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Human Resource Development and Female Middle Managers in Australian Universities

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ABSTRACT

The numbers of females and males employed in higher education in Australia are roughly equal but women hold only 24% of managerial positions. Much of the research on the position of women in academe assumes that women already have all of the qualifications, experience and specific skills to assume management roles. However it has been identified that the leadership attitudes, performance and development needs of women managers in universities have been neglected and they have less 'human capital' than their male counterparts.

This paper explores the human resource development opportunities of women from academic and administrative streams working in middle management in Australian universities. The study involved a paper-based survey sent to all women identified as middle managers on the Australian Vice-Chancellors' 2004 Website List of Senior University Women. Questions focussed on their work life, qualifications and development opportunities.

A demographic profile of the women is presented and the findings are analysed in light of this. In summary, a large proportion of academic women experienced few HRD opportunities in preparation for their current roles and even less development once in those roles. Most stated that their formal qualifications did not prepare them for many aspects of their leadership roles. Administrative women reported some prior HRD, however, once in their roles, they reported a marked decline in development opportunities.

The specific HRD opportunities are discussed at some depth. The paper concludes with the women's suggestions for better practice in HRD for emerging female managers

Stream: Gender and Diversity in Organizations.

Keywords: women and work, gender in organizations,

Human Resource Development and Female Middle Managers in Australian Universities

While the numbers of females and males working in higher education in Australia are roughly equal and some gains have been made in women attaining senior leadership positions, recent figures indicate that women still hold only 24% of managerial positions overall (Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) 2004). Gender issues have been widely explored when examining women's leadership position in academe (for example Allport 1996; Aitken 2001; Blackmore & Sachs 2000, 2001; Currie & Thiele 2001; Ramsay, 2000). However, the actual embeddedness of human resource development opportunities as part of such cultures has not been fully explored. Human resource development in organisations encompasses both formal education, management or leadership development and situated learning such as on-the-job learning, mentoring, coaching and career development (DeSimone, Werner & Harris 2002).

The literature regarding the cultures of organizations, including universities, appears to assume that women already have all of the qualifications, experience and specific management and leadership skills to assume management roles and access to development opportunities has not been problematic for them. However, Joyner and Preston (1998) have identified that the leadership attitudes, performance and development needs of women managers in universities have been neglected. More recently, White (2003) and Wallace (2006) have noted that the deans/heads of department/associate professors in their studies in individual universities received little development for management and leadership roles. Furthermore, Probert (2005: 58), in discussing the under-representation of women in Australian university hierarchies, has stated that, 'Women have less 'human capital' than men, measured in terms of formal qualifications and work experience'. Human resource development for women working in the range of Australian universities is, however, under-researched.

This paper examines human resource development practices and related organisational culture issues in Australian universities as experienced by academic and administrative, female middle managers. The study focuses on women in middle management rather than senior management because experiences of senior, female managers in Australian academe have been well documented (Blackmore & Sachs 2000, 2001, Chesterman, Ross-Smith & Peters 2003) and because of the impending impact of generational change (Chesterman et al 2003; Gardner 2006). A focus on those in middle management roles, who may aspire to senior leadership, is timely. While it is acknowledged that senior management is not every woman's goal and that some women in management struggle with the paradoxes and pressures of their roles (Priola 2004; Wallace 2006) it can also be presumed

that a number of these women want to progress to higher levels of responsibility and reward and, among other things need the 'human capital' to do so.

The central questions of the study are thus:

- How have female, middle managers in Australian universities been prepared for their roles through the range of HRD practices operating in their organisations?
- Do they now have access to development opportunities that would assist career progression?
- What other organisational experiences influence their access to HRD?
- What HRD practices do they recommend as 'good practice' in the development of female managers in the university context?

