Army Talent Management: Developing and Selecting the "Right" Strategic Leaders

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The United States Army is entering a period of challenging times with respect to budgetary constraints and, more specifically, the reduction of United States Army personnel. One would argue that in order to keep the military at the state of readiness needed to fight the limited wars of the 21st century the Army needs to find unique and creative ways to recruit and retain talent. Just as General Martin Dempsey stated, "We must get the people 'right'" if we are looking to maintain and build the next generation of leaders to retain our reputation as a dominant Army in the world. This paper defines the strategic environment and identifies failures in our talent management process in the last twelve years of war that have caused gaps in critical knowledge, skills, and attributes essential for strategic leaders. This paper proposes a definition of talent management in the current strategic environment and provides recommendations in the areas of officer assignments, officer evaluation reports, and promotion boards.

Army Talent Management: Developing and Selecting the "Right" Strategic Leaders

> Our profession is our people. To strengthen our profession, we must recruit talent. We must hone and reward vision. Moreover, we must retain leaders with essential expertise and proven potential. These imperatives must be underpinned by innovative personnel policies that promote more of what we need. In the end, we must get the people "right."

—General Dempsey[1]

The United States Army is entering a period of challenging times with respect to budgetary constraints and, more specifically, the reduction of United States Army personnel. One could argue that in order to keep the military at the state of readiness needed to fight the limited wars of the 21st century the Army needs to find unique and creative ways to recruit and retain talent. Just as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey mentioned above, "We must get the people 'right'" if we are looking to maintain and build the next generation of leaders to retain our reputation as a dominant Army in the world.[2] Multiple general officers, highly respected Army strategic thinkers, and think tank personnel continually conduct critical assessments of the Army's human capital management system or more simply stated--the Army's talent management process.[3] The conclusions of these assessments are typically the same: the process for developing strategic leaders is simply broken.[4]

Although many senior leaders and strategic thinkers are critical of how the Army conducts talent management, they all agree that it is the "most important activity our institutional Army conducts."[5] The assessment, development, and employment of Soldiers is how the Army is going to develop its strategic leaders that will eventually lead our Army. In a recent article entitled, "Keeping the Edge: Revitalizing America's Military Officer Corps," John Nagl and Dr. Don Snider, two of the Army's most respected

strategic thinkers said, "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."[6] The Army, through the assessment, selection and promotion processes, must identify officers who have demonstrated leadership and the capacity to think at the strategic level. After identifying these officers it is critical that the Army prepares them to lead at the strategic level and places them in assignments throughout their career that allow them to see how senior leaders think and operate. Is the Army truly broken when it comes to developing strategic leaders? What impacts have the last twelve years of war had on the development of our strategic leaders? What changes does the Army need to implement to ensure it is effectively managing its talented officers who have demonstrated the potential to be strategic leaders? How should the Army develop this talent? Finally, what talent management systems should the Army modify or improve to ensure talented officers are selected?

I will attempt to provide answers to these questions. I will first define the strategic environment and show how the last twelve years of persistent conflict have created gaps in critical thinking, understanding of the strategic culture, and strategic communication--three critical knowledge, skills, and attributes necessary for our future strategic leaders. Next, I will define talent management and make recommendations in the areas of officer assignments, officer evaluation reports (OERs) and promotion boards. It is my goal to show the reader how proper talent management, throughout an officer's career, can improve the performance of our officers at the strategic level and why our future strategic leaders should not be discouraged to take advantage of assignments that provide special opportunities out of the military mainstream.

Defining the Problem

In July 2013, the Chief of Staff of the Army's strategic studies group in a

document entitled, *Testing Assumptions about the Role of Land Power in 2030* stated,

> As the size of the force decreases and the number of mission-sets
> increases, it is essential that the Army develop human capital
> management (HCM) tools to better leverage the talent in the force to fill
> personnel requirements.[7]

The study negatively commented on the current method that the Army uses to search

and query data for talent management and the methods used to assign personnel.

"These [methods] sub-optimize talent management today and will hinder efforts to

create an adaptive, agile, and flexible organization capable of meeting the demands of

the future."[8] The study recommended that the Army "experiment with innovative

approaches to complement talent management practices . . . for implementation into an

improved talent management process."[9] In the spring of 2012 at the Training and

Doctrine (TRADOC) Senior Leader Conference, Dr. Stephen Gerras, an instructor at the

U.S. Army War College, also commented about the shortcomings of the Army's current

talent management process. He quoted the previous five Army Chiefs of Staff who said

that our current personnel system is "not doing a good job of developing (Army) officers

to lead at the 3- and 4-star levels."[10]

Recruiting, retaining, and managing talent is not only a concern for former Chiefs

of Staff of the Army, but these processes also became a concern for former Secretary of

Defense Robert Gates. Gates asked, "How can the Army break up the institutional

concrete, its bureaucratic rigidity in its assignments and promotion processes, in order

to retain, challenge, and inspire its best, brightest and most battle tested young officers

to lead the service in the future?"[11] Additionally, a 2011 survey found that 65% of active

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duty general officers rated personnel management as one of the worst performing functions in the Army.[12] If the Secretary of Defense, the Chiefs of Staff of the Army and 65% of the general officers believe the Army's talent management processes are ineffective, then the message is clear--fix the problem.

