By Scotty Autin

In 2015, a new generation of lieutenants arrived at Army units. They arrived unannounced with no notice to their receiving commands. These officers are technology-based, possess an innate ability to find information, and are closely aware of the geopolitical environment. While this surge of new thoughts and ideas could be invigorating to the organization, it is more likely that these generational differences will create personality conflicts between senior leaders and these new officers. Some senior officers may not recognize their inherent strengths and only highlight their reliance on social networking and lack of concrete experience.

While academic research continues to explore the impact of differences between the societal generations, it is possible to understand how generational divides have influenced the Army's officer corps. Due to the strict hierarchical structure of the Army and "time-in-grade" requirements for promotions, the officer corps naturally segregates along generational lines. These prerequisites produce officer cohorts that often share similar societal experiences and may develop similar personality traits.

Currently, there are four generations operating in the Army, individually banded to a specific set of ranks. Each of these generations has different and specific perspectives shaped by their generational experiences. For example, some current general officers tend to strongly value organizational loyalty, colonels and lieutenant colonels prefer to empower junior officers and NCOs, majors and captains are comfortable with change, and the new lieutenants have vast digital networks that help them gain context within the strategic environment.

Acknowledging that there are fundamental personality differences within the entire chain of command is important to create an atmosphere that enables trust and growth. In order to optimize effectiveness, officers must accept that generational differences exist in the Army, understand how those differences currently influence officer interactions and recognize how to leverage the strengths of each generation of officers.

Generational Differences in the Army

A generational label is a brand given to a societal cohort born between a set of birth years. Since these generations experience the same social influences, successes, tragedies, and technologies during the formative years of their lives, they often develop a shared societal personality and view of the world. How old someone is when he or she experiences a key national event can have a profound impact on their personality.

Current studies in neurodevelopment show that visual and emotional experiences during the teenage years are molding and shaping neural brain connections (Hensch, 2016). When the events of World War II, Kennedy's assassination, and 9/11 happened, teenagers observed and processed them much different than their parents and grandparents. The summation of these events shapes and influences each of these cohorts into a shared identity and culture. It becomes so pervasive, that psychologists label these cohorts by both birth year and personality type, and thus the terms Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials become common societal lexicon.
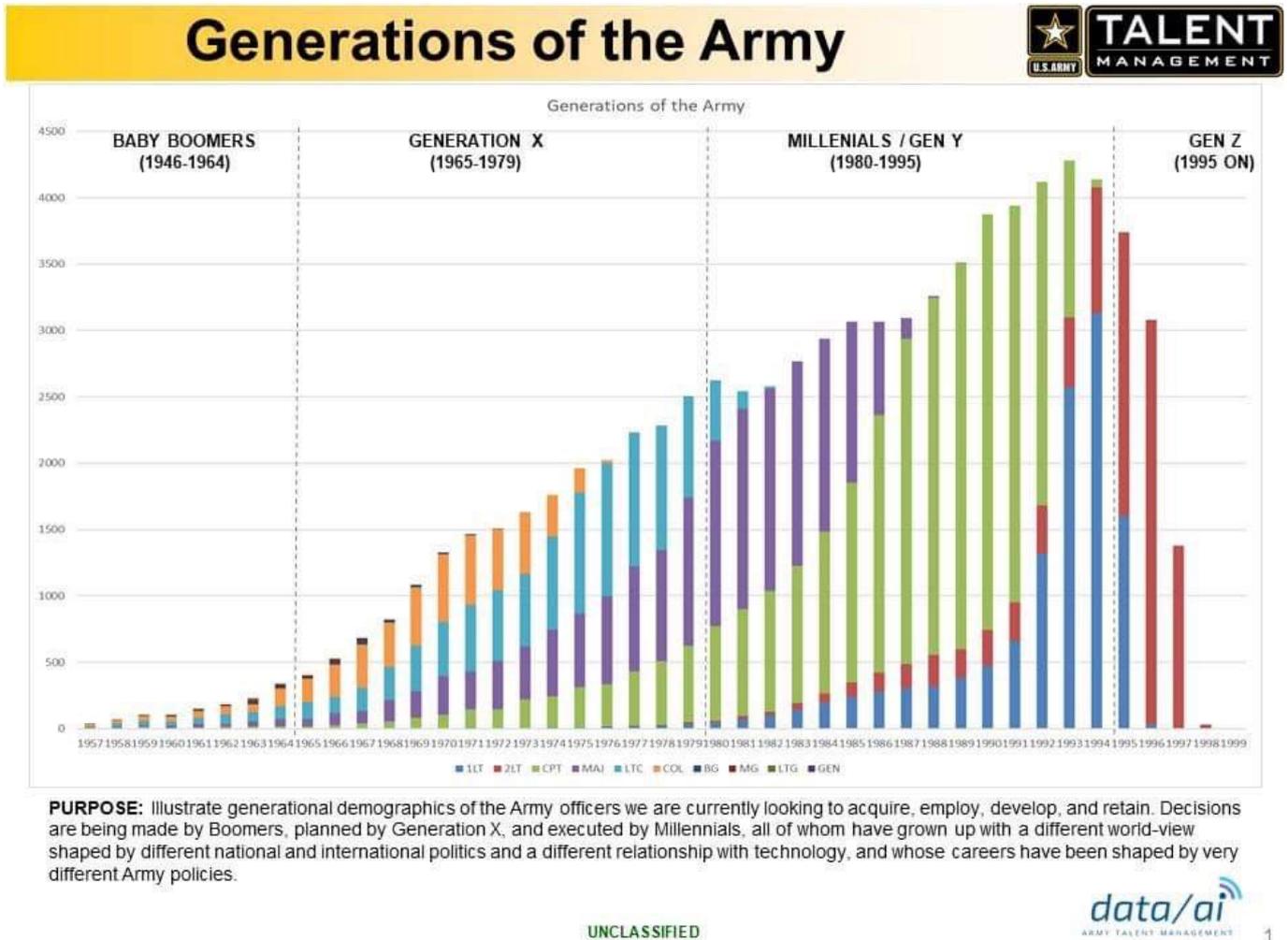
 Without analysis, one might assume that the Army avoids societal generational issues within the officer ranks. With the physical, mental, and societal requirements needed for admittance into the US Army, less than 30% of American youths are eligible for military service (Christeson, 2009). Given these limitations, less than 0.03% of the US population will wear a US Army uniform, and only about 15% of that small amount will become an officer (Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, 2015).

