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PLANNING FOR DIVERSITY

OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR DOD LEADERS

NELSON LIM | MICHELLE CHO | KIMBERLY CURRY

Prepared for the Office of the Secretary of Defense

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1776 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90407-2138

1200 South Hayes Street, Arlington, VA 22202-5050

4570 Fifth Avenue, Suite 600, Pittsburgh, PA 15213-2665

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Summary

With this report, we aim to assist DoD leaders in their effort to develop a strategic plan to achieve greater diversity among DoD active duty and civilian leadership. In order for the strategic plan to be effective, DoD leaders must define *diversity* and explain how they intend to measure progress toward greater diversity and how they will hold themselves and others accountable for such progress. Major institutional changes may be required to improve diversity among the senior leadership. Therefore, the highest level of DoD leadership, not just from the personnel community but also from other functional communities, needs to be involved in this effort. To aid DoD leaders' deliberation, we provide policy options and recommendations based on discussions at the 2007 DoD Diversity Summit¹ and a review of scientific literature on diversity management. The strategic plan that emerges from this current effort will guide the departmental effort in achieving diversity of the leadership of DoD's total force (both civilian and military personnel) in all components (the Military Departments as well as the Fourth Estate²).

This report describes distinct aspects of strategic planning: vision, mission and goals, strategies, and evaluation. Each section poses specific questions for DoD leaders, summarizes insights found in diversity

¹ The 2007 DoD Diversity Summit was sponsored by the Office of Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity and coordinated by RAND and was held February 27–28, 2007, in Arlington, Va. We provide a condensed version of the transcript in the appendix.

² The Fourth Estate consists of the defense agencies, DoD field activities, and defense-wide programs.

literature and experiences shared at the 2007 DoD Diversity Summit,³ and explores implications of the various options for each element of the strategic plan.

Vision: Diversity and Diversity Management Defined

“What kind of organization do DoD leaders want the department to be?” To answer this question, the leaders must adopt a standardized definition of *diversity* for the department and specify a style of diversity management that is consistent with the adopted definition.

Based on the literature on diversity management and discussions at the DoD Diversity Summit, we identify three possible definitions of *diversity* for DoD:

- The first definition focuses on representation of certain groups, commonly based on U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) categories, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and disability.
- The second definition is broader and encompasses a multitude of attributes that can influence the effectiveness of DoD in executing its mission.
- The third definition is a combination of both. It calls for prioritizing representation of certain groups and includes attributes based on DoD’s needs and mission-readiness.

In this report, we discuss aspects of each definition in detail and recommend that DoD adopt a vision based on the third definition. This will result in a vision that will have historical credibility and a clear “business case.” Both are essential elements of an inspiring vision. Having historical credibility is important, because internal and external stakeholders—minority and female civilian employees and service-members, members of Congress, and civil society at large—may perceive a vision without historical credibility as a way to avoid improving

³ We provided a summary of the discussion in the appendix.

representation of minorities and women among the leadership. This perception would be reinforced by the fact that DoD's estimates indicate virtually no prospect of an increase in representation of minorities or women in the higher ranks (flag and Senior Executive Service [SES]) for the next decade, while minority populations are expected to grow significantly in the near future (Defense Human Resources Board, 2005). Having a clear business case is essential, because a vision without a clear business case will fail to instill diversity as one of the core values of DoD in the workforce. This will weaken the implementation of the strategic plan.

Literature on diversity shows that organizations need to manage their diversity to reap its benefits. In fact, studies show that, without management, diversity may have no impact or, worse, a negative impact on work performance. In the report, we expound on two competing objectives: assimilation and inclusion. *Assimilation* implies unity and conformity; *inclusion* implies preserving identity and maintaining individual differences. While assimilation is important for unit cohesion, inclusion is an essential value for a diverse workforce.

Mission and Goals: Who and What, Prioritized

Once the vision articulates DoD's future direction regarding the diversity of its workforce, the next step involves establishing the mission and goals. This step will specify the parameters for implementing the vision by defining the agent and scope of work and prioritizing the strategic action. Specifically, the mission can be either for the Office of Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity (ODMEO), a policy office within OSD, or for the entire DoD. If ODMEO is tasked exclusively with the mission, the existing organizational infrastructure will require little change and will further cement diversity as a human resources issue. If the mission is written for the entire DoD, there are two approaches to the mission: The mission can address diversity separately, or it can integrate diversity into the overall mission of DoD. Both approaches may require major institutional changes, including policies and practices, but addressing diversity separately will treat diversity as an end

goal, whereas the latter approach will treat diversity as a means toward accomplishing the core mission of DoD. Finally, the goals—derived from vision and mission—will communicate the leadership’s priorities to the rest of DoD, serving as a guide to implementation and resource allocation. DoD leadership can emphasize improving representation, the overall climate, or capacity to carry out operations through diversity. We do not recommend a particular approach, for the choice is contingent on how DoD leaders define their diversity vision. However, it is essential that mission and goals also be consistent with the scope of diversity vision.

Strategies: Main Vehicles to Implementing the Vision

Strategies must be tightly linked to the established vision, mission, and goals. Diversity strategies can be grouped into two broad categories:

- *process strategies* that are related to operational elements, including but not limited to accessions, development, career assignments, promotion, and retention
- *enabling strategies* that involve functions that are more far-reaching in nature, such as leadership engagement, accountability, and culture.

The impact of the strategic plan on the ways DoD does business will depend directly on the strength of enabling strategies. In other words, enabling strategies are necessary conditions for the success of process strategies. This is because the essence of diversity management calls on individuals to go beyond the comfort of familiarity and uniformity.