<div align="center">Current Strategic Environment</div>

Despite the Army's incredible sacrifices and performance during the last twelve years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, it cannot afford to rest on its laurels and must do its best to identify and focus on future conflicts. Most experts agree that our future military leaders will need the skills and attributes necessary to become highly proficient in all forms of contact, from "wars of silicon and cyber warfare to conventional conflicts with nation states to irregular conflicts fed by terrorism and transnational crime."[13] Our future strategic leaders will also require the knowledge, skills, and attributes to deal with "wars amongst the people; the increased likelihood of humanitarian and peacekeeping missions in parts of the world with which the United States has little experience; the widespread access to highly destructive weapons; and the 24 hour global media environment."[14] Finally, in addition to mastery of various forms of contact, our next generation of strategic leaders will also have to battle the reality of declining defense budgets and Army military capabilities.[15] This strategic environment will demand adaptive and creative leaders; therefore, it is imperative that the Army gets the talent management processes right. In his article entitled "Building Better Generals," Lieutenant General (R) David Barno commented on the prospects of failing:

> If the nation's leadership fails to invest in the very best processes to optimize the assignment, education, selection, and evaluation of these officers, it risks being left with a military that is ill prepared to prevail in the fraught security environment that the United States will almost inevitably face.[16]

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Qualities of a Strategic Leader

Having described the future strategic environment as violent, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous, the Army must determine the best way for officers to acquire and develop the knowledge, skills, and attributes (KSAs) necessary to be successful strategic leaders. So, what KSAs are required for our future strategic leaders? Multiple Washington think tanks and leadership experts have their opinions. Rand, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and the Center for a New American Society in recent studies claim "critical, creative, and innovative thinking; negotiation and consensus building skills; self-awareness; and communication skills" are essential for strategic leaders.[17] Dr. Stephen Gerras in his *Strategic Leadership Primer* for the U.S. Army War College, claims, "The capacity to formulate and articulate strategic aims and key concepts is perhaps a strategic leader's most significant capacity."[18] Others assert that strategic context, broad influence, and communication skills are the three competencies that stand out.[19]

While officers have sharpened both their leadership and warfighting skills during the past twelve years of conflict, these competencies have not directly translated into the KSAs required for strategic leaders. Unfortunately, in the past twelve years, failures in our talent management process have created a gap with respect to three critical KSAs: critical and creative thinking, knowledge, and experience operating in the strategic culture, and effective communications.

Critical and Creative Thinking

In 2011, as the TRADOC Commander, General Dempsey claimed that strategic leaders "Must think critically and be capable of developing creative solutions to complex problems."[20] Based on the complexity of the future strategic environment discussed

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above, strategic leaders must be able to think critically. They must challenge assumptions and provide alternatives for the Nation's leadership. They must be "comfortable with ambiguity and able to provide advice and make decisions with less, not more, information."[21] The type of environment that our future strategic leaders will encounter will require them to think on their feet, as well as produce and articulate creative solutions to problems that knowledge of history and cookie cutter solutions will not solve.

The Army is not the only organization that values critical thinking. Laszlo Bock, the senior vice president of people operations for Google, claims the number one attribute they look for in future employees is their cognitive ability.[22] He asserts, "It's learning ability. It's the ability to process on the fly. It is the ability to pull together disparate bits of information." Granted, in the past twelve years, the Army has produced a generation of officers who can critically think in a tactical environment, but now the focus needs to shift and deliberately develop critical and creative thinking at the strategic level that many of our most critical engagements will occur.

General Daniel Allyn, the current Forces Command Commander, emphasizes the importance of critical thinking at every echelon of command within his units. He states, "Every echelon of command needs critical thinkers and its importance increases as leadership responsibilities increase. It is vital for every organization to fully leverage the thoughts and ideas that only their senior leaders can provide."[23] Commenting on whether or not our critical thinking skills at the strategic level have suffered in the last twelve years of war, General Allyn stated, "It is hard to criticize our Army's focus on winning wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, wars that have broadened our officers at the

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tactical and operational levels, but critical thinking at the strategic level will require

officers to think more broadly and study how to deal with the diverse challenges found

only at the strategic level."[24] So how do we close the gap between critical thinking at the

tactical and the strategic level? One approach General Allyn advocates is "exposing

officers to strategic level broadening assignments that will further develop their critical

thinking skills."[25]

For the purposes of this paper, a broadening assignment that General Allyn

refers to is one that removes an officer from his basic branch and develops an officer

with an understanding of a broader range of politics, economics, and the use of

information in modern warfare.[26] Examples of broadening opportunities include civilian

education opportunities, fellowships, and assignments on both the joint and Army staffs.

