

Building Better Colonels: A Strategic Approach to Strategic Leader Development

by

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Abstract

Colonel is one of the most critical and versatile ranks in the Army. Colonels must be experts at the tactical, operational, and strategic level, and are the bridge between tactical and strategic leader. Surprisingly, the duties, responsibilities, and skill sets associated with this pivotal position are ill defined. So is the way in which colonels are tracked and managed. There is also very little development which occurs once an officer is selected for colonel. Without clear requirements, and a clear view of the colonel population, it is difficult to identify capability gaps in colonel development. If clear gaps are not identified, then the process of building colonels and implementing a leader development program may miss the mark. This paper will explore how the Army can build better colonels.

Building Better Colonels: A Strategic Approach to Strategic Leader Development

The Army does a terrific job of identifying tactical commanders...Yet no service has a parallel career system for selecting, educating and rewarding officers for strategic leadership

—Major General (Ret.) Robert H. Scales¹

Colonels must be experts at the tactical, operational, and strategic level, and are the bridge between tactical and strategic leader. Surprisingly, the duties, responsibilities, and skill sets associated with this pivotal position are ill defined. So is the way in which colonels are tracked and managed. There is also very little development which occurs once an officer is selected for colonel. Leader development occurs through formal education, individual self-development, and job experience.² A significant body of work has been written on officer development at the tactical level (lieutenant through lieutenant colonel), and a growing amount of literature is addressing senior leader development for general officers. Colonels find themselves bridging the gap between tactical and strategic leader. They must be able to think and operate strategically, much the same as general officers, and possess or develop the same strategic leader competencies in order to be successful.³

This paper will explore how the Army can better develop colonels within a cost-conscious environment. First, it will identify what the Army needs. This area will cover what leader competencies are expected in Army senior leaders, followed by an analysis of what skills are required of colonels based on assigned jobs. Then the paper will analyze what the Army has, by evaluating the current colonel population against experiences that lead to the development of strategic leader competencies. Recommendations for improvements include how the Army defines job requirements, how the Army sees its senior leaders, and how the Army can continue to bridge the

developmental gap between tactical and strategic leader. These recommendations are found at the end of each major section of the paper. All of the recommendations are made with budget constraints in mind, and most of the recommendations focus on streamlining systems the Army already has but does not use efficiently.

The small population size and relatively short retention horizon suggests that a large investment in developing colonels is not worth the expenditure. Many would argue that the Army's colonels are doing just fine now, and no adjustments are necessary. A final argument could be made that the Army has plenty of great strategic leaders, and no shortage of future generals in the colonel ranks who are closely monitored and groomed to take up the mantle of leadership. However, a closer look at this critical population suggests that these arguments understate the importance of colonels in the Army, and an inexpensive and incremental approach can improve Army leaders as they face current and future challenges. Senior Army leaders have clearly articulated their predictions for the complex environment America will face in the future, and the necessary competencies that Army strategic leaders should have. Doctors Stephen Gerras and Leonard Wong's six meta-competencies offer a comprehensive collection of attributes which strategic leaders should strive to attain.⁴ These metacompetencies represent what Army needs conceptually.

What the Army actually needs is less defined. Colonels are a subset of strategic leaders who operate at the strategic, operational, and tactical level. Colonel assignments may be branch specific or branch immaterial, but requirements beyond that are rarely articulated. No definitive requirements mean it is hard to tell a colonel what skills are required for a particular job. It is equally hard for Army human resources

professionals to assign the right person to the right job. The Army could be more succinct in identifying what it actually needs by more clearly defining colonel job requirements through classifying and coding each position.

The Army can also improve the way it identifies what it has. What it has is not tracked according to required competencies. There are better ways to see ourselves. Identifying the experiences in an officer's career that help develop strategic leader competencies, and then tracking them, will more clearly articulate developmental needs in the individual officer and capability gaps in the colonel population. Two ways to start bridging the gaps now are guided self-development through the implementation of a continuing education program, and increased use of mentors.

What the Army Needs

Colonels serve a critical role in the Army. They are the first rank to transition from tactical to strategic leader. That means colonels must have many of the same competencies that general officers do. Colonels are the managers who provide advice, concepts, requirements, products, and briefings to senior leaders. If they are unable to think and operate strategically, then they will be of less value to the senior leadership, and senior leadership will be of less value to our national leadership.

In 2003, the USAWC published the results of an extensive research project to identify strategic leadership competencies. Competencies incorporate knowledge, skills, attributes and abilities. This study went beyond the previous categories of conceptual, technical, and interpersonal competencies. Initial research resulted in an extensive list of more than 40 competencies. This was not helpful in winnowing down into a useful tool to drive leader development. The original list was further divided among six metacompetencies: identity, mental agility, cross-cultural savvy, interpersonal maturity,

world-class warrior, and professional astuteness.⁵ These metacompetencies remain the foundation of the model used today to teach USAWC students. Excerpts from the 2003 study are found in the Strategic Leadership Primer currently used in the War College curriculum.⁶ The study goes into great detail in describing each of the metacompetencies. This paper is not intended to re-analyze the strategic leader competencies, but rather to answer the question: How do individuals and the Army develop these metacompetencies? The answer to this questions will reconcile what the Army actually needs based on job assignment, and inform the talent management process in bridging the gap between what the Army needs and what it has.

Currently, there is no method of identifying critical skill requirements for colonels other than generalities such as branch or previous assignments (e.g. SSC Graduate, former Battalion or Brigade Commander, Army Staff, or Joint experience, etc.).⁷ This is arguably less helpful than the metacompetencies which, at least, define specific skills and attributes. When no specific requirements have been identified, it is difficult to assess whether or not colonels are well prepared for pending jobs. It is also difficult to determine what, if any, leader development programs can help close identified capability gaps. Organizations with colonel positions should be responsible to clearly articulate the requirements of that duty position using a common terminology.

Inquiries with The Army Senior Leader Division (SLD) Colonels Management Office (COMO) confirmed that as an institution, the Army does not categorize specific colonel jobs, nor does it clearly articulate special skill requirements. All jobs are deemed strategic in nature. Senior Leader Division utilizes the Developmental On-line Module (DOM) to interface with the colonel-select and colonel population.⁸ All job assignments

for the upcoming year are listed. Fiscal Year (FY) 16-17, when accessed between 16-19 November, 2016, listed 653 jobs available.⁹ Using key word searches and word groupings from the duty description in the listed jobs, one could determine if it were possible to further categorize colonel assignments to later define special skill requirements for particular positions. The results indicated the emergence of five categories: Strategic Advisor; Strategic Plans and Policy; Planning, Programming, Budgeting, and Execution (PPBE); Professor; and Tactical, Operational, and Enterprise.

