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Administrative and Academic Female, Middle Managers in Higher Education in Australia: opportunities for development

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Biography

Michelle Wallace, PhD, has worked in the university sector for sixteen years and has had a range of management experiences. Prior to joining academe she undertook human resource development roles in the public sector. Currently she is Associate Professor in Human Resources in the Graduate College of Management at Southern Cross University. Michelle's research interests pertinent to this paper focus on the intersection of human resource development/management, organisational change and women and work. Michelle teaches post-graduate students in Australia and off-shore and has a particular interest in critical management studies and transnational teaching and learning.

Abstract

The focus of this paper is human resource development (HRD) opportunities for female, middle managers in Australia's universities. Joyner and Preston (1998) have previously identified that the leadership attitudes, performance and development needs of women managers have been neglected. More recently White (2003: 49) has noted that the heads of department/associate professors in her study 'had received little training for management and leadership roles'. Furthermore, Probert (2005: 58), in discussing the under-representation of women in university hierarchies, has stated that, 'Women have less 'human capital' than men, measured in terms of formal qualifications and work experience'.

Middle managers are the focus of the study reported here because there has been quite a deal of research regarding women at the top in universities but less on middle managers, who may aspire to future leadership roles.

The central questions emerge from an unashamedly human capital perspective, 'Have female, middle managers been prepared for their roles, do they now access development opportunities that would assist career progression and what do they recommend as 'good practice' in the development of female managers in the university context?' Results from an Australia-wide survey of three hundred and forty two female, academic and administrative managers in the country's thirty-eight universities offer some answers to these important questions.

Keywords: middle management, academic and administrative women, human resource development, human capital

Administrative and Academic Female, Middle Managers in Higher Education in Australia: opportunities for development

The research reported here takes an unashamedly human capital view of human resource development opportunities for female middle managers in Australia's publicly funded universities. Joyner and Preston (1998) have previously identified that the leadership attitudes, performance and development needs of women have been neglected. More recently White (2003: 49) has noted that the heads of department/associate professors in her study 'had received little training for management and leadership roles'. Furthermore, Probert (2005: 58), in discussing the under-representation of women in university hierarchies, has stated that, 'Women have less 'human capital' than men, measured in terms of formal qualifications and work experience'.

While issues of masculinist culture have been widely explored when examining women's leadership position in academe (eg Allport 1996; Aitken 2001; Blackmore and Sachs 2000, 2001) the actual embededness of human resource development opportunities as part of the fabric of power relations in 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) that support an understanding of the shadow side of the organization such as the informal power relations (Delahaye 2005).

In a previous study (Wallace 2003) I demonstrated that access to human capital in the form of human resource development opportunities, was one of the discursive practices that positioned women in organizations and played a significant role in whether women advanced to more satisfying and better-paid jobs. What strikes me about some of the literature on women aspiring to leadership roles in academe is that there appears to be an assumption that they already have all of the qualifications, experience and specific management and leadership skills to assume management roles and that access to development opportunities has not been problematic. The empirical material presented here examines whether university women in middle management have access to human resource development opportunities and the types of development opportunities most accessed and recommended.

The research reported here specifically examines the situation for women in middle management in universities and there are several reasons for this. Firstly, while I acknowledge that senior management is not every woman's goal and that some women in middle management struggle with the paradoxes and pressures of their roles (Priola 2004; Wallace 2003 forthcoming) it may also be presumed, and is clear from my study, that some of these women want to progress their careers to attain the next level of responsibility, power and remuneration. The kinds of development experiences, including qualifications, that enable women to take that leap to middle and senior management have been identified as an important, although not the only, factor in women's career

progression (Wentling 2003). Existing Australian studies do not appear to focus on the human resource development aspects of career progression for women in universities, although there is broader evidence from the management literature that human resource development activities, including a range of management development skills (communication, leadership, negotiation, strategic management, political understanding and financial planning, leading and motivating people and negotiating the external and internal politics) are contributing factors to career progression (Jackson 2001; Wentling 2003).

Secondly, a number of the most senior women in higher education in Australia have recently or will soon retire (Chesterman et al 2003) and there is a valid concern that the current, somewhat reasonable representation of women at executive levels may decline if there are insufficient women qualified and experienced to succeed them. It thus appears worthwhile to explore more fully the human resource development experiences of these potential leaders in universities, which have long been acknowledged as highly gendered organizations (Allport 1996; Aitkin 2001).

