

June 15, 1987

Subject: Key Positions and Competitive Development Groups

## I. KEY POSITIONS

1. Key Position: Normally positions involved in determining strategy, plans, and/or policy in the career program or cluster group. In most career programs, key positions will cover grades no lower than GS/GM-13 through SES.

2. Identifying Key Positions: Prior to the development of ACTEDS training plans, career progression paths should be reviewed to determine the key or top level positions to which they lead, i.e., the positions for which the progressive and sequential training is needed. Each Functional Chief (FC) is responsible for identifying key positions within his/her career programs. This process is simplified if the positions can be designated by Army-wide organizational titles and grades, e.g., Senior Project Manager (Supervisory Operations Research Analyst), GM-1515-15. In some cases, specific position titles, series, grades and locations may have to be identified. Small numbers of key positions will facilitate the functional management and administration of the career program ACTEDS program. Each position will require special training requirements, competitive selection of trainees for competitive development groups or individual training programs, monitoring and mentoring of trainees, and placement efforts after the completion of the training.

3. Selecting for Key Positions: Ideally, upon completion of the ACTEDS training program, the employee should be placed in a position in which he/she will be able to utilize the newly-acquired knowledges and abilities. In most cases, however, many employees will be competing for the same key position. Therefore, the FC(R) will want to look at selection procedures that will assist in selecting the best candidate and, at the same time, allow increased functional involvement in the selection process. There are no hard and fast rules for choosing/designing selection procedures. Each career program or cluster group will have unique features that must be considered. Evaluation methodologies are discussed in section II-4 below and Appendix W and are equally applicable to either the direct selection or the competitive development group process.

4. Other Ways to Get Involved: In some cases, the FC(R) may want to become involved in the selection process without changing the current system to a great extent. This may be due to lack of resources to implement new programs or processes, or success of the current system in selecting the best candidates for key positions. Two ways of getting involved are recommended:

a. FC(R)/Candidate Week Program. In this type of program,

final candidates for the key position would each spend a week with the FC(R) before the final selection is made. During the week, the FC(R) will include the candidate in daily activities, giving the candidate an active role wherever possible. This type of exercise will allow the FC(R) to form an objective opinion about the candidate based on observed performance before the final selection is made. It will also give the candidates an opportunity to broaden their perspectives.

b. Selection Concurrence/Coordination. In this option, the FC(R) would allow the current evaluation and referral process to continue up to the point of selection. The name of the proposed selectee would then be referred to the FC(R) for coordination and/or concurrence.

## II. COMPETITIVE DEVELOPMENT GROUP (CDG)

1. Intent: To identify a cadre of high potential employees who will participate in a program of intensive career development intended to prepare them for key positions in the career program. Training funds and spaces are thus concentrated on certain selected employees who are expected to be best able to utilize the training by advancing to more responsible positions within the career field.

2. Applicability: A CDG may be of more benefit to some career programs than to others, depending on a number of factors to include:

a. Complexity: A career program comprised of related specialties or tracks (e.g., IMA, Comptroller) may require its potential managers to have at least a working knowledge of all of the functions. In such cases, a CDG may be extremely useful in cross-training employees in one or more secondary specialties. A relatively homogeneous career program may find no need for such a structured approach to training and selection.

b. Size: Small career programs with few key positions it may not be cost effective to develop a CDG. The formality of a CDG may cause more work than is necessary in order to adequately develop employees in order to staff a small number of jobs.

c. Current applicants: In some career programs, management may be pleased with the quality, quantity, and minority group representation of applicants being certified for promotion to key managerial positions under the current system. In such cases, there may be no need to "fix what isn't broken."

d. Timeliness of current referral system: Timeliness of referral for promotion is one benefit of a CDG if it includes a provision for noncompetitive promotion of graduates. A list of graduates eligible for a particular position could be produced

within a relatively short period of time upon receipt of a recruitment request. If the current referral system is timely, this time savings is not applicable.

