6. Alternative Officer Career Management Systems

Introduction

This section describes the design of the alternative officer career management systems that we will evaluate as we address the key research issues suggested by the Congress and the DoD. The alternatives are different in the way people flow through a career and are accessed, developed, promoted, and separated.

Design of Alternative Career Systems

We specified five alternative officer career management systems. They are designed to have markedly different characteristics such as longer maximum career lengths, greater reliance on lateral entry, and different promotion patterns. One alternative career system was constructed to replicate the DOPMA career management system. The other four are constructed to capture issues of specific interest to the Congress and the DoD as they contemplate future officer systems. These issues include different regulation of flows into, within, and out of the officer corps; rules that provide for less turnover and greater stability; stable career advancement patterns that encourage longer careers; greater use of lateral entry; and longer careers as the rule rather than the exception with up-or-out features of DOPMA adjusted accordingly. These four alternatives cover the relevant range of issues of interest. Our designs were informed in detail by our research on career management principles and by observations regarding actual career systems in the current U.S. military, foreign militaries, government agencies, paramilitary organizations, and the private sector.

We begin with a summary comparison of these five alternative career systems in Table 6.1. Each of the five alternatives has been given a name that captures its central feature. Important characteristics of interest that we do not vary among the alternatives are listed as assumptions following Table 6.1. We follow with a detailed description of each alternative using its salient features.
### Table 6.1
**Key Characteristics of Career Management Alternatives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career flow structure&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Up-or-out</td>
<td>Up-or-out</td>
<td>Up-or-out in-and-out</td>
<td>Up-and-stay</td>
<td>Up-or-out first 10 yrs, then up-and-stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced attrition means</td>
<td>Not promoted</td>
<td>Not promoted</td>
<td>Not promoted</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Not selected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessing Entry point Initial tenure</td>
<td>Year 0 Career</td>
<td>Year 0 Career</td>
<td>Years 0, 5, 10 Career</td>
<td>Year 0 Career</td>
<td>Year 0 Entry positions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Early experience</td>
<td>Skill As needed</td>
<td>Skill As needed</td>
<td>Skill As needed</td>
<td>Most in line Line to skills</td>
<td>Skill As needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill group migration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting Promotion timing</td>
<td>O-4=10 years O-5=16 years O-6=22 years</td>
<td>Adjusted to meet grade requirements</td>
<td>Adjusted to meet grade requirements</td>
<td>Adjusted to meet grade requirements</td>
<td>Adjusted to meet grade requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion opportunity</td>
<td>O-4=80% O-5=70% O-6=50%</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Similar % over a longer promotion zone</td>
<td>Similar % over a longer promotion zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion zone interval</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitioning Maximum career length</td>
<td>30 years</td>
<td>35 years</td>
<td>30 years</td>
<td>35 years</td>
<td>35 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate tenure</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outplacement services</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition payments</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vesting Retirement with annuity</td>
<td>None 20 years</td>
<td>None 20 years</td>
<td>None 20 years</td>
<td>10 years 20 years 30 years</td>
<td>10 years 30 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory retirement&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>30 years 35 years</td>
<td>30 years 35 years</td>
<td>30 years 35 years</td>
<td>35 years 35 years</td>
<td>35 years 35 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>Lateral entry for professional skill group in all alternatives.

<sup>b</sup>If not promoted to general/flag.
Assumptions

In designing alternatives for evaluation, we wanted to be explicit about important assumptions we were making for this analysis. Most of these represent aspects of personnel functions that we do not vary. Others are particular considerations that we believe should be emphasized because they are inherent in the officer management system and changing them would more fundamentally change career management (e.g., moving to a rank-in-job system or decentralizing officer management).

- Primary peacetime accession sources are based on long previewing and acculturation (service academies and ROTC).
- Potential for full career is an entry consideration; a college degree is the credential for this.
- Initial development capacity is adequate, i.e., there are sufficient entry-level positions to give needed experience to entering officers.
- Officers who reach development and promotion plateaus can be effectively managed.
- Six officer grades or levels of responsibility are appropriate. For analysis, O-1 to O-3 are grouped.
- Career system for these grades will remain rank-in-person.
- Decisions within the career system are centralized. Decision systems can support central determinations.
- Promotions are based in some part on seniority and not just on merit. Cohort promotions exist for grades below O-4. Cohort promotions exist for professional skill group.
- Some fast-track promotions are desirable to the military service and to the individual.
- Unqualified officers (substandard performance, permanent medical or fitness limitations) are separated or retired.
- For initial evaluation purposes, an officer career system must meet grade and skill requirements. An officer career system is not controlled by an external constraint such as a grade table. (This analytical assumption is needed to assess the effects of the concepts used in the alternatives. The adequacy of the grade table is evaluated separately.)
Alternative A: DOPMA Short

This alternative career management system was based on the DOPMA officer management system, which is what career management practice would revert to at the end of the drawdown if nothing changes.

