

FEATURE ARTICLES

Lessons for Leadership Coaching in a Leader Development Intensive Environment

Todd Woodruff, U.S. Military Academy

Russell Lemler¹, U.S. Military Academy

Ryan Brown, Rice University

ABSTRACT

Organizations are increasingly using leadership coaching as part of a broader approach to promote leader growth and improve individual and organizational performance. This broader approach can include challenging experiences, new knowledge, reflection, mentoring, and assessment, among other activities and support. There is compelling evidence that most of these components contribute to leader growth, but there is almost no research that explores how these activities interact and should be integrated for maximum effect. This study uses quantitative and qualitative research to assess the effects of leadership coaching within a systematic and intensive approach to leader development, where coaching participants also received science-based leadership instruction, mentoring, reflective exercises, assessment, and evaluated leadership experiences. We apply our insights on leadership coaching to the development of courage, grit, and warrior ethos within the military context. The findings suggest that leadership coaching was preferred to mentoring and structured reflection, creating significant benefits that were different from those created by other developmental activities. Leadership coaching also increased leader identity and intellectual humility relative to the control group, while also enhancing the value of experience and reflection in promoting leader growth. These findings suggest leadership coaching should play a key role within a rigorous, activity intensive leader development system.

¹ The opinions expressed in this article are the authors' own and do not reflect the view of the United States Military Academy, the United States Army, or the Department of Defense.

Organizations pursue numerous methods to develop leaders. The United States Military Academy at West Point uses a model that focuses on the use of challenging experiences, new knowledge (e.g., approaches to cultural change and motivational theories), reflection, mentoring, and assessment; integrated in a way intended to maximize leader growth. While there is compelling evidence that each of these components individually contributes to leader growth and that their integration can accelerate that growth (United States Military Academy, 2018), the current approach does not include leadership coaching, a well-established and effective leader development activity commonly used for business and education leader development.

This seems to be changing, and increasingly the U.S. Army is utilizing leadership coaching as a developmental tool across the institution. For example, the Army's new Talent Management program offers leadership coaching at its Battalion Command Assessment Program (BCAP) and Colonels Command Assessment Program (CCAP) for field grade leaders competing for selective leadership opportunities (Spain, 2020). The Army is also assessing the use of coaching within its education and professional development system, with the Army War College, the Army Command and General Staff College, the Maneuver Center Captains Career Course, and the United States Military Academy implementing coaching programs or pilot studies.

Despite its common use as a leader development tool in business and education, and its introduction within the Army, there is little discussion or study regarding how leadership coaching should be integrated within a leader growth model or comprehensive leader development system. Despite recent progress, there is limited research on leadership coaching in general (Grant, 2012) and an inadequate understanding of how leadership coaching interacts within a multi-dimensional leader development system (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018). This is also reflected in the absence of leadership coaching from the West Point Leader Development System and Leader Growth Model, despite the likelihood that military leader development outcomes such as physical courage, sacrificing, and warrior ethos, may benefit from its use.

This paper discusses research assessing the effects of using leadership coaching within a developmentally intensive environment at the United States Military Academy, where the coaching participants were also receiving leadership science instruction, mentoring, structured reflection, assessment, and evaluated leadership experiences. This is the first study that we know of to examine the value of leadership coaching in a leader development intensive

Colonel Todd Woodruff is the Director of the West Point Leadership Center and the Eisenhower and Benavidez Leader Development Programs (cooperative graduate and executive programs with Columbia University). He previously directed the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership's Leadership and Management majors, chaired the West Point Leader Development System Integration Committee, and served as a career infantry soldier. His previous assignments include four combat deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan and six tours with operational warfighting regiments. Colonel Woodruff completed a PhD in Business Administration from the Kenan-Flagler Business School at the University of North Carolina and holds a Master's degree in Strategic Studies from the Army War College, among other graduate degrees. He has numerous leadership publications in top journals and strives to integrate his diverse leadership experiences and multidisciplinary education in the classroom and the development of leaders at West Point and around the globe.

environment, while controlling for participants receiving multiple integrated developmental activities and resources. ²Given this unique context, we were able to use both quantitative and qualitative data to discern changes in leadership attributes and capabilities attributable to leadership coaching and identify where participants perceived value from this activity. Moreover, the rich qualitative data enabled us to develop insights into the differences between the effects of leadership curriculum, mentoring, reflection, leadership experience, and leadership coaching.

Our findings, discussed later in this paper, suggest that leadership coaching creates substantial value for the development of military leaders. Based on these findings, we argue that leadership coaching can play an important role in leader development and should be included in integrated leader development approaches and systems. We are similarly confident that integrated leadership coaching can be particularly effective in the development of warrior ethos, personal courage, and the related leader attributes needed to address some of the military's most challenging issues, including the willingness to act against violations of human dignity and respect and make sacrifices for the country and teammates.

2 Our special thanks to the Rice University, Doerr Institute for New Leaders for providing the coaching resources required for this study.

