

People Development And Management – A Key Building Block For The Third Generation RSAF

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Abstract:

The journey towards the Third Generation Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF) is built on the key thrusts of Concepts, Technology and Force Structure, Re-organization and People. Access to technologies and hardware will become pervasive and the ability of people to effectively exploit technologies and capabilities will become the decisive factor. The Third Generation RSAF strives to be an Air Force characterised by its integration and full spectrum capabilities. It strives to develop its people into Third Generation Airmen as it is people that make the difference. With a holistic and comprehensive framework towards People Development and Management—starting with recruitment, and continuing with professional training and education throughout the airmen's careers—the RSAF will develop its human capital as talents steeped in vocational competencies and professional skills and thoroughly imbued with RSAF core values and ethos.

Keywords: Third Generation Singapore Armed Forces; Military Transformation; People Development

INTRODUCTION

“People are our most valuable resource. We will develop our people to lead and excel in their mission imperatives. Our emphasis remains to train and educate our people well, and bring out the potential in each individual and team. We will strengthen professionalism in our people; create knowledge through integrated networks, open learning and deep specialisation; and build the necessary leadership competencies for current and future challenges.”

*– LG Desmond Kuek, Chief of Defence Force
PIONEER, July 2007*

The journey towards the Third Generation Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF) started in 2006 and is built on the key thrusts of Concepts, Technology and Force Structure, Re-organization and People.¹ But no matter how much we restructure, introduce new concepts and modernize our hardware, the most crucial factor that underpins the success of any transformation will still be the people. While concepts and technology may advance by leaps and bounds, ultimately the strength of the RSAF and its competitive edge over its adversaries will be found in its people and how well they are trained, developed and managed.

Consider this—as the world becomes increasingly interconnected, it is now possible to fast track capability development through the acquisition of off-the-shelf cutting-edge technologies and weapon systems from the international marketplace. These aspects of capability development, which traditionally require a long lead time and considerable expenditure for the military to develop independently, can now be expedited. In the future, access to technologies and hardware will become less of a differentiating factor in view of its pervasiveness; rather it is the ability of people to effectively exploit technologies and capabilities that will be the decisive factor. The RSAF recognizes this crucial aspect and has thus placed particular and continuous emphasis on our People Development.

UNDERSTANDING THE DEMANDS OF THE THIRD GENERATION RSAF

To ensure a more holistic and effective People Development, the overall strategy adopted must be intrinsically shaped to meet the operational demands of Third Generation RSAF. This will produce more focused and targeted efforts to create the desired outcomes.

Therefore, it is crucial to have an understanding of these operational demands as well as the associated human resource challenges that may be encountered.

Operational Demands

The mission demands on the Third Generation RSAF are far more complex than ever before. These demands will only increase as new and more capable warfighting systems come on line. The Third Generation RSAF will be operating in uncertain and challenging environments, encompassing a wide range of scenarios from peace to war. The landscape of the future battlespace will be ever more complex, more dynamic, and will unfold at ever higher operating tempos. The Third Generation RSAF will become more closely integrated, and will leverage upon cross-domain (air-land-sea) capabilities to overcome service domain stovepipes. More importantly, the enhanced ability to better share information and sense-make across functional divides (ops-int, ops-logs) will result in a more compressed Observe, Orient, Decide, and Act Loop (OODA Loop) cycle for commanders and warfighters alike. All these imply that RSAF airmen will be faced with a much more demanding operational environment, where they need to employ and exploit systems and technologies of increasing complexity (advanced weapons, network-centric structures and unmanned systems).

Human Resource Challenges

Besides operational demands, RSAF's transformation into the Third Generation fighting force will also need to contend with the twin challenges of a shrinking workforce and rising aspirations. The supply challenge is particularly acute for the engineering and technical vocations in Singapore,² vocations critical to the RSAF's operations. For instance, the number of technical diploma graduates are expected to drop from 5000 today to 4000 by 2020.³ Rising aspirations are another reality that the RSAF has to confront. By 2015, it is projected that one in two diploma holders in Singapore will move on to obtain a degree within ten years of graduation.⁴ When viewed against the backdrop of the national-

level competition for talents, this implies that the recruitment of new talents and even the retention of existing ones will become ever more challenging for the RSAF.