The military's strict admission standards suggest that the officer corps does not represent a

cross-section of society, and in turn, a cross-section of societal generations. In 2000, Dr. Leonard Wong conducted extensive interviews of the officer corps and noted that "distinctions between Boomers and Xers are not as glaring because self-selection into the Army serves to homogenize the population."

However, Dr. Wong (2000) did find that generational differences still emerged. Due to the hierarchical structure of the Army, officer's promotions are based on performance and time of service. These factors sectionalize the Army's leaders by age and band them to a specific set of ranks. While a civilian organization may hire a Millennial to serve as a manager of Generation X subordinates, the Army will not directly hire someone to serve as a senior officer. Based on these formal personnel practices, the current Army typically has Baby Boomers as senior generals, Gen X-ers as lieutenants colonel to two-star generals, Millennials as captains to lieutenants colonel, and the iGeneration as cadets to lieutenants.

Generations of the Army

PURPOSE: Illustrate generational demographics of the Army officers we are currently looking to acquire, employ, develop, and retain. Decisions are being made by Boomers, planned by Generation X, and executed by Millennials, all of whom have grown up with a different world-view shaped by different national and international politics and a different relationship with technology, and whose careers have been shaped by very different Army policies.

Impacts of Generations on the Officer Corps

After recognizing that generational differences permeate the force, it is important to understand how these differences influence officer behavior. The effects of generational personalities ripple through the officer corps as each level of command interacts differently with those above and below. Due to the hierarchical structure of the military and the low speed of change, programs enacted by senior leaders can prevail for decades. In fact, aspects of programs implemented by officers born in the 19th century still persist in the Army today. Therefore, in order to capitalize on the strengths of each generation, there should be a better understanding of how the officer corps evolved over the years. While there are currently four generations of officers serving in uniform, a review of the earlier

officer generations helps fully understand the rolling ebb and flow of the officer corps.

