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Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

WALKING IN THE WOODS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF ONLINE  
COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE AND ARMY MENTORING

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Learning Technologies

by

Raymond Andrew Kimball

June, 2015

Jack McManus, Ph.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Raymond Andrew Kimball

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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## DEDICATION

To my mentors, Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Joseph Blackburn and Doctor Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, who showed me possibilities I could not have conceived on my own;

And to my protégés, Dainis Butners, John Paszterko, and Mandi Rollinson, who continue to inspire me every day.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As an Army officer, I was privileged to call upon some amazing Army resources in the completion of this study. First and foremost, I must thank the Center for the Advancement of Leader Development and Organizational Learning at the United States Military Academy, whose past and current staff provided encouragement and support at every stage. Specific thanks goes out to Tony Burgess and Pete Kilner, each of whom intervened at times when it looked like my education was going to be cut short. The Center for Army Leadership was invaluable in providing perspective on the development and current state of Army mentoring doctrine and their Annual Survey of Army Leaders remains the gold standard for anyone seeking to understand the current state of Army leader development. The Army Advanced Civil Schooling program funded my tuition and living expenses during my studies at Pepperdine. The participants in the 2014 and 2015 CALDOL Rendezvous identified participants for this study and provided valuable feedback on its findings.

Pepperdine University's Doctorate of Education in Learning Technologies (DELT) is a unique learning environment that offers unparalleled opportunities for those willing to seize them. I am incredibly grateful to the faculty members who poured their heart and soul into showing me new horizons: particular thanks goes out to Dr. Jack McManus, Dr. Kay Davis, and Dr. Judi Fusco, all of whom gave invaluable guidance in the creation of this study. The most powerful part of the DELT program is the learning cohort itself, which exposes cadre members to experiences they would never have otherwise. I am so thankful for the care and support of Cadre 18 over these last three years; extra thanks go out to Joey Sabol and Kip Glazer, who met with me weekly for the entire time to encourage me and review my work. My reading group, composed of superb professionals both inside and outside the Pepperdine program, read

countless drafts of chapters and provided invaluable feedback: Ron Costello, Beth Ennis, Brett Patron, Terrance Pitts, Mandi Rollinson, Elizabeth Smith, and Janet Tran.

Finally, I must thank my family, who has put up with three solid years of my typing and staring at various screens, big and small: My dog, Ike, who kept me company on marathon writing sessions; my son, Daniel, who tolerated dinner conversations about authentic practice and reification; and most important of all, my wife, Mindy, an amazing officer and scholar in her own right who kept me focused on task and pushing forward. I love you all.

## VITA

**Title, Name, and Duty Position:** Lieutenant Colonel Raymond A. Kimball, Incoming Director, Center for the Advancement of Leader Development and Organizational Learning, U.S. Military Academy (USMA), West Point, NY

**Employment History**

Strategic Advisor, Commander's Initiatives Group, International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan (July 2011 – June 2012): Advised the commander (a U.S. four-star Marine general officer) on a broad range of strategic issues, including coalition political dynamics, North Atlantic Treaty Organization force development, and U.S. national security interagency deliberations. Served as the commander's direct representative during multiple meetings of U.S. interagency policy committees and sub-committees.

Executive Assistant to the Senior Director for European Affairs, National Security Staff, The White House, Washington, DC (February 2009 – June 2011): Functioned as the Chief of Staff for the European Affairs Directorate. Supervised and coordinated the collaboration and staffing of policy documents advising the President and National Security Advisor on all aspects of national policy involving Europe, NATO, and the Western Former Soviet States. Directed day-to-day operations of the directorate, to include strategic planning, resource allocation, and personnel management.

Operations Officer, Center for Company-level Leaders, USMA, West Point, NY (July 2007 – January 2009): Coordinated and synchronized activities in support of the CompanyCommand and PlatoonLeader forums, the premiere communities of practice for the U.S. Army. Planned online and face-to-face leader development and organizational learning initiatives in support of junior officers around the world.

Instructor and Assistant Professor, Department of History, U.S. Military Academy (USMA), West Point, NY (July 2005 – January 2009): Taught multiple courses in World History, History of Western Civilization, and Russian History. Developed, implemented and supervised an entirely new freshman history sequence involving nine instructors and five hundred cadets in twelve months. Served as undergraduate thesis advisor for one cadet.

Aviation Unit Maintenance Troop Commander, Fort Stewart, GA (July 2001 – June 2003): Directly responsible for the health, welfare, training and discipline of 89 men and women, as well as the maintenance and upkeep of vehicles and equipment valued in excess of eight million dollars. Oversaw the maintenance and consumables support to 16 Army reconnaissance helicopters, each valued at \$6.7 million.

Battalion Logistics Officer, Fort Drum, NY (February 1998 – May 2000): Responsible for the food, fuel, consumable supplies, and other logistical support for an Army battalion of two hundred soldiers, 24 reconnaissance helicopters, and 62 vehicles. Acted as primary fiscal manager of a \$300,000 operations & maintenance budget and a \$4 million flying hour budget.

Attack Helicopter Platoon Leader, Fort Drum, NY (November 1996 – January 1998): Directly responsible for the training, discipline, and professional development of nine soldiers, as well as the maintenance, accountability, and flight planning for four Army reconnaissance helicopter valued at a total of \$16 million.

### **Education History**

Bachelor of Science, Russian and German, US Military Academy, 1995

Master of Arts, History, Stanford University, 2005

Master of Arts, Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies, Stanford University, 2005

### **Selected Relevant Honors**

Bronze Star, 2003: Awarded for exceptionally meritorious achievement while serving as a troop commander during the liberation of Iraq.

Heavy Hitter Award, 2005: Given on a recurring basis to informal leaders in the CompanyCommand and PlatoonLeader forums who have made a significant contribution to the functioning of the forums.

USMA Apgar Award for Excellence in Teaching, 2007: Given annually to a faculty member whose projects show promise for affecting the largest number of learners and who have demonstrated promise as outstanding teachers, both in their impact on students in and outside the classroom and in their contributions to the art and methods of teaching.

USMA Department of History Excellence in Teaching Award, 2007: Given annually to 2 or 3 members of the Department who best exemplify excellence in classroom instruction and student mentoring.

Reading High School Outstanding RHS Alumnus, 2014: Given annually to graduates of Reading High School, Reading, PA, who exemplify excellence and the *Arxalma* spirit.

## ABSTRACT

Recent changes in written Army leader doctrine have reaffirmed the informal practice of mentorship as a component of subordinate leader development. At the same time, the use of Professional Forums in the Army has the potential to alter commonly accepted norms, policies, and practices of mentoring. This dissertation conducted a phenomenological study of how lived experience in the Forums complemented or detracted from the practice of Army mentoring. The study found that the lived experience closely corresponded to Kram's mentoring functions, with additional documented experiences in the areas of peer and computer-mediated communications mentoring. The participants' practices of mentoring within the chain of command and cross-gender mentoring were significantly impacted by unique aspects of Army culture. The researcher found that the Professional Forums were supportive of mentoring practice, but were not mentoring spaces themselves. Participants credited the Forums with helping them identify viable mentoring partners and refining their own mentoring practices. Forum participants believed that their engagement in those spaces gave them a positive outlook on Army mentoring. The study's findings suggest best practices for informal Army mentoring while illuminating new directions for quantitative research in cross-gender and CMC-based mentoring.

## Chapter One: Study Introduction

I saw [mentoring]...as walking into the woods. It's dark. It's an unknown area, it's kind of scary. If you have someone to do it with you, to guide you along, it makes the experience much easier. (JOSH, personal communication, January 21, 2015) <sup>1</sup>

### Background and History

No single individual better typifies the importance and practice of mentorship in the U.S. Army than Colonel Fox Conner, whose service spanned the tumultuous years of the Spanish-American War, World War I, and the interwar years leading up to World War II (Cox, 2010). Conner was a master of professional practice, fully conversant in the tactics, techniques and procedures of his native branch as well as the larger operational and strategic needs of an army at war. However, Conner is best known not for his own martial prowess, but for his mentorship and support of three officers who would alter both the U.S. Army and the American experience in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Conner steered a young Lieutenant George Patton toward the then-fledgling field of armored warfare while counseling him to keep his warrior persona within professional norms. Conner divined a peer capability in Lieutenant Colonel George Marshall and ensured he received postings on General Pershing's World War I staff that brought Marshall's abilities and judgment to the fore. Finally, Conner saw potential in a struggling Major Dwight Eisenhower and kindled a flame for professional knowledge in him while Eisenhower served as Conner's executive officer in Panama. Conner exemplified the wide range of mentoring functions described by Kram (1985) and how those functions work on an individual level to support leader development.

Many leaders view the practice of mentorship in the U.S. Army as vital, but do not understand how that practice is implemented or why it is so important. The number of officers who report having a mentor has risen steadily in the past decade but is still below a threshold

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes at the beginning of the study chapters are taken from study participants.

considered favorable (Riley, Hatfield, Freeman, Fallesen, & Gunther, 2014). Many officers who emphasize the importance of mentoring admit that they have not been mentored themselves (Cole, 2012). Army mentoring is perceived by soldiers of all ranks as supportive of professional development, personal growth, and role modeling (Riley et al., 2014). Despite this identified importance, there are few published studies examining how widespread and effective mentoring is in military organizations. The few studies that do exist suggest that informal mentoring (the ad hoc grouping of mentors with protégés on an opportunistic basis) is superior to formal mentoring in military contexts (Johnson & Andersen, 2010). It is unclear whether this advantage is truly due to the superiority of informal mentoring practices or the relative confusion of the Army's current formal mentoring efforts.

Formal mentoring practice in the U.S. Army is notable mostly for its sporadic official attention and lack of clarity. The practice of mentoring itself was never mentioned in any kind of organizational leadership publications until 1994 and was only included in doctrinal leadership publications in 2007 (Nieberding, 2007). This inclusion was largely driven by the findings of the 2002 Army Training and Leader Development Panel, a blue-ribbon commission that reported, "officers believe mentoring is important for both personal and professional development, yet a majority of officers report not having mentors...Officers would like to see a greater emphasis on mentoring, but do not want formal, directed programs" (Army Training and Leader Development Panel, 2002, p. OS10). An early online Army Mentorship Program launched in 2005 almost immediately foundered due to poor design and lack of interest during the peak years of the Iraq War (Nieberding, 2007). A newer effort, the Army Career Tracker (ACT), could be a powerful mechanism for mentors and protégés to find one another, but threatens to repeat the previous mistakes of the Army Mentorship Program. In a recent webinar, the ACT program coordinators

stated that the Army plans to make the program formal and mandatory, despite recent survey data confirming that Army leaders consistently prefer informal leader development practices to highly structured activities (Riley et al., 2014).

The Army's efforts to promote mentoring through online means reflect another growing trend - the explosive growth and wide dispersion of online communities of practice (CoPs). CoPs are seen as vital to current Army efforts to widely disseminate best practices and promote lifelong learning among Army leaders. Senior leaders believe that online CoPs can tap into the digital native abilities of the youngest generation of officers and maximize teamwork, collaboration, and mentorship (Daniels, Grove, & Mundt, 2006). The spread of online CoPs in the Army traces its origins back to the founding of CompanyCommand.com, an unofficial space for company-level leaders to engage one another in conversation, in 2000. CompanyCommand was originally hosted on commercial servers with no official sponsorship or support of any kind. After they became popular among junior officers, CompanyCommand and its sister forum, PlatoonLeader.org (CC/PL), were gifted to the Army in 2002 and moved to official Army servers, where they reside today (Dixon, Allen, Burgess, Kilner, & Schweitzer, 2005).

The Army saw great promise in the idea of *professional forums*, online communities of practice focused on specific Army roles and missions, and quickly moved to expand them. By 2007, dozens of professional forums emphasizing professional identities ranging from CommandNet (the practice of command at all levels) to StrykerNet (the employment of the different variants of the Stryker wheeled combat vehicle) existed. These forums were led by the Battle Command Knowledge System (BCKS), an organization charged with fostering collaboration and professional exchange of knowledge across the force (Summers & Costanza, 2007). Unfortunately, BCKS failed to gain any real traction in Army organizational learning



efforts. As Army budgets contracted in the wake of drawdowns in Iraq and Afghanistan, the ambitious BCKS effort was downsized to a skeleton crew running the Army Professional Forums. Most of those forums, which had never deliberately cultivated their member base, likewise withered. As of this writing, CompanyCommand and PlatoonLeader are the primary officially sponsored Army professional forums remaining in operation, although other less structured spaces are available on various platforms.

### **Need for Research**

Informal learning efforts such as mentoring and online forums have exploded within the U.S. Army over the last decade, but their impact on one another is not entirely clear. Mentoring has been part of the Army's informal learning ethos for decades and has been slowly incorporated into leader doctrine over time. Efforts to formalize mentoring availability for soldiers have largely failed, due in part to grass-roots dislike of directed programs. Online communities of practice have flourished within the Army, offering opportunities for widely distributed leaders to share ideas and techniques with one another. Institutional support for these communities has waxed and waned as budgets fluctuate, but the use of these communities has become accepted practice in the Army. Because mentoring and participation in a community of practice share theoretical elements, it is reasonable to ask how participation in the newer avenue of learning (communities of practice) is impacting established elements of the older avenue (professional mentoring).

A study of community of practice impacts on Army mentorship is highly relevant to furthering an understanding of how a profession's informal actions develop into formal norms. Polyani's (1967) concept of tacit knowledge as concepts that members of a profession know but cannot tell is a crucial underpinning of this distinction. Over time, those elements of tacit

knowledge vital to the success of a profession become routinized by repetition and transmission to others. Eventually, informal actions deriving from tacit knowledge become formal norms as they develop through the stages of understanding, procedures, and rules (Eraut, 2000). Mentoring practices developed in Army communities of practice are still tacit and informal; explicit study of their composition can give clues as to if and how they will develop into more formal norms.

Along with the development of formal norms, this study provided an opportunity to study the transfer of practices between very different means of interaction; in this case, between virtual, online engagement and face-to-face instruction. The current prevailing definition of transfer is knowledge that moves between mechanisms while retaining its contents and shape (Mulcahy, 2013). Studies of transfer to this point have emphasized its representational character; that is, the idea that knowledge is made by human agents alone, who relay that knowledge to one another. Mulcahy argues instead for a relational view of transfer, where the human actor and surrounding network work together to effect transfer. Many of the company commanders who were original participants of CC/PL are now battalion and brigade commanders, preparing to move into the general officer ranks. Because this study incorporated insights from the structure and function of a vibrant community of practice, it adds to the relational literature and insights of transfer.

A broader understanding of how mentoring practices are changing and evolving is timely for the Army as it begins to undergo its most significant social shift since the transition from a draftee Army to an all-volunteer force. Acting on guidance from the White House and the Department of Defense, the Army is studying how and when women should be integrated into the traditional ground combat arms.<sup>2</sup> Lessons learned from previous integration efforts, such as

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<sup>2</sup> The traditional ground combat arms are infantry (foot soldiers engaged in close combat), armor (tanks and other armored vehicles who emphasize maneuver and shock effect), and artillery (indirect tube and rocket fires).

incorporating women into shipboard operations and attack aviation, suggest that mentorship is a crucial component of filling the rank and experience gaps that inevitably result from these efforts (Haring, Coughlin, & Oudraat, 2013). The civilian research in this area agrees that workplace mentoring can help to bridge the gaps caused by differences in background (M. A. Hamilton, Hamilton, & Rhodes, 2002). A study of emerging mentoring practices can help identify elements useful to the integration efforts.

### **Statement of The Problem**

The perceived importance of mentorship and the popularity of communities of practice in the Army raise the questions of should, if, and how these two efforts will converge at the grass-roots level. Both practices show great possibility and potential commonality of effort for creating what Baker (2002) calls *receptive spaces*: places that empower multiple perspectives and safe, supportive contexts for conversation. Baker's characteristics of receptive spaces are familiar to both practitioners of mentorship and proponents of communities of practice:

- Creating and sustaining a safe space and context;
- Listening reflectively to give voice to others, especially those who seem different;
- Recognizing differences and conflict as resources for learning;
- Recognizing and valuing both the cognitive and emotional dimensions of learning; and,
- Making a concentrated effort to attend to all of these characteristics while maintaining a moderate pace in the conversation in ways that are appropriate to the situation (p. 109).

The convergence of mentoring and CoPs is not inevitable. Bryan and Carpenter (2008) found that mentoring discourse did emerge from teaching practices, but did not find a community of mentoring practice. Their specific findings will be discussed in Chapter 2. No studies to date

have examined how this convergence may happen in the context of the Army profession and the impact of that convergence on established mentoring norms, policies, and practices.

### **Statement of The Purpose**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experience of Army mentoring for members of the CompanyCommand and PlatoonLeader professional forums. Specifically, this study examined if and how that experience differs from the mentoring norms established in Army policy and codified in common practice. Those differences have significant implications for future directions of Army mentoring and formal support of mentoring practice.

### **Research Question**

The question addressed in this study was: what is the lived experience of Army mentoring for participants in the Army Professional Forums?

The sub-questions of the study were:

- What makes the Army Professional Forums effective or ineffective spaces for mentoring?
- How does participation in the Professional Forums shape mentoring practices?
- How does participation in the Professional Forums shape mentoring perceptions?

## Significance of the Study

Workplace mentoring as a broad field of study is still relatively new and suffers from significant gaps. Scandura and Pellegrini (2010) noted that there are large holes in current conceptions of *e-mentoring*, how mentoring takes place in virtual spaces. Because this study situates the practice of mentoring within the Army's existing concepts of mentorship rather than a separate e-mentoring practice, it seeks to understand virtual spaces as a mentoring tool rather than an entirely new construct. If this approach was supported by this study's findings, it could help unify some strands of mentoring study rather than fragment them.

By comparing the Army's explicit statements of mentoring doctrine to those practices emerging from informal spaces, the study can help researchers better understand the ability of a profession to truly shape its emerging norms. Previous workplace studies (Francis, 2009) suggested that deliberate empowerment of employees to seek out their own mentors in fulfillment of their own needs is a winning strategy that can shift perceptions in a fairly short time. If the study found that emerging mentor practices are convergent with the established norms, the Army would be advised to amplify and broadly disseminate those practices for wider adoption. On the other hand, if mentor practices are diverging from the stated organizational norms, the Army will have to consider whether the formal doctrine or informal practices are better representative of the desired course of action and act appropriately.

Although this study does not qualify as action research in that it did not seek to directly change mentoring practices (Gray, 2011), it was intended to be topical and accessible to the current Army debates about mentoring doctrine and approaches. An earlier section of this chapter noted that the preponderance of research suggests that informal mentoring in a military context is superior to formal mentoring in almost every way. This is not a foregone conclusion,

however. Other recent research suggests that formal mentoring is critical to avoid duplication of effort and maintain a consistent level of performance to established standards (Lawrence, 2008). This conception of mentoring envisions the human resources personnel leading the mentoring effort as “air traffic controllers”: people who get efforts underway and avoid conflict (p. 127). Current Army efforts such as the Army Career Tracker likewise seem to subscribe to this model. This study will be a useful progress check to see if that conception of formal mentoring is bearing fruit.

### **Operational Definitions**

Like most professions, the Army uses a specialized subset of terminology and jargon to define its activities and set boundaries for professional practice. Fortunately, for the purposes of this study, much of the applicable Army terminology is compatible with the existing academic literature (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2010). This study used the Army’s current definition of *mentoring*: “the voluntary developmental relationship that exists between a person of greater experience and a person of lesser experience that is characterized by mutual trust and respect” (Department of the Army, 2012, p. 7.11). The more experienced person in this relationship is the *mentor*, while the less experienced person is the *protégé*. Mentoring is differentiated from *counseling* and *coaching* in multiple ways, but primarily differs in that mentoring is voluntary, mutual, and can be initiated by either party (See Table 1, subsequent, for additional differences.) One significant departure from academic literature is the references to communities of practice. When discussing the theoretical and academic literature on CoPs, this study references *communities of practice*; when discussing the techniques and practices unique to the CompanyCommand and PlatoonLeader Forums, the study uses the term *Professional Forums*.

Table 1

*Counseling, Coaching, Mentoring Comparison*

	Counseling	Coaching	Mentoring
Purpose	Review past or current performance to sustain and improve current or future performance	Guide learning or improvement skills	Provide guidance focused on professional or personal growth
Source	Rater, chain of command	Assigned coach or trainer with special knowledge	Those with greater experience
Interaction	As a formal or informal conversation between superior and subordinate	During practice or performance between a coach/trainer and the individual, observation, guidance	Conversation on a personal level
How it works	Identify the need; prepare for the session; conduct counseling to encourage subordinate's active participation; set goals; follow up Counseling	From opportunities for demonstration of a skill, observe performance and provide guidance Coaching	Apply the mentor's experience to guide the protégé Mentoring
Outcome	Formal or informal goals for sustainment and improvement	Behaviors identified for improvement, higher performance level	Personal commitment to career choices, intent to improve
Requirement	Required – all subordinates are to be developed and counseled	Required or voluntary	Voluntary, mutual commitment
Occurrence	Prescribed times IAW performance evaluation or when needed	Training or performance events	Initiated by either party

*Note.* Adapted from *Army Doctrinal Reference Publication 6-22: Army Leadership*, p. 7.12, 2012, Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army. Public domain.

### Assumptions

Several assumptions are crucial to best understanding the findings of this study. Most importantly, this study assumed that participants gave an accurate statement of their views on mentorship and were not pressured in any way to conform to a desired outcome. The atmosphere of trust established in the Professional Forums, where members are free to share their views without fear of retribution, was the single most important guarantor of this requirement. This

study also assumed that the 2013 Center for Army Leadership Study of Army Leaders (CASAL) findings (Riley et al., 2014), which will be further discussed in Chapter 2, are an accurate representation of the officer corps' views on mentorship. The CASAL has a well-established reputation for representative sampling and anonymity, making it the best possible source of these opinions. The researcher's desire to use these findings to improve Army mentoring practice assumed that the Army as an institution is sincere in its desire to improve and expand mentoring. The funding and manpower put behind efforts such as the Army Career Tracker in the current resource-constrained environment suggest that this assumption is accurate. Finally, this study assumed that mentoring will remain both a viable career option and practice, not falling into disfavor due to perceived inequities. Given the longevity of mentoring practice in the Army, this seems to be a reasonable assumption. Further assumptions that underpinned the performance of this research as a phenomenological study are discussed in Chapter 3.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

In the interests of time, resources, and clarity, this study delimited its observations in several ways. Participants in the study were exclusively drawn from the Professional Forums rather than non-military communities of practice. This process ensured a continuity of experiences as well as a consistent worldview for reference. Because the Professional Forums' membership is limited to past, present, and future platoon leaders and company commanders, the study participants were all officers. Therefore, any conclusions or findings from this study are directly applicable only to U.S. Army officer mentorship. Because of the widely distributed nature of the Professional Forums, the researcher conducted interviews solely via voice communication platforms. All surveys and interviews supporting the primary data collection of this study took place between December 2014 and February 2015.



This study had two limitations that constrain the validity of its findings: sample size and the fluid nature of the population. The primary limitation of this study was its small sample size. Because the study was conducted as qualitative research, it was impossible to interview enough participants to make the result representative of the entire population. Therefore, the study findings and conclusions are carefully couched and stated in such a way as to be clear about their limited applicability. Additionally, the Army's up-or-out<sup>3</sup> promotion policies drive a constant influx of new leaders into the officer corps annually. This year alone, 7000 new officers will join the ranks (Lesinski, Pinter, Kucik, & Lamm, 2011). Those new officers, in turn, are shaped by a wide variety of experiences, including combat deployments, organizational culture of units, and their education at their commissioning sources.<sup>4</sup> This study should therefore be considered as a snapshot in time of beliefs and practices rather than an extrapolation of enduring outcomes.

### **Summary**

This study examined if and how Army officers who participate in online Professional Forums view the norms and practices of Army mentoring differently from the Army's stated mentoring doctrine and prevailing views as captured by the 2013 CASAL. Chapter 2 discusses the existing literature on workplace mentoring and communities of practice and examines relevant work that studies the intersection of the two. Chapter 3 presents the study's initial research design, data collection and recording techniques, and relevant concerns to the use of human subjects. Chapter 4 provides information on the study participants and their lived

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<sup>3</sup> *Up-or-out* is a shorthand term for the congressionally mandated policy that requires separation of any Army officer who has been passed over for promotion multiple times.

<sup>4</sup> *Commissioning sources* are the schools or institutions that produce commissioned officers for the Army. The three current commissioning sources are the U.S. Military Academy at West Point; the Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, GA; and the Reserve Officer Training Corps, which operates commissioning programs on hundreds of civilian college campuses. The number of officers produced by each source varies every year.

experiences of Army mentoring and the Professional Forum. Chapter 5 draws conclusions from those findings and makes recommendations for further study.

## Chapter Two: Background and Related Literature

You can learn my way of doing things, but if you have issues or problems and what I'm doing isn't making sense or helping, please go find someone that makes sense to you. Go find other perspectives, because I have a very distinct perspective on a lot of things. I may not be the best person, my methods may not work for you. (JEAN, personal communication, January 23, 2015)

### Overview

This study explored the lived experience of Army mentoring for members of the CompanyCommand and PlatoonLeader Professional Forums. Although the Army has unique elements of professional discourse and influence that set it apart from civilian society, many aspects of professional study are still valid for consideration of the Army professional identity. Therefore, this literature review largely draws from studies of civilian workplace mentoring and communities of practice. This grounding in the existing literature is consistent with current efforts in military doctrine to use a theory-based approach to encourage thinking about complex interrelationships of factors in the current operational environment (Williams & Morris, 2009). This embrace of complexity will help drive junior officers to be more adaptive and willing to embrace uncertainty, an important corrective to an organizational culture that all too often stifles creativity and change (Wong, 2004).

Both mentoring studies and communities of practice have a broad range of literature supporting multiple avenues of inquiry. To keep this study tightly focused on elements that are best of use for the study of Army professional learning, it only considers those elements of the literature in both fields that examine learning in professional contexts. For mentoring practice, this means primarily working with studies of workplace mentoring, as opposed to youth mentoring or classroom mentoring. For communities of practice, this means limiting consideration to communities affiliated with a professional practice rather than a craft or skill.

This chapter summarizes the relevant research from both fields, with an eye towards common elements that could be impacted by participation in both disciplines. For mentoring, this chapter defines the fundamental terms of research, examines the benefits and challenges of mentoring efforts, and outlines the avenues of inquiry for informal and peer mentoring. For communities of practice, this chapter looks at the foundational work of Etienne Wenger and then examines other efforts that have broadened and deepened his theories. The chapter then summarizes research that incorporates common elements of both research fields, such as identity management, learning space and networks, storified learning, and cognitive apprenticeship. The chapter also assesses current studies that assess mentoring and community participation's impact on one another. This section incorporates as well the Army's most current survey findings about how mentoring is implemented in the force and the current status of its Professional Forums. Finally, the chapter clarifies how the proposed course of research will differ from previous research efforts.

### **Mentoring Literature**

Although the term mentor dates all the way back to Greek mythology, serious study of mentoring as a phenomenon is a relatively recent endeavor. Levinson's 1978 study *The Seasons of a Man's Life* is widely viewed as the origin of scholarly interest in the study of mentoring. Although definitions of mentoring vary widely depending on the area of focus, almost all definitions include the following components: a learning partnership between two people; process driven with a developmental goal; reciprocal in exchange yet asymmetrical in impact; and, characterized as dynamic with changes over time (Eby et al., 2010). Scholarly examinations of workplace mentoring, defined as a mentoring relationship aimed at the professional growth of

a protégé in the specific context of a defined workplace, began with Kram's 1985 study *Mentoring at Work: Developmental Relationships in Organizational Life*.

Kram (1985) laid out a four phase model of mentoring that stressed the central role of non-linear personal development over time. The first phase, initiation, lasts for the first year of the relationship and is typified by positive thoughts and high expectations for the relationship. The second phase, cultivation, is the most robust phase, lasting two to five years as the fantasies of the relationship are tested against actual realities. This engagement often identifies shortfalls in the relationship and leads to the third stage, separation, in which the protégé redefines their experience and autonomy to transition away from the mentor. The fourth stage, redefinition, sees the former protégé either continue the old relationship with new boundaries or seek out mentoring relationships of his/her own. Kram emphasized that the timing of these phase changes varies for each mentoring pair, driven by developmental tasks, professional concerns, and changes in the organizational context.

