

## Solving the Gordian Knot: Achieving Efficacy in a Diversified Army

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## Abstract

Diversity presents a paradox. On one hand, it is a source of creativity and innovation contributing to competitive advantage. On the other hand, diversity can create social divisions which degrade team cohesion, communication, and performance. Increasing diversity, therefore, presents a proverbial Gordian knot, or seemingly unsolvable problem, for many organizations. Fortunately, some have found ways to cut through the cord, untangle the complexity, and achieve positive results, including increased trust, satisfaction, and productivity. With demographic diversity rising, the U.S. Army needs to better understand the potential challenges in order to align policies and programs to improve organizational effectiveness in the future force. The purpose of this research project is to discuss the benefits and burdens of diversity on team outcomes, evaluate the effectiveness of diversity training, assess the alignment of current DoD diversity initiatives, and offer recommendations to improve the diversity-performance relationship in the Army.

## **Solving the Gordian Knot: Achieving Efficacy in a Diversified Army**

The complexion of America is rapidly changing. The demographic diversity of the Army, which reflects the society it serves, is expected to increase with the commensurate growth of the United States minority populations. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, minorities comprised only 22 percent of the population in 1978.<sup>1</sup> In 2014, minorities represented 38 percent of population. In 2050, they are projected to become the majority.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the changing composition of the national population, the Department of Defense (DoD) recently opened all combat specialties to women and, through targeted recruiting of underrepresented populations, is attempting to increase racial diversity across the force.<sup>3</sup> Increasing diversity presents a challenge in the private sector, but rhetoric from the DoD is much more optimistic.

The opening paragraphs of the *DoD Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan 2012-2017* states that, "Diversity is a strategic imperative, critical to mission readiness and accomplishment, and a leadership requirement."<sup>4</sup> The DoD Office of Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity (ODMEO) likewise refers to diversity and inclusion as "strategic advantages."<sup>5</sup> The reality, however, is quite different. Diversity, a central issue for contemporary organizational management, can complicate team performance and processes and often impairs cohesion, communication and cooperation.<sup>6</sup> These problems, when unaddressed, can result in a host of negative outcomes, including absenteeism, turnover, and conflict.<sup>7</sup>

Diversity presents a paradox. On one hand, it is a source of creativity and innovation contributing to competitive advantage. On the other hand, diversity can lead to the formation of social divisions which degrade team cohesion, communication, and performance.<sup>8</sup> Increasing diversity, therefore, presents a proverbial Gordian knot, or

seemingly unsolvable problem, for many organizations. Fortunately, some have found ways to cut through the cord, untangle the complexity and achieve positive results, including increased trust, loyalty, satisfaction, and productivity. With demographic diversity rising across the DoD, the U.S. Army needs to better understand the potential challenges in order to align policies and programs to improve organizational effectiveness in the future force. The purpose of this research project is to discuss the benefits and burdens of diversity on team outcomes, evaluate the effectiveness of diversity training, assess the alignment of current DoD diversity initiatives, and offer recommendations to improve the diversity-performance relationship in the Army.

### Benefits and Burdens of Diversity on Team Outcomes

According to Elizabeth Mannix, a Professor of Management and Organizations at Cornell, and Margaret Neale, a Professor of Management at Stanford University, diversity in the modern workplace creates a tension between the promise and the reality of improved team process and performance. The promise correlates to an optimistic view that diversity leads to an increase in the variety of perspectives, skills, and approaches brought to a problem set, which facilitates creativity and innovation.<sup>9</sup> The reality is aligned with a more pessimistic outlook that surface level characteristics, such as race, ethnicity and gender, often contribute to negative outcomes.<sup>10</sup> These outcomes manifest in various forms, including miscommunication, conflict and social divisions, which unravels the fabric of trust needed for group cohesion and high performance.<sup>11</sup> While it is not uncommon for organizations to offer positive rhetoric about diversity, rhetoric alone is insufficient in achieving organizational effectiveness. The path to the solution begins with acknowledging the inherent challenges of diversity by considering the psychological and social assumptions undermining team performance. In short, we

need to understand and accept the problem in order to inform policies and practices to achieve desired outcomes at the individual and organization level.

