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NAVY CIVILIAN EXECUTIVE STUDY

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NAVY CIVILIAN EXECUTIVE STUDY

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FOREWORD

This study was conducted at the request of the Navy's Office of Civilian Personnel (OCP). It has generated information that should be useful to personnel at different levels within the Navy, including those who make policy on the selection, development, appraisal, and utilization of civilian executives; who implement such policy; and who design and run executive training and development programs.

This Executive Summary has been prepared to provide the study findings to all civilian executives in the Navy, especially those who participated in the study. The findings will be fully described in a technical report entitled, The Nature of the Navy Civilian Executive Job: Behavior and Development, to be issued later this year. When published, a copy of this report may be obtained from the Navy Personnel Research and Development Center (Code 307).

Appreciation is expressed to the many people who took the time to provide information for this study. Particular appreciation is extended to Mr. Raymond Harrison, Mrs. Alice Donohue, Mr. William Paz, and Mr. Ellis Berne of the Office of Civilian Personnel, and to Dr. James Probus, Director of Navy Laboratories.

DONALD F. PARKER
Commanding Officer

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INTRODUCTION

The Navy has little factual information about the nature of civilian
executive jobs on which to base development, selection, or appraisal systems.
In general, existing systems for the selection, development, and appraisal
of executives in both the public and private sectors are based on assumptions
or speculations about the nature of executive jobs, rather than on empirical
knowledge.

The purposes of this research were to study the nature of the Navy civilian
executive job and to determine the training and development needs of current
and future executives. Navy civilian executives were defined as those occupying
GS-16, 17, 18, or equivalent Public Law positions ($\underline{N}$ = 370). Information from
the study is especially timely, since it can be used in the Navy's implementa-
tion of the Senior Executive Service (SES) portion of the Civil Service Reform
Act. In particular, the Act requires each agency to design criteria for selec-
tion into the SES, criteria and methods for evaluating the performance of those
in SES, and an executive development program for present as well as potential
SES members.

APPROACH

The information that supports our conclusions was collected primarily from
Navy civilian executives themselves. Information was also collected from
(1) military executives in the shore establishment, mostly of flag rank,
who are the superiors of civilian executives, (2) noncareer civilian executives,
(3) the Executive Inventory Record maintained by the Civil Service Commission
containing background data on career civilian executives, and (4) personnel
officials at the Navy's Office of Civilian Personnel and the Civil Service
Commission. All information was collected between July 1977 and May 1978.

Four different methods were used to collect data. Semistructured interviews
were conducted individually with a cross-section of 57 civilian executives, 17
military executives, and 5 noncareer civilian executives. Four civilian
executives were observed doing their jobs over a 2-day period. Nineteen
civilian executives maintained work diaries in which they kept track of
how they spent their time over a 2-week period. A structured question-
naire was mailed to all of the 370 civilian executives; and a shorter question-
naire, to all military executives in the shore establishment who supervise
or have influence in the utilization and development of civilian executives
($\underline{N}$ = 98). Completed questionnaires were received from 55 and 70 percent
of the civilian and military executives respectively. Since those who
returned the questionnaire were fairly representative of the full populations
in terms of their organizational positions, it was assumed that those who
responded did not differ materially in their opinions from those who did
not.

This study did not attempt to evaluate how effectively executives do
their jobs, or to evaluate systematically the effectiveness of existing
training and development programs.

The results of the study were analyzed to determine if there were sig-
nificant differences among various subpopulations of executives (e.g., R&D
vs. nonR&D, staff vs. line, field vs. headquarters). In general, a high
degree of commonality was found across subpopulations. The most common dif-
ferences found were between executives in laboratories and executives in
headquarters. — $L \Rightarrow p. 11$

The Navy Civilian Executive Population

Where They Are

Almost all of the executives are in the shore establishment; only six
are in operational units. Fifty-nine percent of the population (216) are
in the Naval Material Command, most of whom are in acquisition rather than
logistics. Most of the remaining executives are in the Secretariat (33),
Office of the Chief of Naval Operations (42), Office of Naval Research (29),
and Naval Research Laboratory (36).

The large majority (76%) work in organizations dealing in the physical
sciences and engineering.

