; commitment to the Army; and expectations about Army life.

Spouse and Family Support

This topic area includes basic demographic items; items pertaining to support received from Family members; Family members' adjustment to Army life; support received from the Army for family-related issues; and Family Readiness Group (FRG)-related items.

Garrison and Deployed Experiences

This topic area includes parallel items for both garrison and deployed situations, including availability of training and equipment to perform job; time spent completing tasks

associated with MOS; and clarity of job responsibilities. Also includes items assessing the frequency of, duration of, and activities engaged in during recent deployments; communication received pertaining to deployments; the impact of deployments on reenlistment intentions and career plans; and the distribution of deployments and deployment bonuses across Soldiers in the Army.

Career Progression

This topic area includes items pertaining to promotional opportunities; the ability to acquire and enhance skills and experience that can be useful in preparation for leadership positions as well as in the civilian workplace; and general experiences in the Soldier's current rank.

Unit Cohesion and Support

This topic area includes items related to interactions between Soldiers in a unit including trust, caring, and support; the level of cohesion within the unit; communication between Soldiers and NCOs in the unit; and general impressions of Soldiers who reenlist as compared to Soldiers who separate from the Army.

Unit Leadership

This topic area includes items related to the leadership abilities and characteristics of NCOs and officers within the unit; concern that leadership demonstrates for the Soldiers; the attitude and conduct of leaders; encouragement and support, and training and mentoring opportunities provided by leadership.

Retention Personnel

This topic area includes items pertaining to the role of the reenlistment NCOs/career counselors including the role they play in the reenlistment process, the help they provide in fulfilling Soldiers' reenlistment requests, and the knowledge of and concern they demonstrate for Soldiers.

Army Reenlistment Options and Incentives

This topic area includes items regarding the availability of specific reenlistment incentives and options and whether the incentive or option would increase Soldiers' willingness to reenlist.

Intervention Testing and Evaluation

We used both quantitative and qualitative methods to evaluate the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System. Our goal was to examine each component of the system by gathering survey data, retention data, and feedback from potential users so that we might evaluate the likely potential of the overall concept. In the following section, we describe the quantitative evaluation.

We administered the survey to accomplish two goals: (1) to evaluate the effectiveness and perceived value of the survey and feedback system; and (2) to identify items that may be eliminated to reduce the survey length. We also conducted a series of focus groups and interviews with junior enlisted Soldiers and senior company leaders to collect additional input regarding the survey and feedback report.

We first present survey administration details and the analyses conducted to reduce the length of the survey, followed by analyses comparing unit-level data across companies. Finally, we present the results from the focus group sessions, with an emphasis on the feedback report.

Survey Administration

In Fall 2007, the research team administered surveys to junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs in ten units at four FORSCOM installations. Of the 10 units, six represented intact, fully staffed companies. The remaining four companies were comprised of either a mix of Soldiers from several companies, or were newly formed companies.

Preliminary Survey Analyses

After removing poor quality data due to errors and/or lack of variance in responses, the final dataset contained survey results from 558 enlisted Soldiers and NCOs. Of the 558 Soldiers surveyed, 63% were junior enlisted (E-1 to E-4) and 33% were junior NCOs (E-5 and E-6). The participants represented a variety of MOSs; 19% were Maneuver Fires and Effects Division, 31% were Operational Support Division, and 48% were Force Sustainment Division. Most Soldiers were in their first (47%) or second (26%) contract term.

As our primary goal was to evaluate the feasibility of the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System concept, our results focus on efforts to reduce the length of the survey and evaluate the overall feedback system.

We began by exploring the factor structure of the survey. We conducted a principal axis factor analysis with a varimax rotation on items in seven of the nine content areas: Army Experiences; Spouse and Family Support; Garrison and Deployed Experiences; Career Progression; Unit Cohesion and Support; Unit Leadership; and Retention Personnel. We included only those items with strongly disagree to strongly agree Likert-scale responses. We did not include the Personal Factors Related to Army Retention items because these items were not on a 1-5 scale and included items such as MOS, time served, and number of times reenlisted. In addition, we did not include the Reenlistment Options and Incentives content area, as this area was primarily to inform retention personnel about Soldier incentive preferences, and we did not expect the items to group meaningfully with the other scales.

Results of these analyses suggested that a 12-factor solution provided the most interpretable description of the data. In general, this factor structure follows the structure of the content areas. However, the Army Experiences content area split into two factors; Army Expectations and Unit Comparisons. The family items split into two factors, Family Support of Army and Army Support of Family. The Garrison and Deployed Experiences content area split into separate Garrison Experiences and Deployment Experiences factors.

Finally, the Unit Leadership content area split very cleanly into Junior NCO, Senior NCO, and Officer Leadership factors. We created scales for each of the 12 factors by averaging the Likert-scaled items within each content area.

Analyses to Reduce Survey Length

Our next step was to attempt to reduce the length of the retention climate survey. Although we adopted an inclusive approach with regard to the item content, we recognized that a 224-item survey would be burdensome for units to administer. Thus, we re-examined the item content to reduce the survey to a more manageable length.

We used a rational-empirical approach to identify a subset of the 125 scale items to drop from the survey. First, reliability analyses were run on each of the 12 scales. Item statistics were examined, including Cronbach's alpha if item deleted, item-total correlations, and inter-item correlations. In general, the scales were highly internally consistent (see Table 6-1).

We closely examined each item within a scale, retaining items that:

- o demonstrated good item-total correlations with the overall scale;
- o tapped the full construct domain (i.e., items that measured different aspects of the factor of interest rather than items that overlapped);
- o were most likely to provide actionable information for company leaders;
- o appeared most relevant to retention issues;
- o best represented the underlying construct; and
- o possessed the greatest clarity.

Using both the empirical and rational approaches, most of the scales were shortened substantially. In addition, the total number of scale items was reduced by nearly 50% (from 125 to 66). The Family Support of Army, Army Support of Family, and Army Expectations scales were not reduced because the original scales contained only four, two, and three items, respectively. The remaining nine shortened scales contain from four to ten items each.

As Cronbach's alpha is dependent upon the number of items in a scale, and the number of items in some of the scales was substantially reduced, a large reduction in reliability was a potential concern. However, alphas only dropped by a maximum of .04 from the original to reduced scales. Reliabilities for the final, shortened version of the scales were consistently high, with the exception of the Army Support of Family scale with a reliability of .56. This finding is not surprising as this scale contains only two items. Overall, the reliability analyses indicated that the shortened scales were internally consistent and were nearly as reliable as the full-length scales.

Table 6-1. Unit Retention Climate Survey Scale Reliabilities

Scale Name	Scale Version	Number of Items	Cronbach's alpha
Retention Personnel	Original	10	.97
	Reduced	5	.94
Unit Cohesion	Original	7	.91
	Reduced	5	.92
Junior NCO Leadership	Original	26	.97
	Reduced	10	.94
Senior NCO Leadership	Original	26	.97
	Reduced	10	.93
Officer Leadership	Original	18	.97
	Reduced	8	.94
Career Progression	Original	13	.84
	Reduced	6	.80
Unit Comparisons	Original	6	.85
	Reduced	5	.86
Garrison Experiences	Original	5	.82
	Reduced	4	.81
Deployed Experiences	Original	5	.81
	Reduced	4	.79
Family Support of Army	Original	4	.81
Army Support of Family	Original	2	.56
Army Expectations	Original	3	.73

Note: No items were dropped from the Family Support of Army, Army Support of Family, and Army Expectations scales because the original scales contained 4, 2, and 3 items, respectively. Also, approximately 30% of the sample ($N = 223$) had no deployment experience and were not included in the analyses for the Deployed Experiences scale.

We also dropped six background items (e.g., MOS, age), as there was concern that this information might result in the ability to personally identify individual survey respondents. Thus, we were able to drop 65 items from the survey. The other non-scale items were kept in the survey because they provided essential information (e.g., time in service, length of current contract term, number of times reenlisted, reenlistment intentions). Table 6-1 presents a summary of the original and reduced scale reliabilities. The final, 154-item version of the instrument is provided in Appendix 6-1. This version of the survey takes approximately 20 minutes to administer.

Confirmation of the Factor Structure for the Shortened Scales

After scales were shortened, we re-examined the factor structure of the reduced set of 66 scaled items remaining in the revised survey instrument. We conducted a principal axis factor analysis with a varimax rotation on the remaining items in the seven content areas. Again, results of these analyses suggested that a 12-factor solution provided the most interpretable description of the data. Overall, the 12 factors demonstrated a very similar factor structure as the 12-factor solution based on all the items. However, the Army Expectations and Army Support of Family items did not load strongly onto any of the factors. Overall, the factor analysis results provide additional support for our original factor structure. Factor loadings for the reduced set of items are presented in Appendix 6-2. We computed 12 scale scores, this time using the shortened scales. Again, we averaged the selected, shortened set of items to create the scales. We were careful to retain key items in the shortened scales to preserve the construct content. We then used these 12 scales in our next set of analyses, rather than making item-level comparisons.