Mannix and Neale, after analyzing over 50 years of diversity research, concluded that the numerous paradigms to understanding the impacts of diversity on organizational performance can be simplified into two overarching camps: pessimistic and optimistic.<sup>12</sup> The pessimistic view holds that diversity is a burden that creates social divisions in the workplace that negatively impact team integration, cohesion and communication necessary. These divisions erode trust resulting in lowered individual and group performance. Although the majority of studies support the pessimistic view that diversity is a challenge to organizational efficacy, diversity is often lauded as a benefit in organizational communications. According to Thomas Kochan, Professor of Work and Employment Research and Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Sloan School of Management, positive diversity rhetoric is a common, calculated form of strategic messaging in today's integrated workplace, but empirical literature does not support the premise that diverse teams perform at a higher level.<sup>13</sup> The preponderance of five decades of diversity research supports the pessimistic view that diversity is a burden to organizational effectiveness, which presents a challenge for the U.S. Army as diversity increases.<sup>14</sup> The pessimistic view can sub-divided into three basic theories: self-identify, social categorization, and similarity attraction.

#### Pessimistic View: Diversity is a Burden

The first theory in the pessimistic view, self-identity theory, concludes that individuals naturally strive to achieve a distinct self-concept and desire a positive social identity. To enable a positive self-image and social identity, individuals cognitively categorize others into subgroups, while viewing themselves more favorably than

subgroup members, which can lead to favoritism or exclusion. According to Michael A. Hogg, a Professor of Social Psychology at the School of Behavioral and Organizational Sciences at Claremont Graduate University, since self-identity is tied to social groups, individuals gravitate toward groups that provide status or emotional value.<sup>15</sup> Members of demographic minorities tend to categorize themselves and others in terms of surface level differences. By gravitating together, minorities can inadvertently contribute to their own isolation and contribute to social divisions. In a 2000 study, black team members were much more likely to identify themselves in terms of race compared to white team members. When conflict and miscommunication occurred, black team members often attributed the cause to race, while white team members factored the issue to team roles or status. When queried, white team members saw race as incidental or irrelevant to team conflict and miscommunication, which exposes a distinct difference in self-identification that can impact team dynamics, even with a well-intentioned majority.<sup>16</sup>

The second theory in the pessimistic view, social categorization, is the process of classifying others based on surface traits. This process often fosters divisiveness leading to the formation of in-groups and out-groups, which invariably results in favoritism for the in-group.<sup>17</sup> The formation of social divisions can generate debilitating outcomes, including absenteeism, turnover, and miscommunication.<sup>18</sup> Amongst the various types of diversity categories, including age and gender, race tends to present the greatest challenge to team process and performance.<sup>19</sup> The problems associated with self-categorization theory are magnified as the minority-group population increases.

According to Mannix and Neale, a 2002 study involving 1,200 textile workers divided amongst 122 teams determined that homogeneous groups were more

productive than those equally split between blacks and whites.<sup>20</sup> Balanced work groups, in which minorities comprise between roughly 35 to 65 percent of the population, tend to be the most dysfunctional, which raises concerns for the future Army.<sup>21</sup> According to the *DoD Diversity and Inclusion 2013 Summary Report*, minority populations represented 21.6 percent of the DoD Active Duty Officer Corps in 2013, a 2.2 percent rise since 2008, and 40.1 percent of the Enlisted Force in 2013, a 3 percent increase during the same time period.<sup>22</sup> Combined, racial minorities represent over 30 percent of the Active Duty population. In the absence of diversity management efforts, social categorization research indicates that minority-majority balance could pose a challenge to the Army's organizational effectiveness. While the U.S. Census Bureau currently projects racial majorities becoming the majority of the overall population in 2050, heterogeneous balance in the Army should occur much sooner.<sup>23</sup> Heterogeneous balance, when minorities represent at least 35 percent of the population, is being accelerated by DoD policy and programs targeting the recruitment of underrepresented minority populations.<sup>24</sup> Whether a result of natural population changes or DoD emphasis, the composition of the U.S. Army is changing. Self-identity and social categorization theory research contribute to the pessimistic view that increasing diversity, particularly racial diversity, presents a burden to organizational effectiveness, and a challenge for the Army going forward.

