

**Workforce: 46,200 on Active Duty  
(6,150 Officers; 1,470 Warrants;  
31,580 Enlisted; 7,000 Civilians)**

## Synopsis

The Coast Guard's approach to building its leadership pipeline includes several elements that our study did not find anywhere else:

- A leadership framework that helps HQ get its arms around an extensive menu of formal leadership development programs and, among those offerings, define priorities and unmet needs
- A broad definition of leadership development that includes four categories of learning activities: leadership training; learning from experts; external activities; and job assignments
- An integrated information system and a catalog of competencies that will enable the Coast Guard to manage the supply of, and demand for, competencies across the workforce
- Online tools for assessing and developing leadership competencies at both the individual- and the unit-level

## Challenges

- **Four distinct workforces.** The Coast Guard has four major workforce components: Active Military, Reserve Military, Civilian, and a volunteer force of Auxiliaries. The military components are further divided into commissioned officers, commissioned warrant officers, and enlisted members. The Officer Corps has a general, institutional, focus, while the enlisted workforce is the technical and mission-specialist force. Warrant officers are in between, usually highly skilled enlisted specialists who compete to assume greater management responsibilities. Since every person affiliated with the Coast Guard (military or civilian) is expected to have certain leadership competencies, the four workforce components are often considered jointly for development purposes.
- **Separate information systems for various aspects of talent management.** The Coast Guard had separate information systems for each of four major aspects of human capital management—accession (recruiting and initial entry), training, assessment and advancement. Each system also used the concept of competency in a unique way, resulting in wildly different kinds of data. This made it difficult to integrate information, and to manage supply and demand for the workforce as a whole.

## Approach

In his 2001 study of best practices in public-sector leadership development, management scholar Ray Blunt lauded several aspects of the Coast Guard's approach to developing leadership talent:<sup>1</sup>

- A central Leadership Development Center (LDC), akin to a corporate education center in the public sector, located on the grounds of the Coast Guard Academy.
- The Commandant's Leadership Advisory Council (LAC), a guidance group composed of individuals from all levels and workforces, epitomizing the concept that line managers must own leadership development.
- An emphasis on self-development—that is, individuals' personal responsibility for honing their leadership skills and knowledge.

The following case study tracks more recent developments and investigates why the Coast Guard continues to be regarded as one of the best agencies in federal government in terms of leadership development. It focuses on three elements of the Coast Guard's approach:

- The Leadership Development Framework
- Competency Management
- Online tools for Leadership Competency Development

## The Leadership Development Framework

The Leadership Development Framework provides a high-level overview of leadership development activities for the four workforces — enlisted, warrant, officers, and civilians (shown in the top row of the exhibit on the next page). While each of these has a unique hierarchy of positions, they can be distilled into five "responsibility levels" — Executive, Senior Manager, Middle-level Supervisor, First-line Supervisor, and Worker (shown in first column). For each level and each workforce, the Framework specifies which formal training program will prepare employees to move successfully to the next level.

<sup>1</sup> Ray Blunt, 2003, *Growing Leaders For Public Service*. IBM Center for the Business of Government.

### A Sample of Formal Programs Targeted to Specific Segments of the Workforce

	Enlisted (31,581)	Warrant (1,473)	Officer (6,155)	Civilian (7,000)
Executive			Executive Development Capstone	Executive Development
Senior Manager	CMC Capstone	None	Senior Service School; Senior Leadership Principles and Skills	Senior Schools
Mid-level Supervisor	Chief Petty Officer Academy	Commissioned Warrant Officer Professional Development	Senior Leadership Principles and Skills; Leadership and Management School (LAMS)	Senior Leadership Principles and Skills
First-line Supervisor	Leadership and Management School (LAMS)		Leadership and Management School (LAMS)	Leadership and Management School (LAMS)
Worker	A-School		Coast Guard Academy/Officer Candidate School/ Direct Commission Officer School	Leadership and Management School (LAMS)

The Leadership Development Framework’s primary purpose is to help the Coast Guard’s Office of Leadership and Professional Development manage formal programs for developing leaders, explains the Office Chief, Lieutenant Commander Greg Stump, Ed.D. It shows how the elements fit together into a system. It highlights gaps, such as the absence of formal programs for certain segments of the workforce, as well as redundancies. And it identifies which programs deserve highest priority, such as the Leadership and Management School, the flagship training program for enlisted personnel, which is not yet fully funded.