Evaluation of the Retention Climate Feedback System Concept

Our next step was to systematically evaluate the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System concept. Given the careful development process, we were confident that the survey measured factors important to Soldiers' reenlistment decisions. Further, Soldiers repeatedly reported the existence of a unit-level climate with regard to reenlistment perceptions. However, we wanted to confirm that retention climate was a unit-level phenomenon and that retention climate differed meaningfully across units. To this end, we obtained several unit retention outcome measures that allowed us to compare the climate survey results within and across units.

We present these results only as a proof of concept. The results are not necessarily representative of the unit climate in the Army in general. We obtained a limited convenience sample of 10 companies, only 6 of which represented intact, established companies. Also note that data were collected in FY07, when the Army was experiencing heavy deployment cycles, the U.S. economy was growing, and there were good civilian job opportunities for some MOSs.

Retention Criteria

Two retention outcome measures were used to assess the extent to which the survey measured unit retention climate: (1) FY07 unit retention mission accomplishment, and (2) perceptions of unit reenlistment plans.

We obtained FY07 unit-level retention mission accomplishment data from brigade career counselors for the six intact companies that were surveyed. A total of 370 Soldiers were surveyed across these companies.

The remaining four companies comprised a mix of Soldiers from multiple companies, or were newly formed companies with no retention mission accomplishment history. The characteristics of the six companies with unit-level criterion data are shown in Table 6-2.

Table 6-2. Unit Retention Climate Survey, Range of Sample Characteristics Across Companies

	Minimum	Maximum
Sample Size	42	94
Male	80%	100%
Younger than 25	43%	59%
Married	40%	70%
Pay Grade E-1 to E-4	47%	80%
Pay Grade E-5 to E-6	19%	53%
Soldiers in Their First Unit	23%	61%
Average Years of Active Duty Service	3.4	5.7

We recognize that the Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) cycle and Army retention policies have a large impact on unit retention. Therefore, retention policies could have confounded our results. Also, issues such as the FY07 retention bonus policy, 24-month reenlistment window, and frequent deployment cycles possibly encourage Soldiers to wait to reenlist until they are deployed. Thus, deployed and recently deployed units were more likely to meet their retention goals compared to those units who expected to deploy later. We were concerned that the effects of the units' deployment cycles might overwhelm any survey-related differences that might be found both within and across units. In other words, deployment cycle timing could be a major reason that we might see differences across units with regard to reenlistment mission accomplishment. Because we collected data from a convenience sample of companies, we were unable to match companies on characteristics such as deployment cycle. Thus, we were pleased to find a relationship between retention mission accomplishment and our survey results despite the factors mentioned above.

Retention mission accomplishment was reported for initial term, mid-term, and career Soldiers (see Table 6-3). The six companies varied greatly in the extent to which they met their retention goals, achieving anywhere from 68 to 171% of their FY07 retention missions.

Table 6-3. FY07 Retention Mission Accomplishment

Company	Initial Term	Mid-Term	Careerist	Overall
1	82%	50%	67%	68%
2	300%	133%	100%	171%
3	50%	150%	100%	110%
4	117%	0%	150%	100%
5	117%	64%	78%	80%
6	125%	120%	150%	127%

Note: The overall percentage is calculated based on the objective and number of actual accessions in each category, averaged over all career categories for each company.

Our second criterion measure was an item in the survey that assessed the shared perceptions of the reenlistment plans of the Soldiers in the unit. Across the six intact companies, 6.2% of respondents reported that the majority of Soldiers in their unit were planning to reenlist, 17.7% reported about half the Soldiers were planning to reenlist, 40.8% reported that the majority of Soldiers were planning to leave the Army, and 35.3% were unsure of the reenlistment plans of Soldiers in their unit. As illustrated in Table 6-4, there were also differences across the six companies in the shared perceptions of unit reenlistment plans.

**Table 6-4. Shared Perceptions of Unit Reenlistment Plans**

Company	Majority Planning to Reenlist	About Half Planning to Reenlist	Majority Planning to Leave	Unsure of Unit Reenlistment Plans
1	3.2%	8.6%	51.6%	36.6%
2	8.6%	20.0%	30.0%	41.4%
3	5.4%	28.6%	41.1%	25.0%
4	9.5%	26.2%	50.0%	14.3%
5	0.0%	12.0%	40.0%	48.0%
6	12.3%	17.5%	29.8%	40.4%

There were substantial differences in both of the criterion measures across the six companies. In addition, unit retention mission accomplishment was highly correlated with Soldiers' perceptions of unit members' reenlistment plans ($r = .84$, $p < .05$). The between-company variance provided an opportunity to examine the relationships between retention mission accomplishment, shared perceptions of unit reenlistment plans, and the climate survey results.

Measuring Retention Climate Across Units

Our next step was to determine if there were unit-level differences in retention climate across companies. We examined the unit-level scores on the 12 reduced-scale factors. Analyses of the survey results indicated responses across companies were significantly different for several of these factors. To illustrate the differentiation in survey results, we examined the results from two companies that were located on the same Army installation and had very different retention mission accomplishment.

As Figure 6-1 illustrates, two companies (Company 1 and 2) had significantly different means for the Retention Personnel [$F(9, 432) = 6.19$, $p < .01$), Unit Cohesion [$F(9, 547) = 13.23$, $p < .01$), and junior NCO Leadership [$F(9, 548) = 7.01$, $p < .01$) factors. There were significant differences between these two companies on both criterion measures as well. When comparing the criterion measures for these same companies, the company with lower mean factor scores did not meet FY07 retention goals (retention mission accomplishment = 68%), but the company with higher mean factor scores met and exceeded FY07 retention mission goals (171%). Additionally, Soldiers from the company with lower factor means indicated more Soldiers from their unit were planning to leave the Army compared to the responses from the company with higher mean factor scores (51.6% vs. 30.0% majority planning to leave, respectively). These preliminary findings support the intervention concept by demonstrating that the survey tool identified meaningful unit-level differences related to Soldier retention.
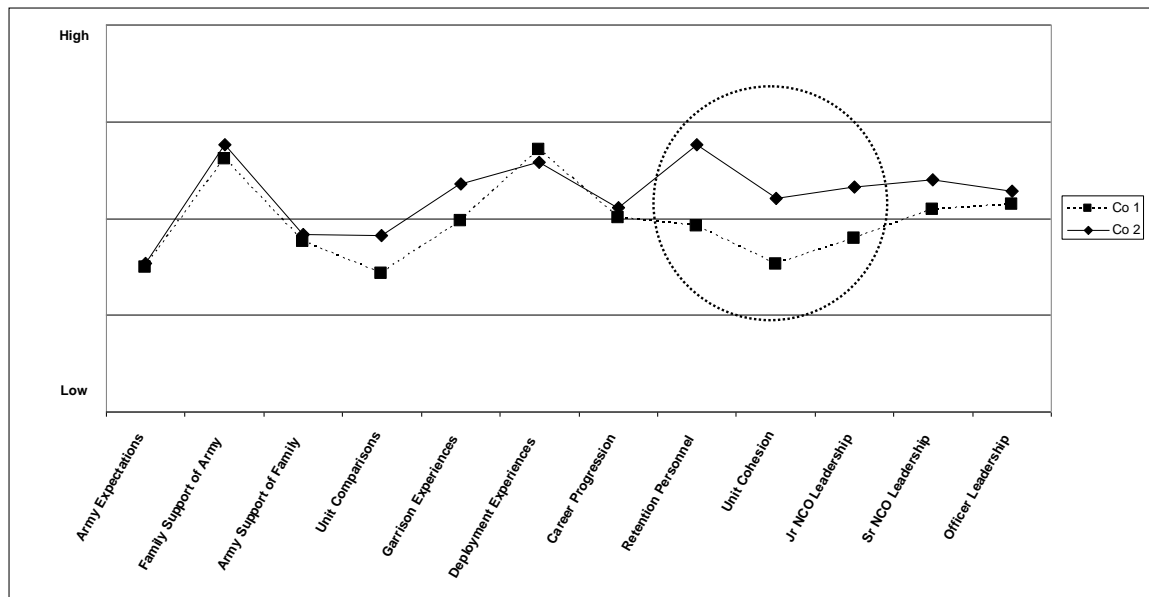
Figure 6-1. Comparison of Two Companies Across Dimensions

Feedback Report Design

The Feedback Report is the second component of the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System and is intended to provide actionable information and guidance that commanders can use to improve their unit's retention climate and subsequently enhance unit reenlistment rates. We developed a sample feedback report based on the data collected from one company during the Fall 2007 survey administration. This sample feedback report was created in order to demonstrate and evaluate the utility of the feedback report concept. Portions of the sample report appear in Appendix 6-3.

