

USAWC CIVILIAN RESEARCH PROJECT

DEVELOPING STRATEGIC LEADERS: INNOVATORS VERSUS OPERATORS

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ABSTRACT

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Developing strategic leaders is a process that begins in the early stages of a career. The Army must make deliberate efforts to develop innovative strategic leaders capable of identifying future transitions in the ways wars are fought through targeted broadening opportunities for high potential officers that are identified early in their careers. Strategic military leaders have historically been unable to predict the nature and challenges of the next war. By increasing broadening opportunities for mid-career officers, the Army will better diversify the characteristics and strategic leadership skills of the future general officer corps. In the corporate world, successful businesses drive and adapt to market transitions. They make deliberate efforts to identify and develop leaders that are innovative. Businesses constantly strive for the right mix between competing priorities of innovation and operational excellence. The Army is skewed toward operational excellence and must take steps to increase the innovative skills of their strategic leaders to balance these two competing priorities. A corps of strategic leaders more driven by innovation instead of operational excellence would greatly enhance preparedness for the next war.

DEVELOPING STRATEGIC LEADERS: INNOVATORS VERSUS OPERATORS

“My greatest achievement as Chief of Staff was to nourish the mavericks.” – General Matthew B. Ridgway¹

Following the end of the Cold War, the predominant mindset of Army leadership was a continued focus on dominating land operations with a heavily mechanized force designed to overwhelm the enemy with fire and maneuver. At this type of warfare, there was no equal. Emboldened by the success of the 1991 Gulf War, Army leaders were unable to identify that warfare was changing. It is easy to point out the signs with the perspective of history. Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Northern Iraq following Desert Storm are examples that would connect long forgotten lessons learned in Vietnam with operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Army must make deliberate efforts to develop innovative strategic leaders capable of identifying transitions, then changing and adapting large organizations to meet the challenge. Throughout the corporate world and the military, truly capable strategic leaders are the exception. Strategic leader skills must be cultivated. The ability to accurately identify market transitions or changes in trends in warfare before they actually occur is a necessary skill for successful strategic leaders. Change generally occurs in two ways. Radical change, primarily through disruptive technologies, is quick paced. Unless you initiate the radical change, you are reactively attempting to identify the causes, understand the impacts and then take appropriate actions. The second type of change is incremental. Incremental change evolves over time through gradual innovations and small steps.² This evolutionary progress is much harder to identify than

radical, disruptive change. Often, it is the incremental changes that add up over time that cause a business to go bankrupt or a military force to be unprepared for the next war. In *Built to Last*, Jim Collins defines evolutionary change as “small incremental steps or mutations . . . that eventually grow into major – and often unanticipated – strategic shifts.”³ A significant reason for failure in the corporate world is the inability to identify market transitions.⁴ The ability to connect “small incremental steps or mutations” and extrapolate the subsequent impacts is a unique characteristic of a strategic leader. It is a characteristic that, if not cultivated and developed, will lay dormant within the leader. One-third of the companies listed in the 1970 Fortune 500 had vanished by 1983⁵ because leaders within the companies could not adapt rapidly enough to a changing business environment. Identifying market transitions in the corporate world is analogous to identifying transitions in warfare.

After studying the desirable characteristics for executives in corporate America, there is one attribute that stands out from the Army’s generally accepted leader characteristics which are commonly referred to as the Army Values. The lesser emphasized attribute is the ability to be innovative. However, the emphasis for leaders to be innovative is not necessarily absent in the Army Values or Field Manual 6-22, the Army’s capstone manual on Leadership. These references place more emphasis on other characteristics that are embodied in the Army’s “Be, Know, Do” framework for leadership. Leadership characteristics associated with the Army Values of Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage are unquestionably the foundation for any successful senior leader. If interpreted liberally, the last characteristic listed, Personal Courage, most closely relates to the aspect of innovation.

Throughout the corporate world, the innovation characteristic is a dominant part of the evaluation, selection, and development process for their strategic leaders. Analogies between the business world and the military have often been dismissed based on fundamental differences. However, there is no question that industries innovate and adapt faster than the military. Systems and procedures used to select and develop strategic leaders is an area where the military and business share common ground.

The Army must ensure that a culture of innovation and self-critical, constructive thought is maintained in its officer corps by developing strategic leaders through career paths that include opportunities for broadening experiences. Strategic leaders in the military should be able to identify or create transitions in warfare. They must have the credibility to be heard, the ability to effectively communicate to a broad spectrum of audiences, and the audacity to persevere through adversity and criticism. These characteristics are more precisely codified as the Six Strategic Leader Meta-Competencies: Identity, Mental Agility, Cross-Cultural Savvy, Interpersonal Maturity, World Class Warrior, and Professional Astuteness.⁶ These six meta-competencies are an amalgam of the multitude of lists of strategic leader characteristics found in various Army publications, most predominantly, FM 6-22, Army Leadership. All attributes are important to the skill set of strategic leaders, but the one that Army leaders have the most difficulty with is Professional Astuteness. A significant conclusion from a comprehensive study of the current status of the Army profession states “Officers do not share a common understanding of the Army profession, and many of them accept the pervasiveness of bureaucratic norms and behaviors as natural and appropriate.”⁷ The acceptance of bureaucratic norms and behaviors in the Army’s leadership, and in any

organization, represents a culture that unintentionally discourages innovative thought. Expanding the base of experience outside of operational assignments, along with encouragement from the most senior leaders to pursue broadening experiences for mid-career officers, is the first step to counteracting the acceptance of long standing bureaucratic norms. Exposure to varied, different environments in business, academia, and other government agencies will allow future strategic leaders with data points to compare how the Army conducts its business.

