

Raising Strategic Leaders: A Call for Action – An Army Perspective and Conceptual Framework for Organizations and Institutions Worldwide

William L. Boice

U.S. Army (Retired) Ft. Lewis, USA

INTRODUCTION

On December 21, 2001, the Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) tasked the U.S. Army War College (USAWC) to identify the strategic leader skill sets for officers required in the post-September 11th environment. In his charter guidance, the CSA specifically stated:

The first of the critical areas to be examined is the identification of strategic leader skill sets for officers in the post-September 11th environment, and those necessary to meet the leadership requirements of the Objective Force... In addition to strategic skill sets, the required knowledge and attributes of the future Objective Force leader should also be discussed. (Wong, Gerras, Kidd, Pricone, & Swengros, 2003, p. 1)

The CSA foresaw the changing pace of operations for the Army. He understood that leaders in the 21st Century would face a complexity of issues greater than ever before. The issues are dynamic and constantly changing. “Globalization is how many describe the period in which we live” (McCausland, 2012, p.1). For organizations to be successful in the future, their leaders have to be able to navigate the complexity of today’s issues and have the ability to strategically provide purpose and direction for the future. Stagnant leaders, those that do not change and grow, those that do not view leadership as a lifelong process of learning will doom their organization to failure.

Leaders outside the military, those in business and industry, have begun to understand the impact of globalization on their organization. “Clearly, leaders have a major role in how their organizations and teams deal with both the challenges and opportunities of globalization” (McCausland, 2012, p.1). To meet future challenges and opportunities, organizations have looked at development plans for their workforce.

Leaders in the 21st century recognize that building their organization’s leadership potential is going to be a major differentiator for future success. For them, the development of a leadership pipeline in their organization will be a top priority. These leaders know that they must venture into new waters for concepts, processes and practices to enable their people to develop the qualities necessary for success today and in the future. (Kets de Vries & Korotov, 2010, p. 6)

The concepts, processes and practices come from any number of Executive Coaching programs available, or Leader Development Programs (LDP) set up from an internal team in the organization, or with outside help. As Guido M. J. de Koenig, a former consultant for Gallup, stated in an article on how the

best organizations select and develop tomorrow's leaders, "all companies need to find and develop the next generation of leaders if they want to survive, let alone thrive" (de Koenig, 2005, p. 1). They need to build their bench, and the key is leader development for the future.



BACKGROUND

Leadership Requirements

The Army and its leadership requirements are based on the nation's democratic foundations, defined values, and standards of excellence. The Army recognizes the importance of preserving the time-proven standards of competence that distinguished leaders throughout history. Leadership doctrine acknowledges that societal change, evolving security threats, and technological advances require adaptability. (ADRP 6-22, 2012, p. 1-2)

Understanding Components of Leadership

As an organization, the Army understands that it requires an individual with certain characteristics and abilities for its leadership positions. However, defining leadership and what characteristics and abilities are needed is not easy. For hundreds of years researchers from many disciplines have attempted to define leadership. "In fact, as Stogdill (1974, p. 7) pointed out in a review of leadership research, there are almost as many different definitions of *leadership* as there are people who have tried to define it" (Northouse, 2016, p. 2). The early studies focused on perceived 'great leaders' in history and their individual traits.

The assumption is that certain people possess inherent qualities and traits that make them better suited to leadership. These trait studies have contributed to the concept of the "Great Man," theory of leadership. Under this theory, leadership is born, not made and privileged to that "exalted" personality who has the rare ability to direct, command, or guide and activity or a group. (Kets de Vries & Korotov, 2010, p. 4)

The trait approach is leader-centric, thus it is helpful in identifying certain traits of leaders that make them successful in leadership positions. One of the disadvantages of studying leadership in this vein is that there is not one agreed upon set of traits for a leader. "This research has emphasized the identification of traits, but has not addressed how leadership traits affect group members and their work" (Northouse, 2016, p.31).

Much like the trait approach, the skills approach is a leader-centered look at leadership. The skills approach looks at the skills and abilities that can be learned or developed for leadership positions.

The skills approach works by providing a map for how to reach effective leadership in an organization: Leaders need to have problem-solving skills, social judgement skills, and knowledge. Workers can improve their capabilities in these areas through training and experience. Although each leader's personal attributes affect his or her skills, it is the leader's skills themselves that are most important in addressing organizational problems. (Northouse, 2016, p. 57)

The trait and skills approach both help in identifying those characteristics and abilities needed to be an effective leader in an organization. However, those abilities alone do not define leadership. As stated

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