In the beginning of the Feedback Report, we provided a very brief introduction that defined unit retention climate, described the dimensions assessed, and summarized the details of the data collection. This was followed by a short section that described how to use the results (e.g., collect additional information, share your results), and a section that described the types of charts and tables in the report. The remainder of the report was organized according to the eight content areas: Personal Factors (basic demographics for the Soldiers who responded to the survey); Army Experiences; Spouse and Family Support; Garrison and Deployed Experiences; Career Progression; Unit Cohesion and Support; Junior NCO, Senior NCO, and Officer Leadership; Retention Personnel; and Reenlistment Options and Incentives.

The item-level survey results were presented in tables, with a colored stacked bar chart for each item (see Figure 6-2 below). In reporting the item-level survey results, various statistics were available for presentation, including frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and sample sizes. We provided several options during our focus group sessions and collected feedback regarding Subject Matter Experts' (SMEs') preferred format. We also presented an option with the company mean and a "benchmark" mean; we created a fictitious benchmark number for illustrative purposes. See Appendix 6-4 for additional examples. Other nominal or ordinal scale item results were presented as bar charts, pie charts, and/or tables, as appropriate.

Soldiers in my unit:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Overall Agreement (%)	
						Company	Bench-mark
Trust each other	34%	29%	21%	14%	2%	16	38
Care about each other	30%	27%	23%	17%	3%	20	45
Look out for each other	30%	20%	30%	15%	5%	20	46
Support each other as a team	28%	23%	28%	16%	5%	21	47
Are Soldiers I enjoy working with	12%	10%	41%	30%	7%	37	62

Note: Benchmarks would be set using normative data.

Figure 6-2. Feedback Report Example for Unit Cohesion

In addition, the feedback report included an overall results chart, or "quad chart" (Figure 6-3). This chart provided the user with a brief summary of the results for each major content area. Users could use this chart to quickly identify the areas where they need to focus their retention efforts. Overall results were presented along two dimensions: (1) current unit performance (low versus high) and (2) level of influence/control of company leadership (indirect versus direct). The overall unit survey results would be used to determine the placement along the current performance dimension (e.g., strong agreement that the unit is cohesive). Performance information was constructed to demonstrate how this information might be presented. Level of influence/control of unit leadership was included as the research team recognized unit leaders have less influence to address issues in certain content areas, such as Deployments. However, the results were split out by items where appropriate. For example, unit leaders may not be able to influence the frequency or length of deployments, but they can influence communication regarding deployments and confidence in leadership during deployments. Thus, some content areas may be represented in different areas on the chart.

Placement along the level of influence dimension was determined through feedback from focus groups and the judgments of the research team. Areas with high performance and direct influence were labeled "areas for reinforcement" (e.g., unit cohesion, unit leadership, in this example); areas with high performance and indirect influence were labeled "areas to value" (e.g., satisfaction with current reenlistment incentives); areas with low performance and direct influence were labeled "areas for action" (e.g., deployment – communication); and areas with low performance and indirect influence were labeled "areas to monitor" (e.g., deployment frequency and length).
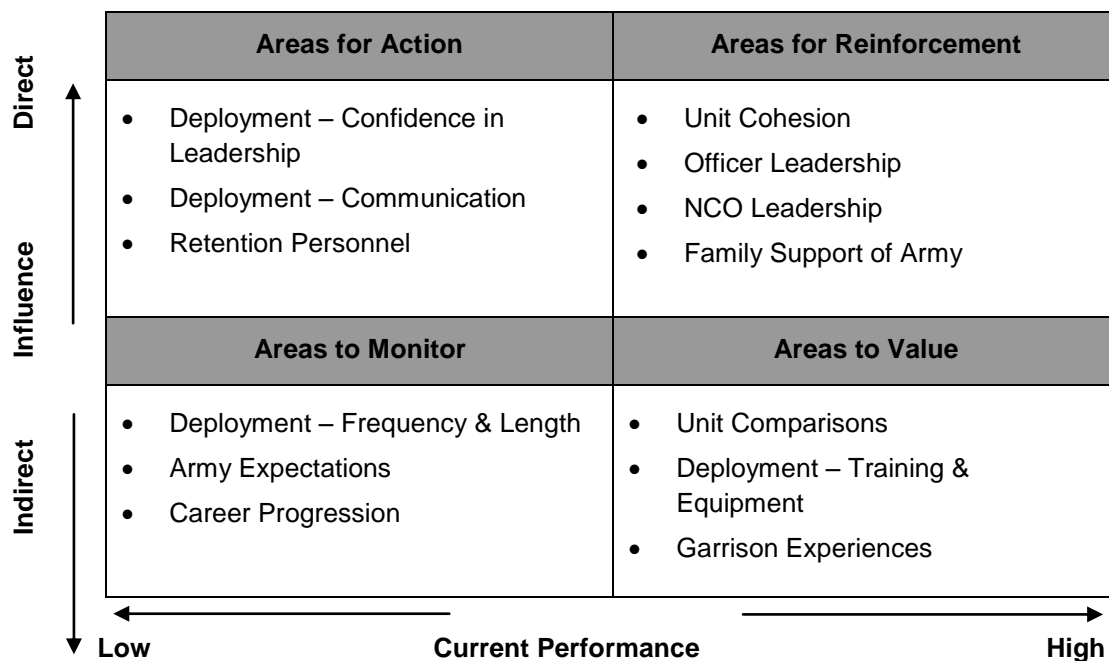
Figure 6-3. Overall Retention Climate Results Chart Example

Finally, the sample feedback report included an example list of potential recommendations and interventions that company leaders could implement to address problem areas associated with each content area. This "Recommendations for Actions" section would provide potential strategies under each area to improve the unit retention climate (e.g., unit cohesion) if average scores were low. Our intention was to demonstrate the feedback system concept by creating an easy-to-interpret summary of unit retention climate along with examples of content-area specific actions that could be used to improve unit retention climate.

Unit Retention Climate Feedback System Evaluation

During the Fall 2007 survey administration, we gathered feedback from the Soldiers regarding the purpose and content of the survey and feedback system. More specifically, we asked Soldiers how often the survey should be administered, who should administer the survey, if Soldiers would respond accurately, if the survey would be received positively by the unit, and if there were any additional topic areas that should be included.

In addition to the Soldier sessions, we conducted focus groups with 62 senior company leaders from each of the ten companies (i.e., company commanders, first sergeants, platoon leaders, and platoon sergeants) to gain additional input on the survey and feedback system. We asked participants to carefully review the survey and provide detailed feedback regarding the survey's content and usefulness. In addition, we asked participants about the utility of a feedback report based on survey results. Company leaders were generally supportive of a Unit Retention Climate Feedback System.

In Summer 2008, we followed up with a series of focus groups with 23 company commanders and first sergeants from 12 additional companies. During these sessions, we presented a draft version of the survey feedback report to company leaders. Again, leaders were supportive of the overall system and expressed interest in obtaining survey results for their units. They were also generally supportive of the "Recommendations for Actions" section that would provide potential strategies under each dimension to improve the unit retention climate (e.g., unit cohesion). The following section summarizes the feedback we received from the three sets of focus groups and interviews listed above regarding the development, administration, and implementation of this intervention. General feedback regarding the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System, including the intervention's utility and challenges to implementation, are provided first. Next, specific feedback on each component of the intervention, including the survey and the feedback report, is summarized.

Feedback Regarding Utility and Implementation

Utility of the Intervention

Overall, unit leadership provided positive feedback regarding the potential usefulness and value of the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System. A common theme across focus groups was that the information gathered from the survey would be valuable in helping both officers and NCOs understand the unit's attitudes and shared perceptions of retention-related factors. The intervention was perceived as being particularly useful for new and/or inexperienced leaders, or for units experiencing significant problems related to retention and/or unit climate. Further, the majority of focus group participants agreed that the company is the appropriate level of focus for this type of initiative.

Challenges to Implementation

Although the intervention generally received a positive response from focus group participants, several challenges to implementation of the concept were mentioned, including: (1) obtaining buy-in from leadership; (2) differentiating this survey from other surveys; (3) ensuring that Soldiers respond honestly to the survey; and (4) providing a quick turn-around between survey administration and the reporting of results.

Leadership Buy-In

As with any intervention, buy-in will need to be obtained from the unit leadership in order to increase the likelihood of the tool's success. Specifically, several focus group respondents mentioned that senior Army leaders must make it a priority and then apply pressure at the battalion level for the survey to be administered. Leaders commented that even a useful tool such as this one will be overlooked unless it is emphasized by top leadership, simply because of the current operations tempo. Additionally, gaining support may be particularly difficult in units where retention goals are being met, given that the survey would be perceived as a low priority item.

Overlap with Existing Surveys

Another factor that may affect buy-in and implementation is the fact that there is some degree of overlap between the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System and surveys that are already being administered to Soldiers. One example is the Command Climate Survey. Although focus group respondents acknowledged the unique value and contribution of the retention climate survey, distinguishing this survey from existing surveys will be important to gain leadership and Soldier support for the initiative.