Strategic leadership development begins after company command. Leaders identify high potential officers at this time. These are the Army's mavericks. They must be guided towards broadening experiences that take them away from strictly operational assignments. Broadening experiences are only part of the development of strategic leaders. Promotion and selection for key positions should continue to be based on past performance, especially in command assignments. However, as the breadth and scope of command expands beyond the tactical and operational dimensions, broadening experiences as a captain and a major will enhance the ability to make the significant leap from operational to strategic thought.

Despite the critique of the inability of our senior leaders to identify the significance of the transition from high intensity combat to counter-insurgency warfare, there were emerging strategic leaders who understood that a transition was occurring. However, those emerging leaders had to overcome significant institutional biases while pursuing the broadening opportunities that helped them evolve into innovative strategic leaders. General John Abizaid was selected for an Olmstead Scholarship and chose to attend the University of Jordan in 1978-1980. Upon completion of this assignment, his

assignment officer assessed his file as “behind his peers” and sent a formal letter to him warning that he needed to return to troops “as soon as possible.”⁸ General Pete Chiarelli earned a degree from the University of Washington in International Relations and taught at West Point in the Department of Social Sciences during his post company command years. After six years away from troops, “armor branch personnel . . . had all but given up on him.”⁹ This broadening experience was viewed as a “dilettantish diversion from real soldiering.”¹⁰ Despite the obvious value of these opportunities, the operational community and personnel assignment officers perceived these assignments as obstacles to be overcome instead of springboards to developing strategic leaders. The same bias exists today.

How do the collective experiences of active duty Army general officers demonstrate participation in broadening experiences? Based on a review of 370 general officer resumes, I defined developmental experiences into four distinct categories.¹¹ I placed each general officer into one of these categories based on their formative experiences as a major and utilization assignments prior to attending Senior Service College. The categories are Scholar, Strategist, Operator, and DC Insider. If the criteria are met in more than one category, the predominance of assignments determines the final classification.

For the purposes of this report, a “Scholar” is defined as an officer that earned a masters degree from an elite university or a PhD as a full time student. There are three distinct pathways for earning a graduate degree: on your own through night-school or distance learning, a cooperative program between universities and professional military education courses, or attendance at a civilian university as a full time student.

Exposure to a different mindset, thought process, and continuous immersion in an academic environment forces officers to expand their base of experience. Based on limited emphasis for scholarly goals in the operational Army, a Masters of Arts in Administration from Central Michigan University is the most common graduate degree among the Army's general officers. Cooperative graduate degree programs combined with degrees from professional military education make up 72% of the graduate degrees for general officers. Twenty-three generals meet the criteria as a Scholar (6%).¹²

A "Strategist" is an officer that attended the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) and continued to serve in planning roles between command assignments. Attendance at SAMS and follow-on assignments provides exposure to senior decision makers not usually experienced by young officers. SAMS graduates have credibility that allows them to be in a unique position to influence thoughts and decisions of senior leaders. There are other ways to become a strategist in the Army, but for the purposes of this research, I only used SAMS to define a strategist. A SAMS graduate remains in the operational track but is required to return to SAMS utilization assignments throughout his or her career. Functional Area 59 (Strategic Plans and Policy) officers, although clearly qualified as a strategist, do not usually alternate between operational and strategic assignments. Since the primary career path for FA 59 officers is strategic plans, it is not a broadening experience for them to be in a strategic plans assignment. Based on this definition, there are 35 Strategists (10%) among active duty Army generals. Because of a driving desire of majors to quickly return to operational assignments during a time of war, the number and quality of applicants for the SAMS

program has decreased.¹³ Army leaders must do more to encourage their high potential officers to participate in the SAMS program.

An Operator has served exclusively in operational assignments. Operators have no tours in DC prior to Senior Service College, have not been a full time student at an elite university, nor a SAMS graduate. These officers have had the least benefit from broadening opportunities and as such, might have more difficulty transitioning to a strategic leader role. Thirty-six percent of the Army's generals are categorized as Operators.

A "DC Insider" had an assignment in the Washington DC area prior to attending Senior Service College. Although the term DC Insider might be perceived as slightly pejorative, there is no intent for that interpretation. In fact, an early career assignment in the Pentagon or other DC office provides unique exposure to strategic level policy and decisions which serves as a valuable broadening experience. Forty-eight percent of the Army's generals are categorized as DC Insiders.

The Army's General Officer Corps needs a mix of all four types of leaders to be able to have the breadth of experiences necessary to identify or create transitions in warfare. Does the Army have the right mix? The DC Insider and Operator are the two main paths to general officer. If Scholars and Strategists who also qualify as DC Insiders are included in the DC Insider category, that percentage increases from 48% to 53%. This further emphasizes the role of an assignment in Washington DC as the most common characteristic of the Army's general officers assignment experience.