Russell Lemler is an assistant professor and the military leadership program director in the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership at West Point. He has held a variety of field artillery positions in the U.S. Army. He completed a B.S. in economics from West Point and a Ph.D. in management from Columbia Business School. His research interests include leader identity development and leadership education.

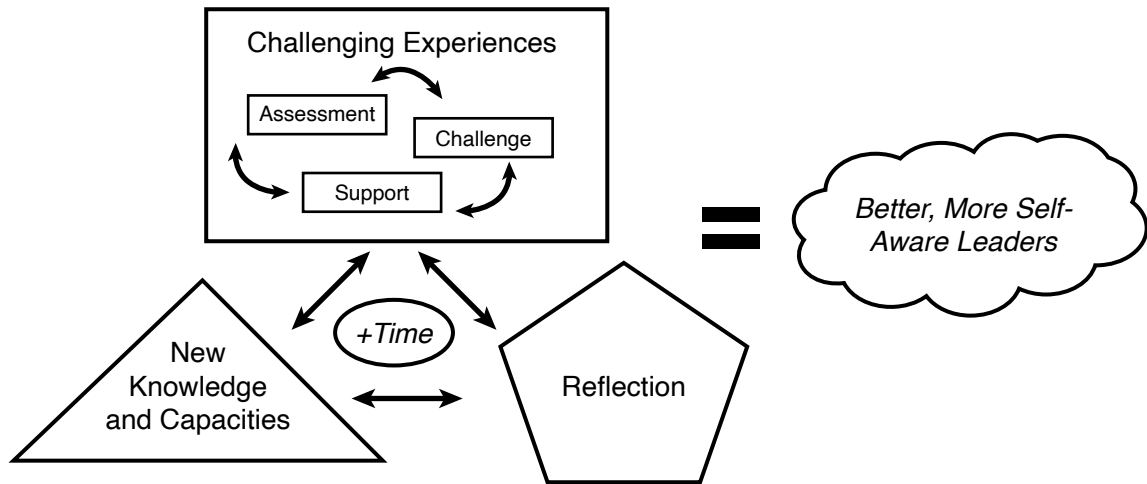
Ryan Brown is the managing director for measurement at the Doerr Institute for New Leaders, Rice University, where he is responsible for assessing the impact of the Institute's leader development initiatives for students. Prior to this role, he was the L. J. Semrod Presidential Professor of Psychology at the University of Oklahoma, where he taught and conducted research on a wide range of topics and helped establish the Institute for the Study of Human Flourishing. Ryan received his BA in psychology from Rice University and his MA and PhD in social psychology from the University of Texas at Austin. He has published over 50 peer reviewed articles and chapters and has authored or co-authored two books—most recently (with T. Kolditz and L. Gill), *Leadership Reckoning: Can Higher Education Develop the Leaders We Need?*

The Role of Leadership Coaching in a Leader Development Intensive Environment

The West Point Leader Development System (WPLDS) is the 47-month integrated approach of individual leader development and leadership development experiences within a culture of character growth. WPLDS produces leaders of character that meet specific developmental outcomes and is based on interrelated theories of adult development, adult learning, leader/leadership development, and relational developmental systems theory (RDST). WPLDS is enacted through core leader development experiences that are integrated, sequential, progressively complex, and provide cadets a common leader development foundation, while also providing individualization (United States Military Academy, 2018). Its key elements include:

- leadership development through progressive leadership roles and enrichment,
- individual development in academic, military, physical, and character competencies,
- an environment of character growth - honor code, values system, and character program,
- a robust leader-developer network with mentors, role models, assessment, and feedback, and
- individualized challenges and/or additional support as needed by the cadet.

Figure 1

Leader Growth Model

The Leader Growth Model (LGM) (see Figure 1) operates within the WPLDS and is used to foster leader and character growth through a cycle of challenging experiences, appropriate feedback and support, exposure to new knowledge, and reflection across these elements (United States Military Academy, 2018). Noticeably absent from this model is mentorship and leadership coaching. While not depicted in the model, mentorship is functionally part of the Leader Growth Model and explicitly included within the leader development system. Leadership coaching, on the other hand, is not routinely used or integrated within the model or system. We argue that its inclusion would create a more effective model and improved leader development outcomes.

Accordingly, this article draws upon new research to understand the role and effect of coaching within an intensive leader development environment; where individuals are receiving all elements of the leader growth model, to include mentorship. We argue that leadership coaching will complement reflection and mentorship and that these three elements will work together in unique ways to accelerate growth by promoting self-awareness, helping individuals

make sense of experiences and new knowledge, and facilitating goal oriented developmental plans. This article will also develop an understanding of leadership coaching's role relative to mentoring, reflection, and the LGM, and discuss its application in developing warrior ethos.

