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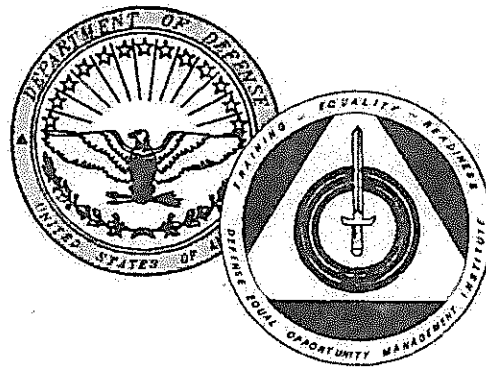
**MENTORING IN THE MILITARY:
A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF
GENDER DIFFERENCES**

by

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PREFACE

LCDR Mary Maureen Sullivan, USN, assigned to the United States Naval Academy, served as a participant in the Topical Research Intern Program (TRIP) at the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute from June 23 to July 22, 1993. The Institute thanks LCDR Sullivan for her contributions to our research efforts in the inauguration of the Service Academy Faculty Experience (SAFE-TRIP) Program.

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INTRODUCTION

The positive effects of mentoring relationships in private industry are well established (Roche, 1979) and are frequently associated with successful career development and a greater degree of self-efficacy among protégés (Lunding, Clements & Perkins, 1978). Burke (1978) described four organizational functions that can be influenced by the mentoring process:

1. Job performance

The mentoring relationship may produce a synergistic effect that enhances the performance of both the mentor and mentee.

2. Career socialization

Adaptation to an organization's culture and learning about informal norms can be facilitated through the mutual exchange of information between the mentor and mentee.

3. Upward mobility

New employees with excellent potential can be developed through diverse mentoring strategies.

4. Preparation of leaders

A mentoring relationship can equate to a "mini course in leadership" that provides a realistic training experience for both participants.

Cook (1979) observed that many personnel assignments are based on personal relationships established through the mentoring relationship. A few studies have explored the mentoring dyad in military organizations. Lewandowski (1985) determined that over 60% of students in the Air War College had participated in at least one mentoring experience. Mentoring was identified as an important factor in the career progression of senior black officers in the United States Army (Mason, 1989). In a study of Air Force officers preceding their move to an

operational assignment, Gouge (1986) described their positive attitudes toward mentoring and their perception of mentors as role models.

While the majority of research focuses on male mentor-male protégé models (Cook, 1979), there is an upward trend toward female sponsorship (Clawson & Kram, 1984) as women assume significant leadership roles in organizations. Yet, the paucity of female mentors highlights the need for special consideration and tailored management in cross-gender relationships (Ragins, 1989). A survey of women Army officers reported that women officers were less positive about their career development and disclosed that they had received less mentoring than their male counterparts (Ratchford, 1985). More recently, Mathews (1988) surveyed 107 O-5 and O-6 Nurse Corps officers who acknowledged a mentor affiliation (67%) whose influence extended to role-modeling (100%), career development (95%) and the provision of information (78%).

MENTORING PROCESS

Conceptually, mentoring is often described as a close, developmental relationship between experienced and less experienced individuals (Collins, 1979). The mentoring relationship typically connotes a mentor-protégé or senior-subordinate dyad (Kram, 1988) where the mentor oversees the protégé's career to facilitate his/her professional development. While the mentoring process is often defined as a long-term, high investment liaison (Keele, Buckner & Bushnell, 1987), it also encompasses four predictable stages (initiation, cultivation, separation and redefinition) of transformation over time (Kram, 1988).

MENTOR ATTRIBUTES AND FUNCTIONS

Historically, mentors have been predominantly White males (Levinson, 1978) possibly due to their prevalence in

senior organizational positions. As more women have pursued careers, more research has focused on women mentors. Lean (1983) suggests that some men frequently interact with female mentors but do not always accurately attribute mentoring functions to women managers. Women, too, may discount their roles as legitimate mentors (Ragins, 1993). There is still a paucity of research as to whether a male or female mentor is more effective. In either case, it is clear that mentors of either gender may assume a variety of roles such as teachers, coaches, sponsors, guides, and counselors, among others (George & Kummerow, 1981; Collins, 1983). According to Kram (1985), the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship is enhanced by the inclusion of multiple functions. Within the reciprocal mentoring relationship, mentors are also perceived as deriving rewards such as promotions, technical support, new ideas, expanded power, pride, and respect from peers and subordinates (Hunt & Michael, 1983).