The alternative reflects the current up-or-out structure and the personnel policies of DOPMA; i.e., officers who twice fail promotion are separated. The system considers four skill groups (line, support, specialist, and professional) with lateral entry only for professionals.

Officers enter with initial expectations for a career or with high expectations for augmenting into career status given successful performance. Early development is within skill group; officers migrate between skills as needed. Promotion opportunity and initial promotion points are those of DOPMA. Promotion timing (10 years to O-4, 16 years to O-5, and 22 years to O-6) is altered as needed to meet various requirement options. Tenure is provided under DOPMA rules; outplacement services and transition payments are limited. The maximum career is 30 years and separation and retirement are in accordance with current rules; hence retirement is mandatory after 30 years of service for O-6 and earlier for other grades. There is no vesting; reduced immediate annuities begin at 20 years of service with voluntary retirement at that point.

The inventory of officers resulting from an alternative of this nature for a notional service and requirement option (Army and Option 0) is graphically depicted in Figure 6.1 below. The histogram represents the inventory that meets the specified requirement option. The horizontal axis is time in years of commissioned service. The vertical axis represents the number of officers in any given year of service.

The number of officers (3,900) in the first year of service represents the accessions necessary to satisfy the requirement option with the current (DOPMA Short) management system. The sharp drop between third and fifth years corresponds to the voluntary departure of officers completing mandatory commissioning obligations and some forced separations. About 1,800 officers remain after 10 years of service. The nearly flat part of the curve between years 12 and 19 suggests a high and stable continuation pattern during that time period. The drop-off at the 20-year point represents the first opportunity for voluntary and involuntary retirement. About 1,000 officers enter the 21st year of service.

In the discussion that follows we use similar figures to highlight key differences among the alternatives.
Figure 6.1—Typical Grade and Service Profile for Alternative A: DOPMA Short
Alternative B: DOPMA Long

The DOPMA Long alternative career management system was developed to evaluate the effect of the single change of extending maximum service careers within the DOPMA up-or-out structure. This responds to the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) Report that said: “Longer careers should be the rule rather than the exception.”\(^1\)

This alternative differs from DOPMA Short in two ways: It allows continuation to 35 years of service for officers in grade of O-6, and promotion points are delayed to accommodate different requirement options and longer career paths. (Appendix G provides the rationale for continuation rates and patterns used in all of the alternatives.)

Figure 6.2 is a typical officer profile for the DOPMA Long career alternative. The inset compares it with the DOPMA Short profile. Fewer accessions are required than for DOPMA Short, and a small percentage of officers is retained through 35 years of service.

Alternative C: Lateral Entry

This alternative career management system was developed to evaluate the single change of lateral entry from civilian life. The alternative allows qualified individuals in all skill groups\(^2\) to enter at designated times. The major differences from other alternatives are greater lateral entry and more emphasis on skill experience. A maximum career length of 30 years is used. Eighty percent of accessions are initial entry with the remainder joining as lateral entrants in the grade of O-3 or O-4 at the 5th year (15 percent) and 10th year (5 percent) respectively. These arbitrary points were chosen to demonstrate the cumulative effect of lateral entries—both in timing and quantity. Lateral entrants are assumed to have the same skill experience as the cohort they join but may lack military experience. They do not become eligible for retirement until completing 20 years of commissioned military service, so that those who enter after the 5th year of service may stay until the 35th year (30 years of military service). Promotion timing is adjusted to accommodate different requirement options.


\(^2\)As noted in Table 7.1, some lateral entry for professionals is allowed in all alternatives.
Figure 6.2—Typical Grade and Service Profile for Alternative B: DOPMA Long
(inset is comparison to DOPMA Short service profile)
Figure 6.3 represents the Lateral Entry alternative. The humps in the curve at the 5th and 10th years represent the accessions of individuals entering laterally with 5 and 10 years of skill experience, respectively. The inventory of officers shown beyond 30 years of service is lateral entrants completing more than 20 years of military service.

**Alternative D: Long, Stable**

This alternative career management system was designed to demonstrate the up-and-stay career flow structure that encourages long careers since it does not force attrition before mandatory retirement. All officers who perform satisfactorily may choose to stay for long careers independent of selection for promotion. The alternative responds to the SASC Report, which said that the “officer corps should be managed under rules that provide for less turnover and greater stability.”

