4. Career Management Principles and Application to Officer Careers

Having determined a range of officer requirements, we turn to the structures used to manage officers. In this section of the report, we present a general model of a career management system and discuss the basic personnel functions associated with it. We describe how we extend the general model to our discussion of officer career management. We also describe how two fundamental policy choices about entry and attrition influence the flow of people into and out of organizations. Next we describe how varying personnel functions can influence the shape of the officer corps. Finally, we provide an illustrative example of how varying career structures and one of the personnel functions—promotion—can change the shape of the officer corps. The purpose of this section and, to a lesser degree, the next is to provide a basis from which to develop a number of career management alternatives that will allow us to highlight the policy implications of choosing one alternative over another.

General Personnel Management Model

The management of a workforce requires the personnel system to acquire people, move them through the organization over time, and, eventually, transition them out of the organization. These basic personnel functions are implemented through policy decisions. Figure 4.1 provides a snapshot of a notional workforce. The curve represents the number of people in the workforce at each year of service for a 30-year career.

Basic Personnel Functions

The management process is accomplished through the following six basic functions.

**Enter People into the System.** This function involves both attracting people to the organization and entering them into it. Individual “firm-specific” systems can be characterized either as “closed” with people entering at the bottom or as “open” with people given credit for other experience or education and entering at different points in the career path.
Develop Organizational Knowledge and Skills. This function pertains to developing the knowledge, skills, ability, and attitudes that are desired by the organization. This function can begin before people join the organization, and demonstrated knowledge or attitudes can serve as a screening mechanism to determine who enters. Examples of preentry development include management trainee programs, the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC), and the service academies.

Assign. This function distributes people across the organization. It closely links with the development function because assignments can in themselves be part of the career development of an organization’s members.

Promote. Exercise of this function advances individuals within the grade structure of the organization. Typically, it involves increased responsibility and compensation. It relates closely with the assignment function, because many assignments require individuals of a certain grade.

Exit. This function moves people out of the organization.

Exercise Quality Control. This function spans the others, beginning with entry, when some are deemed unsuitable to join the organization. Other functions, such as development, assignment, and promotion, serve as the mechanisms by which quality control is exercised. Because of its cross-functional nature, we do
not deal with it as a separate function as we develop the general model to depict officer career management.

**Policies Determine How Functions Are Discharged**

Personnel functions alone do not constitute a career management system but are dependent upon policy decisions for implementation. Policy decisions are crucial because they define the career management system and determine the shape of the organization’s workforce. Organizational objectives drive policies. For example, an organizational objective to have youthful management will result in policy decisions about the entry, promotion, exit, and, perhaps, the quality control functions.

**Designing Alternative Career Management Systems**

Our analysis of various personnel systems—both military and civilian—leads us to conclude that two policy choices are most important in determining career patterns because they fundamentally influence the nature of the career management system. The choices are binary and affect where in the organization people can enter and on what basis they leave. People either enter the organization at the beginning of the career path (closed) or they join it at any point along the career path (open). People either leave at their choice (natural attrition) or that of the organization (forced attrition).

Most military systems are closed systems; people can only enter the organization at the beginning of the career path. The closed nature of the system supports a strong organizational culture. Knowledge about the organization and its culture is highly valued. Besides the military, the professions (health, law, etc.) are typically used as examples of closed communities requiring commitment, adherence to a code of law and ethics, and knowledge and skill expertise acquired only by long education and experience.

By contrast, in open systems, people enter at any level at which an organization has need for them. Often people rise through an occupational career by changing firms and entering a given firm at an advanced level. Their immediate skills are

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1As defined by the General Accounting Office, organizational culture is the underlying assumptions, beliefs, values, attitudes, and expectations shared by an organization’s members. An organization’s beliefs and values affect the behavior of its members. General Accounting Office, Organizational Culture: Techniques Companies Use to Perpetuate or Change Beliefs and Values (NSIAD 92-105), February 1992, p. 1.
valued more than their knowledge about or commitment to the organization. Current examples of open system organizations include sports teams and the entertainment industry. In the case of the military, there is only one employer and advancement in the occupation is synonymous with advancement in a company.

With natural attrition, the choice belongs to the person. People may stay in the organization as long as they want. The organization may choose to provide incentives at various points to entice continuation or induce separation, but the choice to depart for a minimally competent person still belongs to the individual. With forced attrition, the organization makes the choice. Given that people want to stay, the organization determines who will, based on whatever organizational objectives it wants to accomplish and by whatever means seem best. In the military, forced attrition has been primarily implemented through the promotion system and secondarily through the retirement system. However, forced attrition does not have to be implemented via these mechanisms. Other mechanisms that might be used are age, vigor, health, and fitness; skill and experience; or contract completion.

**Philosophies Relating to Career Flow Structures**

Our observations of the many career management systems suggest that the combination of the various permutations of these two basic functions lead to one of four career flow structures, each of which supports a different philosophy of organizational management.

An organization that wants to control upward movement would choose a flow structure in which people enter at the bottom and the choice about attrition is left to the organization. Continually eliminating groups of people at different levels in the organization—presumably to meet specific organizational objectives—makes room for those identified as better able to meet the objective. If, for example, the objective is a youthful workforce, this type of structure could accommodate that goal by eliminating older workers. The prospect of planned movement and greater opportunity for some tends to motivate people. It also tends to reduce career longevity and retirement expenses. The flow upward provides experience and prepares those who remain in the system for higher

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2Some terms will be used frequently. *Ability* is characteristics in the individual leading to adequate job performance. These characteristics include *skills* (what a person can do), *knowledge* (what a person knows), *attitudes* (beliefs and convictions an individual is expected to hold), and *experience* (previously applied use of skill and knowledge). Ability and motivation usually lead to successful outcomes.
positions. Since those who remain have moved through the organization, this structure builds both a strong organizational experience base and culture.

A desire for strong organizational culture and a stable workforce would favor a career flow structure that brings people in at the bottom, induces them to remain for long careers, but leaves the decision about when to leave to them. This type of structure inculcates its members with the organizational culture and allows careful development of experienced people for the higher positions. It tends to minimize both accession and termination costs and maximizes the return on development costs. It allows the organization to benefit from all of its members who reach the height of their usefulness, and it tends to preserve skills. The strong culture, stable careers, and prospect of longevity inspire loyalty. Promotion decisions are separated from termination decisions. This sort of structure is also more consistent with a profession.

An organization seeking the greatest ability to change would choose a career flow structure that provides it maximum flexibility about when people enter and exit the organization. Thus, it would choose one that allows people to enter at will, but the organization would retain discretion for exit decisions. Such a structure allows rapid changes in almost any aspect, for example, in size, composition, or culture. Further, it allows the organization to meet its needs quickly and minimizes accession and development costs. It also allows an organization to meet its needs precisely. It can acquire the exact skills and number of people needed. Allowing organizational choice of attrition provides the capability to eliminate groups of people to meet organizational objectives.