The third and final paradigm in the pessimistic view, similarity attraction theory, presents another challenge. Similarity attraction is a phenomena in which a wide variety of similar attributes, such as race, gender, attitudes, values, beliefs or even common backgrounds, facilitate social appeal resulting in individual compatibility and team

cohesion. Simply stated, individuals are more attracted to and bond easier with others that possess similar characteristics. Similarity attraction is not limited to the workplace. Individuals tend to strive towards homogeneity in career and social networks, seeking comfort in the commonality.<sup>25</sup> According to a 2011 study led by Suzanne T. Bell, an organizational and applied psychologist from DePaul University, “Greater similarity (reduced separation) yields positive outcomes that ultimately lead to increased team performance.”<sup>26</sup> Jan Delhey, a Professor at the Berlin Social Science Research Center, determined that similarity lowers barriers between people resulting in increased trust levels, the “social capital” of team cohesion and performance.<sup>27</sup> Suzanne Bell’s research indicates that “mutual attraction shared among team members with similar attributes” results in more efficient team processes, such as communication, leading homogenous teams to exceed the performance of heterogeneous teams.<sup>28</sup>

Comparatively, dissimilarity can generate the opposite effect. Bell found that racial diversity, in particular, can affect negative outcomes at the team level through a combination of pessimistic theories.<sup>29</sup> Team members from differing backgrounds often have greater difficulty in finding commonality which inhibits the early development of team identity. The result is lowered trust which impacts task-relevant information sharing between members.<sup>30</sup> Mannix and Neale found that diversity not only results in poorer performance and social inhibition within teams, but also contributes to lower individual job satisfaction.<sup>31</sup> Individuals often avoid communicating with those they dislike while gravitating toward others with similar attributes, opinions or views. Avoiding individuals that think or look different can result in divisiveness, social isolation, and the formation of in-groups and out-groups.<sup>32</sup> In 2006, Robert Putnam, a political scientist

from Harvard University, published a study involving 30,000 people from diverse neighborhoods around the country. Putnam's observations were bleak. He found that trust and communication declined with increased diversity. As neighborhood composition shifted toward greater heterogeneity, residents sought social isolation.<sup>33</sup>

The pessimistic views can lead to depersonalization, a particularly debilitating outcome in which in-group members are seen favorably, while out-group members are considered difficult and disagreeable, which perpetuates their lowered status leading to isolation.<sup>34</sup> As previously stated, in-group and out-group formation contributes to undesirable outcomes in the workplace, including absenteeism, turnover and lowered performance. In-groups tend to be demographically similar, which engenders a higher level of trust, information sharing and favoritism contributing to homogenous teams outperforming diverse teams.<sup>35</sup>

Some argue that similarity attraction theory, and the formation of in-groups, might explain the disproportionate promotion rates for white officers to the senior ranks.<sup>36</sup> While this observation discounts individual performance, career potential and occupational specialty, the statistical evidence is intriguing. According to the *DoD Diversity and Inclusion 2013 Summary Report*, white male officers represent 78.4 percent of the overall Army officer population, but comprise 83.09 percent of the general officer ranks. Black male officers, in comparison, make up only 8.7 percent of Army officers and 6.24 percent of general officers.<sup>37</sup> Officers in the minority may interpret the lower promotion rates and racial representation as bias, possibly even prejudice, which could lead to lower trust in their organization or the overall system. The promotion system is merit-based, but if the Army is not perceived as an attractive opportunity to

minorities, recruiting and retention could suffer, which poses a real challenge as diversity increases.

#### Optimistic View: Diversity is a Benefit

Although the research predominantly supports the pessimistic view, the optimistic view presents a contrarian perspective favoring diversity. The optimistic view can be sub-divided into two basic paradigms: information decision theory and value diversity theory. Nigel Basset-Jones, from the Oxford Brookes University Business School and a proponent of the information decision theory, argues that diversity, when managed effectively, enhances creativity resulting in several positive outcomes, including “increased commitment, job satisfaction, and a better interface with the marketplace.”<sup>38</sup> Against a back drop of positive leadership, Mannix and Neale found that “diversity creates an atmosphere for enhancing group performance” due to access to various “backgrounds, networks, information, and skills.”<sup>39</sup> Diverse membership, according to Suzanne Bell, provides a broad range of skills, ideas and insights creating a deeper well of resources to draw upon, especially during brainstorming and other forms of collaborative idea generation.<sup>40</sup> Increased diversity is thought to lower risk aversion enabling better problem solving and informed decision making. The benefit is derived from critical analysis of the first solution set, which tends to receive substantial support in homogeneous groups due to self-identity, social categorization and similarity attraction theories.<sup>41</sup> Under the information decision paradigm, individuals leverage differing expertise and education levels to reject the first proposed solution in search of an even better outcome, a process that enhances decision making. While the pessimistic view argues that diversity impairs cohesion, a necessary component to high performance, the optimistic view holds that the downside to cohesiveness is group

