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# **Military Leadership Diversity Commission Decision Paper #6: Diversity Leadership**

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**February 2011**

MLDC decision papers present the Commission-approved, subcommittee-specific recommendations. These recommendations are the product not only of the logic and evidence presented in the decision papers but also the values and judgments of the Commissioners. Legally imposed time constraints naturally limited the Commission's ability to undertake extensive research. Thus, the decision papers present the evidence that was available and that could be collected during the discovery phase of the Commission. The decision papers were reviewed by subject-matter experts external to the Commission.

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## INTRODUCTION

As a concept, “diversity management” is an umbrella with many ribs. Based on its understanding that diversity management encompasses plans, policies, and practices, the Military Leadership Diversity Commission (MLDC) assigned its charter task on diversity management to two subcommittees: One subcommittee, Implementation and Accountability, addressed diversity management plans and policies; the other subcommittee, Diversity Leadership and Diversity Leadership Training, addressed diversity management practices.

This decision paper documents the work of the latter subcommittee and puts forth the Commission’s recommendations regarding effective leadership practices for diverse work groups, including the need for education and training to develop appropriate leadership competencies. It also describes the logic and research on which the recommendations are based. It does not replicate work that is contained in other MLDC decision papers but refers the reader to them where appropriate.

Because the military calls people management practices “leadership” (i.e., the military “manages” resources but “leads” people), the Diversity Leadership Subcommittee interpreted its task as addressing effective and accountable leadership of diverse groups and developing leaders at all levels to provide such leadership. Thus, this decision paper has a specific concern that is not addressed elsewhere: how leaders at all levels actually lead diverse groups effectively. In other words, it is concerned with leadership practices from the bottom up as they are applied to diverse work groups.

This decision paper does not address the role that top leadership plays in influencing the success or failure of diversity-related policies and programs. This is a common understanding of the term *diversity leadership*, but it is addressed in the Implementation and Accountability decision paper. Nor does this decision paper make the case for the positive relationship between diversity and capability in the military, as that has been done elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

### Strategy to Examine Diversity Leadership Practices

The diversity management charter task shared by the two subcommittees directed the Commission to assess “the ability of the current organizational structure to ensure effective and accountable diversity management across the DoD [Department of Defense], including the Office of Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity and other similar offices within the Military Departments.”

To meet this charter directive, the Diversity Leadership Subcommittee investigated how leaders “lead”—i.e., manage—diverse forces under their command effectively. Building on prior research on this topic (see, for example, Tsui & Gutek, 1999), the subcommittee requested presentations to the Commission by Service representatives, corporate practitioners, and academic researchers; interviewed Service representatives; conducted informational meetings with members of the four DoD Services; and surveyed servicemembers through the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI). The knowledge gained from these activities, including several issue papers, is referred to throughout this paper. Two basic assumptions guided the subcommittee in analyzing this research, which covered three key topic areas.

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<sup>1</sup> Williams and O’Reilly (1998) offer a broad review of the empirical literature; for a military perspective, see Lim et al., 2008; Issue Paper #14; and Decision Paper #5.

## Guiding Assumptions

The two broad assumptions that guided the subcommittee respond to a fundamental question about diversity management: Is it an extension of equal opportunity, or is it something different? The Commission took the latter direction: Diversity management is different from the military's longstanding efforts to prevent unlawful discrimination and to provide equal opportunity. That is, the Commission adopted "the business case for diversity," described in Issue Paper #14. The business case essentially says that workers from underrepresented groups bring different ideas and approaches to designing processes, framing tasks, communicating ideas, and so on, thus providing fresh and meaningful approaches to work from which the organization can learn and grow (Cox, 1993; Ely & Thomas, 2001; Thomas & Ely, 1996).

The first broad assumption is thus that the goal of military diversity management is improved capability—i.e., helping the organization to learn and grow from the differences that exist within it. This assumption derives from the overarching DoD policy statement about diversity and diversity management issued on February 2, 2009 (Issue Paper #50). The directive ties the definitions of diversity and diversity management and the diversity management program goals to improved readiness and capability, not to fairness and the prevention of illegal discrimination. Although the Commission found that the directive did not fully resolve the conflict between these two sets of goals, it concluded that it was a good first step in establishing diversity management as an effort that is separate from equal opportunity (EO).

The second broad assumption is that diversity leadership training is quite different from the diversity training that DoD and the Services have been doing for many years. The Commission did *not* address the topic of diversity training per se, nor did the charter ask it to do so. Diversity training is commonly built to combat bias and focuses on establishing a culture that values all individuals. Thus, diversity training per se is a necessary but not a sufficient step to making diversity improve organizational capability. Indeed, in terms of the specific focus of the Commission, academic research presented to the Commission at its meeting on June 17, 2010, found that diversity training has been generally ineffective in increasing demographic diversity among top leaders, a major concern of the Commission, and is often counterproductive.

Thus, the Commission focused on the role of leadership competencies in leading diverse groups effectively—i.e., in terms of mission capability.

## Key Topic Areas

Because the question of what practices produce effective leadership of diverse groups is a new question for the military, the subcommittee needed to understand the question before it could seek answers and develop recommendations. Hence, it organized its investigation around the following topics:

- definitions of relevant terms
- the relationship between effective diversity leadership and mission capability
- how the Services are conducting diversity leadership training, as understood by the Commission.

## Commission-Approved Recommendations Related to Diversity Leadership and Diversity Leadership Training<sup>2</sup>

The Commission makes one broad and two specific recommendations regarding diversity leadership and diversity leadership training:

### ***Recommendation 1—***

***To enhance readiness and mission accomplishment, leading diverse groups effectively must become a core competency across DoD and the Services. To implement this recommendation:***

- ***a. Leadership training at all levels shall include education in diversity dynamics and training in practices for leading diverse groups effectively.***
- ***b. DoD and the Services should determine the framework for how (e.g., curriculum, content, methods) to inculcate such education and training into leader development, including how to measure and evaluate its effectiveness.***

## Organization of This Paper

The remaining sections of this decision paper are organized according to the key topic areas listed above. Each of these issues is explored here at length, supported by information from the MLDC issue papers elicited by the larger project, as well as other research. The paper closes with a discussion of the recommendations based on these findings.