3. Intake. A system should be designed for determining how often the CDG will be opened for new selections and how many employees should be accepted each time. Factors to be considered include:

a. Entry. Decide how many grades below the grade of the key positions (the target level for the CDG) participants will be brought into the CDG. The grade level for entry into the CDG will vary by career program. It will generally be one or two grade levels below the level of the lowest-graded key position. The earlier in an employee's career that selections will be made, the more difficult and imprecise the evaluation of candidates becomes. Assessing potential is quite complex. When these assessments involve predictions of a specialist's potential to progress into supervisory and then managerial level work, they become much less accurate. Therefore, beginning the CDG more than two levels below the grade of the key positions is not advisable. Projections for intake may have to be done separately for each grade level eligible for entry to ensure that the correct number of employees are being prepared for each covered grade level.

b. Number of and turnover in key jobs. Key jobs, the target positions for CDG graduates, must be identified first. Turnover projections should then be made, based on historical data, available information on age of incumbents and any other considerations, such as future changes in mission or technology, the retirement system, or the compensation system.

c. Training planned. Consider the type, length and number of training courses and developmental assignments planned in the CDG core curriculum. An estimate of the total amount of time to complete the graduation requirements will be useful in determining staggered intake into the CDG.

d. Forecasting. Using guidelines developed by the Office of Personnel Management for Senior Executive Service development groups, the maximum number of candidates selected should not exceed twice the number of annual projected vacancies. A workable size is 1.5 times the number of positions to be filled. The following is an example for a career program of approximately 350 key positions with 10 percent annual turnover:

Estimated yearly vacancies:	30 - 40
Less vacancies to be filled	
by other means (outside	
hire, transfer, etc)*	(10) - (15)
Positions to be filled from pool	20 - 25

Size of pool (1.5 times)  
\*if desirable

30 - 38

Depending on the structure of the career positions and the qualification requirements for the various positions within a program, separate estimates may be needed for the various specialties.

4. Selection:

a. Competition. Selection for entry into the CDG must be competitive because participation is likely to result in rapid advancement. Formal competition must provide the opportunity for all interested and eligible employees to be considered and for the assessment and selection to be based on merit factors only. For each grade level of employee eligible to apply, a separate evaluation procedure may also be necessary. It could be perceived as unfair to rate and rank employees at the GS-12 level against those at the GM-14, for example, whose experiences have enabled them to possess skills, knowledges and abilities at a higher level.

b. Area of Consideration. The area of consideration is the area in which the agency makes a search for eligible candidates in a specific action. The minimum area of consideration for promotion actions to career program positions is set by Army regulation. The area of consideration for the CDG should be the same as that which is set for key positions in the career program (generally Army-wide). It must be the same if noncompetitive promotion will be permitted for CDG graduates (see paragraph 6).

c. Recruiting. There are two basic methods for identifying interested and eligible candidates:

(1) the central referral system (e. g., ACCES or SKAP) if one exists. The existing systems could be modified to provide employees the opportunity to apply on the same forms for promotion and entry into the CDG. These systems may also provide the benefit of automated support for the application and evaluation system. A potential problem with this method is that its use is limited to the grade levels covered by the central referral system. Thus, if the CDG will be open to employees at grade levels which are higher or lower than the current registration levels, this method would need to be supplemented in some manner to permit those employees to compete.

(2) an announcement system (e. g., DACADS, Army-wide vacancy announcements). Such a system would enable employees to respond to a vacancy announcement which is distributed at the work site or to the home address. This would be necessary in career programs which do not have a central referral system. It is also an option for those with central referral programs,

although it may not be cost effective, especially for programs with large applicant pools.

d. Evaluation. The evaluation methodologies which may be used to select employees for a CDG are similar to those used in merit promotion systems. Depending on the availability of resources for design and use of assessment tools and the expected size of the applicant pool, an initial screening under one system could be followed by a more indepth assessment using one or more additional methods. A questionnaire could be sent to all employees in the career program to get a feel for how many would be likely to apply for a CDG so that the most appropriate tools could be selected. The assessment techniques which are considered to be the most appropriate screening methods for use in ACTEDS are (1) a central referral list issued under ACCES or SKAP; and (2) training and experience ratings. Possible supplemental assessment tools to be used in conjunction with either a central referral list or a training and experience rating include: (1) assessment center; (2) structured interview; (3) performance appraisal; and (4) supplemental supervisory rating. All of these evaluation tools are described in Appendix W.

e. Selection. Selecting authority would rest with the FC(R). A panel of advisors may be tasked to review the referral list prepared under the steps discussed above and to recommend selections. Selections should be announced with some degree of fanfare through command channels in order to alert all involved parties and to foster a sense of pride in the achievement of employees at the local level.

