



A Framework for Joint Officer Management

A Strategic Approach

As the United States confronts increasingly complex national security threats, military leaders must work not only with active and reserve component officers, enlisted personnel, and civilians within their own services, but also with those in other services, with the military leaders of other nations, and with both domestic and international civilian agencies. Preparing officers for joint (i.e., multiservice, multinational, or interagency) service—in the right numbers and with the right kinds of expertise—will require that the Department of Defense (DoD) define and implement a strategic approach to joint officer management. Such an approach would identify needs for education and experience in joint matters in particular mission areas and establish personnel policies and practices to ensure that officers with the required knowledge, skills, and experience are available to meet those needs. It would, in other words, focus on aligning the need to carry out particular joint missions and objectives with the supply of officers who have the requisite education, training, and experience.

The Demand for Joint Expertise Is Broad and Long-Standing

Although the drive for joint capabilities has been given increasing urgency by warfare that requires integration of effort and capability among the nation's armed forces, the military services of other nations, and other agencies of government, the call for increased "jointness" is not new. It has been reflected in legislation, in the President's National Security Strategy, and in policy reviews and vision statements issued by DoD. In 1986, Congress passed the Goldwater-Nichols Act (GNA), a major piece of legislation that reorganized the command structure of the U.S. military. Among its provisions were objectives for joint officer management, including promotion objectives and education

Key Findings

- As the missions of the U.S. military evolve, the need for education and experience in joint matters within the officer corps is changing.
- Levels of joint experience and education have risen, but different ways of managing officers to keep pace with the need for joint experience and education may be required.
- A strategic approach to joint officer management can help to align the availability of officers with joint experience and education with the demand.
- A strategic approach to joint officer management can provide a sound foundation for human resource policy decisions.

and experience requirements. Acting in accord with this legislative directive and in response to goals identified by its own analyses, DoD has sought to increase joint capability by specifying assignments—the Joint Duty Assignment List (JDAL)—that provide officers with experience in joint matters and through instruction in the Joint Professional Military Education (JPME) program, particularly JPME Phase II.

Joint Capability Is Increasing, but Joint Officer Management Is Not Keeping Pace

These activities have succeeded in increasing joint experience and education among officers, but joint

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officer management is following these trends more slowly. The policies and practices needed to ensure adequate experience and education in joint operations among the officer corps have not evolved to reflect today's environment. Further, although the level of jointness in the armed services has increased, it now appears to be leveling off and may be constrained by the size of the JDAL and the number of JPME II seats. Finally, the level of jointness varies across the services and across occupational specialties in ways that may be inconsistent with joint needs.

Conflicting Goals, Cultural Resistance, and Career Concerns Complicate Efforts to Increase Jointness

Although the idea of aligning needs and resources seems straightforward, achieving this alignment is, for many reasons, more challenging than it first appears. Certain aspects of the GNA appear to conflict with others. Perhaps most important, objectives that result from the overarching goal of increased jointness are not entirely compatible. It is difficult, for instance, to reconcile the GNA objective of increasing the number of officers who have prior joint experience serving in joint assignments with the need of joint organizations for officers with rich, current service expertise. Likewise, from the services' perspective, an understood objective of minimizing the time away from the military service for the best officers is not consistent with the GNA objective of ensuring that tomorrow's leaders are well rounded in joint matters or with the longer assignments suggested by the GNA that would enhance stability and accountability in joint organizations.

In addition to the complications of addressing these conflicting goals, the development of jointness is hindered by cultural factors and career management issues. Although perspectives vary across the services, military service culture in general tends to devalue joint assignments. Early acculturation of officers is focused on "greening" or "bluing," with limited exposure in early officer education to the concept of jointness. The limited respect for joint assignments is reflected in anecdotes provided by officers interviewed for this research.