Strategic Advisors

Strategic Advisors interact with senior level Army, DOD, or civilian leadership. Key positions include executive officer, initiatives groups, senior advisor, senior defense official, and principal assistant. These jobs comprise 10% of the available positions. They require extensive skills by the very nature of the officers' proximity to strategic leadership. Personnel assigned to these positions should be the top tier officers who are being groomed for promotion. They should have extensive knowledge in strategic plans and policy, PPBE, as well as tactical and operational expertise.

Strategic Plans and Policy

Strategic Plans and Policy involve plans, operations, policy, and strategy. They may also include working on a combatant command (COCOM) staff and developing Theater Campaign Plans (TCP). These jobs include 28% of available colonel positions. Strategic thinking and planning are essential for success in this category.

PPBE

The third category is PPBE. In general terms, this category is greatly focused on how the Army runs. From acquisition and program management, to requirements and manpower; PPBE requires extensive knowledge of the Army Enterprise and how the

Joint community, Congress, and DOD leadership affect the Army. Fourteen percent of available jobs in the DOM that fit this category.

Professors

Professors are the smallest category of colonel assignments, making up just 5%. They include permanent professors at the United States Military Academy and the United States Army War College. Additional jobs in this category include school directors and faculty at various institutions. There are specific requirements based on the officers' exact duty; however, all professors must maintain current strategic awareness in the event they are called upon to serve as future strategic advisors.

Tactical, Operational, and Enterprise

The last category is also the largest. Tactical, Operational, and Enterprise is the "catch-all" for the remaining jobs that are not geared specifically towards strategic leadership. Positions in this category require a level of strategic thinking and understanding, as well as knowledge of PPBE, but the duties don't require extensive qualifications in those areas. Brigade Command, Division and Corps staff, centers of excellence, and some jobs on two and three-star staffs which are not categorized previously, are grouped into this area. These jobs make up 43% of all colonel assignments. Figure 1 is the graphical representation of the data presented above. More than half of the jobs listed in the DOM fall into categories that require additional skill qualifications. These are the 57% of jobs which fall outside of the category of Tactical, Operational, and Enterprise.

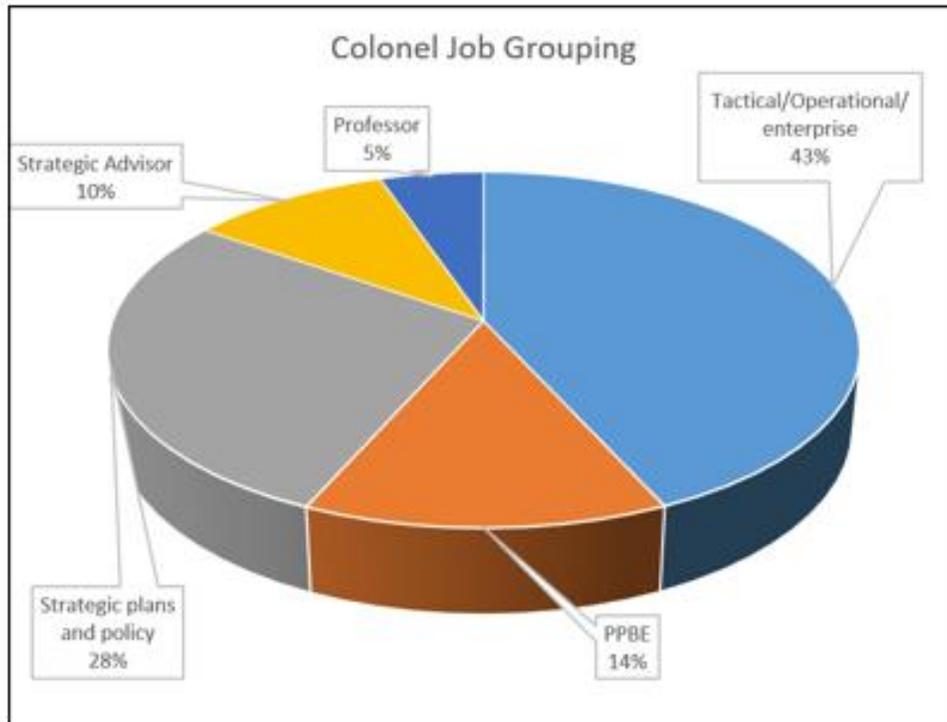


Figure 1. Breakdown of Colonel Assignments by Category

Certain qualifications, specifically joint experience, Centralized Selection List (CSL) and former CSL positions are additional sub-categories which are, in some cases, dictated by policy or statute. Figure 2 shows that 21% of the positions listed are identified as either a joint assignment, or an assignment where joint experience is encouraged. Figure 3 shows that 23% of available jobs are either CSL or former CSL positions.

