

BUILDING STRATEGIC LEADER COMPETENCIES INTO ARMY OFFICER DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER PROGRESSION

BY

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by

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ABSTRACT

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After illustrating that key strategic leader competencies include strategic context, broad influence, and communications skills, the document looks at current officer development and progression. Analysis of current efforts and a review of several influential studies show that officer development and progression tend towards narrow career paths that almost singularly favor tactical competencies, at the expense of strategic leader development.

Recommendations include increasing broadening or strategic experiences, graduate education, and communications training by providing the appropriate opportunities and incentives. Specific recommendations address ways the Army and the

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BUILDING STRATEGIC LEADER COMPETENCIES INTO ARMY OFFICER DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER PROGRESSION

The most important management concept needing alignment with the demands of the Army profession is career progression.

—The Future of the Army Profession 2005¹

This conclusion, reached in successive reviews of the Army profession, is unambiguous. Numerous other studies, conducted by the Army and by leading think tanks, have reached similar results. This research specifically highlights the need for greater attention to strategic leader development.² Therefore, this deduction raises a couple of key questions. What key competencies should our strategic leaders possess? How can the Army better develop these key strategic competencies?

In addressing these questions, I will first establish the key strategic leader competencies required for the contemporary national security environment. Second, I will look at existing officer development and progression to determine how they shape the building of these competencies. The line of inquiry will then consider recent reviews on the topic to identify relevant conclusions that might inform areas for improvement. Finally, I will propose recommendations for change.

The officer career management system has been described as a set of “four interrelated personnel functions – accessing, developing, promoting, and transitioning.”³ In examining how we might better build key strategic leader competencies, this work will focus primarily on development and promotions within the larger context of officer progression. It will not consider access function whose goal is to provide officers with the basic intellectual, moral, and physical foundations required to begin building tactical,

not strategic, competencies. The transition function, which frames career lengths and how long competencies are used, similarly lies outside the range of this investigation.

In addition to concentrating on development and progression, the scope of inquiry will concentrate specifically on those in the operations career field, or line officers, in the ranks of captain (O-3) through lieutenant colonel (O-5) for several reasons. First, the Army's general officers are overwhelmingly, though not exclusively, selected from those in this career field. Thus, changes to the development of this group of officers offer the greatest possible impact on strategic leadership. Second, although the development of strategic competencies does not begin at captain nor end at lieutenant colonel, it is concentrated there. Key formative time spent as a lieutenant (currently the first 38 months) has as its goal the development of basic leadership and tactical competencies. At the other end, once an officer is promoted to colonel and above he or she begins to become individually managed based on the level of development accumulated. The concern becomes more the management of talent rather than its development. Therefore, the window from captain to lieutenant colonel presents the best opportunity to affect the development of key strategic competencies. Determining what those requirements are is the first step.

Key Strategic Leader Competencies

Retired General and Former Secretary of State Powell is certainly no stranger to strategic leadership. His statement, to a cohort of future strategic leaders, provides the central underlying assumption from which to identify key strategic leader competencies:

most of my time...was spent outside, looking outside sensing political opportunity, sensing strategic opportunity, measuring risk, assessing new challenges...as you become more senior you have to get outside the pyramid in order to do your job effectively.⁴

Competencies include the “knowledge, skills, attributes, and capacities” required to accomplish requirements.⁵ The foundation that allows strategic leaders to operate effectively outside their organizations is the understanding of the broader environment. They also need the tools to persuade or influence a range of actors within that setting. Therefore, this section will assert that three key competencies of the strategic leader are strategic context, broad influence, and communications skills.

I do not assert that these three competencies are the only strategic competencies required. Although key, the strategic leader requires other competencies such as the ability to exercise good judgment, to provide vision, and to build teams. Further, competencies are developed over time. Developing communications skills begins while building tactical competencies. However, strategic context, broad influence, and communications skills stand out as key and merit focus for several reasons. First, many of the other competencies are wholly or partly a function of one of these key competencies. For example, exercising good judgment requires the appropriate context to make sound decisions. Another reason for their relative importance is that these competencies are either unique to the strategic level, or at least unique in their degree of advancement, such as the ability to influence broadly outside the hierarchical pyramid mentioned earlier. The first of these key strategic competencies is strategic context.

Building the *strategic context* required to operate effectively at the strategic level comes from frame of reference development.⁶ As its name suggests, a frame of reference is the knowledge or mental construct that provides the individual the perspective to interpret what he or she observes before acting within the environment.

That perspective can be narrow or broad, detailed or superficial. For strategic military leaders operating outside of their organization, strategic context should include an understanding of the other major actors in the national security arena. This includes other services, Congress, government agencies outside of the Department of Defense (DoD), coalition partners, and a host of others that lie within the Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, and Multinational (JIIM) environment.

Developing the context that allows the strategic leader to operate effectively outside his organization is key because it impacts many other strategic leader competencies. Significantly, this broad frame of reference is critical in a strategic leader's ability to understand the alternative perspectives of external actors, in a word – empathize. Empathy in turn is a significant component in successful negotiation.⁷ A strategic leader, who has operated exclusively at the tactical level, has a very narrow frame of reference to draw on when he finds himself negotiating with joint partners or other governmental agencies. This leader might be one of a handful that can “pick it up quickly” or develop that strategic context on the job. However, a deliberate effort to develop strategic context also has the added benefit of helping to develop a second critical competency – broad influence.

