

Strategy Research Project

Women Soldiers in Combat Arms: Creating the Momentum for Change

by

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United States Army War College
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Abstract

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Women Soldiers in Combat Arms: Creating the Momentum for Change

We will extend opportunities to women in a way that maintains readiness, morale, and unit cohesion. And we will uphold the trust and confidence of the American people as we go forward. Our nation demands no less.

—General Martin E. Dempsey

The Army is committed to manning its units with the best qualified Soldiers. Over the last 12 years, women served with courage and distinction alongside their male counterparts in complex and challenging operational environments. Most importantly, women earned the trust and confidence of the American people while helping to eliminate gender bias in the military. As General Cone, Commanding General of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) summarized, expanding women's opportunities in the Army will only make the force stronger.¹ Research shows that gender-diverse teams can lead to higher performance and that successfully integrating women into previously closed specialties depends on the Army's ability to plan and execute a comprehensive strategy for implementing change in organizations.² This paper examines the evolving role of women in the Army and addresses several concerns and benefits about integrating women into combat arms specialties.³ The author applies John Kotter's eight step process for leading organizational change to two examples and offers recommendations about how the Army should implement the Department of Defense (DoD) directive requiring the Army to integrate women into combat arms specialties by 2016.

Evolving Role of Women in the Military

Since the advent of the All-Volunteer Force in the 1970's, women's roles in the military significantly expanded, including service in critical, frontline positions in both

Iraq and Afghanistan. The expanded roles include their administrative attachment to maneuver units serving as military police, communication specialists, military intelligence analysts, combat medics and personnel specialists.⁴ In addition, women served with distinction on Female Engagement Teams (FET) that produced tremendous results through their ability to form relationships with the local population in often dangerous environments.⁵ Since 2001, over 300,000 women have deployed to combat zones which resulted in over 800 wounded and over 130 killed in action.⁶ In comparison, 7,500 women deployed to Vietnam and only eight died.⁷

Ultimately in 2012, the Pentagon concluded the modern non-linear battlefield makes it difficult for the military to identify the frontline or safe zones.⁸ As a result, Secretary of Defense Panetta lifted the restriction against women serving in combat units in January 2013.⁹ Therefore, by no later than December 2015, the Army plans to release the results of their ongoing gender integration study, validating gender-neutral occupational standards and providing strategies for the addition of women into new career fields.¹⁰ These decisions present opportunities for women to showcase their professional competence and reenergize the debate regarding their integration into combat arms specialties.¹¹ The next section outlines potential integration challenges for the Army. However, these integration challenges will not prevent the Army from executing this initiative but will require the Army to develop strategies to reduce their impact.

Integration Concerns and Potential Roadblocks

As the Army prepares to integrate women into combat arms specialties, some have voiced concerns regarding the potential impact to the military. Notable historian Martin van Creveld writes women are “part symptom, part cause, of the decline of the

advanced military.”¹² Concerns about incorporating women into the Army combat arms specialties commonly discussed include the impact on unit cohesion, sexual tension, motherhood, and the perception that women cannot adhere to the increased physical requirements. A summary of these four concerns follows.

Impact on Unit Cohesion

Unit cohesion is tough to define and equally difficult to measure.¹³ As described by the 1992 Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces, cohesion includes the sharing of common values and dependence on each other, often in life or death situations, to accomplish each assigned mission.¹⁴ In addition, each member must adhere to the same physical and behavioral standards to preserve the group’s survival.¹⁵ The military theorist Carl von Clausewitz identified cohesion as one of the most important elements in war and described the loss of morale as having a decisive impact on the success of the operation.¹⁶

In a *Washington Post* article in December 2012, a former Army War College Commandant, Major General (Retired) Robert Scales, highlighted the “band of brothers” phenomenon in the military and the often spontaneous formation of buddy groups.¹⁷ According to MG(R) Scales, the buddy pairings and the human formula behind this phenomenon are a mystery and a key obstacle with the integration of women into combat arms specialties.¹⁸ After 40 years of research on this topic, Scales says that many combat arms veterans believe the act of killing remains a male-only profession.¹⁹ He concludes that the Army must understand and embrace the “band-of-brother” effect in order to take steps to integrate women into combat arms specialties.²⁰ Without understanding this phenomenon and its importance in close combat, the policy change will face implementation challenges.²¹

