Services' Processes for Developing Definitions of Diversity and Diversity Policy Statements

This issue paper aims to aid in the deliberations of the MLDC. It does not contain the recommendations of the MLDC.

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Abstract

This issue paper describes how each Service came to define diversity. All the Services purposely define diversity as encompassing a wide range of attributes that extend beyond the MLDC charter's focus on race, Hispanic origin, and gender. These definitions link diversity to mission readiness and to Service-specific core values but do not describe this relationship in any detail. Across the Services, the development process was collaborative and included representatives from a wide swath of each Service, but only one Service vetted the definition with servicemembers. The paper raises several issues for the commissioners to consider in addressing their charter's task of developing a uniform definition of diversity.

The MLDC charter calls for the commission to recommend a uniform definition of diversity for the Department of Defense (DoD) to use for all the armed forces. As part of its preparation for this task, the MLDC Definition Subcommittee asked the research team to interview the Services about the processes and concerns involved in developing their Service-specific definitions.

Each Service representative was asked the following questions:

1) Why did your Service need a definition?
2) What motivated the definition your Service selected?
3) Who was involved in developing the definition, and what processes did your Service use?
4) How did your Service vet the definition?
5) How is your Service implementing the definition or how will it do so?

Defense Diversity Working Group (DDWG) representatives from each Service were interviewed in January 2010. This issue paper summarizes their responses to these five questions; they are supplemented by publicly available diversity policy statements and other relevant documentation.

Descriptions of Definitions of Diversity

Table 1 summarizes the definitions of diversity from DoD and each Service (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2009), gives the date the definition was finalized, and indicates how long the development process took. With the exception of the Marine Corps (which chose to begin with an overarching strategy before developing a definition), each Service has now developed a definition of diversity.

Service-specific definitions of diversity are embedded within diversity policy statements. These are typically one-page memos written by commanding officers that outline the perceived need for diversity and what it entails (see Preston, Casey, & Geren, 2009; Wynne, 2008; Winter, 2007; Allen, n.d.; and Conway, n.d.). All the policy statements

- define diversity broadly and, with the exception of the Air Force, deliberately do not specify individual attributes, whether they be skill sets, talents, or personal characteristics
- link diversity to mission readiness and/or execution
- link diversity to the Service's core values
- emphasize that inclusion and equity are ways to ensure that diversity policies are successful
- assert that the combination of individuals' talents and qualities makes the Service stronger
- focus on the continuum of a servicemember's career and, therefore, on the need to recruit, retain, and promote a diverse force.

However, there are notable differences:

- The Army's definition of diversity explicitly refers to family members, who bear the brunt of deployment, and to how diversity contributes to a culturally astute Army (Preston et al., 2009). No other Service includes cultural facility or astuteness as a key goal of improving diversity (although the Air Force's definition includes "cultural knowledge" as one component of diversity).
- The Air Force includes a list of diversity attributes but is careful not to limit diversity to only those attributes: "Air Force diversity includes, but is not limited to, cultural knowledge, educational background, work background, language abilities, physical abilities, philosophical/spiritual perspectives, age, race, ethnicity, and gender" (Wynne, 2008).
- The Navy's diversity policy statement specifies a business case for diversity: "[O]ur ability to attract, recruit, and retain a diverse, quality workforce is a business imperative that is crucial to warfighting excellence" (Winter, 2007).
- For the Coast Guard, diversity "is not a program or policy—it is a state of being" (Allen, n.d.) that leads to better problem solving.

Process for Development of Definitions of Diversity

Motivation and Rationale. According to DDWG representatives, a number of factors motivated each Service to develop a definition of diversity and a diversity policy statement.