The Army Leadership manual, FM 6-22, states that leaders need to be able to extend influence “inside and outside the traditional lines of authority.”⁸ This *broad influence* comes from two sources, position power and personal power. Position power is typically exercised in and is most effective within an organization. It is power in its most formal form: the ability to reward, punish, and influence by virtue of the leader's role.⁹ Personal power, on the other hand, is much more common outside the boundaries

of the organization or hierarchy. This type of power is more informal and less overt. It includes referent and expert power.¹⁰ A leader has referent power when people like, identify with, or see that leader as a role model. Expert power comes from a recognized level of knowledge or competence – either in relation to the perceiver or against an established standard.

Strategic leaders require broad influence in order to operate effectively in a variety of environments. In particular, personal power is more familiar in less hierarchical surroundings such as governmental organizations outside the DoD, academia, and think tanks. Referent power coming from a “feeling of oneness” enables the leader to build and sustain relationships in these settings.¹¹ In considering expert power, it is the competence and credibility of the leader that matters. Expert power also depends on the effectiveness of the leader’s information or communication skills.¹²

The leader that has the strategic context to understand the environment and broad influence to affect it cannot persuade his or her intended audience without the corresponding *communications skills*. Communications skills include deciding who to influence, how to influence them, delivering the message through words and actions, and assessing the effectiveness of this effort. Therefore, senior leader communications involve aspects of both art and science.¹³ Often referred to as strategic communications, the ability to communicate at the strategic level differs in significant ways from communicating at lower levels. Because the audience frequently lies outside the leader’s organization, they are much more removed from the speaker – reducing the frequency of interaction, attention span, and familiarity with the topic. This places a premium on persuasiveness, brevity, and clarity.¹⁴

Leaders at the strategic level, operating outside of their organizations, must become even more effective at two-way communication or dialogue. Dialogue provides a venue for both advocacy and inquiry.¹⁵ The two-way exchange of information and ideas enhances a shared understanding of complex problems with long planning horizons that in turn shapes the exercise of power at the strategic level. Through dialogue, the frames of reference of the involved actors are refined. Strategic leaders also gain the forum for exercising referent and expert power to influence and persuade. In much the same way that strategic context enhanced empathy which impacts the ability to negotiate; communications skill, in particular dialogue, promotes consensus and team-building.

Strategic context, broad influence, and communications skills are key strategic leader competencies. They most directly contribute to the leader's ability to operate effectively outside his or her organization. Additionally, they are a source for many of the other strategic competencies to include negotiation, team-building, and the ability to impart vision. Given the relative importance of these strategic competencies, how does the U.S. Army develop them in its leaders? Leader development is generally a product of an officer's experiences, education, and training. The Department of the Army's Pamphlet (DA PAM) 600-3, *Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management*, details each of these areas.

Officer Development and Officer Progression

The Officer Professional Management System (OPMS) is the structure in which the four functions of accessing, developing, promoting, and transitioning occur. Within this construct, DA PAM 600-3 serves as the primary "professional development guide for all officers."¹⁶ Therefore, this section will begin by reviewing the professional

development objectives, approaches, and resources described in DA PAM 600-3. Next it will look at how professional development is shaped by the current officer progression model. This will provide some conclusions about how well development and career progression build strategic leader competencies.

According to DA PAM 600-3, officer development should focus on the “quality and range of experience, rather than the specific gates or assignments required to progress.”¹⁷ It seeks to do this broadly through the domains of operational experiences, institutional training and education, and self-development. An overview of each of these areas will lead to a view of the officer progression model.

Assignments build operational experiences and fall into one of two developmental categories. The first is key developmental positions, sometimes referred to by the acronym KD. These positions are those “deemed fundamental to the development of an officer in his or her core branch or functional area.”¹⁸ All other positions fall into the second category, simply developmental. Seeming to recognize that this division is insufficient, DA PAM 600-3 also states that developmental positions that “provide exposure to experiences outside the officer’s core branch or functional area competencies are considered broadening assignments.”¹⁹

Key developmental positions and their associated duration are listed by functional area, branch, and rank. For example, an Infantry captain’s key assignment is “command of an operating force Infantry company for 18 months, plus or minus 6 months.” Similarly, the desired experience for an Armor major is “a minimum of 18-24 months” in a key assignment such as an operations officer or executive officer.²⁰ For most lieutenant colonels in the maneuver, fire, and effects functional category, key

assignments include command of a battalion or transition team for 24-36 months. The timeframes listed are based on an estimate of the time it takes to ensure the officer has accumulated the desired range of experiences in the position.