Formal training programs are just one category of what the Coast Guard calls “learning activities”—experiences that enhance employees’ competencies so they can move to the next level of responsibility. There are also three other kinds of learning activities:

- Learning from experts (mentoring, coaching, networking, 360-degree feedback, individual development plans)
- External activities (professional associations, seminars)
- Job assignments (on-the-job training, details, teams)

All of these learning activities are aligned with the Coast Guard Competency Model shown on the next page. Employees at the “worker” level are expected to acquire the competencies in Quadrant 1. Quadrant 2 is geared to first-line supervisors and mid-level managers, Quadrant 3 to supervisors of supervisors and more senior managers, and Quadrant 4 to executives and those in expert consulting roles. Since the Coast Guard generally hires at the entry level and then promotes from within (rather than making lateral hires), the competencies are cumulative. Those who have achieved a position considered to be in Quadrant 3 are expected to have the competencies in Quadrants 1 and 2.

## CG Leadership Competencies

<p><b>Leading Self</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accountability/Responsibility</li> <li>Aligning Values</li> <li>Followership</li> <li>Health &amp; Well-Being</li> <li>Self Awareness &amp; Learning</li> <li>Personal Conduct</li> <li>Technical Proficiency</li> </ul>	<p><b>Leading Self</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effective Communications</li> <li>Team Building</li> <li>Influencing Others</li> <li>Mentoring</li> <li>Respect for Others &amp; Diversity Management</li> <li>Taking Care of People</li> </ul>
<p><b>Leading Performance/Change</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conflict Management</li> <li>Customer Focus</li> <li>Decision Making &amp; Problem Solving</li> <li>Management &amp; Process Improvement</li> <li>Vision Development &amp; Implementation</li> <li>Creativity &amp; Innovation</li> </ul>	<p><b>Leading the Coast Guard</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial Management</li> <li>Technology Management</li> <li>Human Resource Management</li> <li>External Awareness</li> <li>Political Savvy</li> <li>Partnering</li> <li>Entrepreneurship</li> <li>Stewardship</li> <li>Strategic Thinking</li> </ul>

On its own, this model is not unlike many other government agencies'. It's what the Coast Guard is doing with this model that's most noteworthy. By creating a database that tracks both the demand and the "inventory on hand" for competencies and competency-building experiences, the Coast Guard is moving to what it calls "Competency Management," the equivalent of workforce planning on steroids. It's an enterprise-level process for managing both the supply of talent and the demand-side that goes way beyond the typical focus on head count. What's more, it has the added benefit of helping individual employees manage their own careers.

## Competency Management

While the Coast Guard has had a competency model for more than a decade, its deep dive into competencies is more recent. It needed to develop an integrated human resource information system (HRIS) to replace four separate systems that couldn't talk to each other. Each supported one area of human resource management: accession, training, assessment and advancement. Each was managed independently and each was affected by different external forces, such as the budget cycle or the labor market cycle. "They all had their own engines driving them," says Dr. Steve Wehrenberg, head of HR Strategy and Capability Development. "It was like having four different drive shafts