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<sup>2</sup> The recommendations discussed in this decision paper are the Commission-approved, topic-specific recommendations that resulted from the Commission's understanding and interpretation of the findings from this subcommittee. Following the approval of all of the subcommittee-specific recommendations, the Commission developed its final recommendations by combining recommendations across subcommittees to reduce overlap and repetition. Therefore, the recommendations presented in this paper do not map directly to the recommendations presented in the Commission's forthcoming final report.

## DEFINITIONS OF RELEVANT TERMS

The lack of widely accepted definitions for common diversity-related terms creates confusion, masks disagreement, and limits mutual understanding. Because the Diversity Leadership Subcommittee was essentially mapping new territory in recommending that leaders at all levels become competent in practices that maximize the performance-related aspects of diversity, it was particularly important to do so with clarity. Thus, based on empirical and other academic and military-focused research, the subcommittee explicitly defined the terms it used to set the boundaries for its work.

### Diversity

The Commission developed the following definition of diversity to use for its work and to recommend to DoD: “Diversity is all the different characteristics and attributes of individuals that are consistent with Department of Defense core values, integral to mission readiness and accomplishment, and reflect the country we serve.”

The importance of this definition for this decision paper is that it defines diversity as the broad set of differences that individuals bring to the military, not just a subset of demographic differences. It thus reflects the empirical evidence that multiple aspects of difference between people are relevant for organizational performance and capability.<sup>3</sup>

### Diversity Management

The Commission understands *diversity management* to be about how organizations drive or affect the impact of diversity on key organizational outcomes. Diversity management has three components:

- *Plans.* Organization-level strategic plans identify goals and strategies that tie diversity management to the overall mission.
- *Policies.* Organization-level policies define the parameters for action and behavior.
- *Practices.* Individual organization members, especially leaders, leverage diversity in service of the mission.

Diversity management is thus about managing how human differences affect organizational capability, whether differences refer to demographics, cognitive types and skills, place in the organizational structure, or identity within the broader global community. Thus, the characteristics and purpose of diversity management are very different from those of EO.

The Commission understands *EO* to be compliance with laws that protect members of certain classes from discrimination (e.g., men and women as different members of the gender class, and whites, blacks, and Hispanics as different members of the race and ethnicity class). This includes ensuring that decisions related to hiring, promotion, and separation are made on the basis of qualifications and performance, not membership in a protected class.

In contrast, diversity management addresses a full range of demographic differences, not just the subset protected by law, as well as other nondemographic differences that are also not subject to legal protection. The Commission heard ample evidence that in private sector organizations, and the Services themselves, diversity goals are improved organizational outcomes. Even when the focus is on

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<sup>3</sup> The Commission’s recommended definition of diversity is discussed in detail in Decision Paper #4.

demographically underrepresented groups, diversity goals are organizational, such as reducing turnover or accessing particular markets more effectively. For instance, the Services speak specifically about the role of racial and ethnic diversity in winning the war for talent.

## Diversity Leadership

*Diversity leadership* is a subset of diversity management as defined above, specifically the practices subset. Diversity leadership addresses how leaders at all ranks and organizational levels shape the impact of diversity dynamics (i.e., the group dynamics that arise specifically as a result of group diversity<sup>4</sup>) in the forces under their command.

In this decision paper, *diversity leadership* refers to specific leadership practices at the group level, whether the groups are small or large—wherever people interact to achieve an outcome. Thus, it refers to how leaders influence the ways in which people and groups under their command relate to one another.

Diversity leadership requires the leader to understand diversity dynamics: how human differences affect interactions between people. Some people use the term *diversity lens* to drive home the insight that leading diverse work groups does not require a different leadership style but rather a different orchestration of tried and true leadership tools based on a sophisticated understanding of the nature of diversity in the unit and its impact on the way people work together. (See Kraus & Riche, 2009, for case studies of this understanding in several Air Force squadrons.)

Diversity leadership thus focuses on the functioning of the unit rather than its individual members. To use a sports metaphor, diversity leadership does not address the coach's inspirational role as motivator or cheerleader. Rather, it addresses the coach's practices in assessing the skills of the team members and maximizing the ways in which they work together to defeat their opponents. As one Air Force case study participant put it, diversity leadership practices sum up to “the things you do in your diverse organizations that amplify the synergistic effect of having that diversity” (Kraus & Riche, 2009).

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<sup>4</sup> Group dynamics are commonly understood as the processes by which group members interact and influence each other's behavior and, therefore, the group's performance. These processes include norms, roles, relations, development, need to belong, and social influence, and they affect how members communicate, cooperate, and develop the trust needed to achieve the group's purpose.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EFFECTIVE DIVERSITY LEADERSHIP AND MISSION CAPABILITY

In developing the Commission's definition of diversity, the Commissioners asked whether there is a business case for diversity and answered it affirmatively: Diversity can increase mission capability. However, research shows that achieving this link depends on diversity-conscious leadership.<sup>5</sup> Hence, the subcommittee investigated what diversity-conscious leadership is and how it is acquired.

Note that although the Commission makes a distinction between diversity management policies and EO policies, its focus on leadership practices supports EO within the workplace. This is because a key aspect of successful leadership when diversity is present is making sure that people feel they are being treated fairly and equitably. Part of that process is making sure that work group members feel that evaluation, assignment, and promotion processes are fair and that the value of diversity is demonstrated through inclusive leadership practices, as well as organizational policies. Informational meetings conducted for this Commission communicated clearly that servicemember trust in fairness is a prerequisite for turning diversity into mission capability (Issue Paper #18).