Institutional training and education consist of two major components. These are military schools which fall largely within the Officer Education System (OES) and civilian education. Military schools, beginning with the Basic Officer Leader Course (BOLC), start out by focusing heavily on branch specific training. In subsequent courses, the balance shifts toward education.²¹ The Captain's Career Course (CCC) aims to prepare officers to command companies and to serve on battalion and brigade staffs. Officers normally attend after promotion to captain between 4 and 7 years of service. Majors go to Intermediate Level Education (ILE) between 8 and 12 years of service; it is the first military school that falls under the category of professional military education (PME). The next level of PME is the Senior Service College (SSC). Unlike previous courses where attendance is required by all, a selection board considers lieutenant colonels and colonels with between 16 and 23 years of service for attendance to SSC on a "best-qualified basis."²²

Although Army officers must obtain a baccalaureate degree, there is no regulatory requirement to pursue an advanced degree. The DA PAM 600-3 states that "officers who want to pursue advanced degrees should do so in an academic discipline that supports their designated branch, functional area or MOS."²³ There are some resources for pursuing an advanced degree including a few fully funded programs followed by a utilization assignment, cooperative degree programs at military schools such as ILE, tuition assistance for those pursuing degrees off-duty, and a small number

of fellowships. Completion of SSC at the Army War College includes the awarding of a Master of Strategic Studies Degree.

Unlike the other two domains, no time is allocated for self-development. Rather, self-development takes place in conjunction with the other two areas. It consists of a number of methods including self-assessment and individual study that are designed to sustain competency and “fill in the gaps” from the other two domains. Many branches encourage officers to pursue off-duty civil schooling or begin work on a master’s degree as part of their self-development guidance. The following figure from DA PAM 600-3 visually lays out the concept for officer development over an officer’s career.²⁴

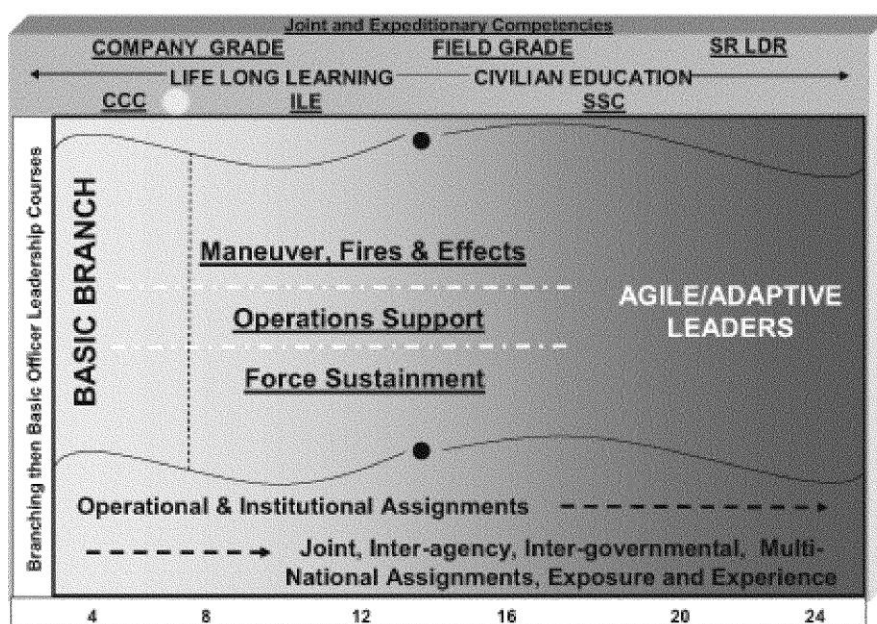


Figure 1: Officer Development over Time

There are many factors that affect the officer management system and officer development by extension. Law and policy have the most significant and enduring effects. The Defense Officer Personnel Management Act of 1980 (DOPMA) created our current system for *promotion flow*.²⁵ The key aspects of this include promotion zones

based on seniority, limiting the percentage of officers promoted below the zone, allowing officers one opportunity per grade to be in a promotion zone, allowing officers above the zone to remain eligible for promotion, and requiring separation of captains and majors who twice fail selection for promotion.²⁶ However, it is Department of Defense policy, “based on congressional intent conveyed in the House and Senate reports accompanying the DOPMA legislation,” that establishes *promotion points*.²⁷ Promotion points occur at 10 years of service for majors, 16 years for lieutenant colonels, and 22 years for colonels with variance of a year on either side of these to allow for below the zone and above the zone promotions.

Assignments and PME are “linked to promotions, future assignments, and career management models for all officers.”²⁸ Therefore, the timing of promotions affects development. Overlaying the various assignment, military education, and promotion timelines produces a view of the officer career progression model below.

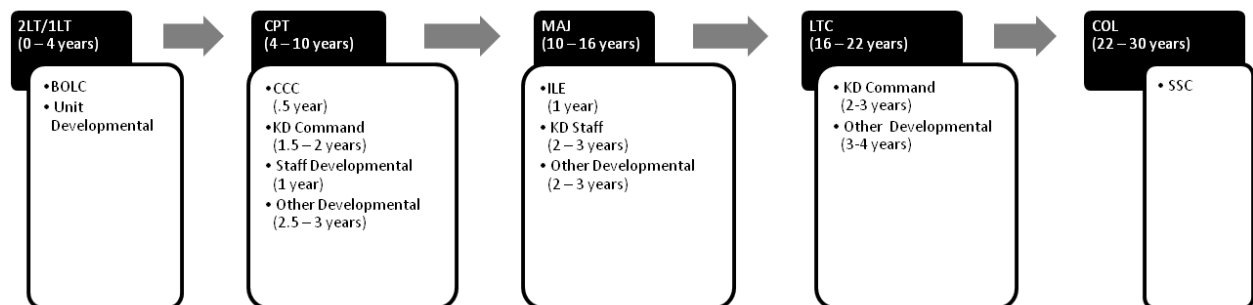


Figure 2: Officer Career Progression Model

There are several conclusions that this review of officer development and the officer career progression model provides. First, officer development does not live up to the goal of quality and range of experience but is driven by time.²⁹ Requirements for length of experience in KD positions and fixed promotion points drive personnel

