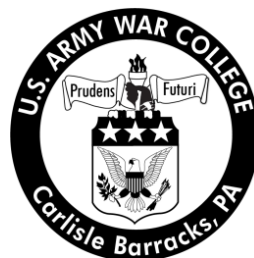


Targeted Mentorship: Is it Still Relevant Today?

by

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Class of 2013

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Abstract

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A goal of national security policy is to have the armed forces representative of the society it defends and its leadership representative of the forces they lead. This paper seeks to provide understanding and actions for U.S. Army leaders to take regarding lack of African American representation in its senior ranks. It examines underlying causes of African Americans under representation and recommends ways the Army can begin a human capital strategy valuing diversity as a strategic necessity. The targeted mentorship of African Americans by all leaders, regardless of race, is a relevant and key aspect to developing this strategy. This research will address the underlying causes of under representation: occupational career choice; self-segregation; and inadequate mentorship opportunities in order to increase the pool of African American candidates who are competitive for senior level promotions. A human capital strategy that focuses on attracting, mentoring, and career management of African Americans is not about affirmative action for promotion but is about the actions required to align the strategic intent of Army leaders with building accountable organizations that value the strategic importance of diversity within its ranks.

Targeted Mentorship: Is it Still Relevant Today?

This paper is about mentorship programs targeted specifically at minorities. Its seeds were planted during a conversation with a former supervisor and mentor. Being female, this supervisor could obviously relate to the challenges faced as a minority rising through the senior ranks of military service, but she had differing views on the need to have mentorship programs that targeted specific gender or ethnic groups. Some believe it is still necessary and others like her believe it is a practice no longer required and that it actually undermines diversity in the organization. This encounter caused me to challenge the validity of my own assumptions.

Assumptions were further challenged while discussing cultural awareness and strategic leadership in seminar. A faculty instructor shared a story about a Brigade Commander (a black Colonel) in Iraq who requested a private meeting with all the African American officers in a particular Battalion. The underlying question was whether that request was acceptable in comparison to the outrage that would certainly occur had a white commander requested to meet with only white officers privately. This situation challenged the assumption that current self segregating interest groups in the military that continue to specialize in the mentoring and networking of black officers are legitimate in light of advances made with respect to racial equality.¹

These two incidents caused me to take a more moderate view on the idea of targeted mentorship of minorities. I felt it was important and knew it had been a factor in my own success. However, it became clear that the concept could be viewed negatively within an organization. Then the Army Chief of Staff, General Raymond T. Odierno, gave a speech in which he echoed sentiments he had expressed in other forums: “I

need African American leaders at all ranks. It is critical to our moving forward and being successful.”² He emphasized that he wanted and needed more African Americans at the senior ranks of his service, and that it was a responsibility of all current leaders to make it happen through mentorship.

What was shocking about his comments was not their validity, for African Americans are under represented at the senior levels of leadership in the military. Army data supported Odierno’s words. From 1994 to 2007 the percentage of black lieutenants who could anticipate becoming general officers fell from 2.4 to 1.8 percent while the expectations of white lieutenants held at 4.1 percent.³ What really surprised me about his comments was that he was challenging all senior leaders, white and black, that these statistics were unacceptable. His words gave validity to proactive and progressive practices including targeted mentorship of minorities. Actions such as a Brigade Commander requesting to speak with a specific ethnic group were not only relevant but encouraged. These thoughts motivated me to research the strategic reasoning behind the Army’s desire to specifically target African American officers for mentoring and development opportunities.

Strategic Importance of Targeted Mentorship

To examine the strategic implications of targeted mentorship practices, I will consider “minority” to be an ethnic, racial, religious, or other group of people in the United States having a distinctive presence within a larger society and who are often subjected to differential treatment by experiencing a pattern of disadvantage or inequality.⁴ I will limit my discussion of minorities to African Americans in the Army even though the results could be easily applied to other minorities, services, and non-military organizations.

