

Strategy Research Project

Parenthood May Accelerate Leader Development

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Abstract

The changing strategic environment places greater emphasis on military leaders and the decisions they make. To prepare the leaders of tomorrow, the Army should consider capitalizing on everyday opportunities to improve leadership skill. Parenthood can offer leaders the opportunity to test and refine strategic leadership skills. The ability to transfer skills between personal and profession life, however, is dependent on the degree of separation between the two. Leaders that create a barrier between family and work may miss this developmental opportunity. Leaders that tightly integrate their roles in the work and family realms may be able to accelerate their leadership development. To capitalize on existing opportunities, the Army must change its organizational culture to permit the transference of lessons learned from experiential learning outside the workplace. The result will positively impact recruiting as well as retention.

Parenthood May Accelerate Leader Development

Raising kids is part joy and part guerilla warfare.

—Ed Asner¹

The leadership environment is rapidly changing. It is faster-paced, more complex and will challenge leaders and their decision-making processes at all levels and echelons. Consequently, leaders will need to develop strategic leadership skills such as adaptability, resilience and the ability to communicate clearly earlier in their careers to mitigate the effects of the environment. The military, specifically the Army, already has a robust leader development program but underutilizes one domain of the program's trinity. The self-development domain is unnecessarily limited to learning linked to the workplace. Instead, it should be expanded to include everyday life experiences. In this thread, parenthood may be one of the best leadership laboratories.² This paper is not recommending an increase in pregnancies or parental obligations. It is, however, advocating capitalizing on existing opportunities.

There are numerous similarities between parents and leaders. Both operate in a challenging environment with varying degrees of human interaction that become increasingly complex over the course of time. Many business leaders readily acknowledge that parenting made them better managers. Assuming multiple roles synergized their physical and psychological resources instead of depleting them. The dual roles of parent and manager enhanced their learning, and they became more adaptive, resilient and had a better understanding of team dynamics.

Lessons learned in parenthood can accelerate leader development. The degree of linkage between work and home determines whether leaders can capitalize on the developmental opportunity. If the connection is prominent, leaders and organizations

can benefit. However, the Army's organizational culture prevents many leaders from making the connection. Furthermore, the Army concept of self-development is vague and skewed toward military-related experiences. As a result, leaders isolate their leader development program from their everyday experiences and retain a narrow view of self-development. Leaders may be able to accelerate their learning of strategic leadership skills by strengthening the relationship between family and work. Self-development could be expanded to capitalize on existing opportunities. Leaders and their organizations would benefit from the accelerated learning.

Leadership Attributes in the Future Strategic Environment

Military leaders operate in a complex, rapidly changing, strategic environment. Globalization, advances in technology and the increased presence of social media are changing the strategic landscape. Digital connections, global networks, and easily accessible social media enable the new interconnected backdrop.³ Not only are the means of communication changing, but also the pace of communications is changing. Leaders of the future will contend with greater connectivity and faster-paced operations. "The speed at which information diffuses globally through multiple means increases the velocity, momentum, and degree of interaction among people."⁴ As a result, leaders will need to adjust.

Changes in the strategic environment will alter leaders' frames of reference. Vast amounts of information will bombard them. "Being comfortable with ambiguity and even thriving in it is fast becoming an important leadership capacity..."⁵ They will be forced to make decisions with little or vague guidance. They may also need to operate more independently as guidance may not keep up with the pace of operations.

Future leaders will need to evolve their decision-making skills to operate in this complex strategic environment. “Complexity occurs when unforeseeable factors converge to create a situation that is not only unpredictable but also immune to the traditional rules of decision making because it is impossible to assign probabilities to different outcomes.”⁶ Current decision-making processes will not address the uncertainty leaders will encounter. Leaders must rely on other skills when traditional decision-making processes are not suitable. Ambiguity, however, provides a chance for leaders to be creative and adapt to changes.⁷ “In the complex world of the future, the bounds must be unshackled and leaders must learn to live with and master persistent paradoxes.”⁸ Learning to adapt and manage change is becoming increasingly important for leaders – especially military leaders.

