Removing Barriers to Strategic Leader Development

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14. ABSTRACT

The Army must develop strategic leaders who can excel in a future operating environment marked by complexity and uncertainty. The questions becomes, is the Army developing officers that are prepared to serve as future strategic leaders? Unfortunately, operational demands placed on the military since 2001 created a culture that precludes this from happening. This culture rewards tactical experiences over the pursuit of broadening assignments and shaped a cohort of senior leaders that mentor subordinates to maximize time at the tactical level. These issues, combined with limited opportunities in an officer’s career timeline to pursue broadening assignments, created a miss-alignment between the Army Officer Professional Development Program and career management system. This research paper highlights those issues that led to this misalignment, offer recommendations that will alter the Army’s culture, change mentors attitudes, and increase time in an officer’s career timeline to pursue broadening opportunities. The application of these recommendations will realign these programs and lead to the development of diverse strategic leaders able to lead the Army into the twenty-first century.

15. SUBJECT TERMS

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Abstract

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Removing Barriers to Strategic Leader Development

Our focus has naturally and correctly been oriented on winning the wars we’re in. As the demand to support these wars is reduced, we need to be ready to add to the knowledge, skills and attributes of our brilliant tactical leaders and prepare them to operate at the strategic level.

—General Martin E. Dempsey

Today’s officers find themselves in a complex operating environment that is evolving at an astronomical pace. Analysts expect the environment to continue to morph as we move into the Twenty First Century. According to the *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations: Joint Forces 2020*, the “Future Joint Forces will face an increasingly complex, uncertain, competitive, rapidly changing, and transparent operating environment characterized by security challenges that cross borders.”

Nowhere are these challenges greater than at the strategic level of leadership where senior officers are expected to possess leadership attributes that will allow them to effectively operate within the Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, and Multinational (JIIM) environment as strategic leaders.

Recognizing this challenge, General Odierno, the former Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA), established leader development as one of his top five priorities in his *Marching Orders* to the U.S. Army. This guidance led to the publication of the 2013 Army Leader Development Strategy (ALDS) and subsequent updates to the Department of the Army (DA) Pamphlet (PAM) 600-3, Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management doctrine released in 2014. These documents each highlight the importance of developing leaders through a career long leader development process, which includes providing high performing officers with additional assignments and education opportunities referred to as “broadening assignments”.
These assignments are those outside of an officer’s branch that will expose them to new environments and afford them opportunities to work complex problems. These assignments ultimately allow officers to grow into strategic leaders capable of performing above the tactical and operational level.⁴

Although the Army has placed increased emphasis on leader development, much debate continues over whether or not we are truly developing well-rounded officers that are prepared to excel as strategic leaders. Prior to September 11, 2001, a culture existed in the U.S. Army in which officers were encouraged to pursue broadening assignment opportunities. These broadening assignments exposed officers to valuable educational and military experiences that honed their strategic leadership skills and attributes. A study conducted in 2010 by Dr. Barak A. Salmoni, a political scientist at the RAND Corporation supports this assertion. During this study, Dr. Salomi and his team of researchers interviewed thirty-seven senior officers, from Colonel to four-star level, to determine what they believed best developed them to serve at the strategic level:

In particular, they recommended diverse educational exposure, to include civilian institutions; recurrent joint assignments and exposure to the interagency processes and norms; assignments on theater- and strategic-level staffs in proximity to senior military and civilian leaders: substantive mixing between special operations forces (SOF) and general-purpose forces (GPF); and repeated exposure to foreign cultures and their militaries.⁵

Only through assignment to non-traditional positions can officers increase their experience and expertise required at the strategic level.

As the Army found itself engulfed in two wars, encouragement to pursue broadening assignments diminished. Instead, when opportunities did exist in an officer’s career timeline, they remained focused on the tactical demands of winning the
nation’s wars. This resulted in a culture shift to the Army rewarding officers who remain at the tactical and operational level versus pursuing broadening assignments.

Therefore, junior and mid-grade officers are faced with a professional dilemma: remain at the tactical and operational level within their respective branch or functional area (FA) to remain competitive for promotions and command opportunities or pursue broadening assignments with the understanding that this may adversely affect their career. The question becomes, are officers effectively developed throughout their military careers or have the operational demands placed on the military created an environment that discourages them from seeking broadening opportunities that allow them to grow into well-rounded future strategic leaders?