Validity of Survey Responses

An additional consideration is whether Soldiers will take the survey seriously and answer honestly when filling it out. Although the general consensus in both the Soldier sessions and the senior leader focus groups and interviews was that the majority of Soldiers will respond

candidly, some stipulations were mentioned. For example, focus group respondents commented that Soldiers will be more likely to take the survey seriously if it is shortened considerably. They also recommended putting the most important questions, such as those that are under unit leadership control, at the beginning of the survey. Soldiers commented that they would answer the survey honestly, but only if: (1) Soldiers are made less identifiable by removing some of the questions on personal information, and (2) leadership takes the results seriously and implements changes in response. Thus, emphasizing to Soldiers during survey administration that unit leadership will receive a detailed feedback report based on survey results will be particularly important. Furthermore, leaders must be vigilant in explaining to their Soldiers what changes are being implemented to address problem areas and, in some cases, why certain issues cannot be addressed (i.e., they are beyond their control, as is the case with policy-related issues).

Quick Turn-Around between Survey Administration and Feedback Report

A related issue is the importance of quick turn-around between survey administration and delivery of the feedback report (i.e., 30 days or less). This will ensure that unit leadership receives the most up-to-date information about their unit, and that Soldiers can see a linkage between completing the survey and visible action on the part of leadership.

Feedback Regarding Survey Content and Administration

Survey Content

The survey was perceived as adequately covering the major factors affecting reenlistment decisions. However, as previously mentioned, a common criticism was that the survey needs to be significantly shorter and that redundancy should be eliminated. Another frequent perspective was that "unit" should be more clearly defined as a company-level unit. Given that "unit" can be interpreted as the company or battalion level, and that such interpretation will affect survey responses, clarification is necessary. However, some corresponding units are referred to as "batteries", as in the case of artillery units, or "troops", as in the case of cavalry units. Thus, the best approach may be to customize the survey and change references from "unit" to "company", "battery", or "troop", as appropriate.

Both the Soldiers filling out the surveys and unit leaders perceived the open-ended questions as very useful. Soldiers emphasized the importance of responding in their own words, and leaders described such information as very valuable. However, a few SMEs disagreed, arguing that Soldiers would skip such questions and/or only respond if they have extreme positions. Furthermore, some people commented that while the open-ended questions are valuable, there are too many of them.

While the survey content was generally well received, some sections/questions were considered more useful than others. Particularly useful sections included retention personnel;

reenlistment options and incentives; Army support of families, especially questions targeting what the unit can do to help; unit leadership; and questions differentiating experiences in garrison versus while deployed. Some focus group participants commented that the section on officer leadership is less important, given that NCO leadership is perceived as more influential to reenlistment decisions. Soldiers thought that questions that could be used to identify individuals – such as MOS, age, and rank – should be removed from the survey.

Focus group participants also had some suggestions for additions/modifications to the survey content. For example, one concern raised by several SMEs was how to break out the different levels of NCO leadership. While the current version of the survey differentiates between "Junior NCOs (E-5, E-6)" and "Senior NCOs (E-7 or higher)," there were differing opinions as to whether this is the best distinction. An example was that specialists in leadership positions must be included as well, so a frequent comment was to focus on position rather than pay grade. Another concern raised by SMEs was that one junior NCO may be viewed positively, while another is viewed negatively, making it hard to provide an overall rating that captures both leaders. Thus, some possible alternatives included: (1) "squad leader" versus "platoon sergeant", etc. (i.e., rate each role separately); (2) "company officers" versus "battalion and above officers"; and (3) "junior NCOs (team leader/squad leader/section sergeant)" versus "platoon sergeant/detachment sergeant." Despite the concerns and alternative suggestions, several focus group participants indicated that the breakdown currently in the survey is satisfactory.

Several SMEs felt that the survey overly targets Soldiers who have been in the Army for many years. In response to this criticism, the following suggestions were proposed: (1) consider replacing the comparison questions (e.g., how does your current unit compare to other units you have been assigned to?) with satisfaction questions (e.g., how satisfied are you with your current unit?); (2) add questions targeting Soldiers who recently completed Army Initial Entry Training (e.g., satisfaction with training, comparison with expectations); and/or (3) include skip patterns, as several questions do not pertain to individuals in their first unit of assignment.

Other questions perceived as valuable additions included those targeting single Soldiers (e.g., more on parental support); additional questions on FRGs (e.g., leadership, expectations, usefulness, how to get families involved, etc.); questions geared toward Soldiers who have already reenlisted (e.g., why they did, are they happy with their decision, what went right/wrong in the reenlistment process); and a section on quality of peers (i.e., trends in Soldier quality and how this impacts reenlistment decisions).

Survey Administration

We also sought feedback regarding administrative factors, including the recommended timing, frequency, and medium of survey administration. In terms of frequency of administration, the general consensus among SMEs was that the survey should be administered approximately twice a year, though a few respondents thought it should be administered more (i.e., quarterly) or less (i.e., annually) often.

With regard to the timing of administration, a common opinion was that the survey should be administered before and after a change in leadership. Although most SMEs holding this viewpoint felt that administration should take place six months before and after the leadership change, others thought it should be within 90 days of a command change. Another factor to consider in terms of timing is the unit deployment schedule and/or ARFORGEN cycle. Specifically, some SMEs believed the survey should be administered at least six months prior to, or after deployments so that responses are not overly negative. Other SMEs thought it would be most beneficial to administer the survey immediately before deployments (within 30 days) because unit climate is very important at this stage, and immediately after deployments (within 90 days) when many Soldiers complete their service obligation. Another suggestion was to administer the survey pre-, mid-, and post-deployments in order to gauge trends. Despite the differing suggestions, SMEs agreed that deployment cycle should be considered in determining when to administer the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System.

Mixed opinions were offered regarding whether the survey should be administered online or via paper-and-pencil. Benefits of online administration include easily accessible data, the ability to analyze data quickly, elimination of paperwork, and the fact that it allows Soldiers to complete the surveys on their own time. On the other hand, proponents of paper-and-pencil administration argued for the importance of having someone overseeing the effort, potentially ensuring that Soldiers would take the survey more seriously, thereby allowing for enhanced quality control. Furthermore, online administration requires computer access, which many Soldiers do not have, particularly during deployments. Paper-and-pencil surveys allow everyone to complete the surveys in one sitting, so that may be a more efficient use of time.

Other feedback related to survey administration was that first- to mid-term Soldiers should be targeted for participation; that the survey should be administered to spouses to gather direct feedback regarding family support; and that the survey should be administered by people from "outside" the Army (i.e., civilians).

Feedback Regarding Survey Results Report

Who Should See Survey Results?

The general consensus among focus group respondents was that company leadership (i.e., company commanders and first sergeants) and reenlistment NCOs should have access to the survey results and feedback report, with some SMEs suggesting that platoon leaders and platoon sergeants be given access as well. Another frequent suggestion was to aggregate the results across companies and report them at the battalion and/or brigade level. SMEs also recognized that talented career counselors are critical to unit retention mission success, and that they should be included in the review of the results. Finally, the Department of the Army and senior Army leadership should also be briefed on the aggregated results, particularly for questions pertaining to the Army as a whole, and/or policy-related factors (e.g., deployments, the promotion system).

Data to Include in Feedback Report

When reporting the item-level survey results, various statistics may be presented, including frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and sample sizes. When provided with all of the options, the most frequent response was that both averages and percent breakdowns of each response option (via color-coded bars) are most helpful. Conversely, standard deviations were perceived as unnecessary, and frequency breakdowns, though endorsed by a few people, were generally deemed redundant. Few people commented on whether the sample size for each item is useful to report, and one person suggested including the overall sample size as well as the number of missing responses for each item instead.

Focus group participants were also questioned regarding the utility of including a benchmark. Overall, benchmarking information was considered useful, though some SMEs were hesitant, commenting that each company has very distinct issues, so it would be difficult to find an appropriate benchmark. Those in support of including benchmarking information generally requested an Army-wide benchmark, as well as a benchmark based on one of the following: (1) a similar company (i.e., matched on such variables as MOS, deployment experience, and/or installation); (2) the battalion; or (3) the installation.

Some SMEs requested that results be broken out by sub-groups (e.g., MOS, number of deployments/years in service, rank, age, gender, marital status, number of children), while others thought such information would be overwhelming and unnecessary. Still others fell in the middle of these two positions, requesting that only certain questions be broken out by sub-group. For example, one SME requested that responses to questions on reenlistment options/resources be broken out for initial, mid, and career Soldiers, and another person requested breaking out open-ended responses by grade.

Given the diverse preferences among unit leaders, another suggestion was to allow for a tailored feedback report, whereby leaders can choose what data to include. Alternatively, the feedback report could include only basic information, with an online link to more detailed information/statistics.