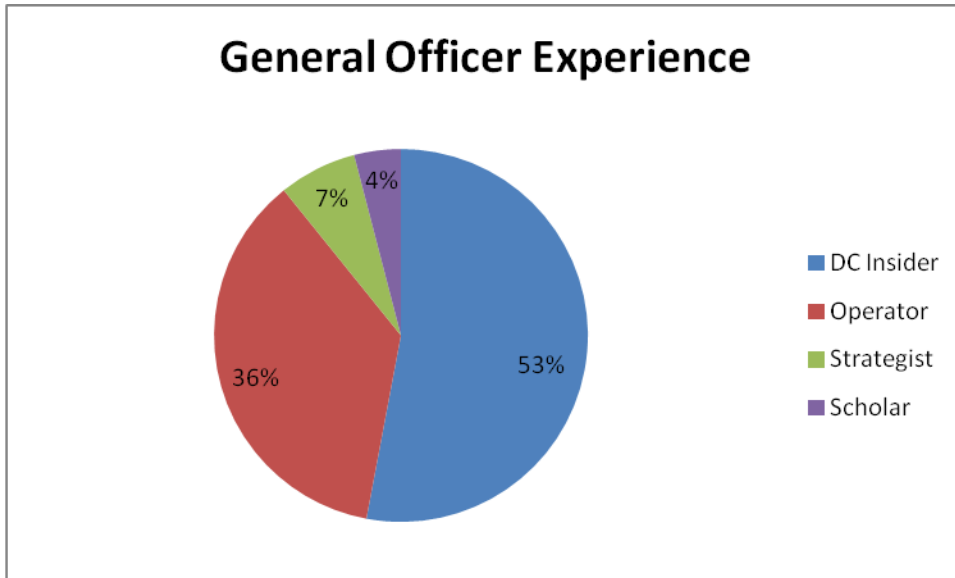


Figure 1. Active Duty Army General Officer Experience Characterization.

The two categories of DC Insider and Operator dominate the base of experience. 89% of all general officers are classified as either a DC Insider or Operator. Outside of the DC-tour, broadening experiences are not acceptably diverse. With only 11% of the general officer corps base of experience outside the operational and DC Insider base, there is a severe risk for a lack of innovative thought and leaders with both the ability to envision future changes in warfare and the credibility to influence key decision makers at the national decision making level. A broader range of experiences would help to prevent the dangers of group think among peers and encourage ideas and conversation that are contrary to the accepted conventional wisdom.

Has the DC assignment become a necessary ticket punch that officers take reluctantly or is it an effective broadening assignment that is essential in developing strategic leaders? The answer lies in the individual officer's motivations. However, Army leadership could be more overt about the leader development aspects of a DC assignment and ensure that those with the highest potential have an opportunity (or

forced) to learn the corporate business of the Army earlier in their careers. Abizaid's and Chiarelli's broadening experiences were formative influences on their careers. These experiences were essential in helping these strategic leaders identify, then change and adapt to successful counter-insurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, the same institutional biases that encouraged young leaders with strategic leader potential to stay only in the operational path that existed when Abizaid and Chiarelli were majors are still prevalent today.

In order to get more diversity of experience, the Army must do more to encourage officers identified with high potential to participate in broadening opportunities that will develop strategic leader competencies. This encouragement will be most effective coming from currently serving battalion and brigade commanders. Unfortunately, most battalion and brigade commanders do not participate in broadening experiences on their journey to command, and therefore, actively discourage their high potential officers from pursuing other than operational assignments. At the most senior levels, the Army needs to encourage participation of the highest potential officers in clearly identified strategic leader development programs including resident graduate school, fellowships, SAMS, Joint Service and assignments in the Capital region.

Corporate business leaders continuously align priorities and resources against two competing fundamental concepts: Innovation and Operational Excellence. As Clayton Christensen concludes in his book, *The Innovator's Dilemma*, "When you look across the sweep of business history, most companies that once seemed successful – the best practitioners of the best practice – were in the middle of the pack (or worse, the back of it) a decade or two later."¹⁴ *The Innovator's Dilemma* points out that focusing

explicitly on improving operating systems is analogous to re-arranging deck chairs on the Titanic. Improving operating systems reduces costs, increases margins and often pleases the board of directors and the stock holders. However, strategic leaders must be capable of shaping the inevitable market transitions to sustain their competitive advantages and their businesses through these incremental changes. Without the vision and ability to innovate, a business could easily become the best buggy-whip manufacturer in the world. Operational Excellence is certainly important, but is inherently short term focused. Visionary CEOs and corporate leaders sustain their competitive advantages by maintaining an appropriate balance between innovation and operational excellence. In order to do this, they must identify and develop strategic leadership in their workforce. In *Built to Last*, Jim Collins states that “visionary companies . . . invested much more aggressively in human capital via extensive recruiting, employee training, and professional development programs.”¹⁵

Truly innovative corporate leaders not only react swiftly to changing market conditions, they *create* the transitions. Innovative strategic leaders in the military should provide the capability to identify coming transitions in warfare, shape the professional discussion, and prepare the Army for the next fight. History has taught us that military forces do poorly at the very beginning of a conflict. The futility of strategic leaders to recognize and prepare for the next conflict is not a new phenomenon, and certainly not unique to the United States. This concept is highlighted in *American's First Battles*, a collection of case studies that demonstrate how the United States military fared at the onset of a new conflict. The author states “The record of Americans’ ability to predict the nature of the next war (not to mention its causes, location, time, adversary or

adversaries, and allies) has been uniformly dismal.”¹⁶ Examples from the Civil War, Task Force Smith in Korea to the initial counter insurgency efforts in Iraq, highlight that the war that was fought was not like the war for which the Army trained. This thought was famously reinforced by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld when responding to a young Soldier’s question in 2004. He said “You go to war with the Army you have, not the one you might want or wish to have a later time.”¹⁷ The rapid expansion of the use of improvised explosive devices by counter insurgency forces in Iraq was a disruptive change for the Army because the non-contiguous, non-linear type of warfare was not envisioned prior to 2003.