managers and the officers they manage. Second, development is overwhelmingly focused on tactical and operational competencies.³⁰ By the time an officer is a colonel with 22 years of service, he or she will have had a maximum of 4 opportunities for a two-year broadening assignment. This is only the case if the officer's career has been managed optimally to allow the maximum number of opportunities and the officer is never promoted below the zone. Those promoted two or three times below the zone will certainly have less of these opportunities. Further, these "broadening" assignments may be anything but. An examination of developmental assignments listed in DA PAM 600-3 for captains through lieutenant colonels shows that as many as 40% to 60% are at the tactical level or are operational in nature, such as tactics instructor or trainers.³¹ As a result, officer development and career progression are optimized to build tactical, operational excellence.

Building tactical and operational excellence is vitally important. It is what has made our military the preeminent fighting force it is in the world today. However, developing strategic leader competencies is not antithetical to tactical superiority. The central problem is to build those competencies in such a way that we maintain our tactical and operational dominance. Several studies of officer development provide an opportunity to assess possible areas for change.

Major Studies and Reviews

This section will look at five influential reviews from a variety of sources and focus on the relevant conclusions and recommendations related to officer development and career progression. Two of these, *The Army Training and Leader Development Panel Officer Study* conducted in 2002 and *Army Leaders for the 21st Century* the final report for the Review of Education, Training, and Assignments for Leaders (RETAL) in

2006, are Army studies. The last three were published in 2010. *Towards a U.S. Army Officer Corps Strategy for Success: Developing Talent* is by three members of the Office of Economic and Manpower Analysis at the United States Military Academy. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) respectively produced the final two, *The Ingenuity Gap: Officer Management for the 21st Century* and *Keeping the Edge: Revitalizing America's Military Officer Corps*.

The Army Training and Leader Development Panel (ATLDP) conducted a series of field interviews, surveys, and analysis and observed that officers felt that Army practices were out of balance with Army beliefs.³² It concluded that operational pace and career progression degraded training and leader development. It also linked development to retention; observing that operational pace, unmet expectations on leader development, and family considerations were the primary factors for officers exiting the profession. One of its main recommendations was to revise DA PAM 600-3 to focus on growing leaders and providing quality educational and unit experiences.³³

The Review of Education, Training, and Assignments for Leaders (RETAL) took more of a requirements based approach in addressing how the Army should “develop its military and civilian leaders, who will serve in both operational and institutional capacities, to become *pentahletes*.”³⁴ It concluded that officer training, assignments and leader development for kinetic operations were fundamentally sound but that those required for non-kinetic purposes should be expanded and improved. It observed that the current system is uneven early in an officer's career and “does not take advantage of all development opportunities.”³⁵ Further, it stated that “a culture exists in the Army in

which officers aspire to the highest positions of responsibility by selecting narrow career paths.”³⁶

Recommendations from the RETAL study ranged from pre-commissioning through General officer. Three of these fall within the parameters of this research project. It recommended that the Army create Leader Development Assignment Panels. These panels, consisting of colonels from the field, would identify and send captains and majors finishing their KD assignments to developmental assignments such as civilian graduate schools and internships.³⁷ Another recommendation was to identify officers most likely to command battalions and to send them to advanced civil schooling followed by a liberally interpreted utilization tour, follow-on KD positions, or a joint assignment. The third recommendation was to create JIIM internships to which the Leader Development Assignment Panels would also assign officers.

The Officer Corps Strategy Series monograph on developing talent was the fifth in a series of six. This particular study began with the observation that the current Army development system “shunts its officers down conventional career paths and through standardized ‘gates’.”³⁸ Drawing on tenets of human capital theory, the monograph emphasized the importance of properly valued signals and continuing education to affect the climate of development in the Army.³⁹ Properly valued signals include credentialing, such as obtaining a degree. Credentials communicate value because they indicate a level of sacrifice required to obtain them, and capabilities possessed.⁴⁰ The monograph recommended increasing the number of graduate school opportunities, noting that these had fallen from 7,000 slots a year in the mid-1980s to fewer than 400 a

year by the early 1990s.⁴¹ It also recommended that the Army do a better job to capture the results, “to track development over time, gauging both its breadth and depth.”⁴²

The CSIS produced *The Ingenuity Gap: Officer Management for the 21st Century* that looked at officer management from a DoD perspective. It concluded that the system governing the development of officers had changed little despite significant changes in the environment and that the military needed to open its aperture on what it considered relevant experience and expertise.⁴³ The authors’ overarching recommendation was to move from a time-based to a competency-based system. To achieve this, they first recommended that the military collect and share information on the competencies of its officers by the use of individual identification, supported by additional objective and subjective means. It further recommended that the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness rewrite current DoD policy to “focus on competencies as the primary basis for promotion eligibility.”⁴⁴ Finally, to increase flexibility in obtaining the required number of officers, DoD should “identify targeted modifications to current law aimed at easing the movement of officers in and out of the Active Component force, both from the Reserve Components and through increased use of direct commissions.”⁴⁵

