Pararescueman with 82nd Expeditionary Rescue Squadron, deployed in support of Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa, participates in static line jump from 75th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron C-130J Hercules near Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, May 11, 2019 (U.S. Air Force/Chris Hibben)

Development Beyond the Joint Qualification System
An Overview

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n 1986, Congress passed the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act, leading to substantial reforms in joint officer personnel policy and management.

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Goldwater-Nichols requirements were based on concerns that the Department of Defense (DOD) had paid insufficient attention to joint officer management and on a perception that there were disincentives to serving in joint assignments. Twenty years after Goldwater-Nichols, continued congressional interest in joint officer development resulted in the 2007 requirement for DOD to establish different levels of joint qualifi-

cation and supporting criteria for each level.[1] In response to this congressional requirement, DOD evaluated the state of Joint Officer Management (JOM) and the Joint Specialty Officer designation process and implemented the Joint Qualification System (JQS) to support a more strategic human resource approach to JOM.[2]

The JQS is a system of progressive career development steps intended to

prepare officers for unified action at the operational and strategic levels. Under the current JQS, officers become credentialed as Joint Qualified Officers through a combination of education and experience, and this designation is required for promotion to general officer/flag officer. The experience requirement can be met either through standard joint duty assignments (S-JDA) after service in a Joint Duty Assignment List (JDAL) position or through joint experience points obtained from experience in non-JDAL joint duty assignments and experiences that demonstrate an officer's mastery of knowledge, skills, and abilities in joint matters (experience-based joint duty assignments, or E-JDA). For both S-JDA and E-JDA, the preponderance of duties must involve joint matters as defined by statute.

The JQS recognizes that significant experience in joint matters is gained through operations supported by joint task forces and other organizations, such as the interagency community and international and nongovernmental partners, as well as through joint exercises and joint training events or courses. At the time of its implementation, the definition of *joint matters* was fairly general and focused on the joint aspects of military operations: "matters related to unified action by multiple military forces in operations across domains such as land, sea, or air, in space, or in information environment."[3] As a result, the JQS was originally intended to include a broad range of experiences, including joint training, education, participation in exercises, and self-development learning opportunities, as well as non-JDAL joint assignments.

Subsequent changes to the definition of joint matters and associated policy since 2007 have limited credit for E-JDA and S-JDA to strategic roles and select education and assignment opportunities. Changes to the definition in 2016 shifted the focus to the strategic mission level: "the development or achievement of strategic objectives through synchronization, coordination, and organization of integrated forces in operations conducted across domains, such as land, sea, or air, in space, or in the information environment."[4] Additionally, other changes

to the JOM policy have limited what are considered joint experiences. For instance, experiences in which the officer is not responsible for implementation of joint policy or program—for example, as a student or in a fellowship or in assignments affiliated with a degree-granting institution or research program—are not eligible for consideration.

Joint Leader Competencies

By focusing solely on the strategic level, the JQS omits a host of joint experiences that may nonetheless be important for building joint competencies. Despite changes to JOM policy and a narrowing of the joint matters definition since 2007, successful leadership in joint environments continues to require a broad set of competencies. In a study on developing Army officers for the joint environment, the officers interviewed cited the importance of joint knowledge, including awareness of the function, capabilities, and cultures of other governments, agencies, or Services.[5] They also emphasized the importance of critical thinking and expertise in their functional specialties. However, above all else, officers emphasized the importance of interpersonal skills, explaining that in joint environments it is essential to develop relationships, listen to diverse viewpoints, and motivate disparate groups to collaborate toward a common goal. Another study of senior executive service members, Reserve component and general and flag officers, and noncommissioned officers arrived at similar conclusions about the skills needed in joint environments. Interviewees emphasized the importance of general people and leadership skills, understanding of other organizations, knowledge of joint operations and doctrine, and expertise in their own fields.[6]

Despite an adequate understanding of the skills needed in joint environments, officers are not always sufficiently prepared for assignments at joint commands. In one study of Joint Staff officers and their senior leaders serving in assignments at the nine combatant command headquarters, more than half of respondents

indicated that the learning curve required in their position was 7 months or longer.[7] This amounted to almost one-third of a 22- to 24-month assignment period. Part of the skill deficit may be due to a lack of education, as about three quarters of Joint Staff officers had not yet attended joint professional military education Phase II courses. Furthermore, given that nearly half of the headquarters billets were at the O-4 level and below, officers may have lacked a sufficient career history of joint duty assignments, deployments, and exercises to prepare them for the position.