Through these functions, the mentor serves the protégé by enhancing his/her visibility, role-modeling successful behaviors, coaching, providing professional feedback and emotional support, among others (Noe, 1988).

PROTÉGÉ ATTRIBUTES AND FUNCTIONS

The needs of the protégé as perceived by the mentor may influence the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship (Kram, 1992). It is not uncommon for protégés to seek a mentor with whom they can forge a candid and close relationship based on common interests, values, or simply role identification among other factors (Ragins, 1993).

Likewise, mentors may select protégés based on their visibility in work settings, enthusiasm for their job and actual job performance (Noe, 1988). Obviously, the protégé's degree of exposure or nonexposure via key organizational projects may be a factor in cultivating voluntary

mentoring relationships. Some of the research discusses barriers based on gender differences. Women in general and particularly those in non-traditional organizations often lack informal access to mentors (Ragins and Cotton, 1991). The frequent interaction and intimacy in communication commonly associated in mentoring relationships may also deter cross-gender mentoring due to peer pressure and other organizational factors. Some women may also be excluded from organizational activities that would precipitate a mentoring relationship. However, Cook (1979) noted in one study that women executives had mentors at a 3:2 ratio compared with their male counterparts which may indicate the changing dynamics of organizational mentoring.

A more prominent issue is the element of sexual innuendo frequently ascribed to a cross-gender relationship. In an early study, Collins (1983) suggested that as high as 20 percent of the protégés disclosed that they had sexual contact with their mentors. Yet, aside from the perceived risks, cross-gender mentoring seems to be a growing phenomenon as recent research illuminates strategies for successful cross-gender mentoring. Some mentors have stated that since "good mentees reflect well on them, their chances of getting good mentees is halved without women" (Horn, 1982).

The presence of senior women in male-dominated professions does not guarantee that they will facilitate the acculturation of junior women. In some cases, limited participation by senior women may signify their overcommitment to other organizational functions due to their minority representation (Ragins and Cotton, 1993). At other times, senior women have been known to exhibit a "queenbee syndrome" where they forego a mentor role since they did not have the advantage of one during their career development (Scott, 1989). More research is needed to determine to what extent gender differences among mentors impact mentees.

The present study was designed to examine the incidence of mentoring within the military, mentor and mentee characteristics, and significant differences with the mentoring relationship based on gender differences. A survey was developed in lieu of an interview format due to project time constraints. This study was a means of piloting the survey and refining the tool as a intermediary step to studying a larger sample of military women.

METHOD

Respondents

The sample consisted of 77 predominantly military enlisted personnel who were students in a 15-week course covering equal opportunity management principles. Students completed the survey on July 7, 1993. The majority of students were Army (48 percent). Other students were grouped by Air Force (35 percent) and Navy/Coast Guard/Other (17 percent). Except for one civilian student, the sample predominantly represented the senior enlisted ranks of the military. Students in the course are normally screened and handpicked for their assignment based on their promising career potential and projected ability to work in an advisory role to senior military leaders following graduation. Seventy-three percent had participated in a college education ranging from taking some courses to completing a Master's degree. The average time in the service was 13.85 years for men and 11.79 years for women. The mode for permanent change of station orders was five. The majority of students (50.6 percent) identified their racial/ethnic status as Black (other than Hispanic) followed by 36.3 percent White (other than Hispanic). The gender composition included 77 percent males and 21 percent females. Two respondents did not disclose their gender.

Procedure

Data were collected using a 51-item survey. Seventeen of the questions focused on whether or not the respondent had a mentor during his/her military service. The survey defined a mentor as "a person who takes a personal interest in another person's (or protégé's) career by coaching, guiding, sponsoring for special duties, and role-modeling." Respondents were able to supply answers for up to a maximum of three mentors sequencing their answers beginning with the most important mentor. A Likert scale was provided for 14 items (e.g. My mentor protected me from organizational pressures; My command/unit has a formal mentoring program; etc.) associated with mentoring relationships in general. A final page included 20 background items concerning socio-economic family and military factors. Data were collected following a lecture on organizational effectiveness. Most students required an average of 20 minutes to complete the survey. Those who did not have mentors were only directed to complete the background sheet. Researchers explained that individual responses would be held confidential; data would only be reported in the aggregate.