Who They Are

Executives are almost all Caucasian males, with an average age of 52
years, and an average of 24 years in federal service. In terms of education
attained, 32 percent have Doctorates; 28 percent, Masters degrees; 36 percent,
Bachelors degrees; and 4 percent, no degree. Sixty-six percent have their
highest degree in engineering or the physical sciences. Only 18 percent
have either obtained or are pursuing a business or management degree at
any level.

Career Progression

Most executives have remained within a single technical or functional
specialty and within a small number of organizations. Since reaching the GS-13
level, for example, 77 percent of them have worked only for the Navy. Some
of the civilian executives and more of the military executives believe that
Navy civilian executives, in general, are too parochial due to this narrowness
of background. In the military questionnaire, the majority of respondents
agreed with the statement, "In order to improve (civilian) executive effectiveness,
rotational assignments for executives should be strongly encouraged." In the
civilian questionnaire, the majority of respondents agreed with the statement,
"Rotational assignments would be more beneficial if given to personnel early
rather than late in their careers."

Plans to Leave Civil Service

The civilian executives were asked (in March 1978) when they anticipated
leaving the Federal Civil Service. Sixteen percent gave no answer. The per-
centage distribution of those who responded is as follows:

17%--2 years or less
31%--3 to 5 years
29%--6 to 10 years
23%--11 or more years

Information from the Navy's Office of Civilian Personnel indicates that 60 percent of the population will be eligible to retire within the next 5 years. While these questionnaire responses are based solely on stated intentions, additional information suggests that the executives will in fact act on these intentions. The large executive pay increase in February 1977 has resulted in slowing retirement rates because executives must stay in civil service 3 years after that time to realize a resulting increase in their retirement annuity (the "high three"). It is therefore expected that the retirement rate will rise in February 1980. Further, in the interviews, some executives said they were staying in civil service only until they become eligible for retirement, at which point they believe they can move on to higher paying jobs in industry.

Some of the civilian executives interviewed expressed concern over the negative effect this projected wave of retirements might have on the maintenance of the corporate memory (i.e., that body of executive knowledge that is not in written form). In the questionnaire, only 21 percent of the civilian executives agreed with the statement that the Navy has effective methods for developing replacements for current executives as they leave the civil service.

The Navy Civilian Executive Job

What Executives Do

Three common speculations about what Navy civilian executives do were disproved in the course of this study:

1. A large number of executives are bench scientists and engineers doing "hands-on" technical work. Based on study findings, it is estimated that there are no more than 15 such people. The large majority of executives spend most of their time in management and administration. They are not general managers, however; rather, they perform management and administrative tasks within their technical or functional specialties.

2. Most executives are in advisory or staff roles. In fact, 66 percent characterize themselves as line managers, 20 percent as performing staff functions, and 14 percent as half line, half staff.

3. Most of the decision-making is left to military or noncareer civilian executives. On the contrary, all three types of executives (career civilian, noncareer civilian, and military) perceive career civilian executives as making decisions and formulating policy within their organizations.

Fifty specific work activities were rated in the questionnaire by the civilian executives in terms of their importance. A factor analysis performed on these responses produced four executive roles. The average importance of all the specific work activities comprising each role was computed. The four roles are given below in the order of computed importance.

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1. **Leadership**, which entails staffing; the guidance, motivation, and development of subordinates; programming work; and resolving conflicts.

2. **Executive decision-making**, which entails policy-making, implementing directives, evaluating outcomes, and planning.

3. **Technical problem solving**, which entails directing, conducting, consulting, and reviewing the technical aspects of one's area of work specialization.

. 4. **Information seeking and dissemination**, which entails receiving and transmitting information between the executive's organizational unit and the outside world.

Job Characteristics

One seemingly universal characteristic of these executives' jobs is variety. Executives see themselves as being called upon to perform many different types of tasks. They feel that there are few limits on what they are required to do, except in terms of their working within a technical or functional specialty.

A reasonable amount of job sharing was identified. In general, they perceive that there is one job to be done (e.g., running a laboratory, running a systems command department), which is shared between the civilian executive and one or more other people. Sixty percent of the executives said they share their job responsibilities with one or more people, excluding their officially designated department or division heads. Moreover, executive jobs are seen as pressured and fragmented (i.e., they have little opportunity to spend much consecutive time on any one thing). Almost 90 percent reported in the questionnaire that there is a moderate or great deal of pressure on them to produce. "Crisis management" was a term frequently used. Most problems are dealt with on a day-to-day basis (sometimes even on a minute-to-minute basis), and executives perceive themselves as having little control over their own time. While pressure and fragmentation are characteristic of most jobs, they are even more characteristic of headquarters jobs than laboratory jobs. The executives reported an average of 52 hours per week of work at the office and an additional 8 at home. Information is exchanged primarily orally, a great deal of time is spent in meetings, and little time is spent alone (approximately 20%).

