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ADF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION DIVIDE: GENDER PROPORTIONALITY IN SENIOR LEADERSHIP

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**ADF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION DIVIDE : GENDER PROPORTIONALITY
IN SENIOR LEADERSHIP**

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ADF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION DIVIDE : GENDER PROPORTIONALITY IN SENIOR LEADERSHIP

AIM

1. The aim of this service paper is to explore how Australian Defence Force (ADF) culture and direction is impacted by the lower proportion of women in senior leadership positions. This paper will address cultural and gender barriers which currently restrict the achievement of proportional senior leadership representation as opposed to focusing on the broader ADF initiative of achieving gender diversity and inclusion through the targeted figure of 25% of women in Defence. It is acknowledged that since the 2011 Elizabeth Broderick Review into the Treatment of Women in the Australian Defence Force, a series of policy, reviews, programs and initiatives have contributed to increased representation and advancement of women in the ADF. The intent of this paper is to inform the Chief of Joint Capabilities of the institutional impact of an under represented senior leadership group, and focus ADF consideration beyond recognition of the problem set and toward generating strategies for improvement.

INTRODUCTION

2. In 2012 the Australian Defence Organisation (ADO) released its strategy for cultural change and reinforcement through the Pathway to Change: Evolving Defence Culture. This was the ADO's first synthesised response to independent reviews regarding culture and gender, informed by additional internal reviews and reform activities.¹ More recently, the Women in the ADF Report 2017-18 identified Defence successes and

¹ Australian Government, Department of Defence, *Pathway to Change: Evolving Defence Culture – A Strategy for Cultural Change and Reinforcement* (Canberra: The Defence Committee, Department of Defence, 2012), 4.

ongoing challenges where continued focus regarding gender representation is required.²

A notable area for improvement remains the proportion of women in senior leadership and representation on senior decision-making committees.

3. With the progress of women in senior ADF leadership and associated committee positions determined as average³ this paper explores causal links between gender barriers and the shaping and setting of ADF organisational culture and direction. Two main categories of causation – behavioural and cultural norms, and organisational practices will be discussed following a brief exploration of ADF culture. The first category will address mitigation of gender bias and organisational messaging. The second category will focus on targeted career management, gender specific promotion targets and representation of females on senior Defence decision-making committees.

4. A deliberate decision was made not to consider the target of 25% of women in Defence as the overarching strategy to grow the ADF talent pool and build its capability⁴. The arbitrary target of 25% does not directly apply to the issue of increasing diversity in thought and perspective which is required by strategic leadership to shape ADF culture in the immediate time period. Nor does the target of 25% directly achieve future proportional senior leadership representation for women in the ADF.

² Australian Government, Department of Defence, *Women in the ADF Report 2017-18* (Canberra: Defence People Group, Department of Defence, 2019), vi.

³ *Ibid.*, x.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2

DISCUSSION

Shaping of ADF Organisational Culture

5. Like many large, complex, geographically diverse organisations, there is no single, homogenous organisational culture in the ADF.⁵ Despite each service creating and developing their own unique identity based upon long standing traditions, beliefs, values, and norms, all three are united and driven by the ADF Mission to defend Australia and its national interests. With this mission in mind, a collective approach to ensuring ADF culture and direction is shaped and continually evolves to maximise capability and sustain the trust of Government and the community is vital.⁶ Consequently, ADF Senior Leadership is directly responsible for delivering capability and military effectiveness through mediums of power and influence. Subsequent acts of senior leadership comprise providing direction and setting the standard for organisational performance and behaviours that are in the best interest of Defence, Government and society.

6. While acknowledging Senior Leadership as the driving force of ADF culture, it is also important to understand the concepts that can impact the group's internal influence on one another and in turn the wider organisation. Northouse identifies ethnocentrism and prejudice as the two main concepts that impact how leaders can influence others. Ethnocentrism being "the tendency for an individual toward their own attitudes and beliefs over others...it may include the failure to recognise unique perspectives of

⁵ Department of Defence, *Review into the Treatment of Women in the Australian Defence Force Phase 2 Report 2012* (Canberra: Australian Human Rights Commission, 2012).

⁶ Australian Government, Department of Defence, *Defence Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2012-2017* (Canberra: Defence People Group, Department of Defence, 2014).

others”.⁷ With prejudice defined as “an inflexible generalisation that is resistant to change in interdependent contexts such as gender or age”.⁸ Noting ADF Senior Leadership has and continues to be male dominated (currently trending 86%)⁹ a causal link between disproportionate gender representation in leadership and potential ethnocentrism and prejudice is viable. For example, within highly institutionalised cultures a predisposition toward selecting senior leaders that reflect current and past leaders is common. As a result, the hyper masculinity of ADF military culture and leadership styles will remain vastly unchanged until a gender balance within the senior leadership group is achieved and consistently developed. This situation reinforces the premise that a significant absence of women in ADF Senior Leadership will continue to limit diversity in thought and broader workgroup inclusiveness across the organisation.