### Leadership Practices and Capability

Research has shown that if it is not managed effectively, diversity—whether defined in traditional demographic terms or more broadly in terms of work-related “difference”—can actually reduce capability, most frequently through the decreased communication and/or increased conflict that result when some people are (or feel) excluded (Thompson & Gooler, 1996; Tsui & Gutek, 1999). Thus, leadership practices that are conscious of the ways in which diversity can harm capability, and that can be “turned” to enhance it, are the link between diversity management policies and the realization of their performance-related goals.<sup>6</sup>

People “hear” such assertions about leadership in relation to diversity in different ways. Some hear them as saying that diversity leadership is used only when needed rather than being an integral part of leadership. Others hear them as implying that leading a diverse organization is no different from leading a homogeneous organization. Both perceptions miss the basic lesson of diversity research: Diversity dynamics require specific leadership practices to make sure that they lead to improved (not worsened) work group performance and organizational outcomes (Issue Paper #14).<sup>7</sup>

The subcommittee found that effective diversity leadership starts with looking through the “diversity lens” to identify and understand the diversity dynamics that are relevant in the leader's command and extends to consciously employing practices to lead through those dynamics (Issue Paper #29). Doing this requires the leader to

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Issue Paper #14; Tsui & Gutek, 1999; and Thompson & Gooler, 1996.

<sup>6</sup> The Diversity Research Network, a joint business and university endeavor formed to remedy the research deficit regarding the impact of diversity on organizations, conducted field studies in four Fortune 500 companies (Kochan et al., 2003). Overall, the research found few direct effects of diversity per se on performance. However, when evaluating the indirect, or mediating, effects of diversity management practices, they found that such practices consistently made a difference.

<sup>7</sup> Thompson and Gooler (1996, p. 427) conclude that “effective diverse teams don't just happen. Rather, they must be designed, implemented, and managed in order to maximize the potential advantages and minimize the potential disadvantages.”

- recognize the “differences” that exist within the command
- understand the dynamics that can cause those differences to have negative impacts, such as loss of cohesion, communications difficulties, or conflict, as well as create opportunities for having a positive effect on organizational performance
- apply leadership practices that can neutralize the negative impacts and, if possible, leverage those differences in support of the mission.

## Effective Diversity Leadership Practices

Research has identified effective practices for leading diverse work groups (Issue Paper #29; Kraus & Riche, 2009; Tsui & Gutek, 1999). Diversity leadership involves applying practices that the management literature has long identified as successful people management techniques but that take on new significance for leaders of diverse work groups. This is because leaders are responsible for the on-the-ground functioning and development of the following elements that determine how diversity affects work group outcomes:

- communication
- cooperation
- cohesion
- trust.

These elements are in play because the fundamental mechanism through which diversity affects capability is social identity and social categorization (see, for example, Jackson et al., 2003; Tsui & Gutek, 1999; and Tsui et al., 1992). People attach meaning to their memberships in identity groups, such as demographic or occupational groups, and these identity groups then shape behaviors and perceptions in different settings (see Mor Barak et al., 1998). For example, in Air Force research, Kraus and Riche (2009) found numerous instances of intragroup conflict that were rooted in differences in component-specific rules governing annual leave,<sup>8</sup> the length of the workday, and other work practices. These basic policy differences then affected how members of each component viewed members of the others, contributing to existing stereotypes about differences in commitment to the military mission.

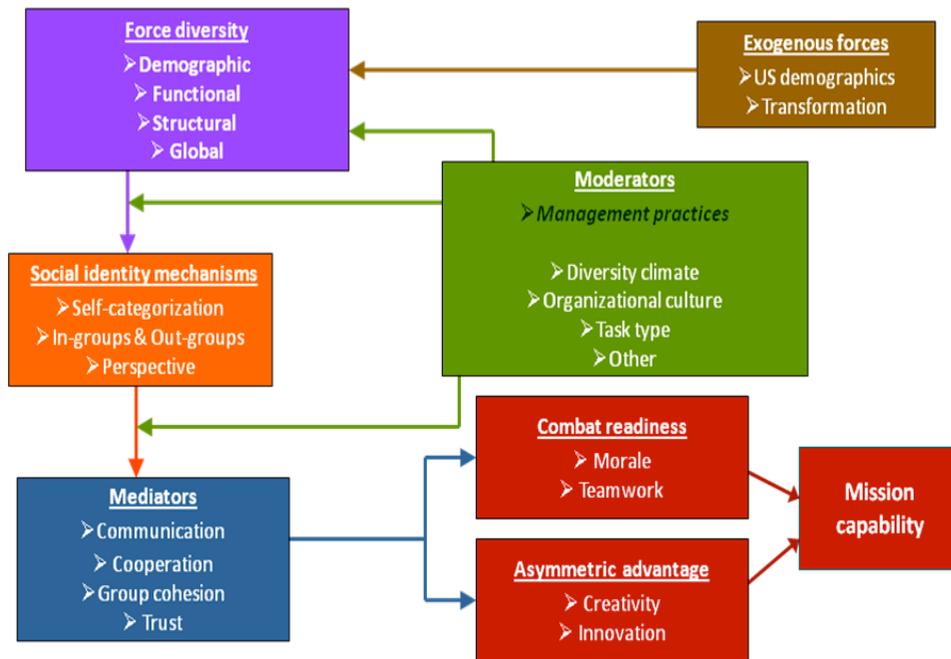
Absent effective leadership, such as the leader focusing the group on the overarching mission, this fundamental and powerful human process can create in-groups and out-groups within a given work unit or organization. This can occur even when the characteristics associated with “otherness” are trivial with respect to the tasks being performed (as when stereotypes feature unfounded assumptions about competence). In other words, it is not negative categorization per se that leads to negative outcomes but categorization that translates into intergroup bias. This is the process that the leader must manage.

Figure 1 is a conceptual map of research-based findings about diversity dynamics developed by Air Force diversity researchers (see Kraus & Riche, 2009, for an explanation of terminology and other information). Overall, the mapping shows how diversity dynamics create and shape an indirect relationship between force diversity and mission capability. Within this framework, it also shows that management (leadership) practices moderate diversity outcomes and provides a platform for thinking about such leadership practices as role modeling, communicating, and climate creation in relation to diversity.