Leadership Coaching Research. Leadership coaching is a targeted, purposeful intervention that helps leaders develop and maintain positive cognitive, emotional, and behavioral change in their personal development and leadership behavior (Grant, 2012; Douglas & McCauley, 1999) and, involves the partnership of the coach and the coachee (i.e., the developing leader; Ennis, Goodman, Otto, & Stern, 2008). Coaching is an open-ended process that analyses the individual's present situation, develops performance goals, applies resources, and then implements a developmental plan (King & Eaton, 1999). A typical coaching session includes dedicated time for reflection, planning, and goal setting (Wise & Hammack, 2011), while the broader coaching experience addresses skill development, performance improvement, and development for future assignments (Ennis et al., 2008). For new or developing leaders (e.g., cadets), coaching has a greater focus on gaining

self-understanding, changing or enacting specific leader behaviors, addressing challenges in the current role, and creating and enacting a developmental plan to address the aforementioned (Marson, 2019). In the context of West Point, this means a cadet-coach partnership that uses extensive feedback, assessment, and self-reflection to understand strengths, weaknesses, and developmental needs, addresses current leadership challenges, creates developmental goals, integrates the development plan using the LGM, and leverages the resources available within the leader development system (WPLDS).

Leadership coaching has become a well-established approach used to enhance leader performance and organizational productivity (Boyatzis, Smith, & Blaize, 2006; Coutu & Kauffman, 2009; Wise & Jacobo, 2010). Its other positive effects include improved well-being, coping, work attitudes, talent retention, leader efficacy, trust in subordinates, job satisfaction for the participant, subordinate empowerment, and attainment of organizational objectives (Jones, Woods, & Guillaume, 2016; Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014; Wise, 2010). While the positive effects of leadership coaching are promising, we currently lack knowledge of its effect within a robust and intensive leader development environment that includes multiple leader development activities. There is also a dearth of research on how leadership coaching creates these benefits (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Grant, 2012). Despite these limitations, we know leadership coaching is context sensitive (Martineau & Patterson, 2010) and interacts within the multi-dimensional systems of the organization (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018). Additionally, the evidence indicates that leadership coaching is more effective when the broader leadership development program is tied to important and challenging organizational issues, and has integration between performance assessment, feedback, and coaching (Fulmer, Gibbs, & Goldsmith, 2000). This suggests that leadership coaching

interacts with other leader development activities and could have significant positive effects within a leader growth model.

Leadership Coaching versus Mentoring and Reflection. Leadership coaching is most closely aligned with mentoring and reflection within the West Point LGM. In fact, leadership coaching and mentoring are often incorrectly used interchangeably. One prominent distinction is the role of experience and expertise and how they are shared or developed, as illustrated by the quote, “*A coach has some great questions for your answers; a mentor has some great answers for your questions, [emphasis added]*” (Amsterdam, 2019). Mentoring is typically defined as a relationship where an experienced leader engages in the professional development of a less experienced colleague (Dziczkowski, 2013). A coach guides individuals to develop competence, achieve goals, and solve challenges, whereas a mentor typically shares knowledge, experience, and recommendations with the mentored individual. The benefits of mentoring are extensive, including increased self-esteem, insights, professional skills, and reduced leader stress (Bush & Coleman, 1995; Dziczkowski, 2013; Hobson & Sharp, 2005; Holloway, 2001; Hopkins-Thompson, 2000). Studies indicate that over 95% of participants (mentors and mentees) felt that they benefited from the mentoring relationship (Holloway, 2001). While the benefits of mentoring are significant, they can be constrained by available time, mentor-mentee incompatibility, inadequate mentor training, and insufficient commitment to obtain desired results (Dziczkowski, 2013; United States Army, 2019).

Reflection is an essential part of transformative learning and personal development that involves the purposeful “mental processing of information, ideas, beliefs, and experiences” intended to enable self-learning, sense-making, and increased understanding (Johnson, 2020). It helps individuals “see” themselves

and identify developmental gaps (Branson, 2007), make sense of past experiences, new knowledge, and feedback, (DeRue, Nahrgang, Hollenbeck, & Workman, 2012; Marshall, 2019), facilitate goal setting and action plans, and promote ownership of personal development. Both coaching and reflection produce increased self-awareness, knowledge of personal strengths and limitations, and increased understanding of experiences (Johnson, 2020; Jones, Woods, and Guillaume, 2016), but where coaching requires a partnership and involves goal setting and action plans (Grant and Stober, 2006), reflection can be a solitary activity involving self-learning and may not include goal setting or developmental planning.

Each of these three approaches (leadership coaching, mentorship, and reflection) enable individuals to accelerate leader growth and promote the achievement of developmental outcomes. There is also reason to expect that when combined they will create greater growth. Lawrence, Dunn and Weisfeld-Spolter (2018) found that an integrative approach to leader development that included intentional development, leadership assessment, coach-supported reflection, and the creation and pursuit of goal-directed developmental opportunities (a common coaching activity), resulted in greater achievement of leadership potential in young adults.