METHODOLOGY

A survey was sent to all women, who could be identified as middle managers (academic and administrative staff) from the Australian Vice-Chancellors' (AVCC) Website List of Senior University Women (AVCC 2004) and took place at the end of 2004/early 2005. Female VCs, DVCs, PVCs (academic and administrative) and Executive Deans were eliminated as being Senior Executive but those in roles such as Deans, Heads of academic/research or administrative Departments were included. Questions involved basic demographics, development activities experienced, recommendations for a management induction program suited to women. Seven hundred and fifty hard copy surveys were distributed by mail and there were three hundred and forty two replies.

A PROFILE OF THE WOMEN

The following figures profile the key demographics. They may not all add to 100% because of a small number of outliers.

Academics:

- Professors (35%), Associate Professors (29%) and Senior Lecturers (29%), Lecturers/Associate Lecturers (7%).
- 61-70 years of age (2.4%), 51-60 years age group (59%), 41-50 years age group (35%), 31-40 (3%).
- Heads of academic schools/departments (43%), heads of research centres (15%), deans (14%) heads of administrative departments (8%), Deputy/Acting/Associate/SubDeans (4%).
- Worked at their university for more than fifteen years (34%), for between eight and fifteen years (30%), between three and eight years (30%).

- Had been in their roles for over six years (29%), for three to five years (43%), for one to two years (27%).
- Worked over 60 hours per week (30%), worked 50-60 hours (43%), worked 41-50 hours (22%), worked less than 30 Hours per week (2%).

Administrative Staff:

- Above HEW 10 level (32%), HEW10 level (49%), HEW 9 level 10%), HEW 9-8 level (7%).
- 51-60 age group (39%), 41-50 age group (40%) and 17% in their thirties.
- Heads of administrative sections or departments (46%) or administrative directorates (20%) or administrative teams (13%) with a smattering of project managers, laboratory managers, and faculty managers, executive officers and internal consultants.
- Worked for their university for more than fifteen years (21%), between eight and fifteen years (35%), for five to eight years (9%), for three to five years (32%) and for 1-2 years (12%).
- Had been in their roles for over six years (37%), for between three and five years (32%) and for one to two years (31%).
- Worked over 60 hours per week (3%), worked 50-60 hours (24%), worked 41-50 hours (55%), worked less than 35 hours per week (4%).

Generally, the administrative managers had a younger profile with less service at their institution or at their current level. However, a majority of the women appear to stay quite a long while at their institutions with sixty-four percent of academic managers and fifty-five percent of administrative managers working for more than eight years at their current institution. As one academic manager stated, 'I have been here for nineteen years and my promotions have been internal. I have never applied to another university'. This steadiness of employment may also be reflective of mobility issues for some women, particularly for those at non-metropolitan universities.

Both administrative and academic female managers appear to attain their middle management position from internal promotion rather than recruitment across the sector. This accords with studies that note the gender inflected nature of mobility and men's more rapid advancement as a by product of mobility within the sector and overseas (Castleman, Allen, Bastalich & Wright 1995). Interestingly, only three women (two academic and one administrative manager) mentioned overseas experience although a small number of both academic and administrative managers did discuss their experience in other sectors or universities in Australia as being beneficial to their attainment of and success in their current roles.

While there are a significant number of women who are relatively new to their levels of appointment, the majority have been in their roles for more than three years with a most significant number of academic managers (29%) and administrative managers (37%) having been at their current level for more than six years. While this indicates a very experienced cohort, the number of women, who have been at their level for over six years may also indicate that they have not been further promoted.

It also appears that for both academic and administrative managers, part-time work was not compatible with their management roles. While it is outside the parameters of this paper large numbers of women commented on the long hours of work needed to fulfil their roles and the resultant negative effects on family life and the time available to develop themselves.

One way of measuring an individual's human capital relates to formal educational qualifications. Table 1 below summarises the educational achievements of the women while Table 2 indicates their evaluation of how useful their qualifications have been to their management role.