Gender Bias

7. While tradition and customs are steeped in history and significantly influence the shape of ADF organisational culture, this is not the only lens through which gender bias should be explored in the Defence. From a behavioural perspective, unity of leadership purpose, thought, and action can be a notable strength in ADF organisational effectiveness. Conversely, such unity conflicts with ADF diversity and inclusion messaging which states that “strategic leadership shapes culture, so it requires diverse perspectives to operate efficiently”.¹⁰ Regardless of the ADF’s clear understanding of the

⁷ Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (California: SAGE Publications Inc., 2018), 434.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 434-435.

⁹ Australian Government, Department of Defence, *Defence Workforce Report: September 2019* (Canberra: Defence People Group, Department of Defence, 2019), Attachment 10.

¹⁰ Australian Government, Department of Defence, *Women in the ADF Report 2017-18* (Canberra: Defence People Group, Department of Defence, 2019), 26.

correlation between behavioural and cultural factors and gender bias, women in the ADF and by virtue, society, have and continue to campaign for gender equality in senior leadership positions. The issue of a disproportionate senior leadership and the subsequent impact on culture is complex and will require continual monitoring, formalised review and communication strategies to guarantee transparency and accountability to Defence and the public.

Organisational Messaging

8. As referenced throughout this paper, organisational messaging regarding the requirement and support for innovative approaches to progress women in Defence and ultimately senior leadership exists. The campaign for gender diversity in ADF senior leadership is a long-term strategy, and therefore, it is imperative to maintain momentum in organisational messaging for all to understand the importance and purpose behind gender diversity initiatives. Without key messaging to emphasise leadership commitment toward achieving gender diversity and articulating how a proportionate female senior leadership will improve capability, the wider ADF will remain in a non-progressive cultural loop.

Targeted Career Management

9. ADF organisational practices that are susceptible to gender barriers and thereby restrict the progression of women into senior leadership positions are largely comprised within the career management domain. Currently the practice of targeted career management is identified as the primary means to ensuring improved organisational performance through a critical mass of women on senior Defence decision-making

boards and committees ¹¹. To build a competitive cohort of women for senior leadership selection, the creation of opportunities to develop competence and experience should supersede action which endeavours to the achieve an undefined “healthy” pipeline figure alone. Such opportunities are managed through both individual service talent management programs and ADF Directorate of Senior Officer Management initiatives.

10. The approach adopted by service talent management frameworks to achieve senior leadership competence and experience is primarily restricted to the rank of Colonel or equivalent, herein referred to by the ADF code of O6. In an effort to encourage a wider pool of competitive candidates for senior leadership, earlier career development and talent management intervention from the rank of Major or equivalent (ADF code O4) is recommended. Earlier intervention enables a flexible and supportive approach to workforce conditions. Specifically, the provision of coaching and mentoring services earlier in an female officer’s career provides the benefit of ensuring experience and knowledge is cultivated with consideration to potential breaks in service that are typically associated with maternity leave or pursuing post graduate study and industry based placement. While the ADF recognises supporting work-life balance is critical for the retention of women, the Women in the ADF Report 2017-18 ¹² also identified flexible work arrangements as a significant contributor to achieving gender diversity. Despite the recent introduction of flexible employment policy guidance, the practice remains largely informal and underutilised, and is not in keeping with the ADF endorsed strategy to

¹¹ Australian Government, Department of Defence, *Defence Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2012-2017* (Canberra: Defence People Group, Department of Defence, 2014), 15.

¹² Australian Government, Department of Defence, *Women in the ADF Report 2017-18* (Canberra: Defence People Group, Department of Defence, 2019), 42.

“remove structural and cultural barriers preventing women from achieving their full potential and full participation.”¹³

Gender Specific Promotion Targets

11. While an truly unbiased selection of senior ADF leaders would look beyond gender and consider the whole self of an individual, discriminatory factors such as gender specific promotion targets are required to meet strategic diversity aims of a gender balanced senior leadership in Defence.¹⁴ Additionally, with women comprising 47% of the Australian labour force,¹⁵ the use of female promotion targets assists in representing the ADF as an employer of choice that prioritises female advancement to achieve organisational effectiveness in keeping with societal trends. Gender specific promotion targets are often a misunderstood organisational growth and talent management strategy. Therefore, clear organisational policy and messaging that advocates and explains how gender promotion targets achieve senior leadership capability requirements would assist in wider understanding and acceptance of targets.