It is also possible to mix characteristics. An organization seeking maximum flexibility in all dimensions of entry and exit would choose a mixed career flow structure, which allows selection from any of the other approaches. Which aspects are selected depends upon the characteristics most needed by the organization to accomplish its goals. It is possible to apply different strategies at different points in the career path. For example, an organization might want to control movement tightly in the early stages of a career path, so it would enter people at the bottom and retain only those who best meet organizational needs. The organization might leave the exit decision to the more senior members of its workforce, in essence granting tenure to all who reach a certain point in the career path.

**Career Flow Structures**

The choices about means of entry and attrition determine the nature of the career flow structure in an organization. Career flow structures are important choices
because they have more effect on the nature of careers than other significant variables of career management. For example, different career flow structures affect commitment by creating quite different expectations between the person and the organization. Career flow structures affect competence of the work force, the strength of an organization’s culture, and networks of relationships that develop that make it easier to coordinate interdependent parts of the organization. Additionally, for the military, relationships with society are affected by career patterns in that structures with higher entry and exit flows would be expected to create more numerical bonds to society than those without them. Choice of a flow structure should be weighed carefully against purpose and objectives for career management.

The choice of a career flow structure imposes constraints on the policies established for each personnel function. Four career flow structures are common: “up-or-out,” which is now employed by the U.S. military; “up-and-stay,” which is used by many foreign militaries and many private and public sector organizations; “in-and-out” or lateral entry, which is also used in many private and public sector organizations; and “mixed,” which uses the other three in various combinations for segments of a career. These career flow structures are generally independent of manpower requirements in that each can meet any specified numerical workforce level. However, each structure meets it in a different fashion and thus may be better suited for certain organizational objectives or more cost-effective in meeting specific manpower requirements than others. The remainder of this section discusses the nature and advantages and disadvantages of each of the four career flow structures. We stress at this point that we are not advocating any of these structures as best for a future career management system. We are interested in what objectives the structures serve and what effects they have if used.

Up-or-Out

Nature. An up-or-out structure is characterized by entry into the military at the start of a career and forced or induced separation on some basis (e.g., failure to

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3 Many companies have scrutinized and rewritten policies to ensure the removal of implicit promises about job security or lifetime employment. Employment relationships result from psychological contracts. These understandings, explicit and implicit, exist between employee and employer, shape people’s beliefs and expectations, and are powerful motivators and demotivators. Flow structures underlying career management are part of these understandings. For example, more than half of middle managers in a 1986 Harris survey of 600 large corporations believed that when they started working for their current employer they could stay as long as they liked, assuming they were doing a good job. Robert M. Tomasko, Reshaping the Corporation for the Future, American Management Association, New York, 1990, pp. 50–51.

progress in grade) at a later point. It is important to ensure that the choice of forcing mechanisms accomplishes the underlying organizational objective. For example, if the objective is a young and vigorous officer corps, policymakers must choose a forcing mechanism related to that objective, e.g., separation age. If the objective is increased flow of younger officers to the reserve component, policymakers must choose a mechanism related to that objective.

**Advantages and Disadvantages.** Up-or-out provides incentives for continued good performance and allows services to retain the best performers. However, depending on the amount of forced attrition, there can be high turnover, which generally increases movement and training costs and disrupts organizations. But turnover also makes people available for other purposes. For example, the military may want sufficient early turnover of officers to support the reserve component. The closed nature of the system supports a strong organizational culture, but the forced-attrition mechanism diminishes long-term commitment. In the military and other organizations, youth and vigor are associated with this type of structure, but that has more to do with the selection of the intermediate exit points than the structure itself. The forced separation decision for the military has been tied to promotion (the origin of the up-or-out label), but other mechanisms could be used. For example, the military has also used the retirement system to force separation.

Moreover, the military has a near-unique characteristic of being the only institution in which the profession of being an officer can be practiced. An officer must be employed by the military to be in the military profession. A doctor can leave one hospital and practice medicine at another, but to be a practicing officer requires staying in the military. Forced attrition terminates participation in the

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5But as van Creveld points out, no matter how the “out” is implemented, in an up-or-out system “the culture becomes increasingly obsessed with youth” even as the life expectancy—and health and vigor—of the population rises. Martin van Creveld, *Command in War*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985, p. 72.

6“In World War II, senior officers had to be removed because of their age, health, and inefficiency. The majority of these officers were simply unable to meet the physical requirements of command or withstand the rigors of battlefield conditions; . . . Congress enacted a 20-year retirement system and a selective ‘up or out’ promotion system to keep promotion opportunity at an acceptable level and to maintain a youthful force.” Paul Arcari, “Why Military Personnel Can’t Serve Until Age 62,” *The Retired Officer Magazine*, October 1995, p. 35.

7Distinguishing characteristics of a profession include: knowledge and skill expertise gained by formal education and long-term experience often validated by formal examinations and credentials; career commitment and a closed community with strong feelings of loyalty; accession, assignment, and promotion based on competence; and a formal code of law and ethics developed, maintained, and applied by the profession. Appendix B elaborates on the profession of “officership” and its meaning for career management of officers. Additionally, this appendix reviews how changes in threat, military strategy, technology, societal demographics and culture, the economy, and the demands of officers themselves are likely to change the defining characteristics of officership. If change makes officership not a profession (i.e., it does not match the defining characteristics), then there are consequences for officer career management. In particular, career structures that are not closed, such as in-and-out are tenable.
profession. Commitment to the officer profession also entails entry into an organization with a strong organizational culture based on values. Sociologist Erving Goffman referred to this as a “total institution,” characterized by (1) all activities being carried out under a single authority, (2) the influence of the immediate company of others who hold the ideals of the institution, (3) a disciplined life fixed by a set of formal rules and procedures, and (4) all activities aimed toward fulfilling the official aims of the institution.8 A former general officer describes this situation more bluntly: “There is only one military in our nation. You are either in or out. There are no lateral transfers to another military. In other words, the ‘company’ is also the entire profession!”9 Other professions are not normally as identified with a single institution. So the forced attrition inherent in this career flow structure means that not only must an officer leave the institution (Army or Navy), he or she must also leave the profession.

**Up-and-Stay**

**Nature.** An up-and-stay structure is characterized by entry into the military at the start of a career and continuation at will of the individual for a full career even if not advanced.10 The military has used this structure for selected skills where shortages of officers exist. For example, Congress has encouraged selective continuation of officers when their skills are needed.11

**Advantages and Disadvantages.** A structure of this type provides career stability. Also, this structure is consistent with the professions, of which, as indicated, the military is one. Additionally, promotion decisions are independent of separation decisions. Less turnover occurs than with up-or-out, and thus the organization requires fewer new entrants to sustain its numbers. This structure best supports organizations with a strong culture because those who accept and adapt to the culture are allowed to stay.

The usual criticism of a structure of this nature is that too much “deadwood” can accumulate. Also, in up-and-stay structures, people reach a plateau at a certain

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10Throughout this study, we will assume that those without satisfactory performance are separated from the career system in appropriate ways.