The growth of strategic leaders requires early planting of the “seeds of success” that must be nurtured throughout an officer's career. These seeds include educational opportunities and broadening assignments within the JIIM environment that provide leaders with invaluable experiences and facilitate the development of strategic leader competencies. Although this is the case, the current culture within the Army has led to a mis-alignment between the Army Officer Professional Development Program and career management system. This misalignment is creating a pool of non-diverse leaders who waive developmental broadening opportunities that would better prepare them excel as strategic leaders.

To address this shortfall, senior leaders should take steps to facilitate the re-alignment of the Army Officer Professional Development Program and career management system. My paper seeks to define what a strategic leader is and identify those attributes strategic leaders should possess. I will examine the current leader
professional development model while identifying shortfalls within it that have contributed to the misalignment of the Officer Professional Development Program and career management system. Lastly, I will provide recommendations on how best to address these shortfalls.

Defining Strategic Leadership

To understand how to develop strategic leaders, one must first define what constitutes a strategic leader and understand their scope of responsibilities. As Army officers progress through their careers, career managers place them in multiple leadership positions at the direct, organizational, and ultimately the strategic level. Figure 1 depicts the different leadership levels, which require commensurate skill sets and increasing span of control the higher up an officer rises. According to Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-22, “factors determining a positions leadership level include the position’s span of control, its headquarters level, and the degree of control exerted or autonomy granted by the leader holding the position. Other factors include the size of the unit or organization, the type of operations it conducts, and its planning horizon.”
Therefore, a direct leader executes leadership at the unit level through face-to-face interaction in less complex environments. At the organizational level, leaders are placed in charge of larger formations where they lead hundreds to thousands of civilian and military personnel, the complexity of the environment in which they operate increases, and they influence through policy making and system integration. At the strategic level, a leader’s responsibilities change dramatically. They apply competencies gleaned at the direct and organizational level, lead very large complex organizations consisting of thousands to hundreds of thousands of personnel, and “their decisions can affect more people, commit more resources, and have wider-ranging consequences in space, time, and political impact, than those of organizational and direct leaders.”

It is important to understand that just because a leader is operating at the strategic level, does not make them a strategic leader. Colonel (Ret) Stephen J. Gerras, a professor of Behavioral Sciences at the United States Army War College (USAWC) provides an example of this:

The Joint Staff J-5 is clearly an important policy and planning leader at the strategic level. At the same time, however, the J-5 has only marginal influence on the military enterprise. The J-5 can’t change promotion
policies, pick the next group of four-star generals, or make key decisions on weapons and technology procurements. The J-5 makes recommendations to strategic leads and surely needs to be a le to view through the lens of that strategic leader, but he does not wear the mantle of “strategic leader”...

For purposes of this document, it is important to differentiate between leaders who operate at the strategic level, who assist strategic leaders in their day-to-day decision-making, who we will call “strategic advisors”, and actual strategic leaders who make strategic level decisions. Although strategic advisors do not carry the same responsibilities as strategic leaders, they must still view strategic challenges through the same lens and possess the same competencies if they are to be effective.

Strategic Leader Competencies

As the Army assesses the future operational environment the question becomes what leadership competencies must strategic leaders possess? Multiple studies and publications addressed this question, providing exhaustive lists of competencies that strategic leaders should possess. In December 2001, the CSA ordered the U.S. Army War College (USAWC) to identify the strategic leader skillsets required for officers within the post September 11th environment. This study revealed six “metacompetencies” necessary for strategic leaders: identity, mental agility, cross-cultural savvy, interpersonal maturity, world-class warrior, and professional astuteness.

At the behest of the U.S. Army Human Resources Command Officer Personnel Management System (OPMS) Task Force, the RAND Arroy Center conducted a second study to identify the key competencies required for success in the JIIM environment. Their study included interviews of Army officers, state officials, and multinational partner officers, which revealed six competencies that they believed are required for success in
a JIIM environment; “general interpersonal skills, knowledge of other government agencies’ capabilities, culture and processes; communication skills (written and oral); conflict resolution: and negotiation.” Additional attributes can be found in the 2011 Joint Officer Handbook (JOH), which identifies competencies that combatant commands require of their joint staff officers (Strategic Advisors). The list includes such competencies as understanding the roles of a joint staff officer, understanding the organization and mission of combatant commands, possessing knowledge of U.S. government agencies and understanding their relationship with combatant commands, researching at the advanced level, communicating effectively at executive level, building constructive work relationships, managing and leading in a diverse work environment, and practicing lifelong learning behaviors.