Table 1. Highest qualifications

Highest qualifications	Acad. %	Admin. %
Certificate	0	2.3
Professional qualification	0	0.6
Graduate certificate	0	3.5
Diploma	1.8	0
Associate degree	0.6	0
Bachelors' degree	3.5	24.4
Graduate Diploma	2.9	19.2
Masters degree	19.4	41.3
PhD	71.8	7.0

Table 2. Highest Qualifications related to Current Role

Qualifications related	Acad. %	Admin. %
Certificate	0.6	2.4
Diploma	4.1	0.6
Associate degree	1.2	0
Professional qualification	1.8	3.6
Bachelors' degree	4.1	24.2
Graduate Certificate	1.2	4.2
Graduate Diploma	2.4	18.8
Masters	18.9	39.4
PhD	56.2	4.2
No management qualifications	7.1	0
Professional development and experience	2.4	0

The predominant highest-level qualification for administrative managers was a masters degree followed by a bachelors degree and graduate diploma. Only three percent had, as their highest qualification, a professional qualification or certificate below degree level, indicating a relatively high level of education. More administrative managers perceived their qualification as directly related to their current role. For instance, of the seventy-one women with a masters degree, sixty-five perceived the qualification was directly related to their current management role. Of the forty-two women with bachelors degrees, forty saw a direct relationship.

The percentage of academic women with a PhD is higher than the national average of 52.9% identified by Probert, Ewer & Whiting (1998). The higher proportion identified in this study may be reflective of the level of ambition of these women and the required qualification level to be a senior academic manager. Of the one hundred and twenty-two academic managers with PhDs, ninety-five perceived a relationship to the academic leadership component of their current role but very few perceived a relationship to the management role.

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The Tables below offer additional human capital information for the female, middle managers. In Table 1 the women look back to the development activities that prepared them for entering their current management roles. Percentages add to more than 100% as a number of women, who did undertake development opportunities nominated more than one type.

Table 3. HRD activities that Prepared the Women for their Current Management Roles

Type of HRD Activity	Acad. %	Admin. %
In-house management training	32.4	36.0
In-house technical training	7.6	10.5
In-house leadership development program	24.1	26.2
AVCC leadership or management program	15.9	22.1
A TEM leadership or management program	1.8	11.6
Short courses outside university	14.8	35.5
Mentoring	32.9	35.3
Accredited professional qualification	4.7	22.7
Degree or higher degree in area related to role	15.3	41.9
Experience-outside	28.6	32.4
Experience-inside	17.5	12.2
Both		4.1
No Relevant activities	39.6	17.6

One of the striking features here is that a sizeable proportion of Academic managers and a lesser proportion of Administrative managers report that they received no management/leadership development at all in preparation for their current roles. Of the academic managers almost forty percent reported no relevant development activities at all in preparing them for their current roles with comments such as ‘This is the University of (Sandstone). It’s sink or swim on your own here’. Of the Administrative managers almost eighteen percent reported no relevant prior development. While it appears that Administrative managers receive more development opportunities than their academic counterparts a sizeable number do not receive any development.

For the eighty-two percent of administrative managers who did cite some development activities, their degree was the most often cited structured preparation for their current management role followed by in-house management training, mentoring, in house leadership development programs and short courses outside the university. Experience outside the university sector figured somewhat prominently as a less structured development experience and this is borne out by comments such as ‘Eleven years in a previous corporate job’, ‘Previously a public servant’, ‘Involvement in feminist groups’,

'Experience in not-for-profit sector' and 'Professional experience in international Higher Education industry and corporate roles'. Experience within the Australian university sector generally involved 'Acting positions where supervision was involved', 'Having a boss who knew something about management' and 'Involvement in project teams'. Short courses that they participated in were offered by professional associations, commercial management development companies, graduate schools of management at universities and ATN WEXDEV (Australian Technology Universities Network Womens' Executive Development).