Overall Results Table

After explaining the overall results, or "quad chart" to focus group participants, the general consensus was that it is a valuable and easily interpretable tool. SMEs emphasized the importance of having a summary page such as this in the report, given that the item-level data are numerous and time-consuming to interpret. When asked which areas the company has influence/control over, SMEs reported that they have: full control over unit cohesion and unit leadership; some control over career progression and family-related issues, such as amount of personal time with Family; and limited control over FRGs because they are led by volunteers (at least in some units). Additionally, retention personnel were considered to be more at the Brigade level of influence.

A final suggestion with regard to the Overall Results Table was that it may be helpful to include page numbers next to each factor in the table, directing the user to the item-level results, in case more detail is desired for a given category.

Recommendations/Interventions for Problem Areas

Also included in the sample feedback report was an example list of potential recommendations and interventions for company leaders to implement to address problem areas. This information was perceived as a helpful addition to the feedback report, particularly for inexperienced leaders. Although this information may be informally communicated in interactions with other leaders or via websites (e.g., http://companycommander.org, http://platoonleader.com, or http://firstsergeant.com), formal leadership training programs do not include this type of information. The SMEs supported including such information in the feedback report, but they emphasized that it should be presented as recommendations rather than required actions.

In terms of appropriate sources to use for generating recommendations, the following suggestions were offered: (1) Army officers/NCOs (e.g., first sergeants, sergeant majors, majors, and lieutenant colonels); (2) Soldiers (i.e., via open-ended survey questions); and (3) company commander's books or chief-of-staff reading lists. SMEs also mentioned that recommendations generated from Soldier feedback should be separated from those generated from other sources.

Mixed reactions were received with regard to the appropriate level of specificity of the recommended interventions. While some SMEs indicated that the level of specificity in the sample report is appropriate, others commented that more specific information would be needed for inexperienced leaders.

Intervention Evaluation and Recommendations

Our efforts to date indicate that the overall concept is sound and appears to be a promising approach for measuring unit retention climate. Below, we summarize: (1) the extent to which the original concept shows potential for a positive impact, and a recommendation for whether the Army should pursue the concept; (2) factors that would create significant challenges to its future implementation; (3) the need for identifying an appropriate sponsor to support the implementation of this retention tool; and (4) knowledge and understanding gained that may inform future research and the Career Continuance Model.

Intervention Evaluation Summary

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative results from the pilot test and initial evaluation of the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System intervention are promising. The survey results demonstrate differences among companies on several of the dimensions measured. These differences appear to be related to unit retention mission accomplishment and shared perceptions of unit reenlistment plans. Further, senior company leaders who participated in the interviews and focus groups indicated that the survey and feedback system would be a useful tool to aid unit leadership in diagnosing issues their companies confront in meeting their retention targets. It provides both a means of gathering important information and feedback and recommendations for action in a way that company commanders found useful. More work is needed to refine the instrument, to make it more efficient, and to further develop the guidance it offers for making improvements, but the efforts put forth so far provide a solid foundation for future efforts.

Challenges to Implementation

While the initial results suggest that the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System may be an effective tool to help company leaders improve the retention climates in their units, several challenges must be addressed to ensure successful implementation.

One issue concerns obtaining Army-wide buy-in. Not only is the support of Army leadership important to this effort, company commanders and junior enlisted Soldiers must perceive the survey and feedback report as a productive use of their time. For example, if Soldiers do not feel unit leadership cares about the survey results or see positive changes in less-effective retention climate units, they might not provide honest responses and the feedback report could be meaningless. Additional outcome-focused research might help support this effort. For example, if the outcome of a study demonstrated that companies improved their reenlistment rates after using the Retention Climate Feedback System, this research would help create buy-in with Army leaders.

Implementation strategy is another challenge to the design of an efficient and effective process for the Retention Climate Feedback System. Important considerations include: (1) selection of a sponsor to promote and notify Army leaders about the system; and, (2) selection of a group to host and maintain the survey, and provide survey results to company and Army leaders.

Several other issues will affect decisions regarding implementation and survey logistics. For example, the Army needs to evaluate the feasibility of administering the survey and feedback report in a computer-based and/or paper-and-pencil format. Important considerations include the resources available to Soldiers to complete the survey tool and the importance of providing a quick turn-around for results.

Also important is further exploration of how results should be reported throughout the chain of command. Although the focus of the feedback concept concerns unit leadership, in order for a company commander and first sergeant to develop and implement an effective course of action to enhance retention, senior leadership support is required. Further, a small portion of the content relates more directly to Army policy, highlighting the need to incorporate a feedback component that is reported to Senior Army leadership. If results are to be communicated back to Army leadership, appropriate sampling across Army units at the company/battery/squadron level is essential. Particular attention should be paid to the type of units included (e.g., Maneuver, Fires and Effects vs. Operations Support), unit composition in terms of age, rank and term of service, location, as well as to where the unit falls within the ARFORGEN cycle.

This effort must be distinguished from other Army climate surveys (e.g., the Unit Climate Profile, the Command Climate Survey, and DEOMI's Organizational Climate Survey). Although there is some overlapping content (e.g., leadership issues), existing Army climate surveys are not focused on enhancing reenlistment in the Active Army.

Need for Sponsorship and Support

Sponsorship and support for the implementation of the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System will be critical to how the System is perceived and utilized by command leaders. As mentioned above, leadership buy-in will be essential to the overall utility of the System. Ideally, the Army agency that sponsors the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System would be one seen as a provider of valued tools for company leadership. Thus, consideration should be given to how company leaders perceive the various agencies and groups considered as potential sponsors.

In addition, practical issues such as online vs. paper-and-pencil administration, survey data entry, survey data analysis, and feedback tool production and distribution, will influence the agency choice. Some groups within the Army are likely better resourced for taking on the tasks needed to sponsor and support implementation of the entire survey and feedback system.

In sum, moving the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System toward full development and implementation will require an appropriate sponsoring agency (or agencies) to support the use of this tool. Identifying such an agency will require very careful consideration of the most feasible options.

Future Research

There are a number of next steps to be explored to support full implementation of the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System concept.

First, the concept has several distinct components: the survey, feedback report, actions by company leaders, and evaluation of the effectiveness of the actions. Each of these merits full and systematic consideration for likely effectiveness. Full implementation would require that all of the components successfully work together to impact retention.

For example, further research should be conducted to ensure that the shortened version of the survey adequately assesses the factors intended. The preliminary research conducted here certainly supports this position, but additional data should be obtained and adjustments made, if needed.

Also important would be the steps needed to make the survey and feedback system available Army-wide, ideally including a web-based feedback reporting system. To maximize the impact of the tool, it must be easily accessible to all unit-level commands, and this will require a fairly logistically intensive effort. Further, the feedback reporting system should be flexible and easily interpretable; and based on the feedback received, we believe a web-based approach is the best way to achieve these goals.

In conjunction with the web-based feedback reporting system, there will have to be further development of the recommendations section of the feedback report. This should be based on existing Army materials and newly developed Army SME input. As time goes on, new ideas and refinements can be added based on ideas obtained from unit commanders utilizing the tool. In addition, a web site for company commanders, first sergeants, and/or retention personnel to look for additional, more detailed information should be developed.

This would ideally be integrated into the feedback report (e.g., provide specific links to supplemental resources), but could also be accessible as a stand-alone resource.

The preliminary analyses done in this project suggest that the Retention Climate Feedback concept can be effective at diagnosing unit climate differences. Going forward, controlled, matched group design studies should be conducted to support and clarify this finding. By more fully investigating the differences and the underlying causes, the survey and feedback reports can be refined and more directly tailored to the needs of the unit commanders utilizing the data.

Finally, we recommend a research study to fully demonstrate and test the concept, evaluating whether retention and attitudes toward reenlistment measurably improve after using survey and feedback in a controlled, pre-post test design. Our initial feasibility data suggest that a positive result is very likely, but strong experimental results would provide a very powerful rationale to support the effort and the resources required to implement it. Further, survey results could be used to help refine and expand the Career Continuance Model.

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CHAPTER 7 - SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

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This chapter summarizes the primary lessons learned from the project, and provides recommendations to guide the Army's efforts to manage Soldier continuance in the future.

This chapter summarizes the primary lessons learned from the enlisted portion of the STAY project, as well as the career continuance tools and resources that were created. It concludes with recommendations to guide the Army's efforts to manage the career continuance of enlisted Soldiers and junior non-commissioned officers (NCOs) in the future.

The Enlisted STAY project was a long-term effort to bring structure and organization to a wide variety of research on, and practice related to, the career continuance decisions of enlisted Soldiers. This was accomplished by leveraging synergies of two approaches: the development of a Career Continuance Model, and the selection, development, and pilot testing of two concurrent interventions. An essential component of the Enlisted STAY project was the interaction between the model development and the development and reviews of interventions. Each process informed the other as we moved forward.