Generational Review:

Lost Generation to Silent Generation

The first major influence on the US Army officer corps was the Lost Generation. These officers were born from 1883 to 1899 and were lieutenants and captains in World War I, field grades in the inter-war period, and general officers during World War II and the Korean War. As children, these officers lived through a period of economic and political reform as the United States struggled with worker strikes and intense political corruption. As lieutenants, they experienced the brutal battlefields of World War I and returned disillusioned from the horrors of the war. Their disillusionment colored their experiences so strongly that Ernest Hemingway labeled the generation as "Lost" because the veterans seemed confused and aimless (Hynes, 1990). In the interwar period, these officers witnessed the 1920 National Defense Act cut the Army to a skeleton shell (U.S. Congress, 1940). With little to no troops in their commands, they focused on education and broadening opportunities. The best of these officers attended the prestigious Command and General Staff College and Army War College (Yarger, 1996). As general officers, these officers quickly mobilized a large US Army, developed new combined arms doctrine, and ultimately won a protracted war across two fronts (House, 2002). Ultimately, these officers witnessed the brutality of war on all its fronts and responded to the call to rid the world of great evil. These officers primed America to move into a new era of development and safety. Their new problem, it seemed, was constraining their overly ambitious G.I. Generation subordinates.

The G.I. Generation, also known as the Greatest Generation, was born from 1900 to 1924. These officers were lieutenants and captains in World War II, field grade officers in Korea, and generals during the Vietnam Conflict. As children, they received an increased emphasis on education and were members of the newly formed boy scouts, learning "patriotism, courage, self-reliance, and kindred values" (Townley, 2007). Their civic-mindedness bloomed during "The Great War" and they steeled their resolve through the Great Depression. As young officers during World War II, they saw the might of collective organization and teamwork; leading to their mantra of "bigger is better" (Howe and Strauss, 2007). Leaving the war victorious, these officers learned that with tenacity and teamwork, anything is possible. When these officers entered the battlefield of the Korean War, they were ready for the same audacious fight they won five years earlier. However, they commanded battalions that were undermanned and under-equipped for a protracted war on

the austere Korean peninsula (Fehrenbach, 1963). These officers arrived home with no
fanfare for their sacrifice, a stark contrast to their arrival home from World War II. While
these officers sought to understand their Cold War role, their civilian peers flourished in
America's economic boom. By the arrival of Vietnam, the GI Generation occupied the senior
positions within the Army, and they disliked the lack of civic support from younger
generations (Howe and Strauss, 1992). They believed that their hard work and struggles
paved a golden path and the public critique and disobedience from subordinates only
disgraced their sacrifice.

 The Silent Generation was born between 1925 and 1942. These officers were lieutenants
and captains in the Korean War, field grade officers during Vietnam, and generals during
the Cold War. As children, this generation saw their parents struggle through the Great
Depression and then depart for World War II. In college and the workplace, they found that
the returning G.I. Generation veterans received preferential treatment and immediately
assumed leadership positions in organizations. As lieutenants during the Korean War, they
performed admirably on the tactical battlefield. However, the war's stalemate and lack of
homecoming contributed to these officer's feelings of being part of the "forgotten war"
(McCraine and Hyer, 2000). Due to the shadow of their G.I. Generation leaders and the
rejection from the Korean War, these officers valued inclusion, acceptance, and conformity
(Howe and Strauss, 2007). This was most poignant when Silent Generation officers became
field grades during the Vietnam Conflict. As mid-level leaders, they were inclined to mediate
between some overbearing G.I. Generation generals and some radical Baby Boomer
company grade officers. Ever the peace-maker, the Silent Generation officer worked to
appease both sides and succeeded in appeasing neither (Howe and Strauss, 2007). Having
to define their own boundaries and identity in a G.I. Generation world, the Silent Generation
officer became masters of a process-driven society. Showcased with the Total Quality
Management program, these officers strove to maximize efficiency from the grandiose
system they received from their G.I. Generation leaders (Department of Defense 1988). As
general officers, they struggled to understand why Boomer field grade officers did not
appreciate or understand their process-driven approach to problem-solving and leader
development.