To better prepare personnel for these roles, the Services and Joint Staff should consider developmental assignments more systematically and promote joint development at an earlier career stage. Formal joint professional military education specifies learning outcomes, instructional methods, and content, and aligns assessments to those learning outcomes. Informal experiential learning, by definition, does not lend itself to the same degree of structure; nonetheless, experiential learning through assignments can be part of a developmental career progression that sets the conditions for systematically building joint competencies over time.

Challenging Experiences Build Competency

Joint development is best completed through a progressive model or building-block approach whereby leaders are exposed to a wide range of increasingly complex and challenging learning experiences. These opportunities to progressively develop the joint competencies described above are not limited to just the strategic level or to formal educational settings, as predicated in the current JQS. Rather, research suggests that a broad range of experiences builds competency, particularly in areas of knowledge that lack clear guidelines or specific sets of rules.[8] Knowledge that is acquired through experience and that cannot be articulated through a formalized set of rules is referred to as *tacit knowledge*. In this context, tacit knowledge includes understanding

Patrolman with 22nd Security Forces, McConnell Air Force Base, Kansas, receives some motivational words from Phoenix Raven instructor during intensive 3-week, 12-hour-a-day Phoenix Raven Qualification Course at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey (U.S. Air Force/Vernon Young, Jr.)

how to work with and lead others of different backgrounds, shape the environment, and contribute and combine Service-specific resources in the joint environment. This learning through application or experience-based tacit knowledge is especially important for problem-solving and has been linked to favorable performance among military and business leaders.[9] Tacit knowledge may be particularly important for joint assignments, given the scope of responsibilities and the competencies required.

Foundationally, experiences must be sufficiently challenging, complex, and broad to have a significant impact on leadership development. Developmentally enhancing experiences often involve high levels of responsibility while performing novel tasks, implementing change, working across functional domains, and working with diverse groups.[10] These challenging experiences promote joint

development because they push individuals to think beyond parochial Service perspectives, expend greater effort, cope with uncertainty, reflect on their outcomes, and develop new behaviors.[11] A wealth of empirical research supports the positive relationship between challenging work environments and development. In fact, supervisors rate junior managers as more competent when they are positioned in challenging assignments.[12] Leaders indicate that they developed the most in positions that were different from their typical assignments.[13]

While it is important to provide challenging and diverse developmental experiences, individuals also vary in their abilities to draw the appropriate lessons from these challenging experiences and then generalize those lessons to subsequent experiences. Leaders early in their careers are more apt to develop and modify their behaviors in response

to challenging experiences, compared to more experienced leaders. Experienced leaders may have well-established belief systems and patterns of behavior that are less amenable to change when compared to their younger counterparts. Less-experienced leaders simply have more to learn and may be more willing to adapt and change.[14]

Implications for Joint Leader Development

As reflected in the research above, to develop joint competency in the military, it is necessary to place Servicemembers in *challenging* joint environments early in their careers. Joint environments require leaders to manage a complex set of individual and group relationships, all while executing a technically challenging and novel mission. Not all joint experiences may be sufficient to develop joint competency. To

contribute significantly to development, experiences must be novel, complex, and difficult, without creating overwhelming cognitive demands.[15] This points to a progression of multiple, increasingly challenging joint experiences over one's career.

To assess whether the types of experiences recognized in the JQS meet these criteria, we reviewed a subset of E-JDA self-nominations, limiting the review to Air Force submissions that were disapproved in calendar year 2017. E-JDA submissions are reviewed by JQS Experience Review Panels three times per year. Panels determine whether each submission meets the joint matters criteria, does not meet the criteria, or should be rewritten. The panels then make a recommendation to the Vice Director of the Joint Staff.

When considering whether to award joint credit for an experience, the JQS Experience Review Panels assess both the "how" (the nature of the work completed) and the "who" (with whom the officer worked). Guidance to the panels requires that joint experiences must be strategic in nature and meet the other elements of the joint matters definition—for example, involving interaction with personnel from another Service, with other U.S. departments or agencies, with foreign military or agencies, or with nongovernmental entities. Although the who component of this requirement is quite broad, the strategic focus limits the scope of experiences eligible for joint credit.