As the work described in this report indicates, Soldiers' career continuance decisions reflect a complex and dynamic process, influenced by a broad array of individual and contextual factors and experiences. This work identified a variety of approaches for the Army to have a positive impact on Soldiers' lives and careers, and influence continuance decisions to the benefit of both Soldiers and the Army.

Career continuance is the end product of multiple decisions reached over the course of Soldiers' time in the Army, and both the Army and the Soldier play a role in this process. The separation of a Soldier from the Army does not occur in isolation; the process involves both the Soldier and the Army reaching some degree of consensus on that separation. For the purposes of this project, we focused on Soldier-driven continuance, rather than on those factors influencing Army-driven continuance, such as manpower requirements or mission planning. Further, we examined both attrition and retention decisions. Attrition was defined as a Soldier leaving the Army prior to the completion of his or her first contract term. Attrition is distinct from retention, which involves a Soldier deciding to continue his or her career beyond an initial contract term.

Summary of Information Learned and Career Continuance Products

In this section of the chapter, we summarize the extensive work reported in the previous chapters for the Enlisted STAY project, and discuss lessons learned during the development of the career continuance products.

In the interest of brevity, we emphasize areas that directly address the organization and structuring of future research, and practical aspects of the Army's management of Soldier and junior NCO career continuance.

Factor Identification

We began our STAY effort by identifying factors that influence the career continuance decision-making process of enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs. This was based on reviews of previous work, and was confirmed and refined through interviews and focus groups with hundreds of Army Soldiers. Throughout our efforts we focused on gathering relevant data regarding career continuance factors important to enlisted Soldiers in their early to mid-careers. Thus, we collected both attrition-related and reenlistment-related themes and factors from drill sergeants, first term Soldiers, and junior NCOs. We also collected information from senior NCOs and the officer chain-of-command regarding the issues affecting attrition and reenlistment of their junior Soldiers.

The major issues influencing Soldiers' decisions to leave the Army during training or before completion of their contract term (attrition) included: individual difference factors such as commitment to the Army; reasons for joining; pre-existing behavioral or emotional difficulties; physical injuries or problems; family history of service; and ability to adjust to Army life. Contextual factors were also important to Soldiers' attrition decisions. These included shocks and stress experienced early in training or at the first unit of assignment; deployment-related concerns; financial troubles; availability of alternative job opportunities; family time-related concerns; peer and other forms of social support; and unmet expectations regarding the Army or Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) -related duties.

We also explored the issues influencing first term Soldiers' and NCOs' decisions to remain in the Army (reenlistment/retention). Although many of the factors were similar for first term Soldiers and junior NCOs, there were noteworthy differences. For example, some factors (e.g., job/financial security, Army benefits, quality of life, deployments, patriotism and pride in service, and family support) were meaningful for both groups, and other factors were more influential for first term Soldiers (e.g., unmet expectations, perceptions of deception, and discipline) or for junior NCOs (e.g., career advancement, educational opportunities).

These factors reflect complex issues that may positively or negatively influence career continuance decisions, depending on the individual. For example, deployments may have a negative influence for NCOs because these individuals may view deployments as time away from Family, or be concerned about stress caused by multiple deployments. Conversely, first term Soldiers may want to deploy and may either be excited about the prospect of deployment, enjoy the deployments they have had, or even be disappointed because they have not had the opportunity to deploy.

The career continuance themes and factors set the stage for the Enlisted STAY project, informing the development of the Career Continuance Model, as well as informing our efforts to identify and develop interventions for addressing attrition and retention in the Army.

Career Continuance Model

The Career Continuance Model was intended to provide a framework for understanding continuance behavior, building on past work and incorporating the themes and factors we learned were important to the career continuance decision process. We also integrated earlier work that had not yet been fully applied to the understanding of Army career continuance, including private sector work on retention and turnover.

In the context of the Enlisted STAY effort, the model was developed collaboratively with the intervention development effort. That is, as we gathered information on career continuance to inform the initial model and revisions, we used that knowledge to refine the selection and development of potential interventions to address attrition and retention. At the same time, the information gathered to develop and evaluate the interventions fed into the model, especially with regard to the variables to be included and the process by which various enlisted career stages influenced their interrelationships.

The intention was to model the career continuance decision-making process, as opposed to answering the question of "why do Soldiers leave the Army?" To this end, the model was focused on both positive factors; such as efficacy, resilience, maturity, friendships and loyalty, as well as negative factors such as stress, lack of opportunity, or disaffection.

The model takes into account two "paths to continuance," from the Soldier's perspective and the Army's. The majority of the STAY effort is focused on the Soldier's decision making process, but the model also provides a framework for integrating the Army's decision making with regard to Soldier separation and retention. The model views both attrition and non-reenlistment as consequences of the Soldier's attachment, a concept similar to organizational commitment in the private sector. The three drivers of overall attachment are affective, continuance, and normative commitment, and these are the heart of the Soldier side of the model.

Another key aspect of the model is that it views the continuance decision as a process that takes place over time. Attachment changes over the course of Soldiers' careers as a result of events and critical experiences they encounter. This dynamic viewpoint operates in a number of ways, and the model is useful in exploring the interrelationships among the variables and how they may change over time. The structure of an Army career provides a series of events or inflection points that may shift Soldiers' commitment levels, such as Basic Combat Training, first unit of assignment, and the transitions in between. These career units are particularly relevant in modeling career continuance. Each career unit has unique, predictable and unpredictable experiences that influence attachment.

The model posits that the career units, and transitions in between, provide varying levels of opportunity for separation. An example of this would be the end of a Soldier's contract term as

he or she is deciding whether to reenlist. At this time, the level of attachment manifests itself in the decision to leave or stay.

Individual difference variables are factored into the model as well. Soldiers come into the Army with different levels of commitment, and these levels change as a function of the Soldier's experiences interacting with his or her personal characteristics and history. In addition to individual difference variables, the model takes into account social and organizational resources. These include Family, which is an absolutely critical part of the decision process, as well as Army programs, policies, and social supports. How Soldiers and their families deal with challenges is a function of these personal and external resources they bring to their experiences.

Given the complexity and breadth of the model, we were not able to empirically test it in its entirety. However, portions of the model were tested using surveys, and these tests provide empirical support for some of the key relationships among the variables. For example, the Soldier Transition Survey directly assesses a number of factors that influence attachment, such as patriotism, its influence on Soldiers' normative commitment and the relationship to Soldiers' likelihood of their remaining in the Army.

The model provides guidance for selecting solutions to applied problems and for evaluating these solutions. It allows for the anticipation of effects of future actions on continuance by identifying important factors and providing a framework for understanding how they interact to predict continuance behaviors. This can mitigate the effects of previously unanticipated outcomes, and facilitate the generation of innovative ideas that might not previously have been considered. The model also provides new perspectives on existing interventions, and ways of assessing or interpreting their effectiveness. It offers an approach whereby researchers and senior Army leaders can review and understand how various resources might best be expended to address the root causes of separation and attachment, and thus influence career continuance decisions.

Intervention Development and Evaluation

Potential interventions were derived from several sources, including the emerging Career Continuance Model, programs used in other services or countries or with other populations (e.g., officers), and reviews of relevant literature. This resulted in two reports that supplement this technical report; the first is a review of attrition interventions (Kubisiak, Lentz, Horgen, Bryant, Connell, Tuttle, Borman, Young, & Morath, R., 2009), and the other is a review of retention interventions (Bryant, Tolentino, Borman, Horgen, Kubisiak, & Lentz, 2009). Together, these reports constitute a rich and useful database of what had been attempted, with varying degrees of success, before the Enlisted STAY project.

This collection of interventions provided a structure for these efforts, in that the interventions are catalogued and grouped by similar content. The taxonomy of interventions has made clear that, in the area of attrition, efforts have been concentrated in the area of screening, or selection-based interventions and training, or enhancing the skills of the Soldier. The latter

approach consists of various ways of helping the Soldier improve his or her methods of adjusting to the Army and making the career a more rewarding experience. With regard to retention, previous interventions break down into three categories: (1) incentives offered to Soldiers, (2) work- related initiatives that make their career more rewarding or otherwise provide career enhancing opportunities within the Army and (3) non-work related initiatives, designed to support the Soldiers and their families outside of their Army duties.

We also attempted to summarize the effectiveness of past intervention efforts. However, only a subset of the intervention efforts reported on their effectiveness. Future efforts should document program evaluations to determine whether the interventions impact attrition, and/or retention rates. In this manner, future projects can feed back into the model for testing and refinement. We cannot overstate the importance of this evaluation process. In Chapter 4, as we identified and generated the potential interventions for evaluation in the Enlisted STAY project, we included evaluation plans for each. These may serve as a guide to future efforts based on the work done here.

Additionally, in FY06 we conducted interviews and focus groups at six Army installations with drill sergeants, company commanders, platoon leaders, first sergeants, platoon sergeants, squad leaders, and junior enlisted Soldiers.