Knowledge and Experience Operating in the Strategic Culture

As an assignment officer at the Human Resources Command I had multiple

conversations with Department of the Army civilians and Army officers who claimed that

officers from the sister services were more effective at the strategic level. While many

Army officers were capable of performing at the strategic level, they were not familiar

enough with the strategic culture to be effective. They were not comfortable with the

strategic culture, the history, key players, or motives within the strategic environment.

Besides exposure to the strategic environment through schooling at either the

Command and General Staff College or the U.S. Army War College, the only way to

gain the knowledge necessary to be effective at the strategic level is through

educational opportunities at civilian institutions or another service school and

experience. The Army can and should provide this experience for its future strategic

leaders, but has traded this experience for more *muddy boots* time in tactical units. For

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the purposes of this paper muddy boots assignments are those tactical assignments within deployable units.

To test my theory I interviewed Lieutenant General William C. Mayville the current Director of Operations, J3 of the Joint Staff. Lieutenant General Mayville agreed that his previous broadening assignments gave him a better understanding of how to operate at the strategic level.[27] However, he also pointed out that we have a "unique generation of younger officers who have participated in combat and stability operations and developed very advanced cognitive skills that will be valuable at the strategic level."[28] Having been assigned at the strategic level earlier in his career, Lieutenant General Mayville questions the logic that "any singular track that does not allow for broadening opportunities exposing officers to the challenges of the strategic culture."[29]

Not only does Lieutenant General Mayville believe that understanding the strategic culture and communicating effectively at the national level is important, so does the Army Chief of Staff, General Raymond Odierno. General Odierno recently directed the U.S Army War College to create a course designed to prepare junior general officers to be better practitioners at the strategic level.[30] Two of the four course objectives target perceived deficits necessary to succeed as strategic leaders. The first is knowing how to decipher the strategic environment and how the Army operates inside it. The second is effectively communicating at the strategic level both orally and in writing.[31] If the Army, through its assignment process, did a better job of exposing officers to these competencies throughout their career and developing critical strategic level KSAs, this course may not be necessary.

As in any business model, it takes investment to improve your product. Exposing future strategic leaders to the strategic culture and the skills needed to be value-added early in their development would result in a better product. For the Army, that is a strategic leader who understands the strategic culture and its processes so he can effectively negotiate obstacles to influence policy and decisions.

Effective Communications

Simply understanding the culture and operating at the strategic level is not enough. To be effective at the strategic level, officers must also be able to engage and communicate effectively both orally and in writing to represent the Army inside the myriad of strategic processes. In an interview with Major General Jeffrey Buchanan, the current Military of District of Washington Commander and former spokesman for United States Forces Iraq, he stressed the importance of communicating at the strategic level. He stated that, "The last twelve years of war have prevented officers from balancing muddy boots and broadening assignments."[32] As a result, "Our leader KSAs at the tactical level are honed to a fine point, but they've clearly suffered at the strategic level."[33] Furthermore, he stressed understanding the culture of those he was communicating with and the difference communicating at the strategic vice tactical level. "Communicating with CENTCOM, the State Department and the Iraqi government all required a different approach and understanding the different cultures was critical."[34]

Officers communicating at the strategic level must decide "who to influence [and] how to influence them," and then "deliver the message through words and actions, and assess the effectiveness of this effort."[35] If strategic leaders fail to communicate their thoughts and ideas internally and externally to their organization, then their overall effectiveness at the strategic level will suffer. Because the strategic culture is one

characterized by multiple complex problems with less time and fewer resources to deal with them, strategic leaders must take advantage of short and quick engagements.

Therefore, concise and coherent communication is paramount. Additionally, strategic leaders must serve as "communication agents for their organizations" and engage both internal and external organizations.[36] With internal audiences, strategic leaders must "ensure alignment between vision and execution of organizational strategies."[37] With external stakeholders, strategic leaders must "facilitate access to resources, encourage support, and monitor changes in the external environment."[38]

Very similar to the development of critical thinking at the tactical level, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have produced future strategic officers who do very well at communicating at the tactical level. It is now incumbent on our talent management process to produce officers who can communicate at the strategic level. If strategic leader competencies include the ability to critically think and effectively communicate at the strategic level, as well as to understand and successfully operate within the strategic culture, then how should the Army develop these skills in its officers?

In preparation for his piece titled, "The Next Petraeus," *Boston Globe* writer Renny Mcpherson interviewed 37 general officers and asked them what helped them become strategic leaders. They responded that the "most beneficial experiences were sustained international experience, civilian graduate education, and taking on special opportunities out of the military mainstream," but relayed that these experiences "were the very ones that they felt discouraged from pursuing."[39] The Army's talent management process balances these experiences, assigns and selects officers for future assignments, and provides military education and civilian graduate school

opportunities. Dr. Stephen Gerras claims that, "Leader competence develops from a balanced combination of education and training, experience, and self-development."[40]

Now that I have made the case that the past twelve years of war have negatively impacted officer development in the areas of critical thinking, exposure to the strategic culture and strategic communications, I am going to provide recommendations to close the gap. I will begin my discussion with a description of the Armor and Infantry strategic leader paths.

