

T-Shaped Managers—One Size Does Not Fit All: Exploratory Study from the Military

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**T-SHAPED MANAGERS-ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT
ALL: Exploratory study from the military.**

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Abstract

People are an organization's most important resource. Managers who are collaborative and innovative ensure that organizations remain competitive. This type of manager has been referred to as a T-shaped manager. "T" given that the vertical portion represents the depth of expertise, and the horizontal portion represents the breadth of expertise. How this type of manager is created has yet to be explored. I contend that the experiences that managers have along their professional development pathway is influenced by the organization. An organization can make decisions that develop a manager's ability to sustain positive productivity. This research proposes that there is variance in the T-shaped manager and makes a distinction between what I classify as Little T-shaped managers (LtMs), and big T-shaped (BTMs). LtMs are managers whose experiences are more tactical and whose depth of knowledge is in a specific skill area. BTMs have tactical depth but also have developed a knowledge base that crosses several functional areas and are capable of more strategic thinking. I illustrate my reasoning using the United States Army as a research setting. I conducted interviews with senior leaders and leveraged additional data to form propositions for future exploration. The research highlights that often what the organization wants in its future leaders is not necessarily what it actually develops or promotes to positions of senior leadership. This work provides a framework for discussing how an organization can create the T-shaped manager it needs.

Key Words: T-Shaped Management; Leader Development; Talent Management

1. Introduction

On June 11, 2003 the Washington Post headline read, *Rumsfeld Picks Retired General to Run Army*. Just three months prior, the United States (U.S.) Army had launched an offensive in the Middle East and the U.S. Army's strategic focus had shifted to Iraq. The new mission was ambiguous and the U.S. Army was working diligently to adapt its force structure from large divisions to smaller, more agile fighting units. Though several generals qualified for the position and ranked high enough to lead the U.S. Army as its Chief of Staff, only a small number met Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld's ideal. After being turned down by two other active-duty generals, Secretary Rumsfeld called General Peter Schoomaker out of retirement to assume the role as the 35th Chief of Staff of the Army. According to Secretary Rumsfeld, Schoomaker had a "reputation as an innovative thinker and experience in a branch of the military known for the agility and mobility the defense secretary would like to see adopted by conventional Army units"(Graham, 2003). Several officers noted that the chief's position was sure to cause consternation among the most senior leaders in the organization; other three and four star

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generals. "Rumsfeld is essentially rejecting all three- and four-star generals in the Army," a senior officer said, "undermining them by saying, in effect, they aren't good enough to lead the service. But apparently he did not feel as comfortable with anybody else" (Graham, 2003).

If this dilemma sounds familiar, the kinds of challenges that leaders in the military face are common throughout non-military organizations as well. Leaders are expected to be flexible and respond competently to ambiguity. They are required to manage in the midst of resource constraints, train and develop a 21st century workforce, while at the same time, position the organization to accomplish its objectives. While the "innovative, experienced, and agile" leaders needed to address such challenges are becoming more valuable, they are also becoming harder to develop. The harder they are to develop, the weaker the pipeline of talented candidates to lead organizations (Avolio, Avey, & Quisenberry, 2010).

The U.S. Army is often viewed as a model for leader development (Groysberg, Hill, & Johnson, 2010). The U.S. Army's core strength is its ability to manage and develop people to accomplish a specific mission (Leonard, Polich, Peterson, Sortor, & Moore, 2006). The U.S. Army, like other organizations, has a defined leader development system. This system is designed to carefully train and evaluate the Soldier force. Through a series of experiences and increasing responsibility, a Soldier has the opportunity to demonstrate qualification for promotion. Promotion is both predictable and expected. The U.S. Army has also created options for the Soldier to broaden their scope. *Broadening experiences* are those experiences that place the Soldier outside of his expertise. These broadening experiences are offered at specific times in a Soldier's career, as shown in Figure 1. The broadening experiences are considered as part of a Soldier's professional development and can complement the Soldier's training requirements.

Although companies go through periods of prosperity and periods of fiscal constraint, the need for innovative thinkers remains constant. U.S. corporations and the U.S. Army are grappling with similar leader development challenges. Both organizations have invested considerable resources to develop internal talent; however, both find that talent to be inadequate to meet the

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current needs. For example, in the U.S. Army, there is subjectivity and variation in the true value the organization places on broadening experiences. It is also unclear how much consideration is given to these experiences during the evaluation process. Corporate leaders have also been re-awakened to the fact that they need strategic thinkers to lead their companies in the future (Oliver, Heracleous, & Jacobs, 2014). They realize that operating in a globally competitive environment presents serious constraints as well as tremendous opportunities for growth (Makino, Isobe, & Chan, 2004; Perkins, 2014). Nevertheless, many are struggling to develop internal systems that prepare their talent to lead the organization. During economic peaks, companies hired and developed their leadership through elaborate rotation programs (Cappelli, 2008). They also offered education opportunities at significant expense to the company. For some, this was a strategic way to gain and retain top talent. During the recession, some of those programs were the first to be cut. Now, seven years later, companies are feeling the effects of those cuts to manager development.

Organizations benefit from a pool of managers who can be classified as *T-shaped managers*. The theory of the T-shaped manager was first introduced by Hansen and Oetinger (2001). These scholars determined that T-shaped managers can operate more effectively because they possess the breadth of knowledge across the organization (the horizontal part of the “T”) while maintaining the depth of functional area expertise and commitment to their individual business unit (the vertical part of the “T”) (Hansen & Von Oetinger, 2001). The benefit of having T-shaped managers in an organization is a more collaborative and innovative environment that drives productivity (Hansen & Nohria, 2005).

The perspective explored here is grounded in a qualitative study of senior leaders in the U.S. Army. It draws parallels between the talent management pathways of the U.S. Army and U.S. corporations. The overarching question is: *How does experience contribute to the creation of T-shaped managers and impact organizational performance?* The purpose of the study is to identify the type of experiences—tactical or strategic--that result in the desired T-shaped

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manager. In this study *tactical experience* is defined as those experiences that build depth on what a manager already knows about their particular function, while *strategic experiences* are those experiences that place the employee further outside of their functional expertise, thus building breadth.

If a *T-shaped manager* is identified it is not readily apparent how the manager became T-shaped. This leads to an additional question: *What experiences make a manager T-shaped?* Furthermore, if a productive and collaborative T-shaped manager is built on prior experience, a third question arises: *Are all experiences created equal?*

The United States military is a generalizable setting to explore this phenomenon. This research is based on a convenience sample of officers in the U.S. Army and open source data. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where subjects are selected because of their convenient accessibility. All interviewees are mid-career and senior level leaders (Major (O-4) - Lieutenant General (O-9)). No junior level leaders were interviewed because they have not had the opportunity to engage in experiences that develop T-shaped managers although they do have depth, but not as much breadth. All interviewees have had some type of broadening experiences, and have been in position to advise subordinates and have received career advice throughout their years of service.

I posit from my findings that T-shaped managers are created through a set of broadening experiences and that all T-Shaped managers are not the same. Specifically, The findings suggest that there are big “T” managers (BTMs) and little “t” managers (LtMs). The BTMs have the benefit of more strategic experiences where the LtMs may have either no strategic experiences or more tactical experiences. I am able to make these comparisons based on the perceptions of the value of the broadening experiences. Organizations make decisions on where to allocate resources for employee development. The decisions can be classified as strategic or tactical. Strategic broadening expands the scope, exposes the employee to new external networks through opportunities like executive education or through job assignments that extend the horizontal

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portion of the T-shaped manager's knowledge base. Tactical broadening involves experiences that deepen the level of the employee's specific skill set. This process extends the vertical portion of the T-shaped manager. I find that what organizations express that they want and what they actually develop and promote are in conflict.

This exploratory research exposes the idea that T-shaped managers do not just exist, but are developed through a series of experiences defined by an organizations. I propose a framework for classifying experiences and offer a space for further discussions around T-shaped managers. I leverage the U.S. Army as a research setting because it is an organization that is known to be at the forefront of leader development.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: section 2, 3, and 4 outline the theoretical framework; section 5 outlines the setting; section 6 outlines the data and methods; section 7 presents and summarizes the results. Section 8 offers discussion and opportunities for future research. The paper concludes with tables and figures that support the analysis.

2. Talent Management

If people are the fundamental resource that drives organizational success, then the efficient management of the talents of people is required. Talent management is defined as “a deliberate and systematic effort by an organization to ensure leadership continuity in key positions and encourage individual advancement” (Rothwell, 1994, p. 6). Some scholars have argued that effective talent management happens as a result of a system of processes that are designed to increase an employee's productivity (Cappelli, 2008; Lewis & Heckman, 2006), while others assert that talent management is embedded in the fabric of an organization's culture. I posit that effective talent management can be achieved in both contexts depending on the industry and the skill level needed in the labor pool. Consider two scenarios; manufacturing and consulting. In a manufacturing based firm, there is significant need for managers with tactical expertise, or LtMs, and a small number of highly trained plant supervisor, or BTMs. Contrast that

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with a global consulting firm where having innovative and flexible thinkers, BTMs, may be critical to the firm's global competitiveness. In the first context, continuous training is important, while in the other, employee development and exposure may be more important. In both situations, when employees are developed strategically they can offer a competitive advantage for the organization.