11For these officers, however, a career will tend to end sooner—usually at the first retirement point—than for officers who continue via selection for promotion to the next grade.
grade or rank; increased future compensation results from longevity at that rank and not from promotion. Motivation (and additional compensation if desired) must come from sources other than promotion. In some respects, the compensation system that the military uses better supports retention in an up-and-stay structure than performance in the up-or-out structure it is supposed to support because it rewards longevity more than promotion.

**In-and-Out**

**Nature.** An in-and-out structure—also called a lateral entry structure—has entry and exit at multiple points in careers. Entry for individuals need not be at the beginning of a career; experienced people who leave can be replaced with experienced, but new, people of needed skills, knowledge, and abilities. In the military setting, officers entering laterally might be from civilian life, from reserve status, from another military service, or from some other source. Attrition can be either forced or natural. Forcing mechanisms can parallel those of an up-or-out system or those of the private sector, e.g., a term contract renewable at the discretion of the organization.

**Advantages and Disadvantages.** In-and-out is widely used in private and public sector organizations especially where occupational and professional identity is not the same as employment by a specific firm. It allows organizations to get needed skills at any point in an experience profile. It is becoming more widely used in organizations that previously had a strong culture to allow needed change in the culture or to more quickly change the composition of the management ranks. In the private sector, organizations with previously strong internal cultures that had used up-and-stay structures are moving to open themselves to more outside hiring including for the most senior levels.

In militaries, the dominant need for military knowledge and experience has limited use of this structure to certain skill groups. The military has employed an in-and-out structure in limited ways to attract professionals such as doctors and lawyers whose professional skill substitutes for military knowledge. In-and-out gives the organization the greatest capacity to change its composition and culture as skill experience outweighs organization experience and immersion in the organizational culture.

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12 The issue of plateaued employees is one that many organizations will have to face as a result of reengineering and delayering. With fewer levels in an organization, promotion is less frequent. See the later subsection on Developing for a discussion of plateaued employees.

Key to using an in-and-out structure is how much organization-specific knowledge is needed. This specific experience—acculturation in the organization—need not be at an early point in a person’s skill career but only before or immediately after entry into the organization. For example, if a military service needs an airlift pilot with 10 years of experience, does that need equate to 10 years of flying experience and six weeks of military experience or to 10 years of military experience and 3 years of flying experience beyond initial pilot training?

Most militaries dislike this type of structure because it connotes entry to higher positions from civilian life, which diminishes the military profession. It receives grudging acceptance for others regarded as professionals (e.g., doctors) but little beyond that. The basis for outright rejection of this structure appears to be the desire to preserve the strong organization culture and the profession. However, some uses of the in-and-out structure appear to enjoy somewhat greater acceptance. For example, these in-and-out flows might be acceptable: early in careers, across military services, from reserve component to active component, from a status of recent military service, from enlisted status to officer status, and from a status of no prior military service in certain skills. Additionally, this structure has been used in times of national emergency requiring a rapid and massive buildup such as in World War II. In all cases, such acceptance in today’s militaries would be grudging at best; for the future, such structures might have greater utility.

**Mixed**

*Mixed Nature.* Mixed structures can incorporate characteristics of any of the other three and thus can be designed in any number of ways. Attrition can either be natural or forced and may apply across an organization or to selected parts. Similarly, entry can be open or closed and applied differently to different parts of the organization. Additionally, the characteristics of entry and attrition could be applied differently in different segments (early or late) of a career.

*Advantages and Disadvantages.* A strategy of allowing mixed structures enables an organization to be very flexible in meeting the organizational needs for management of different skill groups at different career periods. Depending on use in various segments of a career, the mixed structure might emphasize one

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14 Many variations of use of reserve component officers on active duty are possible. Included are use in job-sharing arrangements where reservists might serve 120 days a year on active duty and the rest with a private employer and use of officers leaving active duty in more frequent active roles for several years after transition to the reserves.
set of characteristics but embody others as well. For example, a mixed structure could have entry predominantly at the beginning of a career, but a limited number of later losses might be replaced from outside the organization. Up-or-out might be used early in a career with up-and-stay as a structure thereafter. Additionally, while one usually thinks of in-and-out as a lateral entry system, it also could be a lateral exit system if appropriate inducements to leave are included.

Mixed structures can be designed to accomplish specific objectives. For example, if the objective is to meet societal expectations about opportunity for military service or career compatibility, then early high turnover might have merit and an up-or-out structure can be used early in careers. This approach would allow more individuals an opportunity to serve and might support the institutions of accession as they exist today. Additionally, forced or encouraged separation between 3 and 10 years (but not thereafter except in special cases) dovetails neatly with reserve component needs for junior officers.15

**Personnel Functions Provide Variation Within Career Flow Structures**

*Personnel Functions*

Functional personnel activities integrate the individual’s capabilities with the requirements of the position and affect outcomes. Manipulating personnel functions can provide variation within a career flow structure depending on the choices made about its various aspects. For example, maximum career length, a design concept for the transitioning function, applies to each of the career flow structures but has different outcomes in each. Selecting different maximum career lengths provides variation within the structure. The design of the personnel functions distinguishes career management systems from each other. The following subsections describe the design features of the four personnel functions—accessing, developing, promoting, and transitioning—and the variations available to policymakers.

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15“The challenge is on the officer side. What we’re faced with is 44.6 per cent of our officers are lieutenants [and] the active Army releases very few lieutenants.” Colonel Douglas Hollenbeck, Chief of the National Guard Bureau Research and Staff Support Office, as quoted in Katherine McIntire, “Meeting Force Mandate Not an Easy Task,” *Army Times*, August 23, 1993, p. 20.
Accessing

The goal of accessing is to “inculcate values, leadership techniques, and professional skills that will make an effective [officer] at the operational level.” Accessing has an important effect on the future composition of the career officer corps, the ultimate fit of officers with the service’s needs and culture, and on turnover. The function seeks to provide a military service with officers who have the needed ability—skills, knowledge, attitude, and motivation. The accessing function has a number of design features that the policymaker can vary. They include acculturation, entry ability, and initial tenures and career paths.

Acculturation. Fit—the match between individual ability and motivation and the needs of the military—must be realistic. The acculturation process increases the likelihood of fit between expectations, skills, and core values of individual officers and the military culture because it exposes the individual to the values, mores, and practices of the military culture. In so doing, it serves three functions. First, it provides the entrant with a preview of the culture being joined, and it allows the culture to judge how well the entrant will fit in. Second, the process imbues the entrant with cultural values, tightening the bond between the individual and the organization. Third, it is the entry mechanism to the profession whose characteristics include specialized knowledge and a closed community.

However, such acculturation and previewing to determine or condition taste for the military limit the process of future institutional change because those who fit best at the accession point tend to resemble those who have previously succeeded in the institution. Organizations that have chosen cultures and use a lengthy period of acculturation—education related to attitudes and norms—prior to entry have also decided, in many respects, that the ability to stay the same over time is more important than the ability to change.