In *Keeping The Edge: Revitalizing America’s Officer Corps*, from the Center for a New American Security, the authors begin by observing that changes to the strategic environment and increasing complexity mean that officers must not only “learn and embody enduring principles of warfare and leadership,” but also “develop a broader knowledge of politics, economics, and the use of information in modern warfare.”⁴⁶ Several recommendations bear particular consideration here. First, the study

recommends that the services allow for greater career flexibility. This would come in the form of sabbatical years which could be used to obtain graduate education or work in unconventional assignments, such as with industry.⁴⁷ Added benefits of this sabbatical include greater flexibility in tending to family or personal needs. It also argues for increasing JIIM opportunities and making them available earlier in an officer's career. Other noteworthy recommendations include enhancing officer education in and out of the formal education systems, and increasing education and training in strategic communications, as well as in linguistic and cultural knowledge. In addition to enhancing cognitive abilities, the conclusion states that "the most important factor in ensuring that the profession of arms is able to meet the demands of national security in this century will be the people selected to lead the services."⁴⁸

This survey of major studies and reviews produced several overarching themes and helped identify areas for change. First, leader development is out of line with current requirements and officer expectations. The Army needs to more effectively incorporate developmental assignments into career progression and increase access to civilian graduate education. Second, career progression options are narrow, overly restrictive, and similarly out of line with professional and personal needs. Not only are options that provide flexibility needed, but also changes to the climate or culture that would encourage or incentivize them. As one study observed, "to change the culture of an institution, change the people who lead it, and change what attributes it rewards."⁴⁹ This could take the form of signals or those things that are recorded in official files, and therefore given importance, but should be validated through changes in who gets promoted. Finally, the military should consider changes at a number of levels – from

revising DA PAM 600-3 to recommending changes to DoD policy and even working with Congress to change how law is written. This paper will now offer some recommendations on specific actions the Army can take to increase the development of the key strategic leader competencies.

Recommendations

This section will begin by demonstrating how a few changes in the developmental areas of experience, education, and training have the potential to advance the key strategic competencies of strategic context, broad influence, and communications skills. The most significant changes center on exposure to broadening and strategic level assignments, a quality civilian education, and expanding communications training. Moving from the general to the specific, this section will then recommend concrete steps that we can take to facilitate these changes within the context of officer development and progression – specifically by considering how to provide *increased opportunity* and *increased incentive*.

Not all developmental assignments are equal. Exposure to broadening and strategic level experiences provides the opportunity to develop strategic competencies. These assignments might be strategic through association, such as an aide for a strategic leader; or echelon, such as working in the Pentagon or as an intern with the Department of State. Multiple assignments along these lines increase strategic context and expose an officer earlier and more often to people outside of their organization. It has the added benefit, in an era of multiple deployments, of providing an operational heartbeat to the leader and his family.⁵⁰ **Therefore, the Army should change DA PAM 600-3 to reflect three types of assignments: Key Developmental, Broadening and**

Strategic, and Developmental. This would require that all positions are similarly classified.

A quality civilian education has the ability to enhance all three of our key strategic leader competencies. Leaders who are educated at quality civilian graduate schools, such as those pre-vetted for training academy instructors, gain experience similar to their counterparts outside the Department of Defense. This serves to broaden the frame of reference of future strategic leaders as they gain similar instruction and learn how their civilian counterparts think, and how “some very smart folks see the world very differently than we do.”⁵¹ Shared experience, contacts, and mutual acquaintances enhance the identification necessary for referent power. Finally, leaders get the opportunity to practice communication to a non-military audience, and dialogue in particular, in a rigorous environment where the leader can make mistakes and overcome them. **The Army should require a graduate degree for promotion to lieutenant colonel and emphasize in DA PAM 600-3 that highly competitive officers are those who have obtained a graduate degree at a quality civilian university.**

Communications training should be introduced earlier in an officer’s career and expanded as the leader rises in rank. **The Army should push efforts down a level within the officer education system and consider introducing communications training requirements at the unit level.** Media training conducted at ILE has to make its way into CCC. Majors at ILE should have a public speaking requirement similar to that currently found at the Army War College. Expanding communications training should include instruction in alternative forms of communication such as utilizing social

media. Introducing communications requirements for leaders at the unit level, perhaps in the form of a yearly qualification or certification, would begin to change our approach to developing communications skills from episodic to periodic.

Achieving these and other changes will require opportunity and incentive. Opportunity comes from creating flexibility and time. Given officer development and the officer progression model, increasing opportunity can come from a couple approaches – reducing requirements or lengthening the time between promotion points.