Cisco Systems defines their Leader Attributes using the acronym “C-LEAD”



C-LEAD

C-LEAD AT-A-GLANCE

Leading a successful business in the face of chaos requires a unique combination of capabilities. These capabilities are defined in Cisco’s C-LEAD model.

Themes	Theme Definition	Competencies and Competency Definitions	
Collaborate	<i>Connecting with customers, partners, suppliers, and colleagues – across functions as well as geographies to achieve significant results.</i>	Working Across Boundaries	Involve customers, partners, suppliers, and groups from across the enterprise to develop strategy and maximize results.
		Engaging Others	Motivate others to align with and execute against the organization’s objectives.
		Earning Trust	Earn the confidence of others through open communication and respectful behavior.
Learn	<i>Building Cisco’s capabilities by continuing to develop own and others’ skills.</i>	Developing Self	Continue to develop the leadership and technical/functional capabilities needed to achieve results for Cisco.
		Developing Others	Help others develop the capabilities needed for individual career growth and effective leadership at Cisco.
Execute	<i>Delivering exceptional results by building commitment to the business and enabling teams to succeed.</i>	Demonstrating Passion	Communicate personal commitment to Cisco’s vision and success in the global marketplace.
		Empowering Teams	Provide the direction, support, and authority teams need to achieve significant results.
		Achieving Results	Translate strategy into clear operating plans and promote operational excellence in the delivery of results.
Accelerate	<i>Developing bold strategies and the organization’s capability to achieve its objectives.</i>	Shaping Strategy	Develop a bold strategy for the business that is based on input from multiple sources and promotes short-term as well as long-term success.
		Building Capability	Build an exceptional portfolio of talent to lead and execute against Cisco’s business strategy.
Disrupt	<i>Promoting change and innovation to support Cisco’s strategy and set Cisco apart in the global marketplace.</i>	Promoting Innovation	Create an environment that encourages innovation in support of Cisco’s business strategy.
		Leading Change	Initiate and effectively guide the organization through change.

Figure 2. Cisco System’s C-LEAD Model.

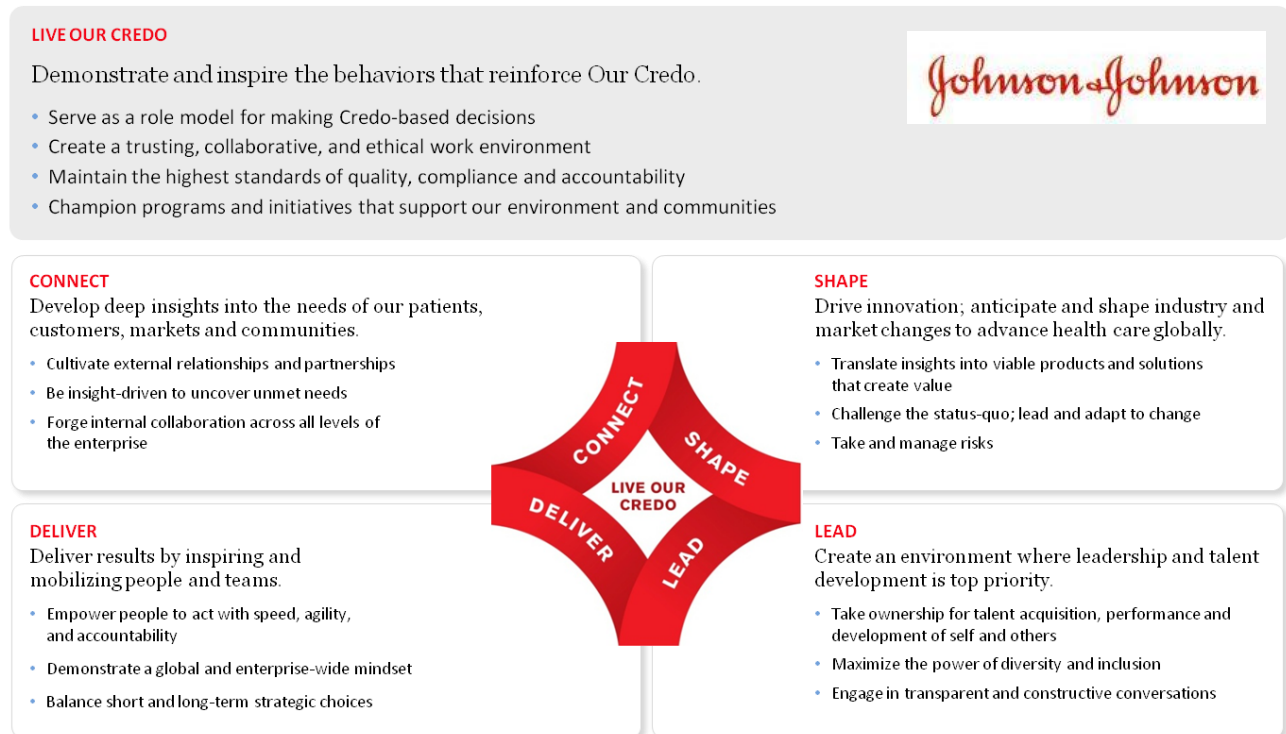
which stands for Collaborate, Learn, Execute, Accelerate, and Disrupt.¹⁸ The last two characteristics, Accelerate and Disrupt, best demonstrate the difference between corporate America and the military. Leaders who “Accelerate” make proactive efforts to shape their industry. They don’t wait for changes to happen and then react to them; they are the ones that are forcing others to adapt to their changes.