In essence, these drivers of change and future operational demands will therefore require the Air Force to develop a new breed of professionals—the Third Generation Airmen.⁵ These are airmen with new and deeper competencies, broader task exposure, and attributes and values that function more effectively in the Third Generation operating environment. They must be highly competent and skilled to harness the advanced technologies and concepts, as well as to exploit and maximize the capabilities of the Third Generation RSAF. At the same time, they will also be more operationally-minded and anchored firmly to the RSAF core values.

While concepts and technology may advance by leaps and bounds, ultimately the strength of the RSAF and its competitive edge over its adversaries will be found in its people and how well they are trained, developed and managed.

THE RSAF JOURNEY FOR PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT

Recognising the importance of having both the right people and the right quality of people, the RSAF has made people development and management one of its core transformation initiatives. This people-oriented thrust leads to the development and establishing of an overarching People Development and Management Framework. As part of the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) Human Capital Transformation effort, the RSAF is also deeply involved in the conceptualisation and development of a new set of career constructs for its people. RSAF National Servicemen NSmen constitute a significant component of its human capital pool, and therefore must also be fully maximised. Each aspect of the RSAF's people development efforts will be touched upon in the subsequent sections of the article.

RSAF PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

To address the challenge in developing Third Generation RSAF airmen, the RSAF has adopted an overarching People Development and Management Framework.⁶ This framework outlines how the characteristics of a Third Generation RSAF shape



Figure 1: The RSAF Journey for People Development.

the demands on the RSAF workforce, in terms of attributes, skills, knowledge, culture and values, as well as the structures required to drive and sustain the overall effort. This helps to provide better focus on the required efforts and streamline the move towards nurturing RSAF personnel to better meet organisational needs.

The RSAF People Development and Management framework encompass four key pillars, namely, Organisation Development (OD), Training and Education (T&E), Human Resource Management (HRM) and Communication and Engagement (C&E), as summarised in Table 1.

Organisation Development

An open, learning and inclusive culture, anchored on the RSAF Core Values, forms a supportive environment for our people to connect to the organisation and to

develop their potential to its maximum. The RSAF aims to provide its people with a positive experience throughout their careers so that they can contribute to the organisation with their hearts and minds. Having the capacity to lead, learn and share is key for an effective Third Generation RSAF. The RSAF thus places great emphasis in the areas of Organisation Learning, Leadership Development and Knowledge Management, as these are recognised to be the key enablers for effective Organisational Development.

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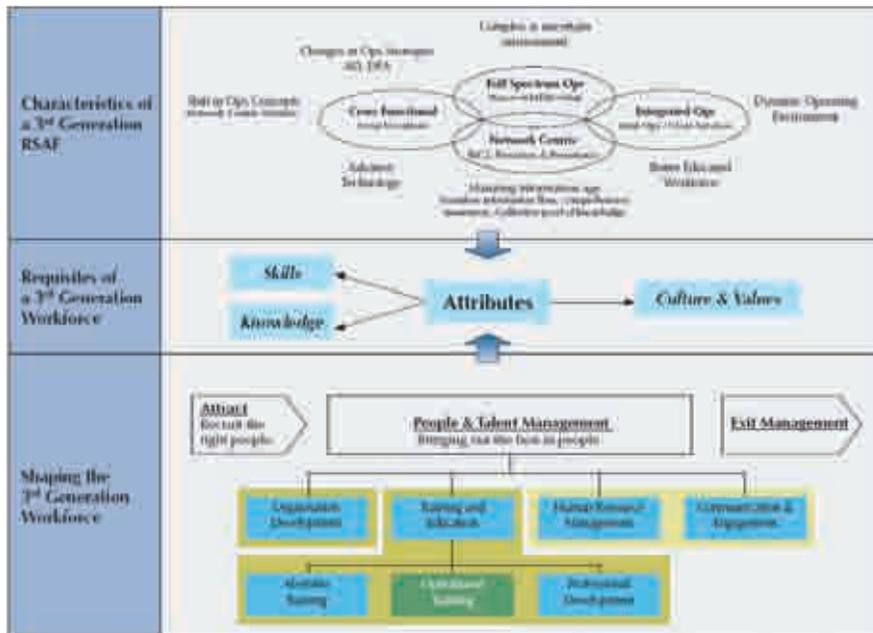