Sexual Tension

James Webb, a former Secretary of the Navy, described the assimilation of women into male-dominated professions as a complex initiative that requires removing cultural bias and changing existing attitudes.²² He also said that “eliminating or neutralizing an attraction to the opposite sex requires much sterner and more imaginative therapy, and is probably impossible.”²³ When men and women serve in close environments, favoritism, sexual jealousies, and rumors often emerge.²⁴ Individuals who start relationships while deployed create unintended distractions and resentment from other members of the organization.²⁵ Most importantly, it has the potential to degrade organizational effectiveness.²⁶

In addition to sexual tension, fraternization double-standards often exist, creating the potential to degrade women’s standing within the organization.²⁷ Women who develop friendships with males often face questions about having a sexual relationship even if one does not exist.²⁸ This perceived fraternization frequently strips the women’s professional status within the organization, a status that may never fully recover.²⁹ In turn, male soldiers who exhibit the same behavior rarely lose credibility or damage their standing as professional soldiers.³⁰ As one Canadian female combat arms Soldier stated, “no matter how competent you are, if you sleep around, you will ruin your reputation, not only your own but of all women.”³¹

Motherhood

Generally speaking, women’s role with childbearing and as mothers causes negative impacts on their professional opportunities. During the course of most women’s professional careers, they often face decisions related to pregnancy and motherhood. At times, leaders challenge women’s ability to balance family and career;

challenges rarely presented to men.³² A small number of women will miss military operations due to pregnancy, which is sometimes perceived as intentional to avoid deployment.³³ Until recently, these situations had little impact on combat arms units because no women were in their formations. With the integration of women into all-male units with combat arms specialties, this topic will require further review and constructive dialog.

In addition, balancing a professional career and motherhood is equally challenging in the civilian sector. Sheryl Sandberg, Chief Operating Officer of Facebook and ranked on Fortune's list of the "50 Most Powerful Women in Business," has stated that society often believes that women remain more committed to family than to work.³⁴ This perception creates a bias that women are not fully vested in the company and will fail to meet corporate expectations.³⁵

Men's self-worth is often based on their professional success while women's status in society is often based on their success as mothers.³⁶ However, over the last decade, societal values and beliefs have evolved with the emergence of women who demonstrated the ability to balance family with successful careers.³⁷ As Sheryl Sandberg highlights, "expectations will not be set by gender but by personal passion, talents and interests."³⁸

Other militaries also experienced conflicts related to professional and family commitments. In Canada, where women have been assigned to combat arms positions since 1989, initially women's assignment into these specialties rose from .3 to 3.8 percent and remained at this level over the last 12 years.³⁹ In addition, attrition rates for women in Canadian combat arms units have averaged about 19 percent compared to 8

percent for men.⁴⁰ Feedback from these women reveals that some prioritized family over a military career.⁴¹ As a result, it has been difficult to recruit and retain high-quality women to serve in combat arms specialties within the Canadian Army.⁴²

Physical Standards

An important concern with women's integration into combat arms specialties is their ability to meet the physical requirements. General Odierno, Chief of Staff of the Army, announced that the Army will not lower standards in order to qualify women for combat arms specialties because the Army enforces a code of conduct that expects equal treatment in the areas of discipline, professional opportunities and recognition.⁴³ Double standards for physical requirements have the potential to destroy institutional cohesion.⁴⁴ As a result, TRADOC is reviewing the physical requirements for each specialty as a part of its Soldier 2020 initiative and plans to publish gender neutral standards.⁴⁵

There are women who may easily meet and exceed the standards but evidence suggests that a number of women will not. However, since the 1970's, the Army witnessed significant improvements in women's physical performance but the majority remain unable to compete at the same level as men. Both men and women have difficulties with the physical requirements. Army statistics show many men fail to comply with the infantry standards because of the intense physical demands required in this career field.⁴⁶ Following the Persian Gulf War, the Army spent years analyzing the physical differences between men and women with the potential goal of creating gender-neutral units.⁴⁷ However, medical research indicates women have more difficulty overcoming their higher rate of stress fractures, injuries requiring hospitalization, 55

percent less upper body strength and 20 percent less aerobic capacity compared to their male counterparts.⁴⁸

Evidence from Iraq and Afghanistan suggests women's physical performance in combat was prominently on display with certain support units.⁴⁹ A relevant example is with the military police branch where women performed cordon and search missions, raids, and route security which paralleled similar functions in most combat arms units.⁵⁰ The best practices and lessons learned from support units can provide a laboratory of discovery and an opportunity to help set the conditions for a successful integration. Despite these challenges, the Army as an institution can benefit from greater integration of women into combat arms specialties.