The U.S. military is considering how to adapt to the rapidly changing strategic environment. The Draft Capstone Concept for Joint Operations: Joint Force 2030 describes the challenges facing the US Armed Forces and explores mitigating measures.⁹ The Capstone Concept identifies that future leaders must be creative against adaptive adversaries and able to thrive in dynamic and fluid environments.¹⁰ These same skills will make them effective leaders in military organizations.

Nested with the Capstone Concept, the Army developed the Army Operating Concept (AOC), a strategy for the force of 2020-2040. The AOC also recognized the future environment is complex, “unknown, unknowable and constantly changing.”¹¹ To succeed in this type of environment, the Army predicts leaders must be able to survey their situation quickly, understand the stakeholders involved and operating efficiently in

a Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, and Multinational team. Strategic leadership skills will mitigate the effects of the environment.

Leaders must also be adaptive, resilient and possess superb interpersonal communication skills. Adaptability is one of the first order capabilities the Army must provide under the AOC. "Army leaders think critically, are comfortable with ambiguity, accept prudent risk, assess the situation continuously, develop innovative solutions to problems, and remain mentally and physically agile to capitalize on opportunities."¹² Adaptive leaders are more creative and willing to accept calculated risks.

Leaders of the future will need to be resilient. Resilience is the ability to recover quickly from setbacks, overcome adversity and stress while continuing to execute the mission.¹³ Every operation will not unfold according to the original plan; the adversary will have an impact. Leaders must be able to continue the mission despite unexpected detours and modifications. Not only must they adapt and overcome to see a vision of the way ahead, but also they must be able to share their ideas.

Leaders must be effective communicators. They need to be able to engage with large, diverse and potentially dispersed populations while synthesizing vast amounts of information. Globalization and technology will spread organizations geographically while changing demographics will morph the composition of teams. Strategic leadership involves harnessing divergent thinking, building a team and developing a vision based on consensus. Communication is critical to share and converge ideas into a cohesive product.

Part of being a good communicator is being a good listener. Active listening is an essential component of good communication skills.¹⁴ Active listening is focusing

attention on the sender, listening to the message and decoding the message according to the context and the situation. “Basically, there are three things that all good listeners do: They think before they speak; they listen with respect; and they’re always gauging their response by asking themselves, ‘Is it worth it?’”¹⁵ Skills like creativity, adaptability, resiliency and effective communications are required by strategic leaders to enhance their decision-making capabilities. These skills, however, take time to develop.

Leader Development

Effective leadership and competent leaders are always a priority for the Army. To address the challenges of the future strategic environment, the Chief of Staff of the Army clearly identified leader development as an institutional priority.¹⁶ As an organization that develops its leader internally, the Army has a comprehensive leader development program. It is divided into three levels: tactical, operational and strategic. The environment and leadership requirements are different at each level.

Military leadership begins at the tactical level. Leader requirements at this level include first person or immediate supervision of soldiers. As a result, military leaders initially display direct or command style leadership.¹⁷ This style is simple, direct and woven into the fabric of military culture. It is directive and hierarchical. “Hierarchical authority, as it has been used traditionally in Western management, tends to evoke compliance, not foster commitment.”¹⁸ It is easy to learn and very effective at this level. It is not, however, conducive to team building and empowering subordinates. Through experiential learning and observation, junior leaders gain insight into different leadership styles.

As leaders progress to the operational level, their leadership style begins to change. Instead of being in a command-type position, operational leaders are routinely

part of a staff working to solve problems on behalf of a higher commander. They must be able to build and lead teams and operate effectively with stakeholders outside their organization. The direct leadership style is less effective at this level. Most leaders shift towards an indirect style of leadership in response to the different leader-lead relationships. The reason may be due to their maturity, their career stage or educational opportunities.¹⁹ It may also be a result of the change in the leader-lead relationships of their workplace. "The higher the rank, less directive; the higher the command level, the less directive."²⁰ Leaders learn to adapt their leadership style to their environment through experience and exposure.

At the strategic level, leaders find themselves operating as a member of a team, leading more civilians than military, or working with stakeholders that are not in the military. They are focused externally and charged with influencing diverse organizations. Strategic leaders must, therefore, adopt an indirect or transformational leadership style to account for the complexities of the strategic environment. "Transformational leaders help followers grow and develop into leaders by responding to individual followers' needs by empowering them and by aligning the objectives and goals of the individual followers, the leader the group, and the larger organization."²¹ Leaders at this level cannot do everything themselves but must delegate and trust their subordinates. This type of leadership is not new to the military. It is, however, more complicated to develop. Through the course of their career, strategic leaders develop and refine their ability to adapting their leadership style to meet their environment.