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<sup>8</sup> Here, component-specific differences include differences between the Active Component and the Reserve Component, as well as differences between military members and civilians.

**Figure 1. The Diversity Model**



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SOURCE: Kraus & Riche, 2009.

The following practice categories and related examples (taken from case studies of diversity leadership in the Air Force) demonstrate the practical nature of diversity leadership and suggest potential ways to teach it (Kraus & Riche, 2009). Once leaders learn to apply a diversity lens (i.e., to consciously attend to how diversity affects the mission), they can decide for themselves what will work for them based on the context and their leadership styles.

**Practice Category: Instill a Mission-Related Sense of Identity**

The military’s collective, mission-based culture lends itself to creating the conditions in which leaders can create work-relevant social categories that supersede nonrelevant social categories. Since the Services already focus on their mission, enhancing this focus can remove or at least lessen sources of conflict, process loss, or other drags on productivity that result from divisive social categorization.

Deployment seems to do this almost automatically, as situations calling for cooperative interdependence motivate group members to see beyond simple stereotypes (Fiske & Taylor, 1991) that lead to bias. But elsewhere it takes leadership to elevate a mission focus to bridge differences between people. As one Air Force squadron leader explained the process of focusing people on the mission instead of their differences, “It’s not comparing apples to oranges, but apples to the fruit basket” (Kraus & Riche, 2009).

**Example of Practices**

The leader can encourage and facilitate understanding between structurally different groups (e.g., active versus civilian or Reserve/Guard) by helping people learn how each unit or function contributes to the mission. One creative research subject overcame destructive interunit rivalries by creating teams that included people from each group in the squadron to accomplish high-profile

missions (Kraus & Riche, 2009). This leader also initiated unit-wide work-related activities in which different groups contributed different skills, to the (visible) benefit of the squadron as a whole.<sup>9</sup>

With these practices, this leader of a structurally and functionally diverse command instilled a learning orientation, as well as a performance orientation. Research finds that fostering such collaborative interdependence helps employees develop relational competencies within the context of diversity and become more likely to learn from the challenges they experience rather than retreat from them (Dragoni, 2005; Kouzes & Posner, 2010; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997).

### **Practice Category: Facilitate Effective Communication**

Strong, effective communication practices are essential for leaders of diverse work groups (Tsui & Gutek, 1999, provides an extensive review; also see Issue Paper #14). Frequently, diversity means that people may “hear” the same thing differently, so leaders may need to communicate in different ways to produce a shared understanding. This involves listening, as well as talking, to acquire the diversity lens that will let leaders know what and how they need to communicate across diversity categories. In essence, by not listening, a leader shuts off any learning about the effects of diversity, as well as signaling that he or she is not really acknowledging differences.

#### ***Example of Practices***

Leaders can factor diversity dynamics into communications. Kraus and Riche (2009) found numerous instances of work group-wide communications that ignored some work group members or spoke to them inappropriately. The leaders who communicated effectively had prioritized getting to know (i.e., listening to) all types of people under their command, not just those who were similar to them, whether in terms of demographics, occupational specialty, or organizational component.

### **Practice Category: Motivate in Accordance with Needs/Goals**

Attending to employee motivation is a common theme in management literature, but a diverse workforce calls for leaders to use a diversity lens. Without such a lens, leaders can operate on inappropriate assumptions, sometimes relying on stereotypes, sometimes failing to acknowledge real differences, and sometimes assuming that the “others” will assimilate to the majority. For instance, Kraus and Riche (2009) found that Air Force squadron leaders who managed functional or structural diversity well were able to do so because they were credible—they had made an effort to learn about squadron functions that they had not performed themselves. Other squadron leaders tended to lack that credibility because they had not become sufficiently familiar with the diverse functions or components.

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<sup>9</sup> The full case study (pp. 145–154) describes the practices that this self-trained leader used to create all five facilitating conditions that Tsui and Gutek (1999, pp. 167–168) identify as “ensuring that inter-group contact will bring positive results”:

- equal status among members of different groups
- evidence that out-group members do not conform to stereotypes (but not so much that they are seen as exceptions to the rule)
- need for cooperation in achieving the work goal
- interaction intimate enough that individuals’ knowledge of one another goes beyond stereotyping
- an organizational context (policies and practices) that favors or promotes a group equality norm.

### ***Example of Practices***

Leaders can use frequent meetings, including one-on-one meetings, to “know” all their people. Kraus and Riche (2009) found that ineffective research subjects did not meet with members from “different” functions or components before making decisions and had little or no understanding about how the decisions would motivate the “different” members.

### **Practice Category: Provide the Tools to Do the Job**

Obviously, leaders need to see that work group members have the time, materials, and skills to accomplish their tasks. But in a diversity context, this need extends to providing the practice and policy support, such as appropriate mentoring and “having their backs,” that enables subordinates to deal with diversity dynamics as they affect their day-to-day work.

Doing this successfully requires the leader to have used the diversity lens (i.e., to be aware of diversity dynamics and their likely sources). For example, leaders can help subordinates manage conflict, including reframing it as a way to reap performance benefits from diversity. Research finds that when people feel supported by their leaders, they can take the initiative to work through differences and otherwise take the risks necessary to engage in the work that develops deeper-level learning from diversity (Nishii & Mayer, 2009).

### ***Example of Practices***

When diversity involves leading groups from different organizations and/or occupational specialties, successful leaders are more likely to empower subordinates and avoid micromanagement. Kraus and Riche (2009) found that ineffective research subjects were unaware of how policy changes affected different units within their command and inadvertently created animosity and process loss if they did not facilitate arriving at appropriately different solutions.

Recall that part of the business case for diversity is the potential to enhance capability by learning from a wider array of perspectives. Empowerment is one tool for using the accumulated experience at hand—down to the lowest levels, if possible. Observing the chain of command and keeping a mission focus seem to be basic requirements for successful empowerment in a diversity situation, since boundaries can be unclear.