The United States military has been a leader in providing equal opportunity since it formally began the process of racial integration with the signing of Executive Orders 9808 and 9811 by President Harry S. Truman in 1948.⁵ Since then, the military has outpaced society in providing opportunities for all service members, regardless of racial or ethnic background, through equal opportunity policies and related recruiting and management tactics.⁶ Despite this, a 2009 RAND report indicated that Department of Defense officials expressed concern about the scarcity of minorities in the senior leadership of the military and the strategic impacts this under representation has on diversity goals.⁷

Ideally, in a democratic society, a military force is representative of the nation it defends.⁸ This is a goal of national security policy, but the demographics of the United States are changing. In fact, it is projected that by 2050 the white population will decrease from 75 to 50 percent while the African American population will increase from 12 to 14 percent, the Hispanic population from 9 to 25 percent and the Asian population from 3 to 8 percent.⁹ This is of strategic concern to our current senior military leaders as they continue to strive to meet national security policy goals and produce fully qualified leaders that represent the diverse nature of the enlisted troops serving in our military and the country they serve. As with all the services, developing minorities for leadership roles is a key focus but, as reflected in General Odierno's remarks, the question is whether the Army is truly providing the appropriate education, training, and human capital strategy to recruit, develop through mentorship, and retain African Americans to become senior leaders.¹⁰

Studies from 2006 to 2008 showed that the enlisted military force as a whole is quite representative of American society and in line with strategic concerns of maintaining a diverse force that reflects all segments of society.¹¹ However in 2010, the Military Leadership Diversity Commission found that minority representation among senior military leaders is neither representative of the populations they serve nor the forces they lead.¹² Thus my research is focused on the strategic concern of how the Army can create an environment that will achieve diversity and proper representation of African Americans at its senior ranks versus just getting more African Americans promoted.

Previous methods of creating diversity focused on reversing discrimination and anti-access through affirmative action in compliance with federal standards and laws.¹³ Although these methods create opportunities for minorities, they also create conflict and rarely result in a true change in the underlying attitudes of members in an organization towards the strategic importance of diversity.¹⁴ Creating an environment where diversity is connected to the organization's vision and strategy is more likely to produce the holistic support of targeted mentorship programs necessary for the Army leaders to correct African American under representation in senior ranks. The Army must move beyond demographic numbers and concentrate on focused recruitment and mentorship to create sufficient quantities of African American candidates capable of filling senior leadership roles in the future.

Most research on the topic of why African Americans are under represented at the senior levels of Army leadership focus on education, occupational career choices, early mentorship, and leadership accountability as the factors that set conditions for

future officer competitiveness.¹⁵ These factors have significant impact on the diversity of Army senior leaders because they create disparities in how and why different ethnic groups make choices that influence future likelihood of promotion. I will examine this issue through four areas: benefits of diversity; factors contributing to African American under representation in the Army's senior ranks; future recruitment challenges; and the reasons targeted mentorship of African Americans is still a relevant practice for reversing the trends of under representation.

Benefits of Diversity

The demographics of the United States are changing. As minority populations appropriate for military service continue to rise, it is strategically important for the Army to cultivate senior leaders who represent this diversity. Value-in-diversity hypothesis states that diversity in organizations creates positive environments of constructive conflict and debate amongst people with different sets of skills, information, and experiences which results in higher-level outcomes for creative problem solving.¹⁶ The government understands that representation of minority groups is strategically important because it demonstrates that public service is open to and representative of all people.¹⁷ General Odierno illustrated precisely why diversity is strategically important to the Army when he expressed the need for diversity in facing and solving the nation's challenges and to ensure Soldiers see themselves reflected at every level of leadership.¹⁸

While value-in-diversity holds that diversity will lead to better solutions to complex problems, the reality of years of social-science research show performance advantages of diversity are often found under very narrow conditions and that racial diversity tends to create more difficulties for organizational performance.¹⁹ Diversity initiatives can unintentionally provoke lawsuits, stir up ethnic tensions, or humiliate certain groups if

they are not aimed at dispelling prejudices versus simply race-counting.²⁰ These are certainly not reasons for the Army to abandon attempts to diversify its senior ranks, but they illustrate the importance of leaders acknowledging the challenges they will face. The key for Army leaders is to communicate the strategic value of diversity and create an environment where diverse individuals share organizational values and goals that decrease non-productive conflict.

Although research shows that racial diversity creates challenges for an organization, they can be mitigated through development of leaders who value diversity and create positive environments for exploiting unique perspectives that result in enhanced performance and solutions to complex problems.²¹ Army leaders need to continuously communicate why diversity is important and how it is linked to the organization's strategic vision.