Differentiating Diversity from Equal Opportunity. The Service representatives cited an organizational need to distinguish diversity, and therefore diversity management or leadership training, from equal opportunity. For each Service, equal opportunity is a legal concept in place to ensure that no servicemember experiences discrimination because of his or her gender, religion or race/ethnicity or by being a member of any other legally protected group. In contrast, diversity is more about the spirit or intent of equity and inclusion. For example, the Marine Corps representative noted that the aim of diversity is to "bring in all the talents in an inclusive way." The Navy representative mentioned the importance of retaining equal opportunity requirements by considering diversity separately.

Table 1. Diversity as Defined by DoD and the Services

Organization	Definition	Date Finalized	Length of Formal Development Process
DoD	The different characteristics and attributes of individuals.	February 5, 2009	Unknown
U.S. Army	The different attributes, experiences, and backgrounds of our soldiers, civilians, and family members that further enhance our global capabilities and contribute to an adaptive, culturally astute Army.	April 1, 2009	1 year
U.S. Air Force	A composite of individual characteristics, experiences, and abilities consistent with the *Air Force Core Values* and the *Air Force Mission*.	March 27, 2008	1 year
U.S. Navy	All the different characteristics and attributes of individual sailors and civilians that enhance the mission readiness of the Navy.	August 27, 2007	A few weeks
U.S. Marine Corps	Currently, no definition per se. Marine Corps policy holds that diversity in the background and experience of those who join the Marine Corps is not only a reflection of American society but also a key element to maintaining the strength and flexibility required to meet today's national security challenges.	February 2008 (policy)	Months
U.S. Coast Guard	All the characteristics, experiences, and differences of each individual.	2006 or 2007	A few weeks

SOURCES: DoD definition from U.S. Department of Defense, 2009; Service definitions presented to the MLDC at its first meeting in September 2009 and found in Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2009; third and fourth columns from DDWG interviews with authors.

Mission Readiness. A second motivating factor was the case for mission readiness. Each Service representative noted that diversity was important to being mission ready. Most Services, however, did not seem to understand how diversity is actually linked to mission capability (as described in Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010a); nor do any of the policy statements articulate such a link clearly. The Marine Corps diversity policy statement specifically notes that diversity is "a key element to maintaining the strength and flexibility required to meet today's national security challenges" (Conway, n.d). The "business case" for diversity was mentioned as particularly important for the Navy, which developed a broad, overarching definition to capture the entire potential population of the Navy. According to the Air Force's diversity website, *diversity* is defined as mission-oriented: exploiting the uniqueness of each airman to enhance organizational effectiveness and readiness. In contrast, *equal opportunity* is defined as compliance-oriented: ensuring that airmen are treated fairly and work in an environment free of harassment and discrimination (U.S. Air Force, n.d.).

Representation. A third motivator was representation. For the Navy, the goal has been to ensure that the officer corps reflects the enlisted force. We heard that it had become clear to commanding officers that enlistees were receiving the wrong message: There was a lack of minorities or women in commanding positions relative to whom they were commanding. In contrast, the Air Force, the Marine Corps, and the Coast Guard see the U.S. population, not the enlisted force, as their benchmark. The Coast Guard's diversity statement sees such representation as important to its relevance: "To ensure that we continue this level of excellence and thus maintain our hard-earned relevance in the minds of the American people, it is imperative that our workforce be reflective of the society that we serve" (U.S. Coast Guard, n.d.). This is a motivation often cited in making the business case for diversity (Military Diversity Leadership Commission, 2010a).

Cultural Competence. Cultural competence seems to unite representation and mission readiness in relation to the Services' global reach; i.e., it assumes that a diverse force will be more competent in dealing with different cultures. In their documentation, the Army and the Air Force note the need for diversity to ensure cultural competence overseas. As mentioned previously, the Army's diversity statement argues that improving the diversity of the Army will increase the cultural astuteness of its members.[1]

Roadmap for Leadership. A fifth motivator was to provide clarity for leadership—to act as a roadmap for recruiting, retaining, and promoting servicemembers. For example, the Air Force decided to provide a list of potential characteristics under which diversity could be defined so that the diversity statement could be used as a tool for leadership development and commanding officers could tailor the definition to their needs. Similarly, Marine Corps interviewees stressed that the policy statement was meant to be internalized by leadership so

that they could emphasize it in their daily operations yet put their personal stamp on it.