### **Practice Category: Establish Personal and Professional Credibility**

A leader’s personal and professional credibility is particularly relevant in a diversity context because of the important role of trust in mediating diversity’s impact. When people are asked to work with and for people who are not like them, leaders need to consciously build confidence in their leadership.

### ***Example of Practices***

Some leaders have successfully synthesized understanding of what all work group members are doing into a big picture that subordinates would not otherwise perceive. One research subject made a practice of doing this in his regular meetings with his squadron; by showing them how their work fit into a larger military conception, his big picture “take” not only built confidence in his leadership but also helped servicemembers value the functional diversity within their squadron (Kraus & Riche, 2009).

Kraus and Riche (2009) found that in diverse squadrons, leaders who were seen to take responsibility for what they were supposed to take responsibility for (i.e., “walked the talk”) were more credible. Behavioral integrity is, of course, characteristic of effective leaders in general, but it

may be easier to realize the benefits of diversity (which tends to broaden the range of responsibilities) when leaders admit that they do not know everything and can make mistakes too. In this way, they model a learning orientation and contribute to a climate in which people learn from mistakes: Learning to see past stereotypes is obviously important in making diversity “work.”

## **Summary**

In short, diversity leadership practices are basic people management practices; what is new is viewing them through a diversity lens. With this lens, leaders can explicitly manage the self-categorization mechanisms that accompany diversity and the mediators—trust, cohesion, conflict, and communication—that make the difference in the impact—positive, neutral, or negative—of diversity on mission capability.

## **ABSENCE OF DIVERSITY LEADERSHIP TRAINING IN THE SERVICES**

This section discusses the results of the Diversity Leadership Subcommittee’s exploration of how the Services are conducting diversity leadership training, as understood by the Commission. First, briefings requested from DoD and Service representatives indicated that the Services are generally not inculcating diversity leadership practices. Nor does the DoD Office of Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity include diversity-specific leadership practices in its strategic goals. Each briefing requested on this topic discussed diversity training, not diversity leadership training.<sup>10</sup>

Second, for the most part, the briefings and related interviews suggested that diversity leadership had not been explicitly identified as a necessary or core competency. However, some current training—as proposed, at least—contains elements of diversity leadership training. This includes the cross-cultural training that the Services are undertaking to help servicemembers work with and lead people from other nations and cultures—i.e., global diversity.

### **The Services Do Diversity Training, not Diversity Leadership Training**

Overall, none of the Services “educate” leaders about diversity and diversity leadership in the sense that the Commission understands such education: understanding the dynamics that diversity brings into the workplace and the way it can affect the mission. Instead, in response to the Commission’s specific requests for information about training leaders to lead diverse forces effectively, DoD and Service briefers mostly described diversity training—i.e., training about understanding and being sensitive to cultural and gender differences, not about practices for leading diverse groups.

In addition, a training assessment performed by DEOMI at the request of DoD found that the diversity training each Service provides at various points during the careers of servicemembers addresses respect for demographic differences (Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, 2008). Similarly, the DEOMI-provided training aimed at improving servicemembers’ ability to work with people who are different from them focuses on fostering an appreciation for individual differences stemming from the cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds of others. The assumption seems to be that with increased knowledge and appreciation of differences, diverse teams may function more harmoniously, as well as effectively. The related implication for leadership is that recognizing and accepting diversity is sufficient. However, as the previous section describes, turning diversity into a capability advantage calls for leaders to “manage” such key processes as communication, conflict, and trust.

Through a survey of servicemembers supplemented by informational meetings conducted at several bases, the subcommittee heard that how leaders adapt their leadership practices to diversity plays an important role in perceptions of mission effectiveness and discrimination within units (Issue

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<sup>10</sup> The MLDC meeting on May 26, 2010, heard briefings from DoD and the Services that were specifically requested to describe their current activities in relation to diversity leadership education and training. Service representatives had been previously interviewed about this topic in preparation for an issue paper, which was foregone because of the lack of activities to describe. Following the briefings, a follow-up interview was conducted with the Navy representative, and email queries were sent to the Air Force representative and a DoD representative; this follow-up was directed at activities the briefers described that could potentially contribute to diversity leadership education and training.

Paper #18). However, current diversity training in the military focuses on a subset of the differences that can affect capability. In addition, it focuses on building understanding of this subset of differences, not ways for leaders to leverage these and other differences to serve capability.

By and large, the Commission heard that servicemembers at all ranks tend to equate diversity with demographics, not other work-related differences.<sup>11</sup> The focus on demographics, in turn, leads them to confuse the goals of diversity programs and policies with the goals of EO programs and policies. This is particularly problematic for leaders who may have difficulty resolving the EO mandate to be both color- and gender-blind with the diversity management mandate to recognize and leverage individual differences to increase capability.

Moreover, diversity training that is focused on understanding cultural, ethnic, and religious differences ignores nondemographic forms of work-related diversity, which, research shows, are equally salient in terms of their positive or negative impact on organizational performance (Webber & Donahue, 2001). Indeed, the Air Force provided the only briefing that explicitly addressed nondemographic types of diversity, such as functional (occupational) and structural (component) diversity. Yet, one Commissioner gave the Commission a vivid example of the impact of such diversity in the Army's transition from divisions to brigade combat teams as the centerpiece of its fighting formations. This transition makes combat support and combat service support an integral part of the combat brigade, giving the brigade a more diverse set of skills and functions. In terms of leadership, the transition gives the commander more flexibility, a greater span of influence, and a more lethal, multitalented force to employ—if the leader has the skills to do this effectively.

In a 2007 study for the Air Force, Riche et al. found that such structural diversity produces the same social identity mechanisms as demographic diversity and requires explicit leadership practices to deliver its benefits. Such understanding is not currently part of leadership development in the military, nor is training in the requisite practices and skills.