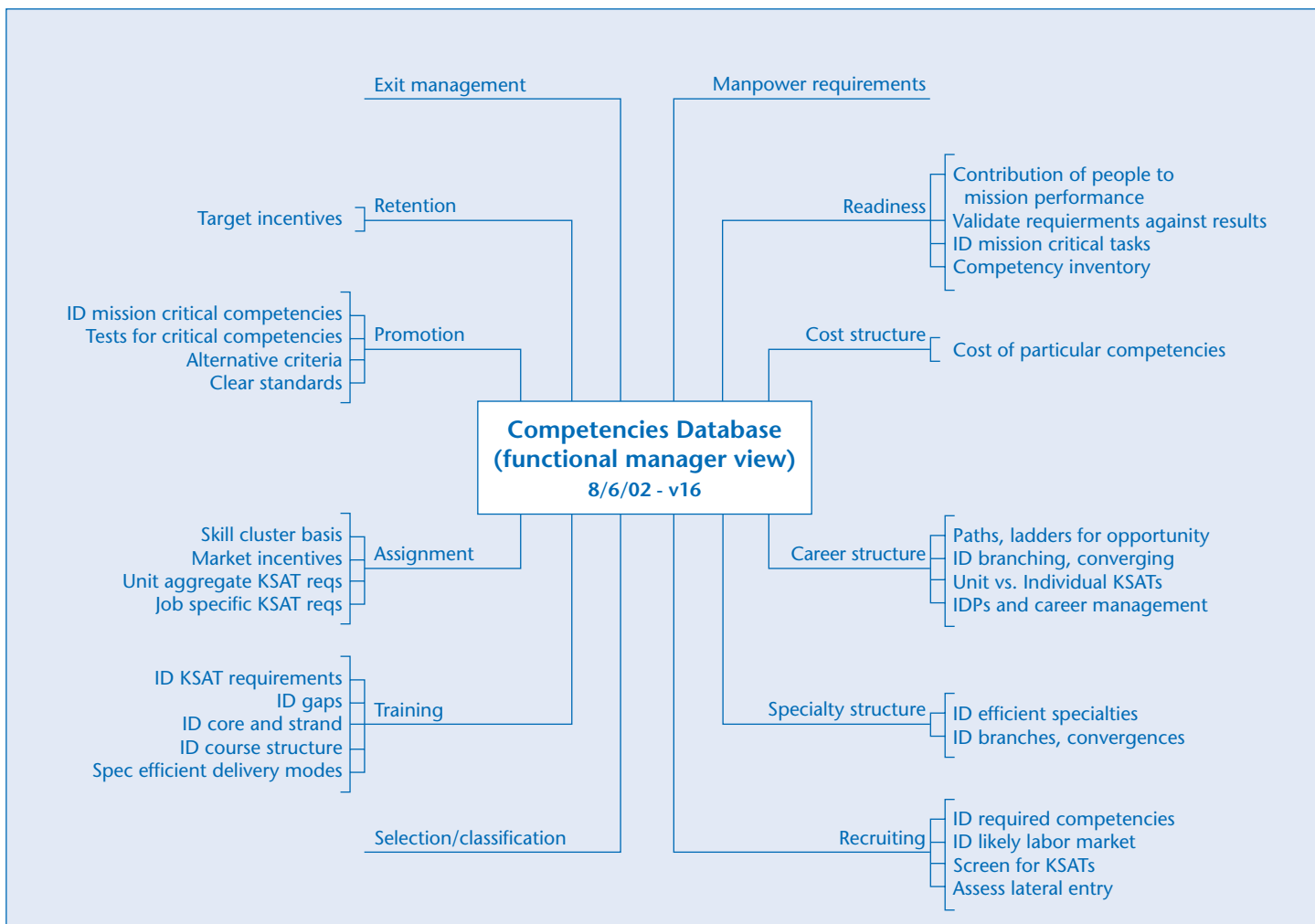
driving four different gears.” As a result, “We ended up with lots of gear teeth on the floor.” In more literal terms, that translated to “enormous overhead because the systems weren’t communicating as they should be,” explains Wehrenberg, who also directs Future Force, the Coast Guard office charged with developing systems and processes to understand supply and demand for the workforce of the future (20-30 years out).

The fundamental problem was that each system used information at different levels of abstraction. The training system focused on information about tasks, knowledge, and skills. The accession system tracked aptitude. The assignment system, says Wehrenberg, “tried to take a handful of attributes of people and fit them with a handful of attributes needed for a specific job.” And the advancement system needed to know extremely fine-grained details related to any of 20 or so occupational specialties within its staffing model. “They just weren’t using the same currency.”

Combining these separate databases into a single system would be far more efficient and effective, the Coast Guard realized. “We were looking for the right level of information to meet the needs of all four systems,” he says. “We always want the finest detail possible, but that detail comes at great cost. The trick is to find the balance.

“That’s when we decided to aggregate things into competencies.” In effect, competencies became a kind of Rosetta stone, a common code that could be used across the systems. But first the Coast Guard had to create a precise definition for every competency and a common notation system for recording competency-related data, regardless of whether it was related to recruiting or training or specifying new jobs. Then it had to develop a “language” for specifying those competencies for every position and every person.