In U.S. corporations, business leaders create a variety of incentives to motivate their talent to be more productive. These range from pay raises and commissions based on sales performance, to stock options and gifts (Hall & Murphy, 2003; Rynes, Gerhart, & Minette, 2004). However, some employers realize that a portion of their talent may be motivated by more than financial incentives. These firms identify those employees with high potential. They then develop pathways to ensure that the identified employees gain a strategic understanding of the organization through exposure within the firm and continued professional education. Our research seeks to understand how this type of broadening experience for the employee contributes to the sustained success of the organization.

Companies like General Motors, Citi Group, Target, and Wal-Mart place their high potential talent in a one to two year program to groom them for positions of greater authority. The rotation program allows the selected employees to work for a defined period of time, in several divisions in the companies. This gives the employee experience with achieving organizational objectives and solving problems in a variety of situations. That same highly skilled employee may not get this perspective through advancement in the same department. This development practice is people focused and companies who invest in their talent in this way hope to bear fruitful senior leaders who are equipped to steer the organization in the future.

As organizations grapple with the challenges of talent management, there is a growing need for managers to be more than just functional experts. Managers are increasingly required to operate outside of their comfort zone in order to achieve upward mobility within and outside of the firm. We consider how managers are developed to meet the strategic and tactical needs of the

company.

3. T-Shaped Management

3.1 T-Shaped Managers

It is essential that organizations create a culture that encourages employees to generate new ideas and develop more efficient processes (Anderson & West, 1998). The culture can improve performance and productivity of the firm by combining existing knowledge with newly acquired knowledge that is gained through external employee interactions that are outside one's specific expertise (Teece, 2007). Hansen and Nohria (2006) define employees with these attributes a *T-shaped managers*.

T-shaped managers benefit organizations in multiple ways. First, because the employees have a broad breath of experiences, their ability to operate in ambiguity and with minimal oversight is heightened (KC & Staats, 2012). Second, due to their deep understanding of their individual business, they require minimal time to focus on internal issues and can thus focus their efforts on improving and assisting other areas within the organizations. Finally, these types of managers will have an increased awareness of where potential opportunities exist because of their broader perspective.

Although there are benefits to generating *T-shaped managers*, organizations must be cognizant of potential pitfalls. Managers may go too far outside the scope of the firm which could create unnecessary tension between departments. For example, if an organization sends a plant manager to an executive experience that does not loosely align with the organization, when that manager returns to his previous position he may attempt to implement recently learned techniques that impede productivity. The manager's tactical expertise may be eroded due to extended time away from their primary craft (Fossum, Arvey, Paradise, & Robbins, 1986). This suggests that the farther a manager gets from their tactical expertise, their ability to coach and mentor direct subordinates decreases.

3.2 Development of Capabilities

Although the T-shaped management phenomenon has been identified, how T-shaped managers are developed, is not clearly understood. This exploratory study attempts to fill this void. Prior work on this topic contends that the horizontal portion of the T-shape is created through carefully designed experiences. These experiences may be customized by the organization. So then, the organization ultimately determines what experiences are necessary for its employees to acquire the strategic capabilities that it values (Cyert & March, 1959; Romanelli & Tushman, 1994). Nevertheless, organizations often struggle to leverage their employees for maximum organizational benefit (Appelbaum, Gittell, & Leana, 2008).

In most organizations, people are the resource that ensures organizational survival (Cravens & Oliver, 2006). Thus, it is in the organization's best interest to identify talented individuals and to provide them with an experience that in-turn produces a capability that the organization can then leverage for future sustainability (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). For example, in hospital administration many executives are doctors. In some instances these physicians will attend an executive management program to provide them with basic knowledge about hospital operations outside their realm of clinical expertise. This experience equips them with the tools to better understand management at a higher level. It also generates a T-shaped manager who can now engage with the Chief Financial Officer while simultaneously discussing the impact of other support services on patient care. Chief Financial Officer while simultaneously discussing the impact of other support services on patient care.

3.3 Variance in T-Shaped Manager Experiences

Giving managers growth and development experiences is essential to firm productivity (Cappelli, 2008). However, all experiences are not created equal. Some experiences provide managers with specific tools to carry out job responsibilities within the organization. An employer seeking to develop their managers in this way might invest in advanced training courses

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that update a skill set. For a manufacturing firm, this might come in the form of a series of short workshops or continuing education courses that focus on a specific skill.

Other experiences give the manager an opportunity to be exposed to other contexts in the organization or to extend their intellectual boundaries outside the organization. Employers who choose to develop their managers in this way might create a rotation opportunity in different departments of the company. They might also leverage graduate or executive education programs to broaden the employee's knowledge base. These two divergent experiences expand the organization's capabilities in different ways. The former is for near-term gain, while the latter has more long-term impact. The tactical focused development may not deepen the manager's network while the latter exposes the manager to an environment where new networks can be established.

Different experiences generate different types of *T-shaped managers*. One type of T-shaped manager is what we term the *Little T-shaped manager* (LtM). This manager's development opportunities are tactical in nature and closely aligned with the organization's production capabilities. The other type of T-shaped manager we term as the *Big T-shaped manager* (BTM). This manager's development experiences extend beyond the boundaries the manager's skill set and have strategic relevance to the organization. BTMs have tactical depth but also have developed a knowledge base that crosses several functional areas.

Organizations invest in employee development experiences based on the short term and long term needs. This research can inform organizations as they allocate resources for development in an effort to impact short and long term objectives

4. Organizational Impact Decisions

4.1 Short Term versus Long Term Needs

One way to frame the various experiences is by understanding how the experience influences the organization. Some experiences are closely aligned with organizational practices and functions. Experiences that are aligned with the means of accomplishing specific tasks, are

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tactical experiences (Ackoff, 1974; Choi & Behling, 1997). *Tactical experiences* build closely on what a manager already knows about their particular function. If an organization is focused on near-term productivity, it may require its employees have additional training on a production process. They may also be trained on how to identify factors that impede progress. A professional development event would target a specific experience to increase employee capabilities that are necessary to increase organizational performance. These experiences strengthen the vertical expertise of the T-shaped manager, *however the lateral exposure is limited*. Through my findings I posit that LtMs are created through these types of experiences.

While there is near-term benefit to *tactical experience*, these experiences may not provide the long-term capabilities required to sustain an organization. Where *tactical experiences* are the means, *strategic experiences* are the ends (Ackoff, 1974). *Strategic experiences* are those experiences that place the employee further outside of their functional expertise. A certain number of individuals within organizations must focus on the trajectory of the business (Argenti, Howell, & Beck, 2005). In order to do this managers need to not only look inward, but also look outward. (March, 1991; O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013) There are instances where managers need to be placed far outside of their comfort zone. Uncomfortable development experiences hone capabilities that are necessary for the manager to potentially influence the trajectory of the organization. The experiences gained by operating in an unfamiliar environment provide the foundation for operating in ambiguity later. Where closely aligned experiences create LtM, fringe experiences develops BTMs.

The two different experiences are provided to the employee because of a decision by the firm to invest in its labor force (Sagie & Koslowsky, 1994). The investment decisions are tradeoffs between developmental experiences that emphasize tactical expertise, or developmental experiences that stretch employees by placing them in situations outside of their particular expertise with the desired outcome of a more collaborative and strategic individual. This research classifies the investment tradeoffs between near-term *tactical experience*, and experiences that

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could influence long-term organizational trajectory - *strategic experiences*.

4.2 Exposure Needs

We can further classify experiences by examining the impact of those that are gained inside the organization versus outside of an organization. This distinction is important because it acknowledges the multiple opportunities within an organization that when provided, enhance effectiveness and productivity. The distinction here also highlights the differences in gains achieved through external experiences. We can easily apply these classifications across different types of organizations. For example, a manufacturing firm develops employees through a series of opportunities. One opportunity may involve an apprenticeship with another manager, while another is through certification at a local college. The former I would classify as an in-the-organization, while the later is an out-of-the-organization experience. In this study, I will refer to inside the organization as meaning inside of the Army, and outside of the organization as meaning outside of the Army. This distinction is important because there are a number of experiences that organizations can leverage to extend the horizontal portion of the “T”; however, those experiences that are truly transformational normally occur when an employee is forced outside of his comfort zone. For example, when an Army officer is selected for a Senior Service Fellowship at Harvard, in-place of attending the Army War College, that officer is completely separated from work environment norms. The officer is required to adapt to an environment where she is the only person with recent military experience. The officer must develop soft-skills to engage with colleague, while at the same time learning how to develop meaningful professional relationships with individuals who may have little understanding of the culture of the military.