Having defined how workplace mentoring dyads function, Kram (1985) went on to describe the aspects of the relationship that enhanced both participants' growth and enhancement. She grouped these aspects into two sets of functions: career and psychosocial. Career functions were those specifically aimed at teaching the protégé the functions and culture of the organization. These functions included sponsorship, exposure-and-visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments. Psychosocial functions were the parts of the relationship designed to enhance the protégé's personal sense of competency and identity. Kram defined the psychosocial functions as role modeling, acceptance-and-confirmation, counseling, and friendship; later research (Ragins & Kram, 2007) suggested that role modeling should be considered as a function set all its own due to its centrality in the relationship. Kram emphasized

that not every workplace mentoring relationship covers all functions; the emphasized functions are driven primarily by the needs of the mentoring pair, the mentor's and protégé's interpersonal skills, and the organizational context of the relationship.

**Who mentors in the workplace and why?** Subsequent research has largely confirmed Kram's initial findings and suggested new opportunities to deepen and broaden understanding of workplace mentoring dynamics. Allen, Poteet, and Burroughs (1997) sought to determine what made mentors decide to assume the responsibility, what kinds of organizational factors either enhanced or inhibited workplace mentoring, and what benefits mentors derived from the relationship. The researchers found that mentors' own experiences as protégés was the most important factor in deciding to be a mentor. Other key reasons for mentoring included a desire to pass on information, build a competent workforce, help others, and derive a gratification to see others succeed. There was no clear consensus on the organizational factors that facilitate workplace mentoring, but time constraints and workplace demands both emerged as clear inhibitors. Additional research (Allen & Eby, 2003) confirmed that workers with experience as a protégé were more likely to be mentors, but noted that those whose experience was associated with significant time costs were less likely to be mentors than those with no protégé experience at all. The authors found that the characteristics most likely to be predictive of relationship formation included mentors with higher self-enhancement motives, greater desire to benefit others, and those who had experienced mentoring with more intrinsic rewards.

Multiple studies examined why some protégés were selected for mentoring relationships while others were not. Allen et al. (1997) examined multiple characteristics of protégés to determine which best predicted their attractiveness to a mentor. The leading protégé characteristic that drew mentors to them was openness to new ideas and a willingness to learn. A

close runner to that openness was a perceived similarity, where the mentor saw characteristics of the protégé that evoked memories of the mentor's early career. Equally important was the protégé's perceived ability and capacity for success, with mentors stating that they sought someone with intelligence and potential. Other strongly correlated factors included a willingness to accept constructive feedback, a strong work ethic, and a people-oriented approach to the profession. Allen et al.'s conclusions on relationship initiation were mixed, with wide variations on how the relationship began. One striking finding was that 35% of female mentors said they always approached potential protégés first; no male mentors made a similar claim.

Ragins and Kram (2007) confirmed Allen et al.'s findings and specifically noted that the *rising star effect*, the tendency of high performers to attract mentoring at a greater rate, required further study on the reasons for its existence and its impact on both members of the mentoring relationship. Ragins and Kram also stated that gender differences in mentoring practice were as old as the practice itself, noting that the original pairing of Mentor and Telemachus in Greek mythology had the additional component of Athena serving as overall guide. Dougherty, Turban, and Haggard (2010) examined mentoring relationships as social exchanges where the perceived benefits outweighed potential costs. Through this lens, they found that protégés were more likely to perceive benefits when the protégés themselves possessed high emotional stability, high self-monitoring, and a perceived internal control of the situation. Mentors, for their part, perceived greater benefits in protégés who were people-oriented, honest, confident, and dependable. Organizational conditions that encouraged the initiation of mentoring included access to the organization's leader hierarchy, an intrinsic reward system for mentoring, and norms that supported mentoring.

**Individual and organizational norms and benefits.** The organizational norms and processes that support mentoring are complex and vary widely, but the current research suggests some common ground. Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, and Gardner (1994) found that organizations who viewed mentoring as a socialization process were more likely to accept mentoring actions in the workplace. This process of socialization is seen as a mechanism of helping the individual adjust to an organization's performance standards, people, politics, language, history, goals, and values. Hall and Chandler (2007) further broadened this idea of organizational socialization to encompass the concept of career cycles, where mentoring needs were triggered by changes in organization structure or the protégé's work role. These career cycles are typified by steps of exploration, trial, establishment, and mastery, with passage through each step buffered by differing levels of mentor support leading to a positive outcome (see Figure 1, subsequent). Hall and Chandler noted that denser and more homogenous work networks were actually hindrances to these career cycles, since they undercut the perception of a need for change.

In response to criticism of mentoring's similarity to emerging research in the leader development field, Godshalk and Sosik (2007) sought to clearly differentiate the two. The researchers noted first that the concepts of transformational leadership and leader-member exchange were closest in current leader theory to the developmental emphasis of mentoring research. Godshalk and Sosik then went on to clarify significant differences in emphasis and outcome between these leader theories and mentoring practice. For instance, leadership only encompasses two of the three mentoring functions: career development and role modeling. Leader-led relationships, such as those within a military chain of command, are by definition formal, while mentoring covers both formal and informal relationships. Mentoring frequently



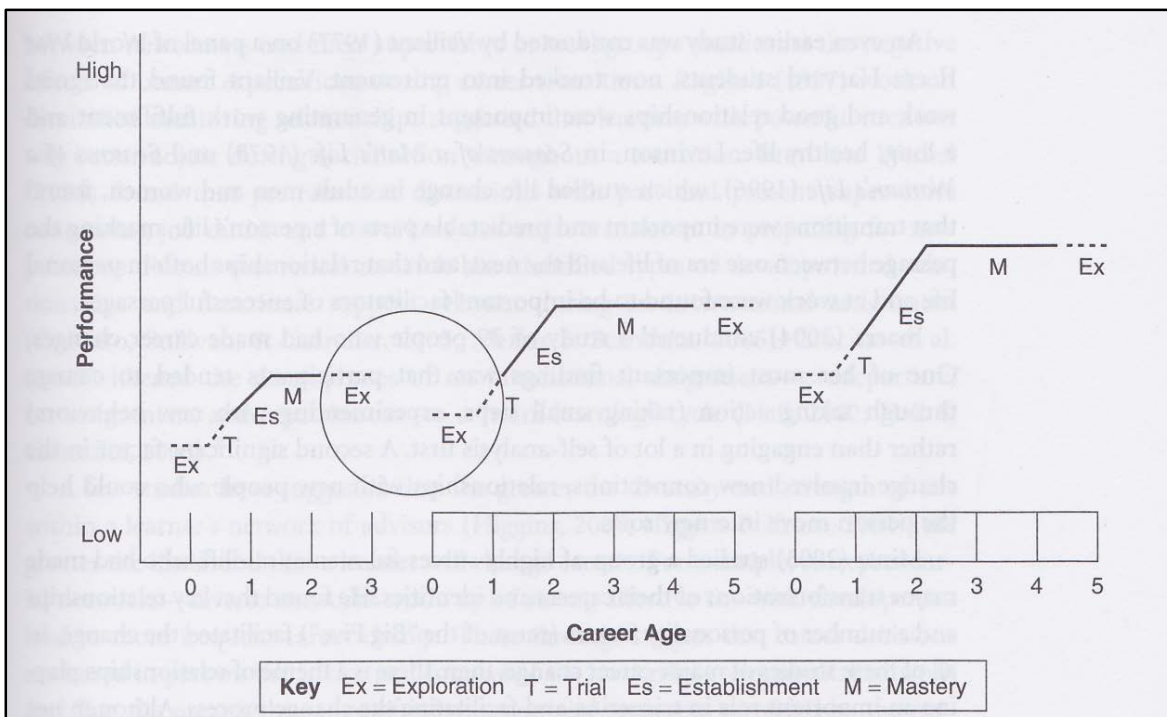


Figure 1. Hall and Chandler's (2007) career learning cycles. Adapted from "Career Cycles and Mentoring," p. 473, by D.T. Hall and D.E. Chandler, in B. R. Ragins & K. E. Kram (Eds.), *The handbook of mentoring at work : theory, research, and practice*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications. Reprinted with permission.

transcends organizational boundaries while leadership rapidly loses effectiveness when asked to cross those same boundaries. Finally, leadership practice emphasizes organizational goals, outcomes, and benefits, while mentoring tends to stress more individually-focused results for both mentor and protégé.

Mentoring research points to a wide variety of individual and organizational benefits from mentoring practice. In addition to the previously discussed mentoring functions, Payne and Huffman (2005) hypothesized that mentoring could develop greater levels of organizational commitment. They divided this commitment into two categories: *affective*, defined as identification with the goals and values of an organization; and *continuance*, defined as a desire to remain with the organization. The researchers found that protégés consistently showed higher levels of affective and continuance commitment than non-mentored employees. Allen's (2007)

work suggested an additional benefit on top of the previously identified extrinsic and intrinsic rewards: the avoidance of a perceived career plateau where the individual believes they have gone as far as they can go. Meta-analysis and synthesis of existing studies carried out by Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, and Lima (2004) suggested some practical limits to these benefits. Their work stressed that the actual presence of a mentor may be more important to objective career success than the degree or frequency of mentoring itself. Early on, Ragins (1997) posited that mentoring outcomes could vary widely depending on the majority-minority balance in the dyad. Ragins was one of the first researchers to note how a diversification of mentoring composition could affect mentoring functions and protégé outcomes. She stressed the importance of understanding how power relationships may vary in mentor-protégé pairs, due to both internal perceptions and external realities.

**Formal vs. informal mentoring, including peer and alternative forms.** Workplace mentoring research varies widely in findings on the utility of formal versus informal mentoring. Formal mentoring is defined as those relationships generated by a party outside the dyad, while informal mentoring covers those mentoring relationships that develop naturally or spontaneously between the pair (Eby et al., 2010). Formal mentoring can be typified by a wide range of relationship initiation mechanisms, running the gamut from externally created matches to provision of a venue only. Payne and Huffman found that informally created workplace mentor pairs significantly outperformed formal ones and cautioned against mandatory mentor assignments. Lawrence (2008) argued for a greater use of formal mentoring to combat the rising star effect and avoid duplication of effort. He emphasized that the formal approach should be only as directive as necessary, using the analogy of an air traffic controller who “gets things underway and avoids conflict” (p. 127). Scandura and Williams (2002) opined that formal

mentoring carries both great promise and significant potential for dysfunction. They called for formal mentoring to mimic the most successful aspects of informal mentoring practice, including emphasis on network formation and peer engagement.

Peer engagement is a promising subset of workplace mentoring research that poses a broad range of challenging questions. Peer mentoring has been part of the workplace mentoring construct from the beginning when Kram and Isabella (1985) posited that peer relationships would vary widely in their provision of the mentoring functions. The duo asserted that the defining characteristic of peer mentoring is mutuality, where both members of the relationship assume the roles of protégé and mentor, often simultaneously. Kram and Isabella identified three different types of peers typified by their level of trust: information peers, who share information about work and the organization; collegial peers, who are more intimate and share ideas about long-term goals; and special peers, who use a close relationship to provide emotional support and friendship. The research also found that peer mentoring was most prevalent during participants' twenties and thirties, in what the authors termed as the establishment and advancement phases of careers. Eby (1997) asserted that alternative forms of mentoring like peer mentoring emphasizing lateral relationships instead of hierarchical ones would become more prevalent. Eby perceived that the flattening of organizations in vogue at the time would necessitate a new emphasis on peer-to-peer learning.

More recent research on peer mentoring has focused on its origins, conduct, and place in mentoring theoretical constructs. Allen and Finkelstein (2003) hypothesized that a growing range of options for professional development would lead to a greater emphasis on peer mentoring. They found the four most common routes for peer relationship initiation to be co-workers, education connections, professional associations, and family. The support mechanisms provided

by each route differed: coworkers focused on organizational support and coaching; education connections and professional associations emphasized skill development; and, family members gave emotional support, feedback, new perspectives, and affirmation of effort. No significant differences in mentoring practice by gender or age were found. Boud and Lee (2005) stressed the importance of peer learning as a becoming process and reciprocal learning activity. They noted the implicit confusion in multiple meanings of the term peer, which they attributed to the inherent ambiguity of what constitutes peer power and ability. McCauley and Guthrie (2007) attempted to resolve some of this ambiguity by comparing the actions of peer mentors of those of leader development learning relationships. In doing so, they posited that peer learning roles can be broadly categorized as either an observer, who watches and provides assistance when possible, or a coach, who remains in more direct contact with both peers and outside resources. Chao (2007) examined the broad range of peer mentoring studies to date and affirmed Kram and Isabella's initial findings that peer mentoring provides many of the same organizational socialization and peer mentoring functions as traditional mentoring.

Concurrent with peer mentoring, e-mentoring has emerged as a viable field of study as personal digital connections become omnipresent in everyday life. Ensher and Murphy (2007) defined e-mentoring as a mutually beneficial relationship between mentor and protégé conducted through computer-mediated communications (CMC). The authors emphasized e-mentoring could be done solely as CMC-only, CMC-primary (where the digital exchanges were supplemented by face to face contact), or CMC-supplemental (where digital exchanges were used to extend the reach of initial face to face engagement). Ensher and Murphy found that reasons for e-mentoring included greater perceived access to mentors; past experience with mentoring; comfort with CMC; a supportive organizational culture; and, a desire to expand a developmental network (see

Figure 2, subsequent, for Ensher and Murphy's proposed research model). Ensher, Heun, and Blanchard (2003) noted that the challenges of e-mentoring include the ease of miscommunication, delays in developing relationships, requirement for increased writing instead of oral communications, and challenges to privacy. B. A. Hamilton and Scandura (2003) asserted that e-mentoring can potentially help decrease the social bias in mentoring by making mentors more broadly available. They also stressed that e-mentoring makes a networked approach to mentoring possible, where a protégé can potentially bring multiple mentors to bear simultaneously on a problem.

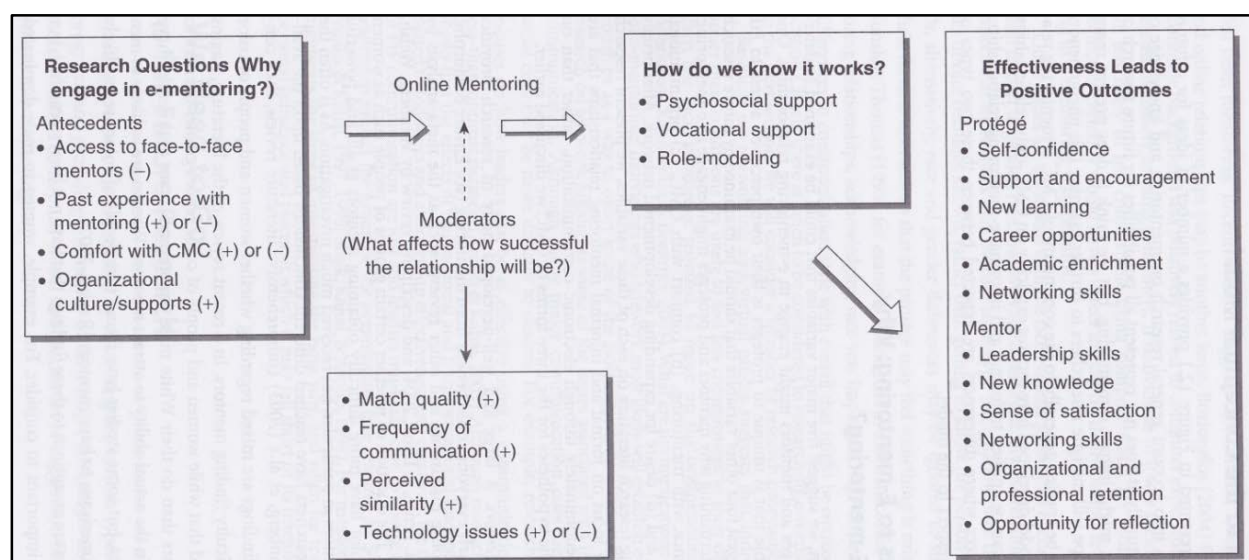


Figure 2. Ensher and Murphy's (2007) e-mentoring conceptual model. Adapted from "E-mentoring: Next-Generation Research Strategies and Suggestions," p.308, by E.A. Ensher and S.E. Murphy, in B. R. Ragins & K. E. Kram (Eds.), *The handbook of mentoring at work : theory, research, and practice*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications. Reprinted with permission.

Current explorations in peer mentoring stress the centrality of personal learning theories and efforts in better understanding how peer mentoring works. Lankau and Scandura (2002) stressed the importance of differentiating between relational job learning, which emphasizes how one's own position connects to others, and personal skill development, which urges employees to acquire new skills and abilities to enable better working relationships. McManus and Russell

(2007) proposed a wide range of new directions for peer mentoring research that sought to examine areas typically taken for granted. For the relationship aspects of peer mentoring, the authors suggested examining how reciprocity functions in this differing relationship, the impacts of collaborative cultures on peer mentoring, and the tools available for use in peer mentoring. From an individual perspective, the authors proposed studying the relative psychological safety of peer mentoring and how antagonistic attitudes towards authority make peer mentoring a more attractive proposition for selected individuals.

Lankau and Scandura (2007) revisited their previous differentiation between relational job learning and personal skill development, seeking to situate it in a broader process model of personal learning. This model (see Figure 3, subsequent) relabels the roles of mentor and protégé as developer and learner, emphasizing that these roles are fluid and frequently exchanged between the dyad. These roles are then paired with a learning context that brings forth the goals and culture of the organization; the roles and context are fused into a learning process that generates both personal learning and personal growth. The outcomes from personal learning stress professional performance, while the growth outcomes are about individual psychological development and competence.

The scholarly study of workplace mentoring makes clear that a broad range of approaches and techniques can potentially be effective when correctly applied to a workplace context. The long-standing practice of traditional mentoring as a dyad of mentor and protégé is still valid but is rapidly being supplemented by a host of new approaches and ideas. Informal mentoring appears to have a clear advantage over formal mentoring efforts due to participant preference and self-selection effects, while peer mentoring reflects the continuing flattening of organizations due to advances in information technology (IT). Those same advances in IT have

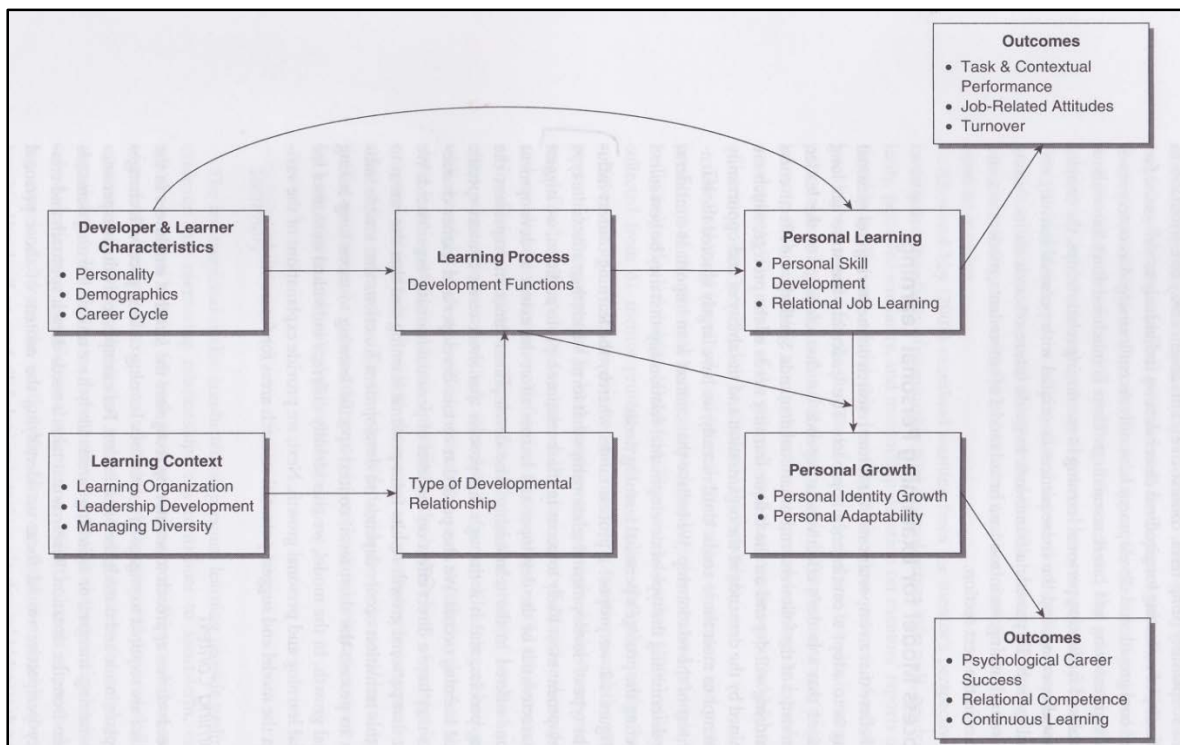


Figure 3. Lankau and Scandura's (2007) personal learning process model. Adapted from "Mentoring as a Forum for Personal Learning in Organizations," p. 108, by M.J. Lankau and T.A. Scandura, in B. R. Ragins & K. E. Kram (Eds.), *The handbook of mentoring at work: theory, research, and practice*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications. Reprinted with permission.

brought e-mentoring into its own, even with many acknowledged limitations. The spread of e-mentoring options therefore suggests incorporation with other online approaches, including those used for online communities of practice.

### Community Of Practice Literature

Any discussion of community of practice literature must begin with the research of Etienne Wenger. Lave and Wenger (1991) coined the term *community of practice* to describe a system that spread knowledge about a practice among peers and near-peers. They saw such a community as an essential element for securing legitimate access to a profession for new members, as well as dividing and apportioning labor within the practice. This kind of *legitimate peripheral participation*, as they described it, is essential to decentralizing authority away from

one master and creating situated opportunities for the development of new professional practices. The community of practice is an essential condition for the creation and sustainment of professional knowledge because it provides the means for understanding the profession's heritage. This understanding is vital because it contains both the tools of the profession and the stories of how the practices and tools of the profession developed. The unceasing processes of displacement and growth in a community of practice ensure that the practice itself is always in flux.

Wenger went on to examine how professional identities form in such a community and how they change over time. Wenger (1998) identified identity in a community of practice as a "negotiated experience" (p. 149), defining the practice's participants as they experience and interact with the practice. A practice defines its community through three dimensions: mutual engagement, conceived as a learned means of communication with others; a joint enterprise, where a common task gives perspective on the world; and, a shared repertoire of community tools. Wenger saw the identities produced by this community building as having multiple components, including community membership, learning trajectories, a relationship between local and global practices, and a nexus of identities derived from multiple practices. At its core, therefore, identity in a community of practice is a means of expressing competence in that profession, albeit one that is ongoing and non-linear with respect to time. Snyder and Wenger (2004) used this core idea of transformative identity to more fully clarify the basic dimensions of a community of practice: a community domain or area of focus, the participants themselves, and the practice, a significant narrowing of the domain. Communities of practice do not replace formal organizational structures, but supplement them. They require sponsorship, support,



conflict management, and collaborative inquiry in order to best function in an organizational context.

Wenger continued to examine the social implications of his theory for both individual learners and learning organizations. Wenger (2000) stressed that a social definition of learning had to contain a blend of competencies in both the professional community and personal experience outside of the community. Members of the community are tied to that community by engagement with its members, imagination of future directions for the community's work, and alignment with the community's core goals (see Table 2, subsequent). At the same time, members are part of multiple communities containing a wide variety of competencies that make up a social learning system. Those multiple communities within the learning system inevitably create boundary effects between those within the community and those outside it; those boundary effects are not necessarily negative, as they can spur needed changes and provide new ideas. The concept of a social learning system creates different imperatives for individuals, communities, and organizations. Individuals must find the set of communities that best fit their abilities and aspirations, negotiating their membership in these communities over time. Communities, for their part, must find a balance between the core processes that serve their membership and the boundary effects that challenge and change the practice itself. Organizations must set the conditions for the functioning of the individual and community imperatives while recognizing that those imperatives cannot be externally controlled or directed.

As the community of practice concept moved into broader use, Wenger worked to make it more accessible to a broad range of audiences and correct misperceptions about its use and application. Wenger (2009) stressed the centrality of personal engagement over organizational

Table 2

*Wenger's Community Dimensions*

	Enterprise: learning energy	Mutuality: social capital	Repertoire: self-awareness
Engagement	What are the opportunities to negotiate a joint inquiry and important questions? Do members identify gaps in their knowledge and work together to address them?	What events and interactions weave the community and develop trust? Does this result in an ability to raise troubling issues during discussions?	To what extent have shared experience, language, artifacts, histories, and methods accumulated over time, and with what potential for further interactions and new meanings?
Imagination	What visions of the potential of the community are guiding thought leaders, inspiring participation, and defining a learning agenda? And what picture of the world serves as a context for such visions?	What do people know about each other and about the meanings that participation in the community takes in their lives more broadly?	Are there self-representations that would allow the community to see itself in new ways? Is there a language to talk about the community in a reflective mode?
Alignment	Have members articulated a shared purpose? How widely do they subscribe to it? How accountable do they feel to it? And how distributed is leadership?	What definitions of roles, norms, codes of behavior, shared principles, and negotiated commitment and expectations hold the community together?	What traditions, methods, standards, routines, and frameworks define the practice? Who upholds them? To what extent are they codified? How are they transmitted to new generations?

*Note.* Adapted from “Communities of Practice and Social Learning Systems,” p. 231, by E. Wenger, 2000, *Organization*, 7(2). Reprinted with permission.

process in the functioning of communities of practice, describing the people who made communities function as social artists. He identified social artistry as being paradoxical in nature and difficult to grasp, describing it as “social yet intentional, collaborative yet willful, idealistic yet pragmatic” (p. 11). Social artistry has to be placed into the governance processes of a community, harnessing the artist’s intrinsic identity and passion as a mechanism for inviting others into the community. In response to critiques, Wenger (2010) emphasized that communities do not ignore concerns of organizational power and individual agency, but reflect them in both meaning-making struggles and individual claims to competence. At the same time,

he acknowledged that the community of practice concept was in danger of dilution from overuse, but asked that engagement continue in an attempt to refine and more fully shape the topic.

**Evolving work.** Current scholarly research on communities of practice focuses on better understanding how communities function and represent themselves to the world. Riel and Polin (2004) examined different variants of learning communities to assess their differing practices and common procedures. The authors added the complexities of multi-generational conversations to an understanding of CoP interactions, as well as how collective engagement with larger organizations can change community norms. Riel and Polin also coined the concept of CoPs as *knowledge building communities* (KBCs), designed for the deliberate and formal production of knowledge as opposed to the capture of tacit knowledge. KBCs construct, use, reconstruct, and reuse knowledge in deliberate, continuous cycles that create externalized knowledge objects. This is a fundamental difference from CoPs, where the knowledge is generated by and for the members of the community. Regardless of the community's aim, Riel and Polin found that healthy communities had high *permeability*; that is, members who moved between multiple communities, bringing new ideas and procedures with them.

In a meta-analysis of community of practice literature, Yang and Williamson (2011) specifically examined academic and business contexts for factors that supported successful community implementations in heterogeneous workplaces. The strongest factor of successful implementation was an organizational culture that supported collaborative inquiry through collective efforts. Another vital factor for community success was supportive leadership that shared the tasks of running the community across multiple domains. This leadership in turn empowered freedom of action in the community based on equality of standing. Final factors that rounded out the elements of successful implementation included a shared vision of the

community's goals, a commitment to continuous improvement, and proximity of members that spurred mutual engagement.

Jawitz (2009) examined Wenger's identity trajectories in a workplace to assess how those competing trajectories competed for attention. The identity trajectories in question were:

- Inbound, in which newcomers seek to find their path as contributors to a specific community of practice;
- Boundary, as members attempt to balance and manage membership in multiple communities;
- Peripheral, a limited option where members seek only limited access to a community and its practice; and
- Outbound, where members chose to leave a community in the hopes of developing new relationships and ways of being.

Jawitz found that the clash of these trajectories and the resultant contestation of identity created tension within the community and spurred actions that emphasized individual agency. He raised the possibility that this increased agency could ultimately lead to changed notions of what constitutes professional identity within a discipline.