Disrupt, a term often used with negative connotations in the military, is considered a desirable characteristic at Cisco. Managers are actively encouraged to evaluate the potential strategic leadership skills of their subordinates by determining their ability to Disrupt the status quo and create an environment that encourages innovation. Over the past 10 years, adversaries have been dictating changes in warfare to United States military. Strategic leaders have been reacting instead of leading that change.

Like the military, the fundamental path to a leadership role in business is based on a proven ability to execute. First and foremost, a potential leader must have clearly demonstrated an exceptional ability to get things done. To rise to the strategic leader level, the characteristics of “Accelerate” and “Disrupt” become the discriminators. The pool of candidates that have reached this level all have demonstrated a superior ability to execute. To make the leap from organizational (or operational) level leadership to effective strategic level leadership, a leader must demonstrate that he or she can be innovative. Developing this characteristic in high potential employees is a focus for Cisco’s executive leadership development team.¹⁹

Johnson & Johnson, in a slightly more conservative way, uses the term “Shape” as one of their four leadership imperatives necessary to demonstrate a leader has internalized the fundamental driving principles in the Johnson & Johnson Credo.²⁰

Johnson & Johnson’s other leadership imperatives of Connect, Deliver, and Lead align well with the Army Values. Johnson & Johnson expects their high potential leaders to



The Leadership Imperatives must be lived in a manner consistent with *Our Credo*

Figure 3. Johnson & Johnson Leadership Imperatives.

drive innovation and create market transitions in order to expand their business.

Leaders are encouraged to challenge the status quo. The Shape leadership imperative description is presented at a strategic level. Shaping markets and industry is strategic level innovation while developing new manufacturing techniques or improving product lines is more about operational level leadership that is associated with the Connect and Deliver leadership imperatives.

The innovation trait is nurtured through assignments that expand the base of experience for certain leaders identified as high potential employees. A common term used in businesses, “Hi-Po” employees are specifically targeted for these types of assignments. At Cisco, these assignments are referred to as “stretch” assignments and are offered to employees that are designated as Hi-Po. Cisco actively encourages development of strategic leaders by forcing them out of their comfort zones into different business lines and geographic regions. If Hi-Po leaders for the Army are defined by early selection for promotion, the Army does the exact opposite for their Hi-Po officers. An early selection reduces broadening opportunities in an already tightly constrained career timeline. Early promotes stay in the operational career track more frequently than their contemporaries who have additional time in their career paths to pursue broadening opportunities. Reduced time in grade translates to a more aggressive plan to hit the next important job, defined as “key developmental” (KD), and less time for exposure to strategic broadening opportunities. KD jobs are inherently focused on the relatively short-term career goals of battalion command. Selection for the honor and privilege of battalion command as a lieutenant colonel with less than 20 years of service is often seen as the ultimate achievement for a mid-career officer. Selection for battalion command is an achievement for which most operational career field officers focus their development. There are three specific timeframes in an officer’s career path for broadening opportunities: following company command (6-7 years of service), following battalion operations officer/executive officer duties (10-12 years of service), and following battalion command (18-20 years of service). If selected for early promotion at any one of those time frames, the opportunity for broadening experiences competes

with accepting an operational assignment to stay competitive for the next promotion. It is too late to begin developing strategic leaders after battalion command. Broadening opportunities after battalion command are still helpful in refining strategic leader skills. However, after 20 years of service, it is much more difficult for officers to change fundamental aspects of their institutional tendencies. Early exposure to diverse experiences can help form the innovative mindset that could be expanded later in one's career.

Army Field Manual 6-22, Army Leadership, lists four fundamental characteristics and expectations of strategic leaders: sustain the Army culture, envision the force, convey the vision, and spearhead institutional change.²¹ Leaders must have intelligence demonstrated by agility, good judgment, innovative thought, interpersonal tact, and domain knowledge.²² They must be multi-skilled pentathletes that are high level thinkers, accomplished warfighters, and geopolitical military experts.²³ Strategic leaders must be comfortable in the departmental and political environments of the Nation's decision making apparatus, especially in the Executive and Legislative Branches of government

and have highly developed interpersonal abilities.²⁴

Is the Army preparing leaders for these skill sets? Or is the Army relying on the self-development, inherent attributes of the individual officer to make the significant leap from superior

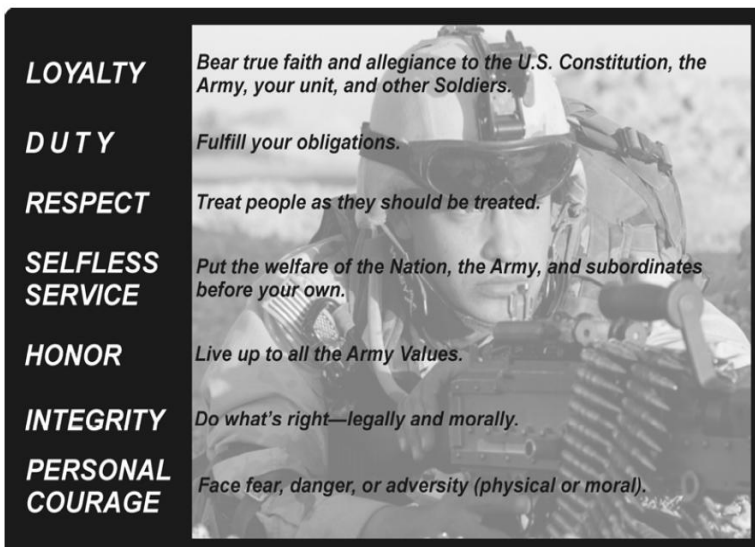


Figure 4. Army Values.