Maintaining tactical and operational excellence is essential, so reducing requirements is problematic. However there is some opportunity for improvement here. Currently, majors are “encouraged” to obtain 36 months of time in a KD position. Brigade Commanders interact directly with Human Resource Command to fill major positions. **The Army should enforce the rule that the desired KD experience for a major is a maximum of 24 months, extendable to 30 months by returning to an installation field grade management authority.** This would provide between 6 and 12 months of additional time for other developmental opportunities, sacrificing some depth for breadth.⁵² One of the biggest challenges to this change, in the near term, is the availability of majors. In response, the Army should reevaluate its requirements of majors across the force, to include possibly reversing some increases to major billets within the modular Brigade Combat Team. The Army could also increase the number of majors by providing a path of lateral entry for a small number of highly qualified officers from the reserve component. Those that wanted to apply would need to volunteer, meet OES and similar requirements, obtain state approval in the case of the National Guard, and ultimately be selected by a centralized Army board. This board would look for the

operational experiences, education, and training that would indicate that these officers had accumulated comparable competencies as their active component counterparts – an increasingly common occurrence. This would require a change to law and therefore, **the Army should request that the DoD work with Congress to consider changes to law reflecting the movement of officers between the reserve and active components.**

Lengthening the time between promotions would provide additional opportunity. This could come from two approaches. The first would allow officers a two year window for consideration within the primary zone, in addition to the normal below and above the zone looks. This would give the officer an additional year with which to complete requirements for promotion while pursuing developmental opportunities, especially advanced civil schooling or broadening assignments, without incurring the stigma of above the zone promotion. An officer promoted in the second year would join the following cohort in continuing his or her career progression. This method carries the burden of requiring a change to existing law. A second option would allow the individual officer to select, within a two year window, when he or she wanted to compete in the primary zone for promotion. **The Army should ask DoD to consider requesting changes to law allowing for one year of additional time between promotions for captains and majors or changes to policy that would allow officers to select their primary zone of consideration.** Either of these options provides flexibility and opportunity while staying true to the intent of 1980's DOPMA. The option for an additional year at captain or major would increase professional and personal flexibility while maintaining an up or out system.⁵³

These changes increase opportunity by providing the flexibility and time to pursue broadening assignments and advanced civilian degrees. Increasing incentive is the second essential condition. A number of changes below would begin to provide that incentive through impacts to promotion and selection.

The Army Officer Record Brief (ORB) is a comprehensive snapshot of an officer's skills, education, and experiences updated frequently and used by personnel managers and promotion boards.⁵⁴ Among the information contained on the ORB, Section VI lists military education and section VII civilian education. By separating these two types of education, there is an embedded mechanism that differentiates the nature and importance of the two.⁵⁵ However, the largest section, Section IX consists of assignment information that is simply detailed chronologically from oldest to newest.

The Army should revise Section IX (Assignment Information) of the ORB into two categories – tactical/operational and strategic/broadening. This would more effectively communicate both the depth and breadth of an officer's assignments. It would also send a signal about the importance of broadening/strategic assignments to the officer and to promotion boards.

				SECTION IX - Assignment Information				Date of Last OER	Org Zip Code
ASGT	FROM	MO	UNIT NO	ORGANIZATION	STATION	LOC	COMD	DUTY TITLE	DMOS
PROJ									
Current									
SECTION X - Tactical and Operational Assignments									
ASGT	FROM	MO	UNIT NO	ORGANIZATION	STATION	LOC	COMD	DUTY TITLE	DMOS
SECTION XI - Strategic and Broadening Assignments									
ASGT	FROM	MO	UNIT NO	ORGANIZATION	STATION	LOC	COMD	DUTY TITLE	DMOS

Figure 3: Recommended Change to ORB Assignments Section

Another tool at the disposal of the Army is the Memorandum of Instruction (MOI) that the Secretary of the Army provides to promotion boards. The MOI is a powerful tool that allows the Secretary of the Army to communicate not only administrative details, but also factors to be considered and any other information required.⁵⁶ **The Secretary of the Army should emphasize the increasing importance of graduate education and breadth of assignments in his MOI to promotion boards for major through colonel, and for battalion command selection boards in particular.** Officer personnel managers and the Army's senior leadership must also reinforce this message strongly and often.

In providing the opportunity and incentive to pursue advanced degrees and broadening assignments, there are several things to keep in mind. First, high promotion rates at lower ranks will temper attempts to incentivize the development of strategic leader competencies. Second, the Army does not need all officers in a cohort to develop into strategic leaders. However, the Army does require that its colonels possess the key strategic leader competencies to provide strategic leadership. Therefore, **the Army should require a graduate degree and the completion of two broadening, strategic assignments for promotion to colonel.** By placing this dual requirement at the colonel level, the Army can ensure that it is providing both the time and motivation to develop strategic leader competencies steadily over a 20 year period. Along with adding flexibility between promotions, it begins to evolve career progression towards a competency-based system.⁵⁷

Conclusion

The following quote by General George C. Marshall reminds us that strategic leadership requires a different set of competencies.

It became clear to me that at the age of 58, I would have to learn new tricks that were not taught in the military manuals or on the battlefield...to learn the arts of persuasion and guile. I must become an expert in a whole new set of skills.⁵⁸

This study looked at how to build these competencies into officer development and progression. It focused on Army officers in the operational career field between the rank of captain and lieutenant colonel. However, many of the conclusions and recommendations are arguably as appropriate for other career fields and other services. This paper began by identifying key leader competencies required at the strategic level – strategic context, broad influence, and communications skills. Next, it looked at officer development and officer progression to assess its impact on building these strategic leader competencies. It concluded that officer development is unable to achieve its stated goals due to time constraints, and it focuses overwhelmingly on tactical and operational competencies.

