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# Developing Senior Navy Leaders

Requirements for Flag Officer  
Expertise Today and in the Future

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Prepared for the Chief of Naval Personnel

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## Summary

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The career paths of Navy officers leave little opportunity for developing depth in an area of expertise outside of what, for most, is their career-long officer designator code. This is especially true for unrestricted line officers. Yet these officers are called on at the pinnacle of their careers as flag officers to lead and manage large Navy enterprises, such as the Naval Sea Systems Command, which engineers, builds, and supports the Navy's ships and combat systems, has nearly 37,000 personnel, and alone accounts for almost a fifth of the entire Navy budget. Former Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Vernon E. Clark, recognized that the Navy might not be developing the business acumen in its military personnel that is needed to command such organizations and established the position of Executive Learning Officer to address this concern.

Is there a gap in officer development that manifests itself in the flag officer ranks, and if so, what is the nature and size of it? Working with Navy colleagues through the ELO, RAND engaged in a four-step process to address ADM Clark's concerns. First, we determined the kinds of expertise required for successful performance in flag billets. Second, we created a model to identify the kinds of expertise incoming O-7s (officers with a pay grade of Rear Admiral, Lower Half) must have to satisfy flag billet requirements. Third, we compared these model-determined requirements against several years of O-7 selectees, looking for differences in areas of expertise those selectees possessed and the model-determined requirements. Finally, we used Navy planning

documents as the basis for forecasting how specific areas of expertise might increase or decrease in importance over the next decade.

The areas of expertise developed in the first step split into two distinct categories: domain-specific areas of expertise and broader, non-domain-specific areas. The domain-specific areas of expertise include many that map well to billet and officer designator codes, such as “surface warfare officer”; some that are currently used as additional qualification designation (AQD) codes, such as “financial management”; and other areas of domain-specific expertise, such as “installation management.”

One might reasonably expect that these domain-specific areas of expertise would be required by some specific billets but not by others. For example, a submarine group commander billet requires a submarine warfare officer (112X) and will not be filled by a surface warfare officer (111X). However, the list of areas of expertise also includes expertise in leadership, management, and enterprise perspective. Unlike domain expertise, these kinds of expertise are not domain-specific. Further, they are widely required by most if not all flag officer billets. For example, our data, which are based on surveys of Navy flag officers and are designed to identify the critical areas of expertise to ensure successful performance in their billets, show that expertise in “exercising responsibility, good judgment, authority, and accountability” is critical for virtually all flag officer billets.

We surveyed all Navy flag officers to identify the areas of expertise they consider critical to success in their billets. Because the leadership, management, and enterprise-knowledge areas of expertise are required of most billets, i.e., are nondiscriminatory in terms of informing billet assignment priorities, in step 2, we constructed a model to illuminate the demand for domain-specific expertise in the O-7 flag officer entry cohort. In step 3, we examined the career experiences of six years of O-7 selectees to understand the areas of domain expertise that naval officers bring to the flag officer ranks, in addition to the expertise identified by their officer designator codes. We compared the demand for domain expertise with the supply of domain expertise to identify the magnitude and nature of the development gap. Finally, in step 4, we examined future planned changes to Navy organizations and equip-

ment procurements to identify where the need for such expertise may shift in the future.

## **Requirements for Leadership, Management, and Enterprise Expertise**

We identified 38 specific areas of expertise in leadership, management, and enterprise perspective. Confirming our expectation that these areas of expertise are critical for successful performance in a wide array of flag billets, each of 22 areas of expertise was rated as critical for at least 70 percent of flag officer billets (see Chapter Four, Table 4.1). The most widely cited as critical (for over 90 percent of billets) were

- exercising responsibility, good judgment, authority, and accountability
- motivating, inspiring, and mentoring military personnel
- exercising good judgment, perception, adaptiveness, and common sense to integrate priorities and eliminate irrelevant information
- guiding expectations, managing risk, and achieving results
- resolving conflict and confrontation with and among superiors, peers, and subordinates in a peacetime environment
- influencing and negotiating with people at all levels.

## **Requirements for Domain-Specific Expertise**

Another kind of expertise required in flag billets is “domain-specific.” By this we mean expertise related to operational or functional areas, such as surface warfare or acquisition, as distinct from the leadership, management, and enterprise expertise requirements of flag billets. We characterize requirements for domain-specific expertise as “primary” or “secondary.” By this we simply mean to answer the question, “What is the most critical area of domain expertise required in a billet?” and “What is the second-most critical area of domain expertise required in a billet?” For many flag billets, we find that several different pri-

many areas of expertise are substitutable. For example, for a number of flag billets, such as carrier battle group command billets, it is critical to have a warfare expertise, but it may be in any one of surface warfare, aviation warfare, or submarine warfare. Some billets are inflexible in primary domain-specific expertise requirements: Approximately 30 percent of billets require one specific primary area of domain expertise. On the other hand, for almost 10 percent of flag billets, a flag officer with any primary area of domain expertise could perform successfully (see Chapter Four, Figure 4.2).