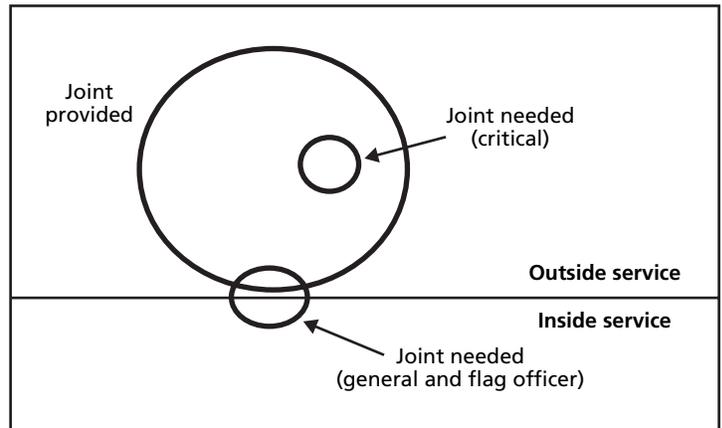
These cultural perspectives are not just biases, but are embedded in career management practices. Service personnel managers point out that officers need important service assignments to maximize the likelihood of receiving service command assignments. Having held a command assignment, the officer is then perceived to have valuable experience that is needed by service organizations. Under these circumstances, joint assignments may be "wedged into" a career path so that an officer can "check the box" for having received an experience that may not be perceived to benefit other service assignments.

Finally, there are questions about what, exactly, are the properties of an assignment that provides officers with a valid joint experience. Interviewees indicated that some positions currently on the JDAL do not provide satisfactory joint experiences and that positions not currently on the JDAL may, in fact, be a better means of acquiring experience in joint matters.

A Strategic Approach Is Needed to Align Requirements for Joint Expertise and Experience with the Supply of Officers Who Possess These Qualifications

What would a strategic approach to joint officer management look like? The figures below portray the shift in policies and practices that would be needed to achieve a better fit between requirements for particular capabilities and the supply of officers to meet those requirements.

Figure 1.
In the current system, officers gain joint experience only from a set of external positions, and a relatively small number of positions are specified as needing joint experience.



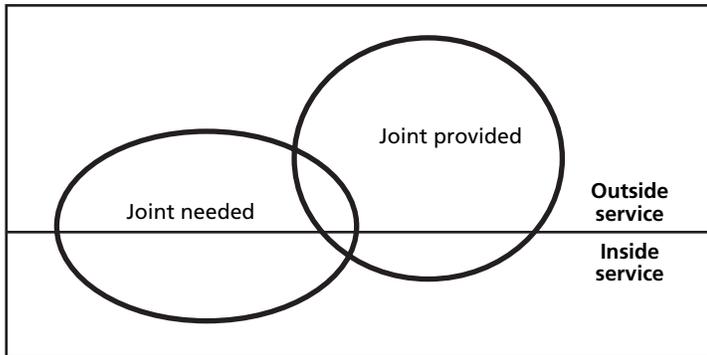
In the current system, depicted in Figure 1, only selected external billets can provide joint experience, and the positions that require joint experience are largely a subset of those that provide such experience. Up to now, efforts to change the law and implement revised policies have generally focused on identifying additional positions that provide a valid joint experience and on reducing or eliminating the recognized need for joint experience.

Unlike the current system, in which the requirements for joint experience are not well specified, a strategic approach, as shown in Figure 2, would involve a deliberate determination of which jobs, inside or outside the service, need joint experience or provide it and how many of each exist. Detailed data analysis will determine the eventual size of the two circles in the figure, their location (inside or outside the service), and the degree of overlap between those groups (i.e., which billets require prior jointness but also provide additional joint experience).

Using this approach, DoD can create a system that identifies the need for joint officers and that provides sufficient numbers of joint officers. It can address the need for joint experience in a much larger number of billets than it does now, particularly in billets internal to the service, and acknowledge that valid joint experience might be provided by billets internal to the service, particularly those associated with joint task forces, with service component commands, and with joint planning and operations. Joint assignments can also be managed in ways that ensure they are attractive

Figure 2.

A strategic approach to joint officer management is based on assessing billets that provide or require joint experience and on adopting personnel policies and practices that ensure that sufficient officers acquire experience in joint matters to meet the identified needs.



to officers. Assigning officers to positions that enable them to gain knowledge and skills that advance their potential performance in future assignments—especially key service assignments that would have an acknowledged need for such experience—would help to overcome cultural resistance to joint assignments, making these positions a desirable component of a military career rather than a “ticket-punching” exercise. Achieving these goals, of course, requires a sound plan for implementing a joint officer management strategy for aligning the circles in Figure 2.