In the questionnaire, civilian executives were asked to rate how much time they spent on 50 specific work activities. They reported spending the most time on the following four activities:

1. Providing guidance and direction to subordinates.

2. Taking immediate action in response to a crisis or "fire drill."

3. Allocating resources (manpower, money, material) among programs or units.

4. Keeping abreast of who is doing what in the unit or command.

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There were some statistically significant differences between executives in laboratories and headquarters in their time ratings, most of which indicated that laboratory executives spend more time in relationships with sponsors and the Fleet than do those in headquarters.

The Executives' Job Environment

The job environment was found to be very important for formulating a description of the executive job. In the perception of executives, their behavior is strongly affected by the larger context in which they work. Four major characteristics of the job environment were identified:

1. Complexity. Executives function within a highly complex system, and they must cope with many people, rules, and other organizations (other Navy organizations, DoD, Congress, GAO, OMB, CSC, etc.). Moreover, the environment is characterized by multiple and criss-crossing lines of authority.

2. Centralization of decision-making. In the perception of most executives, centralization has resulted in increasing numbers of externally imposed, arbitrary, and sometimes conflicting constraints on money and personnel resources. They also feel centralization has produced an ever-increasing number of requirements for executives and their organizational units to justify what they are doing. This, in turn, has produced increased paperwork. In the questionnaire, civilian executives said they saw centralization as having a very negative effect on Navy R&D management but also commented that they expected the trend toward centralization to continue in the future.

3. Personnel shortages and the rigidity of the civilian personnel administration process. While the workload has increased, the availability of civil service personnel has remained constant or decreased. It is seen as difficult to hire and transfer personnel and impossible to fire them. In the questionnaire, 66 and 85 percent of civilian and military executives respectively said that civil service rules and regulations interfered with their ability to do an effective job. As a result, executives have been increasing their reliance on consultants and contractors, but here also they encounter many constraints. In the questionnaire, civilian executives were asked whether their unit has sufficient permanent staff to accomplish its workload, and if not, what the result has been. Only 11 percent said their unit has sufficient permanent staff. Of those who think that they do not have sufficient permanent staff, 52 percent have increased reliance on contractors, 26 percent on consultants, 27 percent on temporary personnel, and 51 percent said their unit has been unable to completely fulfill its mission.

4. Military-civilian interface. The quality of this relationship is seen as very important to the effective functioning of the shore establishment. Many military executives are confronted with civilians for the first time when they reach the 0-6 (Captain) or 0-7 (Admiral) level. They express a need for preparation for and information about civilian personnel administration regulations. While, in most instances, relationships between civilian and military executives were seen as good, there were some definite exceptions.

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Also, both civilian and military executives saw a need for improvement in this relationship at the mid or lower managerial levels. In addition, some statistically significant differences in attitudes about this interface were identified between military and civilian executives. For example, more military than civilian executives agreed with the statement, "There is a productive partnership between military and civilian executives in commands where they work together."

Personal Characteristics Required of Effective Executives

· The civilian executives were asked to rate the importance of 30 personal characteristics in effectively performing their jobs. Six sets of characteristics were identified by factor analysis and are given in overall order of importance (based on the average of the importance ratings of the individual items comprising each set).[1]

1. Managerial ability includes ability to create an effective work environment for subordinates and ability to plan and direct the work of an organizational unit.

2. Interpersonal skills involve the ability to communicate verbally and in writing, listening skills, flexibility, and persuasiveness.

3. Risk taking ability includes willingness to take risks and to question directives, and having an achievement orientation.

4. Administrative ability involves the ability to plan, to process paperwork and to act on other organizational demands, and to manage both time and externally imposed crises.

5. Technical skills include technical ability and keeping up-to-date in one's technical specialty.

6. Awareness of power entails survival skills and building a power base.

Additional Issues Associated with Executive Jobs

A number of other job characteristics was explored, including executive job satisfaction, perceptions of organization-wide characteristics, and utilization of position power. In general, executives were satisfied with their jobs. Several factors external to the work itself, however, were rated relatively low (e.g., fringe benefits and pay). Regarding position power, civilian executives feel that they should have more influence over most work activities, especially those associated with the hiring and promoting of subordinates.