The goal of the Army leader development program is to prepare leaders for the challenges they will face at each level. The Army Leader Development Model combines

three components of developing leaders: training, education, experience with the three domains where the learning occurs: operational, institutional and self-development.²²

“Institutional schooling teaches the fundamentals, operational assignments help leaders convert knowledge into practice, and self-development fills the gaps as a career progresses.”²³ It also recognizes that acquiring leadership skills takes time. “Leader development is achieved through the career-long synthesis of training, education, and experience.”²⁴ The model is designed to incorporate learning across the breadth of the leader’s career.

The Army Leader Development Program is instructive and robust in the institutional and operational domains. “The institutional domain includes advanced civil schooling, training with industry, and fellowships to supplement leader education.”²⁵ It also includes initial military training and follow-on education at Army centers and schools. “The operational domain is where leaders undergo the bulk of their development.”²⁶ Within their units, leaders participate in leader development programs. Although the programs may vary, there is an abundance of reference material available to implement a comprehensive program.

Self-development is a less defined domain. It is comprised of three divisions: mandatory learning, guided self-development, and personal self-development.²⁷ The first two have a general framework to follow and identify learning objectives. Online courses, battlefield tours, and professional reading lists are examples. The third division, however, is self-initiated, unstructured and open-ended. Consequently, it is often overlooked or disregarded.

Self-development is arguably the most underutilized and misunderstood domain of leader development. A 2008 study by the RAND Corporation found that most leaders have a hard time describing what a good self-development program should include.²⁸ To add to the confusion, the Army tries to balance a desire for a wide range of self-development opportunities with the desire to narrowly define and describe it. The 2013 Army Leader Development Strategy identifies personal events as one way to gain experience.²⁹ In contrast, however, the Army Leader Self-Development Reference Guide only identifies military resources to assist leaders.³⁰ Experiential learning is encouraged, but no examples are listed. The opportunity to develop and practice strategic leadership skills outside the workplace is not mentioned. Nowhere does the Army include parenthood or similar occupational experiences as leader development events. Daily life, however, could augment self-development by providing additional learning experiences for military leaders to practice their strategic leadership skills.

Parenting and Leadership

Parenting is one example of personal experiences that offers challenges similar to leadership. In both cases, the goal is to provide direction or influence over a group of people. The environments are complex, ever changing and riddled with human interactions. At the outset, parents and leaders adopt a particular set of skills to operate in their environments. Parenting an infant focuses on the core needs surrounding the child's care. Similarly, junior level leaders concentrate on the basic, direct style leadership skills. As their children grow, parents must adapt and appreciate different nuances of their child's development. They must still tend to their basic needs, but they must also consider their education and the social side of their child's life. Leaders at the

operational level are also learning a different leadership style that is more nuanced and engaging.

Parenthood and leadership also share an element of critique and feedback. Leaders, like parents, are constantly under observation. “Having influence, being a leader, doesn’t turn on and off, nor does it go away when we’d like a bit more privacy or a more convenient time.”³¹ As a result, all parental or leadership actions are under scrutiny. Parenting, however, offers the availability of consistent evaluation. Children are excellent sources of feedback. Young children especially do not possess filters, and they will let their parents know exactly how they feel. “If you’re not doing something well, they’ll tell you.”³² This feedback can be beneficial to parents to develop their leadership skills.

There are, of course, limits to the similarities. “Parenting skills that you learn and enhance are great for becoming a better leader if you know when to use each skill.”³³ Employees and subordinates are not children and may perceive inappropriate or ill-timed references as offensive. “Just having kids won’t make you a better manager, but being actively involved in raising them will...”³⁴ Leaders who understand the similarities and differences between work and family can capitalize on everyday learning opportunities.

Business leaders have identified the correlation between parenting and leadership. Penny Herscher, the former President & Chief Executive Officer of FirstRain, commented in an interview with the New York Times that being a parent was a critical step in developing her leadership style. “I just evolved very quickly to realize that this was not all about me, and I took those lessons and applied them to the

workplace.”³⁵ The connection she made between her roles bolstered the transfer of lesson learned.