The review of Air Force E-JDA submission denials confirmed the limitations of the system described herein. Although the E-JDA submission form requests information on what members did and with whom they did it, the decisions recommended by the panels do not appear to reflect consideration of the who, but instead rely almost exclusively on the what. Most of the disapproved submissions reported experiences involving supervisors and peers from other Services, foreign militaries, and U.S. agencies or non-DOD entities, but they did not receive joint credit due to the tactical or operational level of the work. Thus, the JQS recognizes joint experiences at only

one mission level rather than encouraging a progression of experiences that develops leaders over time. Strategically focused joint experiences are certainly critical, but experiences at the tactical and operational levels are important components of a developmental progression toward joint and strategic leadership. The extent to which an experience is broadening and challenging likely plays more of a role in determining joint development than the specific mission level.

By focusing solely on the strategic level, the JQS omits a host of joint experiences that are important for the Services to encourage, track, and assess for their own joint leader development efforts. Additionally, current Service career milestones may not incentivize joint experiences at early career stages. This limited scope may be necessary from a DOD perspective; providing too many officers with joint qualification through E-JDA may deplete the supply of officers available for JDAL positions. However, from a Service perspective, the limited scope of the JQS provides no benefit and could serve as a disincentive for personnel to seek a variety of challenging joint experiences. Because officers early in their careers likely have the most to gain from the challenge of a joint experience, it is advisable to encourage joint experiences through alternative mechanisms outside the JQS. The Services often retain their best talent for Service leadership positions at the expense of exposing members to a greater breadth of joint experiences at different levels.

Broader approaches to assess, track, and manage joint capabilities are needed within the Services to develop a fully joint-competent force. Service-specific approaches to recognize a wide range of joint experiences throughout the career cycle should emphasize the value of joint matters, encourage Servicemembers to pursue joint opportunities, and support more informed personnel management. It is important for the Services and DOD to recognize and convey the value of joint experiences for career development. Joint experiences are broadening experiences; they provide opportunities to develop general leadership and problem-solving

skills that can be applied to both Service-specific and joint domains.

The Air Force Joint Talent Tracking and Management Initiative

Airmen bring unique Service perspectives and capabilities to the complex challenges of joint warfighting. Yet the Air Force is underrepresented in the senior joint positions most influential for national security strategy and warfighting, as well as Joint Staff positions that are seen as preparatory positions for senior levels of joint command. Various factors may explain this underrepresentation, but one important reason may be that the Air Force often develops its top talent for positions within the Service rather than for joint leadership.[16] Moreover, as revealed in the review of the 2016 Air Force E-JDA submissions, Airmen are gaining valuable joint experiences that are not recognized under the JQS, which can serve as a disincentive to seeking joint experiences that would help develop joint leaders.

Recognizing the need for greater emphasis on joint development within the Air Force, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General David L. Goldfein, established "Strengthening Joint Leaders and Teams" as an Air Force key focus area to advance the Air Force's Future Operating Concept, Strategic Master Plan, and Air Force priorities. In response, the Air Force initiated 26 supporting projects to improve joint development. One of these projects is the Joint Talent Tracking and Management (JTTM) initiative to assess, track, and manage joint experience within the Air Force.

The JTTM initiative recognizes the need to value and track both traditional and nontraditional joint experiences across different career fields. The current joint matters definition in the JQS is too narrowly focused on strategic roles and has been limited to joint officer development, whereas the Air Force aims to track and encourage a broad range of joint experiences for all Airmen (officers, enlisted, and civilians). Accordingly, the Air

Explosive ordnance disposal technicians assigned to 466th Air Expeditionary Squadron walk toward blast pit after detonating four 500-pound bombs during demolition day, March 16, 2014 (U.S. Air Force/Vernon Young, Jr.)

Force broadened the definition of what is considered joint.

