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Developing U.S. Army Officers’ Capabilities for Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, and Multinational Environments

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Summary

Introduction

Law, policy, and, most importantly, ongoing operations require the Department of Defense and the Army to develop a cadre of officers skilled in the integration of joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) capabilities into military operations. The Army is responsible for developing the specific officer management policies to provide enough officers with the right capabilities to meet this demand. Developing such policies requires an understanding of the knowledge, skills, and abilities appropriate to the JIIM domains, identification of experiences that develop these capabilities, and assessment of the feasibility of different career paths in developing the required degree of proficiency. The U.S. Army Human Resources Command’s Officer Personnel Management System (OPMS) Task Force is responsible for developing officer management policy to meet the needs of the future Army and future joint force.

Consonant with that responsibility, the OPMS Task Force asked RAND Arroyo Center to identify and describe the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to integrate JIIM capabilities into full-spectrum operations and to develop a framework that will enable the Army to better track and manage the inventory of officers who possess these capabilities. Our research team combined job analysis with inventory modeling to determine what capabilities Army officers require in the JIIM domains, what jobs develop those capabilities, and whether the Army could produce enough officers with the right capabilities to meet anticipated future demand.
Initially, the study team considered answering these questions with regard to the entire officer population. This broad scope would have been appropriate for several reasons. First, the Army consists of its active component and two reserve components, the Army Reserve and the Army National Guard. The demands that current operations place on these three components are qualitatively similar. Second, it seems intuitively obvious that reserve component officers, particularly those in the National Guard, would bring more experience and thus perhaps better insight into the intergovernmental domain. Time and resources, however, limited us to concentrating on the active component, a scope we could adequately cover in reasonable depth. Thus, while we are reasonably confident that the knowledge, skills, and abilities we identified apply to officers of all components, more work remains to be done in identifying developmental opportunities and inventory requirements for the reserve components.

Research Approach

Four research tasks made up our research approach. First, the research team conducted job analyses to ascertain the knowledge, skills, and abilities required in the JIIM domains. Job analysis is a discipline within the field of industrial and organizational psychology that identifies the major tasks that make up a given job, and the knowledge, skills, and abilities that allow incumbents to perform those jobs. Interviews with Army officers who had been successful in various aspects of JIIM environments, as well as with individuals from other services, U.S. government agencies, and nations, formed the major part of our job analyses. The full range of potential knowledge, skills, and abilities are listed and defined in Appendix A. Second, the team surveyed Army assignment officers to identify the types of positions that developed the desired capabilities. Third, the team developed alternative developmental patterns based on what we learned from our interviews and focus groups, prior RAND research, and existing literature about the development of expertise. We looked at alternative patterns that would allow the Army either to distribute these capabilities as widely as pos-
sible throughout its senior leadership, or to develop a set of experts in these domains by concentrating repeated developmental experiences on a smaller set of officers. Fourth, the team modeled the potential inventory of such officers that the Army could produce under either developmental pattern in order to validate those patterns’ feasibility and assess their suitability. As it turned out, the last two research tasks became inextricably intertwined in an exploration of expertise.

As we mentioned above, this study focused on active component officers. That focus was not wholly exclusive: our respondents included officers from the reserve components and their interlocutors, and the knowledge, skills, and abilities we identified apply broadly to all officers. Time and resources limited our investigation of developmental opportunities to the active component, however. While many of those positions have identical or at least similar counterparts in the reserve components, we did not assess the degree to which positions unique to the reserve components, e.g., those on state standing joint force headquarters, contribute to the development of knowledge, skills, and abilities relevant to the JIIM domains. Intuitively, it would seem that those positions would provide excellent developmental experience, particularly in the intergovernmental domain. More work remains to be done in this arena.

**Findings**

Our investigation uncovered few surprises. Our respondents affirmed the proposition that basic military, branch, and functional area expertise were essential to success in JIIM settings. Interpersonal skills and other integration skills tend to be of primary importance in JIIM environments, in which success usually requires voluntary collaboration between independent organizations that are frequently pursuing different agendas. These and other general findings are described in greater detail below.