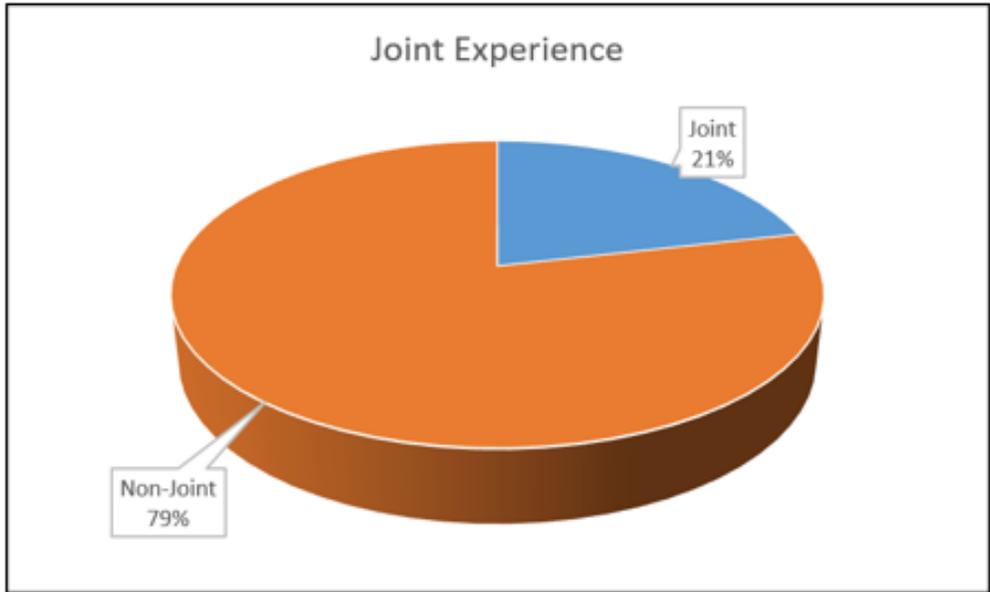


Figure 2. Colonel Assignments Encouraging Joint Experience

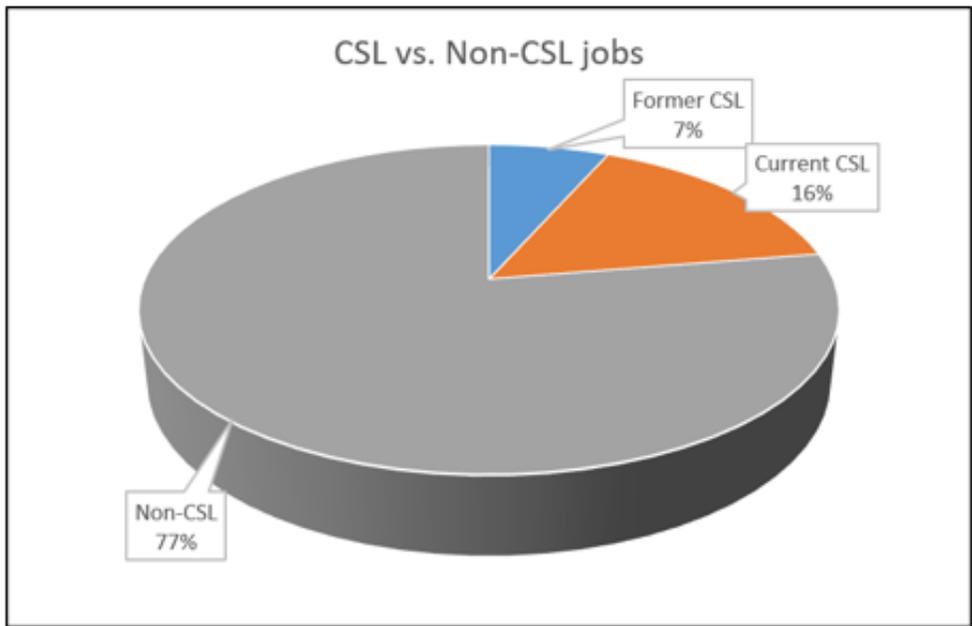


Figure 3. Centrally Selected (CSL) or Former CSL (FCSL) Assignments

The five category-plus-two sub-category system allows Army leadership to clearly articulate skill sets required to perform a particular job. The Profession of Arms White Paper states, "The Profession of Arms requires expert knowledge (i.e. expertise),

and that expertise is manifested as unique skills in the individual professional and by Army Units.”¹⁰ Coding jobs within certain categories may provide more insight into the skill and education requirements for expertise in colonel assignments and thereby help inform gaps in leader development.

Code Duty Positions

To assist colonels in narrowing the gap in their required development as senior officers, Army Human Resources Command (HRC) SLD should identify duty position requirements based on Military Occupational Specialty (MOS), Military Education Level (MEL) and by Additional Skill Identifier (ASI). Position coding by MOS and ASI are typically done for Modified Table of Organization and Equipment (MTOE) and other tactical units. Requiring additional MEL and ASI codes for colonel assignments will help the institution match the right people to the right jobs. The intent is not to overburden an already busy career path, nor is it to incur additional budgetary requirements or more staffing for Army schools. Streamlining systems currently in place may be enough to meet the need.

In theory, to be assigned to a job binned in the Strategic Plans and Policy category, a 6Z (Strategic Studies Graduate) ASI or higher (Functional Area 59 Strategist) should be required. The PPBE category may require a 3R (Force Management) ASI.¹¹ The Strategic Advisor might require both the 6Z and the 3R. Assignments could be awarded without the certification contingent upon completion within the first few months as a way to ensure the maximum ability to compete for jobs. The Tactical, Operational, and Enterprise positions may require Senior Service College (SSC) or MEL 1 but no additional skill sets. Senior Service Colleges expose these leaders to strategic concepts and the strategic environment but do not require additional

specialization. There may be other useful ASIs in addition to the two identified here; these are used as illustrative examples of the benefits to coding duty positions. A thorough review of DA PAM 611-21 Military Occupational Classification and Structure could help to better identify additional skills required for each individual colonel assignment. Additional ASIs may need to be added to include CSL and FCSL and educational requirements such as MEL or graduate degrees.

Building on the previous example, 6Z (Strategic Studies Graduate) is achieved through several different venues. Currently, an officer can earn a 6Z ASI during the electives phase of the Command and General Staff College¹², or online through a four-month program via the United States Army War College (USAWC) Distance Education Program.¹³ The Defense Planner's Course, also available via distance learning through the USAWC does not currently award an ASI, but could probably be modified to meet the criteria for awarding of the 6Z. The School of Advanced Military Study (SAMS) is a one year school that has some overlap with the strategist course. Additional analysis can be done to determine if there is a way to award a 6Z through SAMS curriculum, or as an additional elective option by the student, or SAMS could be viewed as equivalent to 6Z for O-6 assignments. The USAWC Senior Level College currently does not award any additional ASI, including 6Z, although the curriculum warrants it. It may seem redundant to award an ASI for attendance to a school where the graduate receives a master's degree in Strategic Studies; however, if positions are coded based on ASI and MEL, then it stands to reason that the appropriate ASI should be awarded by attending a Senior Service School (SSC) which results in a strategy degree versus another MEL 1 course such as a fellowship which does not produce any degree. This is similar to

certain SSCs awarding Joint Professional Military Education (JPME) credit and others not qualifying for JPME credit based on either curriculum or multi-service mix, or both.