think, an impediment to critical reasoning. Harmony can be healthy for the work environment, in other words, but not when it outweighs the requirement to solve problems.<sup>42</sup>

Value diversity theory, the second paradigm in the optimistic camp, concludes that team members sharing the same values reap a number of positive outcomes, including greater efficacy and less conflict. In contrast, teams with divergent values typically produce less and argue more. In one study involving 306 participants randomly assigned to 60 different teams, team members were given complex tasks requiring high interdependence. Teams comprised of individuals with mutually shared values consistently outperformed the rest.<sup>43</sup> Advocates of this theory consider values more salient than demographics. The recent inclusion of females in all military occupational specialties, including historically male exclusive positions, supports this premise. An advocate of value diversity theory might argue that arbitrarily denying qualified females the opportunity to serve in the infantry, armor or field artillery creates misalignment with values published in the *DoD Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan 2012-2017*, which awkwardly defines inclusion as, “Valuing integrating each individual’s differences into the way an organization functions and makes decisions.”<sup>44</sup>

While the pessimistic view might argue that the introduction of females is an unnecessary social wedge to team cohesion in male-dominated specialties, integration studies often conclude that gender tends to have a neutral or even a positive effect on team performance. Sungjoo Choi, a quantitative and qualitative social researcher from Kyung Hee University in Seoul, and Hal G. Rainey, a Professor of Public Administration at the University of Georgia, in a comprehensive study of federal employees, found that

gender diverse teams can exceed the performance of homogenous teams if managed effectively through the positive alignment of values, policy and practices and backed by supportive, engaged leadership.<sup>45</sup> David J. Woehr, Organizational Psychologist from the University of North Carolina, asserts that differences in values generate more problems than demographics, which bodes well for the Army, a value-based organization.<sup>46</sup>

While the information decision and value diversity paradigms provide an alternative view to the pessimistic theories, they share a common flaw as effective counter-arguments. Both theories proclaim the benefits of diversity, but typically in terms of deep level characteristics, such as educational background, cognitive skills and personal values, not surface level traits, such as race. As previously mentioned, race tends to have a negative impact on team integration, performance and communication in repeated research studies. Organizations, in an effort to overcome the debilitating impacts of the pessimistic view and shortcomings of the optimistic view, seek methods to reduce the burden and maximize the benefit of diversity. The widely employed tactic is diversity training.

#### Evaluating the Effectiveness of Diversity Training

Diversity training seeks to modify employee behavior, but is rarely effective. At best, according to Gwendolyn Combs, Professor of Organizational Behavior from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, diversity training achieves “a short-term suspension of discriminatory activities.” At worst, it reinforces pessimistic social theories, such as social categorization, leading to a variety of undesirable behaviors that the training was meant to resolve in the first place.<sup>47</sup> Even the perception of diversity training has a negative connotation. Regardless of racial background, diversity training is often viewed as a compulsory requirement contributing to dissolution, even cynicism. According to

Colonel Irvin Smith III, a professor at the U.S. Military Academy and author of *Why Black Officers Fail*, “Black officers believe that diversity efforts are ineffective and a number of white officers feel these initiatives actually work against them. The one thing that these two groups do agree on is that diversity training is a waste of time.”<sup>48</sup> The Army is not alone. The following quote from Cora Daniels, author of *Black Power Inc.: The New Voice of Success*, suggests that the private sector also struggles with finding value in diversity training, which many employees consider a time consuming distraction.