Parenthood can be a rigorous, leadership-training program.³⁶ Jelena Zikic, an Associate Professor at York University, studies the combination of career and life transitions. “The skills we learn as we engage in parenting ought to transfer into our work, and vice versa.”³⁷ She highlights adapting to changes as a skill she learned as a parent that also helps her at work. “Raising children teaches us how to become more adaptive to change – to cope with change while learning from it.”³⁸ As her family grows and faces new challenges, she learns how to adapt to them just as she adapts to a dynamic and changing work environment.

A few business leaders acknowledge the similarity between parenting and leadership with regard towards understanding their environment. Dan Ryan, Principal of the Ryan Search and Consulting Firm, a talent acquisition company based in Tennessee, recognizes both roles are situational and dependent on human behavior.³⁹ “Understanding the needs of the follower and the situation at hand will help you determine what to do, or what not to do as a leader.”⁴⁰ Chris and Reina Komisarjevshy wrote a book comparing parenting and leadership. They highlight that like children, each employee is different and requires different approaches to encourage them to grow and stretch.⁴¹ Understanding the nuances can assist parents and strategic leaders build strong teams.

Stosh Walsh, a consultant, coach, trainer, speaker, and writer, compares his life as a parent with his life as an executive coach. “The lessons I have learned from my triumphs and mistakes at home have formed the basis not only for my own practice of

leadership, but for my understanding of it and for my counsel to others on it also.”⁴² The parallels he saw between his family life and his work life seemed natural and appropriate for management.⁴³ In his book, he identifies aspects of parenting that can benefit leaders.

Military leaders have also recognized the benefit of transferring parenting skills to their military roles. Frank Rossi, a Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Force, stated he acknowledged once he had children that parents and leaders use the same skills. “As a father of four young children, I realize parents use leadership skills that commanders and supervisors need every day.”⁴⁴ He acknowledged both parents and military leaders serve as role models, rely on active listening and exercise patience.⁴⁵

There are numerous development programs devoted to becoming a better parent and as many others that focus on becoming a better leader. From Dr. Spock to John Maxwell, there are a plethora of self-help gurus devoted to making better parents and better leaders. These gurus, however, only focus on one role. There are few promoters for a parallel development program between parenthood and leadership.

Role Theory

Examining how people segment their everyday life can explain the ability to transfer lessons learned between roles. Each person operates within certain realms in their daily lives – with family and work being primary realms. Inside each realm, people assume specific roles. Closely connecting personal and professional lives will facilitate the ability for self-development experiences outside the traditional learning environment.

There are two opposing theories on the impact of assuming multiple roles. The first argument is negative. The scarcity theory postulates each person has a fixed amount of physical and psychological resources. Once committed to supporting a role,

those resources are not available for other roles.⁴⁶ The finite nature of resources places the roles in competition with each other. More roles result in stress. “Trying to do it all and expecting that it all can be done exactly right is a recipe for disappointment.”⁴⁷ Scarcity theory, however, is only one explanation for how people use personal resources between realms.

The second argument is more positive. According to the theory of role accumulation, “...the ‘capital’ of role resources can be used to meet obligations in roles other than those which yield the resource, then one’s role system may be expandable...”⁴⁸ The interaction between the realms is not a struggle, but it is additive. Physical and psychological resources are not fixed but expand with the assumption of multiple roles. Sheryl Sandberg remarked she enjoys when her work family and her home family connect. “It’s [also] fun when my two worlds collide.”⁴⁹ Her coworkers get a chance to see another side of her while her children get to see the people she works with every day. The result is a positive engagement that augments resources instead of constricting them.

Several benefits emerge from the theory of role accumulation. One benefit is the ability to moderate stress by offsetting or mitigating adverse effects from one role to other roles.⁵⁰ As a result, people feel less impacted by the stress because multiple roles provide multiple outlets for the stress. Another benefit is the possibility of broadening experiences. Individuals with multiple roles expand their environments, which can lead to new perspectives. Multiple roles can provide additional insights and skills that can assist in other roles than the ones they were learned.⁵¹

Another aspect to consider is the strength of the role inside each realm. Identity theory explains people are a composite of multiple roles. “In identity theory usage, social roles are expectations attached to positions occupied in networks of relationships; identities are internalized role expectations.”⁵² The strength of the role, or value a person places on the importance of the role to their status, will determine how likely a person is to try to integrate the role with other roles.⁵³ The importance will result in a person’s focus or their commitment to developing or maturing that role.