Other researchers have sought to understand the contexts of specific communities and how they point to potential generalizable elements of community formation and support. Bueger (2013) looked at the actions of Somali pirates through the lens of a community of practice and found that a grand narrative had emerged as the master story of the practice, providing coherence and identity. Sookermany (2011) examined the utility of communities of practice in military contexts, finding them to be highly effective opportunities to engage in practice situations with participants from multiple career fields and generations. He emphasized that the core of military

communities of practice is also the cornerstone of military identity: the ability to take initiative and act flexibly on an independent basis. Warhurst (2008) warned against putting the CoP model into broad use, noting that an outstanding record within a profession does not equate to an ability to contribute to the community.

Community of practice researchers have also sought to better integrate their work with other emerging fields. Lubang and Haidong (2014) compared community dynamics to group dynamics in Knowledge Transfer theory and assessed that communities of practice best fit the model of an Interest Group. An Interest Group derives the strength of its links from the relationship between its members, rather than a focus on a particular task or direction from a hierarchy, and is highly effective at transmitting tacit knowledge. Tseng and Kuo (2014) used social network analysis of a teacher community of practice in Taiwan to show that closer network ties in CoPs support more social behaviors and greater appreciation of the community's value. Barragán-Ocaña, Quijano-Solís, Vega-Díaz, and Sánchez-Lara (2012) tapped into complexity theory to examine how communities of practice interface with other complex systems. They used Beer's Viable System Model to recharacterize organizational functions as operative, focused on the fundamental tasks of an organization, and meta-systems, which seek to keep the organization's overall functions running smoothly. These operative and meta-system portions function as separate communities within an environment that encompasses external influencers (see Figure 4, subsequent).

Although Wenger's work began with conventional communities that revolved around face to face interactions, it has evolved over time to encompass the growing fields of online

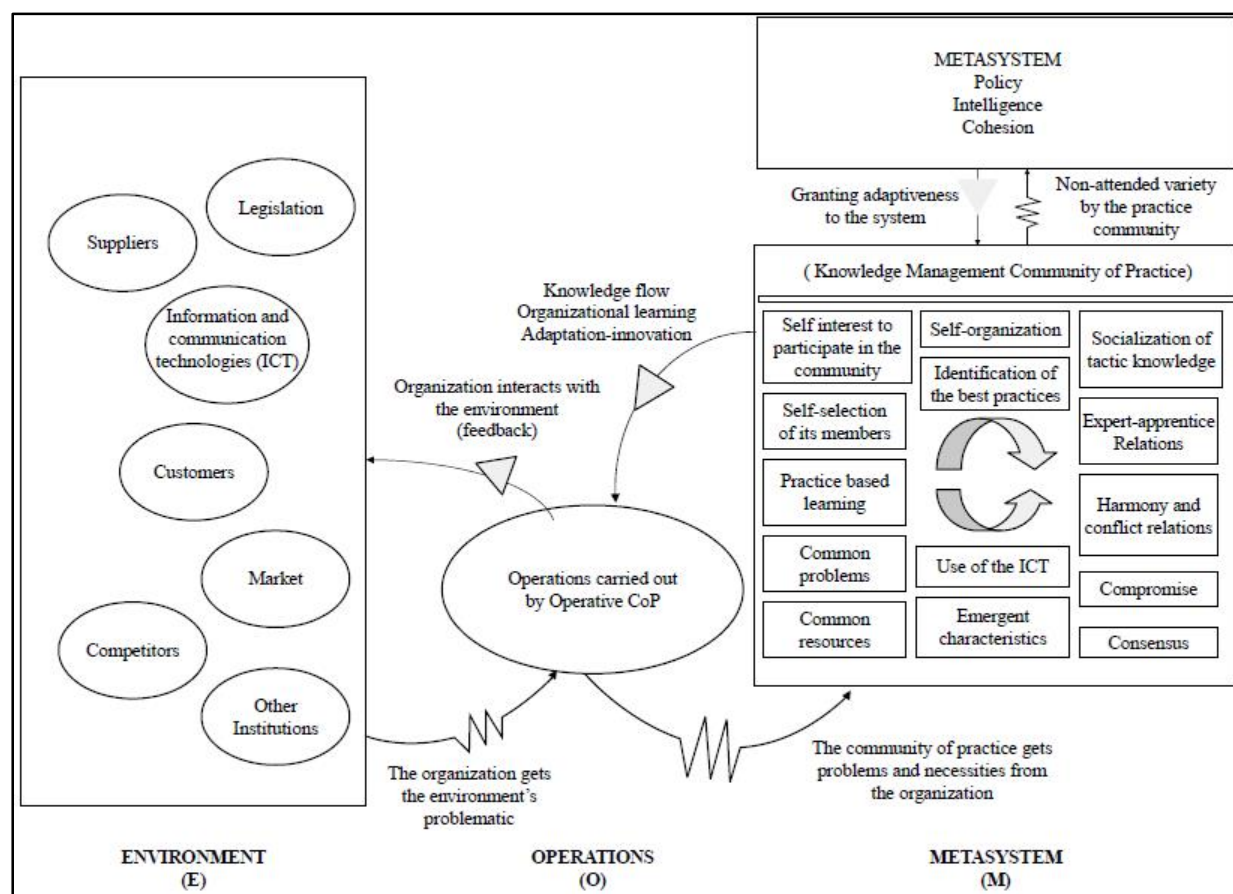


Figure 4. Ocana et al.'s (2012) viable system model integration of communities. Adapted from "Communities of practice: a focus from complex systems," p. 749, by A. Barragán-Ocaña et al, in *International Journal of General Systems*, 41(7). Reprinted with permission.

engagement. Just as workplace mentoring grew to embrace e-mentoring, community of practice theory has rapidly incorporated online communities into its sphere of engagement. This incorporation is feasible because the core principles of both fields remain constant regardless of the interaction domain. In the same manner, both fields share elements of common inquiry that will be useful in shaping the parameters of this study.

### Shared Elements of Both Fields

As previously noted, identity is at the core of both mentoring and community of practice theory. Therefore, a deeper examination of identity activities common to both fields of study will be useful in understanding how participation in one shapes perceptions of the other. Knight and

Trowler (2000) stressed that an individual's agency for any sort of identity management is limited by their organizational culture and supportiveness. Boyatzis (2006) stated that individual changes in identity are driven by changes in behavior, thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. This discontinuous non-linear change process, which he labeled Intentional Change Theory, is driven by personal epiphanies, which are in turn driven by personal and professional discoveries. Boyatzis divided these discoveries into five categories: the ideal self and personal vision; the real self as compared to ideal self; the learning agenda and plan; practice with new behavior; and, resonant relationships (see Figure 5, subsequent). Clegg (2008) stated that professional identity is derived from a wide range of activities, only some of which are inherent to the profession itself. He found that newer emerging identities derived from varying views of the world and differing expectations of the profession.

Wenger's ideal of social learning spaces also manifests in mentoring theory. The best example of this is Higgins and Kram's (2001) concept of developmental networks, which they characterized as a set of people named by a protégé as taking an active interest in and action to advance a protégé's career. This developmental network replaces a single dyad of mentor and protégé with a diverse range of developers and protégés covering a wide range of relationships. Higgins and Kram identified four types of networks, differentiated by their level of diversity and developmental network strength. Networks with a low range of relationship diversity were characterized as *receptive* or *traditional*, with weak or strong ties, respectively. *Opportunistic* networks had high range of relationship diversity and weak ties, while *entrepreneurial* networks had a high range of relationship diversity and strong ties. Networks such as the CompanyCommand and PlatoonLeader Forums described in Chapter 1 are therefore best

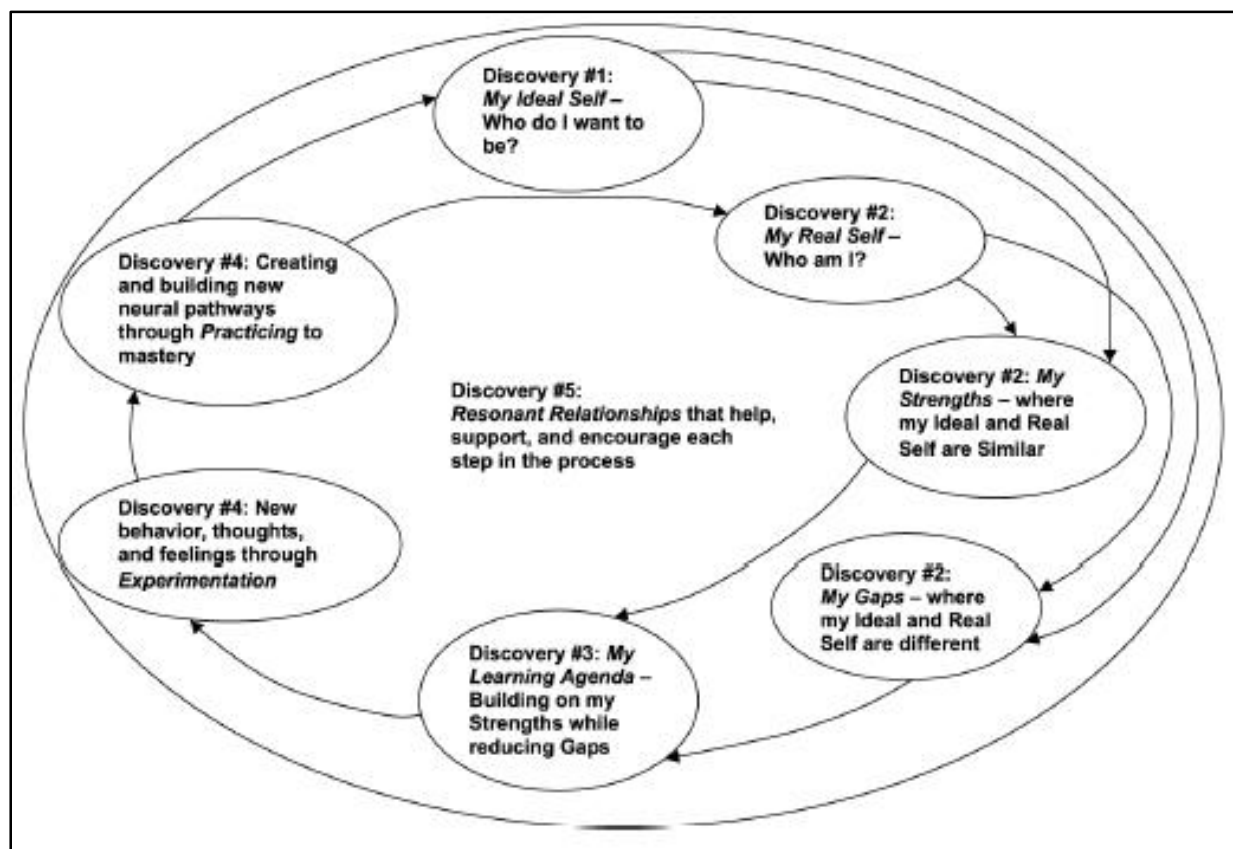


Figure 5. Boyatzis' (2006) intentional change theory sequence. Adapted from "An overview of intentional change from a complexity perspective," p. 610, by R.E. Boyatzis, in *Journal of Management Development*, 25(7). Reprinted with permission.

considered as opportunistic. The protégé's timing and style of entry into a developmental network is shaped by work environment influences such as organizational context and task requirements as well as individual influences such as personality, demographics, and perceived needs. The protégé's level of engagement with his/her developmental network is moderated by organizational and individual constraints on cultivating networks and their own help-seeking behavior. The likely outcomes of participation in an opportunistic developmental network are individual personal learning and work satisfaction.

Another area of convergence in learning spaces between mentor theory and community of practice theory is experiential learning, where knowledge derives from the combination of



grasping and transforming experience (D. A. Kolb, 1984). Alice Kolb (2002) further differentiated experiential learning into two categories: inside-out learning, which sends learners back to their own experience to use their own thoughts and beliefs to conduct learning, and outside-in learning, which are external forces that act upon an individual and force the shaping of learning. Experience itself is brought to bear in two methods: apprehension, characterized by hands-on or concrete action, and comprehension, or abstract study of experience. Likewise, the implementation of experience is done through intension, or reflective observation, and extension, better understood as active experimentation in a practice (D. A. Kolb, Baker, & Jensen, 2002).

Baker's (2002) model of a receptive space provides yet another take on a learning network dependent on both the mentoring value of self-development and the community of practice concept of identity management. Baker characterizes a receptive space as one that empowers multiple perspectives and provides a safe, supportive context for professional conversations. Receptive spaces also listen reflectively to give voice to others, recognizing differences in voice and resulting conflict from those differences as opportunities for learning. Receptive spaces value both the cognitive and social/emotional dimensions of learning and make a concentrated effort to combine all of the above efforts at a moderate pace of conversation appropriate to the situation. Baker stresses that the best way to sustain receptive spaces once opened is to encourage partnership and imagination, allow for differences in voice, help participants take time for reflection, and create spaces where humility is welcomed.

Storified learning also has a strong connection to both mentoring practice and community of practice participation. As Swap, Leonard, Shields, and Abrams (2001) pointed out, both fields use stories to help develop their learning and developmental mechanisms. Storified learning derives its power from its ability to support the pattern recognition that develops expert

knowledge; it does this by helping individuals see likely outcomes and chart appropriate responses. The authors note that an organizational story encompasses past management actions, employee interactions, and other events communicated informally within the organization. Common stories that help illuminate these events include reactions to mistakes and obstacles, perceptions of organizational authority, and reactions to rule-breaking and change. The underlying cognitive mechanisms for storified learning are availability, where a piece of knowledge is made more vivid through associated memories; elaboration, which uses a story to build on existing knowledge; and episodic memory, which deliberately imprints an individual experience as a learning opportunity. The strong association of stories with personal experience means that mentoring and storytelling have to be influenced rather than directly manipulated, with artificial stories being less effective than true ones.

Schank (1990) elaborated how different types of stories lead to different learning outcomes, while stressing that humans assess intelligence of another based on their receptivity to our stories. A neutral story contains perceived wisdom that can apply to both your specific problem and overall concerns as well; it does not have to be limited to a single practice. A condensed story is a shortened or simplified version of a common event drawn from many stories; this condensation helps learners develop case-based reasoning and predict likely outcomes through pattern recognition. Elaborated stories go into greater detail about a specific event or concern; they give specific examples and detailed outcomes to help the learner build explicit schema about the subject. In general, learners collect two classes of stories: those of the subculture they wish to join and those that help the learner define an identity independent of the subculture. For every learner, there are outside stories that draw them in with their lure of the

unknown and inside stories that are more difficult to tell because their broad outlines are already known.

Brown, Denning, Groh, and Prusak (2005) put it simply and succinctly: "Stories constitute the lifeblood of an organization" (p. 166). They see stories as the simplest and most direct way to get tacit knowledge flowing between individuals and sections of an organization who would otherwise struggle to communicate with one another. Stories get listeners inside the idea and force them to live it while relinquishing control of where the story may go. This, in turn, leads to Hall and Kahn's (2002) concept of relational learning, defined as the enlargement of an individual's capacity to learn and act through relationships with individuals or groups at work. Relational learning moves through stages very similar to the mentoring stages or identity development: in this case, the stages are initiation, formation, construction, maturation, and transformation. Hall and Kahn stress that organizations can best tap the learning potential of relationships by nurturing a diverse array of relationships; reflecting on the extent and stage progression of these relationships; taking concrete steps to show their value; and encouraging leadership to tap these relationships to further the organization's practice.

Although not technically linked to either mentoring or community of practice studies, cognitive apprenticeship shares enough of a common focus and aim with both fields that it merits examination in this section. First envisioned by Collins, Brown, and Newman (1987), cognitive apprenticeship focuses on teaching the processes that experts use to handle complex tasks. Unlike traditional apprenticeship, which focuses on physical practices, cognitive apprenticeship emphasizes the cognitive and metacognitive skills necessary for a profession's mastery. Collins et al. urged that cognitive apprenticeship program embrace new conceptual models and provide sufficient scaffolding to force students to be both producers and critics. The authors recognized

that since cognitive apprenticeship lacked the economic incentives of traditional apprenticeship's guaranteed job, it needed to create a "culture of expert practice" (p. 5) to create meaningful work. Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989) differentiated the learning activities of Just Plain Folks, who view the practice from the outside; students, who gain mastery of the profession through situated learning; and practitioners, who facilitate that learning. The authors stressed collective problem solving, refining collaborative work skills, and working through multiple roles as mechanisms to empower cognitive apprenticeship. Revisiting the idea almost two decades later, John Seely Brown (2006) argued for a demand-pull strategy to deliver the necessary elements of cognitive apprenticeship as students take greater control of their education.

The initial application of cognitive apprenticeship ideas fell in the education field, where it was seen as a mechanism for creating greater opportunities for situated learning. Dennen (2004) examined the applications of cognitive apprenticeship theory to date and stressed that more was needed to accurately guide education practitioners. In her review of research to date, she noted that designed interventions using cognitive apprenticeship techniques had shown initial promise but failed to sustain a high level of performance. Austin (2009) took up the challenge of applying cognitive apprenticeship techniques to doctoral candidates by cultivating a learning community of scholars through scaffolded development of research proposals. This approach sought to couple the extensive life experience of students with reflection and development of professional practices. Boling, Hough, Krinsky, Saleem, and Stevens (2012) noted that a key complaint of computer-mediated instruction is the lack of social cues and pointed to cognitive apprenticeship as a possible solution. Their work found that students consistently pointed to social interactions and engagements in learning as being most effective. Kuo, Hwang, and Lee

(2012) proposed melding the ideas of cognitive apprenticeship with an explicit collaborative learning strategy, eschewing a 1:1 model in favor of groups of 4-6. They found that such an approach increased individual abilities in professional problem-solving while decreasing cognitive load.

Research on cognitive apprenticeship in professional contexts has proceeded in parallel with the work in educational settings. Dickey (2008) applied the cognitive apprenticeship model to an education course for P12 teacher candidates; the intent was to model both pedagogically correct and professionally fruitful behavior. The course scaffolded email requests for assistance by initially responding quickly, but then adding in progressively longer delays. Candidates instead were routed to instructional videos, which they found helpful both for coaching and further exploration on their own. Many of the teachers expressed a desire to implement these methods in their own classrooms, thus showing the successful transfer of professional practice. Chan, Miller, and Monroe (2009) took a similar cognitive apprenticeship approach to revamping a corporate training environment that was suffering from high employee turnover and a lack of funding. Their use of problem-based instruction, virtual practice, and on-site assessment resulted in a 50% reduction in training time with equal outcomes in employee skill. This new training approach was especially welcomed by non-native English speakers on the staff, who appreciated the ability to re-engage with the training modules as needed. Huiling (2008) proposed tweaking the model slightly to incorporate the idea of *social apprenticeship*, which would expressly incorporate collaboration with experts, colleagues, and peer in informal settings. Huiling detailed the results of such an approach in teaching nonprofit grant writers the specific tasks of drafting and staffing proposals for the National Institutes of Health. The research was a limited success,

with students finding their knowledge gains constrained by a lack of preliminary research data for their proposals.

The previous sections all represent common elements of mentoring and communities of practice that are promising for further study. Despite these common elements, almost no studies have sought to actively understand how the two fields interact and shape one another. The following section will examine studies that have either looked at military mentoring in depth or integrated elements of mentoring and communities of practice.

### **Summary of Core Findings from Relevant Studies**

Johnson and Andersen (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of the scholarly literature on mentoring and then compared it to the existing evidence from research on mentoring in military organizations. They found relatively few published studies of mentoring prevalence and outcomes in military organizations; the existing ones suggested that mentoring became more likely as time in service increased, although the vast majority of military mentoring relationships were initiated by the mentor. In comparing formal versus informal mentoring programs, Johnson and Andersen asserted that the military programs reflected the scholarly consensus of informal mentoring being superior in both application and results. Mentoring was found to be effective at getting new talent noticed and promoted, although mentors and protégés alike manifested increasing concerns that mentoring was becoming “saddled with the baggage of programmatic requirements and checklists” (p. 118). To combat this, the authors emphasized that mentoring had to facilitate a sense of choice on the part of both the mentor and protégé, lest it be seen as one more developmental obstacle. Although the article itself is dated 2010, the surveyed mentoring efforts largely date from 2004 and earlier, well before online communities of practice became prevalent in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Noting the overlaps in theory between mentoring and communities of practice, Bryan and Carpenter (2008) set out to examine emergent trends in organizations that emphasized both aspects. They posited that since professional practice encompasses learning to mentor and sustaining growth in mentoring, a community of mentoring practice might be expected to emerge. They examined a community of higher education instructors that placed great emphasis on both areas, explicitly encouraging community members to form mentoring relationships both inside and outside of the community. Bryan and Carpenter were unable to find such an explicit community of mentoring practice, although they acknowledged that the dual questions of practice and process provided some overlap. They noted that teachers who act as mentors typically also have other responsibilities putting great demands on their time, which could impede the development of such practices. For future research, they recommended examining mentoring discourses directly borrowed from professional practices such as teacher engagement.

Mattox (2012) sought to examine the preferred methods of adult learning in organizations and better understand what might be hindering their broader adoption. Mattox used a survey administered by a knowledge management consulting firm to assess what techniques were most preferred by organizations. Mattox stipulated that the sought elements of adult learning included formal instruction by experts, coaching, practice, and rewards. He further differentiated between formal learning, which he defined as having objectives set by an organizational training department, and informal learning, where objectives are set elsewhere in the organization. He found that both mentoring and communities of practice ranked highest among all informal learning practices in both popularity and frequency of use; other considered elements of informal learning included virtual knowledge sharing and performance support systems. Mattox stated

that one barrier to broader adoption of these informal learning systems is that they do not align well with typical organizational evaluation approaches.

**Current state of Army mentoring.** Chapter 1 of this study briefly noted the Army's doctrinal position on mentoring, but left open the question of how mentoring is currently understood and practiced within the force. To address that question, the Center for Army Leadership (CAL) included several Likert-style and open-ended questions in the 2013 CAL Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL). This was the first time questions on mentoring were put to a broad Army audience since the 2004 Army Training and Leader Development Panel studies. The CASAL has been conducted annually since the conclusion of those studies and has established a reputation within the Army as being a useful and accurate representation of thinking within the force. The CASAL surveyed almost 22,000 soldiers in the ranks of Sergeant through Colonel and analyzed the data by grouping it into Junior and Senior NCOs, as well as Company-grade and Field-grade Officers (Riley et al., 2014).<sup>5</sup> Because this study is focused solely on the Army officer corps, discussion here is restricted to the 2013 CASAL findings for Company-grade (CG) and Field-grade (FG) officers.

On the question of receiving mentoring, the 2013 CASAL found that a majority of officers currently considered themselves protégés, but with widely varying practices. 59% of CG and 55% of FG officers reported that they were currently receiving mentoring, below the overall survey average of 62%. The frequency of mentoring underscored a stark difference between the two populations: more than half of CG officers stated they interacted with their mentor weekly or more often, while 70% of FG officers indicated that their frequency of mentoring was monthly or less frequent. When asked to explain in open-ended responses what they saw as the primary

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<sup>5</sup> Company-grade officers consist of the ranks of Second Lieutenant, First Lieutenant, and Captain. Field-grade officers are Majors, Lieutenant Colonels, and Colonels.



benefits of their mentoring, the protégés overwhelmingly indicated that they derived professional development, personal growth, and personal encouragement from those interactions. For those officers not receiving mentoring, over half identified difficulty of finding a suitable mentor as a key reason, while 36% stated that lack of time led to their lack of mentoring.

The practice of serving as mentors also underscored a significant divide within the CG and FG officer ranks. The percentage of FG officers serving as mentors (70%) was well above the Army-wide average of 65%, while the percentage of CG officers serving as mentors dropped precipitously by rank. 50% of Captains reported serving as mentors, but only 39% of First Lieutenants and 28% of Second Lieutenants reported the same; this is entirely consistent with the relative experience levels of those ranks and should be considered a reflection of that characteristic. In addition to a divide by rank, a much higher percentage of officers who held supervisory positions identified themselves as mentors than those who did not hold such positions (72% versus 48%). The reasons given for not mentoring almost exactly mirrored the reasons for not receiving it: 50% of participants stated they had not found a suitable protégé, while 34% indicated a lack of time to do so.

**Current status of the Professional Forums.** In addition to the CASAL data discussed previously, it is also instructive to examine the health of the CompanyCommand and PlatoonLeader Professional Forums. Although those spaces are not a primary focus of this study, understanding how they have evolved over time may be instructive to better understanding how members of the Forum engage with the broader Army. Koch and Fusco (2008) created an assessment framework for what they described as *mature* communities of practice, those that have fully internalized an identity as a CoP and are functioning with minimal or no outside developer support. Koch and Fusco identified five factors for assessing the health of the CoP,

each of which will be described below and then applied. Unless otherwise noted, the source of the information underlying this assessment is the researcher's personal interactions with the CC/PL core team (discussed further in Chapter 3).

Mature CoPs bring new members and institutions online on a regular basis. The CC/PL Forums continue to receive a steady stream of new participants, driven in part by encouragement from the Captains' Career Courses.<sup>6</sup> This constant influx of new members helps to offset the significant number of members who leave the Forums after becoming more senior in rank and shifting their attention to different problems. The most significant new institution implemented via the CC/PL community is the Leader Challenge, a cognitive tool that uses the actual experiences of forum members in a small group learning environment to build new schema in junior officers (Kimball, 2013). The Leader Challenge began as an online experiential learning environment in the Professional Forums, but quickly evolved into a face to face method that brought together participants of less experience with facilitators of greater experience. The Leader Challenge has been an integral part of cadet professional development at the United States Military Academy for over five years. The Maneuver Center of Excellence, the Army's premier training institution for close combat and maneuver warfare, has also adopted the Leader Challenge as an experiential learning tool for its commissioned and non-commissioned officers of all ranks. Consistent with Riel and Polin's (2004) idea of a knowledge building community (previously discussed), the CC/PL team until recently published a bi-monthly column in ARMY Magazine containing best-of-class content from the Forums.

Mature CoPs regularly employ mechanisms to check the health of the community. For most of CC/PL's existence, these mechanisms have been forum metrics such as number of

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<sup>6</sup> The Captains' Career Course is the second level of Army Officer Professional Military Education. It normally falls after an officer's service as a platoon leader but before assuming command.

members, number of new posts and replies, and number of knowledge objects generated by members. When CC/PL moved to the MilBook platform, the core team lost these metrics and has only recently regained them. Other measures to assess community health include regular engagements with community members both on- and off-line about their forum experience and ways to make it better. The core team's primary mechanism for forecasting the needs of the community and the resources needed to meet them are offsite sessions, held three times annually away from the CALDOL offices. During these sessions, the core team reviews the vision and values of the Forums to remind one another of the most important aspects of the community. The core team is also exploring new venues for the community such as an Alternate Reality Game that would mimic the experiences of five new company commanders trying to build their units.

Mature CoPs keep in touch with related CoPs to share ideas, experiences, and encourage new initiatives. One noteworthy example of CC/PL engagement with related CoPs is the #CCLKOW initiative, a weekly Twitter chat that connects Army company-level leaders with faculty and students in the Department of War Studies program at King's College, London. This program grew out of informal chats between members of both communities who wanted to use the open access platform of Twitter to facilitate discussion on topics of mutual interest. The outside platform was necessary since civilians are not permitted on the Professional Forums, and King's College has no comparable platform for discussion. At the beginning of each week, a participant from either King's College or the CC/PL team posts a question for discussion on a public blog site; the posting organization swaps every week. Members of both communities are encouraged to respond via Twitter using the hashtag #CCLKOW (Center for Company-level Leaders/Kings of War), which groups the posts into a single conversation space (see Figure 6, subsequent). The conversation ranges throughout the week, with different points of view being

shared among the participants. Because all conversations use the same hashtag, participants can jump in at any point during the week instead of having to engage at the beginning. The #CCLKOW initiative exposes both Army officers and graduate students to relevant, professionally stimulating viewpoints that they would otherwise miss out on.