Causes for Under Representation of African Americans

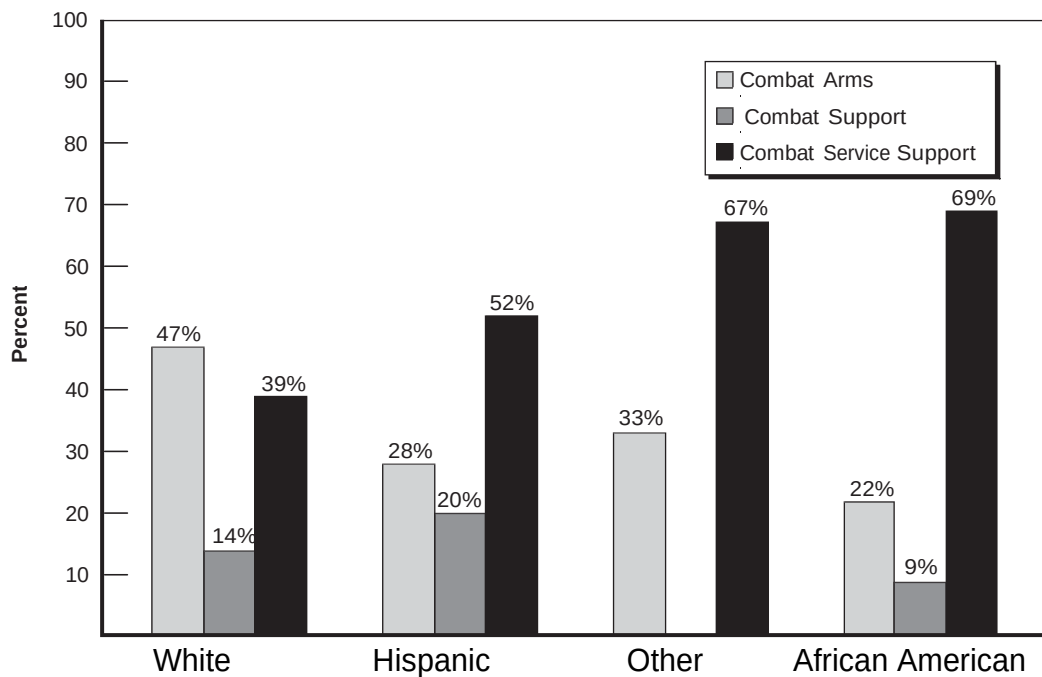
African American soldiers make up about 17 percent of the total force but just 9 percent of all officers.²² Education, occupational career choices, early mentorship, and leadership accountability are all factors to why the Army currently is under represented in African American officers in its senior ranks.²³ This is not to say that the Army has not tried to provide opportunities for African Americans to succeed. However, it has failed to see how these factors have integrated to create conditions that keep minorities from reaching senior ranks at levels that are more representative of society and the forces they lead. I will highlight occupational career choices, education of African American communities to mitigate self-segregation, and adequate mentorship opportunities as the three most important factors contributing to this problem.

Occupational Career Choices

A RAND study observed that officers with combat-related career backgrounds tend to populate the senior ranks of the Army, with over 80 percent of Army generals from Combat Arms branches.²⁴ This is consistent with other services in which the majority of general officers tend to come from combat occupations such as pilots or surface warfare officers.²⁵ General Odierno gets to the core of the problem when he assessed that fewer African American officers are being selected for the rank of Major because fewer African Americans have entered Combat Arms for the last 10 to 15 years.²⁶

The strategic importance of this is that the Army's senior positions are filled by a system that promotes from within. Therefore, its future senior leaders are a subset of the current occupations that are most likely to be advanced. If African Americans are under represented in the subset, their chances of being promoted in a system that rewards combat-related occupations are diminished. African American officers select supporting arms of the Army at almost two times the rate of Combat Arms.²⁷ As the following chart depicts, the lack of African Americans in the Army Combat Arms branches is even more pronounced at the O-6 level where only 22 percent of African Americans are in Combat Arms while 69 percent serve in Combat Service Support Arms.²⁸

Table 1. Branch Distribution of Experienced Army Officers (O-6) in 2006



It has been suggested that because a majority of African Americans are commissioned through the Reserve Officer Training Corps rather than the Military Academy, they are being crowded out of Combat Arms branches and are more likely to be assigned to support branches.²⁹ However research shows that most cadets, despite their commissioning source, receive one of their top preferred branches and African Americans in fact most often receive their top choice, at over 60 percent.³⁰ Therefore, even the most competitive African American officer candidates are less likely to choose Combat Arms branches. The logical conclusion is that African Americans are self-segregating themselves from these careers rather than being excluded because of discrimination practices.