- Successful performance in joint, interagency, or multinational contexts requires the application of highly developed functional
expertise to novel situations. Service, branch, or functional area expertise formed the cornerstone of Army officers’ utility in a JIIM context. Officers need to understand their specialty well enough to think beyond an Army context, however. A military policeman must be able to think and to act like a policeman; a military engineer must be able to perform as an engineer, and so on.

- The JIIM domains are qualitatively distinct, if overlapping. Simply put, success in each of the JIIM domains requires a different set of knowledge, skills, and abilities; proficiency in one JIIM domain does not completely translate to proficiency in another. To the extent that actual expertise is required, developing it requires focus and multiple experiences in different contexts.

- The strategic, operational, tactical, and institutional echelons require distinctly different knowledge, skills, and abilities. That is, jobs at these different echelons differ in kind, not just in degree. A combatant command staff is not just a bigger, more capable brigade staff.

- Broadening experiences contribute significantly to competence in the JIIM domains. For some, that broadening experience was service in the Balkans; for others, it was a tour on a higher-level staff; and for one, it was working with KATUSAs (Koreans Attached to the U.S. Army). What all these experiences had in common was that they forced officers to cope with an unfamiliar context, and that mission success depended on effective, entirely voluntary cooperation from other individuals and organizations.

- In the current operating environment, Army officers have significantly increased opportunity to gain experience in one or more JIIM domains. Our survey of assignment officers indicated that even service in “Army” positions, such as battalion or brigade commander, executive officer, or operations officer, provided significant experience in integrating joint and multinational capabilities. Officers who served on division and higher echelon staffs also accumulated significant interagency experience. Development required deployment, however. In a garrison setting, those same positions provided little opportunity for developing JIIM-relevant knowledge, skills, and abilities.
It should be possible to develop and maintain enough officers with the required knowledge, skills, and abilities in the JIIM domains widely. Our modeling showed that if the Army were to adopt a broad approach to managing experiences, over two-thirds of lieutenant colonels would acquire some sort of JIIM experience by the time they either retire or become colonels, and all colonels will have accumulated a JIIM assignment sometime in their career. Alternatively, the Army could produce substantially fewer “experts” (i.e., by concentrating multiple experiences on a smaller number of officers). It is likely that the resulting inventory could still satisfy demand. Either approach requires deliberate and effective management.

The need for breadth may be our most consequential finding. Army officers and individuals from other services, agencies, and nations with whom they worked largely agreed that competence in Army officers’ branch and functional areas was fundamental to success in any JIIM experience. The Army already spends considerable time and effort developing and refining that competence. There is very little spare time in a typical career available to develop breadth, especially if one were to add a requirement to accrue experience in a JIIM domain. For now, experience in current operations mitigates this tension significantly (Wong, 2004). Over the longer term, however, the Army might consider tilting the balance between depth and breadth of experience toward breadth. Such a shift might be appropriate if the current security environment, characterized by irregular challenges, stability operations, and the concomitant importance of nonmilitary instruments of national power persists. Alternatively, the Army might conclude that the average career is simply not long enough to accommodate all the experience an officer must accrue, and thus seek to lengthen careers for at least some officers. If breadth is valuable, however, the Army will need to incentivize it. To the extent that officers view opportunities as “not career enhancing,” they will avoid them.

The small size of our sample populations, especially for our assignment officer survey, should inspire some caution in acting on these findings. They are nonetheless consistent with other studies and the
findings of the current Joint Qualification Board. We are reasonably confident of their general validity.

There is considerable room for further research. There is probably more to be done to refine understanding of the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed in the various JIIM domains and in other emerging domains relevant to the conduct of full-spectrum operations. In particular, further study is required to better understand the unique developmental opportunities inherent in reserve component assignments, particularly in the intergovernmental domain. A large-scale quantitative study would allow the Army to align particular knowledge, skills, and abilities with JIIM domains and with echelons. Such a study should probably consider the reserve components as well. In the same vein, the Army might want to better understand the alignment of knowledge, skills, and abilities with particular echelons more generally. Our investigation indicated that individuals working at strategic, operational, tactical, and institutional echelons required different sets of knowledge, skills, and abilities, including but not limited to those capabilities in the JIIM domains. Finally, the Army could further investigate the question of expertise, including the degree of proficiency required to perform certain jobs and how that proficiency is developed.