Evaluate MEL 1 Requirements

MEL 1 qualification should be part of the duty position coding at HRC and SLD. Currently 74% of Army colonels complete a MEL 1 course. While previous studies by the Department of the Army identify 75% of colonel positions requiring MEL 1, a 2012 RAND study could not clearly articulate any MEL 1 requirements.¹⁴ The conclusion, then, could be that MEL 1 is, at most, a requirement for 75% of colonel jobs in the Army; and at worst, not a requirement at all. There is no data to correlate the 74% MEL 1 qualified officers as filling the Army identified MEL 1 required positions. Assuming that there is a requirement for MEL 1 officers, HRC or the Table of Distribution and Allowances (TDA) organizations should identify the specific jobs requiring MEL 1 qualification. This ties back to clearly articulating requirements discussed earlier.

If it is determined that there are more MEL 1 requirements than there are MEL 1 officers to fill the position, then increasing MEL 1 throughput should be considered. An alternative to increased throughput could be prioritization. Currently there are 70 professionals enrolled at USAWC resident course, distance education, or a fellowship including; chaplains, doctors, veterinarians, dentists, and nurses. That means roughly a four to one ratio of ACC to professional. Reducing the number of professional enrollments could increase ACC graduate rates to nearly 100% without any changes to the current system. Granted, most of the professionals attend the distance education versus resident course; however, prioritization could be a bigger factor if Army senior leaders favor maximum ACC officer attendance over professional officer attendance. Another cost-effective option would be to expand the distance education certification to

meet increased requirements. The Army could probably even expand USAWC to allow all officers selected for colonel to attend through either resident or distance education. The first step, though, is to identify the specific requirement for SSC attendance.

What the Army Has

The Army needs to do better at visualizing the colonel population to identify capability gaps. This includes both numbers and experience. There are roughly 3300 Army Competitive Category colonels on active duty, less than 1% of the total active Army.¹⁵ Once selected, around the 20-year mark in ones' career, colonels have a maximum of 10 years remaining to serve in the Active Army unless promoted to general, a selection rate of 9%. Only about one third of colonels will stay the full 30 years, at which time they face mandatory retirement. Another third will retire between 26 and 29 years, and one third will retire prior to 26 years in service.¹⁶ Figure 4 depicts the colonel population and career path. The top arrow shows career progression from selection to colonel through selection for general officer. Key events include Senior Service College selection (74%), CSL selection, and ending with the selection for general officer (9%). The bottom wedge represents the time horizons, divided into thirds, where colonels typically choose to retire.¹⁷ The significance of this data is that if a colonel is not being groomed for general officer, he or she is looking at retirement opportunities well before the full 30 years of service. An inexpensive and incremental program to develop colonels along this trajectory could lead to better qualified colonels across the entire time horizon. It could even lead to greater job satisfaction, which in turn, could provide more intrinsic motivation for optimal performance.

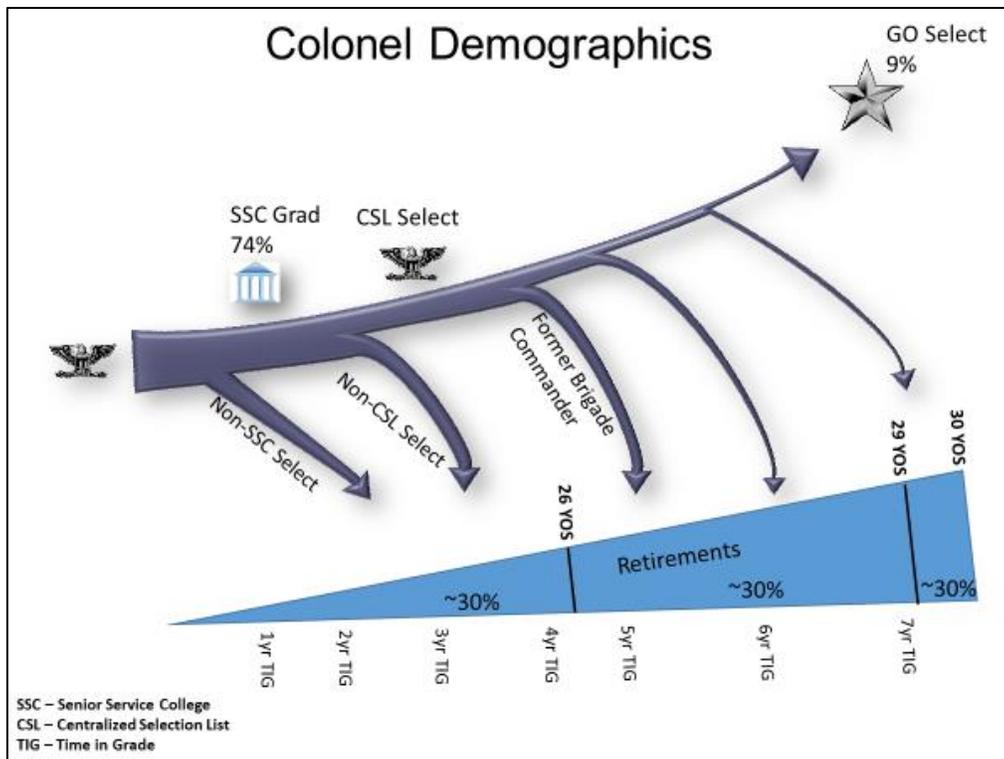


Figure 4. Colonel Population

Developing Strategic Leader Competencies

There is a significant body of work in the form of articles and books on how to better develop officers for the complexities of the strategic environment. In their 2016 article, “Six Ways to Fix the Army Culture”, Lieutenant General (Ret.) David Barno and Dr. Nora Bensahel suggested rejecting Army anti-intellectualism by opening more opportunities for resident attendance at a top tier graduate school, and de-emphasizing combat deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan as the only valued duty assignment.¹⁸ Doctors Stephen Gerras and Leonard Wong also suggested graduate school attendance at a top tier school in their 2013 article, “Changing Minds in The Army”. They also suggest broadening experiences where one is forced to confront his or her frame of reference.¹⁹ The Senior Officer Talent Management publication from the Army

War College identified a downward trend in resident graduate school opportunities over the past 20 years which threatens the intellectual capacity of Army senior leadership.²⁰

The real question should be: what are the best experiences we can offer our officers to develop strategic leadership competencies? An analysis of the definitions and subcategories of the six metacompetencies, indicated four experiences that could best provide the opportunity for an officer to develop many, if not all, of the strategic leader metacompetencies. Those experiences are: earning a master's degree, having a strategic broadening opportunity, having a Joint, Interagency, Inter-governmental, or Multi-national (JIIM) experience, and deploying to combat. Requests to SLD for specific information on these categories produced mixed results. While graduate school data was available in the aggregate, the degree-producing venue was not. Other queries such as strategic broadening or JIIM experience were not readily available, as those attributes were not closely tracked. A review of 265 records from the Biobook entries of the current Army Competitive Category officers in the resident, non-resident, and fellowship program at USAWC provided a statistically significant sample of colonels and soon to be colonels for examination.²¹ Data collected helped create models on how to look at individual and collective experiences which could contribute to developing strategic leader competencies.