Thirdly, there is a considerable body of research on women at executive level in universities but less on women in middle management. The focus has also generally been on women from the academic stream. The empirical data reported here examines the experiences of both academic and administrative middle managers.

There has been considerable scholarship and praxis relating to women in university management both prompting and in response to the *AVCC Action Plan for Women Employed in Australian Universities 199-2003* (AVCC 1999). Wyn et al (1997) examined the experiences of senior women academics working in faculties of education in Australia and Canada. Themes of marginalisation and not being taken seriously both in the discipline area and within the masculinist culture were cited. Probert et al's (1998) national study of pay equity in eighteen, Australian universities indicated that the main predictors of women's lower pay were academic level, years in higher education and formal qualifications. The surprise finding in their study was the number of women who had begun their careers without a PhD and the relatively fewer who went on to attain PhDs (52.9 percent of women in comparison to 61.9 percent of men). Arguing from a human capital perspective, a PhD in one's discipline area is an entry-level qualification to being a fully-fledged academic. However, unless its focus is management related, it does not fully prepare a middle (or senior) manager for the current, corporatist demands of management in the academy. Other development opportunities are needed

A number of studies have explored women's under-representation at higher levels in management roles in universities (for instance Blackmore & Sachs 2001; White 2003; Probert 2005). In relation to specific HRD opportunities for women, Eveline (2004) has analysed a gender equity change process at the University of Western Australia, where an inclusive climate and culture was fashioned from a highly traditional, male-centric work environment. This culture made practical, diverse changes such as modifying the promotion system to acknowledge teaching, and implementing a Leadership Development program for administrative and academic women that supported their

promotion aspirations. The *ATN/WEXDEV* initiative, now in its tenth year, and other initiatives also offer development opportunities to academic and administrative university women. There are some shining examples of good practice across the sector; however, it appears that there has been no broad study in Australia regarding the overall development of women in middle management in the academy. I am thus adding a human capital perspective to current knowledge; that of formal and informal development opportunities that give women the qualifications, education, skills, experience and the tacit knowledge and networks to take on more senior roles.

This paper thus offers a snapshot of the human resource development experiences of women in middle management in Australian universities. It examines the preparation women have had for their middle management roles, the opportunities currently open to them to support their career development and their suggestions for effective development practices.

Methodology

In exploring the human capital issues and experiences of female, middle managers this paper presents selected results from a survey of female, middle managers (both academic and administrative) from the broad range of Australian, publicly funded universities.

The survey was sent to all women, who could be identified as middle managers (academic and administrative staff) from the *Australian Vice-Chancellors' List of Senior University Women – 2004* (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 or Directorates were included.

In this paper the focus is on survey data that explores employment levels, qualifications, job experience, development activities experienced and recommendations for development activities that would support women's advancement.

Seven hundred and fifty surveys were distributed by mail and there were three hundred and forty two replies, one hundred and seventy of these from academics and one hundred and seventy two from those in the administrative (Higher Education Worker or HEW) stream. I note that there is some role blurring between academic and administrative classifications as respondents indicated that, for instance, Learning Assistance staff with HEW classification teach and research, while some of those with an academic classification undertake purely management/leadership roles.

SPSS was used to analyse the simple descriptive statistical data and a manual thematic analysis was used on the open-ended questions.

Findings

Following Marginson's (1999) typology of universities, the responses were as follows.

Table 1 – University Type

University Type	Academic %	Admin. %
Sandstone	20.7	29.2
Gumtreees	17.8	16.7
Red brick	7.7	6.0
Unitec	25.4	22.0
New	28.4	26.2

Tables 2 to 5 offer a demographic snapshot of the women.

Table 2. Academic Level

Academic Level	%
Level A	1.2
Level B	5.4
Level C	28.6
Level D	28.6
Level E	34.5
Other	1.8

Table 3. Administrative Level

Admin. Level	%
HEW 6	0.6
HEW 7	2.4
HEW 8	4.1
HEW 9	10.0
HEW 10	49.4
Above HEW 10	32.4
Other	1.2

Those academics at lower levels may be accounted for by the 4 percent overall, who reported that they were acting in their positions.