17The characteristics on which fit is measured can change over time and between organizations. For example, “Perhaps often, and certainly occasionally, men cannot be promoted or selected or even must be relieved, because they cannot function, because they ‘do not fit,’ where there is no question of competence. This question of ‘fitness’ involves such matters as education, experience, age, sex, personal distinction, prestige, race, nationality, faith, politics, sectional antecedents, and such very personal traits as manners, speech, personal appearance, etc.” Chester I. Barnard, Organization and Management, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949, p. 210. Many of the public policy debates about military service since 1949 and continuing to the present are over this issue of being fit along some previously accepted but currently objectionable attribute or characteristic. In this study, we are interested in a fit of attitude, knowledge, experience, and skills of officers with legitimate military needs at various points in careers. Thus, education and experience will be part of our study but not the other factors in Barnard’s formulation. We will assume that the officer career system is based on merit and not on unrelated characteristics; other studies and reviews continue to measure the validity of this assumption.
The variation available to policymakers is to choose between long periods and short but intensive periods of acculturation and whether it occurs before or after entry. A long acculturation process such as that experienced by prospective officers at service academies or in ROTC programs allows for both acculturation and assessment of prospective fit by both the officer and the institution. Entry through short but intensive acculturation processes such as officer candidate or training schools means that the likelihood of a fit is less assured. Entry with little or no acculturation, such as could be expected with lateral entry at higher grades, also means that cultural fit is less assured. Accessing as currently done for most officers strengthens the culture of the organization as prospective officers receive signals about what the military expects.\(^{18}\)

**Entry Ability.** This design feature pertains to the knowledge and skill needed immediately upon entry. Policymakers can opt for a general knowledge level or for skill-specific knowledge. In many organizations, recently including the U.S. military, a college degree serves as a credential for a minimum amount of general knowledge expected at entry. This credential does not relate to specific knowledge or skill to do the immediate job of ensign or lieutenant—which can be taught in far less time than four years—as much as it does to the potential to succeed in a career beyond the entry job.

However, many organizations and other militaries take a different approach to what ability is needed at entry. They seek individuals with knowledge, skill, and aptitude for the immediate job and then provide further education as needed for those who continue on to full careers. For example, many militaries use enlisted service and a short but intense officer training regimen to select those who can best be junior officers.\(^{19}\) College education, if deemed necessary, is provided afterward in preparation for future assignments. Obviously, not all are expected to have the potential for executive service; nor, in this concept, is it desirable that all do.

**Initial Tenures and Career Paths.** Another variation available in the accessing function is the amount of tenure granted upon entry. In some organizations, tenure is only for the entry position without expectation of a career. Careers, if they exist at all, are a series of linked positions over time. The length of the initial tenure (length of initial commission in military terms) is typically set either to recoup a training or experience investment or to judge whether an entrant has

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\(^{19}\)This is also akin to the process that the U.S. military uses to gain larger numbers of junior officers quickly. Officer candidate programs are expanded to produce officers capable of being lieutenants or ensigns. Entry to these programs may be from the enlisted force or from civilian life.
the potential for continued service. In other organizations, the initial tenure is for the entry position, but entry carries with it an expectation of continuing into a career track (augmenting)\footnote{Augmentation—the process of becoming a career officer—is previewing after initial entry into military service and ends with judgments about officer potential to serve for a full career or at least until separated.} given successful performance in the entry position. In still others, the tenure at entry is for a career. There is not a separate decision made about continuing. In some organizations, individuals enter immediately onto fast tracks, which amount to separate, quicker-advancement career paths in the organization. In other organizations, all enter onto common career paths, and subsequent decisions govern fast tracks along those paths.

***Developing***

The goal of developing is to continue to provide values, leadership techniques, and skills for use in the organization. Career development is a series of assignments by which individuals learn new skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are then used to accomplish organizational needs, while gaining useful experience as a base for further development. Periodically, training or educational tours also develop new skills, knowledge, or attitudes that would not be gained through assignments. Variations in this function include the duration and frequency of assignments, the type of career path, and the development objectives.

Developing must balance duration and frequency of assignments to meet service needs for skills and experience and officers' needs and desires for careers. These decisions determine the minimum military experience that will be needed in each grade and over a career. Moreover, decisions must be made about whether to provide common organizational experiences to all early in a career, whether a skill or cross-skill path will lead to the highest positions in the organization, and how to deal with officers who reach development plateaus.

***Plateaus.*** Because of rapid promotion in organizations, homogeneity in the candidate pool, and shrinking layers of middle and upper management, the issue of plateauing is becoming increasingly important. A plateau is reached when the likelihood of further promotion is very low. In organizations with cultures that have previously emphasized promotion as the measure of success, plateauing is a problem because it can create the appearance of “retiring” on the job. Also, absent frequent promotion as a motivator, the organization must find other ways to provide motivation if it does not derive from job satisfaction directly. It can be
equally problematic simply to separate motivated and productive, but plateaued, managers because the result is loss to the organization of valuable human capital.

Organizations can deal with plateauing in several ways: offering more lateral (not necessarily geographic) moves with varied duties and responsibilities to keep work interesting and challenging, encouraging employees to leave voluntarily after shorter periods of service (useful where there is a high proportion of entry jobs relative to career positions), providing alternative career paths in other skills where promotion might occur; slowing the pace of promotion so that employee expectations about it are lowered, or developing of new skills with compensation and recognition tied to experience and the new skill and not to promotion. Additionally, recognition and status can be tied to career aspects other than promotion—e.g., performance, expertise, and teamwork—thus diminishing employee perceptions of plateauing.21

Duration and Frequency. Developing as a personnel function specifies the velocity of personnel movement through the chosen career structure.22 Velocity is affected by both duration and frequency of assignments along a career path, which may or may not be of fixed length. Assignments might be within or across skill groups. Policymakers have to balance the length of assignments with the number needed for individual development. And there are other trade-offs to consider. Frequent moves drive costs upward. Officers in positions for short times are less effective; costs of training and transfers are high; and risks of failure and costly mistakes increase with inexperience.

Furthermore, decisions about duration and frequency of assignment have to be made within the framework of career length. A set career length will affect the number and duration of assignments. Conversely, should a number of assignments of a given length be the dominant consideration, career lengths might have to expand to accommodate them.

Career Paths. Development can be used to link a series of career segments in various skill areas. There are three general ways to vary career paths. Paths can emphasize assignments common to the entire organization, specialized assignments, or cross-skill assignments. In many organizations, an entrant is expected to begin a career by serving in one or more positions common to all aspects of the organization. For example, in a retail organization, these would be assistant buyer or merchandise manager positions. In militaries, these would be

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22Adapted from Beer et al., *Human Resources Management*, op. cit., pp. 219–232.
operational assignments—service with soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines in squadrons, in the fleet, or with tactical units. After this initial period of common experiences, an officer might then specialize in line, specialist, or support positions within the organization.

However, another common developmental pattern is to specialize early in a skill area and not share common organizational experiences. In this paradigm, an officer could begin a career as an engineering or transportation specialist or as a pilot and stay on that skill track.