Graduate Degree

A master's degree in and of itself offers an experience that could develop some additional capabilities as a strategic leader. Critical thinking, communication, and academic research all contribute to development of strategic competencies. Resident attendance at a top tier school, provides added capabilities. Exposure to other students and professionals with a different world view, world class faculty, and the ability to

spend the full educational experience immersed in study and reflection cannot be replaced by an educational experience received online, through a satellite campus on a military establishment, or through professional military education (PME). For the purpose of this study, a top tier school is identified as one of the top 20 schools ranked by U.S. News and World Reports' Tier One Schools.²² Only 6% of the officers reviewed attended a top tier school. Only 4% had a PhD, almost all of whom were professors. Fifty-one percent of the officers received a civilian master's degree, while 24% received a military master's degree. Collectively, prior to attendance at USAWC, 85% of officers earned a master's degree or higher through some venue. This means the officer had to make a conscious effort to earn the degree through self-development, rather than by simple assignment or attendance at a directed Army school. The desire, then, for intellectual development, appears to be resident in the Army Officer Corps, it may just be a simple matter of balancing competing requirements as to what type of advanced degree is attained. Army leadership should determine whether or not the additional benefits to going to a top tier school justify additional resources to meet requirements. Figure 5 depicts the educational background of USAWC students. Most students earned a master's degree through a resident military course, or through a civilian resident, on-line, or satellite venue.

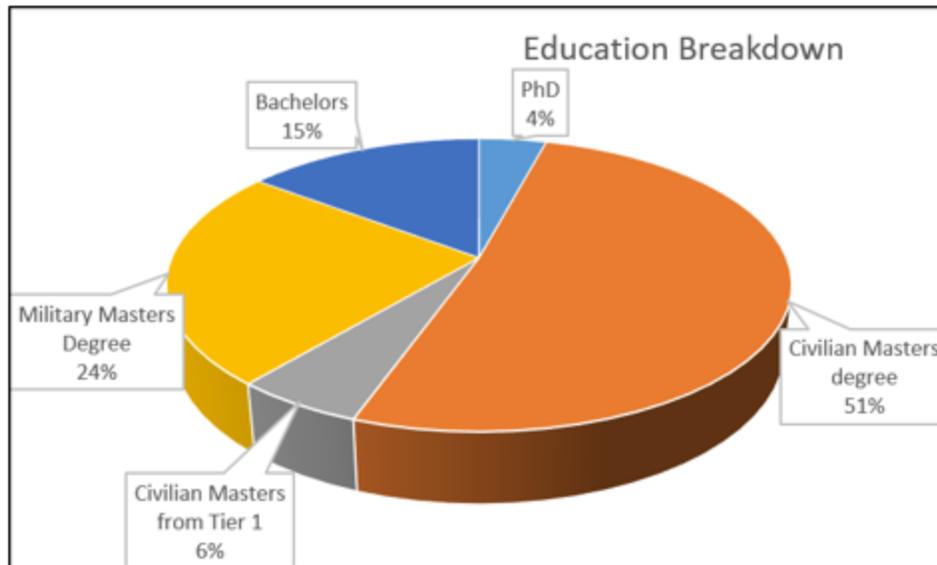


Figure 5. Educational Breakdown of Army Competitive Category USAWC Students

Strategic Broadening Assignment

“Broadening assignments develop a wider range of knowledge and skills...and expand officer awareness of other governmental agencies, units or environments.”²³

Not all broadening assignments offer experience that translates to strategic competencies. A company commander that goes on to what HRC identifies as a broadening assignment as an observer/controller-trainer (O/C-T) at the National Training Center (NTC), or as a company tactical officer at West Point may be exposed to different experiences than an operational assignment; however, that experience should not be considered as development towards strategic leadership. A subset of broadening experiences should be strategic broadening opportunities. In the case of this study, strategic broadening assignments were defined as serving in a four-star headquarters or civilian equivalent, or in a three-star headquarters that clearly was strategic in nature. When applied to the sample group, 71% of officers had at least one strategic broadening experience prior to attendance at USAWC.

JIIM Experience

A JIIM experience is the third category that could contribute to strategic competency development. Regardless of echelon, Army officers who operate in a JIIM environment can gain this experience through: constructive credit through completion of a joint duty combat tour, a joint assignment from the Joint Duty Assignment List (JDAL), or an assignment that is joint in nature but no joint credit is awarded. These officers receive tremendous experience through the interactions between professionals from a different culture, whether that be an institutional culture or a different nationality. This is a key component to developing strategic competencies. Those serving in a strategic JIIM assignment were counted as having both a strategic broadening and a JIIM assignment. When defined this way, 49% of the files reviewed identified at least one JIIM experience.

Combat Experience

The last category measured is combat experience. Combat experience is vitally important in developing strategic leader competencies; specifically, the metacompetency of developing a world-class warrior. Clearly not all combat experiences are the same. Some may be more tactically and conventionally focused; others immerse the officer into a foreign culture and new world view; while some could be just another day in another office. It is hard to qualify what that combat experience may provide, but quantifying it is at least a start. Not surprisingly, 100% of the subjects had combat experience. Figure 6 shows the combat tour distribution based on number of tours. Eighty-eight percent had between one and three tours over the last 16 years. That translates to roughly one tour every five to ten years, although, in actuality, the time between deployments varies significantly. Viewing the data from this perspective, it

is difficult to support criticism that Army leader development has been over-reliant on multiple combat deployments as a way to build leader competencies.²⁴ On the contrary, officers have ample time between combat tours to go to school, do a joint assignment, or work at a strategic broadening job. The Army does not choose when or how often individual officers deploy. Tracking dwell-time is a good start to balancing tour equity; however, Army leadership should be cognizant of the bias towards using number of combat deployments in identifying strategic leader competencies.