RESULTS

Mentor Affiliation

A majority of students (81 percent) indicated they had a mentor while in the military. Three respondents were uncertain.

Mentor Profile

Eight-five percent of the cited mentors were male while 15 percent were female. The racial/ethnic identity of the mentors was predominantly (45 percent) Black (other than Hispanic) followed by 45 percent White (other than Hispanic) among 127 total mentoring relationships. The majority (51 percent) of students indicated

that their mentor was their immediate supervisor while 29 percent indicated they had a mentor who was in their chain-of-command and other than their immediate supervisor. In 90 percent of the cases, mentors were described as having an active duty military status.

Mentoring Relationship Parameters

Once established, the length of the mentoring relationship tended to be either one to two years (22 percent) or over ten years (20 percent). Mentoring relationships with male mentors were more prevalent (88 percent with female protégés; 84 percent with male protégés) although there were more male protégé reports of interactions with female mentors during the second most significant mentoring experience.

Mentor Roles

Respondents identified the primary role of their mentors as a teacher--"instructor in specific skills and knowledge necessary for successful job performance" (25 percent) followed by role model--"someone you can emulate" (23 percent). From 10 possible responses, students indicated that the primary quality of a mentor that fostered a successful relationship was his/her experience (32 percent).

Protégé Roles

Respondents cited their performance (31 percent) as the primary quality that encouraged mentors to establish a relationship with them.

Mentor-Protégé Interactions

Of 15 possible responses, student protégés identified coaching (16 percent) as the primary benefit they derived from a mentoring interaction followed by challenging assignments (15 percent) and role-modeling (14 percent). They perceived that their mentors benefitted as well through a feeling of pride (36 percent). In general, 56 percent of all

respondents indicated they had encountered no problem with their mentor during the liaison. Based on the gender of the protégé, 83 percent of the students again disclosed that they had no problem with their mentor. Of 21 objective responses, protégés perceived that the gender of the mentor contributed to more effective communication (17 percent), effective role-modeling (15 percent) and more encouragement (15 percent).

Mentoring Relationships and the Military

The 14 items in the Likert scale format elicited agreement or disagreement with issues ranging from the benefits of a mentoring relationship in the military to the value of a mentoring relationship as women assume more combat roles.

There was a high consensus that a mentoring relationship helped the respondent perform his/her job better (98 percent) and was important to promotion success (86 percent). Mentors were credited with enhancing the protégés' competency and self-worth through counseling and pep talks (93 percent) and protecting them from organizational pressures (48 percent).

At a command/unit level, only 10 percent indicated that there was a formal mentoring program. However, 29 percent of the respondents indicated that their unit encouraged mentoring relationships. Sixty percent of respondents agreed that other males at their unit were being mentored compared to other females (29 percent). Careerwise, 34 percent agreed that mentoring was necessary for success at work. A majority of respondents (62 percent) associated a mentoring relationship with their decision to remain in the military.

Thirty percent noted that male mentors were more effective than female mentors while zero respondents agreed that female mentors were more effective than male

mentors. Fifty-four percent, however, took a neutral position toward the effectiveness of female mentors compared with male mentors.

Finally, 41 percent agreed that mentoring will be essential as more women engage in combat roles while 53 percent neither agreed or disagreed.

DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this study was to pilot a survey instrument that could ultimately be used to determine the effectiveness of mentoring with a large sample of military women. Despite the small sample size, the percentage of women participants was higher than the overall percentage of women within the Department of Defense and each of the respective services.

Affiliation with a mentor was a prevalent experience among the students. Compared with a few previous military studies, the sample also represented a very high index of mentoring (Lewandowski, 1985; Mathews, 1988) despite the almost exclusively enlisted composition.