Activities Engaged and Players Involved in the Effort

In all cases, the effort to develop a definition was spearheaded by a commanding officer committed to increasing awareness of diversity within the Service branch. In addition, each Service took pains to have a team of representatives from a wide swath of its membership; the development efforts were therefore not consigned solely to a human resources or personnel department. Below, we describe the steps each Service undertook.

Army. The Secretary and Chief of Staff established the Army Diversity Task Force (ADTF) in 2008 to "conduct a holistic review and assessment of diversity programs and progress for military and civilian components of the Army" (Casey & Geren, 2008). The task force had 15 people, plus staff, external experts, a working group, contract support, and support from several Army agencies.

ADTF reviewed the definitions of other Services, governmental and nongovernmental agencies, and many private sector organizations considered to be U.S. leaders in diversity best business practices. ADTF recognized that each Service had approached its definition in different ways to tailor diversity to its own needs. For the Army, ADTF determined that the definition needed to meet the following criteria. It should

- be simple to read and understand
- allow soldiers and all civilians to envision themselves in the definition
- be about the organization—it must be tailored to the Army's needs
- be about the Army's people and the human dimension
- address mission effectiveness (e.g., warfighting and day-to-day operations)
- target internal audiences yet be acceptable for external publication
- contain no examples of attributes or differences
- be perpetual in nature.

ADTF started with Loden's diversity wheel (Loden, 1996), which has 17 personal attributes that an organization should consider. These are organized into primary and secondary dimensions. The task force also relied on a report published by the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, which notes that the key characteristics that academic and industry organizations use in defining diversity are

- inclusiveness (providing opportunities to participate and to value contributions)
- openness (accepting new ideas and perspectives)

- accommodation (of differences)
- valuing differences (understanding "how difference can contribute to solving problems and creating a competitive advantage") (Aronowitz et al, n.d.).

The team members then listed all the key differences that affect work in the Army and quickly realized that there was no way such a list could be inclusive; they had listed 38 distinct attributes and felt they could have found well over 100. Based on this exercise, they decided not to list specific attributes so that the definition would not appear exclusive. Instead, ADTF selected the words *attributes*, *experiences*, and *backgrounds* to describe diversity broadly and avoid exclusivity.

A key goal was to describe differences that the Army could incorporate into core competencies and use to leverage mission effectiveness. ADTF therefore selected the term *attributes* over *characteristics*, for example, because the team did not want to evoke the perception that only demographic characteristics mattered, as opposed to other relevant personal attributes. The term *experiences* was chosen to call attention to a person's training, education, or what he or she has done. The term *background* was selected to cover culture and social background.

An important aspect of the Army's definition development process was extensive outreach across the Service. This component included the Army Diversity Working Group, which had representatives from across the Army; visits to installations across the globe to get feedback on the definition through interviews; and focus groups.

Air Force. In 2007, A1, who is responsible for plans and policies covering all military life cycles and civilian personnel management; the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Manpower and Reserve Affairs; the General Counsel (GCM); Maintenance Resource Management; and Judge Advocate Administrative (Law) worked with the U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA) to develop a USAFA diversity plan. This was considered a reasonable place to start the process of defining diversity because the Academy is a key source for officers, and higher education is one setting in which the Supreme Court has approved diversity efforts. The definition was therefore first applied to USAFA's efforts to diversify its cadets through recruitment and admission decisions. The offices involved in the development process wanted to make sure that the definition was broad enough to be used at USAFA as well as across the Air Force.