Out of all the research and leadership handbooks published, the document that serves as the Army’s baseline in defining a comprehensive list of competencies required in Army leaders—through all levels of leadership—is Army Doctrinal Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-22, *Army Leadership* published in August 2012. The ADRP defines three core leadership competencies consisting of leads, develops, and achieves. Each of these core competencies are reinforced by a total of ten supporting competencies with 55 tasks and 102 sub tasks leaders should embody and be able to accomplish. The Army expects officers to master these core leader competencies as they progress through their careers. Ultimately, by the time they become organizational and strategic leaders they are expected to “be multiskilled leaders who can comfortably operate at all levels of leadership inside or outside the Army and apply their vast experiences and knowledge for success across the spectrum of operations.” Although
ADRP 6-22 outlines those leadership competencies required for success, it still proves to be an exhausting list that is very broad. Therefore, it is incumbent on the leaders and their mentors to identify any shortfalls in their personal competencies.

The Army Leader Development Process

So how does the Army develop officers throughout their career while preparing them to become future strategic advisors and leaders? The Army Leadership Development System outlines the foundation for officer professional development as reflected in DA PAM 600-3. This document serves as the primary professional development guide for U.S. Army officers and assists in their development and career management. It does not provide specific career paths for officers to follow, but instead provides an overview of those developmental opportunities available to them and serves as a mentoring tool for Army leaders at all echelons. According to the DA PAM, “leader development is achieved through the career-long synthesis of the training, education, and experiences acquired through opportunities in the institutional, operational, and self-development domains, supported by peer and developmental relationships” as depicted in figure 2.
Army officer development begins in the institutional domain where officers receive their professional military education (PME). Officers begin their education upon entering the Army as Second Lieutenants where they attend Basic Officer Leader Course (BOLC). BOLC develops the technical and tactical competencies required for their respective branch and prepares them to serve as platoon leaders. Once officers are promoted to the rank of Captain, they attend Captain Career Course (CCC) where they continue to hone their skills in preparation for command at the battery, company, and troop level and to serve on battalion and brigade staffs. Following promotion to major, select officers attend intermediate level education (ILE), which is designed to develop field grade officers for their next ten years of service at more senior levels in their branch or FA. At the rank of lieutenant colonel, selected officers attend one of the services Senior Service Colleges (SSC). SSC is designed to prepare officers to assume strategic leadership positions and educates them on how the military is employed as part of a unified, joint, or multinational force in support of the national military strategy.
The operational domain is the second domain of leader development. In this domain, the Army expects officers to apply what they have learned during their PME while they execute on-the-job-training (OJT) to facilitate their continued growth and development. As officers move through this domain, they are placed in key and developmental (KD) positions which are considered “...fundamental to the development of an officer in his or her core branch or functional area (FA) competencies or deemed critical by the senior Army leadership to provide experience across the Army’s strategic mission.”

In addition, within this leadership domain, leaders have the opportunity to pursue broadening assignments. According to the Officer Personnel Management Directorate (OPMD), these assignments are defined as:

The purposeful expansion of a Leader's capabilities and understanding provided through opportunities internal and external to the Army throughout their career, gained through experiences and/or education in different organizational cultures and environments resulting in a Leader who can operate up to and including the strategic level in multiple environments.

These assignments fall into four categories; functional or institutional, academia and civilian enterprise, joint or multinational, and interagency or intergovernmental.

Assignments within the functional or institutional realm are geared toward further developing skills and attributes required for the officer’s respective branch or FA. Placing officers in academia and civilian enterprise assignments, such as the RAND Corporation or advanced civil schooling enhances their knowledge and experience beyond that of the Army. Joint or multinational positions seek to develop an officer’s skills and attributes required in a JIIM environment such as a joint, multinational, or coalition staff officer, or a Headquarters Department of the Army or combatant
command staff officer. Lastly, interagency or intergovernmental assignments are designed to enhance an officer's understanding of politics and policy. 29

Considering broadening assignments, the challenge becomes identifying which will maximize an officer’s exposure to the strategic environment while developing those strategic leader competencies outlined in ADRP 6-22, ultimately allowing them to operate as strategic advisors and leaders in the future operating environment. For purposes of this paper, these assignments include positions within the JIIM environment.