A third developmental pattern is cross-skill. In this pattern, an individual moves across skills in line and staff positions throughout a career to gain generalist experience. This type of pattern is specifically used to develop broad leadership and management skills apart from technical or even technical leadership/management skills.

These development patterns are all seen in the careers associated with the different categories of officers: line, specialist, support, and professional. Line officers devote most of their early careers to purely military skills with a later choice to be made about cross-skill experience. Typically, in the first 20 years, at least 60 percent of the time is spent in military skills. Skill and cross-skill experience is provided through both operational and staff tours. Educational experiences, both postgraduate and/or service school, enhance the military skills. A progression of command opportunities increases scope as the officer advances. Command at the O-5 level tends to be a de facto prerequisite for selection to O-6 in line skills. While most officers at the O-5 and O-6 level exit the service three years after reaching their highest grade, the career path extends to the maximum years of service. During the last decade of service, the emphasis is on use of the officer’s expertise.

Specialist officers either receive extensive training at entry (e.g. nuclear power training) or become specialists after serving a period as line officers and receiving

\[\text{23In modern militaries, boundaries between line and staff are blurring, which makes it virtually impossible to separate an organization into line and staff in functional terms. More frequently, what was perceived as staff now directly affects or links into line. Intelligence is a good example. In modern warfare, a seamless web of relationships exists between certain (not all) kinds of support and line organizations.}\]

\[\text{24Repetitive same or closely related skill experience is often referred to as “single track.” For example, a Navy surface warfare officer (who is groomed to command ships) may single track by emphasizing ship’s engineering and weapons systems. Air Force officers may single track, for example, as pilots. Army officers may choose single tracks as well. As will be discussed in the next subsection, these single tracks may be limiting for career advancement.}\]

\[\text{25Cross-functional experience is the “dual track” alternative. Using the previous example, a Navy surface warfare officer may gain cross-functional experience (referred to as a “subspecialty” in the Navy) in personnel administration (in addition to his/her primary military experience in ship’s weapons systems). The Army has also adopted a formal “dual tracking” mechanism.}\]
specialized (usually postgraduate) education. Some specialists enter military
service with the prerequisite education; they are usually given 3–6 years of
military experience the same as a line officer. The specialist has essentially a line
officer career path plus the additional time required for the specialized training
(and any follow-on training, if needed).

The support officer practices and is developed in a civilian-related skill (readily
found in the private sector) that has application or use in military service.
Approximately two-thirds of the career path is dedicated to that skill from an
occupational, as opposed to a military, perspective.26

Officers who enter the service with a profession (doctors, lawyers, chaplains,
nurses, etc.) have career paths dominated by providing professional services.
Initial military training is minimal.27 Early tours are primarily within the
profession. In the second decade, emphasis increases on developing
management skills for use within the profession as an alternative. Thus, a
professional officer is frequently afforded a career path whereby he or she may
continue to practice the profession, or pursue a management path within the
profession.

Career paths typically specify either skill specialization or cross-skill experience
as the success path—the career path that leads to the highest positions—and
mandate management and leadership, which the military calls command,28
within either. An emphasis on cross-skill mobility as the success path lessens
barriers between skills, develops officers who understand the views of
specialists, and cultivates officers committed to the solution of operational
problems. However, this approach sacrifices depth-of-skill expertise and creates
a two-class system that can be damaging to the morale and expectations of
individuals in skill paths. For the military, the cross-skill track appears to be
regarded more highly than a specialist skill path. Additionally, management—

26A line officer might receive cross-skill experience in accounting and subsequently use that
expertise to better understand a command budget. A support officer receiving similar accounting
experience would subsequently use that experience to ensure that the accounting function was
performed professionally in the military.

27The Marine Corps tends to be an exception. There are limited numbers of officers in the
professions because support in these areas is provided mainly by the Navy. Lawyers receive
traditional Marine early experiences.

28In some services, the trend has been to designate many management positions, even those in
staff areas, as commands. Van Creveld uses the word “command” in “much the same way as people
commonly use the term ‘management’ to describe the manifold activities that go into the running of a
business organization.” Van Creveld, Command in War, op. cit., p. 1. JCS Pub 1-02, December 1, 1989,
defines command as “The authority vested in an individual of the armed forces for the direction,
coordination, and control of military forces.”
command—has been prized. Whether either of these remains as the success path in the future is one of the choices to make in designing the development function.

**Development Objectives.** Career development can be driven by a timetable dictated by military and service needs or by individual needs. Career paths and timetables driven by service needs—the requirement for military and skill experience—are the basis for determining the minimum experience needed for an officer to be considered qualified. Career paths and timetables that accommodate an individual officer’s needs are related to career commitment and satisfaction.

**Promoting**

Promotion closely relates to development. Promotion is movement to a higher level in an organization with more responsibility and more compensation. Promotion is part of the formal reward system of the organization. The promotion function governs (1) how much vertical movement exists in the officer career management system, (2) at what points in a career it occurs, and (3) on what basis. The chosen career flow structure and promotion concepts can be used to create grade structures of any conceivable shape—not just a pyramid—to support requirements for grades. Choices need to be made about attaching rank to people or positions, timing and opportunity, promotion zones, the number of steps in the system, the mechanics, the basis for promotion, and the objective of promotion.

**Rank-in-Job vs. Rank-in-Person.** Variation in this design aspect attaches rank either to the position or to the individual. Most organizational career systems are based on a concept of rank-in-job. That is, the content of the job itself

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29 According to recent reports, the Army is debating whether to attach the same importance to some noncommand jobs that it attaches to command tours. Sean D. Naylor, “Job Debate Stalls New Career Maps,” *Army Times*, November 29, 1993, p. 3. Most military officers do not command combat units but contribute to performance in today’s complex organizations in diverse ways.

30 Appendix I discusses career paths and the need for military experience in greater detail.


32 In some organizations the compensation system is divorced from the management track so that pay inversions—technical expertise rewarded more than management ability—occur. In the military, payments for specialized skill or expertise have been both in the form of retention bonuses or incentives and in the form of frequent promotions through a skill track independent from management.
determines an individual’s status in the organization. Promotion tends to be based on performance and not seniority.

The military and some other organizations (e.g., universities) typically use a rank-in-person system. This system is also widely used among the professions. Status in the career hierarchy is based on validation of levels of competency and not on the content of any particular job being done. Rank-in-person uses a series of grades that are structured organization-wide to accord status. Rank-in-person fosters loyalty and commitment to a particular organization because status does not change even if the content of the job changes. With rank-in-person, promotions tend to be based upon some combination of seniority and merit.

In a rank-in-job system, the requirements structure determines the amount of promotion and the point at which it occurs. Rather than specifying a numerical promotion stream over the life of a career in advance, the stream is measured after the fact as people move upward only as others move out of fixed positions. The career promotion streams can only be identified and measured retrospectively. The analysis of these systems in which promotion takes place only as vacancies occur is limited to predicting promotions given fixed numbers of positions and people. The organizational structure of positions controls the amount of promotions.