Prior work found that there is a premium placed on CEOs who are generalist (Custodio, Ferreira, & Matos, 2013). However, organizations cannot sustain themselves if all employees are purely generalists. Therefore, an additional aspect to consider, is how experiences contribute to the further development of specialist versus generalist. There are certain experiences that can

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further develop these two types of desired employees in organizations. For example, the executive education opportunity discussed earlier contributes to the development of a more generalist employee. An employee who prepares and takes the exam to be certified as a public accountant is nurturing specialist attributes. The specialist engages in more task oriented activities, while the generalist must be familiar with the initial task, but also have general familiarity with tasks in other departments as well.

The T-shaped managers or leaders are created when the organization develops an employee in specific ways. The framework discussed is illustrated in Figure 2. Briefly, I classify manager development as follows; utilizing the United States Army as the organizational context. First, BTM(specialist), can be defined as transactional leaders because the organization develops this leader in the tactical/out of the Army quadrant. Second, the BTM(generalist) is defined as an adaptive leader because the organization develops this leader in the strategic/out of organizational quadrant. Third, the LtM(specialist) is defined as an operational leader because the development experiences are in the tactical/ in the Army quadrant. Finally, the LtM(generalist) can be defined as a cross-functional leader because they have a strategic orientation that lies in the strategic/in the Army quadrant.

5. Organizational Setting

To further explore the idea of the T-shaped managers, I chose to use a setting known for developing leaders, the U.S. Army. It is the perfect setting to explore this because (1) it has a clear developmental model for its employees; (2) it requires continuous professional development opportunities; (3) it is a large organization whose human resource practices has been replicated; (4) it is in the process of personnel reduction which reveals whether an adequate pipeline of future leaders exists.

Maintaining a large Army force comes at a significant expense to a country. Nevertheless, it has been considered a necessary burden for nations to bear. The key to

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maintaining a ready military force is developing talented and capable leaders. The nations that maintain extensive militaries have acknowledged this need since the dawn of warfare. Yet today, the US Army stands to lose critical combat leadership skills and experience in its officer corps as the organization is forced to downsize with the conclusion of missions in Iraq and eventually Afghanistan. The nation must address how the American military can retain the best officers to lead the future force in the face of such a massive drawdown. By implementing best business practices, lessons learned by the Department of Defense (DOD) following the major conflicts of the last century, the military is developing policies and mechanisms that better assess, retain, and employ its most talented officers. Drawing on lessons learned in over the past century, these policies are being shaped in an attempt to retain innovative leaders for the future force. In this section I examine the Army officer development model. We seek to understand how the Army officer model influences the development experiences of Army officers. We also explore how these development experiences impact the organization's leadership capabilities.

5.1 The Scope of the Problem

The United States has been at war in two separate theaters for almost ten consecutive years. The Army, in particular, was required to rapidly expand to address the pressing need for combat forces. Prior to the events of 9/11, the US Army's personnel end strength was just over 480,000 Soldiers with approximately 32 active duty combat brigades. During the war years, the force structure grew to over 570,000 Soldiers with 45 active duty combat brigades. The former Secretary of Defense, the Honorable Robert Gates, supported by the Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA), stated that in 2014 the Army would begin a deliberate reduction in personnel to pre-9/11 levels. More recently, the current Secretary of Defense, the Honorable Chuck Hagel, accelerated this force structure reduction due to budget concerns incurred from sequestration. The Army will immediately decrease to 450,000 in the near future with the possibility of a further manpower decrease to 420,000. This would make for the smallest standing US Army since before World War II. The CSA has stressed that the largest concern is ensuring the Army retains its most

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talented officers for future service as senior leaders. This concern has merit.

Following Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm in 1991, the Army conducted a reduction in forces that deactivated eight of eighteen divisional units in less than four years--equating to over 220,000 soldiers. Yet, the reduction in manpower was not the problem; it was the loss of the talented officers who exited the Army before arriving at their full potential.

Maintaining a professional, well-trained all-volunteer force is essential to national security. The United States is able to extend its military reach across the globe which is a capability that separates it from every other country in the world. The power of the US military lies in its manpower. After each major conflict in the twentieth century, however, the reduction of the military manpower component has been too severe according to historical analysis. The country faces a difficult decision as we conclude a decade of war. We must weigh current security and domestic needs against future national strategic requirements. Nevertheless, the U.S. Army has plans to reduce its personnel end-strength by over 50,000 personnel by fiscal year 2014 and over 120,000 by the end of 2015. It is essential that a responsible drawdown occurs, and military leaders need to be focused on properly assessing their human capital. This research posits that the military can draw insights from the corporate sector.

In order to prevent the Army from making a similar mistake; one that has been made repeatedly over the last century following periods of conflict, this article can provide insights for the development of personnel policies. This study offers support for talent development through deliberate alignment of officer experiences. The study discovers pathways for creating little “t” shaped managers (LtM) and big “T” shaped managers (BTM).

There is increasing recognition that although force reduction is important, retaining the right individuals is even more important. Unlike previous force reductions, the military does not want to divest itself of high-performing officers who are the future general officers and senior leaders. The military is making a conscious effort to develop and retain its talent, as the next section highlights personnel management.

5.2 Personnel Model

The Army personnel system is similar to a pyramid. The organization has a large requirement for junior leaders and less of a requirement for more senior leaders. The organization is rank based, which means that it is hierarchal and at each level there is voluntary and involuntary attrition. Voluntary attrition occurs when soldiers leave after completing their service obligation. Involuntary attrition occurs when soldiers are separated by the organization due to inadequate performance or if not selected for promotion. In the midst of natural attrition at each level, development, training and retention of high performing officers must continue to occur. See Figure 3.

The primary differences between the Army system and the civilian sector, are first, the system does not allow entry at different ranks. This means that every officer begins at the base of the pyramid. Second, the Army invests significant time and energy on leader development because it must generate senior leaders whose potential may not be realized for twenty years.

The leader development model is referred to in the Army as the Army Officer Development Model and is codified in Department of the Army Pamphlet (DA PAM) 600-3: Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management (Army, 2014). The regulation details metrics and time gates required by the Army to progress within the organization.

Over the past 15 years, the Army has focused on developing its leaders. General Pete Schoomaker, who was brought out of retirement to become Chief of Staff of the Army in 2003, recognized that officer experiences is essential to organizational effectiveness in the near and long-term. An imprint that was made on the Army by General David Petraus was the idea of the “pentathlete”, as shown in Figure 4. The Pentathlete was described as a strategic and creative thinker able to operate in ambiguity.

The Army recognized that in order to develop “pentathletes,” it must take a closer look at the development experiences an officer receives during a career. The experiences were defined as

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“broadening experiences”. DA PAM 600-3 defines broadening as follows:

“Broadening is the purposeful expansion of an individual’s capabilities and understanding provided through opportunities internal and external to the Army throughout their career that are gained through experiences in different organizational cultures and environments, resulting in a leader skilled in sustainment from the tactical through strategic levels in multiple environments. The essence of broadening is to challenge the officer mentally in situations well outside their comfort zone and force them to apply critical thinking to complex problems”(Army, 2014).

These assignment opportunities exist at each rank from Captain (O-3) through Colonel (O-6).

They can be as short as a 3 months leadership program at a civilian university, or as long as a 36 month graduate or post-graduate studies program. Broadening experiences provide officers the opportunity to develop capabilities for organizational success.

The Army considers broadening experiences as binary events. Either an officer has had one, or he has not. There is little consideration given to the variance in experiences. Because all officers considered to be tactical experts in a functional area (the vertical portion of the T-shape), the broadening experience allows the officer to develop his horizontal portion of the T capabilities. General Raymond Odierno, the current Chief of Staff of the Army’s, primary initiative is the development of “Adaptive Army Leaders for a Complex World” (Odierno, 2013). This highlights the need to manage talent and broaden leaders through experiences more carefully.

6. Data and Methods

6.1 Data Collection

To understand how organizations determine which experiences result in the development of the capabilities of T-shaped managers, I gathered data from sources within the U.S. Army (Yin, 1994). From the Spring of 2014 to the Spring of 2015, I conducted field research. I interviewed military officers and senior government civilians. Due to my affiliation as an officer in the U.S. Army, with appropriate clearances, I was allowed access to the organization. Data collection included face-to-face interviews with the military officers and civilians and additional

supporting documents and artifacts from the organization. I recorded and transcribed all interviews and made extensive handwritten notes. The variation in research sources helps to triangulate perception outside and within the organization. This process also increased validity and “provided for multiple measures of the same phenomenon” (Yin, 1994).