The last domain of the leader development strategy is leader self-development. In addition to the requirements of the institutional and operational domains, the leader development strategy requires officers to embark upon a life-long pursuit of self-development. According to DA PAM 600-3, officers accomplish this through “…individual study, research, professional readings, practice and self-assessment…consistent with and officer’s personal self-development action plan and professional goals.” 30

As officers move through these domains, the Army closely manages their careers to ensure they receive sufficient development in both their branch and FA while taking advantage of broadening opportunities. The U.S. Army manages officers’ careers in accordance with the Officer Personnel Management System (OPMS), which is part of the U.S. Army Human Resource Command (HRC), OPMD. 31 OPMS facilitates the recruiting of officers, ensures their subsequent professional development, allows for their utilization through assignments, ensures officers are retained and promoted, and assists in their transition out of the service. 32 Under OPMS, each branch and FA within
HRC defines the training, education, and experiences required by officers at each rank to ensure they are effectively developed.\textsuperscript{33}

To assist officers in constructing their respective career management timelines, each branch and FA develops life-cycle development models (LCDM). These models, as depicted in figure 3, highlight officer promotion, training, and education windows as they progress through their military careers.

Figure 3. Officer Competency Evolution\textsuperscript{34}

More importantly, these models define the windows of opportunity for officers to pursue broadening experiences that will develop their strategic leader competencies. Ideally, officers should utilize these models as a framework to construct career paths that will allow them to accomplish their personal and professional military goals. Officers should work closely with HRC, raters, and mentors to map out their career goals. The goal should be the creation of an officer career timeline that allows for the development of branch and FA skills while providing opportunities for them to pursue broadening assignments.
Defining Professional Development and Career Management Misalignment

To grow effective strategic leaders, you have to present them with experiences that take them out of their comfort zone within the operational Army. The current officer professional development model and career management process, DA PAM 600-3, states that this is accomplished by exposing leaders to broadening positions throughout their career timelines to facilitate the development of “...strategic, adaptive, and innovative leaders capable of performing above and beyond the tactical and operational levels.”

Although our current doctrine is set up to facilitate the development of strategic leaders, what our doctrine and senior leaders say we should do and what is actually happening, are two different things. This is not to imply that Army’s current professional development and career management programs are broken; this is far from the case—they are simply misaligned. Three significant issues have led to this misalignment. First, the current Army culture does not encourage officers to seek broadening assignments outside the functional or institutional realm. In fact, the current culture values and rewards tactical level experiences over the development of strategic leader competencies gleaned through broadening assignments. Next, leaders across the Army are failing to properly mentor and develop junior officers. Lastly, a close analysis of the current officer career timelines reveals that they are rigid and leave little to no room for officers to pursue broadening opportunities.

Military Culture Effects on Misalignment

One of the largest contributors to this misalignment is the Army’s current military culture. Prior to September 11, 2001, a culture existed in the U.S. Army in which officers sought broadening assignments outside the operational Army as they
progressed through their respective careers. In fact, these assignments were very competitive, accepting only the best officers. Over the years, this culture has changed to reflect the current operational environment morphing into what is labeled a “combat culture.” The Army’s current combat culture has created a cohort of officers—who for the last fifteen years—have remained focused on the tactical demands of winning the nations wars versus seeking broadening opportunities.37

In a combat culture, officers continuously attempt to stay in “muddy boots” assignments or—assignments with Soldiers in tactical units.38 These officers, even when presented with broadening opportunities, avoid them in order to remain in tactical and operational level assignments. This mentality runs counter to the strategic leader development strategy outlined in the ALDS and officer professional development program outlined in DA PAM 600-3. A 2011 Army Research Institute survey supports this assertion finding that of the 26,132 Army officers surveyed, 54% of them had not served out of their branch or FA.39 An additional survey of 129 Brigade Commanders found that “18% (23) had not attended Senior Service College (SSC), 46 (36%) had no joint credit and of the 37 infantry branch brigade commanders nearly two thirds needed SSC and/or joint credit.”40 This has resulted in the creation of a pool of officers versed at the tactical and operational level of operations but lack experience at the strategic level.

Arguably, the combat culture is entrenched in our formations and considered the norm for the current generation of Army officers. Edgar H. Schein, a former professor at the MIT Sloan School of Management and author of *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, provides an analysis of how this happened. In his book, Schein describes
organizational culture as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration…taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think about, and react to organizational problems.”

Schein further defines how organizational cultures form, and the need to understand embedding and reinforcing mechanisms before attempting change. One embedding mechanism is how leaders allocate rewards and status. Although the current combat culture grew because of several embedding mechanisms and reinforcing mechanisms, the Army’s allocation of rewards and status remains at the forefront.