Executive Development and Selection

Since a major focus of this study was training and development needs of present and future executives, a considerable amount of information was collected

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[1]Administrative ability and technical skills were rated as equally important.

on these topics. In the initial interviews, however, the issue of executive selection was raised by both civilian and military executives; consequently, information was also collected on this topic.

Executive Development

The terms "training" and "development" are used interchangeably here to mean any type of educational activity designed to help executives do their jobs more effectively, ranging from informal on-the-job development to formal classroom training.

To determine the extent of executive participation in training, in the civilian questionnaire, executives were asked what management/executive training programs they had attended. Seven percent indicated they had not attended any; 27 percent, only one course or program; 23 percent, two; and 43 percent, three or more. Moreover, it is conceivable that some of these courses may have been only 1 day long. The detailed responses are shown below:

Program	Percentage of Executives Attending
Within-command seminars, programs, or courses	44
Federal Executive Institute	42
Civil Service Commission courses	35
Brookings Institute	22
Office of Civilian Personnel courses	18
Defense Management course (Monterey)	18
University programs (e.g., Sloan, Harvard)	17
Industrial College of the Armed Forces	6
Naval War College	4
National War College	1
Other	25

A relatively low level of training participation was also indicated from the Civil Service Commission's Executive Inventory Record, which indicated that 26 percent of Navy civilian executives had never attended any major training program or course. This includes technical training.

Civilian executives varied greatly in their opinions about the extent of their own training needs, ranging from those who would like to participate in a good deal of training to those who do not want to participate at all. Executives were asked in the questionnaire to indicate what training or development they felt they needed, including informal development such as on-the-job assignments. Fifteen percent did not answer the question, implying they do not need training. Another 18 percent explicitly said they do not need any

training. The remaining 66 percent provided a total of 269 responses about the types of training needed. The percentage distribution was as follows:

Management training (e.g., techniques and principles of management, personnel administration, financial management, program planning, interpersonal skills)	50%
Government/DoD practices (e.g., DoD policies and directives, R&D management, weapons system acquisition)	16%
Technical training	16%
Job rotation, sabbaticals, and on-the-job training	10%
Computer training	6%
Miscellaneous	2%

With regard to technical training, some executives said in the interviews that much of the available technical training is too detailed and that they needed survey courses to update them in their technical or functional specialties. Many of these specialties are rapidly changing; yet executives do not have time to keep up-to-date by conventional means (by reading journals, for example) because they are busy performing managerial and administrative tasks. A large majority of civilian and military executives believe that, in general, on-the-job training is more valuable than classroom training.

Civilian executives were also asked to rate 14 general subjects and 30 specific subjects in terms of their importance for prospective civilian executives. Of the 14 general subjects, the three rated most important for prospective executives were written communication skills, interpersonal skills, and public speaking/briefing skills. The three rated least important were military tactics and strategy, military protocol, and labor-management relations (unions). Of the 30 specific subjects, the three rated most important were RDT&E management, project management, and role and functions of DoD as they affect the Navy. The three rated least important were foreign military sales, military personnel rules and regulations, and roles and functions of state and local governments.

Regarding participation in training, interviewees gave a picture of a system in which there are more factors to discourage than to encourage them to participate. The major deterrent is the pressure to produce; that is, the inability to take time away from the regular job. Other factors include (1) the perception that participation is not related to or is negatively related to promotions or high performance ratings, (2) a fear of being displaced while absent if training requires leaving one's job temporarily, and (3) unwillingness to move if training requires geographical mobility. In addition, there are factors that discourage commands from allowing their personnel to participate. Again, the most important is pressure to produce and the inability to spare employees under conditions of personnel shortages. The interviewees indicated that these same factors adversely affect the participation of GS-13 through 15 employees. Moreover, both civilian and military executives thought the GS-13 through 15 population was more amenable to training than were executives, particularly where job rotation was involved.

Executive Selection

When asked about the present executive selection system, 41 and 68 percent of the civilian and military executives respectively felt that it should be improved. The main improvements suggested were improving objectivity and speeding up the process. Less than 20 percent of civilian executives felt that the majority of civilian executives should be chosen from outside the Navy. They also felt that equal weight should be given technical expertise and managerial experience.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Information generated by this study can be used in making decisions about the use and development of Navy civilian executives. Moreover, it has implications for management and executive development throughout the shore establishment. The detailed study findings can serve as input to the development of executive training programs. For purposes of this executive summary, the conclusions and recommendations focus on broad policy considerations.