Connection between Realms

The limiting factor for recognizing daily life experiences as an opportunity for leadership development is the connection between realms. For parenthood, it is the relationship between work and family. The degree of the relationship creates four effects: spillover, segmentation, congruence and conflict.⁵⁴ These effects can be positive or negative.

Spillover is the transfer of similar experiences between realms.⁵⁵ There is plenty of research on the spillover effect from work to family. One study determined that, “...transformational leadership created more positive spillover (i.e., a positive influence) from employees work to family lives.”⁵⁶ Some looked at the directionality of spillover. Most suggested that enrichment was stronger for work to family than family to work.⁵⁷ The focus of this paper, however, is on the positive spillover of skills from the family to work realm.

There are fewer studies on the effect of family on work. “Not surprisingly, organizational research tends to focus its efforts on the impact of work-rather than family-related experiences on employee outcomes.”⁵⁸ Laura Graves explored the impact on commitment to family roles on managers’ attitudes and performance.⁵⁹ Her study

found a commitment to family roles directly affected a person's satisfaction with their life. "One explanation for the direct effects of parental role commitment on work outcomes is that commitment to the parental role enhances overall functioning."⁶⁰ She attributed this to better awareness of others' needs, greater responsibility and maturity as well as improved teamwork.

The second effect is segmentation or the attempt to create a boundary between family and work.⁶¹ The separation between realms is more than the physical differences. "The environment you are immersed in will not set the boundaries for you."⁶² It is a mental division or boundary between work life and family life. The segmentation varies based on individual preferences and specific situational factors. It is also the most critical factor in whether skills learned in parenting transfer to the workplace.

The boundary theory tries to explain the creation and maintenance of divisions between roles. It states, "...people fall somewhere on an integration-to-segmentation continuum such that more integrated boundaries combine the work and family domains in a manner that makes the boundaries more blurred, whereas less integrated (segmented) boundaries sharpen the borders such that the domains are kept separate."⁶³ There are pros and cons on each end of the spectrum.

The degree of the separation can impact the ability for skills to crossover from one realm to the other. The segregation of roles can be intentional or unintentional. Some leaders keep a distinct barrier between work and home while others allow the boundary to be more permeable. The more segmented the roles, the harder it is for skills to transition between realms. "High segmentation decreases the blurring of roles but increases the magnitude of change between roles, fostering the transition challenge

of crossing role boundaries.”⁶⁴ The more integrated, the easier to cross over boundaries.

Conversely, too far to the integration end of the integration-to-segmentation continuum can have a negative impact. “Role blurring may foster confusion and interruptions such that the transition challenge for highly integrated roles lies in creating and maintaining boundaries between the roles.”⁶⁵ Also, depending on the organizational culture and opinion of supervisors at work, close integration may be viewed negatively and have adverse outcomes. Without clear boundaries between roles, the integration or segmentation is a double-edged sword.⁶⁶

The similarity of the roles is a mitigating factor in the creation and maintenance of the boundary. “When work and family role identities are similar, individuals can express themselves in similar ways across roles and can see the connection between the skill or perspective acquired in one role and the requirements of the other role.”⁶⁷ The type of role in each realm will affect the ability to transfer skills.

The third effect is reminiscent of the scarcity theory. Conflict is when role demands in one realm are incompatible with the other realm.⁶⁸ The strain between the roles impacts the ability to function in both roles simultaneously and a negative influence.⁶⁹ The result is constant tension and competition between a leader’s professional and personal life.

The fourth and final effect arising from the degree of the connection between work and family is congruence or the presence of a third variable. Work and family are not linked directly but affected by another factor. “Congruence refers to similarity

between work and family owing to a third variable that acts as a common cause.”⁷⁰ The connection between realms may be affected by an outside influence.

Four factors explain congruence. One factor is a person’s career stage. “Those in more advanced career stages are less aware of the connections and resources gained through family and leisure activities; they are established enough to maintain a strong professional network through their work activities alone.”⁷¹ Early in a person’s career, they have less experience and rely on other realms to provide perspective.