As with any profession, there is an expectation that the organization will reward officers for their hard work with promotions. In addition, many want to serve as commanders, often considered the pinnacle achievement within the military. To increase their chances, officers seek those assignments that will make them more competitive for upward mobility. An analysis of the current combat culture reveals that the Army rewards officers who remain at the tactical and operational level with promotions and command opportunities. For example, the 2015 lieutenant colonel promotion board revealed that of the 1083 non-FA officers considered for promotion, 56% (610) had eighteen or more months in a KD position. Although performance in these positions was a significant contributor for selection, it was determined that those officers with eighteen or more months of KD time had a 64% selection rate over those with less than eighteen months who had a 55% selection rate.

In addition, an analysis of the FY16 field artillery battalion command board results revealed that of the thirty-six battalion command principles, each had served in two or more KD positions.
and averaged a total of thirty-one months of KD time. This statistical analysis is
available to all officers who utilize it to craft their career timelines. Therefore, results
from past promotion and command boards tend to drive their decisions to maximize
tactical level experiences. More importantly, these same officers also tend to utilize
guidance received from those who influence them the most—their senior mentors.

Mentors’ Contribution to Misalignment

An important thing junior officers receive while progressing through their careers
is mentorship, leadership advice, and counsel from their raters and senior raters.
Although this is the case, many leaders are providing mentorship that runs contrary to
the DA PAM 600-3. Instead of encouraging young officers to pursue broadening
assignments that will take them out of their comfort zone and ultimately enhance their
abilities to operate in JIIM environments, they are encouraged to pursue as much
muddy boots time as they can. A 2011 Army Research Institute survey corroborates
this assertion revealing that “…71% of Company Grade (Lieutenants and Captains) and
73% of Field Grade Officers (Majors and Lieutenant Colonels) interviewed “had never
been formally advised and/or encouraged to seek broadening assignments.” This
creates a dilemma for branch managers as they continue to encourage officers to
pursue broadening assignments while mentors encourage their subordinates to do the
complete opposite. In fact, branch managers claim they often have to “beg officers” to
take broadening assignments and opportunities and in many instances place officers
who may not be completely qualified into the position or risk having them unfilled.

In the combat culture, mentors—who are often commanders of deploying units—
attempt to build teams of quality leaders they can rapidly train and deploy.
Commanders must therefore decide between letting an officer leave their organization
to pursue a broadening or educational opportunity versus keeping them in the unit to deploy. The decision is normally to keep them even if they have completed their branch KD positions. A personal example of this took place while I was serving as a battalion executive officer for a unit preparing to deploy in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. As the battalion prepared to deploy, the decision was made to keep several junior officers in the battalion for the deployment even though they had completed their KD time. These officers were some of the best in the battalion who had clearly displayed the leadership competencies required of strategic leaders. There was little pushback from these officers who viewed the deployment as an opportunity that would set them up for success. In addition, these officers were comfortable in the organization and understand that they will be “taken care of” with superlative officer evaluation reports.^48

The reason behind this mentorship shortfall lies with the mentors themselves who are a product of the system they grew up in. Like current officers, the Army promoted them through the ranks under the same combat culture, resulting in a frame of reference as to what they believe a successful officer career timeline should look like. Therefore, they coach and mentor subordinates toward a career path similar to their own, which includes mostly muddy boots assignments and discourages other options. Renny McPherson, an author for the Boston Globe conducted research which supports this assertion. During his research, he interviewed 37 top military leaders consisting of three and four star generals including combatant, theater special operations, and corps and division commanders. During their interviews he found that many leaders reported the most beneficial experiences they received were international experiences, civilian
graduate education opportunities, and special opportunities out of the military mainstream, which were also the ones they felt discouraged from pursuing."