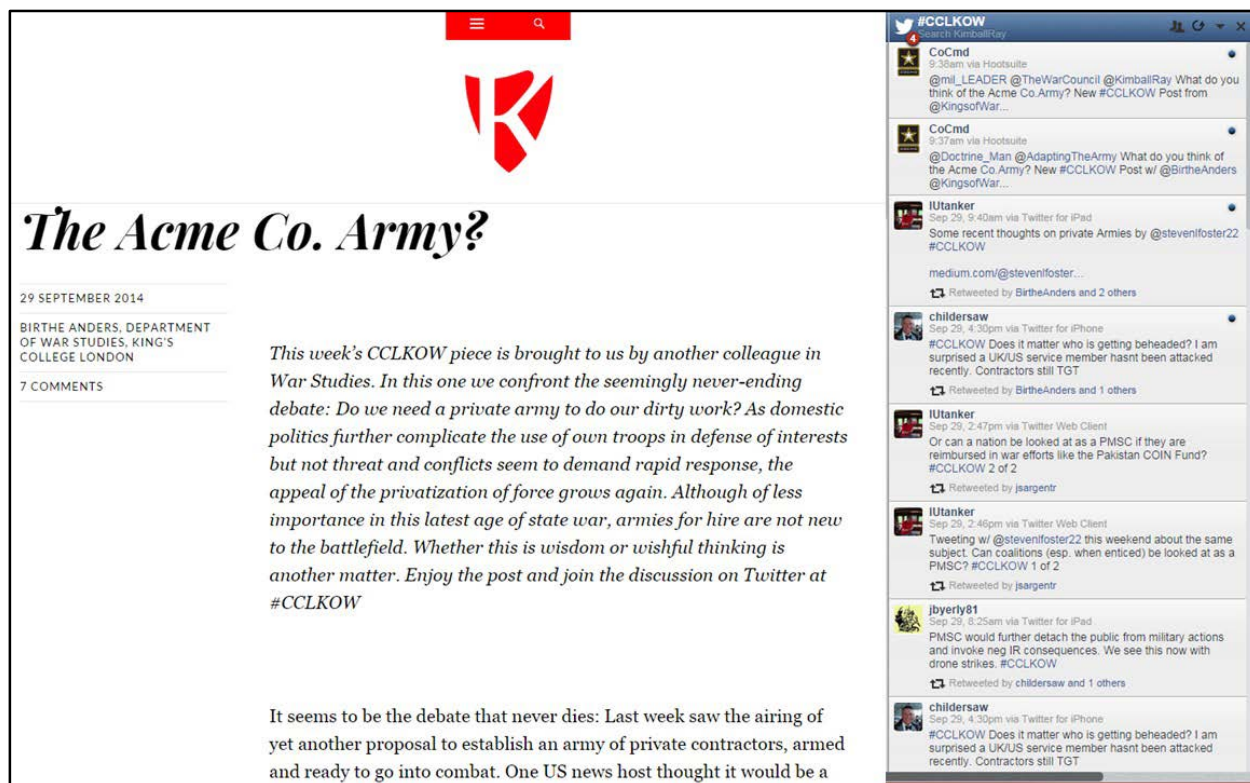


Figure 6. Anders (2014) #CCLKOW blog post, paired with subsequent Twitter conversation. Screenshot reproduced with permission of Kings of War and in accordance with Twitter fair use policies.

Mature communities of practice encourage the emergence of new communities. CC/PL were instrumental in the creation of dozens of new professional forums as part of the Battle Command Knowledge System (previously discussed in Chapter 1). The CC/PL Forum design was used as the baseline for the creation of the new community spaces while the CC/PL core team continue to experiment with new mechanisms and layouts. Unfortunately, CC/PL members were less successful in communicating the need for continued engagement with community

members and cultivating leadership within the community itself. Many of the BCKS facilitators were contractors, not active duty military, who saw their role as pushing information to the community and drawing nuggets from it, not cultivating the community and encouraging its growth. As a result, when BCKS funding was severely curtailed during the Iraq and Afghanistan drawdowns, many of the communities did not have a sufficiently robust member base to survive and withered away. The CC/PL team members continue to look for opportunities to support the creation of new communities both within the Army and within sister services as well.

Finally, mature communities of practice seize every opportunity to encourage community stakeholders to participate in governance and development. The CC/PL team's primary mechanism for cultivating informal leaders is the Rendezvous, an annual gathering of Forum leaders and rising leaders. The Rendezvous is always held away from work areas, normally in a unique area that will both spur conversation and provide a memorable experience for the participants.<sup>7</sup> Rendezvous activities begin with icebreaker activities designed help the participants get to know each other better and gain a better appreciation of one another's talents. During the Rendezvous, leaders are exposed to the core values of the community, given a sneak peek at new initiatives underway, and encourage to come up with new and innovative ways to engage community members. At some point during the Rendezvous, every leader receives individualized one-on-one instruction with another member on forum administration, to include posting content, improving profiles, and improving visibility of forum posts (see Figure 7, subsequent). The desired endstate for the Rendezvous is that every participant leaves empowered to make some part of the Forums that they are passionate about better than it was.

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<sup>7</sup> Past Rendezvous have been held at the GooglePlex in Silicon Valley, a hunting ranch outside of Austin, Texas, and in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty at Fort Hamilton, New York.

<b>Topic Lead Certification (Becoming a <u>milSuite</u> Expert Member)</b>	
<b>Getting Started:</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Edit your profile to make it more personal by changing your photo/avatar and adding some additional info.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Post a new Status Update once a day for three days, answering this question: What are you doing/learning today?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Find at least three members of your personal network on <u>milSuite</u> and "follow" them.
<b>Getting around the forum, finding what you need, and staying connected:</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Use the search feature to find other people you know
<input type="checkbox"/>	Use the search feature to find content
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bookmark some content or discussions [displays in your "bookmark" on your profile space]
<input type="checkbox"/>	Subscribe to a discussion thread by clicking the "Receive email notifications" link
<input type="checkbox"/>	Use the connections tab on your profile to see the activity of your connections. You must have members you follow or members that follow you and are participating in order for this to work
<b>Connecting with others:</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Comment on another member's status update (via their profile)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Send an email to another member (link off a member's profile or <u>metacard</u> )
<input type="checkbox"/>	Send a direct message or a private message to another member (link off a member's profile or <u>metacard</u> )
<input type="checkbox"/>	Share a document or discussion with another member
<b>Forum participation:</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rate a document
<input type="checkbox"/>	"Like" a conversation and one of the replies to that conversation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Participate in an existing conversation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ask a question or start a new conversation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Contribute content (document) to a topic
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tag a discussion or document
<b>Additional Tasks for Topic Leads:</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Add an image to your topic page.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Use special formatting in text (hyperlinks, bold, color).
<input type="checkbox"/>	Highlight a piece of content on a topic.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Create a link to a member or discussion within a piece of content.
<input type="checkbox"/>	"Relate" a document to a conversation.

Figure 7. Rendezvous Topic Lead certification. Reprinted with permission.

### **Demonstration of How Current Research Differs from Previous Studies**

The primary new knowledge contributed by this study is a deeper look at Army officer mentoring practices. Most previous mentoring studies pre-date the Army's service in Iraq and Afghanistan, a crucible experience that greatly impacted junior officer perceptions of themselves and their leadership (Wong, 2004). The 2013 CASAL (Riley et al., 2014) provides a snapshot of current mentoring practices, but underscores some significant concerns. The large gap in mentoring practice between those officers serving as supervisors and those who do not is puzzling, since leaders not serving as supervisors should theoretically have more capacity to conduct mentoring. The 2013 CASAL also indicated that a sizable percentage of potential mentors and protégés do not engage in mentoring practice because they don't know how to begin. The opportunity to ask more detailed questions about these concerns to a small group of officers yields insights on how to address these issues.

This study adds to the small amount of existing literature on the integration of mentoring and community practices. Because this study specifically asked participants to reflect on their community experience and how that impacted their mentoring practices, it contributes to a better understanding of this phenomenon in a professional context. The previously cited Bryan and Carpenter (2008) study did not find a community of mentoring practice in the teaching profession. The differing norms and practices of the military professional will provide a stark contrast and help provide further avenues of inquiry for professions beyond the military and teaching.

Because the CC/PL Forums are distributed across the Army, this study drew from a distributed group of participants that cuts across multiple professional sub-cultures. Among these sub-cultures are combat arms officers, sustainment officers, and specialty officers in low-density

fields such as medical and chemical. Therefore, although the individual viewpoints of members cannot be taken as representative of their entire sub-culture, member perspectives will help provide a holistic picture instead of a narrow view. The previous mentoring studies largely drew from senior officers who were more likely to have a positive perspective of mentoring due to their success. This study provides a more balanced view of both pros and cons of Army officer mentoring as it currently exists.

### **Summary**

This chapter examined the existing literature on workplace mentoring, communities of practice, and learning fields that combine elements of both. The body of work in both domains suggest that the intersection of the two could provide a rich vein of study to better understand how social learning techniques can be applied as a powerful mentoring tool. A review of the literature found no studies that examined how such an intersection is developing in the United States Army; thus, this is an appropriate topic for study. Chapter 3 discusses the methods and human subjects concerns for the proposed study.



### Chapter Three: Research Methodology

As a protégé, you've got a letter to Garcia,<sup>8</sup> but you've got to pick the mission, to get that letter to Garcia. You want to pick the guy with the right message. You want to pick the guy who's sending the right letters, and you want to make sure that the right person gets the letter. (EARL, personal communication, January 24, 2015)

This study explored the lived experience of Army mentoring among members of the Army Professional Forums. This chapter discusses the methods used in pursuing this research question. It covers the rationale, assumptions, and epistemological perspective underlying the choice of a phenomenological study for the study design. It examines the selection of study participants as well as the rationale for the decision to interview them via voice communication only. The chapter describes the data collection for the study and provides means for assessing its validity and reliability. Finally, the chapter presents the data analysis methods for the collected study data and how it conformed to Institutional Review Board (IRB) standards for both Pepperdine University and the United States Army.

#### Restatement of Research Questions

The research question addressed in this study was: what is the lived experience of Army mentoring for participants in the Army Professional Forums? The sub questions of the study were:

- What makes the Army Professional Forums effective or ineffective spaces for mentoring?
- How does participation in the Professional Forums shape mentoring practices?
- How does participation in the Professional Forums shape mentoring perceptions?

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<sup>8</sup> *A Message to Garcia* (Hubbard, 1899) is the source of this popular metaphor among Army leaders. In a short pamphlet, the author uses the example of a covert mission to find a rebel leader during the Spanish-American War as a metaphor to encourage subordinates to exercise initiative.

### **Rationale and Assumptions for Phenomenological Study**

A phenomenological design was the most appropriate approach for this study because it seeks to capture the essence of a shared experience among several individuals. Creswell (2013) stated that phenomenological studies bring out the common meaning of a lived phenomenon for several individuals. In this case, that phenomenon is the practice of Army mentoring and the common link among the individuals to be studied is their use of the Professional Forums. Gray (2011) emphasized the phenomenological perspective that reality is grounded in people's social experience of it; therefore, phenomenological studies revisit subjects' experiences of reality so new meanings can emerge. Because the researcher has shared in the phenomenon to be studied, the study followed Moustakas' (1994) practice of transcendental phenomenology, which involves identifying the phenomenon, bracketing the researcher's experiences, and collecting data from those who have partaken in the experience.

Three primary assumptions underpinned the viability of this research as a phenomenological study. These assumptions are separate and distinct from the assumptions discussed in Chapter 1, which concern the appropriateness of the research question itself. The first was that the researcher was able to understand the lived experience in question and stand apart from it to study it objectively. The researcher's previous Army mentoring experience as both protégé and mentor allowed ample opportunity to comprehend it. Therefore, the researcher's own bracketing and study of mentoring's theoretical underpinnings provided sufficient objectivity. The second critical assumption was that the participants in the study were comfortable representing their lived experience of mentoring to the researcher. The researcher's previous interview work with company-level leaders as well as the IRB protections put into place for this study allowed the study subjects to speak without fear of harm or reprisal. Finally, a

phenomenological approach assumes that the researcher was able to properly represent the experience to those outside of it. To meet this third criterion, the researcher used non-technical language to categorize the participants' experiences while still being faithful to their original meaning and intent.

### **Qualitative Research Design**

The choice of phenomenological study for this research proceeded from a specific set of epistemological and theoretical perspectives that need to be covered briefly. Phenomenology is derived from a constructivist epistemology which holds that truth and meaning are created by the subject's interactions with the world (Chia, 2002). In this view, meanings of reality are constructed by the subject's interactions, not discovered by others. Creswell (2013) went further than Chia, describing this practice as social constructivism, where individuals seek understanding of the world through the search for subjective meaning. Both of these approaches power an interpretivist theoretical perspective that seeks to identify and explain individual views of their world in a given cultural and historical interpretation (Crotty, 1998). A recent example of this approach in a military context is the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) First 100 Days series (Mordica, 2010). In three separate pamphlets, CALL sought to capture the lived experience of a soldier's first 100 days in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan through three perspectives: the individual soldier, the leader of soldiers, and the staff officers and non-commissioned officers supporting those soldiers.

Because phenomenological research derives its theoretical basis from the previously discussed perspectives, it demands a specific methodology that emphasizes subjectivity and context. Creswell (2013) stressed that such study must place its emphasis on the phenomenon itself through the perspectives of subjects experiencing that phenomenon. The study therefore

required initial bracketing of the phenomenon by the researcher himself and detailed interviews with individuals who have lived the experience. Gray (2011) concurred, noting that the resulting data should be analyzed qualitatively, capturing accurately the subjects' opinions and subjective accounts. Both authors noted that the results of phenomenological research are not intended to be generalized to larger populations but should be kept in the context of the subjects' experience. Burgess (2010) used this approach to study the progression of Professional Forum members from peripheral players to leaders of the community. Specifically, Burgess presented the experiences of 10 community members in their own words to describe essential elements of that transition.

### **Researcher's Role**

Consistent with Creswell's (2013) recommendations for qualitative study, it is important to understand the researcher's experiences in mentoring and communities of practice. The researcher benefited from Army mentoring as a protégé at several points in his career. Early on, the researcher moved from a company-level leadership position to a staff position for which he had no formal training. Discouraged, the researcher considered departing the Army until receiving mentorship from the battalion executive officer, who helped the researcher see a larger set of goals and objectives for his efforts. Mentorship came into play again later in the researcher's career when he had the opportunity to work as a research assistant for an ex-Department of Defense senior official. This official challenged the researcher to broaden his horizons in strategic policy and the military's role in American foreign policy, and later provided opportunities for the researcher to serve in positions at the highest levels of government. Because of these experiences, the researcher is predisposed to a positive view of the impacts of military mentorship and its attendant possibilities for leader development.

The researcher currently serves as a mentor to several young officers on a voluntary, ad hoc basis. The researcher met these young officers while serving as a member of the USMA faculty. These protégés voluntarily sought the researcher out as a mentor and have continued to do so for several years. Because of the widely distributed nature of Army assignments, the majority of the researcher's mentoring has been done over email, phone, and private social media. The researcher's mentor-protégé engagements are typified by a question or concern surfaced by the protégé, which then evolves into a discussion about related elements of professional practice. These engagements happen irregularly, sometimes with months passing between the conversations. Both the protégés and the researcher view these engagements as beneficial. For the researcher, they are a chance to get a sounding of emerging concerns and needs among junior officers. The engagements also provide the researcher with an opportunity to reflect on professional practices that may be evolving or changing in response to current operational pressures. This decentralized, sporadic, online-focused method of mentoring also draws a great deal from the researcher's experience with Army Professional Forums. Overall, the researcher's conception of mentoring can be summed up in the ideal of *be there when I need you*: mentors making themselves available when protégés identify a professional need or concern.

The researcher has been heavily involved with Army professional forums in multiple roles for almost 15 years. The researcher was one of the original members of the CompanyCommand Forum and used its content extensively during his service as a cavalry troop commander. After leaving troop command, the researcher volunteered to continue engaging in CompanyCommand as a topic lead, one of several informal leadership roles that support the Forums' smooth functioning. As a topic lead, the researcher worked with community members to help draw out new content, answer member questions and concerns, and identify members

who could help the community by also serving as informal leaders. As a result of the researcher's service as a topic lead, he served as the first Operations Officer for the Center for the Advancement of Leader Development and Organizational Learning (CALDOL), the Army center responsible for the smooth operation of the CompanyCommand and PlatoonLeader Forums. As Operations Officer, the researcher worked full-time on the Forums' operation and research efforts springing from engagement within the Forums. After completing this dissertation, the researcher will serve as the Director of CALDOL, responsible for the overall direction and strategic planning of the organization.

Phenomenological research such as this study has to have meaning not only for the academic body of knowledge, but for the researcher as well. This research helped the researcher better understand his own mentoring practice and how it might be modified or better implemented. Since it is difficult for mentors to get direct feedback from protégés on techniques that are or are not working well, this study was an opportunity to expose the researcher to new insights on practices that may be less effective than initially believed. Since the studied population is highly congruent with the likely population for the researcher's mentoring, lessons learned from this study are very useful and transferable to the researcher's relationships.

As the incoming CALDOL Director, the researcher has an obligation to look for new directions for CALDOL's work that push beyond the status quo. CALDOL's specific mandate is two-fold: enable the experiences of peer-to-peer learning through connection and conversation of Army officers and cadets, and develop technologies to support those experiences. CALDOL's primary mechanism for these efforts over the past decade has been the Professional Forums, but this mentoring study provided consideration of new opportunities for better platforms. For instance, if forum members reported that they consistently conducted mentoring outside of the

Professional Forums after making connections within the Forums, CALDOL would be obligated to look at those outside technologies to see what advantage they provide.

Finally, although not the primary focus of the study, this work provided the researcher with a health check of the functioning of the Professional Forums and how they are meeting the current needs of the community. Just as past profits are no guarantee of future success in business, the Professional Forums' reputation is only as good as how well they serve the current group of company commanders and platoon leaders. During the interviews, the researcher remained alert for indicators that member experiences are not what they should be and sought to capture those experiences for action within CALDOL's existing mechanisms.

Strauss and Corbin (2008) described the primary aim of the qualitative researcher as theoretical sensitivity, defined as "the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn't" (p. 231). This admonition served as an appropriate lodestone for the researcher's interactions with subjects. Because of the limited number of subjects in a phenomenological study, it was vital to select participants who are well-versed in both the Professional Forums and Army mentoring. Once those subjects were selected, the researcher ensured that the questions about their experience were phrased in a manner that drew out their experience and was respectful of the strictures on their time. At the same time, the interviews focused tightly on the mentoring experience to avoid digressions into irrelevant areas. Finally, the study's presentation of the participants' experiences is done in a way that retains the original context while still making it understandable to a broader audience.

## Site and Subject Selections

As the oldest and best established of the Army Professional Forums, Company Command and Platoon Leader (CC/PL) were the logical starting points for seeking study participants. These Forums have been in operation for over 15 years with a laser focus on serving the community of company-level leaders. In doing so, they have acquired a reputation for hosting professional and candid conversation (CompanyCommand, 2009). The CC/PL community is not limited to a single forum design. The Forums themselves have gone through multiple design iterations in the last 5 years, including a Defense Department-hosted official platform, a WordPress-based experimental platform, and a mobile overlay of the platforms themselves. The CC/PL community is diverse, hosting officers from a wide range of generations, branches, and duty locations. That diversity, specifically the large number of duty locations, dictated the use of voice communication to interview subjects, since it is not economically feasible to travel to all subject locations.

Because of its emphasis on capturing the essence of a lived experience, phenomenological research uses a narrower range of sampling strategies than other research methodologies (Creswell, 2013). Dukes (1984) noted that criterion sampling works well for phenomenological research and suggested a range of three to 10 subjects in order to preserve the richness of data collected. This study used two criteria for study selection: current membership in the CC/PL Forums and mentoring experience. Because of its subjectivity, the latter criterion was assessed via recommendation from other forum members. These criteria ensured a consistent baseline of experience and will also emphasize and capture the relational aspect of mentoring. Additionally, snowball sampling was used by asking interview subjects if they have further



recommendations for interview subjects. Members named by one or more subjects were added to the study until saturation was reached, as described in subsequent paragraphs.

### **Original Plan for Data Collection**

Data collection for this study was planned to employ multiple modes of data collection, using more than one instrument to enhance the information gathered (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009). Potential participants had to meet two criteria: be a member of the Professional Forums and be nominated by another member as having experience in a mentoring relationship. Nominated participants were initially contacted via email and offered the opportunity to participate (Appendix A). Participants who agreed to join the study completed an informed consent (Appendix E) describing the purpose, conduct, and parameters of the study as well as the participant's rights and risks under the study. After completing the informed consent, participants would complete a short online survey asking about their mentoring experiences and experiences in the Professional Forums, as well as their gender, branch, and preferred means of interview. The researcher would then interview the participants using their preferred means of voice communication about their mentor and protégé experiences (described further subsequently). This would gather the rich contextual data about participants' mentoring relationships that will form the heart of the study. These two formats would use a unimode construction, employing two or more formats to produce a response with a similar focus (Andres, 2012). For example, both the survey and interview began with standardized definitions of mentor, protégé, and mentoring relationship, ensuring that the participant perspectives remained constant throughout the study.

The survey (Appendix B) would have verified the participants' status as members of the Professional Forums and engagement in mentoring relationships, as well as provide a mechanism

for comparison to the broader population of Army officers. The Mentoring Questions section of the survey was drawn from the 2013 CASAL Mentoring Survey Instrument (K. Gunther, personal communication, August 5, 2014). Although this study's results cannot be generalized to a larger population because of the lack of representative sampling, using the CASAL instrument as a starting point would allow some suggestions for transfer of context between this work and that study's findings (Dey, 2005). The branch categories and functional areas list in the demographics portion were derived from the US Army Human Resources Command's standardized categories (Officer Personnel Management Directorate, 2014). Using these categories instead of listing all branches and functional areas greatly simplified the survey instrument and allowed for an easier assessment of whether or not the participants come from diverse sectors of the Army. The study was not used after pre-testing determined it was redundant and the Army Survey Program failed to provide timely approval (see Chapter 4).

In the interview portion of the study, the researcher asked study participants to describe their Army experiences, their mentoring relationships and how forum participation played a role in those relationships. The interview protocol (Appendix C) was structured as a focused interview, using a minimum of pre-determined questions to give the interviewer maximum flexibility to pursue promising leads (Merton, Lowenthal, & Kendall, 1990). The interview questions themselves were deliberately repetitive to allow the participant to reflect specifically on relevant experiences without bringing in extraneous data. The phrasing of the questions followed Moustakas' (1994) recommendations for phenomenological research, focusing on the participants' experiences and then the context influencing the experience. In this case, the interview protocol asked the participant to first describe an aspect of the mentoring relationship (either as mentor or protégé), and then reflect how the participant's usage of the Professional

Forums shaped that experience. The interview concluded by asking the subject for recommendations for additional subjects, per the previous discussion of snowball sampling. To be respectful of the participants' time, the interviews were structured as four one-hour interviews, carried out on different days. The interviewer carefully monitored the progress of the interview itself, remaining alert to potential signs of subject discomfort such as irritation or boredom. Every participant who began interview sessions completed all four hours.

### **Validity and Reliability of Data Gathering Instruments**

Although validity and reliability are more commonly used in quantitative research (Campbell & Stanley, 1963), this study used measures consistent with the existing literature to ensure the greatest possible instrument validity and reliability. Flick (2009) stressed that the most important aspect of internal validity in qualitative research is grounding the researcher's constructions in the constructions of his/her subjects. In the same vein, Arksey and Knight (1999) suggested using interview techniques that build rapport and trust, prompting subjects to expand on their responses, and constructing interview schedules that are drawn from existing literature and pilot work. As noted previously, all of these precepts were been followed to the greatest extent possible in building the study instruments. The survey data would have been used as a triangulation method for study validity; the participants' survey characterizations of their mentoring experience and work in the Professional Forums would be checked against their interview transcripts for consistency.

An additional guarantor of study reliability involved the planned use of member checks after each interview session. The researcher conducted member checks with each participant during the fourth hour of the interviews to ensure that the participant was comfortable with the characterization of their responses in the transcripts. During the member checks, the researcher

described the researcher's overall impressions and takeaways from the participant's responses; the participant was invited to either correct the record or elaborate on areas that he or she feels are insufficiently explained. This is consistent with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) vision of the member check as a mechanism to test the credibility of the inquiry report with the participants.

In the same vein, Gray (2011) called the use of a standardized interview platform the most important guarantor of qualitative study reliability and urges investigators to use the same means of interviewing for every subject. Because it was not financially feasible for the researcher to visit every subject, this study used voice communication interviews for all subjects, even those located physically close to the researcher. The researcher used the Google Hangout platform to conduct the interviews because of its flexibility in connecting with participants either online or via phone. This flexibility helped lower barriers to participant engagement by increasing their availability. The researcher recorded all interview sessions using Camtasia Recorder, which works well with Google Hangout and simplified the recording process. All primary interview sessions for each participant (minus the member checks) were completed within a five-day timeframe. The researcher transcribed and coded all interviews personally to further enhance data accuracy. Personally transcribing all of the interviews also increased the researcher's familiarity with the participants' experience and accelerated the process of thematic review and coding.

Both the survey and interview instruments were pretested on forum members not participating in the study prior to use to ensure validity and reliability. Two forum members with established and recognized track records in both mentoring and forum work volunteered to participate in a pilot implementation of the survey and interview instruments. USMA granted provisional access to the survey instrument prior to IRB approval for piloting and both

individuals took the survey and provided feedback via email to the researcher on survey design and usability. Both individuals participate in the first three hours of their interview session, one hour per day. The researcher then triangulated the survey results with the pilot interview transcripts, followed by a member check with each individual to review impressions and assess the reviewer's accuracy. The findings from the pilot implementation resulted in a modification to the data collection plan, which is discussed at the beginning of Chapter 4.

### **Managing and Recording Data**

All data was managed, recorded, and stored on platforms with a high degree of security and reliability. The interview recordings and transcriptions were kept in an encrypted folder on a non-web accessible hard drive, with the transcriptions backed up to a secure .mil server. The researcher used HyperTranscribe for initial transcriptions of all interviews and HyperResearch for coding. To further underpin the reliability of the interview instrument, the researcher transcribed the pretest interviews for both practice and assessment of transcription accuracy. All surveys and interviews, including the pretest data, were coded using alphanumeric identifiers for each participant. The key for the alphanumeric identifiers was kept separate from the data in a secured offline location. After data coding, the researcher assigned pseudonyms to each alphanumeric identifier for inclusion of their responses in Chapter 4, further distancing the participants' names from their responses. At no time were the participants' real identities linked in any way to their interview responses.

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

Data analysis for this study followed the broad steps for qualitative analysis prescribed by Gray (2011) for the interview portion. The researcher began qualitative analysis by transcribing the interviews as soon as possible in order to establish familiarity with the data. The researcher found that coding the transcripts increased his familiarity with participants' experiences and helped him more readily identify emerging themes and answers to the research questions. After transcribing, the researcher assigned themes within the interview transcripts. Throughout both steps, the researcher memoed any emerging trends for later reference. Once all interviews were complete and transcribed, the researcher conducted a focused reading, identifying significant statements by the participants. A second pass through the data grouped these significant statements into broader themes that were assigned to specific experiences and context of experiences. This coding identified both common experiences of the subjects as well as uncommon experiences that are unique and noteworthy. The researcher then conducted member checks with the participants, as described in the previous sections, prior to final coding and inclusion of specific passages in the Findings section of this study.

Throughout this process, the researcher practiced personal reflexivity through memoing, capturing the impacts of the researcher's own values and beliefs on the research (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). As the researcher encountered elements of the study that provoke reflection or reactions in himself, he captured those experiences via a running calendar of dissertation events. This calendar was kept separate from the main data set of survey and interview results to avoid accidental inclusion of researcher comments or concerns that could reflect poorly on the participants themselves. The researcher used this reflexivity log to continue the bracketing process begun in this preliminary proposal. By following these steps and the analysis procedures

described in the preceding paragraph, the study remained in conformance with Creswell's (2013) articulated standards for phenomenological data analysis, which include:

- Understanding the philosophical tenets of phenomenology,
- Articulating the phenomenon in a clear, concise manner,
- Using the procedures of phenomenological data analysis,
- Conveying the essence of the experience, including a description of the experience and the context in which it occurred, and
- Employing reflexivity throughout the study.

### **IRB Protection of Subjects**

The study was assessed as exempt under 45 CFR 46.101(b)2 because it involved no more than minimal risk to subjects and only involved human subjects in non-protected groups. The study procedures themselves involved participation in an interview, with minimal possibility of physical or mental harm to the participants. The interview itself focused solely on the practice of mentorship and was unlikely to evoke memories or experiences that could be traumatic for the participants. Each participant was assigned an alphanumeric code used on his or her interview transcripts. The log of codes was not kept on the same location or server as the data itself. Therefore, even if the data were compromised, they contained no personally identifiable information to link back to the subjects. The findings in Chapter 4 of this document use pseudonyms to refer to all study participants, both in their own words and when references by other participants. In research documents, these pseudonyms were only affiliated with the alphanumeric codes, not the participants' name or other information. Because this study was conducted under the auspices of Pepperdine University and involves Army human subjects, the

researcher obtained parallel approval of both the Pepperdine and Army IRB programs (see Appendix G).