<div align="center">Armor and Infantry Strategic Leader Paths</div>

Before defining talent management in the current strategic environment, it is necessary to narrow the scope of my analysis to Infantry and Armor officers. While every branch certainly produces strategic leaders, this focus provides a data set that represents the majority of the Army's Brigade, Division and Corps Commanders who subsequently become strategic leaders. Armor and Infantry officers represent 94% of the Army's tactical brigade commanders commanding 31 of 33 tactical brigades, 70% of the Army's Division Commanders commanding 7 of 11 Divisions, and 100% of the Army's Corps commanders.[41] Although a few of these officers followed different paths in their careers, the Infantry and Armor officers typically have a "proven path" to success. I believe promotion to lieutenant colonel and selection to Battalion Command should be the definition of a very successful career. An officer selected for Battalion Command typically had a successful company command followed by successful key developmental time as a major.

Unfortunately, there are only three times in the first eighteen years of an officer's career that he can take advantage of broadening assignments outside of his basic branch that will assist in development of the three critical KSAs discussed above.

Commanders and assignment officers must balance what is best for the Army, what is best for the professional development of the officer and the desires of the officer when they determine future assignments for their subordinates.

Defining Army Talent Management

When reviewing the available literature and studies on talent management it is quickly apparent that talent management and the methods and processes used in talent management are evolving across many organizations. In fact, Robert E. Lewis in his article titled, "Talent Management: A critical review," states that, "A review of the literature focused on talent management reveals a disturbing lack of clarity regarding the definition, scope and overall goals of talent management."[42] Even though there is a lack of clarity with respect to talent management, multiple individuals and organizations are attempting to define it for the Army.

The U.S. Military Academy, in an effort to match cadets with the branch that best fits their talents, has defined talent as an "intersection of three dimensions--skills, knowledge, and behaviors--that create an optimal level of individual performance when the individual is employed within his/her talent set."[43] Casey Wardynski, David Lyle, and Michael Colarusso in their U.S. Army War College paper titled, *Toward a U.S. Army Officer Corps Strategy for Success: Employing Talent*, state, "Talent management focuses on officer development and employment. It requires new capacities that can identify officer talent and match it with competency requirements."[44] Lieutenant Colonel Scott Halter, a strategic planner serving in the Pentagon, claims that successful talent management has two key ingredients: (1) the organizational transparency of opportunities, requirements, and eligible personnel in near real-time and in all dimensions of individual talent and, (2) the organizational handling of the friction

between unit manning and individual development models.[45] Synthesizing these

thoughts with the essential qualities of a strategic leader discussed above, I propose the

following definition of Army talent management with respect to developing strategic

leaders:

> Identify those officers who demonstrate the ability to critically and
> innovatively think, who have the personality to effectively lead and work
> well with others, and who can effectively communicate their vision. Assign
> these officers to positions where they will be mentored and afforded the
> opportunity to continue to develop their strategic leader skill set. Finally,
> do what is necessary to retain these officers so they can contribute to the
> Nation in the future.

At a minimum, the Army's talent management process needs to address the

following concerns: (1) How early in an officer's career should the Army identify a

"talented" future strategic leader? (2) How should the Army maintain a large enough

bench of "talented" officers? (3) Should the Army afford all officers the same

opportunities? The remainder of this paper will address these questions and propose

recommendations for how the Army should manage its talent.

Officer Assignments

The U.S. Army's Leader Development Strategy states, "Leader development is

the most important core competency of our Army."[46] Assignment officers working at both

Human Resources Command (HRC) and Senior Leader Division can affect the

development of strategic leaders throughout the assignment process. Assignment

officers do their best to manage the needs of the Army, the professional development of

the officer, and the officer's desires. Contrary to some criticisms, they do their best to

match individuals against assignments instead of *adapting* individuals for

assignments.[47] Only in rare cases are assignment officers "jamming round pegs into

square holes and asking the pegs to adapt."[48] In the end, an assignment officer

attempts to place the *right* officer in the *right* job at the *right* time.

From the assignment officer's perspective, the process is simple. The

Department of the Army's (DA) manning guidance dictates to HRC the priority of

assignments and the number of officers needed during each assignment cycle. Officers

working in the Operations and Plans Division of HRC match the DA requirement with

the number of officers each branch has determined is available for reassignment. Each

branch is required to fill its branch-specific, hard-coded positions. Once these positions

are filled, officers compete for a handful of other professional developing and

broadening assignments during a biannual manning conference. With minimal input

from the Commanders in the force, it is up to the discretion of the assignment officer to

determine who gets which assignment.

The assignment process is far from perfect, but the hand-selected assignment

officers do the best they can. One of the major faults of the assignment process is that

not all officers will have equal opportunity for the same developmental experience.