Mandatory diversity seminars or training programs can encounter just as much eye-rolling resistance from black executives as from white. It is not that they do not support the goal. But the general consensus is that it is going to be a waste of time. Even if everyone herded in the room agrees the goal is something that they all should care about, the didactic tone usually accompanying that process makes the participants feel as if they are being forced to eat vegetables.<sup>49</sup>

Diversity training faces three primary obstacles: 1) unconscious bias, 2) misguided focus and content and 3) competing requirements. First, diversity training, which consumes considerable time and resources, is inhibited by the various paradigms within the pessimistic view, which traces its roots to unconscious bias, or inclinations that exist within each of us. Individuals, as an example, tend to be attracted to others with similar attributes. This attraction is a product of the unconscious and does not require a decision, debate or discussion. According to Howard J. Ross, author of *Reinventing Diversity*, an individual acting in a non-inclusive manner might be prejudiced, or they could be operating from bias. Unconscious bias, arguably the greatest impediment to diversity progress, should be openly discussed to increase self-awareness.<sup>50</sup> Organizations that train team members to recognize the detrimental role

of bias might realize a higher success rate than those that focus on diversity awareness, which leads to the next obstacle.

The second obstacle for diversity training is focus and content. Ross, a career consultant for diversity matters in the private sector, asserts that most diversity training programs are focused on increasing employee sensitivity to race, gender and disability issues, but fall short of making employees aware of how bias influences their decision making.<sup>51</sup> Bias needs to be openly acknowledged, confronted and discussed in a mature, open setting to facilitate personal change and reduce discriminatory behavior. Shifting training away from racial awareness and behavioral blame to bias awareness can contribute to a collaborative climate where underlying beliefs, including prejudice, are acknowledged and individual differences are appreciated.

The third obstacle to diversity training is competing requirements. Time is finite. Employee training is necessary, but detracts from the mission, which presents a resource management challenge. The Army, in particular, presents company grade leaders with training commitments that exceed calendar capacity. Army Regulation 350-1, *Army Training and Leader Development*, when combined with ALARACT (All Army Activities) messages and major command policies, imposes more requirements on company grade leaders than can actually be accomplished in a fiscal year.

In the rush by higher headquarters to incorporate every good idea into training, the total number of training days required by all mandatory training directives literally exceeds the number of training days available to company commanders. Company commanders somehow have to fit 297 days of mandatory requirements into 256 available training days.<sup>52</sup>

Although diversity training presents an opportunity to improve organizational culture leading to greater effectiveness, most programs fail to overcome the obstacles accompanied with unconscious bias, misguided focus and content and competing

requirements. Given the pessimistic paradigms and shortfalls in training, diversity presents a stubborn conundrum for leaders seeking to build an inclusive environment. Acknowledging the inherent challenge of diversity, senior U.S. government and defense leaders have taken active measures in recent years to find solutions.

### Assessing the Alignment of DoD Diversity Initiatives

Congress and DoD enacted several initiatives in response to the release of a 2008 RAND study, *Planning for Diversity*, and the 2009 release of Executive Order 13583, which directed a coordinated, U.S. Government-wide approach to promote diversity and inclusion in the federal workforce.<sup>53</sup> In 2011, Congress created a commission to conduct a comprehensive review of policies and practices to identify opportunities supporting the promotion and advancement of minority members in the Armed Forces.<sup>54</sup>

To enable strategic oversight, the DoD reconstituted the Defense Diversity Workgroup to monitor progress and enforce accountability and established the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute Board of Advisors to address emergent and immediate issues.<sup>55</sup> The DoD resourced another RAND study, *Force Drawdowns and Demographic*, to analyze the impacts of military force drawdowns on minority populations.<sup>56</sup> The ODMEIO, which was assessed to be isolated and under resourced, received a Chief Diversity Officer, a new position empowered to report directly to the Secretary of Defense, signaling a major shift in diversity prioritization.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, the DoD published *Strategic Plan 2012-2017*, which incorporated input from the various commissions and studies, to expand the definition of diversity and provide direction across the multiple components of the department.<sup>58</sup> Despite these multi-prong initiatives, five inconsistencies create potential misalignments with ongoing change

efforts: 1) describing a vision for diversity, 2) measuring and communicating progress, 3) celebrating mediocrity, 4) absence of diversity in Army publications, and 5) underscoring the benefit of different value systems.

