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Navy Helps Sailors Chart Careers

News Story by [Dan Verton](#)

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[\(COMPUTERWORLD\)](#) - A U.S. Navy effort launched two years ago is revolutionizing the way sailors plan their careers. It's also ensuring that the Navy puts the person with the right skills in the right job.

In July 2001, the Navy established Task Force Excel (for "Excellence Through Our Commitment to Education and Learning") to help sailors accelerate learning and

improve their proficiency. The program uses advanced trainers and simulators, tailored training programs, mentoring, and performance measurement and counseling tools.

"We think the right answer is to have one single business process for manpower, personnel and training," says Capt. Steve McShane, Sea Warrior's program manager.

Task Force Excel uses the "Five Vector Model" for personal and career development. The vectors represent the five developmental areas of a sailor's career: professional development, leadership, management, personal development and performance. By evaluating the Navy's 370,000 jobs in terms of those common vectors, sailors can easily compare positions to better understand the specific



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requirements of their career paths, says McShane.

Some sailors working in IT can now assess their educational and competency levels, identify skills gaps for specific job requirements and map out career paths through the Sea Warrior program using the Career Management System (CMS). This Web-enabled portal is currently being piloted by a select group of sailors and Navy civilian personnel.

"You could call it an individual development or career progression plan," says Sandra Smith, team leader for workforce initiatives at the Navy CIO's office. For example, sailors can study the skills required to be a CIO and plan their career paths accordingly. "Without a tool like this, a lot of people would not be able to develop as effective a career plan as they should," she says.

Setting a Course

Petty Officer 1st Class Anthony Cagle, a job detailer at the Navy's IT community in Millington, Tenn., has been participating in the pilot project for the past two months. "It's very useful in determining your next move and where you need to point your career," he says. For example, the system tells workers what training they need to obtain the certifications required for their next career steps, based on the jobs for which they're best qualified.

"Before this system came along, all you had was a career counselor to help you - provided they were proactive in their own job," Cagle says. "This puts my career at my fingertips."

Senior Chief Petty Officer Patrick Courchene, another IT community personnel detailer using CMS, says a competent career counselor is critical to the process. "CMS gives you a visual representation of what you need to do, but I still think mentoring from career counselors is beneficial," he says.

The Navy is also using portals to help fill unpopular jobs, such as those overseas that require extended periods stationed away from family.

For example, the Navy has integrated pay incentives with online reverse auctions to fill select jobs. First, the Navy sets a bonus pay cap for a particular job (such as \$500 extra per month). The bids for incentive pay decrease as competition increases, so the Navy saves money. "It's an optimal distribution system, but it's voluntary," says McShane. "Everybody's going willingly."

Ahead of Corporate America

Joyce Brocaglia, CEO of executive search firm Alta Associates in Flemington, N.J.,

says the Sea Warrior program puts the Navy light-years ahead of corporate America in terms of human capital management. "What is unique about the Navy program is that they take a holistic approach to career development," says Brocaglia. "It far exceeds any corporate program that I've seen in my 20 years of recruiting. If corporations adopted similar plans, their retention rates would soar."

In the corporate world, IT workers aspiring to become senior IT executives are usually forced to rely on "calculated guesswork," Brocaglia says. "If a developmental opportunity plan was available to them, they could make informed decisions about training, certifications and job opportunities based on their career goals."

But with budgets tight, the Navy knows it can't simply throw money and new technology at every workforce challenge. That's where Project SAIL comes in. Still a work in progress, Project SAIL (Sailor Advocacy Through Interactive Leadership) is moving the Navy toward an interactive distribution system that in the future may include nonmonetary incentives such as guaranteed schools for high-performing personnel or guaranteed jobs.

Even the \$6.9 billion Navy/Marine Corps Intranet (N/MCI) program is getting in on the act, says Rear Adm. John Cryer, commander of the Naval Network and Space Operations Command. The N/MCI program now takes IT workers coming off of a sea-duty tour and assigns them to a guaranteed two-to-three-year shore-duty job working with industry and studying for various industry-standard IT and security certifications.

"The goal is to return IT 'top guns' to the fleet," Cryer says.

And developing such talent within the ranks is critical to the Navy's readiness, says McShane. "In the 21st century Navy, we are going to be relying on a more lethal force with greater technological capabilities than anything we've seen in the last 50 years," he says. "And the only way we can compete for talent in America is to make sure we improve our HR systems. We don't necessarily need the best and the brightest talent, but the right talent." w



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