There are a limited number of assignments and some are more professionally

developing than others are. Over time, assignment officers who have reviewed multiple

officer files and promotion statistics typically learn which assignments appeal to

promotion and selection board members. The Army leadership should identify those

positions so that they can be filled with officers who have demonstrated the potential to

be future strategic leaders. In this way, assignment officers can deliberately match

designated future leaders to positions that will help them develop the critical KSAs

required of strategic leaders. With this knowledge and guidance from the Army's

leadership, assignment officers could hard code the positions that are advantageous for future strategic leaders and select talented officers for assignment to those positions.

Another fault of the assignment process is that some officers are unable to take advantage of broadening assignments. Most broadening assignments remove an officer from his basic branch for two to three years and contradict the Army culture of sustained muddy boots time in tactical units. In some cases, broadening assignments also put severe stress on an officer's professional timeline. The Chief of Staff of the Army's strategic planning guidance states that officers should look beyond purely Army endeavors. The guidance states, "Enhanced broadening experiences will build critical thinking skills and the ability to develop innovative solutions applicable to difficult solutions."[49] I believe the right broadening assignment is exactly what a future strategic leader needs to develop the critical KSAs that have not been fully developed, due to an Army culture encouraging officers to stay in muddy boots or tactical assignments. Unfortunately, an officer is faced with a career decision: to stay in a tactical assignment because it will make him a better tactical Battalion Commander or to risk a two to three year broadening assignment that may put him behind his peers and take him out of his comfort zone to expose him to the strategic culture?

One recommendation to give high performing officers the time to take advantage of broadening opportunities is to reduce below the zone selections and allow below the zone officers the option to opt-in and opt-out of promotion boards. This option is risky and goes against the competitive nature existing in the culture of our officer corps, but it would address the concern held by many that officer development is driven by time and

not by the quality and range of experience.[50] I will discuss this recommendation further in the recommendations section of this paper.

With some minor changes to the officer assignment process and a shift in the promotion eligibility criteria, the Army can build its case to change "a culture [that] exists in the Army in which officers aspire to the highest positions of responsibility by selecting narrow career paths."[51] These narrow career paths may produce great leaders as they have in the past, but I believe they have created a gap with respect to the three KSAs necessary for strategic leaders: critical thinking, experience in the strategic culture, and strategic communications.

Promotion/Selection Boards and Officer Evaluation Reports

From my experience as the Armor Branch Chief, I feel that the Army's promotion/selection board process is fair and extremely effective in identifying those officers with potential for service at the next grade or position. Prior to the conduct of the board, the Secretary of the Army develops policy guidance that directs the Army G-1 to ensure that board members "adequately reflect the skills, commands, and diversity of the competitive category under consideration."[52] Representing your branch and determining who will comprise the future of the officer corps is an honor.

The DA secretariat administers each promotion/selection board the same way. The process begins with the Secretary of the Army's board guidance. This guidance highlights the need for different officer professional development patterns required for the Army's total mission.[53] Many questions surround the Secretary of the Army's board guidance. Contrary to what some critics say, board guidance establishes clear expectations for performance and does enhance accountability throughout an officer's career.[54] In an article mentioned earlier entitled, *Keeping the Edge: Revitalizing*

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America's Military Officer Corps, the authors are quite critical of the promotion instructions claiming they "favor some skill sets that are relatively less useful than they were during the Cold War, while neglecting to reward those of greatest importance in the emerging security environment."[55] I believe this problem is mitigated when each board member presents to the group his branch's career progression and paths to success.

Both officer evaluation reports and board membership play a key role in the process discussed above. In order to ensure that board members can clearly identify future strategic leaders, a few minor adjustments in both areas are necessary.

In April of 2014, the Army will implement significant changes to the OER. Three senior leader focus areas that the new OER attempts to address include the ability to document, "data mine" and identify talent, to address the "one size may not fit all" assessment of different skills and competencies at different grades, and to keep the OER relevant and adaptive.[56] All of the focus areas are an effort to fix a "poor mechanism for evaluating future leaders" and give the Army the ability to "clearly see what skills, behaviors, and experiences its people possess."[57]

Although I agree with many of the OER changes, I do not believe we have made the necessary changes on the OER blocks to assist board members with identifying talent and future strategic leaders. The new OER still maintains the four blocks that senior raters will use to evaluate an officer's potential. From captain through lieutenant colonel, the top block still has a limit of 49%. This percentage is too high to separate those officers who have excelled beyond their peers. The senior rater retains the ability to describe the officer in his senior rater comments, but from my experience these

comments are too open for board member interpretation and in some cases do not clearly capture an officer's potential to serve as a future strategic leader. The designers of the new OER should apply the same logic to the captains', majors' and lieutenant colonels' senior rater blocks as they did for the colonels'. The top block for the colonel's OER states, "Multi-Star Potential." The percentage of colonels in this block cannot be more than 24%. This percentage is clearly more effective in assisting board members to identify those officers with the potential to be future strategic leaders.