The competency catalog is still a work in progress. Because line managers and program directors must determine the requirement for competencies, completing the catalog has been a major effort. Thus far, it’s about 80 percent done. The results are as cryptic and jargon-laden as an engineering spec sheet. The catalog includes technical, general, and leadership competencies. But while the particulars may be undecipherable outside the Coast Guard, the organizational impact is quite clear. Instead of four different HRIS, the Coast Guard now has one, and the many uses of the term “competency” (e.g., for special pays or bonuses, qualifications, collateral duties) have been clarified. From here on out, this taxonomy will be used to help manage all of the processes that make up the overall talent-management strategy, as shown below:



By building a unified system that makes competencies one of the basic units of information, the Coast Guard has taken a giant step beyond traditional workforce planning. It has married the quantitative information that's typical of most workforce plans with qualitative data captured in the language of competencies. Together, they deliver a more multidimensional picture of current state and future needs.

It's a point that Wehrenberg drives home to graduate students in his course on Strategic Human Resource Planning at George Washington University. "You're not here to manage inventory," he tells his students. "That's an outdated paradigm. You're here to manage the flows, to give line managers confidence that whatever they need, it will be available." Without that confidence, he adds, "line managers will be timid and invariably sacrifice the long-term for the short-term."

### Additional Benefits

The organization is not the only beneficiary. "There are three entities responsible for leadership development in the Coast Guard," says Stump. The first is the Office of Leadership and Professional Development (at Coast Guard headquarters), which Stump oversaw until he moved to a new assignment as Deputy Group Commander, New Orleans. The second is the commanding officer of a unit (or his or her representative), who can suggest specific developmental opportunities to his or her reports. The third is the individual member.

The Coast Guard's focus on competencies serves all three. The preceding section of the case study described competency management at the enterprise level. The final section describes two new, online tools—one just launched and the other still in development—designed to help groups and individuals assess and build their leadership competencies.

### New Tools for Developing Leadership Competencies

According to Coast Guard research, says Stump, 70 percent of Coast Guard members who separate (i.e., leave voluntarily prior to retirement) do so because of their first-line supervisor. That's consistent with other studies, such as the Gallup research reported in Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman's popular *First Break all the Rules* (Simon & Schuster, 1999). Too often, formal leadership training for new supervisors or mid-level managers is a one-time event. Participants need the opportunity to practice what they've learned once they're back on the job. They need feedback, an action plan, and ongoing development.

To help meet those needs, the Coast Guard developed the Unit Leader Development Program (ULDP), a web-based resource for commands (Coast Guard parlance for line managers). Its purpose is to improve the climate and overall leadership prowess of entire units, whether that unit is composed of four or 400 members.

Based on the 28 leadership competencies, the ULDP aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice. That's a critical need, since Coast Guard research also found that 30 percent of employees who graduate from a leadership development course say they can't apply what they learned. Why not? One leading reason, says Stump, is "unreceptive attitudes to contemporary leadership principles at their unit." Thus, the audience for ULDP isn't just the unit command. It's a resource for the group and for individual members. It creates a shared expectation about leadership.

Users can access ULDP from the desktop [<http://learning.uscg.mil/uldp>] When they do, they discover a vast, digital library of training techniques, leadership tools, and proven practices gathered from Coast Guard, Department of Defense, and private-sector organizations. For each competency, the library provides at least five interventions to spark development.

While ULDP puts a world of leadership knowledge just a few clicks away, it's much more than a reference library and tool box. Its real impact as a driver of development comes from a group assessment tool that an organizational unit of any size (commands, staffs, and subcomponents of each) can complete online. Linked to the 28 leadership competencies, the assessment identifies strengths and weaknesses in terms of "command climate," or how well the team works together. The surveys are anonymous. Once at least 50 percent of unit members have completed the assessment, the command receives a confidential report, to which no one else has access. It summarizes the unit's strengths and weaknesses, as they relate to the 28 competencies.

Such an assessment might be a one-time event, if ULDP had no other components. But the command report also includes a list of recommended developmental activities for each area that needs improvement, with links to supporting information on the ULDP site. (For a sample, go to the ULDP website and click on the ULDP Dashboard Summary.) In addition, ULDP links the command to a certified coach who can, upon request, help interpret the results and develop an action plan.