With this assessment, the inquiry turned to identifying areas for change and developing recommendations. A broad survey of recent reviews on officer development, conducted in and out of the Army, showed that the current system fails to provide the opportunity or incentive to develop strategic leader competencies. The paper argues that increasing access to broadening or strategic assignments, greater opportunity for civilian graduate education, and communications training have the greatest impact in developing key strategic leader competencies. Further, several specific recommendations looked to increase both the time available and the motivation to pursue these means of development.

In the process, this document has touched on some of the more salient and thorny obstacles to change. The availability of mid-grade officers, revision to DoD

policy, and changes to law is considerable. It also looked at culture and climate, indirectly by considering signals and the value of what gets recorded; and directly, by changes to the requirements for who gets promoted.

At the center of this analysis is the belief that the Army must maintain its tactical and operational superiority, and it does not need all officers to become strategic leaders. However, it must provide both the opportunity and incentive to develop strategic leader competencies soundly over time for those who will lead the Army at the highest levels. Developing strategic leaders and not just leaders that can operate at the strategic level is too important to leave to on the job training.

Endnotes

¹ This conclusion can be found in Lloyd J. Matthews, ed., *The Future of the Army Profession*, 2d ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2005), 24.

² Major studies by the U.S. Department of the Army in the last ten years include *The Army Training and Leader Development Panel Officer Study: Report to the Army*. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, 2002); and *Army Leaders for the 21st Century: Final Report*. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, 2006). See also Casey Wardynski, David S. Lyle, and Michael J. Colarusso. *Towards a U.S. Army Officer Corps Strategy for Success: Developing Talent*. Officer Corps Strategy Series Monograph, vol. 5. (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2010). Two influential studies by leading think tanks include Maren Leed and David Sokolow, *The Ingenuity Gap: Officer Management for the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2010); and John A. Nagl and Brian M. Burton, eds., *Keeping the Edge: Revitalizing America's Military Officer Corps*. (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, 2010).

³ Harry J. Thie et al., *A Future Officer Career Management System: An Objectives-Based Design* (Santa Monica: Rand, 2001), xiv. A similar definition of the officer management system is “the laws, policies, procedures, and practices that guide how officers enter service and are subsequently developed, promoted, and separated” in Leed and Sokolow, *The Ingenuity Gap*, v.

⁴ Colin Powell, lecture to the Army War College Distance Education Class AY2003, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA, July 17, 2003.

⁵ Stephen J. Gerras, ed., *Strategic Leadership Primer*, 3rd ed. (USAWC, 2010), 28.

⁶ Gerras, *Strategic Leadership Primer*, 28.

⁷ See Ruth Wageman et al., in “Get the Right People on Your Team – and the Wrong Ones Off” in *Senior Leadership Teams: What it Takes to Make Them Great*. (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2008), 30. The authors argue that empathy and integrity are the two competencies that consistently enable teams to develop a shared understanding, engage in dialogue, and come to a shared understanding.

⁸ U.S. Department of the Army, *Army Leadership: Competent, Confident, and Agile*, Field Manual 6-22 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, October, 2006), A-1.

⁹ The seminal work by social psychologists John French and Bertram Raven provides some needed detail. These two authors identified five bases of power exercised by leaders within organizations. These include reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert power. See John R.P. French and Bertram Raven, “The Bases of Social Power,” in *Group Dynamics: Research and Theory* 2d ed., ed. D. Cartwright and Alvin Zander (Evanston, Ill: Row, Peterson, 1960), 612-613.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 618.

¹² Ibid., 620.

¹³ See Dennis M. Murphy, “In Search of the Art and Science of Strategic Communication,” *Parameters* 39, no. 4 (Winter 2009/2010).

¹⁴ Gerras, *Strategic Leadership Primer*, 33.

¹⁵ U.S. Department of the Army, *Army Leadership*, 12-8.

¹⁶ U.S. Department of the Army, *Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management*, Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, February 1, 2010), 1. This document is the primary tool used by officers, mentors, assignment managers, and Department of the Army selection board members.

¹⁷ Ibid., 12.

¹⁸ Ibid., 13-14. Functional areas are groupings of officers who require “unique education, training and experience.” Army officers can opt to specialize into a functional area during their fourth year of service, but must do so by their 7th year of service.

¹⁹ Ibid., 15.

²⁰ Ibid., 70.

²¹ The difference between education and training has been alternatively described as knowledge versus skills or knowing “how to think” versus “translating knowledge into action.” See U.S. Department of the Army, *Leader Development Study* (Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas: U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 1987), 10.

²² U.S. Department of the Army, *Commissioned Officer Professional Development*, 29.

²³ Ibid., 31. MOS stands for Military Occupational Specialty.

²⁴ Ibid., 13.

²⁵ Defense Officer Personnel Management Act of 1980 is also known as DOPMA. For a comprehensive summary see Peter Schirmer et al., *Challenging Time in DOPMA: Flexible and Contemporary Military Officer Management* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2006).

²⁶ Extracted from U.S. Code, Title 10, Chapter 36, "Promotion, Separation, and Involuntary Retirement of Officers on the Active-Duty List" in Schirmer et al., *Challenging Time in DOPMA*, 10.

²⁷ Ibid., 11.

²⁸ U.S. Department of the Army, *Commissioned Officer Professional Development*, 25.