The racial/ethnic identity of mentors was highly proportional to the racial/ethnic identity of the student population. Since the majority of mentors were described as active duty military and Black (other than Hispanic), this information may be valuable for recruiting and retention of minorities within the Department of Defense. Related findings included the perceptions of mentors as role models and a majority of respondents crediting their mentors with influencing them to remain in the military. More research is needed to determine the mentoring effect upon retention of women.

In this study, males had a higher proportion of mentors than females. This information was consistent with much of the research which cites the dominance of the male mentor-male protégé model in traditional organizations. For female

protégés, the majority of relationships were cross-gender, which is not uncommon in organizations where potential women mentors are still in the minority. However, a larger sample of women is needed to truly evaluate the effectiveness of cross-gender mentoring for women since this sample was a highly diverse one in terms of service affiliation, rank and occupational skills.

As typical of many organizations, the supervisors emerged as the most frequent mentor. Not surprisingly, their primary role was labelled as teacher. This is consistent with the classic view of a mentor as a teacher (Zey, 1984). This supervisor-teacher association may have also influenced the primary mentor qualities that contributed to a successful mentoring relationship.

More mentees valued their mentors because of their experience. Predictably, the mentor's experience probably enhanced the protégé's knowledge and mastery of his/her job which ultimately led to improved job performance and career development. Not surprisingly, a majority of respondents agreed that a mentoring relationship was important to their improved job performance and ultimately to their promotion success.

As a corollary to the supervisor-subordinate dyad, most respondents indicated they experienced no problems with their mentor. Although there are little empirical data, many studies discuss the major risks associated with mentoring and the termination of many relationships on a sour note. Perhaps the high mobility of this sample precluded a more in-depth and intimate association which often develops over time but also has the potential to produce more hazards within the relationship. On the other hand, the timed promotion cycle or "up or out" policies within the military may promote positive mentoring relationships as senior, career officers garner pride when their protégés are promoted. More research is needed

concerning the effect of frequent moves upon military mentoring since this sample was almost equally divided between the high and low spectrum length of mentoring relationships.

The longevity of women in the service for this sample was significantly lower than the men. That factor may have also contributed to the reduced number of opportunities for establishing mentoring relationships and consequently, the aggregate number of mentoring experiences. A previous study of military women had also concluded that military women had less mentoring than males although the cause was not clearly defined. Yet, a higher percentage of women compared to men believed that mentoring was important for their success at work. This aspect of mentoring deserves more study to understand how mentoring can enhance job performance for women and why military women have fewer mentoring experiences. In general, fewer females compared with males agreed that mentoring was important to their promotion success. Since selection for promotion is frequently enacted by a central board that is external to the local command/unit, it is possible that many females believe that mentoring is independent from the selection process. It is apparent that there are different perceptions between the men and women in this sample and it would be of value to better understand their rationale. While the majority of respondents aspired for the highest enlisted rating, an objective measure to assess their likelihood of promotion would provide more insight into the tangential effects of mentoring.

Respondents indicated that their performance was the chief reason why mentors connected with them. Not surprisingly, in a transient population such as the military, performance is often emphasized as the key to success just like the private sector. However, opportunities to work on long-term projects or develop social relationships over time may not be as

common. This response also seems consistent with the identification of mentors as supervisors. Who else would be most familiar with one's performance?

A significant number of males agreed that mentoring contributed to their decision to remain in the military. In view of the teaching and role-model aspects of the mentors cited in this sample, this finding seems consistent with Burke's description of mentoring as a "mini leadership course." Additional research into how this may apply to women may be beneficial for improved assimilation of women in the military.

Despite the overall trend of women in this sample to downgrade some of the general benefits of mentoring relationships, the majority of women compared with men agreed that mentoring was essential for women as they expand into combat roles. This indicator warrants more research with a larger sample of women and with a view toward the current positions of survey participants. As women assume more non-traditional roles, they may perceive that mentoring as a means of teaching, coaching, and role-modeling is essential for career success.

In conclusion, military mentoring relationships include many of the characteristics and benefits associated with mentoring in the private sector. In the majority of cases, mentoring was a very positive means of socializing career oriented personnel to organizational norms and leadership positions. While this sample was small, the positive effects were significant enough to warrant further research as minorities and women enter the military in greater numbers and transition to more non-traditional roles. Future research will focus on a larger sample of military women.

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