I conducted interviews with a convenience sample of 30 people. Because I am a military officer with over 18 years of service, I possess an in-depth knowledge of the organizational norms. As an insider I had an unusual level of access to individuals for this exploratory research. The interviews ranged from 35 minutes to 90 minutes. The participants military service ranged from 10 years of service to 37 years of service. Fifteen of the participants are mid-career, while the other half are senior leaders within the military.

6.2 Data Analysis

I conducted data analysis in four stages in order to classify Army leaders in terms of their broadening experiences (*strategic* versus *tactical*). The first stage involved open coding to establish dimensions on which I could compare the Army leaders. With the first 19 interviews, I engaged in line-by-line coding to identify key concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). Next I grouped these concepts into themes. Several interesting themes began to emerge in the early phase of research, including the consensus amongst those interviewed at how broadening in the Army was defined, and in addition, how broadening experiences differed and contributed to leader development. In short, there were perceptions that there was a contradiction between what kind of leaders were needed in the senior ranks and who was actually promoted. I divided all phase one interviews into meaningful units and coded them using the phase one coding scheme. Next, I coded passages in the remaining 11 interviews with the goal of elaborating the dimensions upon which I could compare the Army leaders. In addition to the major theme that “all broadening is not the same,” another theme that also emerged was “timing of the experience in the officer development timeline.” The emergence of this second theme prompted me to look more closely for examples and potential consequences of the categories selected (Strauss &

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Corbin, 1997).

In stage two, I leveraged an open-source web-based qualitative research software, Dedoose, in order to apply my emerging coding scheme to all interviews, which meant I divided the interviews into meaningful units for analysis. Each unit or passage could be assigned up to 24 codes, and almost all units were assigned multiple codes. I coded by (a) determining the maximum number of codes to assign to each unit, (b) adding the maximum numbers for all units to determine the total number of codes, and (c) counting the number of codes per interview. The final step involved sorting units by major code categories. In the final step of stage two, the dimensions for comparing different Army leaders based on their different broadening experiences arose as follows: tactical versus strategic; in the Army versus out of the Army; specialist versus generalist; task versus environment. Examples include officer developmental and trajectory concerns, timing of broadening, and utilization of officers post broadening. Since it was clear from my data that a specialist can be defined as an individual who is an expert at a particular task, which is more in line with the tactical versus strategic requirements of the job, I then grouped the tactical, specialist, and task dimensions together to make this relationship clear. In addition, I also grouped strategic, generalist, and environment dimensions together to account for the idea that strategic experiences in my data are experiences that place individuals in an environmental change and a generalist has the ability to operate in multiple environments that expect him or her to think “outside the box”. From this detailed analysis, I was ultimately able to develop four provisional categories; BTM(specialist) versus BTM(generalist): LtM(specialist) versus LtM(generalist) (see Figure 2a).

In stage three, I reevaluated and renamed each provisional category in order to classify Army leaders into different “types” based on their broadening experiences (see Figure 2b): *transactional*; *adaptive*; *operational*; and *cross-functional*

In stage four, I collected and coded experiences of 345 active-duty Army Senior leaders to explore the connection to broadening experiences and Senior leader trajectory. I then

calculated the total number of broadening experiences to focus on descriptive statistics. Next, I further identified total broadening by rank, commissioning source, branch, year group, gender, and race.

7. Findings

7.1 Interviews

Due to the exploratory nature of this research, I did not begin with any prior hypotheses. Familiarity with the literature on T-shaped management led me to believe that organizations promote the most innovative and collaborative employees within the available pool of employees (Hansen & Nohria, 2005; Hansen & Von Oetinger, 2001). I discovered, instead, that most employees actually experience the opposite. Those I interviewed perceived that although deviating from the prescribed path through broadening assignments is beneficial, it can also be detrimental to a high performing officer's career trajectory if the officer is perceived to have had an extended experience away from the tactical operations of the Army. They described the direct tension between the leadership attributes required for organizational success and the attributes of those who are selected for future promotion to the highest level of leadership. These were not directly aligned outcomes. As one participant noted, the organization is "rewarding deep tactical experience when hoping for strategic critical thinkers".

I found that, all respondents closely defined broadening the same: "Broadening experiences are jobs, positions or opportunities outside the traditional army or military force that help an officer understand how other government or private support entities work to enable national security efforts." This was evidence that the idea of broadening experiences are ingrained in the Army's organizational culture. The organization either is extremely proficient at marketing broadening experiences or what is defined now is an organizational artifact that has been reinvented to fit the present day requirements. As noted by one participant, "When I grew up in the army it was called a nominative assignment. A nominative assignment was defined as

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something that took you out of the mainstream army and out of your comfort zone within your base branch and was designed to get you to think differently about how you did problem solving.” These comments also encouraged further exploration to determine whether certain broadening experiences were recognized as enhancing or derailing a career trajectory. This led me to believe that the organization decides based on specific needs, how it will create the T-shaped managers, BTMs or LtMs. Some excerpts from the interviews are illustrated in Table 1 and Table 2. Based on the interviews, I offer these propositions about how broadening experiences facilitate the development of LtMs and BTMs:

Proposition 1: In order to generate LtMs, an organization need to offer a manager more tactical broadening experiences, thus allowing for the further development of depth.

Proposition 2: In order to generate BTMs, an organization needs to offer a manager more strategic broadening experiences, thus developing strategic critical thinkers.

Proposition 3: Less broadening experiences are required when individuals are in less ambiguous environments where the work and expected outcomes are predictable.

Proposition 4: More broadening experiences are required when individuals are in more ambiguous environments and need to be more innovative.

7.2 Senior Leaders

Historically, most of the Army’s senior leadership have come from specific career fields. These career fields include the Operations Branches: Infantry, Armor, Field Artillery, Aviation, and Engineers. Figure 5 illustrates my results. All Operations branches except Aviation have a median broadening assignment of three prior to being selected for general officer. Aviation has a median of two. The lower median for Aviation can be explained by the Aviation officer’s unique career requirement upon entering active-duty. The Aviation officer is required to complete 18 to 24 months of fight training prior to arriving at their first duty assignment. It is also of note, that an officer can be in the Infantry, have no broadening experiences, and still be promoted to general officer.

The Army career model is based on the date of commissioning, or entering active-duty.

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Figure 6 illustrates the total number of broadening experiences by year group (year of commissioning). I would expect that officers commissioned in the late 80s would have less broadening experiences. Those officers reached mid-career status at the start of the second Iraq war. Most of these officers have been required to deploy multiple times which limits their availability for additional broadening. Of note, someone commissioned in 1976 and an officer commissioned in 1991 have the same median broadening experience of one or none.

Figure 7 and 8 illustrates the different types of broadening experiences. As expected the average number of broadening experiences is higher for senior leaders than junior leaders. What is important to highlight is the large variance between GEN strategic broadening out of the Army of an average of 1.9 experiences versus BG an average broadening of 1.4. This suggests that there may be a need for more developmental assignments to ensure that those selected for senior billets are equipped for success.

In Figure 9 and 10, I take a detailed look at the commissioning source of those in the sample. There are four ways a person enters the Army as an officer; the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), the United States Military Academy (USMA) at West Point, the Officer Candidate School (OCS), and direct commission (DA). An individual commissioned from USMA on average has more broadening experiences with an average of 2.7. Students who attend West Point are exposed to other officers who have had more strategic broadening experiences than the other commissioning sources. This could contribute to the student's future considerations. The other commissioning sources, ROTC, OCS, & DA do not have the same density of military officers. Based on this data, I offer the following proposition on the relationship between commissioning source and broadening experiences:

Proposition 5: The commissioning source influences the type of broadening experiences individuals pursue. Students are exposed to role models at each source. These role models influence student's future decisions.

Figures 11 -14 provide an overview of gender and race. In an organization with no lateral entry, it is essential to gain an understanding of what factors may contribute to developing the

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desired senior leader. Specifically, these figures illustrate that there is little difference in the average number of broadening experiences by gender (i.e., median of 3). Yet, Figures 13-14 reveal differences in the average number of broadening experiences when the sample is segmented by race. Figure 13 reveals that African-American officers have an average of 3.2 broadening experiences while White officers have an average of 2.8 broadening experiences. At first glance this may suggest that if broadening experiences are considered as a factor of promotion, African-American officers have more of an advantage over White officers. However there is an absence of African-American diversity at the most senior levels in the Army. Figure 14 reveals that African-American officers have a median of 4 broadening experiences, where White officers have a median of 3. Yet, in some cases, White officers can be selected to senior level positions without having any broadening experiences. This could suggest that African-American officers need to have a broader base of experiences to be considered for selection to the senior levels of the Army. Ultimately, the African-American officer may need to be a “Bigger” BTM(generalists) or become much more adaptive, which further highlights the importance broadening experiences may play in officer trajectory.