In a rank-in-person system, promotions occur independent of requirements. After promotion, individuals of incorrect rank for the position are assigned to different positions. Frequently, the organizational requirements structure adjusts to the amount of allowed promotion over a longer period of time. Promotion streams can be predicted. The analysis of these systems is akin to determining the number of positions needed at each grade to support consistent, average
promotion rates. Control of the rank-in-person system has to be placed either on fixed promotion rates and times applied to variably sized cohorts or on maximum numbers of people in certain grades—a grade table—with promotion rates or times as the variable.

**Promotion Steps.** This design feature pertains to the number of grades in a system. The concept of having six grades between entry and general/flag rank is rooted in tradition, common in most foreign militaries, and organizationally useful. Of course, not every grade is needed in every organization where officers serve in the military, and the concept of skipping grades (which results from delayering or reengineering) in certain organizations has merit if not all grades are needed. Additionally, all skill groups may not need these same six grades. For example, the professional skill group tends to have only four grades between entry and general/flag rank. There is no reason why other skill groups could not have fewer grades, and even skip grades, even though the overall system has six. We accept that the officer career management system should have six grades but assume that not all grades are needed in all organizations.

**Promotion Opportunity and Timing.** In the military organization, promotion opportunity and timing relate to whether a promotion will occur and when. The first is the probability of promotion occurring measured either from the previous grade or from the entry grade. The second is a measure of how long—either expected time in the organization or average time spent in a grade—between promotions. These two measures, promotion opportunity and timing, can be represented together as promotion outcomes. These outcomes are a result of the promotion decisions and the chosen career flow structure. Policymakers can vary either to achieve different effects. An example later in the section shows how the composition of the officer corps can change depending upon what promotion decisions are made.

Promises of consistent future promotion opportunity and timing can be made only under an assumption of the steady state. One assumes that opportunity and timing are optimal for current cohorts—groups of people usually defined as having entered the organization at about the same time—and also for the future experience of a new entering cohort. If this assumption does not hold—e.g., if an abnormally large or small cohort enters the system or an existing cohort

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37It is interesting to speculate how much the current design of the officer career management system has been driven by the capability to analyze large, steady-state flows through fixed career structures. Markovian-based models and computers have made the math about careers precise, given the right assumptions, and also make it appear that officer careers have been numerically fit to the analytical assumptions underlying the mathematical models.
continues in the system at an unexpected rate—then promotion experience should be either greater or lesser than that designed.

In practice there are likely to be pressures to maintain both the eventual proportions promoted and the [timing] at promotion. However, if the relative grade sizes are to remain fixed these cannot both be maintained simultaneously unless the [entry] distribution remains stable. Thus some compromise between these two situations must be adopted. Empirical studies indicate that [timing] at promotion is often more sensitive than the proportion promoted.38

Promotion Zones. The length of promotion zones provides another variation within the promotion function. Generally, with promotion zones, length of time in a grade is divided into three intervals. In the simplest case, the first interval is the group that meets the minimum service requirement for promotion; normally only a few selections are made from this group. (Those selected are then on what is called a fast track because they are advancing more rapidly than their peer group.) The middle interval represents the promotion zone, and the designated promotion opportunity and timing apply to people in this zone. Most individuals are promoted when in this zone. The top interval is the group of those not previously selected for promotion from the middle interval, and few are typically promoted from this group. This is, in general, how the zones work for most officers to most grades in the U.S. military.

However, more-complex modifications can be designed into this basic promotion zone concept. For example, greater numbers may be promoted from the first interval, which gives the system a fast-tracking emphasis. The amount of first interval selections could also be varied by grade, which creates fast-tracking early or fast-tracking late situations. Alternatively, the end point of the second interval can be made very long (at the retirement point in the extreme), which means that people flow constantly into the central promotion zone based on time in the organization or in grade but leave the zone only by promotion or separation from the system; there is no binding arbitrary upper interval precluding further promotion consideration. (This approach also tends to eliminate promotion as the mechanism for forcing attrition in an up-or-out system.) The length of these upper intervals can also be varied by grade. The length governs at what grade and how quickly officers accumulate in the overall system.39

39Increasing promotion opportunity to a grade with a fixed upper interval or reducing the upper interval with a fixed opportunity to the higher grade has the effect of moving officers from the
Combining the two concepts about variability in length of zone intervals and amount of allowed promotions from the first interval allows for more promotion variance within a seniority-based promotion system. Promotions from the first interval continue to be made, so a fast track exists. However, a more lengthy second interval is used. All with minimum seniority qualifications remain eligible for promotion based on merit for a longer period. The best from this large group are selected at designated promotion opportunities, which might or might not be specified by year. Those not selected remain eligible for future promotion consideration until they reach the upper interval limit. This type of promotion design reduces the numerical emphasis on promotion because opportunity is spread over several cohorts; dampens, but does not end, individual expectations about promotion because the individual remains in promotion consideration; and provides lengthier opportunity for promotion, which motivates people. The point is that a promotion zone system does not have to be consistent in its intervals at every grade but can be used to create differential and more variable outcomes by grade. Additionally, with a larger group to choose from for promotion, one can select for promotion those with desired skills or characteristics if the needs of the organization change.

Promotion Mechanics. The mechanics of promotion selection can be varied, which also affects outcomes. In some organizations, individuals are selected for advancement through a central process based on merit and/or seniority. However, many organizations have used a decentralized “post-and-bid” system either for all advancements or for certain positions that have a history of high turnover or that are generally less desirable. In a post-and-bid system, vacancies are announced and individuals choose to compete for them. Merit and/or seniority criteria are applied only to those who have expressed an interest for a particular position.

Promotion Basis. The basis for promotion offers policymakers a considerable range of variation. Organizations can promote based on strict seniority, merit independent of seniority, or some combination of merit and seniority. Additionally, cohort promotions can be made by advancing all who meet qualifications rather than just those individuals who best meet them. Seniority could either be seniority in the organization or in the present grade. Strict seniority has many benefits in that it is impartial, helps maintain group solidarity, fits in with cultural norms that accord status to the more experienced, and rewards loyalty to the organization. The arguments against using seniority are that it may allow people who are not the best qualified or who are

grade more quickly. Decreasing opportunity or lengthening the interval for another grade means slower flow from that grade and greater accumulation of officers.
unqualified because of age to occupy important positions, it may discourage ambition, and it may undermine morale. Long years of service with superior performance on the current job does not guarantee ability to perform higher-level jobs. Pure merit systems reverse the pros and cons of strict seniority. They reward those who perform best and are judged to have the greatest future potential without regard to their length of service in the organization. Most military organizations tend to use a combination of merit and seniority as the basis for promotion.