## 5. Training:

a. Career Development Plan (CDP). An analysis is made of the employee's background to determine the training from which the most benefit would be derived. A CDP, which details a blending of developmental assignments and formal training courses is then developed. It must conform to the core curriculum (see Glossary, Appendix V) or other similar guidance, be tailored to the individual's needs and goals and spell out the requirements for graduation from the CDG. It is generally written jointly by the employee and a mentor with appropriate resource counseling from an Employee Development Specialist and participation of the employee's supervisor. FC(R)-level review and approval of all CDPs for CDG participants may be desirable for the sake of consistency.

b. Accomplishment. Formal training identified in the CDP will be scheduled by the immediate supervisor as soon as practicable. Training for which there are insufficient quotas for all employees to attend (e. g., Senior Service Schools) and developmental assignments will be handled as discussed in other

papers.

c. Mentoring. The mentor, or advisor, is an essential aspect of this program. The mentor must receive specialized training in coaching techniques, interpretation of the assessment results, and the development of effective candidate CDPs. The mentor should meet the following qualifications:

- (1) willingness to serve as a senior advisor,
- (2) personal commitment to individual career development,
- (3) extensive knowledge and insight about how things get done within the Army,
- (4) broad and extensive managerial experience at two or more organizational levels above that of the CDG candidate,
- (5) occupation of a key position in the Army,
- (6) extensive contact and interaction with other agencies and organizations, and
- (7) a proven record as a competent manager.

It is recommended that the employee have some input into the selection of his/her mentor to help ensure a productive working relationship. Similarly, the supervisor must also be an important player so that difficulties are not encountered in carrying out the CDP.

d. Oversight. Once a CDP is developed and approved, it should be considered a contract between the Army and the employee. All parties should do all that is possible to ensure that it is followed. Some degree of oversight by the FCP is recommended in the initial development and throughout the training period as adjustments are needed.

e. Evaluation. Periodic evaluation of each participant's performance is essential to ensure that only those who successfully complete each phase of the training continue in the program. A standing operating procedure for the evaluation process should be developed for use throughout the CDG. Criteria should be developed which must be met in order for participants to remain in the program.

6. What happens upon graduation? Options include:

a. CDG graduates are the sole source of applicants for key positions. A single round of competition would cover both selection into the CDG and further noncompetitive promotion (one

or more grades) to a key position.

(1) Pros:

(a) It will guarantee a higher degree of utilization of training since more graduates are likely to be assigned to higher level positions.

(b) More employees are likely to apply for entry into the CDG knowing that further competition is not required for promotion.

(c) Vacancies can be filled quickly because a competitive referral list will not be required.

(2) Cons:

(a) It will require strict control over the number of employees selected for entry into the CDG so that sufficient vacancies would exist to permit placements to be effected within a reasonable period of time after graduation.

(b) There will be little or no promotion opportunity for employees who opt out of the CDG, for example, because of the mobility requirement. This is likely to cause morale problems for these employees who find that their careers are suddenly at a dead end.

(c) Commanders and other managers who select for key positions will not be pleased to find that there may be highly qualified employees who are not CDG participants, and therefore, not eligible for consideration. There is likely to be strong concern over the fact that their authority to select from any appropriate source has been diminished.

(d) It will require more sophisticated candidate evaluation procedures to predict an employee's potential to develop from a specialist to a supervisor or from a supervisory to a manager (depending on the the entry level into the CDG). The cost of developing and employing such methodologies would be high and favorable results could not be guaranteed.

b. CDG participation includes training only with no provision for noncompetitive promotion. Competition covers only entry into the CDG and graduates must compete with non-graduates for promotion under the type of merit promotion system currently utilized.

(1) Pros:

(a) It permits consideration of applicants from all sources for key positions. Commanders are likely to favor

this approach since it gives them more flexibility in their selections.

(b) Candidates for key positions will undergo another round of competition directly related to the position to be filled, thereby increasing the validity of the assessment process.