In this alternative, most officers enter in the line skill group to provide common experience as the basis for long careers. At the promotion point to O-4, line officers migrate into other skill groups and further success is based on development of those skills. Officers who initially enter in support skills will have limited opportunity for promotion beyond grade O-3.

Outplacement services and transition payments are used to support voluntary attrition prior to 10 years of service and for other force management needs. Officers not selected for promotion are allowed to continue service. DOPMA promotion zones are adjusted to meet requirements and to accommodate the long career. Long interval promotion zones are used. Fast-track promotions are also included. The alternative provides vesting after 10 years of service, but immediate full annuity retirement payments do not start until 35 years after entry. Retirement at 30 years of service with a reduced immediate annuity is allowed as an option that accounts for the drop in inventory at 30 years of service. Mandatory retirement is after 35 years of service.

Figure 6.4 represents the Long, Stable career management alternative. Fewer accessions are required to satisfy requirements.

---

Figure 6.3—Typical Grade and Service Profile for Alternative C: DOPMA Lateral Entry
(inset is comparison to DOPMA Short service profile)
Figure 6.4—Typical Grade and Service Profile for Alternative D: Long, Stable
(inset is comparison to DOPMA Short service profile)
Alternative E: Career Selection

This alternative career management system was developed to evaluate several related management concepts: linking different career flow structures to enable career selection at various points in careers; a long zone promotion option that would support fast-track advancement of selected officers to one or more of the field-grade ranks based on time in grade while dampening overall emphasis on promotion opportunity; longer maximum careers; and vesting. This alternative has three distinct segments based on career selection points. An up-or-out flow structure based on development and selection for a career, not promotion, is used for the first 10 years. During the first 5 years (segment one) the acculturation of officers continues as they gain military experience and develop skills. In a sense, officers serve at the will of their military service based on recouping investment for pre- and postcommission education and training.

Those selected for continuation based on skill and experience needs (their prior development) are promoted to O-3 and enter the second 5-year segment. Selection is based on both potential in skill areas and performance. Selection rates are designed to be lower than current DOPMA promotion rates to O-3, so attrition is forced to accomplish this. Officers might choose to enter the second phase because they have developed affinity for a military career or because they will become vested after 10 years of service,4 which is included in this alternative. The second segment focuses on further development in skill areas; career selection takes place after 10 years and is again based on skill and experience needs. The best-developed officers for national security needs are selected—coincidental with promotion to O-4. The officers (best developed and best qualified) then enter career status in an up-and-stay structure. Selection into the career has been based on competency to meet expected skill and experience requirements. The system allows flows from line to both support and specialist skill grouping as needed.

The third segment encourages long careers because it does not include any subsequent forced attrition before retirement. For those with career status (retention beyond 10 years of service), retirement at 30 years of service with a reduced annuity is allowed as an option. Mandatory retirement occurs at 35 years of service.

In this alternative, promotions are made only to meet specific needs for management and command positions. Promotion decisions to higher grades use

---

4While vesting begins after 10 years of service, immediate annuity payments do not start until 30 years after entry.
wider promotion zone intervals, which make large pools of officers available. A fast track for the best qualified is provided. Field-grade officers not selected for further advancement may continue serving. DOPMA promotion points are adjusted to meet requirements.

Figure 6.5 represents the Career Selection alternative. Note the sharp declines that represent the forced attrition at 5 and 10 years of service. The outflows here, which are greater than the previous alternative, could support the officer needs of the reserve components. Also the high and stable continuation rates beyond the 10th year reflect a system with high retention and increased experience.

Summary

This section identified assumptions and defined the five career management alternatives to be evaluated. We specified alternative officer career management systems that are designed around and illustrate important management concepts taken from suggestions by the Congress, by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and by the military services; from career management principles; and from observations about the practice of career management in the U.S. military, in foreign militaries, and in military-comparable organizations. These alternatives were designed to elicit analytical information about career management concepts and were not designed to be best for any particular skill group or service nor to be best against any particular requirements option.

Specific features in our alternative officer career management systems suggested by the Congress and the DoD are

- different principles for regulation of flows into, within, and out of the officer corps
- rules that provide for less turnover and greater stability
- stable career advancement patterns that encourage longer careers
- longer careers as the rule rather than the exception
- greater use of lateral entry.

These alternatives allow us to evaluate the principles and concepts suggested. We do not specify one best alternative for the future. Many of the important
Figure 6.5—Typical Grade and Service Profile for Alternative E: Career Selection
(inset is comparison to DOPMA Short service profile)
principles and concepts may require further assessment independent of our use of them in particular alternatives.

The next section provides our methodology for evaluating these alternative officer career management systems.