### **Summary**

This chapter summarized the methodology for the conduct of this study into the intersection of Army mentoring norms and community of practice participation. A phenomenological study design was used for this research, consistent with both a social constructivist worldview and the bracketed experiences of the researcher. The study was originally planned to employ multiple modes of data collection (survey and interview) to best capture different aspects of the participants' mentoring experiences. The data analysis process involved coding methods consistent with phenomenological research that also preserved internal validity and reliability. Chapter 4 discusses the changes to the data collection scheme and subsequent findings of the study.



## Chapter Four: Results

Bouncing it off of your peer allowed me a little more ability to really assess what's going on. Sometimes, with the boss, there's always that stuff that he doesn't know; but with a peer to peer piece, especially if you're right there at a unit level, there's a little bit of a mirror there. It's easy to convince yourself when you're standing on the scale that you're mostly muscle and not as much fat, but when you look in the mirror and you see your gut hanging over, you have to look at it and say, *Yeah, OK.* (COLE, personal communication, January 28, 2015)

This chapter describes the results of this study on the lived experience of Army mentoring for members of the Army Professional Forums. It begins with an updated description of the data gathering process, which was amended from the plan described in Chapter 3. The text then describes the salient characteristics of the study participants and notes attributes of the larger population of Army officers not included in this study. The chapter includes the answers to the research questions re-stated below, using the participants' own words to illuminate the issues in question. The chapter concludes with a summary of the themes that emerged from the findings.

### Restatement of the Research Questions

The research question addressed in this study was: What is the lived experience of Army mentoring for participants in the Army Professional Forums?

The sub-questions of the study were:

- What makes the Army Professional Forums effective or ineffective spaces for mentoring?
- How does participation in the Professional Forums shape mentoring practices?
- How does participation in the Professional Forums shape mentoring perceptions?

### **Modified Procedures Based on Pilot Study**

The study pilot was conducted with two members of the Professional Forums. Based on the pilot results, a modification to the data gathering process was made following consultation with the faculty committee. The pilot participants were two Field-grade officers with extensive experience (>10 years) in the Professional Forums. The pilot participants took the online survey and participated in four hours of interviews (including the member check) on their mentoring experiences. The researcher found that the data gathered by the survey was redundant with and inferior to the content contained in the interviews. For instance, the demographic and Forum participation data gathered by the survey was more thoroughly covered in the first hour of the interview when the pilot participants described their Army and Forum experiences. Although this overlap would have been useful for triangulation of findings, the survey instrument approval process required by the Army Survey Program<sup>9</sup> ended up being unfeasible for study inclusion. Because the study goals could still be achieved through an interview process, the researcher with permission of his faculty committee elected to drop the use of the survey from the data gathering process. An additional question on the benefits of mentoring experiences was added to Hours 2 and 3 of the interview protocol (see Appendix D).

Because survey data would not be available for triangulation, the additional process of Peer Debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was added to the planned member checks to ensure the accurate interpretation of interview data. Peer debriefers are outside observers who have sufficient professional training and content knowledge to evaluate the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer debriefing is an established mechanism in qualitative research to verify internal validity and to identify potential issues in methodology and interpretation (Spall, 1998; Spillett,

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<sup>9</sup> The Army Survey Program exists independent from the Army IRB process and is a required review for any survey of Army personnel that extends beyond a single installation or command.

2003). Two peer debriefers volunteered to assist with this study. Both have doctorates involving qualitative research, are long-term faculty at institutions of higher education, and are familiar with Army process and terminology. Neither peer debriefer has any work or personal relationship with the other. The peer debriefers examined the data collection and analysis in three stages. In Stage 1, the peer debriefers each read an entire transcript of a participant's interview and provided feedback on interview technique and lines of inquiry to be pursued further. During Stage 2, the debriefers examined a coded interview transcript, including the member check portion, to examine the researcher's coding scheme and member check process. For Stage 3, the peer debriefers reviewed the first draft of this chapter for overall consistency and accuracy. The researcher integrated the peer debriefers' feedback at every step of the study and used it to improve the accuracy of these findings.

The member checking process described in Chapter 3 was retained as an additional guarantor of study internal validity reliability. The retention of the member checking process also mitigated the loss of survey data for triangulation. Using computer assisted qualitative analysis (HyperResearch) provided a documented process of the coding of interviews and enabled an efficient process of multiple reviews of coded data by both the researcher and the peer debriefers.

### **Description of the Participants**

The researcher invited ten members of the Professional Forums to participate in the study. All ten agreed to participate and signed consent forms. All participants were nominated as having significant experience in Army mentoring by another member of the Forums. The researcher interviewed nine participants. Because the study reached data saturation prior to interviewing the tenth participant, the researcher instead used that individual to review drafts of this chapter for fidelity with the lived experience of Forum members and preservation of

confidentiality. This affirmed the tenth's participant's willingness to participate and added additional grass-roots perspective to the study. Data saturation was identified by the lack of new themes emerging from the interviews and the dearth of new nominees from later participants. Four of the nine participants had served in a leadership position in the Professional Forums while five self-identified as active participants in the Forums or in the wider community empowered by the Forums. All interview participants were currently commissioned officers at the time of the interview: three were Field-grade officers, while the rest were current or promotable Captains. All participant narratives are attributed by pseudonym and three core team members of the Professional Forums who were cited in multiple participant narratives are also referenced by pseudonyms. Additional individuals who were mentioned only in a single participant's narrative are referenced by a single letter.

The study participants represented a wide diversity of personal and professional backgrounds from across the Army.<sup>10</sup> Commissioning sources were equally represented, with three participants each coming from USMA, the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), and Officer Candidate School (OCS).<sup>11</sup> Seven of the nine interview participants were Active Duty officers. The remaining two were Army Reserve and National Guard officers who had served on Active Duty at multiple points in their careers.<sup>12</sup> Eight of the interview participants were male. Seven of the participants identified as White, while one self-identified as Middle Eastern, and one claimed an unspecified mixed ethnic heritage. Three of the participants came from the traditional combat arms (one each from Infantry, Armor, and Field Artillery). Other participant

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<sup>10</sup> Army IRB requirements mandate that the participant attributes only be listed in aggregate to preserve confidentiality.

<sup>11</sup> USMA graduates are commissioned after completing the Army's course of instruction at the Military Academy. ROTC graduates take military science classes in conjunction with coursework at a civilian college or university. OCS graduates are commissioned after serving in the enlisted ranks and completing OCS at Fort Benning, GA.

<sup>12</sup> Active Duty soldiers serve full-time in the Army. Reserve and National Guard officers serve a minimum of one weekend a month and two weeks a year in their assigned units, although they may be activated for longer periods.

branches included Medical Service, Military Police, Logistics (two participants), Signal/Cyber, and Military Intelligence. No survey participants had experience in any of the following Army officer career field categories: Special Operations Forces, Foreign Area Officer, Operations Support, Soldier Support, and Acquisition.

### Answers to the Research Questions

The lived experience of Army mentoring for the participants in the study closely corresponded to Kram's mentoring functions of career, psychosocial, and role-modeling. Every participant reported experiencing all three functions in the course of their time as either a mentor or a protégé, although not necessarily as both. This is consistent with the existing literature on mentoring, which notes that not every mentoring relationship will include all three functions.

**Lived experience: Career functions.** Mentoring influence in the career function was overwhelmingly focused on advice about future career paths in the Army and setting standards for individual conduct in future roles. Several participants reported receiving insights on assignments that appeared to diverge from a preferred career path. At times, the career mentoring was focused on areas where the officer was failing to meet standards:

JEAN: This lieutenant had real issues with his weight... I walked into his office and asked: *What's your five year plan look like?*<sup>13</sup> [He said,] "I'm going to finish up here; I'm going to go to Fort Leonard Wood to be an XO; I'm going to go to the career course; I'm going to deploy; I'm going to take command; I'm going to apply to instruct at USMA; I'm going to get my Master's in history at Columbia; I'm going teach at the Academy; and, I don't know, at that point, I think I'd enjoy being an Academy Professor." I looked at him and didn't sugar coat my words: *I can think of about 40 reasons that's not going to happen.* And I just looked at him.

The timely intervention of a mentor with career advice was frequently cited as a life-changing event:

JOSH: I don't know that I would have done what I did as a commander, if it wasn't for that initial protégé experience of having a mentor who cared, who was passionate about

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<sup>13</sup> In block quotes, italics are used to identify the participant's internal narrative or remarks directed at others.

profession, and just wanted to see his subordinates succeed over his own career. Then that was followed by a slew of, not horrible, but mediocre leadership. So having that contrast really helped me. It gave me a compass for my own time in command, and how I ran things.

Other career advice included views on the proper timing of attendance at Professional Military Education (PME) schools, which is seen as crucial for individual development and career progression.

The influence of the career mentoring function was not solely limited to benefits for the protégé. Several participants saw it as improving themselves or the overall organization as well:

DARREN: As an officer mentoring another officer, you can see that the benefits are going to be high. If you mentor a private first class, for example, it may take a long time for that to come out and benefit the entire Army. When we mentor a lieutenant or a young captain, those are people that will be better because of it and will make their units better because of it.

The transient nature of military service and the fluidity of Army requirements were cited by a few participants as being indicative of a need for mentoring to assist other officers:

JEAN: It's nice to leave your mark on an organization, and one of the best ways to do that is through people. Positions change, missions change; but if you can touch someone's life, make them a better leader or a better person and help them clarify what they want or what their goal is, what they want to be, that's a worthwhile endeavor.

Participants who cited mentor benefits in the career function saw it as a way to ensure the long term viability of the Army as an organization.

Despite the prevalence of career mentoring, almost none of the participants reported having a mentor directly intervene on their behalf for an assignment or duty position. ARLO, the one participant who did report such an event, noted that it occurred only after he had reached an impasse with his branch manager about his next job. The mentor intervened with the branch manager to get a different assignment without consulting the protégé:

I did not ask him to do a damn thing. He didn't even tell me, nor would he have, that he was going to do something like that... He did it because he knew that [staff officer] and I

would be a great match...He explained why that mission, that next year in Iraq, was a good one for me, and why that [office] itself was a good match. He had really thought through all of the variables in play, why he thought this was a good match for me individually, the unit involved, and the greater Army: short-term, medium, and long-term.. He used one of his silver bullets for me, a protégé, to make something right.

Just as with the examples in the previous paragraph, the protégé came away with the perception that the mentor intervened not exclusively for the benefit of the protégé, but for the betterment of another unit.

Many of the participants stated that they most valued career advice they perceived as not just a regurgitation of the mentor's own career path:

EARL: Most mentors are careerist; ... they say, "I didn't do that, and you shouldn't do that either." But a different form of mentorship is: "Let's talk about you and your family, if you don't want to spend years apart, maybe it is ok to leave the Army, but what's your plan?" You work with them, through their plan; I keep in touch with them as they get out.

In this formulation, mentors were particularly valued for bringing insights into both a specific career track and techniques that were applicable across a wide range of options:

DARREN: He's the person out of all those that I would go to when I had a difficult career choice, or I needed to consider an opportunity, whether or not that's a good opportunity or a good assignment to take. What kind of path I should walk down. He was the branch manager for captains, majors, and lieutenant colonels at different points in his career, so he's got lots of experience in what it takes to move up, what kind of things I need to consider, how I should take care of my records.

Participants saw broad-based career advice as being helpful for making choices about staying in the Army or getting out, as well as choosing broadening assignments that could have later career implications.

Most of the participants stated or implied that protégés had to be seen as having some career potential to begin with. DARREN described how his mentor noted that Army officers were quick to claim high performers as protégés, but avoided perceived laggards:

We do a terrible job at finding those people that could actually use our help and apply mentorship to them...We over focus on people who are doing well. His point isn't that

certain people don't need mentoring; it's that we over-mentor some and under-mentor others. A lot of times, people that perform well seek out people that are like them. They try to find the people that are performing well and get them down the right path. It's convenient or easy to not be associated with someone who isn't doing so well, or just bypass them altogether. I look at myself and ask, *Have I always grabbed the lowest performing officer below me and spent as much time with that person as I would spend with someone who's doing really well?* I haven't.

EROL agreed:

The biggest thing is, you look at someone's internal character. When you're a mentor, you're investing as much time and trouble into the relationship as the protégé is. Hopefully, the folks that are doing it are doing it for the right reasons.

**Lived experience: Psychosocial functions.** Many participants cited an improvement in their decision making skills as a significant part of the psychosocial benefits of mentoring.

EROL described it as “the most important single benefit of mentoring” and added:

Sometimes, it takes a cooler head, somebody who's a little more senior, to be able to sit down and help you think about something objectively, help you think about something from someone else's perspective, and help you frame a resolution that works out for you.

Mentors and protégés who consistently exhibited superior decision-making skills were highly valued:

ARLO: I'm always looking for people who are great decision makers, who are logical and sound. There aren't enough people in this world who do that well. So I'm always attracted to those people... I need to be able to sit down, and say, *I'm about to pull the trigger on something, make a decision, and I need to make sure I'm doing this right.* Good mentors will do that. They'll say, “OK, let's stop and talk about it.”

EARL discussed the timely impact of such advice from a mentor who coincidentally reached out as EARL was preparing to counsel subordinates after they failed to properly prepare a range brief for the battalion commander:

I was in my office fuming with the lights out: *What the hell? What is going on here, this is absurd! How could they forget the attention to detail?* The phone rings... It's my former battalion commander. He says, “I'm calling to see how you're doing out there, what's going on?” I say: *Aw, sir, shit's just bad today.* He's like, “Oh, there's nothing too bad. I promise you that.” [He was] making all sorts of jokes; it brought me down a notch, our banter. He says “What's going on, talk to me?” I explained what happened. He said,



“Here’s what I think you’re going to do. You're going to go in there and do what I would have done, chew some ass, put some people in their place. Don’t do it. Here's what you've got to do. Go in there, explain your expectations, and give them the time to fix what they did wrong.” It was like the poles of the whole world just flopped and I was on my ass. What just happened? It's just a powerful coincidence that he called at just the right time with the right advice and it was from the least expected source.

The advice was particularly meaningful because EARL had previously perceived his mentor as someone who yelled and screamed. The deviation from the mentor’s own practice made a significant impression on him.

Another psychosocial benefit cited by participants was helping them to build their confidence and poise. Mentors were valued for helping teach coping skills that preserved calm in times of crisis:

TRAVIS: He didn’t have to shout; he would just stand and look at you, and the room would go quiet. He had that sort of presence, almost like a really good schoolteacher. The ones who have reached the level that the kids are all talking, they walk in, and the kids stop acting up. I never asked him explicitly how he did that, but I always wanted to know.

In an environment where fear is seen as a potentially lethal weakness, Army officers are often counseled to mask any outward signs of doubt to avoid undermining the confidence of others.

JOSH confessed: “It's scary doing a lot of this by yourself. At least it is to me. So, just having someone else I can talk to, who can relate what I’m going through, and that’s also helpful.”

Just as in the career function, the psychosocial benefits of mentoring were not solely limited to protégés. WILL stated that mentoring helped reinforce his own sense of self-worth:

[Being a mentor gives] a sense of self-awareness, that I do have attributes than I can offer to people, whether they're senior or junior to me. A sense of pride that people can come to you, confide in you, and ask for assistance and guidance.

COLE related how giving psychosocial advice to protégés about the importance of delegation helped him to see a gap between his own words and deeds:

So I'm sitting there, explaining [delegation] to my lieutenants, and I realize, *I just spent three hours inside the wall lockers helping organize supplies because I want them to be*

*exactly a certain way.* Is that sending the right message to the soldiers and to these cadets? Am I being a hypocrite? Am I a party apparatchik, spouting lines but not living them? If I'm doing that, how do I expect these future officers to actually achieve that?

DARREN differentiated between what he saw as a one-way exchange in career advice versus a two-way engagement on psychosocial issues:

If I'm giving career advice, it's not benefiting [me] to think about doing a job I'll never do again. If I'm advising someone to go to the Ranger Regiment<sup>14</sup> as a platoon leader, I'm not getting any leadership benefit out of that; but if I'm talking about a situation that they're under, and I've been in that experience, I can think about the experience and can talk about similar situations. That kind of exercise helps you out.

Every participant in the study stated that their own mentor experiences had made them better leaders.

Several participants affirmed that the best psychosocial engagements made room for alternate perspectives. TRAVIS believed his mentoring experiences helped him to see issues through others' eyes:

[It's about] understanding how people look at problems; how they're dealing with solving those problems and not knowing they're going about it the wrong way; all of the frustration that comes from that, not having the key to unlock the door.

DARREN saw his mentors as people who were willing to accept him despite his flaws:

It's nice having the trust that I can freely flow ideas off of certain people. If I have an idea, I can throw it to [my mentors]; they'll give me honest feedback and they won't judge me. If they don't like the idea, they're not going to change their opinion of me.

EROL sounded a cautionary note about the ability of mentors to truly see the world from a protégé's perspective:

When someone says, "Here's my options, what do you think I should do?" I don't ever think that someone should give advice and put yourself in their shoes. You can highlight the positives and negatives of each course of action. You're not in their situation: you don't know what their family is going through, they may not tell you everything. But you can say: If you go down this path, it's going to limit you this way.

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<sup>14</sup> The Ranger Regiment is an elite special operations unit; assignment there is highly prized.

**Lived experience: Role modeling.** Study participants saw great value in having multiple mentors as role models to cover different work and life choices. ARLO noted that, because of his branch's diversity of roles, he valued having two mentors who exemplified different traits:

P was around our space a lot. We started hanging out. She has a lot of qualities that I would sure like to emulate...She's a good, a truly good all-around officer. B is the consummate analyst, he's the analyst I want to be when I grow up. I want his brain. But P is the leader I want to be when I grow up. Those are two different things.

Because DARREN had a mentor who was able to give him the perspective of a serving officer, he valued also having a retired officer as a mentor:

It's nice having someone that's independent, someone that's not currently in the military, not someone I will work for in the future, that can give me that experience, that will listen to me, give me that perspective, someone that's had the long career and has probably experienced most of the frustrations I've been through.

DARREN emphasized that he saw the retired officer's career path as one that he could potentially emulate. All study participants described some aspect of role modeling in more than one mentor.

Some study participants noted that they used their mentors as role models even when the mentors were not consciously imparting behavior to them. Participants held this as separate and distinct from just observing other officers. Because a mentor had first earned the participant's trust, the participant was more willing to observe and learn indirectly from the mentor:

TRAVIS: That conversation got my wheels spinning, that he was somebody I wanted to watch and learn from. [My mentor] always really had my attention after that. Even when we weren't talking to each other, I felt like I was learning a lot from him. I learned some things not to do; he did have the occasional gaffe where he'd say something insensitive or didn't gauge his audience correctly. That taught me about understanding to think before you speak.

EARL described the role modeling from one of his mentors as "symbiotic", noting specifically that by observing his mentor, he "learned how to wield influence instead of just using rank."

Two participants shared that even the negative examples they observed in non-mentors were useful in future mentoring engagements:

**JOSH:** We put so much stock in great leaders. We also need the bad leaders too. You need darkness to realize there's light. I've been thinking about that a lot; both of those aspects, good mentors and bad leaders, at least what I perceive as bad leaders, helped bring to life to me what mentorship is.

**JEAN:** A lot of time I've gotten my professional development and my growth from watching other people's mistakes, because I'm a firm believer in learning by observation. There are too many mistakes for every lieutenant to have to make all of them. In those small snapshots in those interactions I've had with various people, many small grains of sand eventually make a sand dune.

**Lived experience: Peer mentoring.** Participant perceptions of peer mentoring varied widely, more so than on any other topic in this study. Over half of the participants affirmed that they had experienced peer mentoring in some way while still noting its drawbacks and limitation. Participants with a negative perception of peer mentoring acknowledged the possibility of its existence but cited aspects that kept it from being true mentoring. Almost all of the participants noted that peer mentoring had to be done in conjunction with other forms of mentoring. COLE most directly made this point:

There needs to be both [peer mentorship and traditional mentorship] to be effective. To really truly grow, you do need that senior person, who's actively engaged in the relationship, helping you, providing the depth of experience, providing the perspective that you're not always going to get from a peer and you can't get yourself. At the same time, at least for me as a specialty guy, there is a lot of value in that peer to peer mentorship, where you and another group of peers are actively working together to help each other grow...As with any relationship, the people in it are just as critical as what it is. I'd say it's 75-25, 75% traditional, 25% peer.

Participants with positive perceptions of peer mentoring cited a depth of engagement with peers that set it apart from routine peer contact. Some members noted that such relationships had been powerful influencers on them while acknowledging their relative rarity:

**WILL:** Peer mentoring really has to do with the level of help that they're needing. If it's just small things, then it's really peer to peer. If it's bigger projects, maybe issues they're

having with their command, or the way they are as an individual, then they're more self-aware and they're coming to you on things you wouldn't necessarily go to other leaders with. Things like saying, "I realize that I have this weakness, how do you see me?" That's something that not a lot of peers are willing to do on most levels.

COLE: The nice thing about a peer mentoring piece is, there is still that growth, that development that occurs, but it's more relevant, a little more meaningful. When you're seeking out help, on next steps, and what works, how to go forward, that ability to find someone who's your peer, who can help grow and develop you, is huge.

Other participants noted that peer mentoring could grow quickly and organically, without some of the initial awkwardness that could be part of traditional mentoring:

JEAN: [The peer] was there for his facility, and I thought that was a really effective conversation. It wasn't a one-time occurrence. In the first month, he would shoot me an email, give me a call, stop me at the morning meeting, ask me a question or two. I would touch base with him, we had dinner once more. During his first month and his ramp-up, I coached him through the process. I guess it worked, because he kept coming back to me. I didn't get told to stop it, so it seemed to be a fairly effective methodology. That has been one of my better leading up, peer mentorship, but not relationship experiences.

Both participants who saw peer mentoring as positive and those who expressed doubts about its efficacy stated they saw the inherent competition among peer officers as being a roadblock to mentoring practice:

EARL: I would say there are some professional nuances that make [peer mentoring] not a reliable form of mentorship, because you do have people who are out there for themselves, and you have people whose number one goal is to crush you, to be the Number One, and you're in their way. You can learn from peers, but I don't see it being mentoring in the classical sense.

JOSH: When it comes to peer mentoring...it's very hard. Maybe it's JACK and N, that they're the ones that break the barriers down. I think it's hard for a peer to look at another peer as a mentor. I think we have a natural slant towards competition. You've got the Type A personality thing going on, so for me to look at them as mentors, I have to throw that out of the window. Which I'm perfectly fine with, since I have a desire to learn more and get better at what I'm doing.

COLE: It takes the right group of individuals to do that. I've been in situations where the peer group are all vested in being the top block:<sup>15</sup> "I have to be the best, and if you have to fail for me to be the best, so be it."

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<sup>15</sup> Army Officer evaluations contain a ranking system in which senior raters assess rated officers as Above Center of Mass (ACOM), Center of Mass (COM), or Below Center of Mass (BCOM). ACOM ratings (known as *top blocks*)

In this view, as long as officers are competing with one another for assignments or high ratings, competition will make true peer mentoring impossible.

Participants who voiced reservations also cited the difficulty of differentiating peer mentoring from the routine peer engagement that happens as a matter of course in their day-to-day work:

TRAVIS: I listened a lot to [my platoon leader] because he had a better idea of how the Army works and what needed to be done. I would still say he was my peer, but being as green as I was at the time, it felt like there was a huge difference.

EROL: I'm actually a mentor to someone who is close to me [in date of rank<sup>16</sup>]... I wouldn't call it a mentor-protégé relationship, it might just be colleagues helping each other with their own development. Something like, "Hey, I was in that meeting, how did I come across?" That way, you can get some honest feedback. It's more in the sense of a 360 feedback<sup>17</sup> than a peer mentor relationship...I think [it transitions from 360 feedback to peer mentoring] when they're seeking advice and counsel on career decisions, issues, and they're genuinely asking you for advice in that regard.

JEAN noted that she sometimes saw situations as peer mentoring that her peers did not: "To them, I was [JEAN]; to me, I was practicing for when I had lieutenants, although it was a slightly different relationship when I did get lieutenants."

Two participants flatly rejected the idea of peer mentoring. ARLO explained his opposition:

I am cautious with regard to peer mentoring, just like I'm cautious in talking about peers being involved in professionally developing each other...I thought it was funny when, as an old captain, this young captain kept coming back to me and choosing me, when all I was trying to do was help him prep for his company command. I saw us more as peers, but he didn't. 10 years later, I still joke that we're peers, and he jokes that we're clearly not...that's where the differences in stages in stages in life, the differences in experiences, come in; there has to be something in life that differentiates you two, to give you that different vantage point, or that aperture.

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are highly prized because they must make up less than 50% of a senior rater's evaluations and in practice often make up less than 33%.

<sup>16</sup> Army officers are assigned dates of rank that mark the effective date of their promotions. An officer with an earlier date of rank is technically senior to an officer of the same rank with a later date.

<sup>17</sup> In 2011, the Army introduced a *360-degree feedback* system in which soldiers solicit anonymous evaluations of their performance and potential from peers and subordinates.

DARREN concurred with this view, noting that while he had multiple peer engagements that he viewed as developmentally valuable, none of them crossed the line into mentoring.

**Lived experience: Communications in mentoring.** All of the study participants affirmed the value of face to face mentoring, but stressed that mentoring relationships can begin and continue over other means. Several participants stressed that they would use a medium most effective for the type of conversation they wanted to have with a mentor or protégé:

JOSH: With the phone, if JACK and I get really excited about something, and the excitement level is high, and we're too excited to jam something out on email, or we just want to talk about it here and now, it's a straight up phone call. Or if we want to go in depth about a potential topic or something else, we'll set aside time for a 45 minute or hour-long conversation on the phone.

COLE: It was very common for [participants] to drop our email and say, if you don't feel comfortable talking about this here, email me. I had multiple emails with platoon leaders outside of the Forum, and there were several people who would email me in sidebars.

Study participants saw CMC<sup>18</sup>-based mentoring as a natural extension of mentoring practice brought about by changing times:

EROL: Whether it happens later in Facebook or in person, the whole process of mentoring has to evolve with society as we have. Life exists now in social media, in chat, in text messages, in person, over the phone. It's just looking at all different methods that we communicate by and trying to utilize all of them.

TRAVIS: It's on the protégé to transition it from short-term to long-term, especially when you can't elicit an answer. It's on the protégé in the virtual experience to come forward with something...It's still a form of mentorship, even if it's not regular. If you keep talking over a long period, we're at least communicating and I can impart some of my experience. That's when you see how the long term is going to pan out.

ARLO described himself as having “half a dozen mentors, and I use them all in different ways. It always depends on where we are in the world.”

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<sup>18</sup> Computer-Mediated Communications, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Several participants noted that their CMC-based mentoring was significantly affected by age differences. These differences varied from level of comfort to the ubiquity of certain means:

COLE: I'm finding, particularly with my soldiers that are 30 and below, that they live their lives on social media. That has changed how I use social media as well...calling or texting someone on the phone has different connotations to them than does sending a Facebook message... That's the difference in generations; but there's still a desire, a need for social interactions. The mechanism by which we get it has changed; less face to face, more digital, more virtual.

JOSH: With the older guys, the S3 and the XO, that's a lot of text messages and stuff, the phone calls are usually when they initiate. I think that's what they're more comfortable with, that's my opinion, anyway.

JEAN: You may be the first colonel I ever reached out and friended [on Facebook]. Facebook is one of those things that, it's your job as a superior to reach out to your subordinates and Facebook friend them. It's a lot more personal...From my perspective, it's not appropriate to reach out and try to Facebook friend [senior officers]. I have noticed, though, that the younger generation, my lieutenants and cadets, they have no problem reaching out and Facebook friending someone. That's why my name is spelled so strangely, because my cadets from this past summer found me on Facebook...I don't normally accept those requests [from cadets].