For example, consider a situation in which a supervisor is faced with a hiring decision in which she must choose between two equally qualified applicants, and one of the applicants comes from a different (unfamiliar) background. The background characteristics need not be limited to race, ethnicity, or gender; they could be religion, socioeconomic background, educational level, specialty, career field, or mili-

tary experience. Hiring the applicant with the different background will increase the diversity of her work unit, but the supervisor may consider this action risky for her mission at hand. If she has received a clear direction from her top leaders that taking a measured risk for achieving greater diversity is one of the core values of DoD, she will be empowered to overcome her discomfort of unfamiliarity. Increasing the diversity of DoD requires that thousands of decisionmakers in a similar situation go beyond the comfort of familiarity in favor of diversity.

Evaluation: Measures to Guide Progress

Evaluation serves as the link between strategic planning and implementation by tracking the progress of on-the-ground efforts and informing accountability processes. Metrics for evaluation ought to be derived from the vision, but this is not currently the case with diversity because the field lacks appropriate metrics. Various metrics are available or under development to measure

- diversity in a group
- organizational climate
- intermediate (process) and final outcomes.

Many of these metrics are untested or not feasible to apply in the field. Most organizations, including DoD and its components (the Military Departments and the Fourth Estate), default to measurement of demographic representation and climate surveys, even though they have adopted a broad vision of diversity that goes beyond demographic diversity. This mismatch between the vision and metrics results in confusion and dilutes the impact of diversity initiatives. A more strategic approach for DoD would involve (1) determining what needs to be measured according to the leadership's vision and mission for diversity and (2) employing and/or developing metrics that support the vision and mission. Head counting, for example, is appropriate for measuring representations of certain groups, but it will not completely capture the

most important aspects of a diversity vision that emphasizes inclusion. DoD must be creative and innovative when developing new metrics that focus on mission-readiness.

Choices for DoD Leaders

DoD leaders face critical choices in each aspect of the strategic plan. DoD leaders may choose a strategic plan with a narrow scope, which is conventional and compatible with the current organizational structure. Or they may craft an expansive plan that will further integrate diversity management into all aspects of the organization. For example, DoD leaders may choose a vision based on representations of groups based on EEOC categories. This choice will certainly provide a familiar setting for the institution, but the choice will not instill a direct link between diversity and the emerging operational environments that DoD faces (and will face in the future). Therefore, it will be difficult for DoD leaders to make a business case for diversity beyond its recruiting needs. On the other hand, going beyond a familiar definition of diversity based on EEOC categories, leaders will need to determine which attributes DoD wants to protect and foster. The discussion will need to involve top leaders from a wide range of professional/functional backgrounds. The effort will place the institution in an unfamiliar setting. The vision emerged from this process, however, will have a broad base of support and a tight link to operational needs.

Fortunately, most choices are not mutually exclusive; leaders may combine various features of alternative options to achieve optimal results.

Recommendations

We provide the DoD leadership with six recommendations:

1. Have the Secretary of Defense spearhead the strategic diversity effort.

2. Create an oversight committee with top DoD leaders from a wide range of professional/functional and personal backgrounds.
3. Adopt a vision that combines attention to traditionally protected groups with aims for creating an inclusive environment.
4. Expand strategies beyond accessions.
5. Invest in and develop rigorous metrics on all dimensions that support the strategic vision.
6. Design and apply a comprehensive accountability system with real rewards and consequences for individuals and groups.

We begin with recommendations that set a strong enabling environment for successful development of the strategic plan and its effective implementation. The personal involvement of the Secretary of Defense provides a clear signal to the workforce that ensuring diversity is a core value of the department and that managing diversity is a top priority. The Secretary should do more than issue a diversity statement and occasionally refer to diversity in speeches and press conferences. We recommend that the Secretary personally lead an oversight committee that approves and monitors the progress of diversity initiatives.

Consistent with our first recommendation, we recommend that DoD form an oversight committee of top leaders from a wide range of professional/functional and personal backgrounds to oversee the development of the strategic plan and its implementation by regularly meeting with DoD diversity managers. The members of the committee will provide insights from their vast experience and inputs from their functional communities. In addition, these leaders can serve as powerful champions for diversity.

As for strategic planning, we recommend that *diversity* be defined with attributes that are relevant to DoD's mission, with race/ethnicity and gender prioritized. A definition of *diversity* without these historically significant attributes will not gain the credibility needed for successful implementation. We also recommend that DoD's management approach be shifted toward creating an inclusive environment, with careful preservation of DoD's unique values and norms. The mission may be best applied to all of DoD, and not just ODMEO, to ensure that diversity is not treated simply as a personnel issue.

In developing strategies, we recommend close alignment between the chosen vision and mission. It is critical that DoD employ strategies beyond those related to accessions. Moreover, it is essential that any major initiative, such as Develop 21st Century Leaders,⁴ explicitly address how it will achieve greater diversity among DoD civilian leadership.

The quality and effectiveness of an evaluation and accountability system depend on rigorous metrics. We recommend that DoD apply the most rigorous metrics available for all areas of interest, as reflected in the goals. If such metrics are not available, we recommend that DoD invest resources to develop them with experts in diversity measurement.

While this report mainly sets the stage for DoD leadership's strategic planning, we encourage the leadership to carry the momentum behind planning and into implementation, within a reasonable yet swift timeline, to ensure that the next generation of leadership does not face the same challenge. Participants at the DoD Diversity Summit noted that diversity issues have been discussed at length in the past without any marked progress and therefore major institutional changes may be required for diversity goals to be realized. This report concludes with various strategies to transform the strategic plan to action.

⁴ Develop 21st Century Leaders is an initiative that aims to address the challenges of the changing dynamics of the DoD (i.e., evolving from the Cold War paradigm in the midst of a downsized department and looming retirement among the baby boomer generation) by developing new and progressive strategies to recruit and retain a quality workforce.