

**STRATEGY
RESEARCH
PROJECT**

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**LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OF SENIOR
MILITARY WOMEN IN THE ARMY**

BY

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LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OF SENIOR MILITARY WOMEN IN THE ARMY

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ABSTRACT

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The U.S. Army War College is responsible for senior leader development doctrine. This paper provides an executive overview of an Army War College workshop on the leadership development of senior military women in the Army. The paper provides my personal observations on the implementation of the workshop and provides an analysis on three emerging issues identified by the workshop. First, women lead differently and that difference is adaptable to a changing Army. Secondly, it gives a brief discussion of the importance of networking. Lastly, it examines mentorship and its usefulness to the development of senior military leaders.

INTRODUCTION

The US Army War College recently conducted a workshop focused on the leadership development of senior military women in the Army. This paper gives an executive overview of the workshop. It then provides my analysis, as an attendee, of how we can change leader development to enhance women's development in the Army. Secondly, it examines how networking among senior military women and executive women in academia and the corporate world increased the workshop participants awareness of the common challenges facing women in senior leadership positions. Finally, this analysis describes the criticality of mentorship as a key factor in any senior women leadership development process.

SENIOR WOMEN LEADER WORKSHOP

Methodology. I believe the leader development program of the US Army is by and large, gender based and has not totally recognized the unique potential of the woman leaders. As part of my Strategic Research Project I was involved in the design and implementation of a workshop in leadership development specifically related to gender. Its purpose was to bring together a diverse group of people from academia, industry and the military and to initiate a dialogue on the Army's development of women officers as strategic leaders. The intent was to accomplish this through three methods. *First*, the workshop participants would review research conducted on the development of corporate women executives in general, and specifically focus on a current developmental program initiated by a major corporation. Also, participants would examine current leader

development thinking and activities within the Army. This review would provide a common starting point for the diverse group. *Second*, the group would be discussing how relevant the civilian research is to the Army culture of leader development for senior women. *Finally*, the participants would be recommending follow-on actions and areas for research. The US Army would then have a starting point for a major policy change conference on these issues.¹

Given these methods, three overarching questions were developed to guide the dialogue of the participants throughout the day and one half workshop. The questions were: 1. *What should be the senior leader development model for women?*; 2. *How can the cutting edge research findings and corporate practices on women's leadership development be cross-walked into the Army?*; and, 3. *Are there unique opportunities for women as leaders in the 21st century?* The questions provided a structure for the participants to develop and refine the issues they reviewed in their small group discussions.

Workshop Setup. The concept was to have a day and a half workshop beginning with an evening's dinner and address followed the next day by an intense session at an isolated area with an early morning start and completion by mid afternoon. The Honorable Dr. Diane Disney, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Civilian Personnel Policy, spoke about women leadership trends, providing the session's initial linkage and leadership. The agenda for the main day consisted of an initial panel discussion, followed

by group discussions on specific topics, a working lunch with briefings by the groups, then a second series of group discussions, ending with final presentations by each group. The initial panel consisted of talks by representatives of academia, the Army, and the corporate world with a summary by a War College faculty member who served as Discussant.

The workshop participants knew the expected outcomes: issues framed for possible action; personal networks established among army, corporate and academic communities; proceedings recorded and provided to involved senior leaders; and issues determined for future workshop/conference. Everyone involved "bought into" an active participation by their attendance.

Emerging Issues. Three themes emerged from the introductory panel presentations.

These were that many successful leaders are women, that women do lead differently, and that future trends will require different leadership styles. Women's successful leadership styles will be enhanced and sought by a changing environment. It was noted that successful women entrepreneurs tend to create a web-like flat structure which gathers/includes others from all directions. This is in contrast to a more male hierarchical control of the organization. Research has shown that this alternative leadership method provides for greater interpretive leadership style and allows for a broader understanding of issues from diverse viewpoints. Overall, it came out from the workshop that successful women executives who have exhibited those traits, believe that they are the "right" ones for consideration as leaders of the future.