Many more areas of domain-specific expertise are indicated as critical for flag billets than a single individual could possibly develop in any depth over the course of a Navy career. We interpret this to mean that flag officers must be well-informed consumers of information in multiple domains. Although they can perhaps develop depth in two or three domain areas, they will need to rely on staff for depth of domain expertise they lack. Perhaps because it is recognized that flag officer billets are accompanied by a staff, our data show much more flexibility in the requirements for secondary areas of domain-specific expertise in flag billets. The most widely cited critical secondary domain-specific areas of expertise are financial management, joint and combined warfare, strategic plans and policy, warfare resources management, and information warfare (see Chapter Four, Figure 4.3).

## **The Job Book Documents Each Billet's Areas of Expertise**

The domain-specific and leadership/management/enterprise areas of expertise associated with each flag billet are available electronically through a job book that is maintained and periodically refreshed by the ELO. In addition to the areas of expertise, the job book's entry for each flag billet also indicates if the billet has special education requirements.

In the initial flag officer survey to identify the flag billets' requirements, each billet had at least two survey responses: one from the current incumbent and one from the preceding incumbent. After reconciliation and senior flag review of these responses, the *synthesized*

requirements were placed in the job book. Today, the ELO has responsibility for refreshing each billet's entry in the job book by querying the new incumbent, after he's been in the job for six months, to review and update the billet's requirements.

## Is There a Gap in Officer Development?

The gap analysis was performed by examining the area of expertise characteristics of the 2001–2006 O-7 selectee cohorts. There was no way for us to judge whether individual flag officers in these cohorts had the leadership, management, and enterprise perspectives indicated above as critical, so no gap analysis for those areas of expertise was possible. We did conduct a gap analysis for the domain-specific areas of expertise in those cohorts.

Although there is a great deal of flexibility in meeting today's requirements for primary and secondary domain-specific expertise in flag billets, the results of our modeling (discussed in Chapter Five) suggest that, to meet today's flag officer billet requirements, the Navy would especially benefit from developing the following nine pairs of primary and secondary domain-specific areas of expertise in its officers:

- Air Warfare/Joint and Combined Warfare
- Air, Surface, or Submarine Warfare/Public Affairs
- Surface Warfare/Logistics and Readiness
- Surface Warfare/Strategic Plans and Policy
- Submarine Warfare/Ship Engineering and Repair
- **Special Warfare/Counterterrorism**
- Supply Management/Financial Management
- **Civil Engineering/Financial Management**
- **Intelligence/Joint and Combined Warfare**

Many of the pairs of domain-specific expertise shown in our model solution (see Chapter Five, Table 5.4) were held by members of the 2001–2006 O-7 entry cohorts (see Chapter Six, Table 6.2). However, no flag officers in these cohorts had the requisite expertise

to match three pairs of expertise shown in bold above (see Chapter Six, Table 6.3). It is possible that some individuals did have these pairs of expertise, but it was not evident to us from the information we had available to make such judgments.

Further, our gap analysis focused only on Rear Admiral, Lower Half (RDML) selectees. A more comprehensive analysis gap analysis that focuses on the O-6 (Captain) population viewed as competitive for flag rank would be useful. The presence in this population of officers with the three primary/secondary pairs found missing in the RDML selectees would suggest that gaps could be addressed through RDML promotion board precepts. However, the absence of these competency pairs from the competitive O-6 population would suggest more serious officer development issues.

## **How Might Future Changes in the Navy Affect Requirements for Expertise?**

We examined the Navy's structure, its force development, its doctrinal documents, and its technology acquisitions for the past decade and the next decade to forecast how the demand for domain-specific expertise may change in the future. The areas of domain-specific expertise with the strongest evidence of increasing future importance to the Navy are (see Chapter Seven):

- Information Warfare
- Information Operations
- Information Technology
- Surface Warfare
- Submarine Warfare
- Special Warfare
- Expeditionary Warfare
- Intelligence
- Logistics and Readiness
- Anti-Submarine Warfare
- Littoral Warfare
- Sea Basing.

## Recommendations

If flag officer development is to keep pace with the changing demands for expertise in flag billets, it is important for the Navy to maintain an up-to-date database of requirements. A nascent mechanism for doing this exists in the ELO but will need to be nurtured and supported if it is to survive. ELO is particularly well suited to this task because of its close connection to flag officer development.

Some areas of expertise uncovered by our research as critical for success in Navy billets are not yet well defined. For example, many flag officers identified expertise in Financial Management as critical. However, face-to-face interviews with senior flag officers, conducted after the surveys were completed and reviewed, suggest that Financial Management was a shorthand way for them to convey that it is broader expertise in business-related topics that is critical for performance. We believe the same could be said about other areas of expertise identified in this research, such as Warfare Resources Management and Joint and Combined Warfare, but we have not conducted the face-to-face interviews needed to illuminate this. Fleshing out the details associated with these topics, either through face-to-face interviews or other mechanisms is necessary for the Navy to understand the nature of the developmental opportunities its flag officers require to meet these requirements.

Finally, while the gap analysis does suggest the need to develop a number of primary/secondary domain expertise pairs among pre-flag officers who are deemed to be competitive for flag selection, that analysis also demonstrates that the Navy is for the most part doing a good job in providing pre-flag officers with the necessary domain expertise characteristics to serve effectively in flag billets.