Regardless of whether or not these OER changes are implemented, the Army should take a hard look at the composition of the board members who ultimately select our future strategic leaders. Nagl and Snider commented, "Future selection boards will need clear instructions to properly assess those holistic attributes in candidates for promotion that will be most valuable for anticipated future conflicts, and they should be chaired by officers cognizant of their responsibility to shape the future force to prepare and meet those demands."[58] This paper has already discussed the concerns over board guidance and as long as board members adhere to the guidance, then I do not recommend any changes to how it is developed or enforced.

As stated earlier, I do believe that the promotion/selection board process is fair and extremely effective identifying those officers with potential for service at the next grade or position. Furthermore, I believe that those officers who sit on boards absolutely do the best job they can based on their knowledge, skills, and attributes gained throughout their Army career. However, I do have some reservations with respect to whether or not the Army selects the right officers with the right skill set to sit on our more senior boards, specifically the Senior Service College board. Assuming that the

Senior Service College board selects officers that the Army will invest time and resources in so they can make strategic impact, it is my opinion that prior to this year, not all the officers asked to sit this board were qualified to select the next generation of strategic leaders. Since 2008, only 21 of the 88 officers who sat the Senior Service College selection board were general officers or officers who would eventually be promoted to general officer. The remainder of the board members were colonels, and in some cases had not even commanded at the O6 level. I would argue that many of these board members might not have even had the critical strategic leader KSAs that they were looking for as members of the board. Fortunately, the Army identified this issue, and this year out of the 17 board members, 13 of them were general officers. The Army needs to continue to place scrutiny on board members and ensure that they have the skills and experiences necessary to select our next generation of strategic leaders.

Recommendations

The Army has produced some incredible leaders who have led in some very difficult times and places, including over the past twelve years in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Army now faces challenges both domestically and overseas and must continue to improve its talent management and to take care of the officers who serve. The following are recommendations designed to assist in identifying and developing the next generation's strategic leaders while closing the gap with respect to critical thinking, understanding strategic culture, and strategic communications--three critical KSAs that have suffered due to twelve years of war encouraging muddy boots assignments in lieu of broadening assignments.

Create an additional top block or decrease the percentage allowed in the top block for CPTs, MAJs, and LTCs similar to the new Colonels OER. If the goal of the

promotion board is to identify which officers have the knowledge, skills, and attributes

desired for positions of greater responsibility, then we need to make it easier for

promotion/selection boards to identify those officers. A top block that 49% of the senior

rater's population can earn is simply too broad and puts too much responsibility on the

board member to interpret the senior rater comments and determine how an officer

compares to his or her peers. If the percentage were 24% or lower, similar to the new

colonel's OER, the block would clearly define who is more talented than the rest.

A major argument countering this suggestion would be that we may miss officers

who are more than capable of being strategic leaders, but either had a difficult time in a

particular assignment or ran into a senior rater who failed to correctly see and articulate

their potential. However, an officer will have multiple senior raters and multiple OERs

throughout his career so he has ample time to overcome a poor rating and still be

identified by board members as a future strategic leader. Once we clearly identify these

strategic leaders beginning with senior captains, it is essential that the Army leadership

and the assignment officers identify the right broadening opportunities exposing these

officers to the strategic level and developing the critical KSAs discussed earlier that

have been slighted due to constant muddy boots time.

Identify and hard-code assignments that will give officers the knowledge, skills

and attributes necessary to become strategic leaders. Assign only your best to these

assignments. As senior leaders and assignment officers review available assignments,

there is no secret as to which jobs are better for career progression and for reducing the

gaps in critical KSAs essential for strategic leaders. Army senior leadership should

identify these assignments and code them with a special identifier. Then assignment

officers could assign those officers who have demonstrated the potential to be strategic leaders to these positions.

There are two counter arguments to this recommendation. The first will come from the leadership of those organizations for which Army leadership did not identify positions on the strategic leader list. These leaders will argue that their organization is just as important as any other organization and they should get its fair share of talent. This is certainly a reasonable argument if Army leadership failed to identify its assignment priorities. However, the Army G1 does exactly that in the Army's manning guidance. Through correct strategic messaging, Army leadership could justify its choices. The second argument will come from those who feel that we should increase the early promotions so we do not miss an officer with the potential to be a strategic leader. "The Army must begin by deepening the bench for selection to major in order to increase the odds of netting the most promising strategists in the midst of their tactically competent brethren."[59] Selecting more officers early will actually decrease their chances to take advantage of broadening opportunities because of timeline constraints and will therefore increase the gap in critical thinking, understanding the strategic culture, and strategic communications that our current talent management process has created. The 2010 Center for Army Leadership Annual Survey of Army Leadership concurs with my assessment, concluding, "Rapid promotion and rigid methods for development and advancement has a negative influence on leader development."[60]

Reduce below the zone selections and allow below the zone officers to opt in or out of promotion boards. In order to allow officers to accept broadening or career enhancing assignments that they would otherwise not be able to pursue because of

timeline constraints, the Army should select fewer below the zone officers and allow those eligible to opt in or out of promotion boards. Previously when I discussed the path to a strategic leader in the Armor or Infantry community, I pointed out that timelines become very restrictive if you take advantage of the tactical-level professionally developing jobs otherwise known as muddy boots assignments such as a second company command (Captain) or a brigade level job (Major).