Table 1: Overview of the RSAF People Development and Management Framework.

Training And Education

The RSAF needs to equip its people with the right skills, knowledge and attitudes at the right time. Starting with *ab initio* vocational training right after recruitment, RSAF personnel will be progressively and continuously trained as well-rounded Third Generation warfighters as they advance through the operational and professional training and education phases. Besides ensuring content relevance and currency to the latest operational concepts and doctrines, new delivery methodologies are also necessary for enhancing training effectiveness. The training community in the RSAF is also actively exploring new training methods and technology through benchmarking, continuous improvement and sharing of best practices to complement and enhance the richness of RSAF training.

Human Resource Management

At the macro-level, human resource (HR) management will continue to be a crucial area requiring dedicated attention and delicate management. It is crucial to have a proper and robust HR management system to ensure effective forward planning, tracking and to provide clear visibility of the intra-RSAF, Joint and inter-service management of talents and human resources. This will ensure the right deployment of RSAF expertise to effectively contribute to the Joint planning and execution processes. At the same time, this will also provide the necessary grooming platforms to broaden the knowledge-base and cross domain competencies of RSAF personnel. At the individual level, Route-of-Advancement (ROA) management and postings within the RSAF will need to be planned and tracked more rigorously to systematically groom people to acquire the necessary skills, knowledge and competencies for specific appointments or domains of expertise.

Communication And Engagement

Effective engagement and communication is necessary to mobilise people to realise change, especially during this crucial phase for the RSAF. This will inspire people with the key initiatives of

upcoming changes, the desired competencies valued by the Third Generation RSAF, and the opportunities for the sharpening of current skills and assimilation of new ones. In essence, well-conceived and well-timed engagement and communication plans will aid change management within the organisation, and ultimately contribute to the success of numerous transformation initiatives.

DEVELOPMENT OF NEW CAREER CONSTRUCTS

Besides establishing an overarching People Development and Management Framework, the RSAF has also undertaken the most significant HR development in its history. This is an effort that was undertaken along with the rest of the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), involving a complete revamp of the existing career schemes for RSAF Officers and for Warrant Officers and Specialists (WOSPEC), and more importantly, the implementation of a whole new career construct in the form of the Military Domain Expert Scheme (MDES).⁷ This was a very bold step for the SAF and RSAF, however it was also one born out of necessity in anticipation of the HR challenges ahead. Looking forward, the emerging HR landscape and the rising educational profiles and aspirations of the workforce will require the SAF and RSAF to offer ever more meaningful and engaging careers in order to continue attracting the right quality of people. These will need to be conducted against the backdrop of an increasing competition for talents at the national level.

The new career schemes designed by MINDEF and the SAF will position the RSAF to competitively recruit, retain and develop our people in response to the new organisational demands and the changes in the HR landscape. The enhancement of the Officer and WOSPEC schemes, and the introduction of the new MDES scheme, recognise the wide spectrum of job roles in the RSAF. Importantly, it allows the RSAF to take a more customised approach to rewarding and recognising each group of its people. These schemes allow multiple paths to success so that quality people will be able to fulfil their aspirations while serving with the RSAF.

Besides establishing an overarching People Development and Management Framework, the RSAF has also undertaken the most significant HR development in its history.