The GLOBE study, conducted by Robert House of the Wharton School of Business, University of Pennsylvania can shed additional light on the military culture and its effects on leader development. House describes nine dimensions in his study, but two are relevant for understanding the cultural implications of the misalignment between leader development and career management. First, the U.S. Army is an extremely hierarchical organization, which the GLOBE study refers to as having power distance or “the degree to which members of a collective expect power to be distributed.” Power distance results in subordinate officers accepting the guidance and direction of their senior leaders simply based on where they are within the rank hierarchy. The second dimension that assists in the understanding the U.S. military culture is assertiveness, which is “the degree to which individuals are assertive, confrontational, and aggressive in their relationships with others.” Many tactical, operational, and even strategic military organizations have established cultures with low assertiveness. This has led to a cohort of company and field grade officers who are loyal and cooperative with their chain of command making them less apt to say or do anything contrary to the professional and career guidance provided by their mentors. The combination of increased power distance and low assertiveness leads to junior officers pursuing assignments and developing career timelines based on their mentors’ guidance—even if they may not necessarily agree with them.
Another issue that contributes to professional development and career management misalignment lies with officer LCDMs. Although designed to be flexible, current LCDMs fail to account for variables that affect an officer’s ability to adhere to them. For example, promotion and command boards serve as the foundation for LCDMs leaving limited time for officers to complete both KD requirement and follow on broadening opportunities. Because of this, officers are often forced to choose between maximizing KD time in order to remain competitive for promotion and command or pursue broadening assignment opportunities such as a Joint or multinational assignment that would grant them joint credit and better prepare them to perform as a strategic leader.

For instance, in a perfect scenario, as listed in figure 4, an officer would be promoted to Major, immediately attend Command and General Staff College (CGSC), report to their new unit, and walk into a KD position. In this scenario, an officer would have approximately four years before they met their sixteen-year pin on point (PoP) to lieutenant colonel following graduation from CGSC. Although they have four years until promotion, they only have three years to complete their minimum twelve months of KD time before their lieutenant colonel and battalion command boards. Although this is the minimum KD time, recent board results reveal that to be competitive for battalion command, officers should obtain twenty-four months or more KD time. In fact, analysis of the results of the FY16 field artillery battalion command board revealed that of the thirty-six battalion command principles, each had served in two or more KD positions and averaged a total of thirty-one months of KD time. These board statistics can
reinforce the mentality in officers that if they want to remain competitive for command—they must maximize their time in KD positions.

It is important to understand that officers can maximize their KD time and still have time to pursue a broadening opportunities, but it would have to be under the perfect scenario listed in figure 4. For example, an officer could receive twenty-four months of KD time straight out of CGSC and still pursue a joint qualifying assignment. However, they would have to obtain an early release at twenty-four months to receive joint credit before assuming battalion command. Should an officer receive thirty-six months KD time, which is normally the case for highly qualified officers who demonstrate strategic advisor and command potential, they would still have time to pursue a joint qualifying assignment, but would have to defer command for a year in order to get the minimum twenty-four months in position to receive joint credit.

![Figure 4. Army Major LCDM Timeline A Perfect Scenario](image)

The problem is that officer career timelines do not progress in a sterile environment. Things happen, both professional and personal, throughout an officer’s career that prevent them from adhering to the LCDMs outlined in DA PAM 600-3. For example, as depicted in figure 5, majors are often unable to attend CGSC immediately after promotion to major and may have to wait a year to attend.
Based on personal experiences while serving as a battalion commander, officers who show up to their new units rarely are able to walk into a KD assignment. Often, they must fill staff positions while waiting their turn to assume KD job. This may result in an officer waiting an additional six months up to two years. In essence, the leader development model and career timelines presented in DA Pam 600-3 contradict each other. Although the Army leader development strategy says we want to “grow strategic, adaptive, and innovative executive-level leaders capable of performing above and beyond the tactical and operational levels,” our current officer leader development timelines do not support this.57

Recommendations

The Army should strive to set the conditions for every officer to realize their full potential in a system that recognizes both broadening and muddy boots assignments. This starts with realignment of the Army Officer Professional Development Program and career management system. The Army can realign these programs through several steps. First, the Army culture must change to support junior officer broadening assignments. Next, the way in which raters and senior raters mentor their subordinates must change. Finally, officer leader development models and promotion timelines must allow time for broadening opportunities. Addressing these issues will create an
environment in which officers do not shy away from broadening assignments, thereby creating a pool of well-rounded officers with the depth and breadth of experiences that will set them up for success as strategic leaders.

**Enabling Realignment through Cultural Change**

The first step in realigning the Army Officer Professional Development Program and career management system requires a change in the Army culture. As operations draw to a close in Iraq and Afghanistan, an opportunity presents itself to change the combat culture that values tactical time over broadening experience. This change will not happen overnight and will require the use of embedding and reinforcing mechanisms proposed by Edgar Schein to accomplish.