Some of the age distinction is relative. Two quotes provide an interesting contrast: WILL, the youngest participant in the study, remarked “[The platoon sergeant], he's more senior, he had more of a mature experience. As with the soldiers, they're a little more junior, they're not as comfortable contacting me on the phone after the fact.” EROL, one of the oldest participants, stated “This generation just doesn't talk as much as we did. We would use the phone, they would rather have seven threads of text messages going with seven different people than actually talk to someone. It's amazing.”

Almost all of the study participants singled out Facebook as a useful tool for mentoring. Among the elements consistently cited was the ability to remain in loose contact with mentors or protégés. DARREN stated, “You can tell if someone's having a bad day by reading their status and you can reach out to them; that's something I can't see if we're just using voice or email.”



EARL concurred: “It's an easy medium, you can gauge what they're doing and how they're doing based on their posts.” Participants who used Facebook for mentoring also praised it for its persistence. Facebook was seen as a way to get to people faster and with less hassle:

JEAN: With my actual friends that I mentor, of course they're on my Facebook. It's a great method to do it; it's a lot more convenient than email. I don't know what your email address is right now, but I can Facebook message you all day long and it will get to you.

EARL: I mostly use Facebook [to keep in touch]. It makes it easy. You've got Messenger, it goes right to their phones.

DARREN: I think mentorship has been easier on my part because of stuff like Facebook, which allows me to reach out to a lot of people...For convenience in a time-limited world, I prefer Facebook for the advantages it gives in terms of being able to go back and forth. It allows me to do a lot of stuff with less time than on phone, where it's only one person, back and forth, and e-mail, again, where it can get lost in the shuffle. Facebook messages can too, but I get far less Facebook messages than emails on a daily basis, so it's a lot easier to focus in on those.

Another factor contributing to Facebook's popularity in Army mentoring was its ability to bridge the communication gaps caused by being physically located in different time zones:

JEAN: A lot of the time, when the Army sends you on your way, you can be three to eleven time zones away from your friends, and that makes phone calls difficult. So in considering communications, distance is an interesting one to contemplate as well. Peer mentoring can be an after-hours thing; I can Facebook my friends at 11:30 at night and no one is going to care. But I can't call my mentor at 11:30 at night because they have lives.

EARL concurred, stating “[My mentors are] usually within 12 hours of being reached [via Facebook], at any time, ever, even when I'm [deployed].”

One non-CMC mechanism for mentoring that came up in some sessions was using meals as a means to facilitate conversation. WILL noted that his continuing mentor relationship with his platoon sergeant was sustained by occasional lunches where they would reconnect with one another. EROL struggled to explain why he felt so strongly about it:

To me, just from a purely personal perspective, there's something about sharing a meal that forges relationships, more so than other things. Someone taking someone else out to lunch; it's a small gesture, but I think it goes a long way, without having to be seen as a

bribe or favoritism...This is purely just the corny side of me: breaking bread with somebody, it just opens up a different world, especially if going to a different kind of place that the person's never been to before, and they're trying something new.

ARLO stressed: "I favor face to face [mentoring], I really do; there's something about having a meal that's actually sort of my preferred medium."

**Lived experience: Coaching vs mentoring.** Participants differed on whether the Army's doctrinal definitions of coaching and mentoring overlapped in practice. Some participants saw the key distinction between the two as being the personal nature of the topics discussed:

JOAN: Coaching is a lot more task focused, where I'm trying to teach you how to call the sergeant major, hand receipts, counseling. To me, coaching is very object-oriented, with a task, conditions, and standards...Mentoring becomes more organic, free-flowing; it tends to revolve around more around individualized issues and problems...It's a perspective based thing. I do a lot more mentoring with my cadets, and at the time, I probably did more coaching than mentoring with my lieutenants, just because I had specific outcomes in my job...Mentorship tends to be more personalized.

ARLO: Mentoring is about the relationship. Coaching is about things. Coaching, as I've observed it, tends to be far more option picked up and dropped: "I've got this problem; I'm looking for an answer to this; I have my answer, thank you." You choose your mentor, because that's how mentors work, you choose yours. Your mentor usually doesn't get a vote in it. You find out you're a mentor, and you go, *Son of a bitch, I'm a mentor, how did that happen? Why am I still hearing from this person? Why am I still calling them, they haven't worked for me in ten years?*

Other participants saw the primary differentiation between coaching and mentoring as the time horizon involved:

INTERVIEWER: It sounds like your key criteria for mentoring is a sustained relationship. Is that an accurate characterization?

TRAVIS: I think that's definitely true. I wish I had that more.... The coaching aspect depends on the person: some will be more inclined to come back to you having confided in you once, or if it's towards the Forum, that it gave enough details to cross the line into sharing.

JOSH: I see coaching as a step down from [mentoring]. A leader, somebody who is more senior to me, giving me some sort of advice, whether it be on a project, career, or whatever, but not really a deeper, ongoing relationship.

INTERVIEWER: So coaching is more transient, much shorter in duration, while mentorship is a longer term relationship?

JOSH: Yes. I see mentorship as a noun, coaching as a verb. Within a mentorship relationship there is coaching, but just because there's coaching, doesn't mean there's a mentor-protégé relationship.

WILL: I've had some time to reflect over the past 24 hours, I do really see a differentiation between teaching, coaching, and mentoring, now that I think about it. Mentoring is really long-term relationship building, where coaching is a specific type of mentoring, as well as teaching is a specific type of mentoring.

Four participants made no mention of any overlap or conflict between coaching and mentoring.

**Lived experience: Mentoring in the chain of command.** Eight of the nine study participants reported having some type of mentoring relationship with a member of their chain of command,<sup>19</sup> either as a mentor or as a protégé. On its face, this appeared to be a misapplication of the term, as mentoring requires the relationship to be voluntary and mutual for both participants, a seemingly impossible criterion for a hierarchical connection. However, when challenged on this point, every participant who experienced mentoring in the chain of command insisted that it was voluntary and mutual. JOSH noted that his efforts to develop a struggling lieutenant were rooted both in that lieutenant's desire to improve and JOSH's unwillingness to write him off as a lost cause. DARREN stressed:

I could have easily just gone to my once-a-year evaluation counseling and sat in. [Instead], I would drop by [my commander's] office on my way out at night, we'd talk, or we'd see each other in the hallway and we'd start talking.

EARL stated that the command climate he set as a staff officer allowed his subordinates to be voluntary participants in mentoring:

If they were to give me feedback, "Hey, you're wasting my time," I'd have understood that. They never said that, and you can sense it, if you're an empathetic person: *Hey, they're not really getting anything from this.* If we ran into a dry spot with nothing else to talk to, we'd stop. And that was OK.

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<sup>19</sup> *Chain of command* refers to the hierarchy of a soldier's superiors. The chain of command extends all the way from the soldier's immediate supervisor to the President of the United States.

Mentoring in the chain of command consistently sprung from a leader-initiated developmental relationship that grew into mentoring over time. COLE described his relationship with one of his subordinate staff officers:

With the active duty lieutenant, that one didn't feel forced or required. We did spend a lot of time talking about duty things, but we spent time after duty talking about other things. We're both captains; he's very junior, he's only been a captain for a year and a half, while I get my board look for major this year, so there's a number of years between us. He still has reached out; he's asked questions, we've had some dialogue that exists even through there's no current ties.

JEAN saw mentoring with her subordinates as growing out of an initial imperative:

I had a very personal reason for them to become better officers and supervisors: if they didn't know how to handle what was going on at 3 am, they were going to call me...Some of it was altruistic, but at the beginning, not all of it was. At the beginning, I didn't have the time to consider them as people, they were AOICs<sup>20</sup>; but as I got more comfortable in my battle rhythm as an OIC, that changed a lot. I became a much better mentor for it, but at the time, I had a very specific set of requirements.

ARLO acknowledged that such leader-initiated mentoring was rare:

Even when I was his rater, the level of openness and the level of intimacy in topics that we discussed, the issues we went into, went far beyond what it needed to...It's dumb luck when you have someone in your chain of command who also makes for a suitable mentor...That he was willing to open up about all of these things was not inappropriate; that he was choosing me as a mentor was not inappropriate. But, that both things were happening at the same time was uncommon.

ARLO's assessment of the rarity of chain of command mentoring is borne out by other participants' reports of it as only one of many mentoring experiences.

One natural concern stemming from mentoring in the chain of command is the perception of favoritism or special treatment due to the mentoring relationship. Participants noted that mentors in the chain of command were usually able to avoid that perception by having a common baseline of development of all of their subordinates. DARREN noted that his mentor

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<sup>20</sup> Assistant Officers in Charge.

did recurring counseling for all of his leaders. ARLO stressed that “what he would do for me, he would do for anybody.” EROL emphasized that he was able to avoid perceptions of favoritism on his part both by being upfront about the relationship and highlighting the protégé’s superior work performance:

People knew that we worked together in the past; I would always preface it by saying: *Hey, he's worked with me in the past; I'm bringing him in to be detachment sergeant because of his expertise, his work ethic.* No one was looking at it, going, “Oh, he's playing favorites”, because this guy earns every bit of it.

No participant reported negative outcomes of mentoring within the chain of command.

Several participants stated limits to their ability to mentor within the chain of command.

DARREN noted, “I don't think mentorship starts from day one as a company commander because you're trying to figure out who the person is, get them going in the right direction, and make sure everything is going right.” WILL expanded on that aspect:

[The participation wasn't entirely voluntary and mutual] at first...But when they continue to come to you for assistance and suggestions and guidance, then it turns from my role as a supervisor to more of a mentoring relationship...It really opened a door for them, for me to be more approachable; because we had that initial small group sit down, they felt more comfortable coming to me for things like that. One of the soldiers came to me, because she was having troubles at home and just wanted an ear to listen to. It really opened up a door to mentoring more than anything else. The approachability of a leader and a mentor is extremely important in how well the mentor can relate to others.

EARL mused that although he would have liked to continue the mentoring relationships he formed in command, he felt constrained in doing so by his current circumstances:

They are [deployed]; they have units here, and some of those guys are scattered into some of the shops I work with. I still professionally keep in touch, but as an outgoing commander, you have to allow that incoming commander some leeway.

The participants made it clear that not everyone is comfortable with or capable of mentoring in the chain of command.

Some jobs appear to be less conducive to chain of command mentoring than others; specifically, positions in the Army's training base were cited as being more difficult to mentor in. JOSH described it this way:

INTERVIEWER: Why do you think that your time as an instructor doesn't seem to have been as conducive to building a stronger mentoring relationship?

JOSH: I think it's the relationship piece. The way the class was structured, there was a lot of work on your own, the instructor overseeing you. I think what we missed out on were shared experiences together and time.

INTERVIEWER: It seems that the common denominator [for mentoring relationships that came out of instructing] was that they showed an extra interest, they took an additional step, they did something forward that lent itself to a relationship?

JOSH: Yeah. I don't want to push myself on anyone.

DARREN concurred:

It's tough to [mentor at BOLC<sup>21</sup>] because you've got 40 lieutenants at one time, and not a lot of time to spend with each one of them. There are certainly lieutenants that would come and seek out advice more, but I don't think it ever crossed the line into a mentorship relationship... As a BOLC instructor, you've got forty or so lieutenants, so that stands in the way of your ability to really reach out. It's a 13-week period versus a year or two year long relationship... as an instructor, you're trying to develop and ensure that person has those basic skills they need to succeed.

**Lived experience: Cross-gender mentoring.** Cross-gender mentoring experiences varied widely among study participants. Three participants had never done cross-gender mentoring of any kind. Three had only experienced it as either a protégé or a mentor and three had engaged in cross-gender mentoring as both a mentor and a protégé. When their frequency of cross-gender mentoring was pointed out to them during the member checks, over half of the participants, including ones from all three of the above categories, expressed surprise or stated they had never considered cross-gender mentoring as a distinct function.

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<sup>21</sup> Basic Officer Leader Course. Most Army officers use the term to refer to BOLC B, the initial branch training received by newly commissioned lieutenants.

The officers who had no or limited cross-gender mentoring overwhelmingly attributed it to the lack of women in their units when they were junior officers. All three of the combat arms officers who participated in the study had no experience in cross-gender mentoring:

JOSH: Being a combat arms guy, I've only vary rarely come into [professional] contact with females. As a matter of fact, I was thinking about it: I've been in the Army now for 11 years and only 6 months out of that time was I working with someone of the opposite sex. That plays a huge part... The assignment system is determining, almost randomly, who I come in contact with most of the time and who I'm influenced by. I think it's so important, because of that, to reach out beyond the system, to link in with people.

DARREN: Up until I was an HHC commander, I never had a female subordinate. I never had a female above me in any type of capacity, where I had a relationship with that person.... I don't think it's a gender thing so much as I'm in a branch that has kept me away from being able to develop that relationship.

TRAVIS: Part of it was, at my first unit, there were no women at all, either in the field artillery battalion or infantry battalion. During that time period, the battalion staff was closed to women as well. So, as far as unit experiences, [women] weren't around.

Other participants who only had cross-gender experiences as a mentor or a protégé, but not both, reported similar assignment barriers:

COLE: On the officer side, in the Cav.<sup>22</sup> we had so few female officers. In the units I've been in, there haven't been as many females. We did have a female in our senior command group, but she was focused more on her people.

EROL: Within the unit I was in, there just happened to be more male commanders; I only had one female and she went AGR.<sup>23</sup> I think it just happened to be luck of the draw there.

Both COLE and EROL serve in career fields that have a significant proportion of female officers.

Participants from all categories of cross-gender mentoring stated that perceptions of potential fraternization between mentors and protégés of different genders were a major barrier.

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<sup>22</sup> Slang term for a Cavalry unit. Cavalry units conduct reconnaissance and security missions to locate the enemy and prevent the enemy from determining the disposition of friendly forces.

<sup>23</sup> Active Guard / Reserve, a different reserve component career path than EROL's.

The following quotes are reproduced verbatim to show the remarkable similarity of language among the participants:

DARREN: At least in the Army, some people are concerned about perceptions of mentoring, male mentor to female protégé; high profile cases like what happened with General Sinclair<sup>24</sup> don't help that perception.

JEAN: It also becomes an issue when [people think that] perception is reality and people have nothing better to do than poke holes and prod. With same-gender mentoring, I have no problem doing that alone, or even alone in the building. I do have a problem doing that when it's a dude. It's not about my personal safety, his personal safety, it's about the safety of our reputations. Even with the lifting of Don't Ask, Don't Tell<sup>25</sup>, you and I both know that perception is much more likely to spring to mind with a male captain and a female lieutenant than with a female captain and a female lieutenant... You have to be careful; you have to be cognizant; you have to accept facts. "Nothing was going on" is not going to fly. It just isn't. I enjoy mentoring, I like having protégés, and I enjoy being a protégé. But I am not about to put my career on line for that.

ARLO: Sadly, there's always a concern of perception; for me, that's a sensitivity that dates back to my days at OCS, where we were taught things like "Never be alone with a female for the sake of appearances." That's to avoid being in a situation you can't explain. But I've never had anybody accuse me or, I think, even suspect me of anything inappropriate, because there's never been anything. But it's always been a concern, because in the Army, we can be stupid at times about things like this.

EARL: There's something to be said that distinguishes between environments where we're in our duty uniform, in an office setting and when you're at a pool with a brand-new female lieutenant in a bikini with a beer in her hand. I don't think our [Army] culture is mature enough for that. I think there's room for misperception... Those concerns always exist in that informal atmosphere; you run the risk, if you're not careful, of losing that professional context if you're not mature and guarded against it. It takes discipline to be the older person in a mentoring relationship and still maintain some semblance of professionalism, even when your hair is down.

COLE: I was always a little concerned about creating opportunities for someone to think something inappropriate was going on... I wouldn't think twice about grabbing a guy to talk to him, pulling him aside into a room and closing the door. When you're dealing with a female, especially in a deployed environment, pulling her into a closed door room can create an awkward situation. [With female subordinates], I would try to set a time to talk and I would leave it up to them whether we left the door open or closed. It does make relationship a little more different. There were times when they sought me out, and I

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<sup>24</sup> Brigadier General Jeffrey Sinclair was court-martialed in 2014 for improper relationships with three women in his command, one of whom was his aide.

<sup>25</sup> The Department of Defense policy on sexual orientation from 1993-2011 was colloquially known as *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*. The lifting of the policy in 2011 abolished most restrictions on sexual orientation in military service.



would ask: *Do you want to leave the door open or close the door and have discussions?* It adds a level of consideration that you have to take into account.

All five participant views follow a similar pattern: while they have never entertained the idea of an inappropriate relationship with a mentor or protégé, they feared the perception of misconduct to the point that it altered their mentoring practice.

A few participants noted that perceptions of spouses were a significant hindrance to cross gender mentoring. EARL expressed puzzlement about his lack of a female protégé:

EARL: In that group [of lieutenants], I had a female [officer]. I still keep in touch with her on Facebook. She doesn't approach me as much as the guys do; I'm not sure why that is... I'm sure my wife wouldn't appreciate her writing me too much.

JEAN bluntly stated her own experiences with this phenomenon:

As a woman, I find it difficult to make [a mentoring] connection with my superiors, because most of them are dudes and most of them have a wife. I've had to work something out with one of my NCOs before where, when the wife called him, I was to shut my face in my own office, because he didn't want to have to go home and deal with the question, "Who was that girl in the background?" "That was my boss."

In both cases, a significant factor in the spouse's perception was that the female officer was unmarried.

Some of the male participants in the study noted that the Army's current emphasis on eliminating sexual harassment and sexual assault in the ranks weighed on how they approached cross-gender mentoring:

COLE: For me, while I was attempting to be a mentor, I was trying to be mindful of the big concerns about sexual harassment and sexual assault. Even the language I would use would be different with women than with men; you don't want to come across as offensive, inconsiderate. When talking among guys, you can engage in guy talk; but in my experience, guy talk won't gain you points as helpful or useful with women. It's an added difficulty in communication as you try to communicate.

EROL: Especially in today's age of SHARP<sup>26</sup> culture that we're living in, some of the locker room talk that might have gone on years ago needs to stop in general...But that

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<sup>26</sup> Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention. The Army requires every soldier to participate in recurring classes on how to prevent and report incidents of both.

also speaks to how we're evolving as a society. That whole locker room talk thing, it's good that the Army is starting to stamp it out, saying that it's just not good in general and needs to stop. We kind of winked at it before, that it's OK to say certain things around certain people; I think we need to finally clarify, that we need to be the same around everyone. Just don't do it.

One point that needs to be emphasized with these two quotes: neither participant was in any way dismissive of the Army's efforts to reduce incidences of sexual assault and sexual harassment.

The researcher asked the three participants with the most experience in cross-gender mentoring to reflect on whether they believed cross-gender mentoring was appreciably different from single-gender mentoring. Their responses varied widely:

ARLO: [long pause] No. [long pause] No, I don't think it's different. I'm running this through my head. My mentors treat me the same; we have the same levels of intimacy; they ask me all the same questions; they function the same; they ask after me in all the same ways. And I don't think there's a difference in how I've handled protégés... From the pure professionalism of the concept of mentoring, being a mentor and a protégé, the functionality of it; no, I don't see a difference in it.

JEAN: I do [see a difference in cross-gender mentoring]. Some of it is because, I know that when I've sought out mentoring for various situations and issue, sometimes I have very specific issues or questions that I don't know that most men will understand. Things like having a family, or working professional planning around personal planning, or dealing with male subordinates who don't respect you... I can't ask a dude because one, from their perspective, they have no idea about the questions that I'm asking or their experience is only second hand and two, I don't know that I would have those life planning conversations with many of the male officers I've met. Their implicit and explicit biases that show up in casual conversation, things that are not done at a knowing level, would make it a really odd, awkward conversation.

WILL: I don't know if it is different. I do think you're more willing to go to someone of the opposite sex, it's the nature of humanity; it's just easier to talk to them sometimes... I don't know if I have an answer to why it's easier. It just is.

JEAN further noted that mentor relationships sometimes substituted for social interactions "that my male counterparts get talking about football scores, or hunting, or fishing, or whatever. It's stuff that doesn't interest me or doesn't apply."

**The Professional Forums as effective spaces for mentoring.** All study participants saw the Forums as effective spaces for enabling mentoring to some degree. The most frequently cited element of Forum effectiveness was the availability of different experiences that both mentors and protégés could draw upon. For some participants, the Forums were a useful mechanism to tap into specific career field-related knowledge:

DARREN: My organization now, I don't necessarily have the same breadth; there's an MP officer, a logistics officer, an MI officer, and then two infantry officers. But if I go on the Forums, I have someone who's done just about everything you've done in the Army. You'll get any number of officers willing to talk to you, any number of officers willing to come on and answer questions. Definitely, for me, it's the exchange of ideas, the exchange of knowledge, which you just can't get in a unit that doesn't have that many people around.

COLE: That's where the Forums, for me as a specialty branch officer, fill a gap. How do you learn to be a medical platoon leader when the nearest medical platoon leader is 4 hours away and maybe not even drilling the same weekend you're drilling? Your brigade MEDOPS officer doesn't even know who you are, doesn't care who you are, and he's another 3 hours away in a different direction and definitely not drilling the same weekend as you. So where do you go? Who can fill that gap? [My mentor] was great...at teaching me the fundamentals of being an officer, but I had to fill in the specialty piece, and the Forums were a great way to do that.

Other participants were more interested in tapping into specific experiences represented on the Forums, some of which ultimately led to mentoring relationships:

EARL: There are a lot of platoon leaders going [to the PlatoonLeader Forum] because they have nowhere else to go, especially if you're from a small ROTC detachment. So you have a lot of commanders and new captains who will pop down to the PL Forums just to check it out. I noticed myself doing that: you go in there, pop in, and see what the hot trending topics are.

JEAN: It is a great way to reach out, connect with people, that you can then go off line and shoot them an email: Hey, I saw your post on this, and I'm really not comfortable talking about [these things]. Can you give me some insight on that?

The experiences in this regard corresponded closely with mentoring actions in the career function domain.

Several members saw the Forums as a way to connect with officers who had similar perspectives on officership or outlooks on life. For them, the Forums' role in mentoring was less about tapping into specific skill sets and more about finding someone who matched or complemented their own approaches to life and leadership:

TRAVIS: That's where I get most of my mentoring... On the Forums, there are people I can keep going back to. ... I feel like the Forums, you have a group of people that you know will contribute wherever they are; they're going to write something, at least give you something. There's nothing worse than putting yourself out there and getting zero replies.

WILL [The Forums are] something that I can point people to for assistance if they needed it. You're on the site, something catches your eye and makes something click in your brain: I can take this and make it better; I can take this and use it; I can start a conversation with this person because they're having the same issues I am. 100%, I believe that the professional Forums are mentorship oriented.

JEAN described her engagement with potential protégés in the Forums as part of “my firm belief that the people who show up, looking for help, seeking help, truly do want to change, but not the drive-bys.” Many of the experiences described reflect role-modeling functions of mentoring.

Several participants noted the role that the Forums played in providing encouragement or support for mentoring relationships during difficult times. JOSH noted how essential this was for him:

When I'm surrounded by people who are just getting beat down by the job; soldiers' shoes are popping out<sup>27</sup>; a brigade commander is just beating the hell out of his battalion commanders; battalion commanders are struggling to build a team of company commanders, where only one or two of them cared, and the rest are treading water; it's good to reach out beyond that to find someone that's not in that moment, that's not hampered by that, that has similar level of passion that I can connect to. For me, that was a huge thing, being sustained with the level of morale, motivation, passion that I wasn't getting in my command, and was coming directly from the Forums, because of the environment I was in.

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<sup>27</sup> When leaving the Army, some soldiers choose to tie the laces of their boots together and throw them over a power or telephone line in front of their unit headquarters. The boots hanging on a wire are seen as a last act of defying military authority (Gomez, 2013).

Others noted that the collective nature of engagement in the Forums allowed for a greater extent of mentoring that what would be possible with a traditional dyad:

DARREN: If I mentor a cadet here in my office, what he and I talk about stays between him and me unless he shares it. But if I mentor a young captain on the Forum, that person is going to get that experience, but others can reach in. It's almost an enhanced version of mentorship; it's not always as personal, but it can lead to that, because I think most people who contribute to the Forums are very open to any of the people that are on the Forums contacting them and seeking advice. I guess it extends the ability to mentor beyond our traditional roles.

COLE: [The Forums aren't] just single people mentoring, it's almost like a group mentorship, where you can have a lot of people who can validate or share your experience. It was great as a young platoon leader to ask a question and get a lot of feedback from 2 or 3 different people... You're able to tap into, instead of one officer's experiences, you tap into that whole community of former platoon leaders and current platoon leaders. You get the historic and the fresh perspectives. That is something you're just not going to get in the standard mentor-protégé relationship... In a traditional mentorship relationship, what you're getting is a single person's perspective and experience. If your mentor hasn't dealt with your problem, then you're getting their opinion, not their experience. On the Forums you can get both.

EROL stated that working in one of the Forum leadership positions served as a powerful catalyst for his protégé experience:

PERRY...asked to me to take more of a leadership role within the community itself. We started having some conversations. At the time, he was a major, I was a second lieutenant. We just started some discussions, I would bounce some ideas off of him. We started a good working relationship. As it evolved, we continued to have dialogue, it became more of a friendship than just a mentor-protégé type relationship.

One unique aspect of the Professional Forums that bears mentioning here is the Rendezvous experience. The Rendezvous is an annual offsite hosted by the Forum core team that brings Forum informal leaders together for several days of training and team-building. Several Forum participants pointed to the Rendezvous as being a seminal event in building mentoring relationships both in and beyond the Forums:

JOSH: The first thing we did [at the Rendezvous] was the leadership exercise, where you get one minute to tell a leadership story about someone that impacted you, or just a story about leadership that's meaningful. And then everybody would put their arms on someone

else whose story was big for them. I remember thinking to myself, *I can't imagine a single battalion commander trying this in a unit*. So I felt, for me personally, that I was among people that thought the same way I did and cared about the same things I did... I feel like, a lot of times out in the Army, rank and branch and all these other things really get in the way and impede any growth from happening.

WILL: [The Rendezvous] was a great experience. I met a lot of great people; it was good seeing that there's others out there who want to better the Army, who believe in mentorship, who believe that if we work together, talk about things and dialogue about things, that you can change things for the better. It opened my eyes that there is more than just the Platoon Leader Forum out there; that there's a lot of good organizations, there's the Company Command Forum, and other resources and venues for you to use.

COLE summed up his Rendezvous experience: "For me, as an early user, it was about my question, something I want feedback on, or a view to be validated. But there's a whole other level of understanding that came from the Rendezvous."

**The Professional Forums as ineffective spaces for mentoring.** Some participants cited concerns or shortfalls with using the Forums themselves as spaces for mentoring. JOAN noted that the "quasi-public" nature of the Forums could lead to some misrepresentations by Forum members:

Very rarely does anyone show up on the Forums and say, "Dude, this was such a huge fuckup I made, and I want you guys to know." Rarely do you see someone who will admit that, sometimes things don't go the way you planned. When they retell the story, it's always, I was so perfect at this. When I retell this, the plan that actually worked is the one I put forward.

TRAVIS noted that Forum participation often suffers from significant time lapses, which makes sustained mentoring through the Forums difficult to achieve:

You'll have somebody, they'll be on the Forum as a cadet for 6-12 months and they'll disappear. Then they're a lieutenant, and they'll show up for 6-12 months on the Forum, and then disappear. Then they're a captain a couple of years later, and they'll show up for 6-12 months on Company Command and disappear for good, because they're done with their company-level assignments... If you try to put it into the equivalent of a face to face discussion, that lapse would be kind of rude. Someone gives you a lot of help, asks how you're doing, and you don't say anything. But when it's abstracted and online, it just doesn't register with people.

DARREN put forth a paradox: some Forum members were so active or engaged that he felt like his queries would add to that person's workload:

TOBY is someone I know I can count on if I have a question, or if I need advice. He's not someone that I would say is my go-to person. Partly that's because I know TOBY has a ton of junior officers that are seeking his advice, so I don't want to clog up his inbox every time I have a question. I think I would probably reserve my biggest questions, conundrums, or needs for him, versus spending more time with others on the lesser or more routine questions of mentorship.

EARL highlighted a specific limitation of the CompanyCommand Forum:

I feel like CompanyCommand is more of a peer to peer kind of thing... You don't see too often a lieutenant colonel who had been a battalion commander who came down, not on my stuff, anyway. It's not a sustained mechanism of the Forums. It's a good catalyst for questions, but really it seems to be a captains' club.