One of the most significant discussions in the workshop was on major challenges confronting successful women senior leaders. Four challenges seemed to be easily applied to the current Army environment.² The first challenge is that of obtaining recognition. Research shows that women reaching the top often worked harder than their male peers to reach that level. Women's stories are not being told in the media or in research. "Recognition in major newspapers of women managers/entrepreneurs is highly disproportionate to the percentage of women who own businesses or are in management positions."³ Promotions for women are often to jobs with less visibility and risks even after a "trial" period of proving that she can handle the increased responsibility.⁴ Often these positions are less critical positions and are more often staff rather than line positions within the organization. This affects women in that the responsibilities associated with these positions are described as technical not decision-making. Research indicates executives making these promotion decisions recommend candidates with whom they have a high comfort level and who are usually of the same gender.⁵

The second challenge is in expectations of how one should lead. There are traditional characteristics, usually associated with a male model of leadership, assigned to high level leadership positions no matter who fills the role. These leaders are often characterized as competitive, confrontational, analytical, goal oriented and authoritative. When a woman gets into a position of leadership or authority and doesn't appear to be competitive or confrontational then often times there is a question of her abilities since

she doesn't "act like a leader should". It is usually expected that women who use a different leadership style, will adapt their behaviors to ensure others are comfortable.⁶

The third challenge is the lack of role models for women. Role models often help shape style, personal values and professional identity. Many times women are the pioneers in their role. This puts them in a dual position of role model/mentor and pioneer at the same time.⁷ This often times creates frustration and tension because there is no one to look to who may have been in that circumstance. For the woman, it can be extremely difficult to follow a male role model because attributes he exhibits may be inappropriate or ineffective for the woman leader. This lack of senior women leader role models makes leader development for women more complex than for men.

Lastly, there is the challenge of balancing and managing roles. Women, both emotionally and physically, often times have the responsibility for dependent care, whether it be parents or children. This places a strain and an added burden on women. Most institutions in America ignore this fact and have not adopted family-friendly policies. These policies can accommodate the balance between work and family responsibilities which impact choices of career paths.

The following questions served as the basis of the dialogue within the workshop's groups. These are further expanded in the workshop proceedings.⁸

Is there a need to enhance the organizational environment and commitment for high potential senior women leaders?

Are there current women's leadership development issues that will become critical in the next ten years?

Does a changing organization (e.g., a downsizing Army) lead to a "zero sum gain" diversity mentality in leader development?

Are there roles that need to be taken now by the current senior women in the Army?

These questions were discussed and refined, and then the groups prepared recommendations to be considered for inclusion into actions toward a future workshop. Of all of the discussions, three emerging issues became central to the workshop: vision, diversity and mentorship. Harback in his analysis of the workshop stated, "There needs to be a more comprehensive conference which will focus on the issues raised and will initiate greater research, awareness and action."⁹ The concepts of vision, networking and mentorship are the focus of the rest of this report.

DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

It is my belief, after listening to discussions during the workshop and considering the increasing diversity found within the Army, that the ways women lead should be capitalized upon and placed into the Army's leader development program. The research presented indicates that women who are successful in medium-sized, nontraditional organizations demonstrate that employing a command-and-control style of leadership, normally associated with men in large, traditional organizations, is not the only way to

the top. The second wave of successful female executives are drawing on their experiences as women and the patterns associated with women's socialization to break through to the top levels. They are capitalizing on opportunities in fast-changing and growing opportunities and showing they can be successful because of-not in spite of-some characteristics generally considered to be 'feminine' and thus inappropriate in leaders.¹⁰ Women's leadership is characterized by a style of cooperation, influence, and empowerment while men's style stresses a traditional hierarchy, dominance, and order.¹¹ This success by women in business proves that organizations can benefit and find strength from other than the traditional leadership styles.

Vision. Women vision differently than men. Both women and men must be able to formulate a vision and maintain a path towards that vision. The challenge is doing that in a future environment which will most likely be complex, ambiguous and constantly changing.¹² The style of visioning will make a difference and that is where the importance of how one visions comes into play. Visioning of the future will be more global, and as such, more multi-cultural. It will require a leader capable of looking at many sides of an issue. It must also include more diversity. Research shows that there is a gender dimension to the style and outcome of the visioning process. Women's visioning is characterized as more flexible, purposeful, innovative, changing and more integrated.¹³ This vision process is more conducive to a diverse workforce of the future and a diversity of mission requirements. As the Army looks toward its unpredictable future, Gordon R. Sullivan, a former Chief of Staff, stresses that the Army must be

capable of an unprecedented degree of flexibility and adaptability in providing the right packages to joint endeavors.¹⁴ The Army will need to actively pursue its utilization of women to fully capitalize on their abilities which match the stated requirements.