Mentoring and leadership coaching take different approaches. Their combination likely provides complementary value by bringing together the deep professional experience and expertise of a mentor with coaching's more collaborative and egalitarian approach to helping the individual develop insights from their own experiences and self-assessment, leading to collaborative goal setting (Grant and Stober, 2006). One study that looked at the use of coaching and mentoring within organizations found that coaching and mentoring both have positive effects on employee performance (Neupane, 2015), but the study

did not examine the effects of individuals receiving both interventions. This reflects the broader issue that coaching and mentoring research has not examined the simultaneous or integrated use of both methods within individuals. One of the few studies that integrates mentoring and coaching found they interact to create positive effects on organizational commitment (Woo, 2017), providing some evidence of a complementary and interactive relationship.

The relationship between reflection and leadership coaching is arguably more closely linked and integral, so much so that reflection is viewed as an established and necessary part of coaching (Cushion, 2018). In fact, most coaching sessions include time for reflection (Wise & Hammack, 2011) and coach-supported reflection tends to produce improved leader development outcomes (Lawrence, Dunn, & Weisfeld-Spolter, 2018). In general, coaching assists and focuses reflection by asking probing questions that push the individual to deeper reflection, leading to greater insight and understanding (Wise, 2010), and enabling these insights to be developed into action plans to address leadership challenges and produce leader growth.

Despite these findings, our understanding of how to best integrate leadership coaching, mentoring, and reflection is limited. Our knowledge of how to optimally incorporate leadership coaching within the LGM is even less clear, and the ideal application of leadership coaching to develop warrior ethos among emerging military leaders (the focus of this journal edition) is almost completely lacking. This article seeks to shed light on these areas with a new study.

Leadership Coaching Study

Methods and Sample. This study assessed the impact of leadership coaching within a leader development system and an intensive leader development environment, in

which the participants were concurrently receiving leadership knowledge, mentoring, and reflective exercises as part of the behavioral and social science based *Military Leadership* course. Cadets enrolled in this semester-long leadership course received mentorship in understanding, explaining, predicting, and influencing human behavior in organizations and met for at least three sessions to discuss and receive feedback on three written reflective assignments. These assignments were the Journey Line (reflection on life experiences, core values, and purpose in life), the Leader Self-Assessment (integrated peer and leader feedback and self-assessment), and the Leader Philosophy Paper (reflection on the leader they aspire to be and their leadership tenets). Cadets were tested on their ability to apply leadership theories and concepts to in-depth case studies. Participants also engaged in leadership roles within the current academic year, held a team leader position in the previous year, and will have a leadership position the following year.

Participating cadets were 20-24 years of age, primarily in their third year at West Point, and were representative of the diversity present at the Academy in terms of race, gender, home state, and academic major. The study used 100 cadets, from over 500 cadets enrolled in the course, who volunteered to receive free leadership coaching sessions during the semester. Cadet volunteers were then randomly assigned into a coaching group and a control group (50 each). This allowed us to control for motivation and better isolate the effects of leadership coaching. Prior to receiving their assignment into the coached and control groups, cadets completed a survey to measure *Authentic Leader Identity, Sense of Purpose/Meaning, Self-Regulation, Intellectual Humility, and Self-Concept Clarity*. Those selected to receive leadership coaching also completed the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i 2.0) to assess constructs related to emotional intelligence. Five professional certified coaches provided EQ-i feedback and five coaching sessions throughout the semester in a live video format.

We identified change in psychological and character assessments from Time-1 at the beginning of the semester (before any coaching sessions) to Time-2 at the end of the semester (after all coaching sessions were complete). We measured these changes through pre- and post-coaching surveys assessing leadership and character factors. The post-coaching survey also assessed cadets' perceptions of the value and satisfaction associated with the coaching program. At the end of the semester, and after all coaching sessions were complete, the two groups received the same survey plus five new items related to their coaching experience. The coaches received questions via a Qualtrics survey where they provided open-ended responses regarding the areas the cadets wanted to improve and general feedback on the cadets as coachees. These 46 responses included 105 areas of desired improvement or developmental focus and were coded into categories based on areas assessed within the EQ-i. Lastly, the coached group was asked to participate in a focus group to gain an understanding of their coaching experience and their perception of its value on their own leader growth. 40 of the 50 cadets receiving leadership coaching participated in these interviews in groups with five or fewer cadets.³

Results. The study produced rich and substantive insights from both the quantitative and qualitative data, demonstrating that leadership coaching created unique and additive value within an intensive leader development environment that included challenging leadership experiences, new knowledge, reflection, mentoring, and assessment. Cadets reported receiving unique value from coaching, mentorship, and reflection, such that each provided different benefits. Generally, cadets indicated that coaching provided support with goal-setting, developmental planning, and iterative leadership interventions to address recent/current leadership challenges, improve leadership, and

3 Additional information on methods, analysis, and findings are available from the corresponding author at todd.woodruff@westpoint.edu

develop leadership attributes as selected by the cadet or based on EQ-i results.

Specifically, cadets receiving coaching (plus mentoring, reflection, assessment, and the new knowledge of leadership science) increased their levels of Authentic Leader Identity and Intellectual Humility relative to the control group that received the same leader development activities and support but without leadership coaching. In the case of Leader Identity, significant change occurred in both groups, but was higher among the coached group. Intellectual Humility, on the other hand, only changed (increasing) among the coached group.