## **Diversity Leadership as a Leadership Competency**

The Diversity Leadership Subcommittee inferred that the absence of diversity leadership training reflected the absence of an expectation that leaders at all levels of the Services should provide effective diversity leadership. Consequently, the subcommittee interviewed Service representatives and reviewed Service documents to develop an understanding of the current status of diversity leadership in Service leadership requirements.

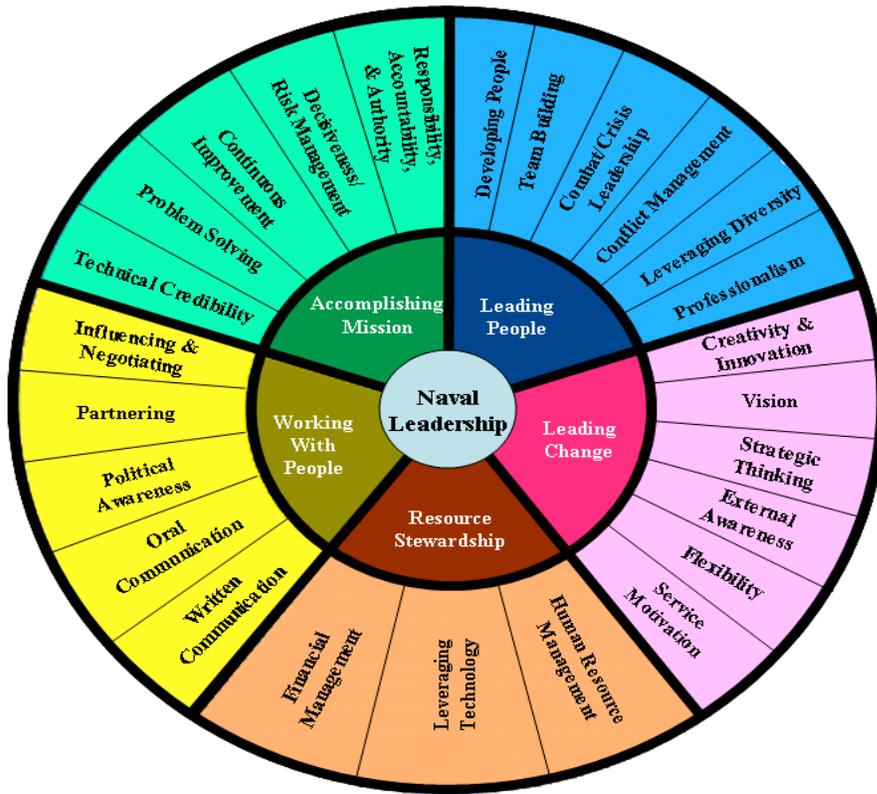
The Services do not revise their leadership requirements on a regular basis and are at different stages in developing diversity management programs (Issue Paper #20). Thus, they are at different stages in considering the role of diversity leadership among other leadership competencies. Currently, some of them include diversity ideas in their materials about leadership competencies, but, with the possible exception of the Navy, they do not describe very well, or very concretely, what this means.

Figure 2 shows how the Navy has integrated diversity in a comprehensive Naval Leadership Competency Model (U.S. Navy, n.d.). The model has an explicit place for diversity, but many other individual competencies in the model call for leadership skills that have been shown to leverage diversity effectively. Thus, the Navy's individual competencies provide a framework for teaching leadership practices with a diversity lens, if the Service should choose to do so.

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<sup>11</sup> This observation is consistent with findings from both military (Kraus & Riche, 2009) and civilian (Bell & Hartmann, 2007) research.

**Figure 2. Naval Leadership Competency Model**



SOURCE: U.S. Navy, n.d.

The Air Force doctrine document (U.S. Air Force, 2006) does not mention diversity, but many of the core leadership competencies that it describes call for leadership practices that, as described earlier, can be very effective when leaders know how to employ them with a diversity lens. A more recent document (U.S. Air Force, 2009) explicitly mentions diversity as one of three aspects of the Leading People institutional competency. In addition, many of the other institutional competencies that it lists can benefit from the application of diversity leadership practices.

The Army’s current field manual on leadership (U.S. Army, 2006) includes “recognizing diversity” among the “interpersonal tact” conceptual components affecting the Army leader’s intelligence. Specifically, it states: “A leader’s job is not to make everyone the same; it is to take advantage of the different capabilities and talents brought to the team” (p. 6-3). Although this is the only reference to diversity as a core competency, throughout the manual the competencies called for include many diversity leadership practice categories, as laid out in Issue Paper #29 and as illustrated in the previous section. Thus, the Army has a framework for teaching diversity leadership practices, if it should choose to do so.

Current Marine Leadership Principles (U.S. Marine Corps, 2001) do not include the word *diversity*, but these principles were developed before this Service undertook its current diversity initiative, and its representative told the subcommittee that the initiative had not yet addressed this topic.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Note that the subcommittee did not receive leadership competency materials from the Coast Guard.

## The Potential for Training in Diversity Leadership

In addition to the potential framework for requiring diversity leadership described above, Service briefings to the Commission on May 26, 2010, as well as interviews with Service representatives, suggested that the Services already teach practices that can be effective in leading diverse groups; they just do not perceive them that way. Furthermore, no Service seems to perceive the importance of applying the diversity lens, as described in Issue Paper #29 and conceptualized in Figure 1. This subsection summarizes what the Commission learned about what each Service is currently doing or contemplating.

According to briefings to the Commission, the Navy has a potential space for diversity leadership in its training materials (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010). For example, the officer core curriculum in the Center for Naval Leadership Training Module starts this way:

- Describe the benefits and limitations of managing by “walking around.”
- Describe the responsibility of a division officer to assist subordinate education and career planning.
- Examine the impact of delegation and empowerment on command environment and division effectiveness.
- Develop an effective approach for motivating and recognizing subordinates.
- Provide context and awareness for mission and divisional taskings.
- Integrate command and department priorities into division’s daily work.

These practices have all been found to be effective in leading both diverse and homogeneous work groups. However, the Navy does not know to what extent this module is being taught or how effective it might be, nor does it specifically educate leaders in how these practices can be effective in leading diverse groups.