operational warfighter to strategic leader? Because 89% of the Army’s general officers come from the DC Insider and Operator base of experience, my conclusion is that the Army relies on the inherent attributes of the individual officer. With past performance in key jobs as the primary requirement for promotion and selection for strategic leader roles, the Army hopes the leader can make the transition from operational warfighter to strategic leader. Past performance is only an indicator of potential and, unfortunately, the only sufficiently tangible evidence of potential as a strategic leader. However, relying on past performance as the sole predictor of future potential will dramatically restrict the pool of qualified applicants for future strategic leader roles within the Army. Research has clearly demonstrated that most high performers are not, in fact, high potentials.²⁵

In order to realize the full capabilities of the highest potential leaders in the Army, participation in broadening experiences that challenge the officer’s intellectual abilities, including agility, judgment, innovative thought and interpersonal tact, should be highly

encouraged during the major and lieutenant colonel period in a career. Figure 5 is a Top 10 list of the most valuable broadening experiences for majors. This list is very subjective and worthy of significant debate as to the advantages and relative benefits of each program. The Army

Top 10 Broadening Opportunities for Army Majors

1. Joint Chiefs of Staff/OSD/Army Staff Internship
2. Army Congressional Fellowship
3. White House Fellowship
4. General Wayne A. Downing Scholarship
5. USMA Instructor Program
6. G35/Harvard Strategist Program
7. Arroyo Center Fellowship
8. USMA/USNA/USAFIA Instructor Program
9. School for Advanced Military Studies (SAMS)
10. George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies Fellowship

Figure 5. Informal list of top broadening opportunities for Army Majors.²⁶

should include participation in one of these broadening opportunities for all leaders classified as high potential.

Early identification of high potential officers and participation in strategic broadening opportunities before the 10-year mark in the officer's career achieves two goals. First, the officer is aware that he or she is identified as high potential. That positive feedback could influence the officer to further his or her career in the military. Second, the officer participates in broadening opportunities that encourage him or her to think beyond the previously identified finish line of battalion or brigade command.

It is not a question of being innovative at the tactical and operational levels. There are countless examples of company, battalion and brigade commanders that have effectively adapted to a very different environment for which they prepared. There is a clear pattern of innovative tactics, techniques, and procedures that Army commanders have developed in response to evolving threats and changing social situations in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, the ability to transition from an innovative operational commander to an innovative strategic leader has not been as clearly demonstrated.

Strategic leader skills are developed from past experiences. There are certain innate leadership attributes that are consistent in most successful leaders, but those that rise to the very top of their profession do so based on what they have learned from their past. In *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell presents this as the predominant theory of how people rise to the very top of their professions. He concludes:

People don't rise from nothing. We do owe something to parentage and patronage. The people that stand before kings may look like they did it all by themselves. But in fact they are invariably the beneficiaries of hidden advantages and extraordinary opportunities and cultural legacies that allow them to learn and work hard and make sense of the world in ways others cannot. It makes a

difference where and when we grew up. It's not enough to ask what successful people are like, in other words. It is only by asking *where they are from* that we can unravel the logic behind who succeeds and who doesn't.²⁷

Two points stand out in the quote. First, the idea that “extraordinary opportunities,” combined with hard work, are catalysts for developing strategic leaders. The Army has a responsibility to provide those extraordinary opportunities, through operational assignments and broadening experiences, to their highest potential leaders at a relatively early stage in their careers. Secondly, understanding where leaders come from is essential to explaining their perspective of the world and how they will apply it in their strategic leadership roles.

The DC Insider broadening experience is valuable in the aspect of learning the Army's corporate business and how to accomplish strategic, service level initiatives. However, the DC Insider, as well as the operator, base of experience does not necessarily contribute to innovation and identification of emerging trends in warfare. DC Insiders and Operators learn operational excellence for the Army. Strategists and Scholars are the innovators for the Army.

In order to gain a more thorough understanding of where the Army's general officers come from, I analyzed several permutations and variations including segregation by rank and functional divisions. Independent of how I grouped and analyzed the records, the percentages by experience always calculated to roughly the same numbers: 50% DC Insiders, 35% Operators, 10% Strategists, and 5% Scholars. With approximately 85% of the senior leaders coming from backgrounds of Operational Excellence and only 15% of the senior leaders coming from an Innovation background, the Army needs a more diverse mix of senior leader experiences to ensure dissenting voices are credible and heard.

The Army's General Officer Corps is unbalanced. It is heavily weighted to the Operational Excellence base of experience at the expense of Innovation. At a time that is clearly marked by a transition in the Army, there is a need to develop more Innovators (Scholars and Strategists) as strategic leaders to insure that the Army maintains a healthy balance between Operational Excellence and Innovation.