Benefits of Integrating Women into Combat Arms Specialties

Women's contributions and impact on society continue to grow with their rise to key leadership positions within the public and private sectors. Women have played a major role in the military over the last 12 years and their integration into combat arms specialties will only increase the magnitude of their impact. As Nancy Goldman described in her 1973 article entitled "The Changing Role of Women in the Armed Forces," the military and civilian sectors have redefined traditional gender roles.⁵¹ Such changes often produce strong reactions but society appears ready to embrace a "coeducational" existence.⁵² Typically, the benefits of expanding the role of women in an organization includes improving the organization's collective intelligence, higher team performance, and the evolution of a more mature and balanced culture.

Women Improve Organizational Collective Intelligence

The Carnegie Mellon University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) have worked together to research group factors related to collective intelligence.⁵³

Their research indicates that increasing the number of women in a group improves the collective intelligence.⁵⁴ They believe the reason for the improvement is related to a trait called social sensitivity which provides the ability to observe emotional changes.⁵⁵ Women consistently score higher than men on sensing changes which translates to improvements with collaborative patterns of group behavior.⁵⁶ This research also indicated that group conversation controlled by one person reduces overall intelligence and women have traditionally facilitated open communication which improves group performance.⁵⁷

The most interesting finding from the Carnegie Mellon University and MIT study indicates organizations have the ability to design teams to perform consistently better.⁵⁸ Research proved that group intelligence is more than the average IQs in a group.⁵⁹ While there is little organizations can do to improve individual intelligence, it is possible to improve collective intelligence by changing the composition of a team.⁶⁰ Women's participation plays a major factor in group improvement by listening to other members, accepting criticism, keeping open minds and a willingness to share authority.⁶¹

Gender Diverse Teams Lead to Higher Performance

In July 2013, the Catalyst Research Group released a study on the importance of diversity within organizations.⁶² From a business perspective, the Catalyst Research Group related the factors of financial performance, leveraging talent, improving company reputation and increased group productivity to their impact on organizational diversity.⁶³ Regarding financial performance, the study found that companies with three or more women in senior executive positions consistently outperformed companies lacking women leadership at the highest levels.⁶⁴ The overall statistics revealed companies with women serving as Chair of the Board of Directors correlated to 42

percent higher sale revenues, 53 percent higher on equity returns and 66 percent higher return on investment capital.⁶⁵

The results of the Catalyst study also indicated women performed better than men in several core leadership competencies.⁶⁶ Women excelled in the areas of integrity, initiative, self-development and relationship building.⁶⁷ The diversity climate women create reduces turn-over and more importantly improves employee job satisfaction.⁶⁸ In addition, this research shows companies that treat minority groups with respect creates the belief that leaders care and employees are valued members of the team.⁶⁹

In the category of building an organization's reputation, Catalyst determined that women in leadership positions provide better corporate management skills and reduce the incidents of fraud and unethical behavior.⁷⁰ For example, over a ten-year period in China, companies with women serving as Chairs of the Board of Directors were less likely to commit security violations in the areas of embezzlement, illegal buybacks, inflated profits and price manipulation.⁷¹ Most importantly, Catalyst determined that companies improved their social responsibility ratings and overall reputation by adding or including women.⁷² After reviewing the composition of over 700 J.C. Penney stores, Catalyst researchers determined that companies which reflect the gender and ethnic make-up of their communities produce more profits and receive higher ratings of customer satisfaction.⁷³

The final category Catalyst researched was group performance. Catalyst believes diverse organizations promote innovative ideas and women increase creativity and the group's ability to solve complex problems.⁷⁴ The research also concluded that a

major contributor to the group's success was women's ability to reduce conflict within an organization.⁷⁵ Instead of becoming overly competitive and individually focused, women often achieve group consensus and consistently improve organizational effectiveness.⁷⁶