When promotion boards select officers below the zone, they lose the opportunity for a broadening assignment and more importantly prevent closing the gap on critical KSAs discussed above that they have ignored during their operational assignments. If below the zone, officers were able to opt out or in of promotion boards they might be less hesitant to accept broadening opportunities, because they would remain competitive amongst their peers. Future boards must balance the number of officers selected below the zone. Selecting officers early, rewards performance and for many officers provides an incentive to work harder, but this should not drive their desire to work hard. Reducing the number of below the zone officers or asking an officer to opt out of a promotion board goes against the competitive atmosphere that exists in the Army culture. If we are truly trying to give officers control of their own careers and afford them the opportunity to take assignments closing the gap in critical KSAs essential for strategic leaders then this recommendation should be considered.

The Army Leadership should review the skills and attributes of all board members to ensure they have the necessary level of expertise to select officers for promotion or selection. To make the promotion/selection process even better than it already is, the Army leadership should continue to place scrutiny on officers asked to sit

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on boards. Having simply attained a certain rank or completed a particular job does not make an officer a good board member.

Selecting the future strategic leaders is not an easy task and some officers may be overlooked. Not every officer who has performed well on his OERs has the potential to be a strategic leader. Board members must look deeper than the OER and attempt to evaluate an officer's potential to develop the critical KSAs essential for strategic leaders. It is impossible for board members to identify and select officers who have the capacity to develop strategic leader KSAs if the board members themselves do not have these qualities. Board members without strategic leader KSAs have a tendency to select officers who have followed their own paths to success and fail to look beyond the officer's assignment history.

As a former assignment officer who asked other officers to sit on promotion boards, I did my best to select officers who would not only benefit from the experience, but also had the knowledge, skills, attributes, and maturity necessary to select the right officers. Just like the last Senior Service College board, the Army needs to continually evaluate board members, their knowledge, skills, and attributes and make sure they are fully qualified to select our future strategic leaders.

Conclusion

In a recent *Washington Post* article entitled, "How to lose great leaders? Ask the Army," Tim Kane states that "experts initially blamed the war in Iraq for high officer attrition rates resulting in a 'broken pipeline' of available officers,"[61] however, he articulates that the problem is more "deeply rooted than that."[62] Kane claims, "The Army has bled talent for decades, a consequence of a deeply dysfunctional organization that poorly matches jobs with talent and does not trust its officers to make choices about

their own careers."[63] This paper provides recommendations to assist with fixing the broken pipeline and giving officers more control of their development to become strategic leaders.

After defining the strategic environment and identifying three critical knowledge skills, and attributes that are underdeveloped due to our current talent management process, I proposed a definition for Army talent management and focused my recommendations in the areas of officer assignments and the promotion/selection board process, including OERs. The recommendations in this paper pertaining to the OER, the identification and hard coding of strategic leader assignments, the reduction of below the zone officers, and increased scrutiny on board members will result in officers having more confidence in our personnel system. Overcoming the institutional resistance to change in the area of talent management and selecting the right strategic leaders will ensure that our Army will be fully capable to tackle the challenges that lay ahead in the future strategic environment.

Within the personnel pipeline exists plenty of great officers who are more than capable of leading our Army within the violent, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous strategic environment. It is essential that we identify and develop these officers throughout their careers. As in any great organization, the Army needs to refocus from time to time to ensure it is still taking care of our number one asset, our Soldiers. Based on reduced budgets and questions surrounding the Army's role in the future, now is the time for us to refocus our talent management process.

Endnotes

[1] GEN Martin E. Dempsey, *Chairman's Strategic Direction to the Joint Force* (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, February 6, 2012), 9.

[2] Ibid.

[3] David Barno et al., *Building Better Generals* (Washington DC: Center for a New American Society, October 2013); Brian M. Burton et al., *Keeping the Edge: Revitalizing America's Military Officer Corps* (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, February 2010); Robert H. Scales, "Too Busy to Learn," *Proceedings Magazine* 136 (February 2010): 1.

[4] Robert P. Ashe, *The Evolution of Army Leader Development* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: 2013) 1.

[5] Scott M. Halter, "What is an Army but the Soldiers? A Critical Assessment of the Army's Human Capital Management System," *Military Review*, January-February 2012, 16.

[6] Burton et al., *Keeping the Edge,* 48.

[7] Dave E. Johnson, *Chief of Staff of the Army Strategic Studies Group – I Final Report: Testing Assumptions about the Role of Land Power in 2030* (Washington, DC: Army Strategic Studies Group, July 2013), 24.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] In a presentation at the TRADOC Senior Leader Conference in the Spring of 2012, Dr. Stephen Gerras presented a slide with the five previous Army Chiefs of Staff in which he quoted all five of them as saying something similar to: "I have been told on multiple occasions by DoD leadership that we are not doing a good job of developing (Army) officers to lead at the 3- and 4-star levels.