Under the new schemes, the RSAF officers will be groomed to be strong leaders valued for their systems-level thinking and organisational leadership. The MDES corps will be deep domain specialists valued for their knowledge and experiences. The WOSPEC corps will be tactical commanders who are smart users of technologies. The three different career schemes will enable the RSAF to better attract and develop quality people. With a longer career period across the board for all the three new schemes, it will facilitate and allow for the development of deep expertise in various domains at every level for all vocations across the RSAF.

IMPLEMENTING THE NEW CAREER SCHEMES – HARNESSING THE MAXIMUM POTENTIALS OF OUR HUMAN CAPITAL

These three new career schemes were launched on 1 April 2010. Of the three services in the SAF, the RSAF featured the largest number of in-service personnel that crossed over from both the Officer and WOSPEC corps to the MDES corps. In particular, the new career schemes provide a holistic roadmap to facilitate and enhance the value proposition, attractiveness, grooming and development of RSAF professionals right from the start point of recruitment and across the entire duration of their professional career till retirement.

Recruitment As The Starting Point

Harnessing and developing the right people for the Third Generation RSAF starts at recruitment. With the new HR constructs, the RSAF is now well equipped with an ever better set of employment terms, career advancement and development policies to make the RSAF a compelling and attractive career proposition. Through these, the RSAF is better able to attract the necessary talents and also to match each potential recruit to a best job fit as the new airman embarks on a career scheme in the RSAF either as an officer, a military expert, or a warrant officer. Once people of the right qualities and qualifications are recruited, the RSAF may then focus on and ensure that its people are properly trained, properly grounded in core values, and properly prepared for their operational roles.

Professional And Personal Development Across The Whole Career Span

As its people advance in their careers, the RSAF will continually ensure their personal and professional grooming and development, and also continually keep them engaged and committed. This will be achieved via the RSAF People Development and Management framework as highlighted earlier. RSAF personnel will have more opportunities to develop themselves in every aspect of their career. Through Continuing Education, the RSAF will provide a useful range of academic upgrading sponsorships that will sharpen the intellect and broaden the horizons of its people. The RSAF will also develop its people with premier leadership and organisational skills through the Professional Military Education and Training (PMET) programme, including systematic inculcation of expertise and knowledge in cutting edge technologies and systems. Overall, this will enable the RSAF to cultivate all-round Third Generation RSAF Airmen grounded on strong core values and military ethos, highly competent, and fully committed to the organisation and one another.

Re-Profiling And Re-Designing Job Scopes To Meet Career Challenges And Rising Aspirations

Besides development opportunities, it is also critical to ensure the availability of commensurate appointments and advancement opportunities for RSAF servicemen. Doing so will not only serve to meet the Third Generation demands better, it will also provide the necessary career path advancement and challenges to better meet the aspirations of the RSAF talents. For example, in the engineering domain of the Air Engineering Officers (AEOs), 26% of them possess Masters qualifications and above. In the past, these AEOs would have spent their entire career undertaking job scopes related to aircraft airworthiness, aircraft maintenance and avionics. This pool of AEOs represent a very significant pool of talent that can be allocated to many other non-aircraft areas such as UAVs, sensors and networked systems. However, such avenues were not available in the past. As such, to maximise the opportunities presented by the new career constructs, the RSAF has looked to further re-profile and re-design the span of the job scopes for its servicemen. When coupled with training and upgrading initiatives, it will continually improve and sharpen the skills and competencies of RSAF airmen, creating better job-fits to meet organisational



needs. It will also provide a more progressive route of advancement for individuals to better meet personal aspirations. This will open up more professional career advancement opportunities for RSAF personnel, centred on organisational needs as well as identified high interest areas (e.g. Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, Integrated Knowledge-Based Command and Control) where it is crucial to cultivate and build up the pool of RSAF talents. The productivity and effectiveness of the airmen and the RSAF as a whole will thus be enhanced with time—a key strategic goal and outcome for the RSAF.