The 2009 "White House Project Report: Benchmarking Women's Leadership" also provided clear indicators that elevating women into key leadership positions often translates to higher company earnings and improves the quality of decision-making.⁷⁷ Currently, less than 7 percent of the Army's general officers are women due to 80 percent of the promotions coming from combat arms branches.⁷⁸ The decision to allow women into combat arms specialties would open the door for future senior leaders while creating a stronger force with greater capabilities.⁷⁹

One of the lessons learned during the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan is the role that Female Engagement Teams (FET) played in gaining access to local populations and their ability to effectively contribute to combat arms formations.⁸⁰ FET's success with forming relationships with local women significantly improved information and analysis capabilities.⁸¹ In addition, the trust women Soldiers developed with the local communities reinforced the legitimacy of the mission, improved unit force protection and enhanced the understanding of local culture and conditions.⁸² Clark Summers, in an article in *Military Review*, argues women possess innate abilities that allow them to perform at a higher level than men in certain tactical situations.⁸³ In addition, he indicates that FET's produced positive results, while reducing tension and improving credibility with the local population.⁸⁴ Because of little research in this area, Summer recommends that the Army further examine the number of battlefield attacks between

mixed gender and single-gender units in an attempt to identify patterns, trends and relationships in order to more fully understand the impact of women on the battlefield.⁸⁵

Evolution of a More Mature and Balanced Culture

The addition of women into combat arms specialties has tremendous potential for transforming the military into new and innovative directions. Unit culture and how the Army employs violence must adapt to the changing face of war. Robert Egnell, Director of Teaching in the Security Studies Program at Georgetown University, believes the masculine and aggressive nature of male-dominated units that served in Iraq and Afghanistan has not set the conditions for strategic success.⁸⁶ He argues that the addition of women into combat formations creates a more mature and balanced culture and the problems in both wars were regarding the “nature of the instrument at the disposal of political leadership and the conduct of its operations.”⁸⁷

The complexity of the current battlefield requires officers and non-commissioned officers to solve difficult problems, remain flexible, demonstrate strong cognitive skills and work well with local populations. The Army requires Soldiers with a mindset that is much more than just “killing.” Women’s contributions help facilitate a more mature and balanced culture that increases the ability of Army units to deal with an enemy who evolves faster than Army forces can adapt.⁸⁸ Cultural change begins with recruiting and retaining the right Soldiers but must advance into training, education and policies.⁸⁹

Changing the military culture also involves evaluating people for their performance rather than their gender. If the Army judges women Soldiers strictly by their performance, integration into combat arms specialties should occur smoothly and without incident.⁹⁰ A cultural shift begins when units prioritize professional competence higher than gender.⁹¹ As an example, a female Canadian Soldier suggests that when

leaders enforce standards and women meet or exceed the standards, integration into male dominated units happens naturally.⁹² As a result over the last 10 years, the Canadian Army shifted and professionalized its culture to accept women in combat arms specialties by focusing their training on professional competence rather than the gender of its Soldiers.⁹³ Canada's experience indicates that women who perform at high levels have a positive impact on their male counterparts who fear failure.⁹⁴ This phenomenon has the potential to elevate the performance and effectiveness of the entire organization.⁹⁵

In addition, a cultural shift can also serve to inspire other women to believe, as Sheryl Sandberg states in her book *Lean In*, that they have earned a seat at the table.⁹⁶ Witnessing other women achieve positions of authority will reinforce the notion that women truly belong and can help eliminate doubts about whether they deserve to reach the highest levels of an organization.⁹⁷ Since men hold most leadership positions in both the Army and civilian companies, some women do not believe they qualify and often do not compete for the top management positions. Sheryl Sandberg believes women must overcome the "imposter syndrome" in which they underestimate their abilities.⁹⁸

As proven by their performance while serving in combat service support and combat support units in Iraq and Afghanistan, women helped evolve how the Army fights wars. Allowing women to serve in combat arms specialties is a step in the right direction that will improve the institutional culture, increase the effectiveness of the Army and instill further confidence in women leaders.⁹⁹ As the Army prepares to integrate women into combat arms specialties, successful implementation will depend on the

planning and executing a comprehensive strategy for implementing change in organizations.