Unlike in the other Services, GCM was integral to the development of the definition. To guide the development process, this office relied on the Supreme Court decisions in Grutter v. Bollinger et al. (539 U.S. 306, 2003), which involved the University of Michigan Law School's admission process, and Gratz v. Bollinger et al. (539 U.S. 244, 2003), which involved the university's undergraduate admission process. These decisions state that public institutions of higher education may have a compelling government interest in promoting diversity in their student bodies. During this process,

the predecessor to the present Air Force's DDWG and a representative from SAF/MR visited Michigan's law school admissions office to understand its "whole person" review process, which, unlike the more mechanistic system used in the university's undergraduate admissions office, had been upheld by the Supreme Court as sufficiently "narrowly tailored" to satisfy the U.S. Constitution. Based on these efforts, USAFA currently incorporates a "whole person" review in its admission procedures (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010c).

In March 2009, officials in the Air Force Equal Opportunity Office and the Strategic Diversity Integration Office joined forces to produce a video that demonstrates the commitment of senior Air Force leaders to diversity and equal opportunity programs. In the video, titled "Diversity and Equal Opportunity in Our Air Force," Air Force senior leaders voice their perspectives on diversity and equal opportunity, citing "people" as the strength of the Service (Lyle, 2010).

Navy. In 2006, Admiral Michael Mullen, then the Navy's Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) and now Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, spearheaded the effort to start developing a definition of diversity. According to the Service representative, ADM Mullen wanted a definition that was overarching and that would include all attributes, including religion, race, ethnicity, gender, culture, and language. ADM Mullen was also clear that he wanted an action plan with metrics and accountability measures built in.

The Navy brought together a team of experts from the equal opportunity field and representatives from the Navy's major enterprises to build a statement that would encompass the widest scope of attributes sailors have to offer, was connected to mission readiness, and was aligned with the Navy's core values. The team was also concerned that diversity would be lumped together with affirmative action or equal opportunity and so wanted the definition and the policy statement to be differentiated from those concepts. The team spent approximately one week working together to hammer out the core concepts of the definition. Once the core concepts had been developed and vetted with leadership, the team presented its definition to the Diversity Senior Advisory Group (DSAG), which included the Navy Vice Chief (the Service's second-highest ranking official). DSAG took one day to finalize the definition.

Before the CNO sign-off, the definition was vetted by the Navy public affairs office, its legislative affairs office, and legal counsel. Legal counsel was used in a consultative capacity (similar to the way most other Services operated): The attorneys would chime in about what was legal but otherwise did not participate actively. After these three offices had approved the definition, it went to the CNO for final approval.

Marine Corps. The Marine Corps' diversity policy was set in February 2008 and took a number of months to develop. The exact process was not articulated to us in interviews because the Service representative had only recently taken on the diversity responsibility, but we were told that a committee

within the Diversity Management Office developed the policy in concert with the Equal Opportunity Office, since they are co-located organizationally. The development committee used the diversity framework developed by Wilson (1996) as a guide.[2] The committee deliberately developed a policy statement first to define diversity within a framework.

The Marine Corps stresses small-unit leadership because it is the "flattest" of all the Services. It has the most junior officers, relatively, and they are charged with small teams. It is therefore particularly important to focus on recognizing and leveraging the talents of all individuals. For this reason, the DDWG interviewee said, the Marine Corps felt that a policy statement would work better than a mere definition because it would provide clarity to leaders.

Legal counsel is considered an equal member at the table. Whenever any changes to diversity policies are being considered, the Marine Corps' attorneys are consulted and provide oversight.

Coast Guard. Led by the Coast Guard's Diversity Office Staff, a number of military members and civilian employees collaborated on developing the Coast Guard's diversity policy statement and its definition of diversity. The commandant, Admiral Thad Allen, added his touch and coined the phrase that "diversity is a state of being." Although ADM Allen signed the final document, the author was Team Coast Guard (Conway, n.d.). The DDWG representative said that this collaborative process was meant to be an example of a "diverse workforce approach to problem solving."