OPTIMISING NS RESOURCES – THE OTHER VITAL POOL OF RSAF HUMAN CAPITAL

The RSAF's focus on enhancing the HR construct as well as the development and management of the regular force personnel are crucial in building a highly competent, professional, and full time corps of airman to anchor the high readiness core of the Air Force. At the same time, the RSAF has also not forgotten about the other vital component of its Human Capital pool—its National Servicemen. Similarly, the RSAF has developed and implemented an NS Management Framework to better harness the latent potential of its NSmen, comprising of four key thrusts—namely, NS Resource Optimisation, Recognition, Engagement, and Training.

NS Resource Optimisation

The optimisation of the NS resource is a key aspect under the RSAF NS Management Framework. The RSAF recognises that there are significant opportunities to better apply people-to-job-matching in its NS cohort, as the pool consists of many talented people, such as professionals with specialised degrees and skills, who could be better employed in positions to better harness their unique skill sets. NSmen who are in leadership positions in either the private sector or government ministries, for example, may be employed in areas where they can exercise their leadership skills and perhaps act as mentors for younger generations. Additionally, there are many NSmen serving in related aviation or engineering sectors whose wealth of experiences and skill sets could also be better harnessed in the operational and engineering areas of the RSAF's air operations. The RSAF also seeks

to balance its HR portfolio to ensure a more even distribution of manpower across the RSAF, and to provide optimal NS experiences for its NSmen.

Recognition

The second initiative involves recognising the achievements and contributions of the NSmen. This has been done through the adjustment of the NS promotion mechanism and the criteria for the RSAF NSmen of the Year awards. The revision of the promotion mechanism aims to narrow the gap between the military potential of the NSmen and the rank he holds in recognition of the appointment that he serves in, while the revision of the criteria for the awards will allow the RSAF to better recognise an expanded pool of NS personnel.

As such, to maximise the opportunities presented by the new career constructs, the RSAF has looked to further re-profile and re-design the span of the job scopes for its servicemen.

Engagement

The third initiative under the RSAF NS Management Framework is about engagement. The RSAF intends to better reach out to NSmen through initiatives such as invitations to major service-level events like the RSAF Open House and Cohesion Day, as well as unit events which aim to strengthen the bond between active and NS personnel. When the Air Force conducts operations, the integration, camaraderie, and trust between all its warfighters and airmen, be it the active personnel or NSmen, will be a crucial determinant of mission success. As such, the objective is to provide the platform and springboard to build and strengthen the bonding between the NSmen and their units, with the aim of becoming a fully integrated fighting force and a family that is fully committed to the defence of the nation. This goal of this thrust will also aim to reach out to the families and employers of the NSmen, to provide them with a better understanding of the role played by the NSmen in the defence of the nation.

Training

Training is the final key initiative under the RSAF NS Management framework. In order to maintain its status as an effective fighting force, the need for continual refresher training, and the participation of NSmen in local and overseas exercises will need to be carefully planned and managed to ensure that personnel are given adequate training to perform their roles when called upon.

CONCLUSION

The Third Generation RSAF strives to be an Air Force characterised by its integration and full spectrum capabilities. It strives to develop its people—Officers, WOSPEC and Military Experts—into Third Generation Airmen as it is people that make the difference in any organisation. With a holistic and comprehensive framework towards its People Development and Management efforts—starting with recruitment and continuing with professional training and education throughout the airmen's careers—the RSAF will develop its human capital as talents steeped in their vocational competencies and professional skills and thoroughly imbued with the proper set of RSAF core values and ethos. These will serve to propel the RSAF into the next spiral of its Third Generation transformation, according to Mr Teo Chee Hean, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, at the Committee for Supply Debate on 5 March 2010:

People are a key building block of the Third Generation military fighting force. People are the key resources that will enable us to realise our transformation efforts. This means that we will have to attract and retain the best people. We must develop our people through new and enhanced career schemes as well as revising training and curriculum, so that we have capable and committed people to meet the requirements of the Third Generation demands. 🌐

ENDNOTES

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