Recommendations to Implement Change in the Army

Implementing change in organizations such as the Army is complicated and often meets with stiff resistance by those affected. As outlined in John Kotter's book entitled *Leading Change*, many factors can derail leaders' efforts to transform organizations.¹⁰⁰ Kotter identifies organizational complacency, inability for leaders to communicate a clear vision, the lack of consensus, and the organization declaring victory prematurely as some of the most common errors.¹⁰¹ When leaders are unable to overcome these errors, strategies for change often fail. Kotter endorses an eight-stage process for creating change in organizations which includes the following: establishing a sense of urgency; creating the guiding coalition; developing a vision and strategy; communicating the change vision; empowering broad-based action; generating short-term wins; consolidating gains and producing more change; and anchoring new approaches in the culture.¹⁰²

Currently, the Army has not adopted a model to guide the cultural change necessary to integrate women into combat arms specialties. Therefore, the author recommends the Army apply Kotter's eight-step process to help successfully lead organizational change.¹⁰³ This paper will draw comparisons using Kotter's process with the addition of women at the United States Military Academy at West Point in the 1970s and General Shinseki's efforts to transform the Army in the 1990s. The research shows these initiatives attempted to create long-term change in the Army and can provide Army leaders lessons learned for the integration of women into combat arms specialties.

Establishing a Sense of Urgency

The integration of women into combat arms specialties should not become a rush to failure and does not necessitate crisis planning. The Army has time to assess the impact of this initiative because the majority of women will integrate into combat arms specialties beginning in FY 2016.¹⁰⁴ As outlined in a February 2013 Women in the Service update, the Army's sense of urgency applies to the development of a comprehensive plan that creates a long-term vision, preserves unit readiness, maintains unit cohesion, establishes an effective communication strategy, and positions the Army and individual Soldier for future success.¹⁰⁵ In addition, TRADOC is reviewing the social and cultural impacts, developing gender-neutral standards for each specialty, and executing a gender integration study to help mitigate organizational tension and conflict.¹⁰⁶

Creating the Guiding Coalition

In order to create an effective guiding coalition, Kotter endorses four principles organizations should consider before implementing institutional transformation. First, leaders must get the power players on board to minimize resistance and promote progress.¹⁰⁷ In the case of women's integration into combat arms specialties, the Army should continue to gain support from both internal and external audiences, including senior leaders within the military, veterans and members of Congress. If these audiences believe they have a voice in the final plan and the overall strategy protects the integrity of the Army, this initiative could move forward with little resistance. Second, the guiding coalition should include experts in education, sociology, and medical career fields to ensure that informed decisions occur.¹⁰⁸ TRADOC recently formed an educational advisory committee to review and analyze recommendations,

study outcomes, and provide advice to senior Army leaders.¹⁰⁹ Third, the guiding coalition must have credibility.¹¹⁰ A successful plan should include a strategy for earning the trust and confidence of the American people through effective communication efforts. And finally, the strategy should involve proven leaders to drive the transformation efforts.¹¹¹ Participation from current, prominent military leaders such as General Dempsey, General Odierno, and General Cone reinforces the importance of this initiative along with providing expert leadership and management skills to guide the coalition.

General Shinseki's efforts to transform the Army are seen as successful and the strategy he implemented often draws comparisons to Kotter's eight steps.¹¹² General Shinseki understood the Army was resistant to change and realized the importance of maintaining a unity of effort by keeping the guiding coalition together during the initial stages of transformation.¹¹³ He also understood the importance of building relationships with retired general officers and senior civilians who helped generate support with the American public, Congress and the executive branch.¹¹⁴

The impact of not having a guiding coalition emerged during the integration of women at the United States Military Academy at West Point. Weeks before starting classes, several West Point faculty members made public statements disagreeing with the Congressional decision.¹¹⁵ The lack of a strong, guiding coalition within the faculty allowed similar feelings to develop among the male students. As a result, women's integration at the Academy experienced some initial turbulence that gained national attention.¹¹⁶ With the increased notoriety and the pressure to succeed, female cadets worked hard to gain support and earn the respect of their peers and faculty.¹¹⁷