A rank-in-person system that uses merit as one basis of promotion requires choice between advancing all who are qualified (cohort merit) or only those with the highest qualifications (individual merit). The U.S. military uses combinations of “fully qualified” and “best qualified” promotions at different grades and in different skills. For example, lower-grade promotions for most skills are on a fully qualified basis (cohort promotion) and later promotion (to grades O-4 and above) are on a best qualified basis. However, in other professional skills such as medical, promotion is on a fully qualified basis to all grades below flag/general. Fully qualified promotion after minimum periods of seniority reinforces the perception of the use of promotion to reward seniority and is also consistent with advancement in a profession. Best qualified promotion with minimum seniority does the same but to a lesser degree.

Promotion Objective. How much emphasis should be placed on promotion in a career system? Can it be under- or overemphasized to the detriment of the organization and those who are not promoted? Emphasis has certainly changed over time in the military. In the 1941 Army Officers’ Guide, promotion was part of a chapter that included leaves of absence and retirement and was covered in a half page. (Leaves of absence took one and one-half pages.) The only numerical constraint was minimum years of service at each grade required for promotion to the next higher grade. By 1989, promotion was a separate 10-page chapter (authorized absences had grown to only 6 pages) that was imbued with numerical constraints of grade tables, selection rates, time in service, promotion opportunity, and minimum time in grade. In 1941, the words “passed over” did not appear; by 1989, the section on career expectation was built on the notion of “twice failed for selection.” The question is not whether the promotion system of 1941 was better than that of 1989, but whether there are

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40 During the current drawdown, greater selectivity is being shown at lower grades to increase separations.
benefits to be captured by using the more modern promotion concepts (more merit and less strict seniority) in a less numerically driven, nonfailure-related career like that of 1941.43

One can arrive at about the same point in careers via different routes. For example, allowing 50 percent of O-5s to be selected to O-6 in a one-year promotion zone interval equates to allowing a 10 percent opportunity from a five-year promotion zone interval in which large numbers have accumulated. It also allows more flexibility in that if skill or knowledge needs change over time, a larger pool exists from which to select the needed people. Said another way, a reasonably open-ended upper interval for promotion (much like that used in selection from O-6 to general/flag rank) deemphasizes the instant failure of the many and celebrates the periodic advancement of the few. However, this implies that the promotion system is used for selecting those who are being advanced and not for selecting those who are being separated.

**Transitioning**

Transitioning is movement from the organization and can be at an intermediate point or at the end of sufficient service for retirement. The transition function should include decisions about whether to grant tenure to officers, retirement policy, maximum career lengths, and integration with other career management systems such as general/flag officers and reserve component officers.

**Tenure.** Tenure is a contract between the organization and the individual that protects individual rights by limiting involuntary separation as a management practice. The variations are whether to grant it, when, and for how long. If tenure for continued service is granted to officers, the military must take extraordinary care in selection, development, promotion, and internal movement because the officers are protected from separation. Guarantees of long tenure provide the most stability for the individual but the least flexibility for the organization. Lack of tenure guarantees reverses this. Individuals are more likely to commit to organizations if their service in the organization is not likely to be ended abruptly. However, the lack of tenure for individuals in organizations can be overcome by the organization providing outplacement

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43For example, a recent article explaining promotion in the Marine Corps is a complex assessment of the mathematical intricacies of modern promotion. The article explores actions “the Marine Corps is taking, or is planning to take, to reduce the flow points to the field grades.” The article highlights the Marine Corps’ “Flow Point Reduction Plan” but never addresses the meaning of promotion other than in its use in forcing greater attrition to allow for more promotion. “By using reduced promotion opportunity, VSI/SSB, and the current early retirement options, excessive promotion timing should decrease substantially after FY97.” Major Michael L. Gregory, “Why Is It Taking Longer to Get Promoted?” Marine Corps Gazette, April 1993, p. 36.
services and transition payments to individuals who voluntarily or involuntarily separate to accommodate organizational needs prior to retirement eligibility.\textsuperscript{44} Flexibility for the organization is obtained in this manner while still affording the individual some financial stability if not career protection. Thus, for the organization, the choice becomes whether to provide some amount of tenure to engender commitment to the organization or to buy maximum flexibility by promising outplacement services and transition payments when separation occurs.

**Retirement.** An organization can vary the point at which transition—early separation or later retirement—takes effect by skill, grade, and experience or hold it uniform across some or all skills, grades, and experience levels. We are not examining retirement policy in this study. Recent research addressed this issue,\textsuperscript{45} and we generally accept the assessments of that research, which suggests two policy issues that are relevant to the issue of variation. The first addresses the period of service required before qualifying for some form of annuity, and the second deals with the point at which individuals should be encouraged to separate. The researchers observe that vesting with an annuity early is unlikely to change retention or work effort and thus represents a giveaway. Thus, early vesting does not provide any additional flexibility in force management. The research does suggest that about a 10-year vesting is correct because it clearly distinguishes separation payments from old age benefits.\textsuperscript{46}

**Maximum Career Length.** This design feature can vary by length across all skills or within skill or grade groups. Making the decisions is difficult because quantitative analysis provides little insight. Reasoned debate about the meaning of and future need for youth and vigor throughout a career, about societal practice, comparisons with comparable public safety jobs, and review of military tradition and practices of other militaries may be of more assistance. In all of

\textsuperscript{44}Modern outplacement practices have begun to be perceived as serving two purposes: assuaging managerial guilt (at having to terminate committed employers) and managing survivors (continuing to engender commitment in those who remain).

\textsuperscript{45}Asch and Warner, “Should the Military Retirement System Be Maintained?” op. cit.

\textsuperscript{46}Vesting is the right to share in a pension fund after certain periods of employment and can be implemented in several ways. The Employee Retirement Income Security Act, which regulates such plans, does not apply to plans established or maintained by the U. S. government. We will consider early vesting without an immediate annuity in our study at points around 5 to 10 years of service because we desire in some alternatives to separate officers at these points. We believe the demands for equity and the availability of such vesting in the private sector after limited periods of service make this a commonsense approach even though it represents a “giveaway” in the Asch-Warner formulation. We make no economic assertions that our point of vesting is theoretically correct; we assert only that it is equitable with the private sector practice given separation after a sufficiently long period of limited service.
these, the evidence appears to be on the side of longer allowed careers for the future.47

As with use of age or age-based experience as the forced attrition mechanism in an up-or-out system, the argument about maximum career lengths pivots on whether the requirement for youth and vigor necessitates retirement or separation by a certain age. This argument can be simplified by reasonable approaches. First, those who are no longer qualified as determined by medical and physical performance standards should be precluded from further military service and taken care of through disability retirement and separation procedures.48 (There are exceptions to these standards.) Second, general physical fitness standards, regular physical fitness testing, and height/weight standards should provide screens for determining remedial action for those who are temporarily not qualified.49 Third, job-specific fitness and health standards should be developed and used if needed. (For most officers, general fitness levels should be sufficient for continued service.)