Selection for command at the rank of colonel is a key indicator for an officer that has demonstrated the potential to be strategic leader. Performance in this key job will be a determining factor in future selection for promotion to general officer. There are several categories of commands for which a colonel can be selected. Each officer can choose which category he or she wishes to compete for selection.²⁸ The types of command can be broadly categorized as Operations, Strategic Support, Training, Garrison, Key Billet, and Recruiting.

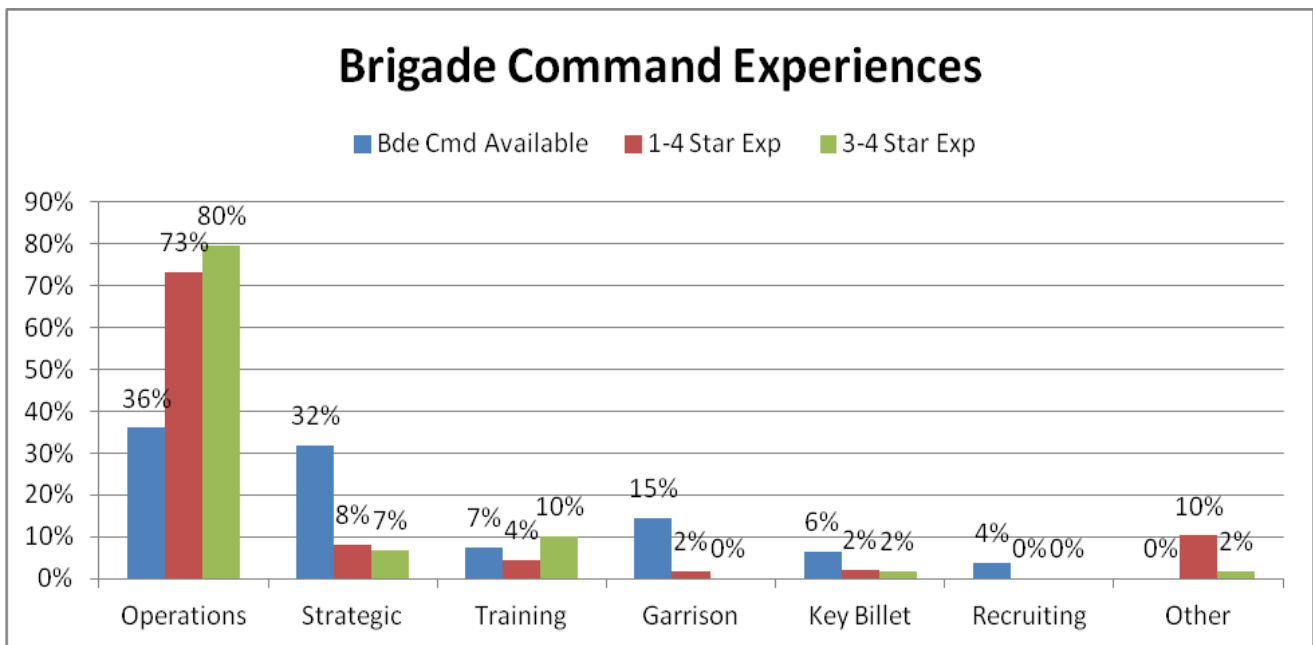


Figure 6. Brigade Command experiences available compared with the brigade command experiences of the Army's General Officers.

Figure 6 shows the brigade command experience of the Army's active duty general officers. The graph is broken down into three categories that include the percentage of brigade commands available by type including operations, strategic, training, garrison, key billet, recruiting. The "Other" category is included because there are some general officers that did not serve in command positions as a colonel. The vertical bars represent the commands by type as a percentage of total commands available. For instance, there are 364 total brigade command experiences in the Army. 131 are operational commands.²⁹ Therefore, 36% of all available brigade command opportunities are operational commands. Conversely, 64% of commands are other than operational. However, as indicated by the percentages of the commands by type for the Army's general officers, operational command experience dominates the strategic leader experience base. 73% of all general officers commanded brigades in the operations category. When filtered for three and four star generals specifically, that percentage increases to 80%. Colonels that commanded units designated as strategic support only represent 8% of the general officer corps. Strategic Support commands differ from Operational commands in several ways. They are generally more organizationally complex, have a unique mission set, and interact regularly with organizations and influences that extend beyond the Army and the Department of Defense. The data reinforces the conclusion that the path to becoming a general officer is through the operational career path. It is somewhat ironic that commanding a unit designated as "strategic" greatly reduces the probability of becoming a strategic leader in the Army.

What is the right mix between innovation and operational excellence? There is no exact answer to this question. However, it is safe to say that the existing 89%-11% ratio is too heavily weighted to operational excellence. A 50-50 split would not be desirable either. A predominance of strategic leaders should come from the operational excellence background. A reasonable target for the Army would be 75% Operational Excellence and 25% Innovators. Based on the current career progression paths, it will be relatively easy to maintain 75% operational excellence as a target. The more difficult task will be to increase the innovators from 11% to 25% of the population. This increase is needed to provide a broader availability of strategic thinkers with a different enough background to shape thought and present alternative, credible perspectives on the future force. This change could only happen gradually, beginning with today's population of captains and majors. By encouraging and affording the opportunity for the Army high potential young officers to pursue diverse broadening experiences, operational excellence base of experience and innovators will naturally come into balance for the future general officer corps.