[11] Halter, "What is an Army but the Soldiers?" 16.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Barno et al., *Building Better Generals*, 8.

[14] Burton et al., *Keeping the Edge: Revitalizing America's Military Officer Corps*, 13.

[15] Barno et al., *Building Better Generals*, 5.

[16] Ibid., 8.

[17] Maren Leed andDavid Sokolow, *The Ingenuity Gap, Officer Management for the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2006), 16; M. Wade Markel et al., *Developing U.S. Army Officers' Capabilities for Joint Interagency,*

Intergovernmental and Multinational Environments (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2011), 24; John Nagl, Brian 24.

[18] Stephen J Gerras, ed. *Department of Command, Leadership and Management, Strategic Leadership Primer,* 3rd Ed. (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2010), 30.

[19] Daryle J. Hernandez, *Building Strategic Leader Competencies into Army Officer Development and Career Progression* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2011), 3.

[20] Martin E. Dempsey, "Building Critical Thinkers: Leader Development Must be the Army's Top Priority," *Armed Forces Journal*, February 2011, 1.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Thomas L. Friedman, "How to Get a Job at Google," *New York Times*, February 22, 2014.

[23] GEN Daniel Allyn, interview with author, Carlisle Barracks, PA, March 20, 2014.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Burton et al., *Keeping the Edge: Revitalizing America's Military Officer Corps,* 5.

[27] LTG William C. Mayville, interview with author, Carlisle Barracks, PA, March 19, 2014.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Alan G Bourque, email message to author, Carlisle Barracks, PA, March 15, 2014.

[31] Ibid.

[32] MG Jeffrey Buchanan, interview with author, Carlisle Barracks, PA, March 18, 2014.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Hernandez, *Building Strategic Leader Competencies into Army Officer Development and Career Progression*, 5.

[36] Stephen J. Gerras, *Communication with External Audiences – A Stakeholder Management Approach* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, June 2010), 4.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Renny Mcpherson, "The Next Petraeus," *Boston Globe*, September 26, 2010.

[41] U.S. Army General Officer Management Office, *Army General Officer Roster* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, March 2013).

[42] Robert E. Lewis and Robert J. Heckman, "Talent Management: A Critical Review", *Human Resource Management Review* 16 (2006): 139.

[43] *United States Military Academy Branching Program Whitepaper,* July 31, 2013 (accessed February 13, 2014) 1.

[44] Casey Wardynski, David S. Lyle, and Michael J. Colarusso, *Towards a U.S. Army Officer Corps Strategy for Success: Employing Talent* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, May 2010), 34.

[45] Halter, "What is an Army but the Soldiers?" 21.

[46] *U.S. Department of the Army Leader Development Strategy* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Training and Doctrine Command, 2009) 1.

[47] Casey Wardynski, David S. Lyle, and Michael J. Colarusso in their article, "Towards a U.S. Army Officer Corps Strategy for Success: Employing Talent," on page 35 states that to achieve efficient job matching, the Army must create an internal market in which consumers can demand and suppliers can provide talent. By creating such an employment model, the Army would shift its practice from adapting individuals for assignments to matching individuals against assignments.

[48] Casey Wardynski, David S. Lyle, and Michael J. Colarusso in their article, "Towards a U.S. Army Officer Corps Strategy for Success: Employing Talent," on page 17 states rather than continuously jamming round pegs into square holes and asking the pegs to adapt, the Army should develop the institutional adaptability to place the *right* officers in the *right* jobs at the *right* time.

[49] *Army Strategic Planning Guidance 2014*, Second Coordinating Draft, Version 2.0, October 15, 2013.

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

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

[52] 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), 37.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Barno et al., *Building Better Generals*. This statement contradicts the following quote found on page 6 from this article, "officers will need a selection and evaluation process that establishes clear expectations for performance and enhances accountability throughout their careers." I argue that we already have this process in our current promotion/selection process.

[55] Burton et al., *Keeping the Edge: Revitalizing America's Military Officer Corps*, 7.

[56] "Revised Officer Evaluation Reports 1 APR 14 Implementation" PowerPoint presentation, Human Resources Command, accessed February 17, 2014.

[57] Halter, "What is an Army but the Soldiers?" 19.

[58] Burton et al., *Keeping the Edge: Revitalizing America's Military Officer Corps*, 8.

[59] Scales, Robert H. *Finding a Genius on War: An Essay on Strategic Generalship*, Unpublished manuscript provided by Dr. Stephen Gerras. (accessed February 17, 2014).

[60] U.S. Department of the Army, *2010 Center for Army Leadership Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASCAL): Army Education* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Center for Army Leadership, 2011) 33.

[61] Tim Kane, "How to Lose Great Leaders? Ask the Army," *Washington Post*, February 5, 2013.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.