Our research has uncovered a wealth of information about career length and retirement age. None of it allows a quantitative determination of retirement age for officers, but it does provide policymakers who must address these issues with important information. Major conclusions from this aspect of our research include the following:

1. “Age is a poor predictor of the decline of stamina, strength, reasoning, and comprehension.”50

2. Military officers are healthy and vigorous at all ages at which they now serve. A recent study of physical fitness in the Army showed that “senior age groups performed well overall” and were generally more fit than their younger counterparts.51 Military officers have a significantly higher level of

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47 We have separated two related issues: length of an allowed career and the forced attrition mechanism in an up-or-out structure. They appear related because age is the measures for both. However, one could have long, or short, military careers in any of the career structures. In an up-or-out structure, not all are allowed to reach the maximum career point. In other career structures, far more are. The choices are independent of one another. Research about age in nonmilitary organizations is reported in the next section.


49 For example, the purpose of the Army physical fitness test is to ensure the maintenance of a base level of physical conditioning essential for every soldier in the Army regardless of skill. The event standards are criteria-based and designed to establish the minimum acceptable level of physical performance.


physical fitness than their civilian counterparts because of precommission screening and emphasis on fitness in military culture.52

3. Job-specific fitness standards for individuals should govern youth and vigor needs.53 There may not be measurable differences of need for youth and vigor between contiguous grades (e.g., recently in the Air Force, brigadier generals who can serve for 35 years have replaced as wing commanders colonels who can serve for 30 years; in the Navy, O-6s who can serve to 30 years have replaced O-5s as air wing commanders on carriers).

4. Current mandatory retirement for U.S. military officers is age 62 unless retired or separated earlier. Most are separated or retired earlier because of intermediate tenure points by grade. Senior officers are allowed to serve for longer periods of service than officers of lower grades. For example, retirement-eligible officers in the grade of O-4 who have failed selection for promotion to the grade of O-5 for the second time must retire, which usually occurs with about 20 years of service; officers in the grade of O-5 not selected for O-6 generally must retire after 28 years of service, and O-6 generally must retire after 30 years.

5. Social trends in the United States are toward an older labor force but earlier retirement. “Age at retirement has fallen by between four and five years for both men and women since mid-century; continued declines are projected for the 1990’s, accelerating for the period 2000–05.”54 At the same time, the number (and percentage) of people over 60 is the fastest growing group in America, and they are reentering the workplace in increasing numbers.

6. National policy is to not tie mandatory retirement to age. Exceptions exist until January 1994 for some, including state and local public safety occupations.55 However, federal law enforcement officers are required to retire at age 57.56
7. Fifty-five to sixty years of age is the typical age at retirement in foreign militaries and in public safety occupations.\textsuperscript{57}

There is no analytical evidence for maximum career lengths as they exist now or for any particular career length applied as a group standard to officers in all skills. Comparable public sector organizations and foreign militaries establish retirement age norms, for the grades we are studying, at 55 to 57 years of age.\textsuperscript{58} For an officer who enters through existing accession programs, these age limits mean the maximum career length would be approximately 35 years. In militaries, career length or retirement age generally does not vary by skill group; in the public sector, certain occupations have maximum career lengths in law or have allowed for them to be set by state or local jurisdictions.

**Integration with Other Career Management Systems.** A consideration for the transition function is the amount of integration that should exist with other career management systems. In particular, the officer career management system feeds the general/flag officer system and must be capable of providing officers developed to meet those requirements. Also, the active military has become the major provider of officers to the reserve component, particularly for the Air Force and Marines. Moreover, Congress has specified that the Army must increase the proportion of Army National Guard officers with prior active-component service. From a larger organization view, it may be desirable to have officer transitions occur at particular points to satisfy reserve component needs even if that may appear more costly for one of the components. For example, the active component has been cited as the component that can most effectively develop an officer while the reserve component is often cited as most efficient in husbanding that capability at lowest cost.\textsuperscript{59}

**An Illustration of the Effect of Personnel Functions Within Career Flow Structures**

The discussion thus far has described four career flow structures, the critical personnel functions, and the different variations available within these functions. The personnel functions interact with the career flow structure to produce very different officer populations. This subsection illustrates the effect of the interaction between the promoting function and three career flow structures.

\textsuperscript{57}Appendices D and E.

\textsuperscript{58}This is also similar to the retirement age of 58 for a colonel suggested by General Eisenhower in his often cited testimony in support of an up-or-out system for the Army in 1947. *Hearings Before the Committee on Armed Services United States Senate on H. R. 3380*, July 16, 1947.

\textsuperscript{59}NDRI, *Assessing the Structure and Mix of Future Active and Reserve Forces*, op. cit.
The next three figures show a grade distribution—the proportion of all people in the organization at each grade and the points in years at which service in a grade begins and ends. These figures highlight the relationship between grade and years of service (which typically correlates with age and military experience) that results from different career flow structures.

As shown in Figure 4.2, in an up-or-out structure using promotion as the mechanism for forcing attrition, one cannot attain a career of maximum length (shown in this figure as 30 years) except through promotion to the highest grade. The upper bound of the next lower grade (O-5) terminates before the 30-year point. For example, only O-6s are in the career system after year of service 29. The timing of the expected promotion to a higher grade relative to the career length is extremely important. An officer is separated from the career at the intermediate grade and experience points designated by the promotion system. No one continues to the end point of the career in lower grades; failure to get promoted means the officer must leave. The area allocated to each grade depends on promotion opportunity and time between promotions.

In Figure 4.2, there is a close relationship between grade and years of service. For example, a vertical look at year of service 15 shows all officers to be at grade O-4.

In the mixed career structure shown in Figure 4.3, the first four grades are governed by up-or-out as above but the two highest grades use an up-and-stay
structure and are allowed to reach the end of a longer career of 40 years. Promotion timing defines career length for the two lowest grades, which are separated prior to 11 years of service, and for the two intermediate grades, which are allowed to stay for careers of intermediate length—about 20 and 30 years, respectively. In Figure 4.3, there is less of a grade and year-of-service relationship in that officers exist in grades O-3 and O-4 at year of service 15. Moreover, the grade of O-5 now covers a range of about 20 years of service (year of service 20 to year of service 40) as opposed to a range of about 10 years as seen in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.4 represents career and promotion outcomes for another mixed structure that combines up-or-out for the two lowest grades with in-and-out for all grades. Career advancement measured by promotion opportunity is less stable. Individuals are promoted at points shown but also are hired at the various grades as substitutes for internal promotions depending on the organization's needs for skills and technical experience. Military experience at each grade can be short or long—grade becomes more a function of skill, education, and experience than of military service. Additionally, in this example, age and military experience do not have the usual relationship, in that older individuals could be serving in lower grades for short periods of military service before leaving and younger persons could be senior in grade but not military
experience. For example, all six grades are now represented at year of service 15, and the O-5 grade now ranges over all 40 years of service.

Summary

This section has described the general personnel functions and discussed how the interaction between those functions and policy decisions determines a career management system. It has also described how policy decisions about entry and exit determine the fundamental shape of the career flow structures. Policy variations in other personnel functions can tailor the career management system in a variety of ways to accomplish different organizational objectives. The next section investigates the operation of a number of different career management systems.

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60This is another reason why militaries tend to dislike in-and-out structures. The assumption of a consistent age/military-experience profile is the usual one.