For the sixty percent of academic managers who claimed some development activity, mentoring closely followed by in-house management training were the most often cited structured management development opportunities, followed by in-house leadership development. Experience outside the sector was also seen as somewhat helpful and this is also born out by some comments such as 'Prior senior management experience in the public sector in the 1980s', 'Management experience in community agencies at local/national levels', 'Political activism in women's movement'. Experience in the sector and in their own institutions also figured, 'Experience over a long time – nineteen years at the same uni' and 'Thrown in the deep end – participated in strategic planning at executive level'.

In addition, academic managers were more likely to mention that mentoring had been very informal and spasmodic. A large number of academic women perceived that their male counterparts were mentored in a more comprehensive yet informal way. Interestingly, slightly more administrative managers than academic managers had participated in some sort of mentoring. The administrative managers were more likely to cite this mentoring as being more structured and focussed.

Overall, it appears that administrative managers have received more development than have academic managers in preparation for their current roles. One of the reasons for this higher level may be that academic managers are still seen as mainly working in the teaching and research sphere, which are part of their academic training and current competencies while administrative managers are more involved with legislative, financial, human resource, industrial relations and other spheres with more external accountabilities. However, the accountabilities related to teaching and research are growing exponentially and recent research (for example White, 2004; Blackmore & Sachs, 2004) indicates that academic managers have similar financial, resource, human resource, strategic planning and governance responsibilities as administrative managers. The increasingly competitive climate also requires academic managers to be entrepreneurial in seeking money-making opportunities as government funding decreases. This can involve such activities as business networking and contract

negotiations requiring skill sets unrelated to most academic disciplines. There also appears to be high regulations and compliance in both management roles with the academic managers appearing somewhat less prepared for them. This is borne out by the comments below regarding development needs.

In fulfilling their current responsibilities and looking forward to continued advancement and career development it could be expected that both administrative and academic managers have the opportunities for further development once in middle management. Table 4 offers a snapshot of their development activities since taking up their current management roles. This development is relevant to both success in their current roles and preparation for further advancement.

Table 4. HRD Activities while in Current Role

Development activities since taking up current role	Acad. %	Admin. %
In-house management training	38.2	41.9
In-house technical training	14.7	20.3
In-house leadership development program	30.6	37.2
AVCC leadership or management program	13.5	20.9
ATEM leadership or management program	1.2	8.1
Short courses outside university	15.1	34.6
Mentoring	39.1	28.5
Accredited professional qualification	1.2	5.8
Degree or higher degree in area related to role	4.7	14.5
Other Professional Development	15.4	30.8
Education-Formal/directed	10.3	25.0
No relevant activities	59.0	34.6

There has been an increase in both administrative and academic managers stating that they have not participated in development activities since they have commenced their current management role: almost fifty percent more in the case of administrative managers and twenty percent more in the case of academic managers. When this is compared to the length of time these women had been working at

their current level it would be expected that they would have had at least some development in this time.

Of the thirty-five percent of administrative managers who did participate in development once in their middle management roles, in-house management training was cited as the most frequently utilized type of development, followed by in-house leadership development, short courses outside the university, mentoring and formal education. The most often cited formal education was an MBA or other masters programs and professional librarianship training. Mentoring was also discussed in the terms of Executive Coaching. Other professional development was most often cited as attendance at conferences and networking with other administrators in professional associations.

Of the forty percent of academic managers who participated in development, the ranking accorded to mentoring and in-house management training was the same as their 'before' responses. The most often mentioned short courses were ATNWEXDEV courses, which apply to only six universities in the country. There was a marked difference in responses between women from these type of technology universities and the few other universities that were reported to have specific development programs for women staff and responses from women from other universities. In other words, the women who had participated in structured, ongoing development programs had a much more positive view of their universities and their own capacities. The most often mentioned formal courses that were relevant were a masters or PhD in management.

Overall, it appears from this sample that female, middle managers drawn from the administrative ranks tend to have a greater amount of pre-management training and development opportunities while in the middle management role. While academics have less development overall they do seem to participate in greater amount of mentoring once in middle management, either as a result of structured leadership and development programs in their institution or across the sector and/or as a result of less formal female solidarity from those in senior management in their institution or sector.