There was no change among either the coached or control group for Sense of Purpose/Meaning, Self-Regulation, and Self-Concept Clarity. While the lack of change in these three constructs is unusual for college students (e.g., Rice University students receiving leadership coaching experience significant improvement in all five areas), it is less surprising among cadets, who have been engaged in over 24-months of leader and leadership development that included significant reflection and study of their purpose, self-concept, and self-regulation. In fact, Time-1 (pre-test) West Point cadets were very similar to Time- 2 (post-test) Rice University students, suggesting that these factors were already salient and developed among the cadets. Given the value expressed by cadets in survey and focus group comments, it is also likely that the value of coaching was not adequately captured by Likert scale measures of factor levels.

Moreover, the data revealed a strong majority of cadets that received coaching had a high degree of satisfaction and perceived the coaching experience as valuable to their leadership development, with 89% of cadets

receiving coaching saying they would recommend it to others and over 85% saying the experience was ‘highly valuable’ or ‘valuable’ and they would do it again. This finding is not unique to cadets at West Point, as similar levels of satisfaction were reported among field grade officers receiving coaching as part of the previously cited BCAP. Less than 10% of cadets did not find coaching valuable, citing that coaches did not understand the specific challenges of being a cadet, or that they expected their coaching experience to more closely resemble professional mentorship.

The mentoring-leadership coaching distinction is important. Most coached cadets preferred leadership coaching to the mentorship experience or written self-reflection, with a 3 to 1 preference for leadership coaching over mentoring and a 6 to 1 preference for coaching over written reflection. The minority that preferred military mentors felt strongly about this

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preference, citing a desire for more profession-based discussion and in-person interaction provided by the military mentoring experience. The preference for leadership coaching does not mean there was less value in mentoring. In fact, the common preference for a coach that understands the life of cadets and the challenges of leading in the military suggests there is still significant value in military mentoring and

the potential for combining coaching insights with military leadership expertise and experience available from mentors.

The value of reflection and coach facilitated reflection is well established (Wise, 2010). Cadets in this study recognized the value of coaching focused on their self-selected challenges/leadership attributes and the importance of structured reflection tied to course outcomes. Unsurprisingly, they preferred coaching and coach facilitated reflection focused on self-selected areas that were less constrained by course objectives and not subject to evaluation.

Cadets cited increased self-awareness as a valuable benefit of leadership coaching. The EQ-i survey was cited by most cadets as a valuable aspect of the coaching experience and an assessment that increased their self-awareness and ability to identify areas for growth. The EQ-i results were key to enabling a cadet and coach to

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jointly identify and focus on areas for improvement, shape coaching discussions, and target cadet goal-setting. There was overwhelming support among cadets for using this instrument in their future development and for other cadets at the Academy. Cadets also expressed that it would be easy to integrate the EQ-i with other reflective exercises in the course and the broader developmental system (WPLDS).

Leadership coaching proved particularly important to cadets because of its ability to focus on areas where the coach and cadet perceived the greatest need, enabling the concentration of effort on character issues and current leadership challenges through iterative engagements during the semester. Specifically, cadets indicated that coaching provided valuable assistance with ongoing leadership challenges, and they appreciated the ability to work on character and leadership strengths and weaknesses identified by self-assessments and the EQ-i. This process included working with the coach to develop specific leader actions to try prior to the next session, discussing and assessing these actions during the subsequent coaching session, and adjusting the plan and subsequent actions based on those insights. Related to this, cadets frequently expressed the value of having the coach challenge their thinking, push their consideration of options and actions outside of their comfort zone, and provide specific recommendations to try before the next meeting. Importantly, cadets indicated the leadership coach enabled them to work on aspects of their character and leadership they would not have otherwise addressed or would have tackled independently.

Cadets frequently cited the importance of working with a coach outside of West Point to provide new perspectives and discuss character and leadership issues safely and without concerns for career or confidentiality. The importance of this should not be discounted. Cadets appreciated the difference in perspective that leadership coaches provided, with one cadet statement reflecting a common sentiment, “Here you’re just surrounded by cadets and officers. It’s nice to have it from the other side looking in.” Additionally, unlike a mentor from within the cadet’s organization or a reflective writing that is reviewed by an instructor, the leadership coach provided someone they trusted based on their capabilities and the psychological safety of not being evaluated or having to interact outside

of the coaching experience. Based on cadet feedback, having a leadership coach away from West Point and not associated with their leaders, instructors, or social network freed some cadets to share personal struggles and goals they would not have disclosed to a mentor or through graded reflections. For a significant proportion of cadets, they needed to feel free from grade-based evaluation and the likelihood of running into their coach to feel safe discussing their weaknesses, challenges, and failures.

When exploring the use of in-person coaching versus synchronous, virtual coaching sessions, most cadets favored the synchronous, virtual coaching modality, but also preferred coaches familiar with issues that cadets face at the academy and within the military, which was also one of the reasons some cadets preferred working with their mentor over their coach. Cadets also indicated that volunteering for coaching was an important aspect of the experience. Cadets expressed consensus that making coaching a required element of the course or a graduation requirement would have reduced their motivation and engagement with the activity.