Self-Segregation

Self-segregation is common among human groups in response to threats, challenges, and opportunities and is the deliberate forming of racially segregated

organizations and special interests groups for the purpose of assisting other members of the same demographic group to advance in society.³¹ While self-segregation of African Americans in the past was a result of oppression, today's requires a conscious decision to bond with others based on racial identity, feeling of shared fate, the comfort of imposed brotherhood, and commonality in social beliefs.³² Although the reasons for self-segregation are different today, the reality is many established African Americans still feel it is an effective way to mentor, and many young African Americans still believe it is the only way to deal with racial challenges in today's society.

African Americans in particular think about themselves in terms of race, because that is usually how the rest of the world thinks of them, and their self-perceptions are shaped by the messages received from those around them.³³ For example, my early adolescence brought about encounters of subtle African American stereotypes regarding education, athleticism, and dress which only got more intense as I grew older. As African American youths gain a heightened awareness of the significance being placed on race by society, they begin to grapple with what it means to be a member of a group targeted by racism.³⁴ This naturally leads them to protect themselves from further offenses and they begin to self-segregate themselves with others who they hope will better understand their perspectives.³⁵

African Americans who join today's voluntary Army make a decision that military service is preferable to other opportunities. However, discrimination practices of the past left almost all African Americans out of the Combat Arms occupations which led to recognition and promotion. By segregating African Americans to support roles, the Army created a network of officers who came up through a system that only offered them

opportunities to advance in the Combat Support branches and that knowledge was shared with future officers. Future African American officer candidates looked through the ranks and only saw similar people succeeding in Combat Support roles and were unwilling to pay the social and psychological costs necessary to be successful in Combat Arms.³⁶ They naturally segregated to the branches where they felt they will be supported throughout their careers and this legacy is self-sustaining today.

Adequate Mentorship

For Army senior leaders to mitigate self-segregation risks to its diversity goals, they need to ensure that when African Americans do accept and show promise in Combat Arms occupations, feelings of lack of support are eliminated through mentorship that provides self-confidence and career development. Once a pattern of support is established, future African American officer candidates will see an environment that is tolerant of their diversity and will be more willing to commit to careers in the Combat Arms branches. The Army must implement comprehensive mentorship programs to illustrate to African Americans that there are fair opportunities for them to succeed in Combat Arms branches unlike the past. For unless they embrace and request leadership roles in these branches at a much higher rate, the under representation of African American officers will remain unchanged.³⁷

Future Recruitment Challenges

Exasperating the Army's ability to attract African American candidates into the Combat Arms branches is the fact that the pool of potential candidates is getting smaller. Statistics from the Pentagon show three out of four young people ages 17-24 are not eligible to join the military because they do not meet entry requirements.³⁸ Of all potential candidates, 23 percent cannot meet education or test score standards.³⁹ This

deficiency is even more evident in minorities where studies regarding the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) test showed wide disparities in scores among white and minority students. Between 2004 and 2009 nearly 40 percent of black students failed the ASVAB compared with 16 percent of whites.⁴⁰ Over 35 percent of all candidates get medically disqualified, with obesity, a serious problem in the African American community, being the largest contributing factor.⁴¹ Finally, 18 percent of candidates are removed for drugs, alcohol, or other criminal misbehaviors which leaves only 24 percent eligible to serve.⁴² If the estimated 10 percent who are qualified but attending college are subtracted, the Army is left with only 14 percent of the youth population who are eligible and available to serve.⁴³ Compounding this problem, the number of African American students who stated no interest in joining the military increased from approximately 65 to 85 percent between the years 1984 to 2008.⁴⁴

These factors along with other issues of career selection and self-segregation will adversely affect the strategic goal of the Army to ensure its officer corps is representative of society. Army leaders cannot rely on a continuation of economic recession to ensure they have enough qualified African Americans to meet diversity goals. It will need to reach out to African American communities to convince those parents, teachers, coaches, and community leaders to recommend service in the Army as a viable career choice. In doing so, they will have an opportunity to make the Combat Arms branches more attractive and to advocate its impact on future promotion opportunities. The Army can do this by placing more emphasis on targeted mentorship of African Americans early on within the community and continuously throughout their careers.