The process went through a number of steps: The Coast Guard Diversity Office staff first developed a straw man definition and policy statement in 2006 with assistance from the commandant's Diversity Advisory Board. That version was then routed to the Chief of Staff and the Judge Advocate General, and an edited version was forwarded to the commandant.

Although the Coast Guard is one of the five armed services, its characteristics differentiate it from the others. These unique characteristics were considered in the definition development process. For example, the Service representative noted that the Coast Guard's definition is tailored to fit its conception of mission readiness: Not only are servicemembers warfighters, they also have a humanitarian mission. They conduct search-and-rescue missions, protect the environment, and enforce treaties. According to our interviewee, "We are the ones pulling people from the waters, rescuing people from rooftops during hurricanes, and working to protect the environment and living marine resources." Therefore, the Coast Guard's mission is broader than that of other Services. Furthermore, the Coast Guard Academy is not part of the same system as the other academies: It does not have a Division I sports team, nor does it have congressional nominations. And the Coast Guard is situated not in DoD but in the Department of Homeland Security. (Thus, it is unclear how the uniform DoD definition called for by the charter will apply to this branch.)

In September 2009, the Coast Guard Diversity Office produced a strategic plan that followed from the diversity policy statement. The Service representative reported that the Coast Guard has other plans in place that will link the definition of diversity to leadership training and accountability.

Service-Wide Reception to Diversity and Diversity Policy Statements

We asked each Service representative how the definitions and policy statements had been received. No interviewees reported encountering any pushback or arguments against the need for a definition of diversity. However, the Army was the only branch that used extensive outreach to servicemembers in the development process.

Nevertheless, all the interviewees flagged messaging as a potential hurdle. That is, misunderstandings about the importance of diversity and inconsistent definitions of diversity should be taken into consideration when trying to implement diversity policies. For example, interviewees at the Marine Corps likened diversity policy to a Rubik's Cube. Although there was no mention of specific pushback from servicemembers or leadership to the diversity policy statement, they did note that there is a misperception within the Service—and across society in general—that diversity is equivalent to affirmative action, that it specifically targets blacks or Hispanics and therefore excludes whites. We heard similar accounts in our Air Force and Army interviews. These responses are in line with Servicemembers' perceptions, as reported in Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010b. They also reflect a sometimes hostile reception to the MLDC, some of which is described on the MLDC website (*Another Perspective on diversity*, n.d.).

Conclusions

This issue paper provides a brief summary of each Service's definition of diversity and corresponding diversity policy statement. These definitions are deliberately broad and encompass a wide range of attributes that differ from individual to individual beyond the traditional demographic characteristics. Each Service undertook a thoughtful, strategic process to ensure that the definitions and policies were clearly linked to its own determination of mission readiness and its core values. Each Service also wants its definition and policy statements to be useful to units.

We found that legal advice was helpful in ensuring that definitions and policy statements did not overstep the bounds of equal opportunity (e.g., by suggesting quotas or representation benchmarks) but that legal counsel did not create the definitions and policy statements.

Issues for the MLDC to consider in developing a uniform definition for DoD include the following:

- How will the proposed DoD definition be congruent with the Services' diversity statements, which are deliberately broader than the narrow focus implied in the MLDC charter?

- Although the Services acknowledge different rationales for diversity, they all have mission readiness as a goal. Should this be the focus of the MLDC definition?
- How can the MLDC be mindful of each Service's different conceptions of mission readiness and core values?
- Should the MLDC propose that its definition supplant the Service definitions or support them?

Notes

[1]Empirical research does not support this view.

[2]Wilson (1996) asserts that recognizing and developing the unique talents of *all* employees will result in an equitable workplace that experiences superior business results. His framework incorporates the Human Equity™ philosophy, which is grounded in the idea that "when organizations recognize and leverage the unique talents of all employees they have a competitive advantage in key business outcomes such as productivity, profitability, and retention" (TWI, 2010).

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