Based on data and theory, we identified fifteen promising intervention concepts for possible development in the STAY effort. We developed a detailed plan describing the relationship between each intervention and each of the critical factors, including how they might be implemented and evaluated. In the process of developing these potential interventions, we established a set of criteria for what constitutes an effective intervention. These criteria (see Chapter 4), the taxonomy of interventions, and the group of interventions themselves, are a useful product of the Enlisted STAY effort. That is, they provide a solid basis for exploring future efforts to address career continuance.

We described promising interventions to panels of Army subject matter experts over several iterations. Their feedback helped identify six "best bet" attrition and retention interventions: (1) Unit Retention Climate Feedback System; (2) Drill Sergeant Training, with a focus on Soldier psychological adjustment and socialization into the Army; (3) Realistic Job Previews (RJP) prior to Initial Entry Training (IET) and arrival at the first unit of assignment; (4) a training tool on "Lessons Learned from IET Transformation"; (5) an online Reenlistment Information Toolkit; and (6) Family Resilience Training. Senior Army leadership endorsed the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System and highlighted the need for an additional intervention strategy, a Soldier Transition Survey.

Soldier Transition Survey

The Soldier Transition Survey was designed to provide timely, scientifically-based information to help Army leadership understand, forecast, and manage reenlistment trends for junior enlisted Soldiers and junior NCOs. It focused on the individual-level factors that drive

career continuance decisions. Based on themes and factors identified in the interviews and focus groups described in Chapter 2, the survey contains items covering 10 content areas: MOS/Assignment; Career Progression; Deployments; Unit Leadership; Peers; Unit Cohesion; Family Support & Concern; Quality of Life; Army Benefits; and Alternatives to Army Career.

Surveys were administered to Soldiers and NCOs who: 1) had recently reenlisted in the Active Army; 2) were in their reenlistment window; or 3) were currently exiting the Active Army. Additionally, because of practical difficulties in gathering data from Soldiers directly, this intervention explored the use of career counselors and Transition Services Managers (TSMs) as proxy samples. Participants completed one of the following three forms: a General Form, an Exit Form, or a Manager Form.

The survey data indicated that some of the most important item-level reasons to stay in the Active Army across Soldiers who had recently reenlisted or were currently within the reenlistment window were healthcare and retirement benefits, job security/stability, and the opportunity for Soldiers to serve their country. Items found to be the most important reasons to leave the Army across exiting Soldiers and those in the reenlistment window included the Army "Stop-Loss" policy, the amount of time away from Family while deployed, family stress, and the length of and time between deployments. Many of the items that were perceived as important reasons to leave were categorized under the Deployment or Family Support and Concern factors, which were the most important general factors leading to separation from the Army. The Benefits, Peers, and Alternatives to Army Career factors were perceived as being the most important factors influencing decisions to stay.

Additionally, survey responses were compared across groups to determine if other individuals could provide meaningful and accurate information regarding career continuance decisions. Results from the proxy group analyses showed a similar pattern of responses with regard to the relative importance of various factors to the career continuance decision. Junior Soldiers and NCOs who recently reenlisted in the Active Army were the most similar to responses from junior Soldiers and NCOs who were in their reenlistment window and indicated they were likely staying in the Active Army. Likewise, responses from exiting junior Soldiers and NCOs very closely resembled responses from junior Soldiers and NCOs who were in their reenlistment window and indicated they were likely separating from the Army. Although the similarities between the career counselor and TSM responses were not as great as those between Soldiers and NCOs in the reenlistment window, patterns of consistent findings did emerge.

The Soldier Transition Survey is a promising initiative for Army leadership to use to understand, forecast, and manage individual-level reenlistment trends of junior-level Soldiers and junior NCOs. Further, the proxy sample analyses identified both Soldier and expert (career counselors and TSMs) groups that can be used to closely approximate the career continuance perceptions of reenlisting and separating junior-level Soldiers and NCOs. These proxy groups would allow for the collection of accurate reenlistment trend data in a timely, cost-efficient manner.

Unit Retention Climate Feedback System

The Unit Retention Climate Feedback System intervention was designed to measure unit-level experiences and shared perceptions that influence Soldiers' retention decisions. Our focus was on ensuring the survey measured unit-level factors that were relevant to Soldiers' retention decisions and providing easy-to-understand feedback to unit leadership on issues affecting their Soldiers.

Based on the findings of earlier retention research, as well as interviews and focus groups, we identified nine content areas that first term and junior NCOs indicated were important to their career continuance decisions and influenced the overall unit climate regarding reenlistment. We administered a pilot survey to (1) evaluate the effectiveness and perceived value of the survey and feedback system; and (2) identify items that could be eliminated to reduce the survey length. Following the pilot, we conducted a series of focus groups and interviews to collect additional input regarding the survey and feedback report.

Pilot survey results suggested that 12 factors drive perceptions of the unit retention climate, including: Army Expectations, Army Support of the Family, Family Support of the Army, Career Progression, Deployed Experiences, Garrison Experiences, Junior NCO Leadership, Senior NCO Leadership, Officer Leadership, Retention Personnel, Unit Cohesion, and Unit Comparisons. We were able to reduce the survey length to a manageable 154 items.

Next, we evaluated the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System concept by confirming that retention climate was a unit-level phenomenon that differed meaningfully across units. The pilot test indicated that companies varied greatly in both recent unit retention mission accomplishment and perceptions of unit reenlistment plans. Further, unit-level scores on the factors, and responses across companies, were significantly different. For example, one company with lower mean factor scores did not meet FY07 retention goals, whereas another company with higher mean factor scores exceeded FY07 goals. Additionally, Soldiers from the company with lower factor means indicated more Soldiers were planning to leave the Army compared to Soldier responses from the company with higher mean factor scores. Although more data are needed to substantiate these findings, they support the intervention concept by demonstrating that the tool identified meaningful unit-level differences related to Soldier retention.

The survey results were compiled and summarized in a feedback report designed to inform unit leadership (company commanders in this case) of the retention climate in their units. The report provides actionable information and guidance that commanders can use to improve their unit's retention climate, and subsequently enhance unit reenlistment rates. It includes an overall results table, with survey results presented along two dimensions: current performance (low versus high) and level of influence/control of company leadership (indirect versus direct). This feature is meant to clarify the distinction between influences on retention that the leaders can impact, such as communication within chain of command -- as well as influences that they cannot, such as stop-loss policy. Finally, the feedback report includes an example list of potential recommendations and interventions for company leaders to implement to address problem areas associated with each content area.

We gathered preliminary feedback from Soldiers and senior company leaders regarding the survey and feedback system. In general, they thought the survey should be administered by people "outside" the Army twice a year, both before and after a change in leadership. They thought Soldiers would receive the survey positively and respond accurately if several challenges to implementation were met, including: (1) demonstrating buy-in from leadership; (2) differentiating this from other surveys; (3) ensuring that Soldiers respond candidly to the survey; and (4) providing a quick turn-around between survey administration and the reporting of results.

Overall, Soldiers and leaders were supportive of the survey, and leaders perceived both the survey and feedback system as particularly useful for new or inexperienced leaders, or for units experiencing significant problems related to retention and/or unit climate. Work is needed to further develop the guidance it offers for making improvements in the unit retention climate, but our experiences show that the intervention has considerable promise.

Managing Enlisted Soldier and Junior NCO Career Continuance

In this section of the chapter, we discuss the conclusions that can be drawn from this work and how they can inform the management of enlisted Soldier and junior NCO career continuance. This information is presented with a strong emphasis on the utilization of the products developed during the Enlisted STAY project.

There are five main areas in which the results of the Enlisted STAY project can enhance the Army's management of career continuance: (1) continued monitoring of Soldier attitudes and trends; (2) establishing a centralized method of tracking career continuance work; (3) enhancing communication of career continuance information; (4) directing and structuring future research and practices; and (5) developing innovative intervention approaches. These five aspects are discussed below.

Continued Monitoring of Soldiers' and Junior NCOs' Attitudes and Trends

The Army routinely tracks attrition and retention rates and trends in great detail. While this information is essential, we believe that for the Army to effectively manage Soldiers' career continuance, it must maintain an up-to-date awareness of their opinions and attitudes regarding their career choices beyond what is currently being done. These opinions and attitudes provide meaning to the numerical data, and can help the Army better understand and predict changes in attrition and retention rates. This is not to suggest that the current command climate surveys, such as the Unit Climate Profile (DA Pam 600-69) or the Command Climate Survey (AR 600-20), for example, are flawed or ineffective. Rather, the point is that more targeted instruments are required. Critical issues that can influence reenlistment decisions can change over time, and sometimes quite rapidly. For example, the data gathered during the current project suggested that "stop-loss" policies and their effects were significantly influencing Soldiers and junior NCOs to consider not continuing their military careers. Assuming that this policy is implemented less often over the coming years, it will likely be less influential.