A fundamental distinguishing characteristic of the most enduring and successful corporations in the world is that they preserve a cherished core ideology while simultaneously stimulating progress and change.³⁰ The Army's Values define its core. The common thread of the Army's core values is spelled out by the acronym artfully formed by its individual components: LDRSHIP. Developing strategic leaders is a fundamental part of the Army's cherished core. Maintaining an appropriate balance between experiences that lead to future competencies of strategic leaders in both

operational excellence and innovation is essential to ensuring that future transitions in warfare are identified prior to discovering the change once Soldiers hit the battlefield.

Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) John Nagl, an armor battalion commander during Operation Iraqi Freedom, said “Beware the majors of Desert Storm” in reference to senior leaders applying inappropriate lessons learned from Operation Desert Storm in 1991 to Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2004.³¹ The Desert Storm majors were now Iraqi Freedom generals. In 2025, will someone say “Beware the majors of Iraqi Freedom”? The answer will be yes if the general officer corps of the future is dominated by those with operational experience only. The Army would do well to adhere to the advice of General Ridgway and “nourish the mavericks” to ensure future strategic leaders have the breadth of experience to identify, then change and adapt to emerging transitions in warfare.

Endnotes

¹ Major General Perry Smith, “Leadership at the Top: Insights for Aspiring Leaders,” June 1990, Marine Corps Gazette pdf file, 234. <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/au-24/smith.pdf> (accessed February 15, 2012).

² Christensen, Clayton M., *The Innovator’s Dilemma: The Revolutionary Book That Will Change the Way You Do Business* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2011) 34-35.

³ Jim Collins and Jeremy Porras, *Built To Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 145.

⁴ Bronwyn Fryer, “Cisco Sees the Future: An Interview with John Chambers,” November 2008, <http://hbr.org/2008/11/cisco-sees-the-future/ar/1> (accessed February 18, 2012).

⁵ “The Living Company: Habits for Survival in a Turbulent Business Environment,” 2002, Bloomberg Business Week, <http://www.businessweek.com/chapter/degeus.htm> (accessed February 17, 2012).

⁶United States Army War College, *Strategic Leadership Primer, 3rd Edition* (Carlisle, PA: Department of Command, Leadership, and Management 2010), 62.

⁷ Watkins, Gayle L. and Don M. Snider, *The Future of the Army Profession* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2002) 537.

⁸ David Cloud and Greg Jaffe, *The Fourth Star: Four Generals and the Epic Struggle for the Future of the United States Army* (New York: Crown Publishers 2009), 33.

⁹ Ibid., 59.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ General Officer Resumes, <https://www.gomo.army.mil/ext/portal/ResumeArchive.aspx?Type=Active> (accessed multiple times February 2-12 February 2012).

¹² For the purposes of this research, I did not classify Doctors and Lawyers as Scholars because their professions require advanced degrees for certification. For example, a doctor going to medical school is not equivalent to an infantryman getting a graduate degree in political science.

¹³ Unfortunately, this statement has no empirical evidence. It is an imprecisely defined trend that is substantiated by conversations that I have had with multiple Army lieutenant colonels and colonels serving in key positions and in the Army’s Human Resources command.

¹⁴ Christensen, *The Innovator’s Dilemma* , xxxiv.

¹⁵ Collins, *Built to Last*, 193.

¹⁶ Heller, Charles E. and William A. Stofft, *America’s First Battles-1776-1965* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1986) xii.

¹⁷ Secretary Rumsfeld responded to SPC Thomas Wilson from the 278th Regimental Combat Team on December 4th, 2004 at Camp Buehring, Kuwait during a televised town hall session. The 278th Regimental Combat Team was in the final stages of preparing for their mission in Iraq. SPC Thomas’ question was based on the lack of add-on-armor for their vehicles.

¹⁸ C-LEAD at a Glance. Cisco Systems Internal Guidance for evaluating potential leaders (26 Jan 2012).

¹⁹ Notes from conversation with Dr. Caroline McCabe, Cisco Systems, March 29, 2012.

²⁰ Johnson & Johnson Leadership Imperatives (March 11, 2011).

²¹ *FM 6-22, Army Leadership: Competent, Confident, and Agile* (Washington DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, October 2006), 12-3.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Fernandez-Araoz, Claudio, Boris Groysberg, and Nitin Nohria “How to Hang On to Your High Potentials” in *Harvard Business Review*, October 2011, page 7.

²⁶ This is an informal study of the fellowship opportunities. I studied the fellowships and rank ordered the experience based on the extent of exposure to organizations outside of the Army. Each fellowship was assigned a score of 1-5 based for the following categories that I subjectively assigned: Exposure to Other Services, Branches of Government, Nations, Industry, Senior Military Leaders, Academia/Civilian Education, Strategic Thought, Availability and Exclusivity. All scores were averaged to determine a composite score. Fellowships are ranked based on their composite score in these categories.

²⁷ Gladwell, Malcom, *Outliers: The Story of Success* (New York: Back Bay Books/Little Brown and Company, 2008) 19.

²⁸ For more on the process for selection of command and key billets at the colonel level, see Army Regulation 600-20: Army Command Policy, dated 1 February 2006 and Army Regulation 600-8-29: Officer Promotions, dated 25 February 2005.

²⁹ Information on the number and type of commands for colonels was provided by US Army Human Resources Command, Senior Leader Division.

³⁰ Collins, *Built to Last*, 220.

³¹ Cloud, *The Fourth Star*, 198.