The implications for executive development are as follows: Although relatively few executives have had extensive academic training in management, leadership, or administration, they spend most of their time performing tasks in these areas. This highlights a major training need. It includes not only general management knowledge and skills (e.g., decision-making, communication) but also specific knowledge and skills relevant to functioning in the Navy shore establishment (e.g., civil service rules, PPBS). There is a secondary need for technical training; but for survey or updating courses rather than for detailed technical training. A need was also identified for the integration of civilian and military training in the shore establishment.

To improve the situation with regard to the current low level of participation in training and development, policy must provide for adequate resources for training and incentives for individuals and commands to participate. There are four major resource components: (1) time away from the regular job to participate, (2) money to finance training, (3) information regarding what training is available, and (4) high quality training. The quality of training is a very important consideration. Sending people to low quality training is perhaps worse than giving them no training at all. As far as incentives are concerned, training participation should in some way be associated with rewards such as high performance ratings and promotion. Supervisors and managers (which includes most executives) should not only be rewarded for their own training participation but also for how much their subordinates participate. In the civilian questionnaire, executives were asked what percentage of executives' performance ratings should be based on the extent to which they encourage the development of personnel in their units, and the average response was 20 percent. Also, steps must be taken to increase the possibility of people being able to get away from their regular jobs. Suggestions here include on-the-job training, spacing out training time to minimize the amount of consecutive time taken, and providing support mechanisms for those required to relocate physically.

One can characterize the mechanisms for training programs in two dimensions. The first is how many people participate, ranging from everyone to a select group. The second is whether participation is mandatory or voluntary. Putting these two dimensions together, it is recommended that (to the extent allowable under regulations) participation in executive training be voluntary, that all executives and potential future executives be given a chance to participate, and that incentives for participation be instituted. In other words, leave as much of the decision about participation as possible up to the individual and his or her supervisor. These jobs and the people who fill them are too different from one another for an outside authority to decide what is needed.

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Moreover, mandatory requirements do not seem to work. For example, although the Federal Executive Institute is mandatory for newly appointed executives, many do not attend. In addition to allowing individual discretion, it is also advisable to allow commands discretion in this regard, recognizing that some minimal level of standardization across the Navy is necessary. Commands generally feel that their personnel have unique development needs, and strongly centralized approaches to management and executive development in the past have failed or have been mitigated in their effectiveness for this reason. Therefore, to the extent feasible, commands should be given the latitude to meet the particular needs of their own personnel. In summary, incentives and resources should be provided, and discretion should be allowed regarding participation.

In addition to implications for training and development, this study's findings have a variety of implications for other areas pertaining to executives. Some of the most important are the following:

1. The fact that there is so much job sharing and job variety at executive levels suggests that the one-person/one-job and position description approaches to position classification and management may be inappropriate. Under the provisions of the Senior Executive Service, there is an opportunity to modify these traditional approaches, and this opportunity should be explored.

2. The fact that there is a large wave of projected retirements within 5 years calls for two action steps. One is an exploration of whether this in fact poses a serious threat to the corporate memory, and the development of ways to ensure smooth succession. The other is the need to undertake rapidly the development of those likely to replace the existing executives. Based on past history, the large majority of replacements will come from the Navy's GS-13 through 15 population.

3. A need has been identified to design executive development, selection, and appraisal systems around a common core of skills, knowledge and abilities required by those in executive jobs. In the past, development, selection, and appraisal have frequently been conducted independently of one another, with differing sets of criteria being employed. One of the major products of this study is a list of skills, knowledge, and abilities that can be used as criteria for all three processes.

In conclusion, the information collected in this study represents the collective wisdom of the majority of successful and influential people in the Navy shore establishment. They have identified certain needs. At present, a climate exists that offers the potential to meet many of these needs. The two major events which have produced this climate are the Civil Service Reform Act and the Navy's adoption of a Total Force concept. The former puts strong emphasis on executive development, and the latter encourages better integration between military and civilian personnel. The way in which the people in the Navy actually implement these changes will determine whether the identified needs will be met and indeed will have a long-lasting impact on the functioning of the shore establishment.

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