An Effective Joint Officer Management Program Requires a Comprehensive, Systematic Implementation Plan

The process of implementing a joint officer management system requires the following five steps:

- 1. Determine workforce characteristics that will be needed in the future to meet strategic intent.** Likely characteristics include multiservice, interagency, and multinational experience, as well as joint education and training. Analysis of survey responses could eliminate one or more of these characteristics or identify needs for other characteristics.¹
- 2. Determine needs for such characteristics as joint experience, education, and training.** This step involves identifying the positions for which officers with the defined characteristics of joint experience, education, and training are needed. DoD would need to determine how many of these positions there are; whether they differ across services, occupations, or levels of seniority; and whether the need for such officers extends to in-service billets. For this step, planners and personnel specialists would have to decide which external and in-service billets need an officer with prior joint experience or education.

¹ Billet needs with respect to characteristics such as grade (experience) and occupation are inherent in position descriptions.

- 3. Determine which billets provide these characteristics and identify the number of currently available officers with these characteristics.** Existing personnel databases can be used to assess the current numbers of officers with the experience and education characteristics of interest. By surveying all external billets and selected in-service billets, DoD can determine those billets that provide joint experience to officers as a basis for projecting future availability. Current numbers and timing of JPME II seats will likely need to be used as the starting point for projecting educational qualifications. Existing personnel databases can be used to assess the current numbers of officers with the experience and education characteristics of interest.
- 4. Use models to determine how best to develop and retain a sufficiently joint officer corps.** The data collected in the preceding steps can be used to project the availability of officers with these characteristics in the future, given certain career management practices; to calculate future gaps between the need for officers and the availability of them; to refine and evaluate near-term policy alternatives to reduce gaps within the strategic context; and to develop strategies that address long-term issues for reducing the gaps.
- 5. Identify other implications of the strategic approach such as effects on objectives and desired metrics for evaluation.** By following these steps, DoD can confirm the characteristics of interest (i.e., multiservice, multinational, and interagency experience, as well as joint training and joint education); gather data regarding the need for jointness, the current stock of jointness, and the possible future provision of jointness; and evaluate the degree to which jointness can be accumulated and the extent to which the future availability of jointness will satisfy the future identified demand for jointness.

A Strategic Approach to Joint Officer Management Will Provide a Sound Foundation for Policy Decisions

By relying on systematically collected data regarding the need for and availability of the workforce characteristics and the likely effects of alternative management frameworks, policymakers can address a broad set of policy matters, including:

- Which variables should be included in a definition of qualifying joint experience
- How “joint” a billet should be in order to be considered validly joint
- Whether needs for and sources of multiservice, multinational, and interagency experience are distinct and should, therefore, be monitored and managed separately
- Whether there are service or occupational variations, such that accumulating jointness will be more difficult in some career fields than in others
- What the objectives and metrics of a system to develop officers in joint matters should be.

Looking Toward the Future

A strategic approach to joint officer management aligns human capital with the organization's mission, rather than empowering other influences such as the cultural heritage of the organization or existing managerial practices that are incompatible with achieving desired levels of jointness in specific occupations and mission areas. Implementing this approach will require extensive data gathering and complex modeling and data analysis as a foundation for defin-

ing appropriate policy alternatives, but the return on these investments will be substantial. DoD can acknowledge where jointness is needed and use its resources more effectively to achieve the jointness required in the current and future strategic and operational environment, and officers will be able to develop and employ their expertise in a way that serves military needs and that is individually rewarding. ■

This research brief describes work done for the RAND National Security Research Division documented in *Framing a Strategic Approach for Joint Officer Management*, by Harry J. Thie, Margaret C. Harrell, Roland J. Yardley, Marian Oshiro, Holly Ann Potter, Peter Schirmer, and Nelson Lim, MG-306-OSD (available at <http://www.rand.org/publications/MG/MG306/>), 2005, 234 pp., \$28.00, ISBN: 0-8330-3772-2. MG-306 is also available from RAND Distribution Services (phone: 310.451.7002; toll free: 877.584.8642; or email: order@rand.org). The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. **RAND**® is a registered trademark.

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