Proposition 6: The timing and type of broadening opportunities influences career trajectory. If the opportunity happens early, then there is the potential to apply the lessons from the experience to multiple future assignments, and cause the individual to have a broader network and extensive reputation. This strengthens the officer’s network and prospects for promotion

8. Discussion and Conclusion

Leaders in the 21st century must be more innovative and collaborative if an organization is to remain competitive. This means that organizations cannot solely manage through traditional succession planning, but they must be more deliberate in providing opportunities that develop specific capabilities in the management pool in order to have the pipeline of T-shaped managers it needs. Using interviews and additional data, I develop a framework for defining broadening experiences. I further explore the variance in T-shaped managers and the experiences needed to

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create LtMs and BTMs. I conclude with a discussion of how T-shaped managers influence organizations.

In the context of my setting, I find that respondents believe deeply that broadening experiences are very different and develop very different capabilities. For example, if a signal corps officer leaves his unit to take an assignment in the Office of Congressional Legislative Liaison in Washington, D.C., the officer has the opportunity to expand his core competency by and learn how vital communication occurs across government divisions. This exposure opens the officer's aperture and better prepares him to work with other military and non military personnel. It also helps him understand how the Army's assets are best leveraged to accomplish national security objectives. Additionally, the data highlights that the majority of senior leaders need at least three broadening experiences to be considered for senior positions.

Although the Army is the primary setting for exploration, the development of T-shape managers is not isolated to the Army. It is an issue in the corporate sector as well. When there are prosperous times there are normally no issues allocating resources for employee development. However, when a recession arises, the investment in human capital decreases. Organizational talent management decisions contribute to whether the right pipeline of T-shaped managers will exist.

8.1 Talent Evaluation and Retention

Maintaining the brightest people within an organization is not just a military concern, but it is the difference between ultimate success and failure within any business or profession. As competition within the global market increases, the need for innovative personnel increases. Over the past two decades, organizations have placed a higher value on human capital. One of the concerns in any organization is how to adequately differentiate employees to promote to the future leadership positions in the organization. The metrics used to assess employees' performance and their leadership potential are critical.

The U.S. Army, like all military organizations, uses written evaluations, termed Officer

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Evaluation Reports (OERs), to assess its officers. The Army uses a series of promotion boards to identify and progress its talent pool with the OERs as the primary tool to highlight talented individuals within the immense Army formation. These OERs are in a narrative format and are considerably subjective. Over the past 15 years, the OER has undergone multiple revisions to better quantify talent through a myriad of rubrics based on the translation of specific verbiage. Currently no specific metric is used to quantify broadening experiences.

The Army is a large organization working to complete its assigned mission as efficiently as possible. In order to do this, the Army requires exceptional people to ensure success. The private sector is similar; however, the ability to adjust its workforce is what separates the military from the private sector. The military has learned a great deal about personnel management from the private sector. In addition, there has been a definite focus on broadening opportunities over the past decade. The Army believes that this is a key component to developing the capabilities that are necessary to have a pipeline of T-shaped senior leaders.

8.2 Conclusion & Future Research

A key implication of this paper is the acknowledgement of how the experiences given to employees in an organization translates to desired capabilities that generate the creation of the T-shaped managers needed for sustained success. The research highlights that all T-shaped managers are not created equal even in an organization that invests heavily in professional development. I recognize that in large organizations, like the Army, there is need for different types of T-shaped managers.

Through this exploratory study I identified other opportunities for future research. First, an empirical analysis on the relationship between individual experiences, development decisions, and individual work behavior would be useful. Second, an organization should determine the optimal mix of T-shaped managers based on desired firm outcomes. This would have immediate managerial implications. Finally, future

research should consider how the timing of broadening experiences influences career trajectory.

If we consider the evolution of talent management, we understand that T-shaped manager development will become more common in organizations. More research in this space will contribute to the study of human capital management and strategic human resource management. Corporations can gain insight from the Army's efforts to better assess, retain, and develop its most talented officers. Although the methods used by the U.S. Army cannot be directly applied within the private sector, the techniques articulated here can be modified to fit a corporation's unique personnel and leadership structure.

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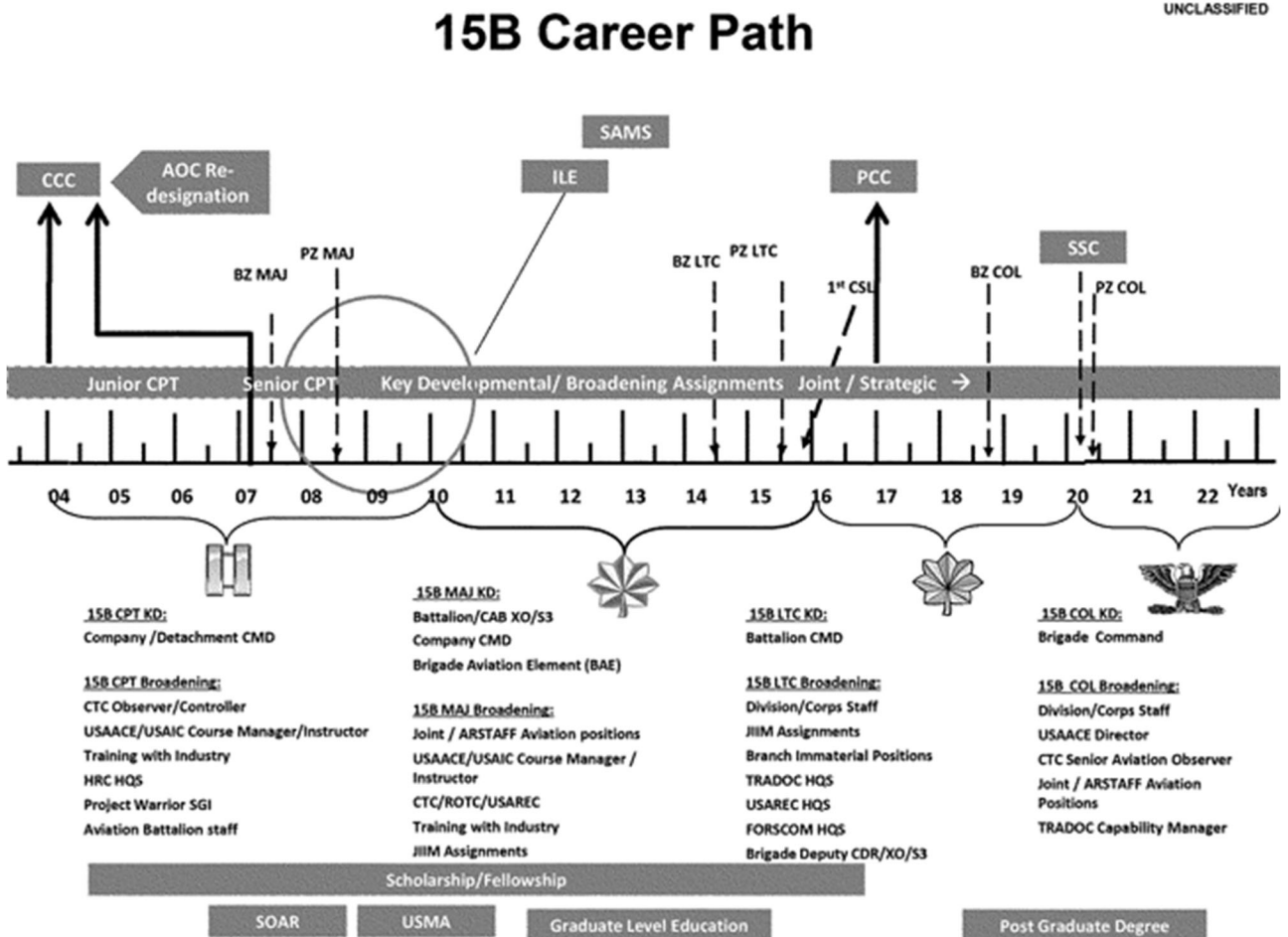
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10. Figures and Tables

Figure 1: An Example Army Officer Career Model with Broadening Experiences



Note: The Army Officer Career Model for 15B, which is the classification for Aviation Officers. This highlights the broadening opportunities at each rank.