Representation of Women on Senior Decision-Making Committees

12. Generating a future senior leadership pool and promoting females into positions linked to strategic boards and committees also requires the ADF to recognise non-traditional leadership approaches such as democratic or collaborative styles are legitimate

¹³ Australian Government, Department of Defence, *Defence Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2012-2017* (Canberra: Defence People Group, Department of Defence, 2014), 14.

¹⁴ “Defence cannot achieve its strategic aims if it does not maximise the potential of its female ADF members.” *Ibid.*, v.

¹⁵ Australian Government, Workplace Gender Equality Agency, Aug 19, accessed 27 Oct 19, <https://www.wgea.gov.au/data/fact-sheets/gender-workplace-statistics-at-a-glance>

and well suited to the strategic environment. This approach does not infer a preference or advocate the exclusion of a specific leadership style, nor does it espouse that gender and leadership styles are definitively linked. This paper does argue that increasing female representation on senior decision-making boards and committees can increase organisational effectiveness through championing differing perspectives and achieving balanced outcomes. Additionally, it is important to note that this assertion should not be considered as the only measure of success in determining whether or not the ADF achieves a greater understanding of how gender difference influences organisational success. Cyclic reporting of gender diversity targets and appointment of females to senior board and committee positions will continue to remain an integral performance measure in determining the ADF's ability to draw upon female talent.

CONCLUSION

13. The achievement of proportional female representation in senior ADF leadership is a well-known and published issue. Despite the significant progress made by the ADF in relation to identifying and reporting diversity and inclusion concerns, gender bias and an under representation of female senior leadership remains the status quo. Having considered causal links between gender barriers and the shaping of ADF organisational culture, the most effective means to address female senior leadership progression includes earlier career development and talent management initiatives from the rank of O4, and key organisational messaging. Clear organisational policy and messaging which emphasises how proportionate female senior leadership improves capability was also identified as a means to both clarify the importance of gender promotion targets, and encourage a positive culture toward acceptance of gender diversity. A departure from

considering a target of 25% of women in Defence as the overarching strategy to grow the ADF talent pool was a deliberate decision. The arbitrary target of 25% women in Defence does not directly apply to the issue of increasing diversity in thought and perspective which is required by strategic leadership in order to effectively shape ADF culture.

RECOMMENDATIONS

14. The intent of this paper was to focus consideration beyond recognising the organisation impact incurred from an under represented female senior leadership group, and generate strategies for improvement. This paper explored how gender barriers may be bridged through the delivery of key career management initiatives and organisational messaging. The following four recommendations are offered in support of concluded findings.

15. **Recommendation 1.** The Gender Equity Advisor Board (GEAB) is to consider the utility of introducing niche diversity and inclusion training within the Professional Military Education and Training (PMET) continuum from the rank of O4 for all ADF officers. The focal point of training would relate to understanding gender difference and bias and how such distinctions impact senior organisational leadership. Targeted training and education will assist in broadening perspectives required for career progression, and increase the understanding and purpose of gender based development initiatives at promotion boards which O4 ranks and above participate.

16. **Recommendation 2.** ADF Directorate of Senior Officer Management (DSOM) work in unison with single service talent management cells to draft ADF centric talent

management personnel policy. This policy would provide overarching guidance for all three services in relation to the early development and flexible employment of all officers from the rank of O4 and above. The policy would provide rigour to newer employment practices such as flexible work arrangements and industry based mentoring and placement programs. An additional ADF wide communication plan would serve two purposes in support of ADF centric talent management personnel policy. Firstly, senior leadership commitment toward achieving gender diversity would be reaffirmed. Secondly, how a proportionate female senior leadership improves ADF capability would be articulated in the main.

17. **Recommendation 3.** ADF Directorate of Senior Officer Management (DSOM) to consider industry based mentoring programs for female officers identified through talent management initiatives from the rank of O4. Noting the limited number of women in senior leadership positions past the rank of O6, industry based mentoring programs would ensure senior female ADF officers are not overburdened or inundated with direct requests from the more junior ranks who may be seeking a mentoring relationship.

18. **Recommendation 4.** Consider further review and study of the ADF's overarching strategy of achieving 25% of women in Defence in an effort to attain gender diversity that reflects societal norms. This service paper acknowledges the arbitrary figure does not directly nor immediately apply to the issue of increasing women in strategic leadership positions. However, consideration of linkages between gender equality in the military and society may lead to innovative career development and flexible employment solutions for female senior leaders.

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