Lastly, cadets were in general agreement that the optimal time for receiving leadership coaching was while in a leadership position, but after their initial leadership experience, and with at least one future leadership role remaining prior to graduation. Additionally, five sessions spaced across the semester (which is often the duration of a leadership position) was viewed as sufficient for development and avoided diminishing returns. For most cadets this means receiving leadership coaching during their third year leadership position, after serving as a team leader the prior year, and with the expectation of having a subsequent leadership experience in their fourth and final year before graduation. This ensures the coached cadet:

- has the leadership experience, assessments, and reflections necessary to see themselves and know their strengths and weaknesses,
- has the opportunity to work on previously identified leadership issues and ongoing challenges in their current leadership role, and
- has the opportunity to develop goals and a developmental plan to be implemented during their next leadership role in their final year as a cadet.

Feedback from the coaches also proved insightful. Coaches were surveyed about where their cadet wanted to focus their development. The 46 cadet responses (as reported by the coaches) included 105 areas, typically 1 to 3 focus areas per cadet. A number of these focus areas occurred with greater frequency. Over 40% of cadets asked to work on confidence or assertiveness, nearly 20% on empathy, 15% on emotional expression, over 10% on decision-making, and over 10% on stress tolerance and resiliency within a leadership role. Coaches were almost universally “very satisfied” with cadet goal progress, with some saying they had observed transformational change.

Leadership Coaching Findings Summary

- There was unique value in coaching, mentorship, and reflection, such that each provided a different type of developmental engagement or insights.
- Leadership coaching improved leader identity and humility beyond any increase created by other leader development activities.
- 85% of cadets receiving coaching found it to be valuable and would do it again.
- Self-awareness and assistance with ongoing leadership challenges were cited as the most valuable benefits.
- Cadets preferred coaching to mentoring 3 to 1 and coaching over structured written reflection 6 to 1.
- Those who preferred mentoring said their coaching was too meditative or the coach did not appreciate the challenges of being a cadet.

- Most cadets preferred focusing their coaching sessions on their goals and challenges rather than course-framed reflection topics.
- Cadets preferred to work on specific recommendations they could implement and then discuss the next coaching session versus general reflections or generalized feedback.
- Cadets liked coaches that challenged their thinking and pushed their comfort zone.
- Cadets preferred coaches outside the Army for gaining new perspectives on leadership.
- The psychological safety provided by an external coach enabled cadets to share their struggles with character and leadership without concerns for career or confidentiality.
- Cadets also wanted coaches that had some knowledge of the lives of cadets/soldiers.
- The EQI survey was incredibly valuable in focusing coaching engagements and there was overwhelming support for using this instrument.
- Timing and duration: five sessions spaced across a semester, while in a leadership role.
- Volunteering proved to be very important; cadets agreed they would have been less engaged and received less value if they had not volunteered.
- Cadets most frequently asked to work on developing confidence/assertiveness, empathy, emotional expression, decision-making skill, and stress tolerance and resiliency.

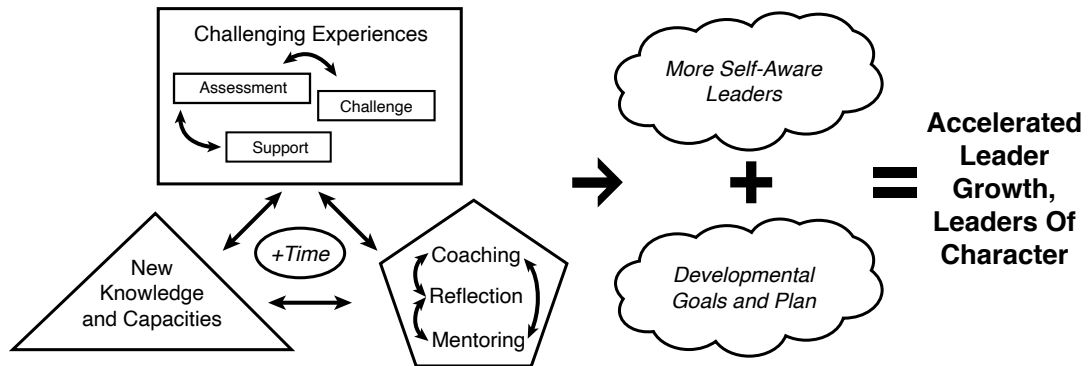
Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

This study sought to determine the effects of leadership coaching within an intensive leader development environment having multiple developmental activities and substantial support within a leader development system. It also explored the role of leadership coaching in the development of warrior ethos. While there is significant evidence for the individual value of leadership coaching, mentoring, reflection, feedback, assessment, and new leadership experiences, the degree and nature of their value within a system including all these activities was largely unknown. Moreover, we

lacked clarity on how leadership coaching should be integrated into this leader development model (LGM) and system (WPLDS) to maximize its effect on leader growth, leadership performance, and warrior ethos.