Baby Boomer: Current 3 and 4 Star Generals (tail end of the generation)

The Baby Boomer officers, or Boomers, were born from 1943 to 1960. These officers were
company grade officers during the Vietnam Conflict, field grade officers during the Cold
War and Desert Storm, and generals during Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation

Iraqi Freedom. As children, Boomers received the windfall of economic growth in America (U.S. Department of State, 2011). While the radio and television brought the horrors of the Korean Conflict to their living room, their parents shielded them from the reality of this war (Spock,

1946). As Boomers became teenagers, the nation emerged into an age of optimism. They watched as their parents placed men on the moon and witnessed women and African Americans fight for equality. Early-stage Boomer lieutenants left to fight a war in Vietnam and came back disgruntled and unappreciated (Karestan, Stellman J., Stellman S., & Sommer, 2003). They returned to a nation that cursed their service and devalued their participation in an unpopular war. As field grades in the post-Vietnam era, they witnessed their Army bottom out on readiness and give way to the arrival of zero defects, careerism, and new heights of micromanagement into the military (Jones, 2012). However, with the election of President Reagan, this same army rapidly grew and modernized. Vowing to learn from the failures of Vietnam, early Boomer colonels and brigadier generals helped write Air Land Battle Doctrine and tested its tenants at the newly formed National Training Center (Meyer, Ancell, & Mahaffey, 1995). Their hard work paid off during Operation Desert Storm when Boomer officers led the battalions and brigades that routed the 4th largest army in the World (Hoffman, 1989). At the start of Operation Enduring Freedom, senior Boomer officers had the ability to see the fight unfold and talk to the tactical officer on the ground. Often their tendency to micromanage proved too great, and junior Generation X officers rebuked their tinkering at the tactical level.

Generation X: LTC-2 Star General

Generation X officers were born between 1961 and 1980. While some of these officers served in Operation Desert Storm and Grenada, most were company grade officers during Bosnia and the initial phases of OIF and OEF. As children, Generation X felt the impact of a divided Boomer household. Due to an increase in divorce rates and dual working parents, they were generally independent and self-supporting early in life (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000), also known as latchkey kids. As teenagers, they experienced social failure on multiple fronts between Presidential resignation, economic crisis, and the Challenger Explosion. When Generation X officers entered the Army, a majority of them did not share the same work ethic as their Boomer field grade officers. These junior officers often failed to adapt to the 24/7 work attitude of their leaders, as many felt the Army was simply a way to make a living and not a lifestyle (Wong, 2000). In the mid-1990s, their perspective was reinforced when a downsizing Army laid off many Boomer and Generation X officers. As the

Army entered direct combat engagements in Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq, their experience and commitment to the organization grew. Their independent personality thrived as they controlled large sections of the battlefield and even served as interim mayors of towns (Crane & Terrill, 2003; Cerami & Boggs, 2007). However, as Generation X officers occupy the senior ranks, they struggle with how to connect to the Millennial junior field grade and senior company grade officers that work for them.

Millennial: CPT- new LTC

Millennial officers were born between 1981 and 1993. These officers were lieutenants and captains in Iraq and Afghanistan and sustained a bulk of their leadership development during these conflicts. As children, Millennials experienced a resurgent focus on family values and a rebuking of the divorce culture their parents endured (Amato & Keith, 1991). A key moment of their cultural development was the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center Towers, as many were teenagers during this attack (Ames, 2013). They watched the terror live on television and then witnessed America and the World band together to take action. While in high school and college, Millennials experienced the rapid growth of the internet, instant reporting, and the birth of social media. When they entered the military, these officers found an Army that was fighting two protracted wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. As currently serving company commanders and junior field grades, Millennials have a direct impact on the newest generation of officers.