WILL voiced concerns that it was more difficult to use the Forums for the frequent back and forth involved in mentoring:

I would say the structure of the Forum isn't as friendly with messaging. It's easier just to pull up Global email<sup>28</sup> and send an email. In the future, if we could figure out a better Forum, a better way to reach out to soldiers and leaders, it would be more helpful in the way of mentoring relationships. Sometimes technology gets in the way, depending on what type of system or software it is.

**Forum participation and mentoring practices.** Study participants described multiple ways in which their Forum participation impacted their mentoring practices. Overall, participants stated that Forum participation greatly expanded their opportunities for engaging in mentoring both as a mentor and as a protégé. EROL described how much it meant for him, as a reserve component officer, to have the expanded engagement offered by the Forums:

To me, that was important, because guys like PERRY and you, I would never have met some active duty officer in my line of work that was doing the stuff you guys were doing had it not been for those Forums opening it up to me, by facilitating that discussion... I think that's big, especially when you think about how geographically dispersed we are as an Army, the working relationships we have with the Active vs. Reserve [components].

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<sup>28</sup> The Army Enterprise Email system, known colloquially as *The Global*, contains a master registry of all US Army email addresses. It is technically possible for a soldier of any rank to email a soldier of any other rank; the Army's hierarchical norms severely limit this in practice.

COLE affirmed that participating in the Forums had personally expanded his mentoring horizons:

I ran into three lieutenants at officer basic who I had chatted with on the Forums, having discussions back and forth. Suddenly, I realized: that was cool, to really understand the full impact...I do talk to my lieutenants, and other lieutenants; a large number are on it; the discussions that happen off of it as well help to drive, improve mentor-protégé relationships.

Despite his earlier critiques of irregular engagement on the Forums, TRAVIS stated that he still saw that engagement as a potential form of mentoring: “If you keep talking over a long period, we're at least communicating and I can impart some of my experience. That's when you see how the long term is going to pan out.”

Study participants saw their Forum activities as giving them a broader set of tools to use in their offline mentoring relationships:

ARLO: When I was a pre-command captain, [my mentor] made me sit down and lay out the rest of my career on a spreadsheet....It's a vehicle for talking about both personal and professional development. ... Then I put it on excel and he kept making me update it. By the time the Forums came around, it was something we talked about as peers. Ideas that came out of that; I'm sure others looked at what he made me do, I'm sure they took it, brought it back to their mentors, and used it as a conversation piece. But there were things on there that came out of the Forums, that I dragged out of the Forums and onto the spreadsheet. Those became part of my living conversations with E, and others, as I started to map out the rest of my personal and professional development timeline.

WILL: It gave me another venue to mentor, to receive mentorship and coaching. In the end, it's just a tool; you really need that one on one dialog that comes from either the Forum or that comes from contact with protégés and mentors.

COLE opined that some of his Forum engagement had a largely unconscious impact on his mentoring practice: “To a degree, it was to go seek and get a question answered, validate an opinion, seek guidance on a course of action; but I didn't understand it as how it impacted me in mentorship.”



Other participants saw the primary benefit of Forum engagement as expanding the potential pool of mentors and protégés beyond the people in their workplaces. JOSH saw a substantial difference between the potential mentors in his units and the members on the Forums:

If I didn't have the Forums, I would have been chained to the assignment process. I would have been being surrounded by people who I viewed as not really passionate about the profession. Some of them were more career focused, and didn't really go above and beyond the standard requirements of the job. By being involved with the Forums, I was able to latch on to and pick up mentors, JACK and TOBY, who could pull me beyond the standard practice in the Army.

DARREN agreed, noting how his initial Forum engagements led to subsequent face to face interactions that shaped his mentoring relationships:

I definitely would not have met JACK and JOSH if it wasn't for the Forums, because that's what got TOBY and I in contact. We developed a relationship, that's what led him to invite me to come to West Point, to talk to the MX400 class. That's when I met JACK, and because of that, that's when I was invited to [the Rendezvous], and that's where I met JOSH. I would say that my relationship with JACK and JOSH is very much an extension of the online Forum: here's a problem, here are some potential solutions, here's my experience, who has experience this same thing?

EARL mused that some of this engagement occurred even when members' Forum presence was not particularly deliberate:

Every now and then, you would see someone pop down into the PL Forum to throw some sage advice in from their perspective...you get a guy who has spare time, probably a post-command captain or a post-command lieutenant colonel who goes in saying, "Hey, I've got all this spare time. I've got this CAC reader<sup>29</sup> and a government computer, let me see if I can help out."

Every study participant affirmed that they had met someone on the Forums they would not otherwise have come in contact with who shaped their mentoring practice.

Several participants noted that the free flow of information that characterizes the Forums bled over into their mentoring engagements. As DARREN put it:

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<sup>29</sup> Common Access Card: a military identity card that also serves as a public-key access system for logging on to military websites. Since early 2013, the Professional Forums have required a CAC reader to access them, but many officers do not yet have a CAC reader in their home.

The same reason that I was giving advice on PlatoonLeader was because I was getting advice on CompanyCommand. The willingness to do it in an online Forum makes you just as willing to do it in a more personal setting. It's opened me up as a person to both seek advice and give advice, and have it be thoughtful advice, because some of the advice you get in the Army is, "we've always done it this way." Instead, I say: *Here's my experience. I also know these three people in the Forums have done this; consider that as you go forward.* I think it has helped me to be able to mentor lieutenants who aren't [my branch], because I've interacted with people outside of my branch on the Forums that have a different perspective than me...I try to shape people in the Forums and move them towards the Forums.

JEAN saw that style of engagement as directly impacting how she communicates with protégés:

One of the things I've learned from the Forums is communication, the questions to ask. There is a distinct difference between someone says something, and you get up in arms over the way they said it and demand [angrily], "What are you talking about?!" or saying [more calmly], "I don't understand what you mean, can you elaborate on that?"

Noting his earlier concerns about dysfunctional competition, EARL stated, "You feel freer to share information [through the Forums] than at an OPD, or in a social setting...You're not going to necessarily compete with some of these folks directly for a while."

**Forum participation and mentoring perceptions.** Study participants also shared several ways in which their Forum participation altered their perceptions of Army mentoring. Many participants linked their positive outlook on Army mentoring as a whole to their participation in the Forums:

COLE: When you start dealing with the Rendezvous, the way it was laid out, the discussions, the interactions, you come away incredibly pumped up, incredibly enthused about the Forums. You understand globally what's happening; when they show all of that background architecture that is not apparent to the end user, it was really powerful.

DARREN: When you start meeting and talking to [Forum members], or the relationship starts on the Forum, where you notice the people that are contributing and making a lot of recommendations. You start meeting with these guys, understanding what they're like. Everyone is all about this positive exchange of ideas: let's innovate, let's think about new ways of doing things. Because of that, it's a very positive environment, it makes you want to become more creative and more innovative, because that's the way that they do things. It's a very encouraging environment to be around them.

JEAN saw her participation in the Forums as being supportive of an overall conception of mentoring as a professional responsibility and personal well-being:

I believe in the concept of karma. I believe that if you do good things for other people, other people will do good things for you. I also believe that, within the military, it's a social and organizational imperative to improve the organization. I think that, because mentoring is one of my strengths, forming those relationships and nurturing them, it's one of the best ways I can contribute to the overall good of my organization.

Several participants mused that their Forum participation had increased their own belief in the viability and impact of Army mentoring. ARLO noted that, through the Forums, he saw people doing things with their mentors or protégés that he directly imported into his own mentoring practice:

The rich, deep amount of experiences that are captured [in the Forums] are irreplaceable when it comes to the very nature of mentor-protégé discussions, because experiences are one of the most important things that make the relationships work. To be able to have so much more to draw upon, when used correctly, they expand on and build upon those discussions between two people... We were able to draw upon what we would read in the Forums as a third person's experiences, and then share and discuss them. ..To be able to reach out and draw on scenarios and examples from third parties allowed us to leverage detailed experiences in our own language and use them as learning points together within the confines of our relationship... We were able to go and grab case studies off the shelf out of those Forums and use them as a means together to have conversations.

JOSH saw it as a component of both his traditional and peer mentoring relationships:

You've got JACK and others providing that positive peer influence due to the Forums. You're seeing what other people were writing, just some great stuff. And you have someone like TOBY who is older in the profession, has got a lot more experience, but can give you some great leadership insights when you need it... Because those guys took the time to work with me on various aspects of leader development and writing, I feel like I want to do the same thing for others.

EROL took it further, noting that his Forum participation opened him up to mentoring experiences in other online spaces:

My aptitude to want to reach out to people whom I've never met before has improved. On a place like RallyPoint,<sup>30</sup> I've got connections with a lot of colonels and brigadier generals who, five to ten years down the road, will be the people that will be future brigade and division commanders that I want to go work for, and can guide me.

Not all of the impact of Forum participation on mentoring perceptions was positive.

Several participants noted concerns on mentoring that directly stemmed from their Forum experiences. These concerns were not always about mentoring within the Forums themselves, but showed how their Forum engagements raised expectations for mentoring practice as a whole:

TRAVIS: It's on the protégé to transition [the mentoring relationship] from short-term to long-term, especially when you can't elicit an answer. It's on the protégé in the virtual experience to come forward with something when the mentoring part is ongoing; that onus has to be on the protégé to just offer something when it's virtual. You can't pull teeth on people...Some people view mentoring as the Giving Tree<sup>31</sup>, but I have to get something out of it as well. If I'm just doing this as altruism, from the goodness of my heart, that's not going to work.

EARL: It [Forum engagement] feels like mentorship, so I guess it has to be. The take away was that mentorship doesn't fit in one box; there's no joint manual or ADRP for it. I think it would do it an injustice if codified. You have to be creative with it, interesting, and make it enjoyable for both you and the people you're mentoring. If it's not enjoyable, people won't want to do it.

WILL bluntly stated his concern that he would not be able to replicate his mentoring experiences in the Forums elsewhere in the Army as he moved on to his other assignments: “[Mentoring is] an important factor in the military and it's going away. I don't see as much of it as there needs to be.”

### **Summary of Themes from the Research**

The lived experiences of Army mentoring for the study participants closely corresponded to Kram's model of mentoring functions. Career experiences heavily focused on advice about

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<sup>30</sup> RallyPoint is an unofficial online space designed to improve servicemembers' professional networks. Participants are specifically encouraged to share their past and future assignments as a way of improving their hiring prospects (Weiss, 2015).

<sup>31</sup> In Silverstein's (2014) short story, a tree gives everything she possesses to meet the requests of a little boy.

career paths from mentors to protégés, with limited direct intervention in protégé job selection. Protégés particularly appreciated career advice that was seen as going beyond simple repetition of the mentor's career path. In some cases, protégés had to be seen as having some career potential before they could be considered viable for a mentoring relationship. For psychosocial functions, many participants emphasized the importance of mentoring in improving their decision-making skills as well as building their confidence and poise. Similar to the career functions, protégés appreciated mentor perspectives that incorporated worldviews beyond those of the mentor. Likewise, participants assessed that benefits of the career and psychosocial functions accrued to the mentor as well as the protégé. With respect to role modeling, protégés saw value in having multiple mentors who could serve as role models for different life and career choices. Even unconscious or negative role modeling was cited as positively contributing to mentoring relationships.

Other aspects of the participants' lived experience mirrored emerging fields of study such as peer and CMC<sup>32</sup>-mediated mentoring. Perceptions of peer mentoring varied widely, with more than half of participants citing their peer experiences as being positive and in line with the traditional definition of mentoring. Participants who expressed concerns about peer mentoring cited difficulty in distinguishing it from routine peer interactions or doubted the validity of it as a construct. Both positive and negative perceptions of peer mentoring included the concern that competition among peers for promotion and coveted positions inhibited peer mentoring. Most participants affirmed that they varied their means of mentoring communications to match the type of conversation desired or according to their circumstances. Age distinctions also played a role in methods of communications, with older mentors perceived as preferring email and phone

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<sup>32</sup> Computer-Mediated Communication. See Chapter 2 for full explanation.

over social media. Facebook emerged as a significant conduit for mentoring communications, owing to its widespread use among the participants. One point of contention among participants was the differentiation between coaching and mentoring; over half of participants brought out that concern at some point during their interviews. The key point of distinction between coaching and mentoring varied from the personal nature of the topics discussed to the long-term duration of the relationship.

Two unique aspects of Army mentoring emerged in the participants' lived experiences: mentoring in the chain of command and cross-gender mentoring. Almost all of the participants reporting having a mentoring relationship with a member of their chain of command. These relationships were typically initiated by the leader rather than the led, but none were seen as leading to or stemming from preferential treatment. Specific positions that did not facilitate year-long or more engagement with soldiers were seen as less conducive to mentoring. Cross-gender mentoring experiences varied widely in the study, with a third of participants each having no experience, experience as only a cross-gender protégé or mentor, and having experience as both. A lack of cross-gender mentoring experience was attributed to a lack of women in units, concerns about perceptions of fraternization or sexual assault/sexual harassment, and spousal disapproval of cross-gender mentoring relationships. Participants who had experience as both cross-gender protégés and mentors disagreed with one another on whether such relationships were fundamentally different from single-gender ones.

Study participants generally assessed the Professional Forums as being effective for mentoring as well as correlating with significant impacts on mentoring perception and practice. Participants cited the ability to gain additional insights on career paths, identify and connect with potential mentors, and gain additional psychosocial support during difficult times. The face to

face Rendezvous engagements hosted by the Forums were cited by several participants as being particularly effective at catalyzing mentoring practice. Elements of the forum experience that were judged as ineffective for mentoring included the inability to verify the accuracy of forum postings, the infrequent nature of forum engagement, or concerns about the applicability of members' approaches to user needs. Study participants noted that their forum participation improved their mentoring practice by encouraging such engagement, giving them a broader set of tools for those engagements, and improving the availability of potential mentors and protégés. Forum participation also affected participants' mentoring perceptions, with members noting that they had a more positive outlook about the benefits and impact of mentoring. There were some negative impacts on mentoring perception, with members citing concerns about the ability to replicate the kind of engagement they felt in the Forums in the Army as a whole.

This chapter summarized the changes to research design of the study as well as its findings. Chapter Five will draw conclusions about those findings, compare them to the researcher's own context, and make recommendations for further study.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusions and Suggestions for Future Research and Action**

I'm a huge believer in the importance of experiences. I have only done so much; my career is very linear, it's gone exactly where I've gone. But having people who can come and sit and talk; they've walked through the same woods, but hundreds of meters away from me, and seen and heard and smelled other things. That gives me a better understanding of the same woods through which we've been walking. (ARLO, personal communication, January 26, 2015)

This chapter will provide additional insights and recommendations derived from the findings of the study on the lived experience of Army mentoring for members of the Professional Forums. The researcher will discuss their significance of the findings and will expand on the literature for a specific topic that emerged over the course of the study. The researcher will identify limitations of the study and the study's impacts on the researcher. The chapter will close by examining the conclusions and implications of the study findings and making recommendations for further research and action.

### **Significance of the Findings**

The study's affirmations of the presence of career, psychosocial, and role-modeling components in Army mentoring affirm the validity of Kram's mentoring functions model to Army mentoring. Although previous research on Army mentoring has referenced the presence of these elements as singular elements, neither recent research nor current doctrine has applied Kram's model as a whole. Understanding the applicability of this model could help Army mentors and protégés more accurately shape expectations of their mentoring practice and identify what they hope to gain from it. The validity of Kram's model to Army mentoring also suggests that other areas of study in workplace mentoring may be useful to apply to Army mentoring. However, researchers must be cautious in first verifying that underlying cultural assumptions in the broader field of research remain valid in an Army context.



The study's findings on the presence and variability of peer and chain-of-command mentoring offer a window into how Army hierarchical culture may impact specific areas of mentoring practice. The wide range of opinions on peer mentoring, coupled with the persistent identification of peer competition as a limiting factor, suggests that the broader literature on peer mentoring needs to be carefully applied to this particular aspect of Army mentoring. Although peer competition is present in most workplaces, the Army's practice of identifying individuals for promotion competition by year groups<sup>33</sup> makes that competition even more explicit. Chain-of-command mentoring offers an obverse example of where cultural impacts should preclude effective application of mentoring practice, but do not. The significant power an Army leader holds over subordinates should preclude any developmental relationship being voluntary and mutual, but it does not. Although the participants agreed that chain-of-command comprised only a small portion of their mentoring practice, the fact that almost all of them experienced it at one point or another suggests its validity as a form of mentoring practice. Both of these cases illustrate how the application of broader elements of mentoring theory has to be tempered with an understanding of Army culture.

The study findings on CMC as a mentoring component support an emerging consensus in the wider mentoring literature: CMC can and does form a vital and supportive part of mentoring practice. The variability of CMC mentoring practice in the study suggests that mentoring relationships optimize their use of CMC to best fit the parameters of the relationship, rather than the relationship being shaped by the specific CMC mechanism. The persistent presence of Facebook as a CMC means in many of the participants' relationships is an important addition to

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<sup>33</sup> A *year group* is a set of officers who commissioned during a given fiscal year. Much of an officer's career management is centered around their year group, with eligibility for promotion, schooling, and assignment all driven by it to some extent.

the CMC mentoring literature, which previously focused on email and dedicated Forums as components of CMC mentoring. The continued spread of Facebook onto mobile applications as well as the rollout of new features like Messenger that enhance instantaneous communication are likely to have a real and continuing impact on mentoring practice.

The Professional Forums were affirmed as supportive spaces for mentoring, but not as mentoring spaces themselves. The researcher found that the Forums were helpful places to find mentors and protégés and to begin conversations that could eventually lead to mentoring relationships. Additionally, the powerful impact of the Rendezvous on both forum engagement and the development of mentoring relationships suggests the importance of blending face to face mentoring with CMC. Given that the Forums' stated mission is to connect company-level leaders in conversation about the profession, it is not surprising that they are seen as facilitators of mentoring practice. However, the desire of many participants to have those deeper conversations out of the semi-public nature of the Forums speaks to a fear of exposure among one's peers.

Although it was not initially identified as a study component during the preliminary literature review, cross-gender mentoring emerged from this study as a significant factor in Army mentoring practice. One-third of the participants noted that they had never experienced any type of cross-gender mentoring, although this was attributed to assignment restrictions that may be changing as a result of new Army policies.<sup>34</sup> That lack of access, coupled with the limitations imposed by perception and understanding discussed by many participants, suggest that cross-gender mentoring is currently far less viable in the Army than other forms of mentoring. Women currently comprise only 16% of the Active Army officer corps (Tice, 2015). A significant

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<sup>34</sup> In January of 2013, the Secretary of Defense announced an end to the blanket exclusion of women from direct combat units and directed the services to come up with less exclusionary policies not later than January 1, 2016 (Roulo, 2013).

portion of the officer corps being less accessible for women as protégés or mentors has very real implications for professional development. What follows is a summary of the current literature on cross-gender mentoring in the workplace, which suggests that many of the issues identified in this study have parallels in civilian contexts. This brief review appears here, rather than in Chapter 2, because the differentiation of cross gender mentoring was an unanticipated outcome of this study.

**Literature on cross-gender mentoring.** The current literature on cross-gender mentoring suggests that cross-gender mentoring has different compositions, practices, and outcomes than same-gender mentoring. A 2004 survey outlined significant variations between men and women in how they perceived mentoring (Catalyst, 2004). Fewer men (17%) than women (23%) reported being satisfied with the availability of mentoring in their workplace, while women were more likely than men (40% versus 28%) to have a mentor. A larger number of women (25%) than men (16%) perceived challenges to workplace advancement from a lack of mentoring. Ragins (1989) noted that women in mentoring relationships may demand less of their mentor at any one time, but depend on the mentors more and are less willing than men to end the relationship. In comparing the characteristics of male-female and female-female mentoring pairs, one study claimed that the cross-gender pairs lasted three times as long as single-gender pairs (Bowen, 1985). In fact, Clawson and Kram (1984) stated that attempts to ignore gender in mentoring relationships often led to the affirmation of stereotypical gender roles, allowed suppressed tensions to undermine mentoring relationships, and devalued informal engagements outside of the workplace.

The current literature on barriers to the formation and sustainment of cross-gender mentoring relationships suggests that those barriers are remarkably similar to the ones identified

in this study. Both female protégés and male mentors expressed fears of the mentoring relationship crossing the line into sexual harassment or being perceived as a sexual advance (Hurley & Fagenson-Eland, 1996). Outside perceptions were also seen as a significant factor impeding the formation of female-male relationships, with jealous spouses (22%), office gossip (16.7%), and family resentment (16.7%) all identified as factors unique to those relationships (Bowen, 1985). However, the resentment of co-workers over perceived preferential treatment as part of the relationship outweighed all of the above factors (33%) for both male-female and female-female pairings. Clawson and Kram (1984) attributed the fears of sexual intimacy in cross-gender mentoring relationships to the fact that many characteristics of developmental relationships exist equally in romantic relationships. They described these characteristics as *levels of intimacy* and mapped out how excessive intimacy and distance can be equally destructive in developmental relationships (Figure 8, following).

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	<b>Unproductive Intimacy</b>	<b>Productive Levels of Intimacy</b>	<b>Unproductive Distance</b>
<b>Internal Relationship</b>	Sexual liaisons likely; less than desired growth.	Desired levels of productivity and development.	Less than desired productivity development.
<b>External Relationship</b>	Perceived favoritism and distrust.	Development of respect for boss, subordinate, and for other sex.	Reinforced prejudices.

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*Figure 8.* Some outcomes of three levels of intimacy in two kinds of relationships. Adapted from “Managing Cross-Gender Mentoring,” p. 25, by Clawson, J. G., & Kram, K. E. (1984). *Business Horizons*, 27(3). Reprinted with permission.

Some barriers to cross gender mentoring varied by experience level or rank: older, higher ranking, or more senior women felt they had more access to mentors than younger, lower-ranking women (Ragins & Cotton, 1991). In the same vein, female protégés with previous mentoring experience reported fewer barriers to subsequent mentoring relationships than inexperienced female protégés.

Although proposed solutions to the above barriers are not within the scope of this study, they are instructive for what they suggest about viable cross-gender mentoring practices. Giscombe (2007) suggested that something as simple as referring to *cross-gender mentoring* instead of *women's mentoring* could improve acceptance of those programs as being non-exclusionary. Workplaces were also encouraged to take steps that promote and recognize the relevance of mentoring for all genders and provide opportunities for protégés to show the skills derived from those relationships (Bowen, 1985). Cross-gender mentors and protégés were also encouraged to participate in the development of workplace mentoring guidelines to ground them in authentic and realistic practices (Hurley & Fagenson-Eland, 1996). At the individual level, suggestions for mediating unhelpful perceptions of cross-gender mentoring varied from the prosaic method of leaving an office door open during interactions to avoiding pet names for one another (Clawson & Kram, 1984). Many researchers stressed the importance of both parties continually examining their assumptions, attitudes, and behavior for potential barriers to successful relationships.

### **Additional Links to the Literature**

In addition to the affirmation of Kram's mentoring functions and the cross-gender mentoring elements previously listed, the study findings also reinforce the validity of shared theory elements previously discussed in Chapter 2. The first of these is Baker's concept of

receptive spaces as a venue for professional growth. The participants' experiences clearly indicate that the Forums cannot be considered as purely mentoring spaces since they lack the privacy essential to good mentoring practice. However, all of the participants indicated that they saw the openness of dialogue and freedom of engagement inherent in the Forums as being supportive to mentoring practice. Some members saw their work in the Forums as being beneficial to identifying mentors or protégés, while others believed that their experience directly shaped their mentoring tools and practices. This study lends strong credence to the idea that a receptive space, be it face to face or online, can lend invaluable support to successful mentoring.

The conduct of the interviews in this study also reinforces the link between mentoring and storified learning. All of the participants used specific anecdotes to illustrate different aspects of their mentoring practice as protégés and mentors. In many cases, telling those stories helped the participants form specific links to other aspects of their development or make causal connections between mentoring engagements and developmental outcomes. All but one of the participants indicated that the interviews were the first time they had ever thought deeply about their own mentoring experiences and how those experience shaped their development. In some cases, the deeper exploration of their mentoring stories allowed participants to amend or clarify statements in the initial interview segments that seemed at odds with the rest of their story. Clearly, storified learning has a vital role to play in sense-making of mentoring experiences and should be considered a useful tool.

The participant experiences in this study make a strong case for mentoring to be considered as a component of cognitive apprenticeship. All of the study participants indicated that a mentor was vital in helping them to form schema that assisted in their professional development. In many cases, those schema furthered understanding of a complex cultural or

social element of military service that seems unfathomable to civilians (playing the Just Plain Folks role). Huiling's concept of social apprenticeship appears to have a strong parallel to the elements of peer mentoring encountered by many participants. The uneven perception of peer mentoring by study participants may be partially explained by Huiling's finding of limitations imposed by resource constraints. Thinking of mentoring as a part of cognitive apprenticeship may also help lessen the pressure on individuals to find a mentor if they perceive that there are multiple paths for professional development.

### **Identification of Limitations**

Since this study contained a small number of participants, its findings cannot immediately be generalized to the Army as a whole or even the Army officer corps. Although study participants were all nominated by someone else for inclusion, their availability suffers from a self-selection bias by virtue of their optional engagement in the Professional Forums. Membership in the Professional Forums is not mandatory at any stage of an officer's career. In fact, leader mandates for forum participation are strongly discouraged by the Forum core team because they inhibit candid engagement. The small number of participants also means that most service branches only had a single participant representing them, and several career fields had no representation at all.

The broad applicability of the study findings are also limited by a lack of ethnic and gender minority representation. No African-American or Hispanic soldiers participated in this study, although they make up 12% and 7% of the Active Duty officer corps, respectively (Maxfield, 2014). This lack of participation mirrors larger Army concerns about the promotion and retention of ethnic minority officers, particularly in the combat arms (Vanden Brook, 2014).

Although many of the survey participants had experience working with and mentoring women, only one woman participated in the survey itself.

### **Impacts on the Researcher**

The findings of this study caused the researcher to reflect on how they matched or differed from his own mentoring practice and perceptions. The researcher has participated in cross-gender mentoring as both a protégé and mentor, but was genuinely surprised by the barriers to mentoring expressed by study participants. Upon further reflection, the researcher identified two factors that might have caused him to overlook or avoid these barriers in his own practice. Because the researcher is married to a female active duty officer, he may have been less subject to spousal disapproval of his mentoring relationships with women. Since his spouse had professional mentoring relationships with men, she is less likely to be concerned about male-female mentoring dyads. In terms of perception, the researcher may have avoided roadblocks to practice by carrying out most of his cross-gender mentoring via email and social media.

Although both his cross-gender protégé and mentor relationships were initially formed through face to face contact, the vast majority of subsequent engagements have happened in computer-mediated means. This would be consistent with McKeen and Bujaki's (2007) proposed research question about CMC mentoring reducing the barriers to cross-gender mentoring by lessening the perceptions of intimacy or sexual misconduct.

The researcher's experiences with CMC mentoring closely resemble those of the study participants. The researcher uses a wide variety of non-face to face means to communicate with mentors and protégés alike, including phone, email, and Facebook. The researcher was able to identify how the specific content of mentoring conversations as well as personal preferences drove his means of engagement. For instance, with one protégé, the researcher routinely engages



over Facebook, with some discussions on email when discussing a document or other knowledge object. With another, the researcher holds almost all of the discussions over official email or phone, depending on the protégé's availability. In the same vein, the researcher's mentor drives much of her engagement with him via personal email, reserving conversations that are particularly sensitive for discussions via telephone.

The researcher was unable to find any analogue for the peer mentoring experiences described by study participants in his own practice. It is unclear why this is the case. One possibility is that the researcher perceives such interactions as being routine peer engagements, while the peers perceive them as being close to mentoring. Another possibility is that the researcher has pursued an atypical career path, which would limit both the ability to mentor peers on an extended basis and the utility of career advice. The researcher resolved to move forward from the study with a heightened awareness of peer mentoring possibilities.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

The findings of this research lead to several conclusions. With regard to the dynamics of mentoring relationships, the findings affirm the viability of Kram's functions for the study of military mentoring. The persistent emergence of career, psychosocial, and role-modeling components in the participants' mentoring experiences is consistent with Kram's model. Because of the unique nature of military culture, it is tempting for researchers to declare it *sui generis* and create unique models of activity. One example of this in the field of mentoring is Melanson's (2009) proposal for six stages of military mentoring: role model, preceptor, coach, advisor, confidant, and counselor. Melanson's research does not draw on any established mentoring research, but instead uses specific aspects of military culture to build a model. Using models derived from broader research in civilian workplace contexts does not necessarily deny the

unique aspects of military culture, but it does avoid duplicative effort and enable researchers to dive more deeply into specific lived experiences.