Benefits of Target Mentorship

Mentorship allows new members to grow, develop, and become more effective because it shows they have leaders who understand their potential value and appreciate their contributions.⁴⁵ Mentorship is more than just good leadership because it involves taking a substantial personal and professional interest in someone's future. A mentor is responsible for developing a protégé for successful growth within a profession in two main areas: career and psychosocial.⁴⁶ Career functions are those aspects of the mentorship designed to enhance career advancement through sponsorship, exposure-and-visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging work assignments; while psychosocial functions enhance the protégé's sense of professional competence through role modeling, acceptance-and-confirmation, counseling, and friendship.⁴⁷

Unfortunately, many African Americans find ourselves excluded from quality mentoring relationships because they usually emerge from involuntary psychosocial functions. Friendly relationships most often start because of a similarity in culture. Young minority officers often do not have the luxury of a minority rater so if they feel isolated from the mentorship process a hostile environment can emerge.⁴⁸ Isolation can create hostile environments by causing members of the organization to form stereotypes about minority members. Studies have highlighted this fact showing that the more isolated the minority group members are in relation to the majority, the less likely they are perceived to be high achievers by majority standards.⁴⁹ This is because they are perceived less as individuals than as tokens and this token status is associated with conditions that in turn generate responses detrimental to the minority member's performance.⁵⁰ First, they are highly visible and the over-observed status generates disproportionate performance pressure.⁵¹ Second, the presence of tokens leads to

polarization within the group and those characteristics which distinguish the token person come to be perceived as salient, even if they are irrelevant to performance.⁵² Third, the individual characteristics of token persons are distorted to bring them into line with stereotypes about the token's group.⁵³ The isolated member can counter these conditions only if they are willing to meet performance demands through over-achieving or challenging peer expectations at every encounter, but often find it easier to just accept limited and traditional opportunities.⁵⁴ Because of this, an isolated minority's performance is likely to affect not only their own advancement but also the future acceptability of other members of the minority group.⁵⁵ This in turn can lead to resentment, influencing other minorities to further self-segregate and avoid the very groups senior leaders are attempting to diversify.

The small number of senior minority officers creates an environment where fewer junior minority officers have the opportunity to develop mentoring relationships with other successful minorities who may be better able to relate to their challenges. The notion that individuals are more attracted to others who are like themselves and this attraction would most likely lead to a successful mentorship partnership is valid. However this attraction theory limits the types of role models that young African Americans are exposed to and conditions them to believe that only other African Americans are legitimate role models.⁵⁶ It also conditions other races into believing they are not expected to attempt to mentor young African Americans.⁵⁷ Regardless of ethnic status, young officers must seek advice from Army leaders of all races. In turn, all Army leaders must seek opportunities to target African Americans for mentorship

opportunities so that they can influence their acceptance to serve and progress within the Combat Arms branches.

Targeted Mentorship Strategy

If the Army truly wants to correct under representation in the senior ranks by getting more African Americans to commit to careers in its Combat Arms branches, it must embrace targeted mentoring programs. Targeted mentorship must be a strategy that seeks to educate African Americans about the opportunities of a career in the Combat Arms branches. While minorities often lack the opportunity to experience quality mentoring relationships for various reasons, army leaders have access to organizations that can help facilitate targeted mentorship opportunities to African Americans until a more robust human capital strategy can be developed to train and hold accountable all officers to mentor more African Americans.

One of these organizations is ROCKS, named after Brigadier General Roscoe “Rock” Cartwright. Developed in the early 1970s, the mission of ROCKS is to mentor junior black officers.⁵⁸ General Colin Powell described the organization as one that wanted to help young black officers up the career ladder, give them information on assignments, tell them about commanders able or incompetent, and introduce promising African American candidates to the right people to help them realize their potential.⁵⁹ ROCKS’ goal is to increase the representation of African American officers in the Army by going directly to the community to increase the pool of African American officers and offer guidance to enable them to work and advance within the military system.⁶⁰ The benefits of the ROCKS is that it brings together the limited number of experienced successful minority officers who can serve younger officers who want to enter into a mentoring relationship.

Professional organizations like ROCKS that target minorities for mentorship also seek to diversify their programs by integrating professionals from all races into their programs.⁶¹ To truly implement an all-inclusive human capital strategy that ensures all African Americans who have the potential to succeed in the Combat Arms branches receive quality mentoring, senior leaders must be held accountable for improving African American representation across the force. The Army should recognize the value of the multiple short term mentors, peer mentors, and mentoring groups from all races in accomplishing its diversity goals.⁶² It should make it mandatory for all Battalion commanders to attend a ROCKS meeting to see what resources are available to aid in mentoring their minority officers.