Another factor is a person’s gender. One study suggested that women might be more likely to perceive professional benefits from skills acquired outside the work realm.⁷² “Personal roles such as those of spouse, friend, parent, traveler, sister, volunteer, and daughter were identified as providing opportunities to learn skills, values, and abilities useful at work.”⁷³ Another study found women were more likely to feel enrichment from family to work realms than men.⁷⁴ The reason was cultural or societal expectations. “The boundary between family and work is not as open and permeable for men as it is for women, because for men, it is less culturally acceptable for family experiences to affect work.”⁷⁵ As societal and cultural norms change, men may also recognize the possibility of leadership development opportunities at home.

Disposition may also be a factor. “In attempts to define whether happiness or productivity comes first...it turns out that adults and children who are put into a good mood select higher goals, perform better, and persist longer on a variety of laboratory tasks, such as solving anagrams.”⁷⁶ Happy people may simply be more productive.

A final factor may be a person’s sheer determination or grit. Angela Duckworth describes grit as a combination of passion and perseverance.⁷⁷ She explains that

successful people are deeply committed to a goal and can consistently work towards this goal for an extended period. Therefore, leaders who want to develop themselves may more readily recognize learning opportunities.

Parenthood as a Component of Leader Development

Leader development is a complicated process with a long-term commitment and significant investment. Leaders who maximize opportunities benefit by gaining experience in a compressed timeline and accelerating their acquisition of strategic leadership skills. “The fastest learning occurs when there are challenging and interesting opportunities to practice leadership with meaningful and honest feedback and multiple practice opportunities.”⁷⁸ The benefits from accelerating leadership development may extend beyond individuals to their organizations – depending on their organizational cultures.

Organizations may be inadvertently hampering their leader development programs by limiting self-development opportunities. Organizational cultures may prevent the transmission of lessons learned from experiences outside traditional learning programs. The Army maximizes experiential learning in operational assignments through a comprehensive system of lessons learned. Self-development experiences, however, are not integrated into the workplace. In addition, there is a negative perception about time spent away from work. It is downtime and irrelevant to leader development. Regarding leader development, extended absences may be perceived as a step back in career progression. A negative stigma is attached to leaders desiring to take time off to be with their family. As a result, many talented leaders feel conflicted and believe they must choose between work and family. They

may decide to leave so they will not be perceived as a drain or less committed within their organization.

The Army culture may be accepting of family values, but it does not promote a positive view of parenthood for its members. Pregnant soldiers are non-deployable and often considered as a drain. The primary reason is the impact on readiness. Fellow soldiers may also feel resentment as they perceive their workload is increasing to compensate for less available personnel. For the female soldier, this can have a psychological impact. “This negative experience will often impact her decision to stay in the Army.”⁷⁹ As a result, the Army may be losing talented leaders due to the negative stigma surrounding parenthood. The Army has made some progress by modifying parental leave. Now, military mothers may receive up to 12 weeks of non-chargeable leave, and military fathers may also take time off to bond with their new children.⁸⁰ The stigma surrounding the time off, however, has not changed. The organizational culture remains biased against experiential learning outside the workplace.

Not considering all sources of learning may impact recruiting efforts. Stella Collins, the Creative Director of Stellar Learning and founder of the Brain Friendly Learning Group based in the United Kingdom, says organizations are not capitalizing on available talent.⁸¹ “Many organizations are missing out on peoples’ talents by not necessarily considering how well parenting skills can be carried into the workplace, and it may be that many excellent leaders in business are not transferring some of their proficiency into the home.”⁸² The organizational culture must be receptive to capitalize on non-traditional experiential learning opportunities.

The Army is considering multiple options to recruit and retain qualified leaders. Some of these changes include personnel management like allowing time off for family. Secretary of the Army, Eric Fanning, stated, “There is no reason we can’t, for example, stretch things out a little bit more to give people more time for developmental opportunities and to make a decision for their family that doesn’t take them off the track to get them to general officer.”⁸³ Taking it a step further, if parenthood is part of a learning opportunity, then leader development may continue without a break. Parenthood could be training time instead of being considered time off. Parents get time to raise their children while developing critical leadership skills. The result could improve the Army’s attempts to recruit and retain quality leaders. It would also open the door for the acceptance of other sources of experiential learning.