According to briefings to the Commission, in the Air Force, diversity and cultural studies are woven throughout the officer and enlisted education and training curricula (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010). The curriculum features a Continuum of Learning, starting from basic understanding/knowledge and rising to strategic-level critical thinking/decisionmaking. However, it does not educate leaders in the dynamics of diverse groups or include training in practices for leading such groups effectively.

Army briefings to the Commission asserted that the “human dimension of leadership” and “managed talent” are aspects of mission readiness (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010). However, although an “expanded human dimension of leadership skills” is a strategic outcome that it seeks through training, there is no mention of educating leaders about the dynamics that diversity creates or training them in effective diversity leadership practices. Rather, the emphasis seems to be on building an understanding of human differences and assuming that leaders will adapt their leadership styles accordingly.

Similarly, the Coast Guard’s current focus is on training to understand the value of diversity to the Service. (The Marines did not report any relevant activities.)

## The Potential of Current Cross-Cultural Training

Research suggests that diversity-specific military leadership practices are transferable across contexts and situations and adaptable to individual leadership styles (Issue Paper #14; Kraus & Riche, 2009). Thus, the Commission surmised that training in working with and/or leading culturally different

people who are not under a leader's command (i.e., global diversity) might be useful in developing training for effectively leading culturally different people who are under the leader's command.

Consequently, the Commission asked DoD and the Services to describe the training they are developing and conducting in cross-cultural competencies (3C) to see whether it might be transferable to training leaders to lead diverse forces. Although this training is focused on working in foreign cultures, the DoD definition of 3C—"[t]he ability to quickly and accurately comprehend, then appropriately and effectively act, to achieve the desired effect in any culturally complex environment"—suggests that it might be equally effective when working with diverse work groups (Greene, 2010).

In 2008, the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Plans) commissioned the Regional Cultural Capabilities and Assessment Working Group (RACCA WG) to identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities that constitute 3C and to recommend ways to institutionalize 3C across DoD. The RACCA WG concluded that 3C skills are related to diversity and recommended that they be linked within a developmental framework for servicemembers in the United States military (McDonald et al., 2008).

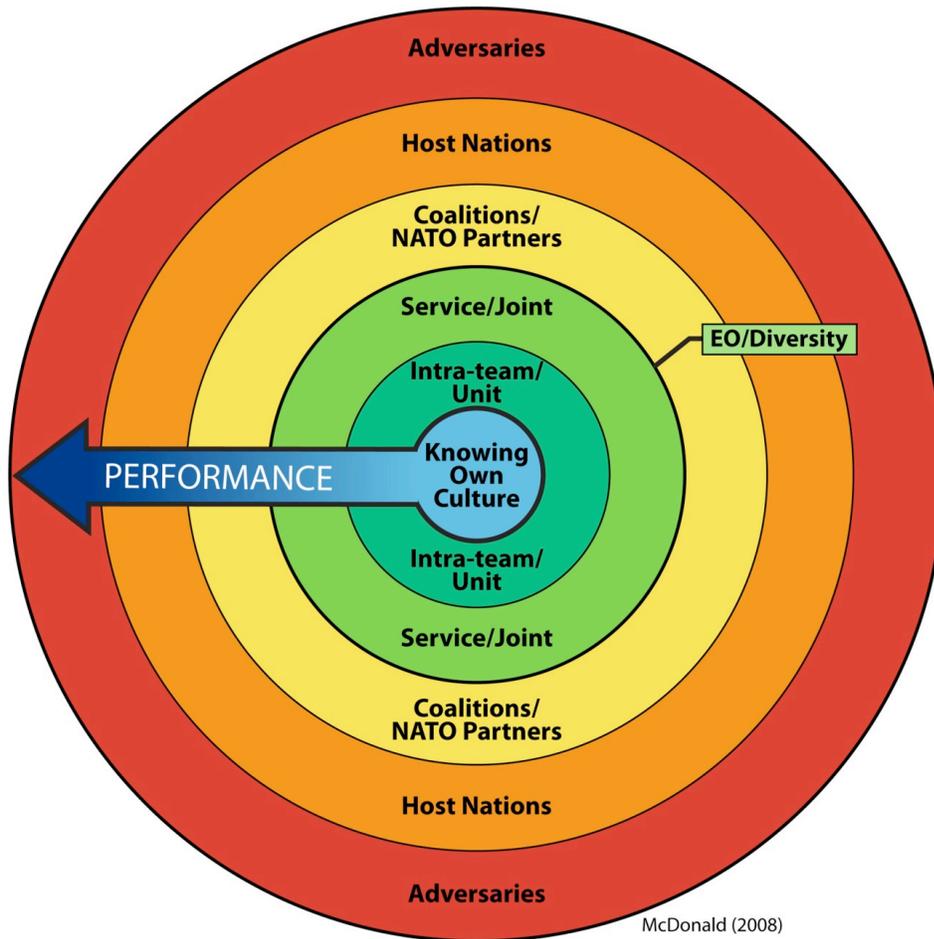
McDonald (2008) provided a nested diagram of 3C factors that may affect mission effectiveness (Figure 3). This model illustrates the potential relationship between diversity leadership skills and those skills associated with 3C, as well as how these skills may be developed. For instance, the RACCA WG suggested that the skills necessary to interact effectively with culturally diverse others originate with self-knowledge; are expanded by training, education, and interactions related to diversity; and are further developed through training, education, and interactions related to 3C (McDonald et al., 2008). Based on this logic, the RACCA WG concluded that acquired diversity-related skills, including diversity leadership, are not only transferrable to contexts in which 3C is required but are also fundamental to the development of the skills associated with 3C (McDonald et al., 2008).