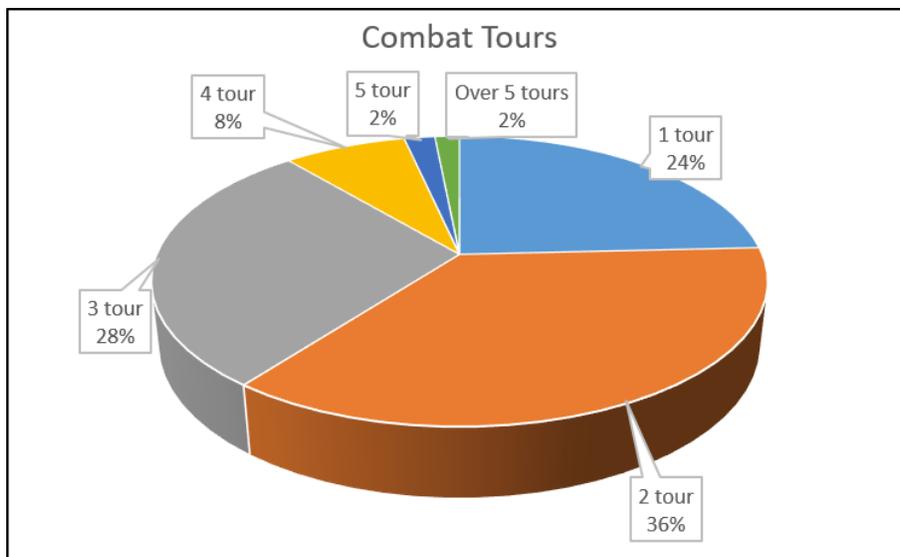


Figure 6. Combat Tours of USAWC ACC Officers

Figure 7 shows the percentage of officers, by category, whose experience might lead to the development of strategic competencies. This represents a stove-piped approach to looking at each experience to better analyze which experiences are more predominate in the studied population.

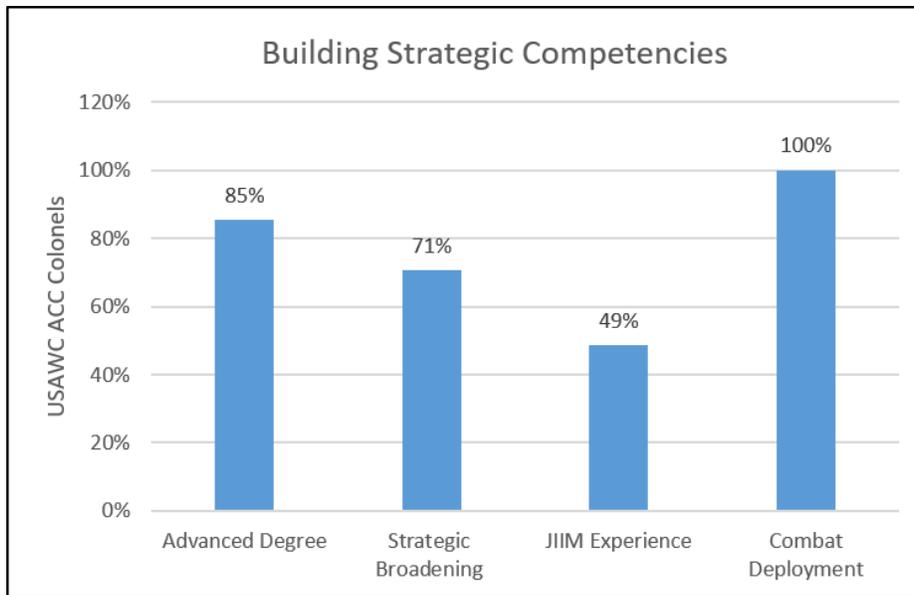


Figure 7. Strategic Competencies of USAWC ACC Officers

Choosing only one experience to measure the strategic competency of an officer will most likely produce results that are unreliable at best, and misleading at worst. Furthermore, it may not indicate an officer's true worth. Even measuring all four experiences leaves out certain aspects of character, ethics, morals, and intellectual curiosity which can alter the formula. That said, looking at combinations of experiences can be informative to how the Army develops its strategic leaders over time. Sixty-nine percent of officers in the sample group had three or four of the measured experiences to develop strategic competencies prior to attendance at USAWC, with more than half of that number possessing all four. Overall, this data indicates that the Army does value experiences which develop strategic competencies, but falls short in managing officer's careers to attain these competencies prior to reaching the rank of colonel. Superior talent management would result in 100% of colonel-selects having all four experiences. Figure 8 shows combinations of experiences that provide the maximum opportunity to develop strategic leader competencies. The abbreviations in the figure are combat

(CBT), strategic broadening (SB), and Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, or multi-national (JIIM). More than two thirds had either three or four of four experiences in the categories listed.