(c) Employees who opt out of the competitive development group and those who are not selected will remain eligible for key positions, thus lessening morale problems which may be caused by using CDG graduates as the sole source to fill key positions.

(2) Cons:

(a) Funds will be expended in training people who may never be promoted to key positions. However, it is likely that the training received will be of benefit to them in their careers.

(b) Morale of people who have received the training and have not been selected may be adversely affected. However, if selection and training is good, the chances of this occurring will be slight.

c. Give the selecting official a choice of two lists from which to select. A list of CDG graduates eligible for noncompetitive promotion could be issued and a second list, developed under competitive procedures could be either automatic or issued only upon request. A selection could be made from either list.

(1) Pros:

(a) Provides management a greater degree of flexibility by permitting a choice in recruiting applicants from all sources, including non-Army applicants.

(b) Applicants who have successfully competed for the CDG will not have to undergo further examination and competition. This process would also provide for very quick response time on referral requests.

(c) Morale should not be negatively impacted since all employees will remain eligible for consideration.

(2) Cons:

(a) The possibility of training excess people who will never be promoted still exists. However, as mentioned above, there will still be some benefit derived from that



training.

(b) Morale of people who have completed the training may suffer when non-CDG graduates are selected for key positions.

#### 7. Mobility requirements:

a. Purpose. To give the FCR the greatest amount of flexibility, participants must be available for a wide variety of assignments and duty locations. A mobility agreement is used to ensure that employees will accept world-wide assignment. The mobility agreement, if desired, should be a part of the application package for entry into the CDG so that all applicants are in agreement from the onset. Without mandatory mobility, the FCR will have neither the authority to assign employees to the training assignments which would be most beneficial for career development nor the option to recommend placement of graduates for vacancies in key positions in any location. This is a major difference between the military (highly mobile) and civilian (selectively mobile) personnel systems.

b. Application. Mobility relates to both the training process and the placement of CDG graduates. Training sites for the formal courses which would be mandatory for CDG participants would be known up front, as would the locations of the key positions for which graduates would be referred. Generally, employees are given the opportunity to make their assignment preferences known. Consideration of the employee's preference and the needs of the Army are weighed to determine where the employee will be assigned. The number and location of the key positions will have an impact on the likelihood of employees accepting a mobility requirement.

#### c. Considerations.

(1) A mobility requirement may cause a problem for some high potential employees who cannot to be mobile because of personal considerations. Thus, some of the potentially best-qualified employees may not apply.

(2) A DCSPER study conducted in 1992 found that women are much less likely to be mobile than are men. Unless this trend has been drastically reversed in the last five years, it can be expected that a mobility requirement will have adverse impact on women.

(3) Some employees are likely to agree initially to a mobility requirement but refuse to relocate when the time comes for actual placement. The career program must have a plan for dealing with this situation.

(4) Willingness to relocate on a short-term basis for training may differ from willingness to relocate on a permanent basis for an actual duty assignment. Again, locations of both the training sites and the key positions will have an impact.

8. Resources:

a. The level of resource commitment needed to run a CDG will vary depending primarily on the complexity (see Section II, Paragraph 2a above) of the career program. Elements of these programs which would affect the resource requirements include:

(1) The extensive cross-training of employees in related fields associated with complex career programs, such as IMA and Comptroller, raises the expectation that the length of time for participants to complete all graduation requirements would be longer in these types of programs. The longer the period of training, the higher the cost.

(2) The degree of individual tailoring of the CDPs and graduation requirements is expected to be greater for complex programs than for less complex programs. This would cause additional work on the part of the mentors and employees and at the CDP review and approval level.

b. Costs to consider include:

(1) Development of assessment tools. This may be done in-house or by contract. Some projection of cost is provided in Appendix B along with the description of each tool.

(2) Travel and per diem, including:

(a) subject-matter-expert travel for development of assessment tools,

(b) subject-matter-expert and applicant travel for assessment of applicants and interviews,

(c) mentor and participant travel for orientation meetings, if desired, and development of CDPs, and

(d) participant travel to and from formal training, developmental assignments, etc.

(3) Formal training tuition.

(4) Miscellaneous, such as salaries, administrative, support and material costs.