Developing a Vision and a Strategy

The development of a vision and a strategy is arguably the most important step in Kotter's eight-step process. As General Shinseki described, "if visions have any reality at all, it's because the organization believes the vision is right."¹¹⁸ A vision provides a window into the future to clarify the direction of change, inspire others to embrace the new direction, and most importantly synchronize efforts across multiple audiences.¹¹⁹ Kotter indicates the vision must have achievable goals, maintain flexibility, and is easily communicated to the intended audiences.¹²⁰ The development of a vision and strategy remains a collaborative effort involving leaders guiding the process but receiving input from many different levels.¹²¹ As outlined in the Army War College's Strategic Leadership Primer, "vision is a leader-focused activity that gives a sense of identity, purpose and direction, and energy."¹²² The successful integration of women into combat arms specialties will require a vision and strategy that will hold Army leaders accountable and set the conditions to achieve the desired end state.¹²³ If the vision does not align to the Army's organizational priorities and values, the chances of effectively integrating women into combat arms specialties reduces significantly.¹²⁴

The Army's current Soldier 2020 initiative provides that vision and the guiding principles to expand the role of women in the Army. The three guiding principles of the Army's vision include:

- 1) maintain the dominance of our Nation's war fighting forces by preserving unit readiness, cohesion and morale;
- 2) validate occupational performance standards, both physical and mental, for all military occupational specialties (MOSs), initially focusing on those currently closed to women;
- 3) and set the conditions so all Soldiers, men and women, have an opportunity to succeed as their talents dictate.¹²⁵

The Army's goal is to remove barriers preventing Soldiers from serving in positions for which they qualify.¹²⁶ Therefore, the focus of Soldier 2020 is about improving organizational effectiveness and less about gender integration.¹²⁷

Communicating the Change Vision

A vision is a powerful tool when the intended audiences clearly understand the message and desired end state. Because those arguing against integrating women into combat arms specialties believe the change will disrupt combat effectiveness, Army leaders' inability to communicate a clear and consistent vision could create misunderstanding, lack of trust, and lost confidence within the Army and with the American public. The Army's vision must instill confidence that Army leaders have developed a thoughtful and synchronized strategy that won't compromise the integrity of the military and reinforces the premise that integrating women will strengthen the Army. Likewise, in communicating its vision the Army should capitalize on using simple terms and multiple media sources, and promoting open dialog with the targeted audiences.¹²⁸

The Army is beginning to communicate its vision and strategy with target audiences as evidenced by Secretary of the Army John McHugh's memorandum stating the "Army will keep the Department of Defense, Congress, the American people and its Soldiers informed to ensure they know and understand the Army's progress towards a fully integrated and more capable force."¹²⁹ However, the Army should carefully consider the impact its communication strategy has on active-duty men and women. In the 1970s, the Army over-promoted and advertised women's integration at West Point.¹³⁰ As one male cadet stated in a 1980 *Time* magazine article, "if I hear one more call for a meeting about the women, or for the women or because of the women, I'm going to get

sick.”¹³¹ As a result, the oversensitivity with the integration decision promoted separatism, alienated men and impacted transformation efforts at West Point.¹³²

Empowering Broad-Based Action

Research indicates that transformational change rarely occurs unless there is support from the internal organization.¹³³ One of the most important components of moving the Army’s vision forward is empowering subordinates to champion the effort. Hypothetically, if a battalion full of infantrymen understands the vision, embraces women’s capabilities and professional competence, and understands this initiative will serve to strengthen the organization, the integration will occur smoothly. Subordinates often experience barriers because of structure and system impediments that create difficulties to act or effectively endorse the initiative.¹³⁴

As part of Soldier 2020, TRADOC is creating the conditions to empower broad-based action through the development of standards for each specialty, understanding the history and challenges with gender integration, and setting the conditions for successful integration.¹³⁵ These three initiatives should help the Army capture lessons learned, prioritize resources, determine leader focus areas and empower subordinates to champion the effort.¹³⁶

Generating Short-Term Wins

Short-term wins can serve to provide momentum which helps move the initiative forward.¹³⁷ Not only do “wins” help refine the vision and strategies, but they also provide clear evidence that change was worth the costs.¹³⁸ Most importantly, performance successes create difficulties for those opposed to prevent future progress. The Army experienced its first short-term win with the decision to rescind the order restricting women from being assigned to combat arms organizations. This policy change

produced positive results in deployed environments with minimal negative feedback. The Army should capitalize on this success to gain momentum, increase support from its coalition and inspire cultural change.¹³⁹