The evidence from this study and extant research clearly demonstrates that leadership coaching has a place in leader development, creates value in an integrated leader development approach (LGM) and broader leader development system (WPLDS), and develops warrior ethos and its component factors, an area discussed below. From the cadet perspective, there was clear and substantial value from leadership coaching not produced by other actions, and there is reason to expect that coaching, mentoring, and reflection each have the potential of interacting to make the other two activities more impactful. While recognizing the substantial value of leadership coaching, its impact was limited by the lack of integration with other contemporaneous leader development activities. For example, in the study, coaching and written reflection were largely independent, with neither activity explicitly making use of the other. It is likely they could create greater value through their integration. To maximize the value of leadership coaching, its subsequent use should move beyond its inclusion within the repertoire of leader development activities. This should include 1) incorporating coaching to deliberately complement the mentoring benefits from military domain specific knowledge and experience and 2) developing a close integration of coaching and reflection activities to enhance the impact of both. While the latter is common practice within coaching programs, coaching at the military academies would ideally be integrated with the many existing reflection activities (there are more than 40 reflective activities within the 47-month WPLDS experience) and numerous sources of assessments and feedback (e.g., semester counseling with tactical officers, academic counseling from military and civilian faculty, military grades from a cadet chain of command, career compatibility assessments, etc.).

Figure 2

Revised Leader Growth Model

For example, the military leadership course deliberately integrated mentoring and structured reflection. Mentoring was focused on generating self-awareness and leadership knowledge through engagement with an experienced leader at West Point who provided feedback on the cadet's personal journey line, their leader self-assessment, and their leadership beliefs and approach expressed through a leader philosophy paper. Each of these three assignments provided structured reflection to focus the mentoring interaction on specific leader development outcomes, and the mentor interaction then provided feedback for additional reflection. This integration was not done for leadership coaching but should be in the future.

Coaching, when deliberately integrated with mentoring and reflection, should also make use of the copious, but underutilized, assessments and feedback available to every cadet; their new knowledge gained from multiple sources, and leadership experiences. The integration of leadership experience is an essential element of leader development and is integral to the leadership coaching process and outcomes. In one study, individuals rated new leadership experience and responsibilities as the most critical aspect of improving leadership capabilities, while coaching and mentoring without integrated experiences received relatively lower evaluations (Boak & Crabbe, 2019). With these

changes, the LGM approach will help developing leaders 1) process and learn from their past and current experiences, 2) understand and make use of new knowledge, 3) see themselves and their leadership strengths and weaknesses, and 4) facilitate leader development goals and plans.

Given the insights derived from this study, we propose a Revised Leader Growth Model (Figure 2) that integrates mentorship, coaching, and reflections, adds developmental goals and planning, and positions increased self-awareness as both an outcome and a necessary component for achieving optimal leader growth and improved developmental outcomes.

Who Does the Coaching and When? Beyond its integration with mentoring, reflection, assessment, and experiences, leadership coaching also requires systematic integration within the broader leader development system (WPLDS) in terms of its timing, duration, audience, and modality. The costs of coaching are significant, financially and in time requirements, so coaching needs to be used judiciously at the right time and place, with the right individuals, and within a system to best leverage leadership experiences and new knowledge from assessment, feedback, and leadership curriculum to achieve the desired developmental outcomes.

In terms of timing and duration, we believe it is best to 1) have a leadership role before coaching to provide the self-knowledge and experience needed to inform and focus limited coaching resources, 2) be in a current leadership role and work iteratively on

Leadership coaching is well suited to developing warrior ethos and is effective in helping individuals reinforce or change self-perceptions by strengthening their values and beliefs and helping them change their behavior to align with the organization's values and belief system.

ongoing leadership challenges and desired leadership capabilities, and 3) have a subsequent leadership role to focus and motivate stretch goals and developmental planning that will enable greater individual ownership and follow-through after coaching ends. We agree with the cadets that five coaching sessions spread across a semester while the cadet is in a leadership role is sufficient to achieve most of the coaching benefits and avoid diminishing returns and unsustainable demands on cadet time and Academy resources.

Ideally, one semester of coaching would be available to every cadet that volunteers for it. If leadership coaching is not feasible for all developing leaders who request it, cadets engaged in key leadership roles (e.g., team captains, cadet unit commanders, scholarship program participants) and those experiencing crucible failures and ongoing struggles should receive coaching. These cadets would gain the most from the coaching experience and coaching these individuals would create the greatest value for the institution.

Academies should include leadership coaching using certified external coaches in synchronous virtual sessions. First, cadets have a strong preference

for coaches from outside the Academy based on their ability to provide new perspectives and create the psychological safety needed to share weaknesses and failures. The online virtual coaching sessions also enabled more flexible scheduling and required less time

from their already stretched schedules. Second, coaching research reinforces the cadets' perspective and preferences, showing that outside coaches provide accountability, honest discussion, and trust based on the confidential nature of their relationship. The research on coaching format shows that all coaching modalities (e.g., face-to-face, blended face-to-face, and virtual coaching) had positive effects on organizational outcomes and there was no difference in effect on leader

development between the coaching formats (Jones, Woods, & Guillaume, 2016). Moreover, the online virtual sessions will enable the Academies/organization to access certified coaching talent from across the nation, potentially lowering costs and enabling the use of geographically dispersed coaches with knowledge of the cadet experience and military leadership challenges.