Maintaining this awareness of Soldiers' attitudes can be done through surveys and focus groups involving individuals throughout the chain of command. The tools developed and pilot tested in this project, the Soldier Transition Survey and the Unit Retention Climate Feedback System, are valuable assets in maintaining this awareness. However, continued work on their refinement, and continuing to establish the databases resulting from their use are essential. Further, the research supporting the use of proxy samples supports the notion that even when it is not feasible to assess attitudes and opinions directly, viable alternatives are available. This can yield improved efficiencies as well as improved timeframes for capturing information, enabling the Army to conduct more fine-grained assessments and with greater frequency than is currently practical.

Establishing a Centralized Method of Tracking Career Continuance Work

In conducting our reviews of previous work that has been done to understand Soldier and junior NCO attrition and retention, we discovered a vast array of scientific research, formal and informal reports of interventions, anecdotal information from SMEs and a host of other sources of helpful, productive information. We believe that there is considerable value in establishing a systematic, coordinated way of organizing these efforts. This could be accomplished through the establishment of a specific agency or group to organize and track the attrition and retention efforts. This agency could establish standardized practices for evaluating interventions, provide a centralized repository of reports, databases and other information, and could act as custodian of the Career Continuance Model.

For example, with regard to the Career Continuance Model, as researchers and practitioners develop interventions and/or policies and procedures intended to influence attrition or retention, this agency would gather this information and consolidate the results.

The interventions could then be evaluated with regard to what factors they address, how effective they are in influencing Soldier and junior NCO behavior, and whether they support the relationships described by the model. Thus, refinements could be made to the model described above.

Further, this agency or group could act as a resource for Army leaders looking for potential solutions for attrition or retention issues. For example, unit commanders could be provided a menu of past interventions, along with information about the effectiveness of the interventions.

We also recommend that this agency periodically gather information on what other entities outside the Army are doing with regard to attrition and retention, or related work, and integrate the results of those efforts into a central database. This approach would allow the Army to more effectively take advantage of existing and ongoing career continuance research and practice.

Enhancing Communication of Career Continuance Information

As we conducted our research on the Enlisted STAY project, we found that there was a great deal of information and a wide variety of resources available regarding several aspects of career continuance. However, according to our SME feedback, this information was not well communicated up and down the chain of command or across functions within the Army (e.g., research vs. field).

We recommend the refinement of a method to regularly communicate up-to-date research, as well as new and effective practices to reduce attrition and address retention. We envision this as a method for multiple constituencies to communicate and understand pressing and "big picture" issues. For example, researchers would be made aware of the current situations and practices in the field, retention personnel would be made aware of the current research, senior Army leadership would be made aware of current issues in the field, and results from broader efforts, such as transition surveys, would be made available to all interested parties.

This mechanism may take the form of a task force, a committee that meets annually, or at minimum, a periodic e-mail that is sent out to representatives of the interested entities, including TRADOC, Accessions Command, the Attrition Working Groups, the Accessions Research Consortium and others. The communications established in this way also facilitate the continued monitoring of Soldier attitudes described above, providing an efficient means for individuals on the ground to get suggestions and new ideas to the leaders who can effect change. This would also have the added benefit of enabling some of these entities to expand their focus beyond just accessions to the entire Soldier career life-cycle.

Directing and Structuring Future Research and Practices

The Career Continuance Model provides a framework for understanding how factors that influence the decision interact and influence behavior. It brings together an array of literature and experiences from previous intervention efforts and consolidates the information in one source. The Army, or any interested party, can readily see posited relationships among the variables. This will facilitate understanding of how potential changes to the influencing factors will affect related outcomes. These relationships can be empirically tested, and if not supported, the model can be refined. Existing interventions can be reconsidered in terms of the model relationships and more systematically evaluated. In addition, the model can be used to help identify new or existing interventions to address emerging problem areas with regard to attrition and retention.

The model was designed to deal with many contingencies, contexts, and factors. Our intention was to provide a model that took into account not just changes in the Soldier and his or her career over time, but changes to the greater context of the Army, over time, as well. That is, as events such as the economic status of the U. S., labor markets, overall Army mission, and cultural perceptions of military service change, the model is designed to still be applicable and valid. These shifting contingencies can be factored into the existing model structure, and the

outcomes on continuance behavior can be predicted. In this way, the model transcends the time during which it was developed, and should be a useful tool going forward.

This is not to say that the model, in its current form, is conclusive or exhaustive. But as a tool for structuring the research and formulating the questions to be investigated, its utility will remain. To that end, we recommend that the model be refined over time, as new data are gathered and existing pieces of the model supported or refuted.

Further, the model can be used to structure existing research, identify gaps, and direct future research to address areas where more work is needed. In this way, ARI could develop a "roadmap," or an Attrition and Retention Campaign Plan, for attrition and retention research work.

Developing Innovative Approaches

One of the original goals of the Enlisted STAY effort was to develop innovative ways to address career continuance. The Career Continuance Model provides an empirically and theoretically grounded mechanism for exploring this further. But additional impact comes from developing new ideas for addressing the reasons that Soldiers and junior NCOs decide to stay in or leave the Army.

To facilitate innovation in this project, we focused on the Soldiers themselves to identify the domain of factors that influenced career continuance, rather than simply relying on published literature and project reports. We gathered input directly from Soldiers, NCOs, officers of all ranks up to O - 6, and other Army SMEs throughout the Enlisted STAY project. In this way, we were able to support the factors that went into the Career Continuance Model, and that underlie the interventions, as relevant and meaningful to the targeted Soldiers and junior NCOs. This experience helped us identify the relative importance of the factors in the current Army context. Although this relative importance may change over time, it was still important to help identify which interventions might be most helpful now. This approach also allowed us to be open to phenomena that hadn't necessarily been addressed before, such as the stress of repeated deployments in the current Operations Tempo (OPTEMPO).

In addition to reviewing existing interventions, we put considerable effort into refining ideas for new, innovative interventions to be developed and pilot tested. The results of this work yielded an even richer pool of potential interventions than what is described in the attrition and retention reports.

Further, we demonstrated a novel approach to collecting survey data on influencers of Soldiers' career continuance decisions. Proxy survey respondents, such as Army Career Alumni Program (ACAP) Transition Services Managers (TSMs) and career counselors who are knowledgeable about Soldiers were used to closely approximate the career continuance perceptions of recently reenlisted and separating junior-level Soldiers and NCOs. This approach can yield considerable efficiencies in future data collection procedures.

Many of these new ideas were based on approaches that had not previously been explored. For example, some ideas involved leveraging technologies in new ways, such as the development of a web-based, searchable database of available reenlistment opportunities that Soldiers could view themselves. Other concepts involved refining the training opportunities made available to Soldiers. An example of one such idea is to offer them training in skills that would make them more marketable in the private sector after their military career is over in exchange for more years of service.

These ideas are non-traditional in that they consist of new ways to appeal to Soldiers and address their needs by targeting different aspects of the decision process. We believe that these ideas may have indirect benefits that greatly outweigh their costs, especially in terms of increased morale, better retention, and better quality of life, both during the Soldiers' careers and after retirement. We recommend continuing the exploration of additional ideas along these lines as new interventions are sought.

Further, these new intervention ideas tie into, and can be conceptualized in terms of, the continuance model. That is, by exploring the implications of the interrelationships of variables in the model, we gain insight into what parameters we can change to affect career decision making. For example, consider the intervention that consists of teaching Soldiers a skill that they can use after their military career. A review of the model indicates that personal resources affect experiences that drive growth. Such growth, in turn, drives perceptions of individual well-being, as well as perceptions of the Army as an organization that is concerned for the Soldiers, and subsequently results in increased affective commitment. From this, a researcher can conclude that improving a Soldier's personal resources and growth should logically increase affective commitment. Therefore, the researcher can seek out an intervention, such as teaching life skills, to address those needs. By providing a Soldier with training that they can use in their lives after their service commitment is over, the Army is providing that Soldier with experiences that enhance the resources they have available to them. This results in increased personal growth, improving the Soldier's evaluation of his or her own situation, status, and career. It increases the perception that the Army cares about Soldiers and will provide opportunities for them and their families. These factors act together to increase a Soldier's affective commitment, as well as the Family's evaluation of the benefits of the Army career, together increasing the likelihood that the Soldier continues a career in the Army.

This example illustrates how the model can reveal indirect benefits that may not be immediately apparent when developing new interventions. By systematically evaluating the interrelationships among the variables, we can explore and find innovative solutions to complex situations.

Closing

In closing, the Enlisted STAY project has resulted in a number of lessons learned, career continuance tools, and resources that should be of utility going forward. We were able to learn a great deal about what drives Soldiers' and junior NCOs' reenlistment decisions, and we believe the Army will be able to leverage this information to influence both attrition and retention in a variety of ways. The Army currently does a very good job of monitoring and addressing career continuance decisions. However, the outcome of this project should contribute to increased efficiencies for the Army, and increased morale for the Soldiers and junior NCOs, as they get even more from their Army careers.

References

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