Figure 2a: Framework for T-Shaped Manager Development

**Organizational
Development Decisions**

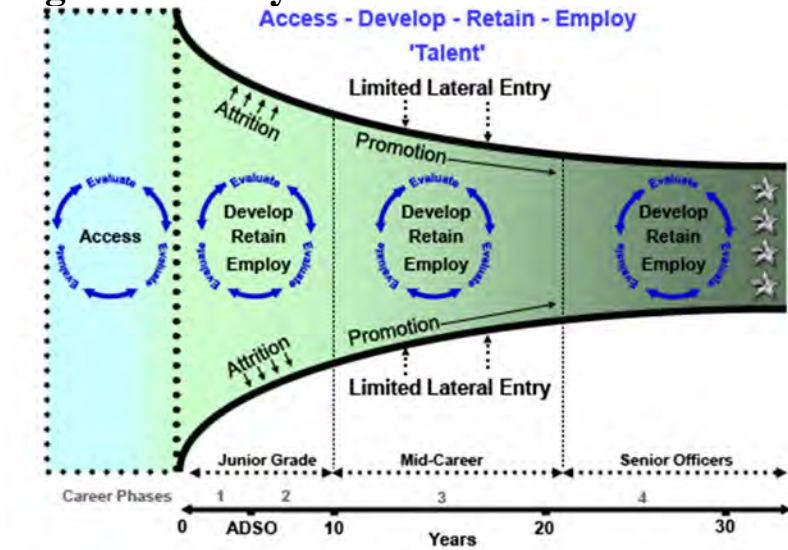
	Tactical Experiences	Strategic Experiences
OUT of the Army	BTM(Specialist)	BTM(Generalist)
IN the Army	LtM(Specialist)	LtM(Generalist)

Figure 2b: T-Shaped Manager Classification

**Organizational
Development Decisions**

	Tactical Experiences	Strategic Experiences
OUT of the Army	Transactional	Adaptive
IN the Army	Operational	Cross-Functional

Figure 3: Army Officer Career Model



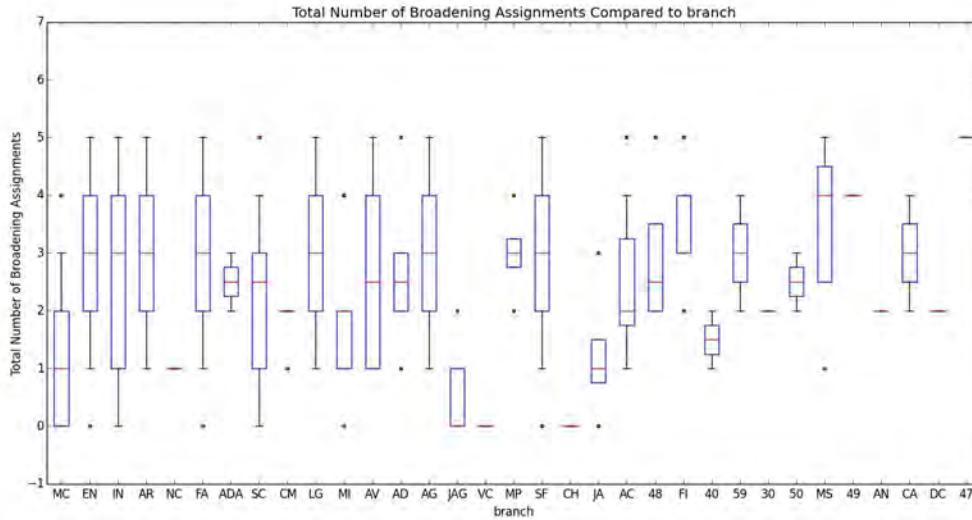
Adapted from “Senior Officer Talent Management: Fostering Institutional Adaptability,” by M.J. Colarusso and D.S. Lyle, 2014, *Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press*, p. 34.

Figure 4: 21st Army Leader Development Model



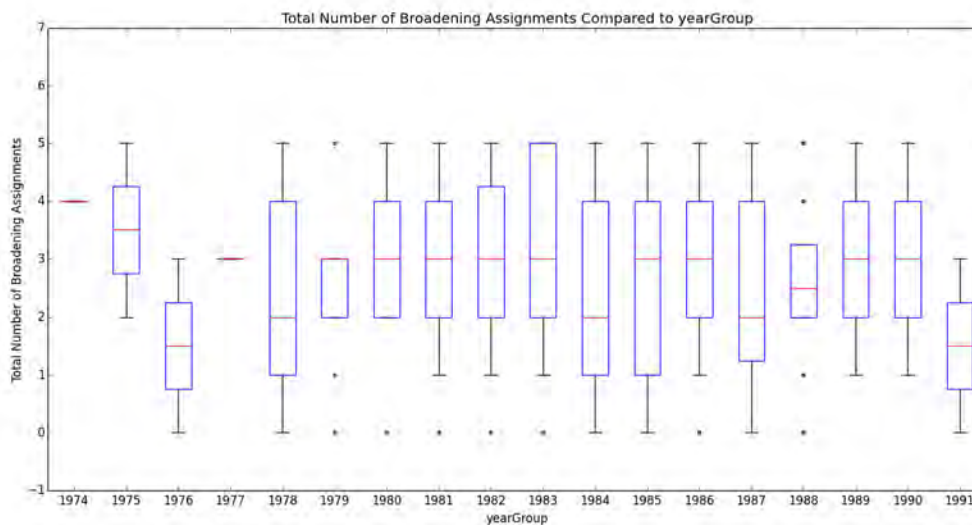
Note: The “Pentathlete” was coined in 2006 to describe the attributes necessary to be a 21st Century Senior Army Leader.

Figure 5: Total Broadening by Individual Branch



Note: This Chart describes the average number of broadening experiences by individual branch. The red line indicates the median for the individual branch. The upper quartile is the top portion of the box. The upper bound excluding outliers is denoted by the attached line. The lower quartile is the bottom portion of the box. The lower bound excluding outliers is denoted by the attached line. The unattached dots are outliers. The Infantry (IN), Armor (AR), Field Artillery (FA), and Engineers (EN) have similar median values, while Aviation (AV) is lower. Also of note, is the existence of Infantry (IN) officers with no broadening, but who were selected to senior levels.

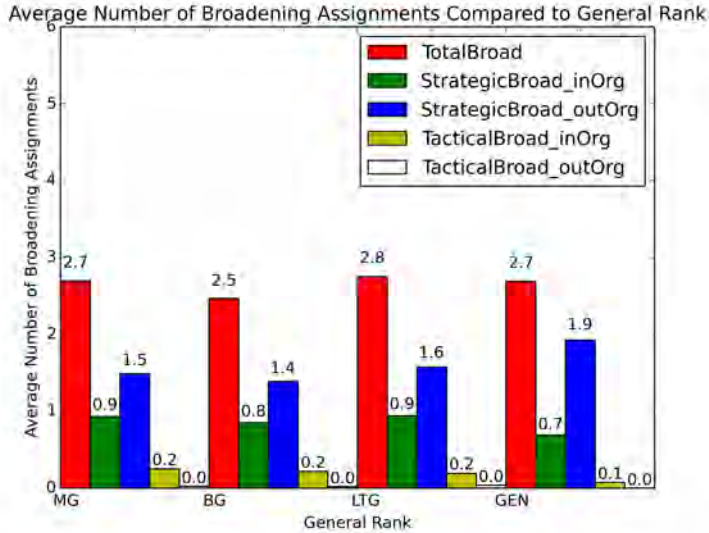
Figure 6: Total Broadening by Year Group



Note: This Chart describes the average number of broadening experiences by individual year group (YG) (or date of commissioning). The red line indicates the

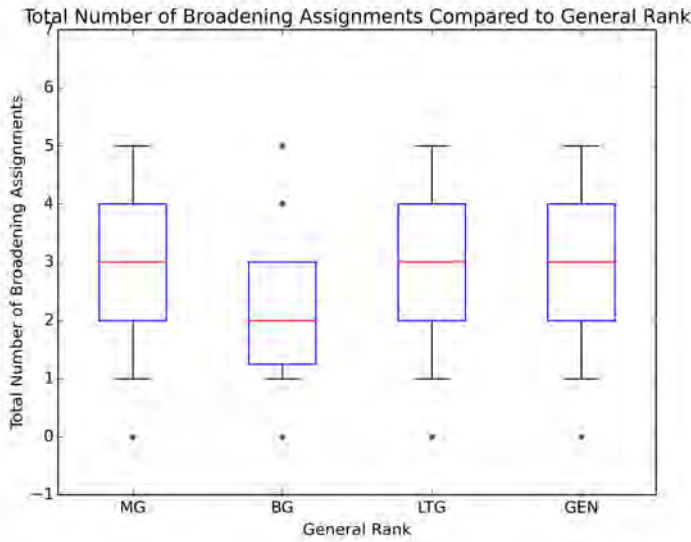
median for the individual branch. The upper quartile is the top portion of the box. The upper bound excluding outliers is denoted by the attached line. The lower quartile is the bottom portion of the box. The lower bound excluding outliers is denoted by the attached line. The unattached dots are outliers. A comparison between YG 1976 and YG 1991 is of interest because it illustrates that the similarity between those who lead the organization selection those with similar backgrounds.