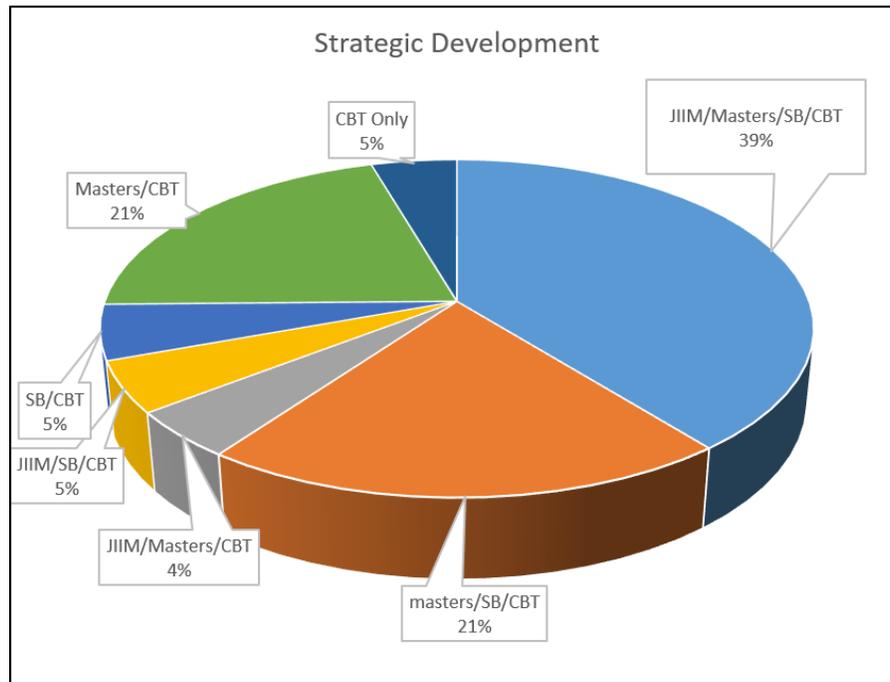


Figure 8. Strategic Development of USAWC ACC Officers

Competency Based Career Management

One of the biggest impediments to truly mastering talent management is the inability to visualize the colonel population as it was described in the analysis above. One way to assist Army leaders in talent management is to re-think how an officer's career is viewed. Human Resources Command, branch managers, and unit leaders all share the Army's linear career timeline with their subordinates. The documentation of an officer's career is also done in a linear and chronological manner on the Officer Record Brief (ORB). Because of this, it is difficult to discern which experiences lend themselves to developing which competencies; tactical or strategic, or that some experiences

overlap between tactical and strategic. Figure 9 is the current officer career timeline posted on the HRC webpage.²⁵

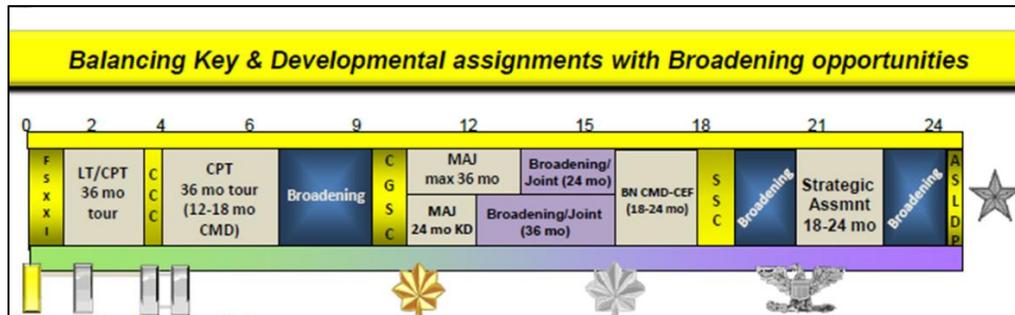


Figure 9. Current Officer Career Timeline

By using a competency based model versus a linear or chronological model, talent managers and individual officers are better able to determine whether or not an officer is balanced between tactical and strategic level assignments. Early in an officer's career, it will be apparent that there is an imbalance to the side of developing tactical competencies. This is expected, as mastery of tactical skills takes up a large part of an officer's early career. As new experiences arise through the senior captain and junior field grade officer years, the balance should begin to shift towards developing strategic competencies. This change is not exclusive to colonel development. It stands to reason that colonels are not built overnight, and much of what can be done for developing colonels should be considered years before the officer pins on the rank. The competency based model, while intended to inform colonel development, should be applied across the spectrum of officer management; starting when the officer transitions from company to field grade officer.

Figure 10 provides an example of what a competency based career tracking tool might look like. The Balanced Officer Model offers a visual tool to quickly discern

multiple facets of the officer's career. Those experiences which develop tactical competencies are shaded in blue and are further broken down by colored stars representing assignments, combat assignments, and education. Those experiences which develop strategic competencies are shaded in gray. The experiences which could develop both tactical and strategic competencies are represented in the overlapping portion in the middle.

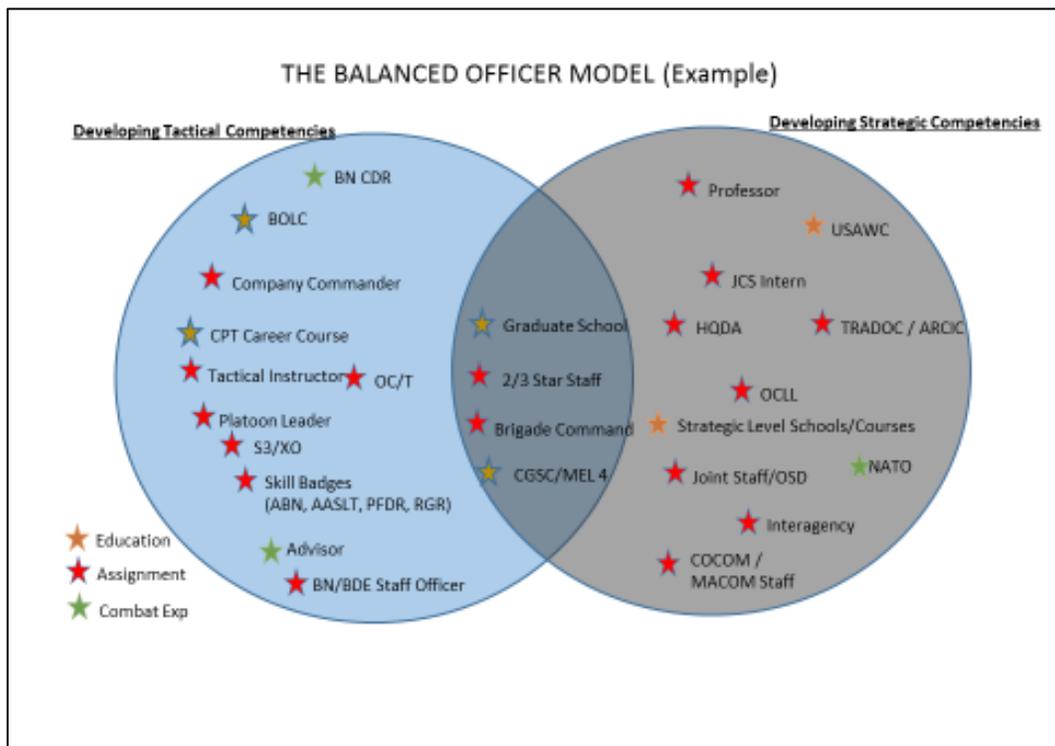


Figure 10. Officer Competencies Model

Closing the Gaps through Self-Development

The Army can more clearly identify capability gaps between the tactical and strategic leader by articulating colonel requirements through coded positions, and visualizing the colonel population through a competency-based model. As an institution, the Army can provide more officers more opportunities to develop strategic leader

competencies. The Army can use self-development to help close the newly identified capability gaps.