In terms of exploring potential synergies, the DoD briefing to the Commission described the multiyear 3C and Diversity Research Project currently under way. The goal of this project is to identify the shared content, goals, and outcomes between 3C training and diversity training (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010). Briefings from the Service representatives on May 26, 2010, also addressed training being undertaken in 3C. These briefings furthered the Commissioners' sense that the broad context of cross-cultural training can help leaders "lead" in the context of new operational demands, as well as of increased diversity of personnel within each Service. In short, training in leading through "differences" can be both internally and externally focused.

## Summary

The Diversity Leadership Subcommittee found that neither DoD nor the Services are requiring or teaching diversity leadership as the Commission understands it. However, the subcommittee found elements in current training that have the potential for helping to develop such leadership if they are supported by education in diversity dynamics. Understanding such dynamics, as illustrated in Figure 1, can alert leaders at all levels to ways in which the presence of differences calls for applying specific leadership practices.

Figure 3. 3C Factors That May Affect Mission Effectiveness



McDonald (2008)

SOURCE: McDonald, 2008.

## RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

### Recommendation

The Commission makes one broad recommendation regarding diversity leadership and diversity leadership training and accompanies it with two specific recommendations to facilitate its implementation:

***Recommendation 1—***

***To enhance readiness and mission accomplishment, leading diverse groups effectively must become a core competency across DoD and the Services. To implement this recommendation:***

- ***a. Leadership training at all levels shall include education in diversity dynamics and training in practices for leading diverse groups effectively.***
- ***b. DoD and the Services should determine the framework for how (e.g., curriculum, content, methods) to inculcate such education and training into leader development, including how to measure and evaluate its effectiveness.***

The broad recommendation—*To enhance readiness and mission accomplishment, leading diverse groups effectively must become a core competency across DoD and the Services*—is a direct response to the evidence presented to the Commission that effective leadership practices are necessary for neutralizing any negative impacts of diversity on the mission, as well as for eliciting the potential benefits of diversity for mission capability. This recommendation also addresses the charter’s emphasis on the future workforce, which, the Commission heard, is becoming increasingly diverse demographically. In addition, during the course of the Commission’s work, the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review reported changes that are increasing functional/occupational and structural/component diversity in the military (U.S. Department of Defense, 2010). All these changes create more conditions in which military work groups include people who are different from one another and call for explicit, informed, and sustained attention from leaders at all levels of the military hierarchy.

Thus, the broad recommendation addresses a clear need—increasing the mission capability of diverse work groups—by proposing a new competency that, evidence suggests, will accomplish that task.

The Commission also made two implementation recommendations based on its finding that the military does not currently address diversity leadership practices. Numerous briefings made clear that leaders, like all servicemembers, receive training in acknowledging and becoming comfortable with people who are culturally different from them, but this is not diversity leadership. They also made clear that current leadership training in the military does not include specific training in practices for leading diverse groups effectively.

The first implementation recommendation—*Leadership training at all levels shall include education in diversity dynamics and training in practices for leading diverse groups effectively*—responds to both the empirical evidence regarding the role of leadership in leveraging diversity and the findings from the informational meetings with servicemembers conducted by the subcommittee. Both sets of

information lead the Commission to stress leadership training “*at all levels*,” because leaders who are in direct contact with work groups—from the lowest rank on up—are the ones whose practices make a difference in capability. The key term here is *work group*, because that is where day-to-day interactions among different people take place. In short, the Commission views leadership practices as what leaders do themselves day to day, not what others (e.g., EO advisors, diversity offices, etc.) may do on their behalf.

This recommendation also reflects the Commission’s conviction that developing leaders to lead diverse groups effectively requires more than simply training them to understand diversity. It requires educating them about the dynamics that diversity, broadly understood, engenders in work groups (as in Figure 1) and then training them in practices that will neutralize the negative dynamics and maximize their positive potential.

In large part, these practices are already part of leadership training, but they need to be taught with the diversity lens that education in diversity dynamics produces. Thus, the Commission does not recommend new leadership activities but merely incorporating education in diversity dynamics and training in associated leadership practices into existing leadership development.

The second implementation recommendation—*DoD and the Services should determine the framework for how (e.g., curriculum, content, methods) to inculcate such education and training into leader development, including how to measure and evaluate its effectiveness*—follows the broad statement of the desired outcome with a broad statement of how to achieve it. The Commission found no syllabus that addresses diversity leadership and felt that someone needed to be given the charge of conveying the learning that the Commissioners want to impart. Thus, the Commission does not instruct the Services in how to achieve this outcome; it only recommends that DoD develop a framework for doing so effectively.

This approach acknowledges the already-large training burden on the Services. As one Commissioner said about the recommendation, “The last thing we want is another training requirement, but we need to shift from an EO to a Diversity framework. This [recommendation] is different.” Such a framework would allow the Services to develop their own education and training modules while ensuring that they address the same goal: creating a core competency at each level of leadership for leveraging diversity in the service of mission capability.

In addition, the Commission recommended that once the education and training that it recommends are developed and put in place, they should be evaluated. Evaluation, of course, is a best practice for any kind of training, and the subcommittee was unable to find any indication that the Services have even evaluated diversity training per se.<sup>13</sup> This recommendation therefore addresses the Commission’s conviction that sustainability requires some form of institutionalization, which in turn requires evaluation for effectiveness and for assigning and monitoring accountability. The Commission observed that developing metrics to quantify effective diversity leadership is thus an implicit part of the recommendations.

## Conclusion

The recommendation on diversity leadership is the product of two strands of investigation by the Commission. First, briefings from numerous experts plus empirical evidence from diversity research made clear that effective diversity leadership is required to elicit the capability benefits that the

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<sup>13</sup> A training assessment performed by DEOMI (Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, 2008) at the request of DoD asked the Services to specify how they were evaluating the attainment of their training objectives. Their failure to do so led the subcommittee to infer that no such evaluation has taken place.

military seeks from diversity. Second, briefings by and interviews with Service representatives made clear that the Services are not teaching diversity leadership now, at least not systematically. Cognizant of the existing burden of career training, the Commission recommends no new activities but rather the incorporation of a diversity lens in military leadership development at all levels of the military hierarchy.

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