Schein suggests that a culture cannot be changed unless embedding mechanisms are implemented that leaders will pay attention to, measure, or control on a regular basis. Leader development was a top priority for the former CSA of the Army, General Raymond Odierno. This priority should continue with the current CSA if the Army is to change its culture. To reinforce this priority, the CSA should issue formal guidance to HRC and OPMD directing them to place increased emphasis on ensuring that officers who demonstrate strategic leader competencies are placed in joint or multinational or interagency and intergovernmental broadening assignments. This guidance should include annual quotas requiring each branch and FA to place a percentage of each year group of captains, majors, and lieutenant colonels in strategic leader broadening assignments.

As seen over the last ten years, simply issuing guidance will not change the attitudes and behavior that has led to our current combat culture. True change will only happen if additional embedding mechanisms are applied, which include changing how
the Army allocates rewards and recruits, selects, promotes, and attrits personnel in the military.\textsuperscript{59} Despite issued guidance, officers will continue to pursue tactical assignments until promotion and command board results reveal they will be rewarded for pursuing broadening assignments. Therefore, promotion and command boards should receive specific instructions not to discriminate against officers who pursue broadening opportunities. Instead, officers with strong files who met the minimum KD times outlined in DA PAM 600-3 and have served in broadening assignments, should be considered favorably.

The last recommendation involves adjusting requirements to receive joint qualification. Joint assignments place officers in an environment that will significantly enhance their strategic leader competencies. Although this is the case, officers are currently not required to be joint qualified unless they desire to become a general officer. This sends the wrong message to officers across the Army and provides little to no incentive for captains, lieutenant colonels, and colonels to pursue joint qualification assignments. Many officers have little to no aspiration to become a general officer and will not pursue joint assignments, even when presented with the opportunity. Officers may tend to view joint assignments as a requirement for general officer promotion versus an invaluable broadening opportunity that will enhance them professionally. A requirement for joint qualification before officers are selected for brigade command would remedy this issue. In addition, battalion command boards should receive instructions directing them to view joint qualification as a positive discriminator in determining who is selected for battalion command. These changes will increase the
importance of joint qualification, make officers more competitive, and ultimately force future strategic leaders to pursue these assignments earlier in their careers.

Enabling Realignment through Mentors

Unfortunately, many of today’s mentors are products of the combat culture who will continue to advise officers to pursue a career path that mirrors their own. The combat culture will never change until these leaders change their perception of what a successful career path looks like. This can be accomplished through the execution of an aggressive strategic communications plan designed to inform mentors of the CSA strategic leader development guidance and HRC and OPMD’s enforcement efforts. The OPMD Leader Development Division can help in this communication effort by targeting current battery, company, battalion, and brigade commanders at their home stations and scheduling an additional block of instruction for future battalion and brigade commanders during their pre-command course (PCCs).

A branch manager’s ability to evaluate officer potential is limited to what they can assess through the review of officer evaluation reports (OERs) and officer record brief (ORB). Although the current OER does an outstanding job in allowing mentors to describe officer leadership competencies, it cannot tell the full story of the officer’s capabilities and potential to serve in strategic leader positions. To offset this shortfall, mentors should seek to strengthen their relationships with HRC assignment officers and provide realistic advice based on individual potential in multiple areas and not solely tied to command track opportunities. If the Army is to correct this issue, mentors must place the same level of emphasis on getting their officers into broadening assignments as they do tactical and operational. This will assist assignment officers in placing only
those officers who possess strategic leader competencies in broadening assignments that will groom them for future success.

Lastly, it is imperative that mentors adhere to the published CSA guidance while seeking to establish a command climate that decreases the level of power distance between them and their subordinates. This will create an environment in which their subordinates will feel comfortable in seeking their counsel without fear of reprisal should they wish to seek a career path that deviates from the norm.

Adjusting LCDMs to Enable Realignment

The last area of realignment requires changes to the Army officer LCDMs. The intent of these changes is to create slack in an officer’s career timeline that will allow them to complete required KD requirements while still having sufficient time to complete strategic leader broadening assignments.

First, the CSA should include in his guidance to HRC and Army leadership, mandates for the minimum and maximum number of months required for KD completion for captains and majors. Although DA PAM 600-3 currently establishes this, raters and senior raters fail to adhere to them. This guidance will force raters and senior raters to release KD complete captains and majors immediately upon completion of their maximum allowed KD time. Requests to keep officers past their KD complete timeframe should be on a case-by-case basis and require a division commander request through HRC to do so. Adherence to this guidance will also assist in changing the combat culture mentality that more KD time is required for promotion and selection for battalion command.