EXPERIENCES RELATING TO DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Not only did the women report relatively few development opportunities prior to or while in their current roles, they also indicated related organisational issues that impacted on their ability to access or be considered for human resource development opportunities.

The academic managers expressed concerns relating to the behaviours of senior management. They included 'Lack of support from senior management in enabling Deans to manage their own staff' and 'Continual changes in reporting relationships with changes in senior managers'. While such comments may be seen as the lot of the middle manager sandwiched between competing demands there is a real sense of distance between senior management and these female middle managers. However, related comments indicate that these women perceived their male peers as having closer collegial relationships with senior managers. Most of the women reported that in their performance reviews with members of university executive their further development was not discussed or had to be raised by themselves.

Unsurprisingly, the questions regarding the challenges facing female managers in universities and the opportunity to raise other issues evoked the greatest and most emotive responses. Seventy percent of the academic women reported challenges in achieving work/life balance and many related this to carer responsibilities, the loose concept of academic work hours and the demands of a management role.

Another challenge related to recognition in the university environment for achievements. This included reference to 'Promotion criteria that continue to privilege research over service or teaching' and '... that effective management is constructed from a male perspective'. A related aspect was a strongly reported opinion that there exists 'Lack of transparency and informal decision-making among a few men' and 'avuncular behaviour' that is condescending and disempowering. However, there was recognition that it was political skills as well as technical excellence that supported advancement. Academic women cited specific development in both political and technical skills as an unmet need.

A major concern for administrative managers, not mentioned by academics, related to what was called 'academic apartheid'. As one respondent stated, 'It's the Feudal system – the aristocracy (academics) and the serfs (administrative staff) and the attitudes and elitism of academics'. Others cited the 'Divide between academic and administrative staff and the lack of respect for administrators and their experience and qualifications' and 'The belief that administrative staff are not interested in or are totally removed from academic endeavours'. This concern was echoed by a number of women and was gender inflected as 'Being taken seriously by older, male academics' was implicated in this divide. A number of women noted the 'Perception that they (female administrative managers) are not as good' and 'Competition from older, male academics who think management is easy and they can just move into an administrative role if their research career fails'. Ramsay (2000: 7) has identified

this continual imperative for women in leadership positions to re-establish credibility with superiors, peers and subordinates as a factor that drains morale and threatens productivity.

Fifty percent of the administrative managers mentioned specific gender issues as one of their greatest challenges. Gender issues were overwhelmingly seen as a source of challenge to administrative managers in university cultures. This took the form of 'Hidden decision making and exclusion from the 'real' meetings' and in certain areas such as 'the blokey finance department' it was seen that 'Senior men accord each other status and voice, which they do not accord to female managers', 'Men's opinions are still seen as more legitimate and not much has changed since the 1970s'. The relatively low numbers or total lack of senior women were noted in some universities and this led to an invisibility of women or a situation where 'Women are relied on as 'high performers' but men who are 'high flyers' appear to have an easier ride and are better rewarded', 'Mismanagement or error of judgement by a female manager is likely to be more of an issue', 'Our uni has no senior females at all and is isolated from networking with other women and there is no support or encouragement from senior males'. A few respondents did note that even when there was a more balanced representation of women at higher levels some were not good role models and were perhaps not interested in assisting less senior women. The expectation that women in positions of power in academe will support junior women and the disappointment when this does not happen has also been reported by Lord (2005).

One of the administrative managers' other main concerns was linked to resourcing and resultant behaviours in the increasingly competitive climate; 'As dollars become scarce, principles go out the window and the ground rules for collaborative effort are difficult to sustain', 'The rules of the game are gender driven when resources are scarce'. Interestingly, this issue was not mentioned by academic managers. It was also noted that, 'As the environment gets tougher through government policy changes and tighter budgets fewer women will apply for senior management jobs' and 'The competition between female managers works against greater numbers of successes'. This accords with Chesterman's (2004) finding that some women see the higher roles in universities as un-do-able jobs and Munford & Rumball's (1999) finding regarding competition among the few senior women in organisations. Administrative managers appeared to be more tuned in to the increasingly competitive climate, its gender-inflected behaviours and their need to negotiate the politics to survive. Many expressed a need for mentoring or more specific skills development to assist them in this.