²⁹ The DOPMA system is a time-based system that compels "a trade-off between the length and the number of assignments, or between what could be called officers' depth and breadth of experience." See Peter Schirmer et al., *Challenging Time in DOPMA*, xv-xvi.

³⁰ Some of the most significant changes to the officer management system in this regard were driven by the comprehensive Review of Education and Training for Officers or RETO Study in the late 1970s. This study emphasized a greater need for building technical and tactical competence and the "institutionalization of the need for specialists" at the expense of generalists whom would be needed in "fewer numbers as the Army becomes more hardware oriented." See U.S. Department of the Army, *Review of Education and Training for Officers (RETO)* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, 1978), III-18. The Leader Development Study, or Sullivan Study, sustained this focus on battlefield missions recommending the creation of an "Army culture...focused on warfighting requirements." See U.S. Department of the Army, *Leader Development Study*, 28. None would argue against this focus, but the degree to which the recommended culture permeates the Army will complicate change without adequate incentives.

³¹ Ibid., 60. For example 7 out of 13 listed positions for Armor Captains fall into this category. Examples include training support brigade trainer and staff, CTC trainer or observer/controller, and service school small group instructor for Armor Captains. See U.S. Department of the Army, *Commissioned Officer Professional Development*, 69. Similarly, 7 out of 12 are listed for Infantry Lieutenant Colonels. However, the Major developmental positions are weighted much more heavily towards what we would consider strategic or broadening.

³² U.S. Department of the Army, *The Army Training and Leader Development Panel Officer Study: Report to the Army*. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, 2002) OS-1.

³³ Other noteworthy recommendations to improve officer development that were subsequently adopted included a two-phased Officer Basic Course which became BOLC and 100% ILE for Majors. Ibid., OS-12 – OS-13.

³⁴ U.S. Department of the Army, *Army Leaders for the 21st Century: Final Report*. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, 2006), A-3.

³⁵ U.S. Department of the Army, "Appendix D – Officer Team Report," *Army Leaders for the 21st Century: Final Report*. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, 2006), 7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁸ Casey Wardynski, David S. Lyle, and Michael J. Colarusso. *Towards a U.S. Army Officer Corps Strategy for Success: Developing Talent*. Officer Corps Strategy Series Monograph, vol. 5. (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2010), 4.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, viii.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 17-18. Improper signals are those that are outdated and/or emphasize status over capability, such as the officer who wears airborne wings but has never been on jump status, 25.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 18. One of the two other recommendations was to synchronize talent development with the other components of the officer management system (accession, retention, employment). The second was to adopt a trimodal OER with variable distributions for above, center of mass, and below based on unit type or promotion rate targets.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴³ Maren Leed and David Sokolow, *The Ingenuity Gap: Officer Management for the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2010), vi-vii.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, vii-viii. Other recommendations included expanding the experience base of junior officers prior to commissioning, and enhancing critical thinking skills with emphasis on self-awareness and moral development.

⁴⁶ John A. Nagl and Brian M. Burton, eds., *Keeping the Edge: Revitalizing America's Military Officer Corps*. (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, 2010), 5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁵⁰ For a perspective on the effect of operational pace on retention and quality in the officer corps see Andrew Tilghman, "The Army's Other Crisis," *The Washington Monthly* 39, no.12 (December 2007). Although all of the services are facing challenges, the Army is particularly so. See U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Military Personnel: Strategic Plan Needed to Address Army's Emerging Officer Accession and Retention Challenges* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Accountability Office, January 2007).

⁵¹ David H. Petraeus, "Beyond the Cloister," *The American Interest* 2, no. 6 (July/August 2007), 18.

⁵² This seemingly small increase would expand the available time for other developmental positions between 16% and 50%, at the rank of major. Additionally, field grade officers who are likely to command would have an opportunity to pursue a non-operational assignment between demanding KD time as a major and lieutenant colonel.

⁵³ RAND has conducted modeling on allowing flexibility between promotions at the mid-grade level. They concluded that this flexibility did not significantly affect the average length of time in an assignment, the average time in grade, or the probability to promotion for major through colonel. See Schirmer et al., *Challenging Time in DOPMA*, 42.

⁵⁴ The ORB is Department of the Army Form 4037. For a description of each section see U.S. Department of the Army, *Officers' Guide to the Officer Record Brief*, Department of the Army Pamphlet 640-1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, April 1, 1987).

⁵⁵ For more on embedding mechanisms and how they emplace assumptions into the culture of the U.S. Army see Stephen J. Gerras, Leonard Wong, and Charles D. Allen, *Organizational Culture: Applying A Hybrid Model to the U.S. Army* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, November 2008), 17.

⁵⁶ U.S. Department of the Army, *Officer Promotions*, Department of the Army Regulation (AR) 600-8-29 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, February 25, 2005), 17.

⁵⁷ Experiences alone are no guarantee of competencies obtained. However, experiences coupled with manner of performance captured on the Officer Evaluation Report may be the best method available to assess competencies developed. Other methods, such as testing, have their own set of advantages and disadvantages which are beyond the scope of this paper.

⁵⁸ General George C. Marshall quoted in U.S. Department of the Army, *Army Leadership*, Field Manual 6-22 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, August 31, 1999), 7-1.