The next recommendation specifically targets Army majors, requiring them to serve seventeen years prior to promotion to lieutenant colonel. The additional year
served as a major, combined with the enforcement of the twenty-four month maximum KD time, creates valuable time in an officer's LCDM. Under this plan, majors with strong files and demonstrated strategic leader potential will have an opportunity to pursue a joint duty assignment list (JDAL) assignment in order to receive their joint qualification. As depicted in figure 6, this additional year will also account for the potential variables that could consume time in an officer's LCDM, such as waiting to attend CGSC or assuming a KD position. It even accounts for the potential of having to defer command for a year to complete their joint time.

The additional year as a major will limit their time at lieutenant colonel to five and a half years prior to promotion to colonel. Although officers will have less time as lieutenant colonels, this will not affect their career progression. For example, even under the worst-case scenario, as depicted in figure 6, (officer defers CGSC, waits a year for KD position, and defers command) they still have time to complete command and attend SSC prior to promotion to colonel and brigade command selection. A potential issue that may arise is that lieutenant colonels may have to forego their former battalion command (FBC) utilization assignment after command. The purpose of FBC utilization tours is to fulfill joint qualifications, so this is no longer an issue since it will be taken care of as a major.
Figure 6. Army Major Recommended LCDM

By targeting majors versus other ranks, OPMS could achieve several efficiencies. First, it allows captains to remain focused on pursuing broadening assignments within the functional and institutional realm in order to continue the development of their technical and tactical skills. Next, this modified timeline affords lieutenant colonels the opportunity either immediately following battalion command or upon completion of Senior Service College (SSC) to receive an additional broadening assignment within either a joint, multinational, interagency, or intergovernmental assignment that will further develop their strategic leader competencies.

Conclusion

If the Army is to remain a dominate player in the world, it must develop strategic leaders who excel in this environment. Unfortunately, the operational demands placed on the military over the last fifteen years created a combat culture within the Army that precludes this from happening. Today’s officers find themselves in a military that rewards tactical level experiences over broadening assignments that would otherwise develop their strategic leader competencies. Further exacerbating this problem is the fact that our military contains senior leaders who are a product of the combat culture and therefore, mentor their subordinates to pursue the same career path. Lastly, even if
officers desired to pursue broadening assignments, they have limited opportunities throughout their career timelines to do so. The combination of these issues creates a misalignment between the Army Officer Professional Development Program and career management system that, if not addressed will continue to stagnate the Army’s strategic leader development efforts.

If the Army truly wants to implement a leader development program that develops well-rounded strategic leaders, it must realign these programs though a fundamental change in culture. Culture change will not be easy and it will require the CSA to lay the foundation for this transformation. Moving forward, the CSA must formally direct HRC to fill joint billets with officers who demonstrate strategic leader potential. In addition, he must also direct command and promotion boards to consider joint qualification as a positive discriminator and require joint qualification prior to selection to brigade command. Culture change must also address the perceptions of mentors as to what a successful officer career path looks like. This starts with a strategic communication plan that targets company and field grade officer development. In this way, mentors will understand the merits of broadening assignments through close coordination with HRC to ensure officers develop strategic leader competencies. In addition, the Army must stress the importance of mentors working closely with HRC to ensure that officers with strategic leader potential receive broadening assignments that will hone their strategic leader competencies.

Changing the Army’s culture to one that values broadening opportunities will mean little if opportunities to pursue them are not created. Therefore, the Army should seek to adjust officer LCDMs to extend the time officers serve as majors from six to
seven years. This additional time will provide majors the opportunity to complete both their KD requirements and joint qualification prior to battalion command and SSC.

As operational requirements begin to subside, the Army has a unique opportunity to focus on leader development. The recommendations outlined in this paper will allow for the realignment of the Army Officer Professional Development Program and career management system, facilitating the development of the Army’s future strategic leaders. The future of the Army rests on the shoulders of young officers who are entering the service today. The Army must create a culture that encourages them to seek training and experiences that will develop their strategic leader competencies. This will create a pool of diverse and well-rounded strategic leaders who possess the requisite skillset required to lead the Army into the twenty-first century.

Endnotes


8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 2-5.

11 Ibid.


14 Ibid., v.


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18 Ibid., 6-1 - 8-4.

19 Ibid., 10-1.


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22 Ibid., 5.

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