

LEADERSHIP AND HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT REVISITED: AN ASSESSMENT OF MIDSHIPMEN LEARNING PROCESSES AT THE UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY

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This thesis attempts to answer the following research questions: (1) How do midshipmen learn about leadership? (2) How do officer learning processes differ from midshipmen learning processes? The learning literature and the leadership literature identified the following leadership learning processes: (1) experience, (2) observation, (3) reflection, (4) experimentation, (5) interpersonal interactions, (6) organizational cultural, (7) formal instruction (i.e., conceptualization), and (8) self-direction. To test the research questions, the author conducted 25 focused interviews with Naval Academy midshipmen, Naval Postgraduate School students, and Naval Academy leadership instructors. The interview data were transcribed and analyzed. The data analysis yielded eight general themes related to midshipmen leadership development. The data suggested midshipmen learn leadership from the following sources: experience, observation, reflection, interpersonal interaction, and organizational culture. The interview data further suggested midshipmen do not learn leadership from formal classroom instruction; however, the officer interview data supported conceptualization (i.e., theoretical instruction) as an important leadership learning process. The officer interview data suggested that graduate students and leadership instructors use an integrated (i.e., systems) approach to learn leadership.

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