iGeneration: Cadets-1LT

A typical iGeneration officer was born after 1993 and started to arrive at U.S. Army units in 2015. When these officers were born, home-based internet became mainstream and connected people through email, chat rooms, and websites (Coffman & Odlyzko, 2001). This invention influenced the way they learned, processed information, and even interacted (Anderson & Rainie, 2010). As an adolescent, they watched the 9/11 attacks unfold live on television and struggled to understand the fear and uncertainty that gripped the nation in the aftermath (Ames, 2013). As teenagers, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sites were mainstay hangouts among their friends. Due to witnessing a terror attack, financial ruin, and world power plays, they are naturally guarded and more pessimistic about America and the future (Doherty, 2105). With the invention of smartphones, information was instantly available and they had the ability to answer any question, interact online with any

number of their social circles, and enjoy constant streaming access to world news and
current events. With this capability also emerged an environment where companies were
marketing to them around the clock. One side effect to this is their inherent distrust of the
'corporate narrative' and they prefer to follow the advice and recommendations of the
'average person'. This is evident in the explosion of YouTube stars that do videos of
unboxing, product reviews, movie recaps, and even video game players. Technology is
second hand to these officers and through social networking or data mining, they possess an
innate ability to find or crowdsource information. Even with unprecedented access to
information, these instant updates on world events may also lead to a false t awareness of
the strategic environment.

Leverage the iGeneration

Understanding the context and dynamics of the officer corps creates an atmosphere of
growth and development. With context, officers understand why Boomer generals value
organizational loyalty, Generation X senior field grades and generals prefer to "power
down," Millennial officers are comfortable with change, and iGeneration lieutenants that
possess a natural ability to build large social networks to gather information and learn.
Ultimately, self-awareness is a leader's ability to understand their own personality, the
personality of others, and most importantly, how their personality affects those around
them. Based on the cohort study analysis above, officers should have an insight of
themselves, their leaders, and their subordinates. This collective self-awareness is a vital
recognition of strengths and weaknesses. The average age for an Army officer is currently
35 years old. This age is the border period between a Generation X officer and a Millennial
officer. In the next five years, approximately 15% of all officers will be an iGeneration officer
and nearly 65% of the officer corps will be of the two youngest generational groups (Office
of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense and Military community and Family Policy,
2015). Given these demographics, the force is primed for institutional changes that
maximize the iGeneration lieutenant's strengths while leveraging the experience and
knowledge of the Boomer and Gen X senior leaders. The context in which an iGeneration
lieutenant developed influences how they learn. Between social media, Youtube, and video
games, these officers are comfortable with reading, watching, and even interacting with
history, science, and current events in an online environment. This information access
developed a cohort of officers that have little concrete experience in the world, but an
ability to virtually mine anything they need to know. What they lack, however, is the critical
analysis needed to filter and understand this information. Leaders should recognize these

dynamics and present their experiences in a way that appeals to this new generation. New lieutenants will best learn by observing, researching, and collaborating. This style is less receptive to directive orders and more motivated through senior mentorship. This does not mean that these officers are not effective followers. Instead, they prefer to take the problem at hand, brainstorm ideas, and view it from multiple perspectives to gain consensus on the best solution.

Leaders at the tactical to strategic level should consider these traits while developing organizational programs. Tactical commanders can use the iGeneration's unique learning style to develop critical analysis by encouraging these officers to critically think and write. Likewise, senior Army leaders could consider expanding the acceptance of more junior officers into information operations and operational support career fields. Operating in these functional areas will leverage these officer's strengths and can promote and grow the Army capabilities as a whole. Overall, the inclusion of these new officers in multiple arenas of the US Army will promote growth and development for the ability to fight on a twenty-first-century battlefield.

Summary

There are currently four different generations of officers within the Army and these generations arrange themselves across the Army's hierarchical rank structure because of "time-in-grade" requirements for promotions. Leaders should understand that these generational differences impact those around them. Over the last seven generations of officers, these differences often perpetuated a cycle of misunderstanding. Recognizing how these misunderstandings can occur, officers should be aware of personality traits and how leaders and subordinates will interpret these traits. Leaders should also recognize that a new generation of lieutenants is arriving in the Army. These officers are technology-based and have a vast social network that can span various nations and cultures, granting them a unique perspective into the strategic environment. They possess an unparalleled ability to virtually mine the internet but lack the critical analysis to understand it. With proper self-awareness within the officer corps, leaders can effectively develop programs for this emerging generation of lieutenants. Senior officers should develop more programs that develop the critical thinking and analytical abilities of these officers while leveraging their strength and understanding of technology and social networking. By better understanding

the Army's generational divides, officers can ensure that the Army remains on the leading edge of technology, leadership, and war-fighting capability.

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