In relation to age, the bulk of academic managers (59 percent) were in the 51-60 years age bracket while 35 percent were in the 41-50 years age bracket. Forty percent of administrative managers were in the 41-50 years age bracket and 39 percent were in the 51-60 years age bracket thus making academic managers slightly older than their administrative colleagues. Academic managers were more likely to be heads of academic schools/departments, heads of research centres or were non-executive deans, managers of off-shore programs and directors of studies. Most administrative managers were heads of administrative sections, departments or teams with a smattering of project managers, laboratory managers, and faculty managers, executive officers and internal consultants.

These 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 in 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 et al 1995). Interestingly, only three women (two academic and one administrative manager) mentioned overseas experience, although a small number of both academic and administrative managers discussed experience in other sectors or universities in Australia as beneficial to their attainment of and success in their current roles.

Table 4. Years Worked in Current Role

Worked at current level	Academic %	Admin. %
1-2 years	27.2	30.8
3-5 years	43.8	32.0
6-8 years	10.1	17.4
Over 8 years	18.9	19.8

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 percent) and administrative managers (37 percent) 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.

Table 5. Highest qualifications

Qualification	Academic %	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

More administrative managers perceived their qualification as directly related to their current role. 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 few to the management role.

Human Resource Development Opportunities
The most striking findings relate to the relatively sizeable proportion of women who report that they have experienced no human resource development opportunities in preparation for their current role or while in their current role. Of the academic managers thirty nine 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 number do not receive any development.

Table 6 detailing HRD activities below thus needs to be read with caution as it represents only 60 percent of academic respondents and 82 percent of administrative respondents. In this table the women look back to the development activities that prepared them for entering their current management roles. Percentages add to more than 100 percent as a number of women, who did undertake development opportunities nominated more than one type.

Table 6. Development 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	5.9	22.1
ATEM 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

Administrative managers receive more development opportunities in almost every category than their academic counterparts. Their formal tertiary education 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 other short courses outside the university. Other short courses mentioned only once each by administrative managers were an AIM (Australian Institute of Management) course, a four-week ATN WEXDEV industry experience placement (1996), a ten-day study tour of the USA and a residential, management course. A few respondents appeared to have experienced a great deal of development activities such as the study tour, participation in the university managers group and Association of Women on Campus at a Sandstone university and WEXDEV opportunity, mentoring and structured leadership development

but this was the exception. Most women who did receive development mentioned one or two types of activity.

Experience outside the university sector figured somewhat prominently as a less structured development experience for administrative women 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'.

For the academic managers who did report some development activity, mentoring closely followed by in-house management training were the most often cited structured management development opportunities. 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 indeed in their own institutions also figured, 'Experience over a long time – nineteen years at the same uni', 'Thrown in the deep end – participated in strategic planning at executive level' and 'Working out how to do the job while on the job'.

Other short courses were mentioned less by academic managers. One mentioned an executive program at the AGSM and another a Harvard leadership program but these were the glamorous exceptions. Academic managers were more likely to mention that mentoring had been very informal and that at their university people at their level such as heads of school received no development at all. 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.

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 of development may be that academics, who are managers are still positioned as solely focussed on the teaching and research spheres, which are directly related to their academic training. In contrast, administrative managers are positioned as more involved with legislative, financial, human resource, industrial relations and other spheres with more external accountabilities thus requiring ongoing development as the sectoral landscape changes. However, the accountabilities related to teaching and research are growing exponentially and recent research indicates that academic managers have similar entrepreneurial, financial, resource, human resource, strategic planning and governance responsibilities to administrative managers (for example White 2004; Blackmore & Sachs 2000, 2001). In the restructured university sector in Australia there appears to be a high element of regulation and compliance in both academic and administrative management roles in addition to dealing with volatile sectoral issues but the academic managers seem

to have been less prepared for these challenges. A number of the administrative managers also complained that they were positioned in their institutions as having little interest in the teaching and research missions of their universities yet all espoused a vital commitment to those missions.

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 roles. However, an astounding 60 percent of academic managers and 35 percent of administrative managers reported that they had received no development at all while in their current roles. When compared to the reports on development for their current roles this denotes a marked increase in those reporting no development. This is particularly of concern as 72 percent of academic managers and 69 percent of administrative managers had been in their roles for three or more years (with 19 percent of academic and 20 percent of administrative managers being in their roles for more than eight years) and so could be expected to have been offered some forms of development to assist in the changing nature of their current roles and develop them for future roles/promotion.