The troubling nature of this study's findings on cross-gender mentoring in the Army suggests an urgent need for further study in this area. As previously noted, the low participation of women in the study makes it impossible to generalize its results to the larger population of female officers, but several consistent elements emerged in multiple narratives. The lack of cross-gender mentoring opportunities available to officers in the combat arms may unconsciously hinder them from pursuing later opportunities in mixed-gender contexts. For women, the many formal and informal barriers to cross-gender mentoring may effectively close off 80% of potential mentors to them. As the number of positions open to women in the Army grows, this problem may actually become more acute as more Army officers with no experience in cross-gender mentoring suddenly find themselves being asked for it. At a minimum, the lack of agreement among study participants on the role and nature of cross-gender mentoring indicates a need for greater discussion and assessment in this area.

The findings with regard to CMC-based mentoring suggest that it plays a role in mentoring practice that is highly individualized. All of the study participants described some CMC mechanism as part of their mentoring practice, but the actual medium and means varied widely. The widespread use of Facebook for the maintenance of mentoring relationships suggests avenues for future study of social media as a receptive space for mentoring. In the same vein, the Forums were widely regarded as useful supports to mentoring, but not as mentoring spaces exclusively. In all cases, mentoring relationships began or were strengthened through face to face engagement and were then sustained via CMC.

While the findings of this research cannot yet be generalized to the entire officer corps, they affirm some portions of Army mentoring doctrine while suggesting potential improvements to others. Current Army doctrine (Department of the Army, 2012) allows for the initiation of mentoring relationships by either party and urges potential protégés to be “active participants in their developmental process” (p. 7-11). This is supported by the varying experiences of participants in this study, many of whom initiated some of the relationships they found most fulfilling. Likewise, the Army view on peer mentoring (described as *supportive mentoring*) is consistent both with the larger body of study and the experiences of many study participants. The Army’s doctrine is very vague on mentoring communications, stating only that it involved “conversation on a personal level” (p. 7-12). This stipulation may lead soldiers to believe that mentoring communications can only be carried out face to face, but the findings of this study suggest that CMC is a viable means of sustaining a mentoring relationship for the long term. The current doctrine also implies that the benefits of mentoring accrue primarily to the protégé. In contrast, this study suggests that mentors also derive substantial individual benefits from mentoring practice. Most troubling, the Army’s current mentoring doctrine makes no mention of the challenges of cross-gender mentoring, but proposes a one-size fits all model. As noted previously, such blanket models are more likely to exacerbate gender-based differences than to address them.

Although not a central focus of the study, the participants’ experiences also give insights into the role the Forums play in the overall leader development of Army officers. In general, study participants affirmed that the Forums remain most viable and useful when they give insights into people’s personal and professional characteristics. Many Forum participants noted the utility of Forum elements like a robust personal profile and a member contribution history.

These were seen as a way to better gauge the identity and professional expertise of forum members, which in turn led to greater credence in the member's contributions and trust in the member. Other observers of leader development have noted how mentorship naturally develops in an environment that encourages meaningful interactions (Carr, 2015); keeping the Forums focused on this kind of engagement will ensure they stay relevant.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

The study findings make a strong case for Army leaders at all levels to create informal mentoring connections from and within their commands. The role of individual agency cannot be overstated here: study participants clearly indicated that they wanted the ability to initiate relationships at a time and place of their choosing. Participation in the Professional Forums is one option for such informal engagement. Others include meeting spaces where individuals at all levels are encouraged to speak candidly about their experiences and concerns. Anthes (2012) proposed one such space that would draw upon the various PME courses located at Fort Lee, VA. In his vision, newly commissioning lieutenants would join informal sessions with more senior Company-grade and Field-grade officers to draw on their experiences. Anthes' model could easily be modified for use by brigade and division commanders, who have substantial populations of officers under their command. Many participants in this study noted that they believed such gatherings were commonplace in past generations of officers. The success of the Women's Mentorship Network at Fort Hood, TX, shows that such informal mentoring networks can succeed in the resource-constrained and time-limited environment of the operational Army (Gunther, Alderson, & Kimball, 2014). The watchword for units seeking to foster mentoring in their ranks should be *spaces, not faces*: that is, creating experiences that foster mentoring connections instead of trying to match mentors and protégés.

Any change in formal Army mentoring doctrine must be preceded by broader qualitative research within the Army officer corps to see if this study's results can be replicated. If the study results can be confirmed on a larger scale, they may comprise a logically conforming subset of Army norms concerning mentoring. The Center for Army Leadership's CASAL<sup>35</sup> study series is the perfect venue for such research; as noted previously, the 2013 CASAL provided a picture of Army officer mentoring that deeply informed the explorations of this study. Future CASALs should ask questions about CMC mentoring to determine if the perceived utility of social media is ubiquitous across the officer corps or a phenomenon of self-selection into the Forums. The most current CASAL only asked about mentoring benefits experienced by protégés. Future iterations should inquire about what benefits, if any, mentors saw from their relationships. Perhaps most importantly, the CASAL needs to give both men and women an opportunity to speak candidly about what they perceive as differences in and obstacles to cross-gender mentoring. The body of literature on the subject suggests that such truth-seeking, while initially painful, will ultimately pay great dividends at a time when gender roles in the Army may be changing dramatically.

The study provides a strong impetus for CALDOL to continue pursuing Forum designs and center activities that empower strong connections among Army company-level leaders. The ability of the Forums to foster candid and professional online conversations about leader development is unparalleled, but recent Army moves to standardize the Forum design and administration with those of other DoD platforms has removed some of their luster. CALDOL should move forward in pursuing research and design initiatives that lower the barriers to participation for eligible Army leaders and improve the visibility of individual contributions and

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<sup>35</sup> Center for Army Leadership Annual Survey of Army Leaders. See Chapters 1 and 2 for more details.

characteristics. At the same time, CALDOL should sustain the Rendezvous gathering, which was cited by almost all study participants as a vital part of their mentoring experience in the Forums.

### **Closing Thoughts**

The results of this study affirm the rightful place of mentoring in Army Leader Development doctrine. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, the Army views mentoring as part of a continuum of leader development actions which include coaching, counseling, and directive guidance. Nothing in this study should be read as suggesting the primacy of mentoring over any of these other aspects of leader development. The infinite variability of human experience means that there cannot be one standardized path for leader development, with all Army leaders receiving mentoring, coaching, and counseling at centrally prescribed times. Instead, leaders should see these three techniques as tools in a toolbox, to be brought out at the appropriate time and place. Army leaders are already comfortable talking about counseling and coaching, but need to achieve the same level of familiarity in expressing their mentoring needs and experiences.

The study findings on CMC-based mentoring suggest additional nuance to the Army's relationship with social media. The Army's official views of social media emphasize its utility as a tool for public outreach and engagement while simultaneously underscoring the hazards associated with social media use (Office of the Chief of Public Affairs, 2013). The current official guidance on Army social media use consequently emphasizes the need for command approval and review at all levels to ensure consistency of Army messaging. While this is entirely appropriate for external engagements, it ignores the utility of social media for leader development and internal engagement. This study clearly demonstrates that soldiers are making

and sustaining developmental connections on Facebook and similar tools. The Army's conception of social media must expand to encompass this new reality.

Much of the tension inherent in negative views of mentoring stems from the essential duality of the roles of individual and group in a professional Army. The Army's conception of leadership involves soldiers leading to accomplish the mission and improve the organization (Department of the Army, 2012). Mentoring, which is individually focused in nature and practice, would therefore seem to be out of place in this worldview. One way to unify the two is via Johnson's (1992) conception of *Polarity Management*, which involves understanding the upsides and downsides of individual and team focus. Polarity Management does not seek to eliminate these downsides, since they are an integral part of each aspect. Instead, it seeks to gain a better understanding of each perspective so that teams can account for these upsides and downsides in their planning to make best use of all. In the same vein, mentoring can be best understood as developing highly capable Army leaders who are better equipped to accomplish their missions and improve their organizations.

This study began with a discussion of the impact of Colonel Fox Conner's mentorship on three key officers during World War I and the interwar years. In retrospect, Conner's experiences closely mirror many of the ones discussed in this study. Conner served as a peer mentor for George Marshall, helping Marshall see some key opportunities that were opening in Pershing's general staff. He provided key career mentoring for George Patton in identifying Patton as a viable candidate for the fledgling Army Tank Corps. He pursued chain of command mentoring for a very junior Dwight Eisenhower and stayed in touch with Ike via correspondence for almost a decade afterwards. This parallelism should provide hope to anyone concerned about Army mentoring that it lives on, albeit in ways that Conner might not recognize. The challenge

for today's Army leaders is to emulate Conner's spirit in developing those who will carry his torch in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



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## APPENDIX A

## Invitation to Participate

**Sample Invitation to Participate in Study**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Ray Kimball, and I'm an active-duty member of the CompanyCommand and PlatoonLeader (CC/PL) forums pursuing a doctoral degree in Learning Technologies through Pepperdine University. As part of that degree program, I'm doing dissertation research into the experience of Army Mentoring for members of the CC/PL forums. Your name was provided by other members as a forum member with experience in mentoring relationships. I would like to invite you to participate in my study and share your vital experiences with the profession.

Your participation would happen in two steps:

- You would complete an informed consent, which will outline your rights under the research and any potential risks of the study;
- You would participate in a series of one on one 1-hour interviews, four in all, about your Army experiences, your participation in the professional forums, and your mentoring relationships. The interviews will be recorded. Three of the 1-hour interviews will take place within the span of a week. The fourth will be conducted approximately one month later.

I'm genuinely excited about the potential contribution of this study to the Army's understanding of effective mentoring practices and outcomes. I think your experiences could be a vital part of the study, and hope you will consider joining. I'd be happy to answer further questions about the study either via email or phone (301-244-8574).

Ray Kimball

Past PL (2/A/1-10 AV)

Past CC (F/3-7 CAV)

## APPENDIX B

Proposed Survey Instrument (Not Used in Final Study)

**Mentoring Survey Instrument**

This survey supports a project examining officer perception of mentoring norms in the U.S. Army. This survey should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. No personally identifying information, including IP addresses, will be affiliated with survey responses. This survey runs in two parts; the first part will ask you about your views towards Army mentoring, while the second will ask for some demographic and contact information to support the study's data analysis and subsequent interviews.

1. Please enter the identity code given to you in the informed consent release you signed. This identity code assists in keeping your answers confidential.

## Part 1: Mentoring Questions

This section will ask you questions about your own mentoring background. Please answer on the basis of your own personal experience. For the purposes of this survey:

- "mentoring" is the voluntary developmental relationship that exists between a person of greater experience and a person of lesser experience that is characterized by mutual trust and respect.
- a "protégé" is the member of a mentoring relationship with less experience.
- a "mentor" is the member of a mentoring relationship with a greater level of experience.

2. Are you currently a protégé?

- Yes, with one mentor
- Yes, with more than one mentor
- No

3. Have you previously been a protégé?

- Yes, with one mentor at a time
- Yes, with more than one mentor at a time
- No

4. Please select from the following list benefits of your current or past protégé experiences in mentoring relationships. Please select all that apply.

- Helps me set and maintain focus on developmental goals
- Helps me know how best to advance in my career
- Provides first-hand knowledge and experience specific to my field
- Provides me with a "sounding board" for my ideas
- Informs me on visionary or "big picture" dynamics occurring in the Army
- Other benefits I receive from being a protégé (please specify)

5. Are you currently a mentor?

- Yes, with one protégé
- Yes, with more than one protégé
- No

6. Have you previously been a mentor?

- Yes, with one protégé at a time
- Yes, with more than one protégé at a time
- No

7. Please select from the following list benefits of your current or past mentor experiences in mentoring relationships. Please select all that apply.

- Helps me set and maintain focus on developmental goals
- Helps me know how best to advance in my career
- Provides first-hand knowledge and experience specific to my field
- Provides me with a "sounding board" for my ideas
- Informs me on visionary or "big picture" dynamics occurring in the Army
- Other benefits I receive from being a mentor (please specify)

## Part 2: Demographics and Contact Information

This page will ask for demographic info and contact information. This information will be kept strictly confidential and will not be shared with any third party.

8. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male

9. Please select from the following list of categories any branches and functional areas you have served in during your career. You may select as many as necessary to accurately represent your career path.

- Maneuver (IN, AR, AV)
- Maneuver Support (EN, MP, CM)
- Fires (FA, ADA)
- Special Operations Forces (SF, PSYOP, CA)
- Signal (SC, FA 24, FA53)
- Military Intelligence (MI, FA34)
- Foreign Area Officer (FA48)
- Cyber (CEM, FA29)
- Operations Support (FA30, FA40, FA46, FA 47, FA49, FA50, FA52, FA57, FA59)
- Logistics (TC, OD, QM, FA90)
- Soldier Support (AG, FI)
- Acquisition (AC)
- Not sure

10. Follow-on interviews for this study will be conducted through voice communication. Using the check-boxes below, please indicate any means through which you would be comfortable being interviewed. Next to each item checked, please enter the phone number, userid, or address as appropriate.

- Landline telephone
- Mobile telephone
- Skype
- Google Hangout
- Defense Connect Online
- Other (please specify and include user id or address)

11. Do you have any concerns about your participation in this study that I can address?

- Yes (with text box)
- No



## APPENDIX C

## Pre-Pilot Interview Protocol

**Mentoring Interview Protocol**

Times of Interview:

Dates of Interview:

Method of Interview:

Interviewer:

Interviewee Identity Code:

Current duty description of Interviewee:

Interviewer opening narrative: Thanks for agreeing to be a part of this study of Army Mentoring. This interview will take no more than three hours of your time, to be completed in one hour segments. During this interview, I will ask you questions about your experience with mentoring relationships, and I ask that you be as open and candid as possible. All of your responses will remain strictly confidential and will only be used for the purposes of completing this study. You previously signed a consent form that laid out all of your rights under this study and any possible risks of the study. Would you like me to review any of the content from that consent form for you?

(If yes, review requested items. If no, continue)

Before we begin the interview, I would like to review the definitions of terminology that I'm using for this study.

For the purposes of this interview:

- "Mentoring" is the voluntary developmental relationship that exists between a person of greater experience and a person of lesser experience that is characterized by mutual trust and respect.
- A "protégé" is the member of a mentoring relationship with less experience.
- A "mentor" is the member of a mentoring relationship with a greater level of experience.
- The "Army Professional Forums" refer to the CompanyCommand and PlatoonLeader forums.

Do you have any questions about these terms?

(If yes, address questions. If no, continue)

Hour 1:

1. Tell me about your Army experience.
2. Tell me about your experiences in the Professional Forums.
3. Do you believe that mentoring happens in the Army Professional Forums? Why or why not?





## APPENDIX D

## Post-Pilot Mentoring Interview Protocol

**Mentoring Interview Protocol**

Times of Interview:

Dates of Interview:

Method of Interview:

Interviewer:

Interviewee Identity Code:

Interviewer opening narrative: Thanks for agreeing to be a part of this study of Army Mentoring. This interview will take no more than four hours of your time, to be completed in one hour segments. During this interview, I will ask you questions about your experience with mentoring relationships, and I ask that you be as open and candid as possible. All of your responses will remain strictly confidential and will only be used for the purposes of completing this study. You previously signed a consent form that laid out all of your rights under this study and any possible risks of the study, which are minimal. Would you like me to review any of the content from that consent form for you?

(If yes, review requested items. If no, continue)

Before we begin the interview, I would like to review the definitions of terminology that I'm using for this study.

For the purposes of this interview:

- *Mentoring* is the voluntary developmental relationship that exists between a person of greater experience and a person of lesser experience that is characterized by mutual trust and respect.
- A *protégé* is the member of a mentoring relationship with less experience.
- A *mentor* is the member of a mentoring relationship with a greater level of experience.
- The *Professional Forums* refer to the CompanyCommand and PlatoonLeader forums.

Do you have any questions about these terms?

(If yes, address questions. If no, continue)

Hour 1:

Tell me about your Army experience.

Tell me about your experiences in the Professional Forums.

Do you believe that mentoring happens in the Army Professional Forums? Why or why not?

Hour 2:

Please describe one or more memorable protégé experiences in your career.

What benefits did you derive from those protégé experiences?

Do you think that/those experiences were shaped by usage of the Professional Forums? Why or why not?

Hour 3:

Please describe one or more memorable mentor experiences in your career.

What benefits did you derive from those mentor experiences?

Do you think that/those experiences were shaped by usage of the Professional Forums? Why or why not?

What other forum members would you recommend I speak with to better understand this phenomenon?



Hour 4:

[This hour is for the member check, to confirm that the interviewer's data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are valid from the perspective of the participant. The interviewer will review the salient elements of the participant's contributions and give the participant the opportunity to comment, correct, and/or expand on their contributions.]

## APPENDIX E

## Informed Consent Form

**INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator: Raymond A Kimball, Pepperdine University

Title of Project: By Any Other Name: Online Communities of Practice and Army Mentoring

1. I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in the research study being conducted by Raymond Kimball under the direction of Dr. Jack McManus.
2. The overall purpose of this research is to explore the lived experience of Army mentoring for members of the CompanyCommand and PlatoonLeader Professional Forums.
3. My participation in the study will consist of four separate voice interviews lasting approximately one hour each. Three of the interviews will be conducted in a one-week time frame; the fourth will take place approximately one month later. The interviews shall be conducted online via a means of voice communication to be designated by me. The interviews will be recorded.
4. I understand that the possible benefits to myself or society from this research are:
  - a better understanding of how Army mentoring practice may evolve over time
  - a deeper reflection on how mentoring has shaped my career to this point
  - a fuller conception of how I might better mentor in the future
5. I understand that the risks and discomforts associated with this research are minimal due to the non-intrusive nature of the survey.
6. I understand that there is no requirement for recovery time after each portion of the study. Each interview session will be conducted on separate days.
7. I understand that I may choose not to participate in this research by simply not completing this informed consent.
8. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to participate and/or withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in the project or activity at any time without penalty or retribution of any kind. If I withdraw before beginning the second hour of interviews, my data will be deleted from the study. If I withdraw subsequent to starting the second hour of interviews, my data will be retained unless I request that it be deleted.

9. I understand that the investigator(s) will take all reasonable measures to protect the confidentiality of my records and my identity will not be revealed in any publication that may result from this project. The confidentiality of my records will be maintained in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. Under California law, there are exceptions to confidentiality, including suspicion that a child, elder, or dependent adult is being abused, or if an individual discloses an intent to harm him/herself or others.
10. I understand that the investigator (Raymond Kimball, raymond.kimball@pepperdine.edu) is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact Dr. Jack McManus (jack.mcmanus@pepperdine.edu) if I have other questions or concerns about this research. If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I understand that I can contact Dr. Thema Bryant-Davis, Chairperson of the Graduate and Professional Schools IRB, Pepperdine University (thema.bryant-davis@pepperdine.edu).
11. I will be informed of any significant new findings developed during the course of my participation in this research which may have a bearing on my willingness to continue in the study.
12. I understand that in the event of physical injury resulting from the research procedures in which I am to participate, no form of compensation is available. Medical treatment may be provided at my own expense or at the expense of my health care insurer which may or may not provide coverage. If I have questions, I should contact my insurer.
13. I understand to my satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have received a copy of this informed consent form which I have read and understand. I hereby consent to participate in the research described above.

---

Participant Signature

---

Date

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the subject has consented to participate. Having explained this and answered any questions, I am cosigning this form and accepting this person's consent.

---

Principal Investigator

---

Date

## APPENDIX F

## Authorization for Use of CASAL Survey Instrument

Gunther, Katie M CIV USARMY CAC (US)

Sent: Thursday, August 14, 2014 10:41

To: Kimball, Raymond A LTC USARMY TRADOC (US)

If it were not complicated, it would not be a doctorate, I guess!

No worries on my end. Thanks for the explanation!

Best,  
Katie

—Original Message—

From: Kimball, Raymond A LTC USARMY TRADOC (US)

Sent: Saturday, August 09, 2014 8:00 AM

To: Gunther, Katie M CIV USARMY CAC (US)

Subject: RE: Mentorship\_CASAL 2013.xlsx

Katie:

Thanks for passing on the concern. Let me try to address it as best I can, and if we need to set up a follow-on call, I'm happy to do so.

Looking at the instrument, I would like to use the first half of your instrument, namely the sections on "who provides and receives mentoring in the Army?" and "How does mentoring benefit leaders who receive it?". I will likely add an additional section mirrored on the latter to the effect of "How does mentoring benefit leaders who provide it?" These will be useful for comparing my interview subjects to the baselines found by this year's CASAL, but they will not be the core of the study, as my population is not intended to be representative of the officer corps at large. The primary meat of the study will be qualitative interviews that ask subjects to describe their protege and mentor experiences, and how the forums did or did not play a role in those experiences.

Therefore, I believe I will avoid double-tapping these folks by both the additional difference of my survey instrument as well as the more lasting impact of the qualitative interview.

Please let me know if this addresses the concerns you raised. Given the amount of assistance you all have provided to me on this, it is really important to me that I honor and meet your concerns.

V/R Ray Kimball

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From: Gunther, Katie M CIV USARMY CAC (US)

Sent: Tuesday, August 05, 2014 16:46

To: Kimball, Raymond A LTC USARMY TRADOC (US)

Subject: Mentorship\_CASAL 2013.xlsx

Please find attached the mentoring items that you requested from the 2013 CASAL Survey. I have to pass on a concern from my boss, because he was not altogether sold on sharing these.

It would be best for our organization if you could use comparable but not identical items for your dissertation research. There are two rationales: 1) Differences in survey samples could result in drastically different results that would be difficult to explain post hoc. 2) If we use the same items next year, and our random sample includes members of your dissertation sample, those folks are getting double-tapped with identical content. Bad for morale. The scientific integrity of your project may require that you use the items as is, but I'd be remiss in not passing along the concern.

## APPENDIX G

## IRB Approvals

# PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

## Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board

November 25, 2014

Ray Kimball

Protocol #: E1114D03

Project Title: Online Communities of Practice and Army Mentoring

Dear Mr. Kimball:

Thank you for submitting your application, *Online Communities of Practice and Army Mentoring*, for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Graduate and Professional Schools Institutional Review Board (GPS IRB). The IRB appreciates the work you and your faculty advisor, Dr. McManus, have done on the proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations (45 CFR 46 - <http://www.nihtraining.com/ohsrsite/guidelines/45cfr46.html>) that govern the protections of human subjects. Specifically, section 45 CFR 46.101(b) (2) states:

(b) Unless otherwise required by Department or Agency heads, research activities in which the only involvement of human subjects will be in one or more of the following categories are exempt from this policy:

**Category (2) of 45 CFR 46.101**, research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: a) Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and b) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

In addition, your application to waive documentation of informed consent has been **approved**.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit a **Request for Modification Form** to the GPS IRB. Because your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the GPS IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite our best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the GPS IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete explanation of the event and your response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the GPS IRB and the appropriate form to be used to report this information can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* (see link to "policy material" at <http://www.pepperdine.edu/irb/graduate/>).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all further communication or correspondence related to this approval. Should you have additional questions, please contact Kevin Collins, Manager of the

Institutional Review Board (IRB) at [gpsirb@pepperdine.edu](mailto:gpsirb@pepperdine.edu). On behalf of the GPS IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thema Bryant-Davis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Thema Bryant-Davis, Ph.D.  
Chair, Graduate and Professional Schools IRB

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives  
Mr. Brett Leach, Compliance Attorney  
Dr. Jack McManus, Faculty Advisor

## Exempt Approval

Mallory, Linda Dr CIV USA USMA [Linda.Mallory@us...

To: Kimball, Raymond A LTC USARMY TRADOC (US)

Friday, November 21, 2014 10:19

You replied on 11/21/2014 10:27.

After a careful review of your protocol, Be There When I Need You: Online Communities of Practice and Army Mentoring, I have determined that this is human subject research according to 32CFR219 and meets the requirements of exempt status under 32CFR219.101(b) (2).

Your project control number is **15-12 Kimball**.

This constitutes only a review for human subject testing and is not approval to begin collecting data. Before you can collect data, you must secure approval from ARI to survey/interview subjects who are active duty, but outside of command. Please contact

Robert O. Simmons, Ph.D.  
Senior Research Psychologist  
U.S. Army Research Institute (ARI)  
(703) 545-2332  
DSN: 865-2332  
[Robert.O.Simmons2@civ.mail.mil](mailto:Robert.O.Simmons2@civ.mail.mil)

Linda Mallory, EdD  
Research Analyst/EDO  
Office of Institutional Research  
US Military Academy at West Point  
West Point, NY 10996  
845-938-7385  
845-938-7380 (fax)  
[linda.mallory@usma.edu](mailto:linda.mallory@usma.edu)

**RE: USMA 15-12 Kimball Survey Request (UNCLASSIFIED)**

Mallory, Linda Dr CIV USA USMA [Linda.Mallory@usma.edu]

Sent: Monday, December 01, 2014 13:56

To: Kimball, Raymond A LTC USARMY TRADOC (US)

No. ARI approval is only for surveys.

Once you have your institution's IRB approval, you can proceed with the study.

Linda Mallory, EdD  
 Research Analyst/EDO  
 Office of Institutional Research  
 US Military Academy at West Point  
 West Point, NY 10996  
 845-938-7385  
 845-938-7380 (fax)  
 linda.mallory@usma.edu

-----Original Message-----

From: Kimball, Raymond A LTC USARMY TRADOC (US)

[mailto:[raymond.a.kimball2.mil@mail.mil](mailto:raymond.a.kimball2.mil@mail.mil)]

Sent: Tuesday, November 25, 2014 7:35 AM

To: Mallory, Linda Dr CIV USA USMA

Subject: FW: USMA 15-12 Kimball Survey Request (UNCLASSIFIED)

Linda - the delays from ARI (see below) are very significant and may imperil my dissertation timeline. I'm thinking through some options; one of them is dropping the survey portion from my research and focusing solely on the interviews. If I solely did interviews with no survey piece, would I still require ARI review and approval?

V/R Ray Kimball

From: Simmons, Robert O CIV USARMY HQDA ARI (US)

Sent: Monday, November 24, 2014 18:21

To: Kimball, Raymond A LTC USARMY TRADOC (US)

Subject: RE: USMA 15-12 Kimball Survey Request (UNCLASSIFIED)

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED

Caveats: NONE

Unfortunately, it will probably take 4-6 weeks because there are people ahead of you in the queue, I am about to leave the office for over a week, and my assistant had major surgery today.

-----Original Message-----

From: Kimball, Raymond A LTC USARMY TRADOC (US)

Sent: Monday, November 24, 2014 4:50 PM

To: Simmons, Robert O CIV USARMY HQDA ARI (US)

Subject: RE: USMA 15-12 Kimball Survey Request (UNCLASSIFIED)

Sir:

Is there really no way to get a review prior to that? I'm on a tight timeline with this being for a dissertation. I understand the workload your office must have, but



this is a very small scale study (<10 participants) that has already passed one IRB review and should be getting the second any day now. I'd be grateful for any expedited consideration you could give this.

V/R Ray Kimball

---

From: Simmons, Robert O CIV USARMY HQDA ARI (US)  
Sent: Monday, November 24, 2014 16:39  
To: Kimball, Raymond A LTC USARMY TRADOC (US)  
Subject: RE: USMA 15-12 Kimball Survey Request (UNCLASSIFIED)

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED  
Caveats: NONE

Thank you, LTC Kimball. It could be January before we can review your package.

V/R

Robert O. Simmons, Ph.D.  
Senior Research Psychologist  
U.S. Army Research Institute (ARI)  
(703) 545-2332  
DSN: 865-2332

-----Original Message-----

From: Kimball, Raymond A LTC USARMY TRADOC (US)  
Sent: Sunday, November 23, 2014 2:01 PM  
To: Simmons, Robert O CIV USARMY HQDA ARI (US)  
Subject: USMA 15-12 Kimball Survey Request

Sir:

Attached please find an Army Survey Request Supporting Statement (ver. Nov 2014), with supporting documentation, for my upcoming dissertation research. I remain available at your convenience to answer and questions or concerns about the study.

V/R LTC Ray Kimball

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED  
Caveats: NONE

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED  
Caveats: NONE