General Odierno fully understands this when he stated: “I don’t have enough white officers mentoring black officers...It doesn’t matter what race you are, an officer is an officer...and what we need to know is why we’re not meeting what we believe are proper numbers for our diverse Army.”⁶³ Diversity leadership must become a core competency at all levels of the Army and should be linked to performance appraisals highlighting effective leaders who are promoting fairness and equity.⁶⁴ Many senior leaders will not like this because they will see it as affirmative action rather than a strategic action to ensure the Army has diversity in its senior ranks. But it is their obligation to recognize, develop, and mentor African Americans if this strategic goal is to be successful. And young African American officers must actively seek out mentors of all races and show motivation towards self-improvement early on, for it is ultimately up to them how far they will go.

Recommendations

My recommendations for the Army to move forward in its efforts to address its strategic concern of African American diversity in its senior ranks is implementation of a robust human capital strategy based on 3 themes: recruit; leadership education and accountability; retain through mentorship. First, the Army must strategically recruit and attract young African Americans through community outreach programs. Secondly, it must provide current leaders the proper direction and cultural awareness skills needed to effectively mentor African Americans and hold them accountable. Finally, it will need to continue the practice of targeted mentorship of African Americans to provide career management guidance that will ensure enough are retained and in the proper career fields to compete for senior leader positions in the future.

Recruit and Attract

The Army needs a more aggressive and robust human capital strategy that is based on a systematic approach to recruit more African Americans. This approach must be demonstrated by support from the top, based on a timeline with milestones to assess progress, and be firmly aligned with the Army's strategic intent to have African Americans properly represented in its senior ranks. General Odierno set the stage for his strategic intent when he asked ROCKS: "What can you do to increase the attraction of the Army to talented African Americans and their influencers and why are certain branches of the Army more or less attractive to African-Americans."⁶⁵ It is time for the institution, and not just ROCKS, to develop and assess a strategy that accomplishes this goal.

Accomplishing this task requires building awareness and improving educational preparedness in African American communities.⁶⁶ The Army should have senior ranking

officials of all races, active and retired, visit high schools and colleges with a high concentration of African Americans to discuss opportunities for a career in the Army.⁶⁷

The Army should be sure to focus heavily on utilizing those senior officials who served as Combat Arms officers to get their messaging across. To improve educational preparedness, the Army should work in cooperation with community programs promoting the importance of science, technology, engineering and mathematics backgrounds to ensure African American youth have the educational foundation to meet entry requirements.⁶⁸

The Army needs to develop a detailed analysis of which cities, communities, and schools will be targeted and set annual timelines for these actions to occur. It will also need to determine whether current numbers of African Americans accessed in the Combat Arms branches is sufficient to correct the diversity problem and make adjustments to future accession targets. The Army should ensure its strategic messaging ensures that leaders at all levels understand that these targets are not to be treated as goals but only measures of progress. If targets are not met, it should only signify the importance of ensuring the actual pool of African Americans in Combat Arms branches are provided adequate career management guidance. The results of this effort will be seen 20-25 years from now, because even if the Army were to attract every African American youth who was able and willing to serve, it will take that long to manage their careers to a soldier capable of filling a senior level position.

Educate and Hold Leaders Accountable

If the Army wants to improve its diversity at the senior level ranks it will have to hold its current leaders accountable for moving the institution beyond affirmative action to a strategy designed to combat under representation through targeted mentorship.

The Army can do this by using metrics and performance reports as accountability tools to encourage and award senior leaders who are actively promoting its diversity strategy. For example, one civilian company studied in 2005 asked its senior managers to mentor three junior managers to be ready to replace them. In order to get more diversity at the senior ranks it later instituted rules that at least one of three junior managers had to be an under represented minority and that each performance evaluation would include assessments of how well he or she mentored their selections.⁶⁹ These actions not only increased the amount of diversity throughout the organization but also increased the amount of interaction between senior managers and minorities.⁷⁰ Promotion of a diversity strategy will be hard to measure but the Army can overcome this by utilizing subordinate-to-rater feedbacks and documentation of feedback sessions to African Americans to demonstrate active participation.