Networking. One of the expected outcomes of the workshop was the establishment of personal networks among the diverse group of the Army, academia and the corporate world participants. Although the groups reached this goal and established networks, it was more significant to me that the military participants recognized the need for a network among themselves. Many of these women officers had actively avoided being involved in women's issues or networks. They had perceived that to be successful they needed to be "one of the boys" which to them meant the avoidance of any involvement in women's groups. The personal accounting of the academic and corporate participants of how their successes and contributions to mission accomplishment were enhanced by networking, made the women officers realize that the notion of networking could be beneficial for them and their organizations. The issues faced by senior women leaders have more similarities than differences. The participants' awareness of the role networking can play in the development of solutions to alleviate some of the unique challenges senior women leaders will face in the Army of the 21st century was increased during the workshop. An effective female networking system could also be an avenue for senior women to identify junior officers whom they believe should be included in an active mentoring program.

Mentorship. Of the three issues, mentorship, has the most significance to me. The participants felt mentorship for both women and men must be emphasized in the development of successful senior leaders. This is especially important as the phenomenon of downsizing has created much discord in the area of career potential. Having a mentor or being a mentor is more important than ever. A mentor provides guidance by virtue of her or his knowledge, network of resources and objective advice in making career decisions.

Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-80, Executive Leadership, addresses leader development through mentoring. It describes mentoring as a "process used to develop the thinking skills and frames of reference for sequential and progressive leader development. Mentors, superiors once removed, are concerned with assessing potential, developing capabilities and a frame of reference for the future."¹⁵ The dictionary defines a mentor as a trusted counselor or teacher. A mentor is generally a person of greater experience or rank with whom a personal relationship is established and who actively guides you in attaining your goals. Mentoring relationships are generally thought to be long term. A protégé may work with a mentor and develop a career path which incorporates schooling, assignments, professional development and personal concerns. However, the relationship may only last through certain stages and need not be a linkage solely within a reporting structure. Mentorship can go beyond the institutional structure..

Kathy E. Kram, an acknowledged authority on the subject of mentorship, cites four common characteristics found in mentorship. First, the protégé is allowed to “address freely personal and professional concerns while the mentor provides opportunities to gain knowledge, skills and competence.” Second, both individuals benefit since the relationship “responds to current needs and concerns of the two people involved.” Third, the relationships “occur in an organizational context that greatly influences when and how they unfold.” And lastly, these relationships “are not normally available to most people in the organization.”¹⁶

There are two broad categories of mentoring functions: career and psychosocial. Career functions are “those aspects of the relationship that enhance career development.” Psychosocial functions “enhance a sense of competence, identity, and effectiveness in a professional role.”¹⁷ The career aspect involves sponsorship by the mentor and exposure and visibility of the protégé within the organization. A mentor helps the protégé find challenging assignments which will continue to further the individual’s progression. Although mentors in the Army may recommend and be instrumental in having a person assigned to certain positions, the individual’s manner of performance and demonstrated potential as written in the Officer Efficiency Report are the basis for selection for promotion, not the mentor.

Coaching is ongoing throughout the relationship. A mentor provides feedback, working to maximize the protégé’s strengths and minimize weaknesses. The mentor also

provides a shield of protection which allows one to error during learning. In cross-gender relationships the appropriate balance of the protection function is often hard to achieve. The young woman feels as though she is being deprived of opportunities, while the senior colleague thinks he is protecting her.¹⁸

Psychosocial functions consists of role modeling, counseling, friendship, and acceptance and confirmation of the protégé. The mentor sets the example professionally and personally. The protégé observes the mentor's decision making process and standards of conduct by which she or he lives and makes choices. The mentor allows the relationship to be friendly with informal exchanges being shared. However, this is an area in cross-gender relationships which is more limited due to anxiety of perceptions of improper behavior. In the current environment formal policies and informal practices inhibit career success for women and enhance opportunities for male success. It is the position of the mentor, and therefore her organizational power, that will determine the protégé's degree of upward mobility.¹⁹

Mentoring by women for women is necessary but very often women are not in the position of influence in one's career progression. I believe the institutionalization of the mentorship process could enhance the successful development of women as senior leaders. A leader development program incorporating training mentors could teach how to handle cross-gender issues which would make senior leaders more comfortable with

dealing with protégés of dissimilar backgrounds and characteristics. The attitude of the leadership will determine the success of an educational/executive development effort.²⁰