Expanding self-development to include everyday leadership opportunities could be a win-win situation. “When employees perceive that their work and family roles are enriching, they may reciprocate toward the organization with desired attitudes.”⁸⁴ The organizational culture would adapt to be more accepting of integrating family and work. When a leader personally experiences enrichment, they may be more likely to create an environment that fosters enrichment for their subordinates.⁸⁵ The result is an environment that is more permissible for the transference of leadership skills from personal experiences to professional activities.

Now is the perfect time to change. The Army is looking for ways to prepare leader to meet future challenges. General Milley stated, “Every assumption we hold, every claim, every assertion, every single one of them must be challenged.”⁸⁶ Expanding the idea of self-development is one approach for the Army to explore.

Capitalizing on learning through everyday experiences could accelerate the acquisition of strategic leadership skills. To implement, the Army must change its organizational culture to accept experiential learning opportunities outside the workplace.

Changing the organization culture requires a concerted effort to develop embedding and reinforcing mechanisms. The Army must first develop a sense of urgency.⁸⁷ A policy directing increased emphasis on self-development may be necessary to kick starting the change. Leaders should encourage their subordinates through counseling sessions to explore their everyday lives for additional opportunities that may provide unique environments to test and refine their strategic leadership skills. Opportunities could include coaching, volunteering in community service programs or mentorship programs. The key is to align the type of roles and include these opportunities as part of leader development programs. The discussion will also aid in creating a connection between the roles.

Next, the Army must build a strong guiding team. The team must include successful senior leaders in critical positions who grasp the concept of sharing leadership lessons learned between work and family realms. These leaders must share their experiences with others.⁸⁸ An aggressive information campaign through social media would raise awareness of the potential learning opportunities in everyday life. Their stories of capitalizing on experiential learning events will resonant with junior leaders struggling to realize their potential and reconcile roles.

The next step to changing the organizational culture is developing a vision and a strategy.⁸⁹ The amount of funding dedicated to accelerating the acquisition of strategic leadership skills will set the parameters as the means of the strategy. Funding may

include additional research and development as well as marketing costs to improve awareness and share the vision. A capability assessment will provide additional considerations for a complete implementation concept. Closing the gap may require 5-10 years to achieve full implementation.

A quick win for the Army can be reinforcing experiential learning as part of the third division of self-development. The U.S. Army Learning Concept for 2015 described a tailored learning environment centered on the learner.⁹⁰ It specifies technology as the key enabler for self-structured learning. Technology, however, does not offer the immersion of everyday life. Online courses and scenario-based training cannot replicate dynamic situations needed for the acquisition of strategic leadership skills. The concept of self-development should remain broad, but listing specific examples such as parenting and volunteering will expand the third division of self-development. Once the organizational change takes hold, the Army must anchor the change by developing reinforcing mechanisms.

Conclusion

This paper explored the similarities between parents and leaders. Everyday opportunities like parenting or volunteering can provide a valuable laboratory for leader development. The environments in each realm are complex and ever changing. The skills required to succeed in each are remarkably the same. Instead of competing for limited physical and psychological resources, leaders who assume multiple roles can increase their energy through synergy. Closely linked roles may also have the benefit of creating a positive spillover effect where the experiences gained in one realm may help a different realm. Experiential learning outside the workplace could benefit a leader in the military. The ability to capitalize on the developmental opportunity, however, is

dependent on the degree of the connection between the realms. If the connection is permeable, leaders and their organizations can benefit. Many business leaders have recognized the connection, but few in the military have done so.

While the Army is searching for new ideas to prepare leaders for the future, it may be missing an opportunity that fits into the existing structure. The Army already has a robust leader development program. It is a three-tiered program that includes the institutional, operational and self-development domains. It devotes significant effort to leader education and training. The self-development domain, however, is lacking in vision and implementation. The broad concept of self-development is intended to all-encompassing, but it falls short in providing ideas beyond taking classes online, following a professional reading list or conducting a staff ride. Instead of limiting self-development to opportunities in the workplace, it is worth considering experiential learning events in everyday life. Implementing this idea will require a change in organizational culture. Once recognized, the expanded notion of self-development will have cascading effects that will permeate the organization and help recruiting and retention.

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