Specifically, JTTM uses a broad Air Force–specific definition of *joint experiences*: "an assignment or experience that develops or demonstrates mastery of knowledge, skills, and abilities in joint, interagency, intergovernmental, or multinational (JIIM) topics or activities." JIIM experiences include not only billets and operational assignments, but also education, exercises, and other experiences. The definition aligns with joint policy, adapting the definition of E-JDA in the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction on JOM, but expands the range of experiences and extends beyond officers to enlisted Airmen and civilians. Additionally, the JTTM development team defined a set of indicators to use in identifying, validating, and potentially valuing these experiences. The indicators, drawn from previous studies regarding joint experience, are as follows: type of experience, duration of the experience, exposure to non–Air Force personnel or organizations, organizational level, mission level, joint functions, and joint role.[17]

To ensure that Airmen had a voice in the initiative, the JTTM development team gathered input from Career Field Managers and other Airmen when developing the definition and indicators. Career Field Managers tested a precoding questionnaire to assess officer and enlisted assignments on the joint experience indicators (duration, exposure to non–Air Force personnel or organizations, organizational level, mission level, joint functions, and joint role). Additionally, both officer and enlisted Airmen completed self-nomination questionnaires describing their joint assignments, deployments, and education along the indicator dimensions. The study initially involved career fields that were known to have joint experiences, such as air liaison, explosive ordnance disposal, medical corps, judge advocate general corps, logistics, and weather, but later extended to a broader range of fields (for example, foreign area officers, cyber, intelligence, force support, mobility pilots, fighter pilots, and airfield operations).

Responses to the precoding and self-nomination questionnaire indicated a diverse range of joint experiences, roles, and functions available to Airmen. Most respondents indicated that exposure to JIIM personnel or organizations occurred on a daily or weekly basis. The majority of precoded questionnaires identified experiences at the tactical level, while about half of self-nominated questionnaires were at the operational level. Given that the majority of these experiences lacked a strategic focus, they would not be eligible for E-JDA credit, yet they clearly demonstrated exposure to a broad range of joint experiences in a variety of domains.

In a related initiative, the Air Force is working to refine joint knowledge standards as part of its Institutional Competencies. Many of these joint competencies align with the knowledge, skills, and abilities described by officers and other senior leaders in the research highlighted above, particularly those pertaining to joint knowledge. Recognizing the interdependency between joint competency and leadership competency in general, the joint competencies were developed to align with the Air Force's broader competency framework. This allows for a greater integration of joint skills throughout career development.

Currently, the Air Force is working to implement its Institutional Competencies (including joint competencies), JTTM, and other joint development initiatives. Next steps for JTTM include developing the processes and information technology

to support the collection and storage of JIIM experience information for use in career development. In combination with the other joint development initiatives, the Air Force's JTTM system will directly promote joint career development by conveying the value the Air Force places on joint experiences, encouraging more Airmen to pursue joint opportunities, and supporting more informed personnel management. Broadening the tracking of joint experiences beyond officers and to a wider spectrum of experiences, including tactical and operational joint exposure, will enable the Air Force to develop a deeper pool of joint competent and credible Airmen across all ranks. The Air Force's enhancement of its tracking and management of joint experiences for all Airmen acknowledges the crucial role of enlisted and civilian Airmen and the fact that officers serve as only one element of the Air Force team in a joint fight.

Conclusions

Joint experiences provide the kinds of complex "stretch" assignments that contribute to leadership development. A variety of joint experiences at all mission levels (for example, tactical, operational, and strategic) can place Servicemembers in complex situations, expose them to diverse perspectives, and require them to engage in new behaviors and ways of thinking that develop stronger leaders. As such, joint experiences should be considered as valuable for their potential to develop not only joint competencies but also broader leadership and problem-solving skills that will transfer to both joint and senior Service leadership. The Services should plan for these experiential assignments more deliberately, developing the bench for future joint leadership earlier in members' careers.

Today's adversaries are increasingly challenging the United States by employing lethal and nonlethal effects across multiple domains and regions. As military operations grow in sophistication and complexity, the value of joint leaders who have progressed through developmentally challenging joint experiences will increase. The JQS focus on

officers working at the strategic level will be insufficient to build the joint-ready force needed to meet our nation's warfighting demands. It is time to move beyond a strategic and officer-centric joint development focus and ensure that joint development encompasses the total force. Joint officers cannot succeed without civilian and enlisted leaders who are similarly developed for joint roles. The Air Force has taken steps to enhance joint development that can serve as a model for the other Services in developing their own career development processes to better prepare leaders for the demands of joint operations. These efforts should proceed in close coordination with the Joint Staff, consistent with JOM and education policies, to ensure that career development meets both Service and joint requirements. **JFQ**

Notes

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