ULDP was recently approved by Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Thomas H. Collins and will become mandatory on July 1, 2005. There are several reasons for making the assessment compulsory, explains Stump. The first has to do with time pressures and the likelihood that individual and team development get bumped by other demands. "Unless we require that people spend time having this leadership dialogue," he says, "they're never going to have it."

But can it work, if the leader really isn't interested? Stump illustrates by conjuring up a Coast Guard archetype: An "old salt" with 25 years of service under his or her belt and an old-school way of operating: high on command-and-control and low on concern for people's feelings. A call goes out for people to attend Leadership and Management School and three of the group's members go. When they return, pumped up with enthusiasm and new ideas, they suggest the unthinkable: Could we sit down for a half-hour once a month and talk about group issues? Needless to say, the old salt is unreceptive.

That's why ULDP is mandatory. "We're trying to force that enlisted member or officer to take the pulse of his command with the ULDP assessment," says Stump.

Rather than simply sending employees to off-site programs, the Coast Guard hopes to make leadership development an ongoing process in the workgroup, and not simply a one-time event. It hopes to reduce the percentage of participants who can't apply what they learn in a leadership course because of unreceptive attitudes in their workplace.

### Empowering Individuals

Back when the Coast Guard was figuring out how to manage competencies, it wasn't thinking just about workforce supply and demand. It was also thinking about individuals and how to help them navigate their own course in the Coast Guard. "We want to give people more control over their own destiny," says Wehrenberg. "We want to give them a way to assess their options and make good career decisions. To do that, we have to be able to describe the opportunities that are available."

Empowering employees to manage their careers is fundamental to the Coast Guard's approach. It was one of the distinguishing features Ray Blunt noted in his 2001 study. And it's still explicit.

Now that the Coast Guard is getting a firm grasp on its formal leadership programs (through the Leadership Development Framework) and has developed the basic architecture for managing competencies across its workforce, it's ready to take the next step. With a website called TRISTAR, it hopes to give every one of its members the resources to assess their current leadership competencies and chart their course to further development. Once it's funded, TRISTAR will do for individuals what ULDP will do for units. It will provide a single destination where an individual can find diagnostic tools, get feedback, browse reading material, learn about the competency levels, find out about learning activities that will bridge the gaps or advance strengths—all calibrated to his or her responsibility level.

With TRISTAR, the Coast Guard will reinforce its message that individuals must take responsibility for their own development. "It's a two-way street," says Stump. "We provide the resources and direction, but people need to be deploying this on their own."

While both ULDP and TRISTAR focus on leadership development, they take aim at different levels. For example, the ULDP asks unit members to indicate the extent to which "People at my unit are comfortable bringing up controversial issues." TRISTAR, by contrast, might ask the individual to assess the extent to which she or he "builds consensus through give and take" or "encourages others to express ideas even when these ideas may seem unusual."

### Cost

The Coast Guard has an operating budget of \$6.8 billion (FY 2005). Of that, it budgets approximately \$2.5 million for leadership training. The cost to develop ULDP was less than \$100,000. Stump estimates the cost to develop TRISTAR will be \$36,000, some portion of which could come from a \$200,000 allocation for e-learning.

### Evaluation

The Coast Guard plans to evaluate ULDP by tracking usage. Because it can be costly to develop and track measures associated with leadership development, the primary indicator of ULDP success will simply be if Commanding Officers/Officers in Charge, and their respective units, find the product worth using.

Typically, the Coast Guard asks participants to evaluate formal leadership programs at the end of the course. Like his counterparts in other agencies we interviewed, Stump says it's difficult to implement the more rigorous evaluations described in Kirkpatrick's four-level model (see sidebar on page 54 "How Do We Know If What We're Doing Is Effective?"). When the Coast Guard did use a level-three evaluation (asking supervisors to complete a survey six months after their employee completed a formal training program), the response rate was just 15-20 percent. "We want to get to a level three or four," says Stump, "but we just don't have the resources."

"Of course, the real measure of success will be unit and individual performance and the workplace climate at those units" says Wehrenberg. The Coast Guard uses a biannual Organizational Assessment Survey to measure the latter at both the unit level and aggregated up the chain of command. Like other private and public sector organizations, he says, "we have a lot of people wrestling with performance measures." Coming up with better metrics is "just a matter of time."