Table 7 offers a snapshot of the development activities experienced by the 40 percent of academic respondents and 75 percent of the administrative respondents, who did participate in development activities so again needs to be read with caution.

Table 7. Development 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
Education-Formal/directed	10.3	25

The administrative managers cited in-house management training 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 program relevant to their roles. Other professional development was most often cited as executive coaching, attendance at conferences and networking with other administrators through 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 although they had increased in percentage points. Mentoring was informal and self-instigated and could be summarized as, 'Mentoring from my previous head', 'A small group of women, who get together and talk things over. We give each other advice' to 'Conversations with my secretary'. Few women mentioned formal mentoring programs. However, about 40 percent of the women discussed a desire for mentoring that is unfulfilled. The most often mentioned short courses were *ATN/WEXDEV* courses and Executive coaching courses. The most often mentioned formal courses were a masters or PhD in management. Other professional development included self-directed reading.

Overall, it appears 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.

Women's Recommendations for Development Opportunities

Both administrative and academic women, in far greater numbers than those who had reported having been mentored, suggested mentoring as the most significant development activity they would recommend for a woman in preparation for a middle management role. 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.

A large number of academic women and a smaller number of administrative women discussed the all-consuming natures of their work, issues with work/life balance and time constraints on networking. As 87 percent of academic managers reported working over forty-six hours per week with 30 percent working over sixty hours and with 77 percent of administrative managers working over forty-six hours per week with 3.5 percent working over sixty hours per week, it is little wonder that informal networking/ mentoring falls by the wayside.

For the administrative managers, the next most popular type of development recommended was leadership development. This was described as including techniques in staff motivation, team building and supervisory skills and could be seen very much allied to interpersonal communication skills including conflict resolution and grievance handling, managing difficult people, negotiation and assertiveness as well as strategic planning. Closely allied to leadership development but not necessarily seen as part of it was information on the context and culture of the university – governance, processes, legislation, compliance funding, although a number of women also cited 'Politics 101', developing an understanding of the shadow side of their organization and its informal power relations.

Short courses with sectoral groups such as Australian Tertiary Education Managers (ATEM), AVCC, and ATN 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.

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.

Academic managers also recommended a number of other areas for the development of female middle managers. Financial management is one skill set strongly recommended. Many female, academic managers do not have a discipline background in business/finance but appear to be expected to acquire these skills without structured training. An understanding of the higher education context, institutional governance, policies and procedures was the next most important area for development with a stronger emphasis on the power and politics of the organization than was evident in responses from administrative managers. An understanding of the individual university context and its particular structures, governance and policy frameworks were also seen as important followed by a more general call for leadership development that could be skills in the development and management of people. Specific relationship skills in conflict resolution, coaching and team building were considered the next most important area for development followed by the human resources package of recruitment, job design, performance management, occupational health and safety and industrial relations were also important.

Half as many academic managers as administrative managers suggested courses such as those run by the AVCC and ATEM. A more diffuse set of self-development activities was recommended by academic managers including stress management, critical reflection, use of psychometric tools and more general career development.

Conclusion

The data indicates that large numbers of women currently in middle management roles in our universities have not been developed for their roles or for career advancement. As one woman stated:

> We get into these jobs because we're good in our discipline or we're quite good with people and they [*senior management*] know we're hard workers and will get the job done. It's a hard slog though because these are complex

> jobs and we just don't have all the skills. Experience is a hard teacher. If I'd learned some of this stuff when I was new to the job or even before, it would have saved a lot of burnout. (Academic Manager)

Despite the AVCC's recent focus on the development of women in Australian universities, the impact of its guidelines, at least for these women managers, 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 with many innovative and successful programs, some of which are reported at this conference. However, there also seem to be a large number of universities, and from the data the 'New' and to a lesser extent 'Sandstones' are strongly represented, that are doing little or not spreading the development to a broad base of women. There has been a change in climate is some parts of the sector but from the data presented here it seems that cold fronts continue to effect the landscape for many female middle managers. That the AVCC has released its *Second AVCC Action Plan for Women Employed in Australian Universities 2006-2010* (2006) indicates that there is more work to be done.

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