Figure 7: Average Broadening by Rank



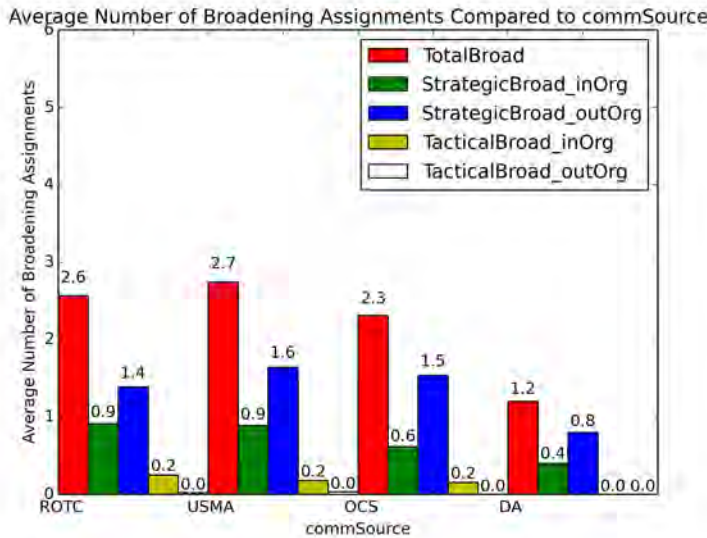
Note: The X-axis represents the rank, specifically of the senior leader. The Y-axis represents the average number of broadening assignments. The red bar represents the average total number of broadening experiences. The green bar represents the average number of strategic in organizational broadening experiences. The blue bar represents the average number of strategic out organizational broadening experiences. The gold bar represents the average number of tactical in organizational broadening experiences. The white bar represents the average number of tactical out organizational broadening experiences. The largest difference is between the Genera (GEN) strategic out of organizational experience of 1.9 and the Brigadier General (BG) strategic out of organizational experience of 1.4.

Figure 8: Total Broadening by Rank



Note: This Chart describes the average number of broadening experiences by rank. The red line indicates the median for the individual branch. The upper quartile is the top portion of the box. The upper bound excluding outliers is denoted by the attached line. The lower quartile is the bottom portion of the box. The lower bound excluding outliers is denoted by the attached line. The unattached dots are outliers.

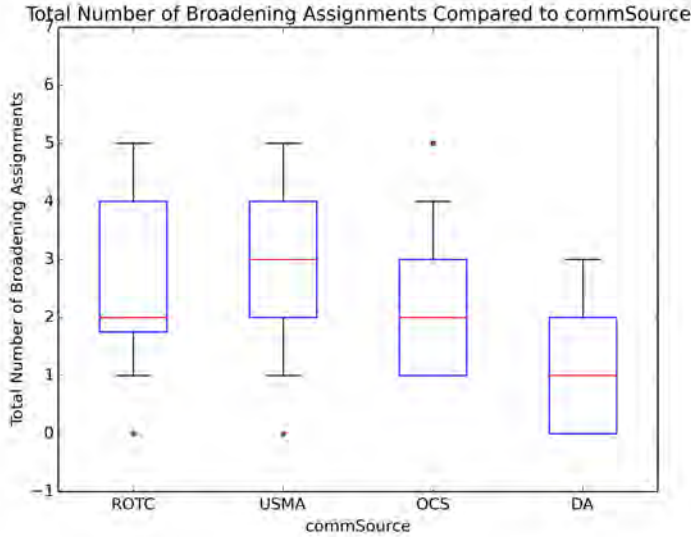
Figure 9: Average Broadening by Commissioning Source



Note: The X-axis represents the commissioning source, way in which one enters the Army. The Y-axis represents the average number of broadening assignments. The red bar represents the average total number of broadening experiences. The green bar represents the average number of strategic in organizational broadening experiences. The blue bar represents the average number of strategic out organizational broadening experiences. The gold bar represents the average number

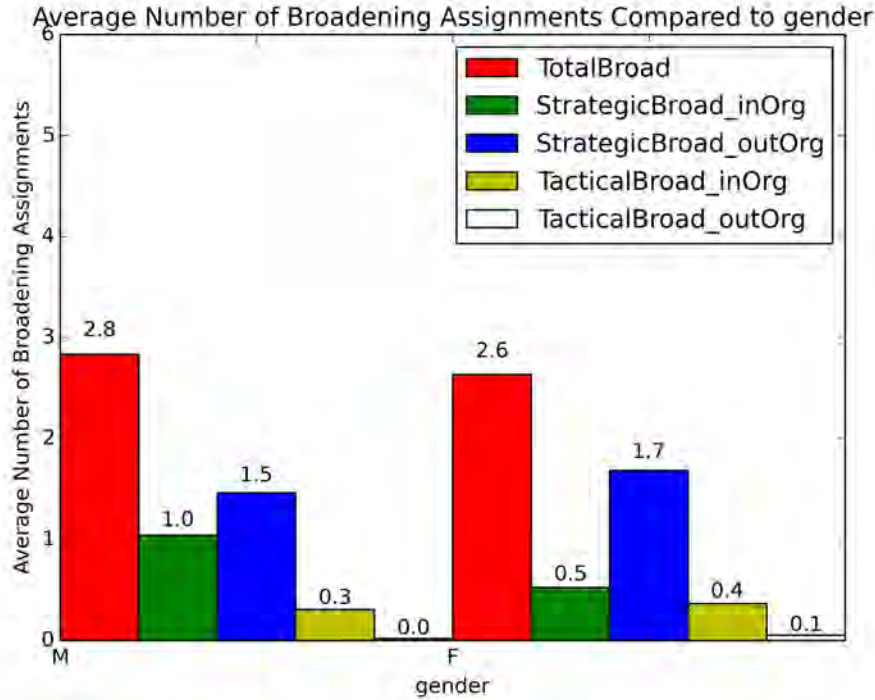
of tactical in organizational broadening experiences. The white bar represents the average number of tactical out organizational broadening experiences. The largest difference is that those who are commissioned from USMA have more broadening experiences.

Figure 10: Total Broadening by Commissioning Source



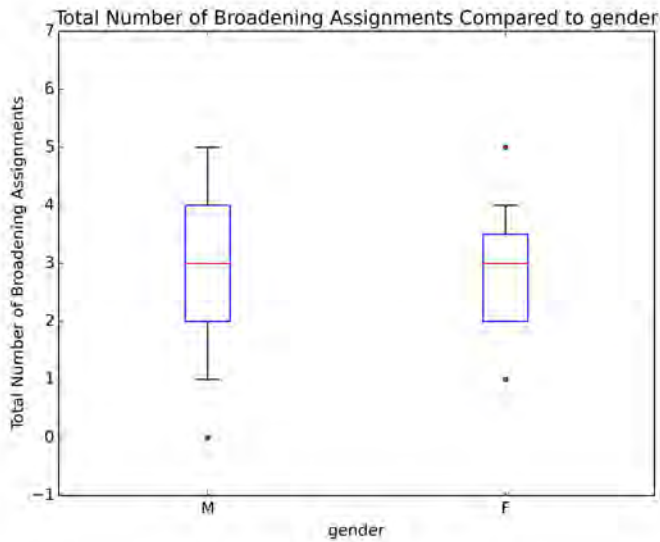
Note: This Chart describes the average number of broadening experiences by commissioning source. The red line indicates the median for the individual branch. The upper quartile is the top portion of the box. The upper bound excluding outliers is denoted by the attached line. The lower quartile is the bottom portion of the box. The lower bound excluding outliers is denoted by the attached line. The unattached dots are outliers.

Figure 11: Average Broadening by Gender



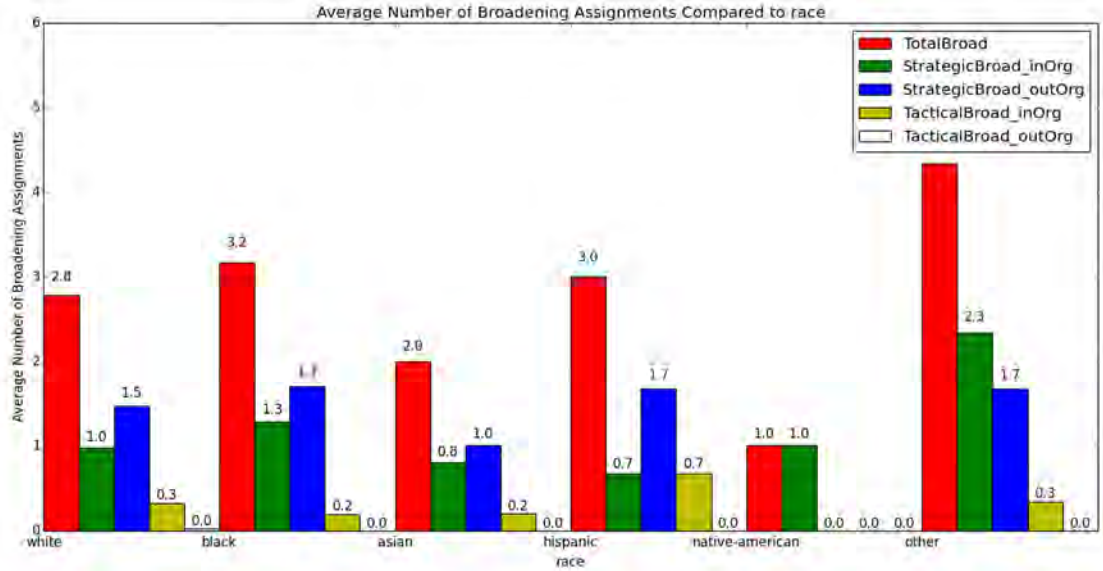
Note: The X-axis represents the gender. The Y-axis represents the average number of broadening assignments. The red bar represents the average total number of broadening experiences. The green bar represents the average number of strategic in organizational broadening experiences. The blue bar represents the average number of strategic out organizational broadening experiences. The gold bar represents the average number of tactical in organizational broadening experiences. The white bar represents the average number of tactical out organizational broadening experiences.