The self-development domain is perhaps the most expansive form of leader development. Unfortunately, it is also the least used domain. Only 61% of Army leaders think that self-development has a large impact on their development.²⁶ The non-commissioned officer corps recently adopted structured self-development; a concept in which specific learning modules must be completed prior to attendance at Non-Commissioned Officer Education System (NCOES) courses, and for promotion. The officer corps has no such program. Officers fortunate enough to work for leaders who focus on development may receive direction through guided self-development in which leaders suggest certain learning objectives, but levy no specific requirement for completion. As officers ascend through the ranks to lieutenant colonel and colonel, it seems to be expected that the officer knows where self-development should be applied. But, as identified in the competencies analysis, more than one third of the USAWC students never served in a strategic broadening assignment. Those officers may not know where to begin self-development to gain strategic leader competencies. More guided self-development through a continuing education program and increased use of mentors would help focus colonel self-development and close previously identified capability gaps.

Continuing Education Program

An Army continuing education program would reinforce the concept of lifetime learning found in the Army Leader Development Strategy (ALDS).²⁷ It would help officers gain insights; see problems in a different light; learn techniques, skills, or concepts to maintain a competitive edge. There need not be too much structure to the

program, simply a required number of hours per quarter or year, and guidance determining acceptable continuing education venues. With so much already accessible on-line, very little investment needs to be made in building an architecture for the program.

Junior and mid-level officers would feel little impact to new requirements, as most of the continuing education requirements within the Operational Domain could be met through normal Leader Professional Development (LPD) and Officer Professional Development (OPD) venues, tactical courses, or certification requirements. For colonels operating at the strategic level, LPDs and OPDs are not as common, but the need to develop still exists. This requirement could be met by attending a seminar/webinar, a short course, listening to a guest speaker, publishing an article or paper, participating in a think-tank study, or Joint Knowledge Online (JKO) courses. There are countless ways to meet this requirement without significantly impacting an officer's workload. The benefits would far out-weight the drawbacks. The Army could adopt this program quickly, and test its efficacy for a short trial period. Feedback could be given and received through developmental counseling, and if it is determined that the continuing education program is beneficial, then a more permanent method of recording compliance may be explored; for example, a block check on an Officer Evaluation Report (OER) much like the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) is measured today. The proponent for the continuing education program could be the USAWC, as it already has institutions designed for the study and development of strategic leaders.

Increased Use of Mentors

Mentorship is critical to the development of officers at every level, and colonels are no exception. Unfortunately, mentorship is a hit or miss endeavor. The Department

of the Army G1 published the Army Mentorship Handbook in 2005 in an attempt to increase the utilization and focus of mentors. Research conducted one year after the unveiling of the handbook and the new Army Knowledge Online (AKO) mentorship site found that less than one percent of AKO users utilized the mentorship site.²⁸ The conclusion of the study found:

Mentoring is about leadership and about caring beyond the normal everyday routine actions that a soldier conducts. Mentoring does not occur through websites, written action plans, and mentorship handbooks. It requires effort on the person who has the greater experience to exert that effort to develop the person with the lesser experience.²⁹

The 2014 Center for Army Leadership Survey of Army Leadership (CASL) identified only 56% of field grade officers have or use mentors.³⁰ A renewed emphasis on making mentorship a requirement for leader development may have better results. A more detailed discussion of mentorship should be considered in existing professional military education (PME) leadership modules. Officers need to know what to expect from a mentor; and mentors need to know what the mentee expects of them. What would be a good strategic broadening experience? How would you grade my board file? What job should I be looking for after War College? What skills, courses, seminars, or books, should I be acquiring, attending, or reading to ensure I make the transition from tactical to strategic leader? These are the questions a lieutenant colonel and colonel could be asking a mentor; but first, they must have a mentor. It is unclear whether or not those officers that do have mentors utilize them for the purpose of receiving guidance on self-development opportunities. Further studies along this line should be considered.

Conclusion

Colonels comprise an extremely small percentage of the officer corps, and an exponentially smaller percentage of the Army, yet their contributions and impact to the institution are felt across the force. There is truth to the old adage, colonels run the Army. Colonels also have varying shelf-lives. Further investment in their education and development may only yield minimal returns; however, a more streamlined approach to career management and leader development may produce significant benefits at little or no additional cost. When colonels are better, they provide better counsel to senior leaders. They also provide better guidance and mentorship to juniors and ultimately make the Army better.

Army leadership clearly identified what the Army needs conceptually with the six metacompetencies to developing strategic leaders. The Army can do better in identifying what it actually needs in terms of qualifications for colonel assignments by first categorizing, then coding each colonel position. The five categories of: Strategic Advisor, Strategic Plans and Policy, PPBE, Professor, and Tactical, Operational, and Enterprise; and two sub-categories of Joint and CSL/FCSL help bin colonel assignments into groups which require similar skills and attributes. By coding each position by MOS, ASI, education level, and additional identifier for command tracked assignments, the Army can be more succinct in identifying colonel requirements.

The Army can also do a better job visualizing the colonel population through the use of a competency-based model for career tracking and talent management starting at selection for field grade officer. The competency-based model tracks experiences which develop tactical competencies, strategic competencies, or both. Collectively, HRC and SLD should track experiences which lead to the development of strategic

competencies; specifically, graduate school, strategic broadening, JIIM, and combat. This will help inform officer career management. Lastly, the Army should increase the efficiency of the self-development domain of leader development through the use of an officer continuing education program and the increased use of mentors. No rank in the Army is more in need of development than that of colonels because of the critical transition from tactical to strategic leader.

Endnotes

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¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ David Barno and Nora Bensahel, "Six Ways to Fix the Army's Culture," *War on The Rocks*, blog entry posted September 6, 2016, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/09/six-ways-to-fix-the-armys-culture/> (accessed January 27, 2017).

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