Over fifty percent of the administrative managers discussed work /family imbalance as an issue, 'We have predominantly female senior management but I still see colleagues struggle with children and

elderly parents. Those in management can't work part-time'. The long hours and 'presenteeism' that seem inherent in the management role were identified as being at odds with other policies:

While universities have policies that are family friendly, senior management attitudes do not seem to support the policies. Many female management staff are returning from maternity leave very early because of the pressure put on them by management that we have childcare at uni. (Administrative manager)

In this climate it was noted that development needs were not discussed, to express such needs implied 'weak' management skills and finding time for development was extremely difficult.

WHAT WOMEN WANT IN THE FORM OF HRD OPPORTUNITIES

Women clearly identified the sorts of development opportunities they needed:

1. Mentoring . Both administrative and academic women, in far greater numbers than those who had reported having been mentored, named mentoring as the most significant development activity they would recommend for a woman in preparation for a middle management role. This was linked very directly to the organisational culture and 'The minefield of being a woman in management'. That so many more women recommended than had participated in mentoring may also indicate that these women know what is helpful even though they may not have experienced it. It may also indicate a longing for further interest and engagement in their development by significant senior staff.

2. Leadership Development. While mentoring is undoubtedly part of leadership development both administrative and academic women referred here to specific skill development including techniques in staff motivation, team building and supervisory skills, interpersonal communication skills including conflict resolution and grievance handling, managing difficult people, negotiation and assertiveness as well as strategic planning.

3. Detailed knowledge of context and culture of the sector and specific university. Again, closely allied to leadership development but not necessarily seen as part of it by the administrative and academic women was a knowledge set that included information on the context and culture of the university – governance, processes, legislation, compliance, funding, structures and business processes. While mentoring is a path to these understandings there was a clear preference expressed for although a number of women for direct orientation programs covering these areas. Some women also cited 'Politics 101', that is developing an understanding of the shadow side of their organization and its informal power relations.

4. Technical Skill Development. Short courses with sectoral groups such as ATEM, AVCC, ATN and AIM were seen as the next most important source of development and could indeed encompass specific issues such as financial management or HR or more general leadership development as above. Job rotation, shadowing, secondments, project work and experiences across the university and in inter-university were also seen as important. Academic women in particular expressed needs in developing these technical skills, which were far less apparent in their own academic discipline training. A much smaller number of administrative managers cited strategic planning, financial management, writing briefs and plans and meeting procedure as important skill development areas.

There was strong preference for structure, especially from administrative managers and a 'Program of activity rather than piecemeal workshops so we really have something to show for it'. In fact, specific accredited courses such as an MBA or Graduate Certificate in University Management were seen as professionalising some of the tacit and situational learning of middle management roles.

CONCLUSION

One of the core functions of a university is developing people yet it seems that this may not apply to staff as it does to students. It also seems that there are cultural issues that work against the development of certain female staff. However, the findings of this study beg further investigation. A study of the development of male, middle managers would confirm or disconfirm the impression that HRD in universities may be part of a gender-inflected culture. A triangulation of findings with the perceptions of senior managers and an examination of universities' HRD policies and practices would offer an even more rounded picture. Further analysis of some universities' claims to be learning organizations could have an HRD component among its broader inquiry.

Despite the AVCC's recent focus on the development of women in Australian universities, the impact of its guidelines, at least for the women managers in this study, seems to be patchy. Certain types of universities or certain universities with the support of senior management have taken the development of women to heart. However, there also seem to be a large number of universities that are currently doing little in relation to the human resource development of their female middle managers.

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