Leadership Coaching and the Warrior Ethos. Warrior ethos includes the *Moral Courage* to take morally-ethically appropriate actions in the face of adversity and negative personal consequences; the *Physical Courage* to put the mission and others' welfare before one's self, regardless of personal physical risk or hardship; and the *Grit* to persevere despite failures and physical and mental hardships to achieve long-term goals (United States Air Force Academy, 2020).

Leadership coaching is well suited to developing warrior ethos and is effective in helping individuals reinforce or change self-perceptions by strengthening their values and beliefs and helping them change their behavior to align with the organization's values and belief system. Developing moral and physical courage through coaching requires "deep insight into how

people self-motivate to do what is moral and difficult, and how they self-justify and obfuscate when they lack courage,” and requires coaches to serve as an external conscience and sounding board to facilitate high quality reflection (McLaughlin & Cox, 2015). Moral development and courage can be formed through the coaching process, with coaches guiding individuals to find courageous role models, helping them plan and practice morally and physically courageous behavior within the organizational context, and assisting them in developing necessary leadership attributes (McLaughlin & Cox, 2015). As an example, coaches will ask the cadet to think about other courageous leaders and reflect on their stories or narratives. Coaches then ask the individual to consider what they want their own story to be and help develop a plan to enact a pattern of behaviors that create the desired narrative of how to live and lead (Barner & Higgins, 2005). Within our own study, we observed examples of cadets developing attributes and practicing behaviors associated with the warrior ethos. When asked by coaches what attributes they wanted to work on, most cadets selected attributes associated with the warrior ethos, with confidence and assertiveness being the most frequently selected focal attributes (40% of all cadets) and the most relevant to moral and physical courage. Cadets also chose to focus on empathy, self-awareness, emotional expression, and interpersonal skills. As aspects of emotional intelligence, these attributes are essential to enacting moral and physical courage in ways that are authentic and engender trust and positive influence as a leader, and along with humility, are thought to contribute to moral development and courage (McLaughlin & Cox, 2015). Coaches and cadets then focused their coaching discussions, reflection, practiced behaviors, and action plans to achieve growth in these warrior attributes.

Identifying what coaching interventions lead to actual morally and physically courageous behaviors can be challenging. In a rare study that looked at the enactment of moral courage (in this case, intervening when observing someone stealing), the enacted

behavior was predicted by the individual’s readiness to act, sensitivity to perceived injustice, an increased solidarity toward the disadvantaged group/individual, and a spontaneous perception of being involved in a norm violation (e.g., not acting makes me feel like part of the problem) (Baumert, Halmburger, & Schmitt, 2013). While this is a complex set of antecedents, leadership coaching uses a combination of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional approaches that align closely to each of these areas (Douglas & McCauley, 1999).

Most researchers believe grit can be developed (Duckworth, Weir, Tsukayama, & Kwok, 2012) and leadership coaching is well suited to the task. For example, leadership coaches help individuals identify and live their purpose, and individuals who had a deeper purpose in their life and strong commitment to that purpose tended to develop greater grit (Hill, Burrow, & Bronk, 2016). Armstrong, Van der Linger, Lourens, and Chen (2018) developed an approach for enhancing grit that aligns very closely with the leadership coaching approach, and includes having self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses, setting high standards, establishing future-oriented goals, aligning personal and team goals, and developing the capacities to breakdown a complex challenge.

Conclusion

The value of this study rests in its direct application of skilled leadership coaching during an intensive leader development experience within a broader program. The insights of this study should prove valuable to businesses, governmental organizations, and universities engaged in leader development for young adults. While few of these organizations can engage their young leaders in this frequency or intensity of developmental activities and support, most will still use multiple activities (e.g., coaching, assessment, and leadership experiences) and therefore benefit from insights on which activities to use and when and how to integrate their developmental activities and resources to achieve optimal leader growth. Moreover, we expect that most universities, governmental agencies, and

major corporations could achieve coaching, mentoring, and reflection integration and implement the Revised Leader Growth Model in their own programs. Lastly, while the cadet population may seem unique, they are similar in many ways to other university students and new business leaders that are still developing an understanding of themselves, their approach to leading, and the inherent challenges of leading individuals and teams in complex competitive environments.

We acknowledge the limitations of this study and encourage future research in this area to explore the inclusion and integration of other leader development activities (e.g., switching the roles of coaching and mentorship as a variable in the study) and testing specific aspects of coaching (e.g., number of sessions and coaching focus). Additionally, future studies would benefit from a larger sample size, longer period of observations, and a more deliberate integration of coaching with other activities, similar to the integration of mentoring within the military leadership course.

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