It would be unfair to suddenly tell senior leaders to start effectively mentoring minorities or be held accountable. Before the Army can make changes to its senior performance evaluations, it needs to provide training that will ensure diversity leadership is a core competency of at all levels. The Army needs to develop a training program that improves cultural awareness of organizational diversity challenges such as self-segregation, isolationism, and tokenism of minorities. The training should also emphasize leaders' self-awareness to how they view conformance to organizational values versus racial differences, and how they are ensuring mentorship opportunities are not precluded because of race. The Army will need to decide at which level it begins administering this training, but I recommend at least before Company command and on an annual basis. After a few years of tracking applicability and progress of this training,

the Army can begin restructuring its current senior officer performance reports to reward those who are actively promoting its strategic diversity goals.

Target African Americans for Mentorship

Successful recruitment of African Americans and senior leadership education and accountability are just two recommendations for the Army to ensure its strategic goal is met. Targeted mentorship of African Americans is still relevant to ensure senior ranks in the Army are representative of the forces they will lead. Many will argue that targeting certain individuals for mentoring because of race is wrong and could lead to an unfavorable command climate, but they must realize that the targeted mentorship is meant as a leadership and development tool designed to meet strategic goals.⁷¹

Targeted mentorship programs must define diversity from a non racial point of view by utilizing all races to provide mentorship that affords exposure to other career choices so that more African Americans are capable of earning promotions to senior ranks.⁷²

Targeted mentorship of African Americans only adds to Army leaders' strategic goal of ensuring senior ranks are representative of society and its forces. It also makes African American officer candidates fully aware of how failures to embrace certain occupations will limit their promotion opportunities.

Although the Army has access to quality organization such as ROCKS to help mentor African American officers, it needs to ensure individual leaders understand strategic diversity goals and are being held accountable for their progress. By utilizing network groups like ROCKS in conjunction with trained and dedicated individual mentors, the Army can create a broader network perspective on mentoring that provides a mentee a list of prospective mentors whose competencies best match their needs.⁷³

This combination of organizational and individual mentorship targeted at African

Americans will ensure that they are prepared to manage their career progression through early education of career choices and recognition of career enhancing opportunities.⁷⁴

Conclusion

Sixty-four years have passed since President Truman signed the Executive Orders that started the integration of the military. In that time, the Army has made great strides in affording African American and other minority officers the opportunity to succeed by reducing discrimination and other barriers. Despite these efforts, the number of African American officers representing the senior ranks of the Army falls woefully short of its strategic diversity goals. African Americans are not representative of the populations they serve or the forces they lead, and senior leaders want to change that.

In order to correct the under representation of African Americans in its senior ranks, the Army must implement a holistic human capital strategy to attract young African Americans to careers within its Combat Arms branches. The Army must make efforts to engage the African American communities to increase awareness of an Army culture that values diversity and affords opportunity for advancement to all who embrace the challenges of Combat Arms. It must also ensure that it holds all senior leaders, regardless of race, accountable for creating environments in their organizations that promote the strategic vision of the Army to have everyone see them self properly represented at every level of the organization.

This human capital strategy will face many challenges. The pool of African American youth who are able and willing to serve has decreased over the years and the Army cannot continue to hope that economic recession will help meet recruitment

numbers. The Army will need to continue the controversial yet relevant practice of specifically targeting African American communities and officers for mentorship opportunities. This practice does not come without risk. Some in the organization will view it as affirmative action by a different name. It also has the potential to make race a more salient distinction amongst the Army's officer corps and lead to hostile environments between various ethnic groups. The Army can mitigate these risks by ensuring a strong strategic messaging campaign that highlights the value of diversity and how targeted mentorship aligns with the Army's strategic goal of ensuring representation of its senior ranks in comparison to its nation and forces.

Targeted mentorship of African Americans will aid the Army in reaching its diversity goals. It combats the real and historical social inequalities that have influenced African Americans to self-segregate themselves to careers within Combat Support branches at two times the rate of Combat Arms. Once the Army has convinced African Americans to favorably embrace Combat Arms, targeted mentorship can provide the moral support that eliminates feelings of isolationism and tokenism and motivates them towards the self-improvement that will make them competitive for senior leader positions.

General Odierno sees diversity in his senior ranks as a strategic necessity to solving the future challenges of the Army and he wants African Americans properly represented in those ranks. But for diversity to be turned into a genuine competitive advantage, the bottom line must be that the right people are put in the right jobs.⁷⁵ There are plenty of African Americans who are "right" for those jobs. The Army needs to implement a strategy that taps these resources and nurtures careers so that the pool of

capable African American candidates is increased. Otherwise, the continued under representation of African Americans will remain unchanged.

Endnotes

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