Similarly, General Shinseki's Army transformation efforts produce three short-term wins that supported his long-term vision and helped create cultural change. These short-term wins which changed Army processes included the implementation of Intermediate Level Education (ILE) for all Army majors, the development of interim brigade combat teams (IBCT) and the fielding of the Objective Force Acquisition program.¹⁴⁰ These three highly visible examples moved the Army's overall transformation efforts forward and provided the catalyst to consolidate gains and produce more change.¹⁴¹

Consolidating Gains and Producing More Change

As organizations plan major transformational efforts, they rarely understand the full magnitude of all the required adjustments at the beginning. Integration of women into historical all-male units is complicated and full of challenges. As changes occur and problems develop, the Army should regularly assess progress and determine required changes. Sometimes the situation may dictate a complete restructuring of the strategic plan and an updated vision statement. During this process, the Army's senior leaders must work to maintain clarity, mission focus, and preserve the guiding coalition.¹⁴²

General Shinseki identified consolidating gains and producing more change as a critical step during Army transformational efforts.¹⁴³ He realized the importance of integrating his vision into personnel, budget and acquisition processes.¹⁴⁴ As an example, he unveiled the Objective Force Acquisition program to provide the catalyst for change by connecting the personnel, budget and acquisition systems.¹⁴⁵ Because the

program connected multiple systems, Army leaders could not cut one component without jeopardizing the entire program.¹⁴⁶ As a result, Army leaders supported transformation initiatives and General Shinseki consolidated gains while maintaining irreversible momentum.¹⁴⁷

Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture

While cultural change is at the end of Kotter's model, it often requires a mindset adjustment that can take years to observe.¹⁴⁸ According to Kotter, success will likely depend on whether the results made the Army better and only then will the new approaches infiltrate the culture.¹⁴⁹ The Army's communication strategies should reinforce its short-term "wins" and quickly address issues as they arise. The most important element of this stage is recruiting and retaining the right people in order to maintain progress. In some cases, the Army might need to make personnel changes in order to select leaders who fully embrace the vision and will help lead cultural change.¹⁵⁰

The Army is underway with anchoring new approaches in its culture. The 2012 Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule (DGCAR) exception to policy opened 14,000 positions to women and provided the Army with organizations to research and evaluate.¹⁵¹ Secretary of the Army McHugh emphasized this process saying, the "Army will assess and learn from the newly integrated units and occupations to identify and replicate best practices while mitigating issues arising in the long-term."¹⁵² The lessons learned from these units will help support the Army's future strategy and set conditions for long-term cultural change.

History provides insights and reinforces the concept that cultural change does not happen overnight. As identified in the Project Athena report which researched the admission of women to West Point, assimilation and cultural change requires long-term

commitment from senior leaders at all levels.¹⁵³ Brigadier General Anne MacDonald, West Point Class of 1980, stated that “with anything that is new, there is sometimes hesitation and reluctance to change.”¹⁵⁴ Although identified as a recommendation in the Project Athena report, there is little evidence that the Army conducted additional research to improve women’s integration into West Point or tracked their progress upon graduation to help sustain momentum.¹⁵⁵ In addition, the report identified the importance of support groups with cultural change. The women’s support groups at West Point provided opportunities to address integration concerns, helped social adjustment and facilitated long-term cultural change.¹⁵⁶ The support group concept could prove helpful with the integration of women into combat arms specialties.

Conclusion

Major change within organizations is not easy and long lasting change will not endure without transforming organizational culture. Army leaders responsible for the success of integrating women into combat arms specialties should consider using Kotter’s eight-step process to guide them in planning for implementing this complex change. To achieve success, the Army should establish a guiding coalition to communicate the Army’s vision and strategy often and empower subordinates to help generate short-term wins and maintain irreversible momentum.¹⁵⁷ Creating an effective team involves picking the best people for the right positions in order to strengthen the organization. Women consistently served with courage and distinction in Iraq and Afghanistan while performing many of the same functions and tasks commonly found in Army combat arms units. Because of their proven performance and professional competence, women have earned the right to join the combat arms specialties while helping to transform the Army in a new and innovative direction.

Endnotes

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