Figure 12: Total Broadening by Gender



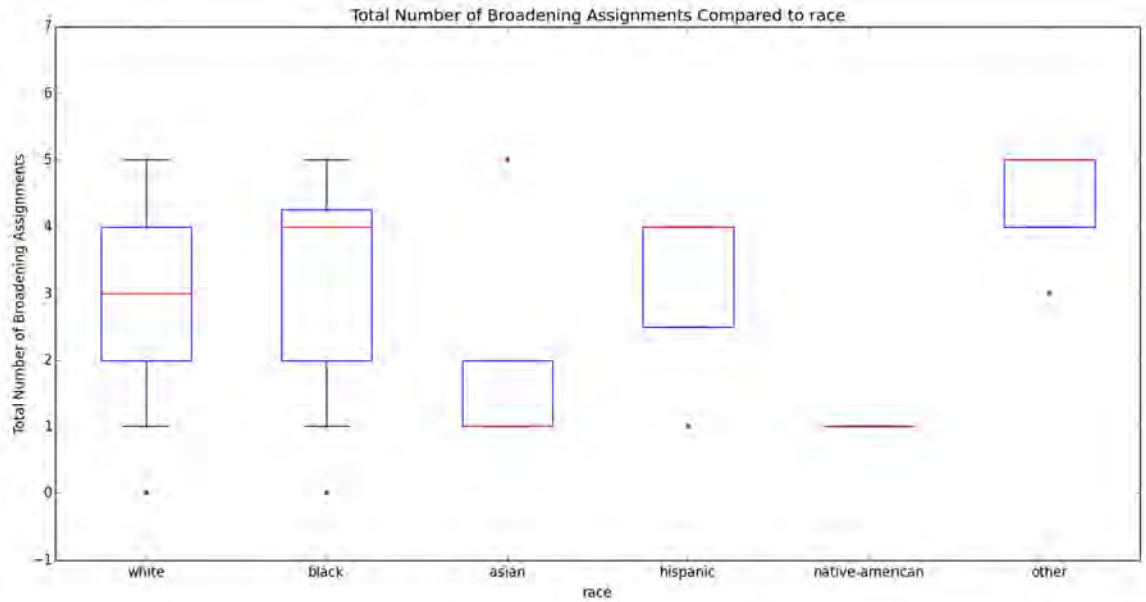
Note: This Chart describes the average number of broadening experiences by gender. The red line indicates the median for the individual branch. The upper quartile is the top portion of the box. The upper bound excluding outliers is denoted by the attached line. The lower quartile is the bottom portion of the box. The lower bound excluding outliers is denoted by the attached line. The unattached dots are outliers.

Figure 13: Average Broadening by Race



Note: The X-axis represents the race of an individual. The Y-axis represents the average number of broadening assignments. The red bar represents the average total number of broadening experiences. The green bar represents the average number of strategic in organizational broadening experiences. The blue bar represents the average number of strategic out organizational broadening experiences. The gold bar represents the average number of tactical in organizational broadening experiences. The white bar represents the average number of tactical out organizational broadening experiences. The largest difference is that those who are African-American have the most broadening experiences.

Figure 14: Total Broadening by Race



Note: This Chart describes the average number of broadening experiences by race. The red line indicates the median for the individual branch. The upper quartile is the top portion of the box. The upper bound excluding outliers is denoted by the attached line. The lower quartile is the bottom portion of the box. The lower bound excluding outliers is denoted by the attached line. The unattached dots are outliers.

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Table 1: Interview Excerpts

Theme	Representative Quotations
How Experiences Matter	
Broadening Experiences	"So broadening from the perspective of what the Army specifically is trying to ensure that leaders have specific experiences that are outside of the normal combat land power expertise. "(Future Brigade Commander)
	"Well I think it's broadening in that it exposes you to not just knowledge that you wouldn't get otherwise because I mean knowledge has some value but it usually isn't that transferrable."(Staff Officer)
	" The Army senior leadership has designed a series of opportunities, experiences, education and training for that matter that will create an officer leader who is agile and adaptive based on the velocity of instability across the globe and the fact that we can't in the current contemporary operating environment identify the threat, very different from the army I joined where you know, it was very clear who the enemy was and we trained accordingly."(Senior Staff Officer)
Tactical Experiences	" I would offer being an observer controller at the Joint Training Center is not broadening."(Senior Staff Officer)
	"So what I noticed is that guys that were products of Army ILE coupled with just their tactical experiences had a much larger learning curve than I did."(Staff Officer)
	"Being a Combat Training Center observer controller would make you a better S3 (operations officer) or battalion commander. There's no doubt about it."(Executive Officer)
Strategic Experiences	"Well as an organization if you look at the recent trends of officers selected for brigadier generals, it will show you that officers who attended fellowships tend to do better."(Senior Staff Officer)
	"When I was young, I worked for the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and I thought for the most part I was going to be his handler, I was going to kind of help him as a special assistant, and I remember one day I put a speech together for him to go out to Stanford to speak to a group of 500 doctors, nurses and lawyers on biomedical ethics, how do you decide who to care for and who not to based on the medicine, the priorities and those so I wrote his remarks."(Senior Leader)

T-Shaped Manager – One Size Does Not Fit All

			"I work in the Office of the Chief Legislative Liaison right now, this is one where we really get to peel back the onion and see the legislative process but also get to see how things work in the Pentagon, because it's a very, very different world here and understanding the Army staff is just as important as understanding how things work on the hill."(Staff Officer)
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Table 2: Additional Interview Excerpts

Theme		Representative Quotations	
How Experiences Matter			
Adaptive		"I mean if I had an assignment in the White House working next to, high-level execs or the president himself I'm probably going to learn a lot more. Although I would learn a lot in an Army headquarters, still, senior people there (in the White House, etc.) are different...clearly they're different assignments that will give you more opportunities to improve your leadership skills out of this, to make you more aware of other things outside of your comfort zone." (Mid-Grade Staff Officer)	
		" Let's say you have mastered the principles of being a company commander. So now let's see if you can similarly master the planning programming budgeting system. And then if you can, then now we exclusively got a guy who can be a senior leader."(Future Brigade Commander)	
Operational		"It (being and observer controller)gives you greater experiences at the tactical level than you would otherwise have, which is going to be helpful to you, but I don't think it helps you to become an agile, adaptive leader because you are not in the crucible, you are an observer controller, so conditions play out before you that are then able to help advise, assist your counterparts."(Senior Staff Officer)	
		"I think if the Army stays the way it is you play it safe going either route. If a young officer says I just want to be tactical or go be an OC, odds are he's going to be a great S3, a brigade S3 and become a battalion commander."(Former Executive Assistant)	
Cross-Functional		" The Army senior leadership has designed a series of opportunities, experiences, education and training for that matter that will create an officer leader who is agile and adaptive based on the velocity of instability across the globe and the fact that we can't in the current contemporary operating environment identify the threat, very different from the army I joined where you know, it was very clear who the enemy was and we trained accordingly."(Senior Staff Officer)	

T-Shaped Manager – One Size Does Not Fit All

			"I worked for the Department of the Army Inspector General, so definitely a different job than anything aviation related."(Staff Officer)
Transactional			" So for instance, recruiting command, is absolutely an important job that we need captains and majors to do. But it's not going to teach them how to think at the strategic level. But it's going to teach them how to critically think differently and assess differently."(Future Battalion Commander)
			"(ROTC) there's a little more to it because I mean you're, for all intents and purposes are a faculty member of a university and there's a little bit more to it I would say, but there's a lot of similarity."(Current Executive Assistant)