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented a discussion on leadership development of senior military women in the Army. It reviewed The Army War College workshop held to initiate a dialogue on the development of senior military women. The workshop was a success. The design was well-thought out. The structure of having a social time before the intense session aided the participants in finding common ground and bridging gaps among the diverse group. The selection of participants was appropriate for the workshop and I believe the same participants, to capitalize on the networking from this session, should constitute the base guest list for the next workshop. However, all but one of the participants were white, so diversity needs to be considered in the future. I believe conducting the sessions through the second evening with a wrap-up the following morning would have provided the extra time the participants needed to design a ‘strawman’ action plan. The read-ahead material and the preselection of issue groups provided the participants the common basis needed for discussions. Because the structure was flexible, the participants felt at ease reworking the issue questions as discussions dictated.

I believe that the participants were open and eager to learn from each other. They quickly identified the issue as broader than gender. They saw it as a human issue of the positive leveraging of diversity for maximum performance and in so doing, the focus widened the long term impact of the workshop. I think the workshop increased the military participants knowledge about how similar our challenges are to those of the women in the corporate and academic worlds. I also believe the workshop awakened the awareness of the research academicians to another entire element for inclusion in their research. The research is clear that the woman's ability to vision and function in a manner different from men may better suit them for the approaching times. What better field to include than one in a male dominated society undergoing rapid change. The success of the workshop indicates that alliances between corporations, learning institutions and the military to study executive development in a wide spectrum of areas will better prepare their leaders to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

I believe I added value to the workshop because I was the source of many answers and explanations for questions asked by participants who had no knowledge of how the Army system worked. As a floater, I provided an 'honest broker' approach to several of the discussions during the workshop. I personally gained from being involved in the workshop, insight into how to increase my effectiveness as a leader by educating my peers on how they can capitalize on the differences a diverse workforce brings to their organizations. The workshop provided me the avenue to increase several of my peers awareness of and involvement in issues concerning the active development of women

leaders. I also realize more the need for outreach to the community to become more a part of the solution to the challenges facing us all in a time of downsizing for the 21st century.

ENDNOTES

¹ Herbert F. Harback, "Critical Issue Paper: The Leadership Development of Senior Military Women for the 21st Century Army" (Carlisle, PA: Pennsylvania State University, Education Department, 1996), 11, photocopied.

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³ Candida Brush, "Women's Strategic Leadership: Issues and Opportunities for the Future," Paper presented at the USAWC Strategic Leadership Workshop on Women, Carlisle, PA, 2 March 1996, 3-4.

⁴ Marian N. Ruderman, Patricia J. Ohlott and Kathy E. Kramm, "Promotion decisions as a diversity practice," Journal of Management Development, V. 14, N.2: 6.

⁵ Ibid, 9-10.

⁶ Brush, 5.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Harback, 13-18.

⁹ Harback, 21.

¹⁰ Judy B. Rosner, "Ways Women Lead," Harvard Business Review (November-December 1990): 120.

¹¹ Helen S. Astin & C. Leland, Women of Influence, Women of Vision (San Francisco, Ca: Jossey-Bass, 1991).

¹² Herbert F. Harback and Ulrich H. Keller. "Learning Leader XXI," Military Review (May-June 1995): 37.

¹³ Brush, 7.

¹⁴ Gordon R. Sullivan, "A Vision for the Future," Military Review (May-June 1995): 3.

¹⁵ Department of the Army, Executive Leadership, Army Pamphlet 600-80 (Washington: U.S. Department of the Army, 19 June 1987), 49.

¹⁶ Kathy E. Kram, Mentoring at Work: Developmental Relationships in Organizational Life (Glenview, Ill. Scott, Foresman and Company, 1985), 2.

¹⁷ Kram, 22-23.

¹⁸ Kram, 29-30.

¹⁹ Janine Knackstedt, "Are Female Protégés Better Off with Male Mentors?" Mentoring Connection (Fall 1994). Internet:<http://www.indiana.edu/~rusgdev/female.html>.

²⁰ Harper W Moulton & Arthur A. Fickel. Executive Development: Preparing for the 21st Century (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 93.