First, the vision published by the ODMEO is vague, and possibly misguided. Ideally, a vision articulates a desirable future end state that current members of the organization can rally around. In contrast, the vision, “To maintain a diverse, mission ready force,” is neither future focused nor inspiring.<sup>59</sup> This vision seems to convey that the U.S. military, which is already diverse and mission ready, is working toward the goal of remaining exactly as it is. Considering that we are several years into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Army’s 2013 vision for leadership development, “An Army of competent and committed leaders of character with the skills and attributes necessary to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” also falls short and lacks future focus.<sup>60</sup> Worse, this vision implies a gap in competence and character in the current force by desiring these attributes in the future. On a positive note, the vision offered in the *U.S. Army Diversity Roadmap*, “The National leader in embracing the strengths of diverse people in an inclusive environment,” sets a high standard and describes a compelling future end state.<sup>61</sup>

The second issue with the DoD change initiatives involves inadequate methods to measure and communicate progress. Little has changed since 2011, when Representative Elijah Cummings, in a letter to the Secretary of the Army, stated that “The Army has yet to identify concrete metrics to capture performance progress.”<sup>62</sup> This observation was echoed in a 2013 RAND study, which concluded that DoD focused on gathering a wide range of demographic data, but remained deficient in collecting

information related to inclusion efficacy.<sup>63</sup> The emphasis continues to trend toward measuring demographic composition in order to increase diversity. The opening paragraphs of the *DoD Diversity and Inclusion 2013 Summary Report* highlight the priority, “Racial and ethnic minorities make up 30% of our total civilian workforce, and women represent nearly 34% of all Department Civilians. These statistics mark a notable increase in DoD workforce diversity, and are a result of the consistent and successful initiatives detailed in this report.”<sup>64</sup> Is the goal increasing diversity or achieving inclusion efficacy?

In the same report, the DoD Chief Diversity Officer asserts, “Looking to the future, we will continue to our efforts to increase and enhance diversity and inclusion throughout the Army.”<sup>65</sup> Intentionally shaping the demographic of the All-Volunteer Force creates a potential misalignment with the goal to “establish DoD’s position as an employer of choice by creating a merit-based workforce...,” and could engender dissolution for those that want to serve based on qualification, not characteristics.<sup>66</sup> The Military Leadership Diversity Commission expressed concern that “some service members may react negatively if they feel that diversity management initiatives and programs are basically a repacking of EO that will benefit some and not others,” yet the DoD priority seems to be focused on accelerating diversity, not increasing the effectiveness of diverse organizations.<sup>67</sup>

Celebrating mediocre milestones presents the third strategic messaging issue. For example, in the *DoD Diversity and Inclusion 2013 Summary Report*, the ODMEO proudly reported 452 Facebook “likes” on their Facebook page in December 2013 to highlight a 10.5 percent increase in four months. Gaining 47 social networking

approvals, or roughly 11 “likes” per month, is a questionable achievement for a prestigious organization. The DoD also reported a 53.6 percent increase in Twitter followers during the same time period, which sounds impressive until we consider the raw numbers. The ODMEO went from 68 Twitter followers to 126 followers in 4 months, an inconsequential milestone considering a nation-wide population in excess of 322 million.<sup>68</sup> What is measured matters. The DoD might be served better by tracking quantitative and qualitative progress to overall diversity policy and programs instead of celebrating mediocre achievement in strategic documents, which exposes low expectations and messaging misalignment.

A fourth issue potentially impacting change efforts is a lack of emphasis, or even acknowledgement, of diversity in Army publications. Despite the Army’s ingrained cultural emphasis on teamwork, values, and leadership, the topic of diversity is conspicuously absent in doctrine and regulation. When diversity is actually mentioned in Army publications, it is out of context from the DoD definition and unrelated to team performance. As an example, although diversity is referred to three times in Army Regulation 600-20, *Command Policy*, it mentioned as a subset to equal opportunity awards and training programs or as a component of Senior Executive Diversity Awareness Training, not as a potential advantage for organizational leaders to develop positive command climates and achieve team outcomes.<sup>69</sup> Diversity is mentioned once in Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-0, *Mission Command*, but is also out of context. *Mission Command* refers to diversity in terms of the disparate capabilities of Unified Action partners, not as a moral leadership imperative to organizational

effectiveness.<sup>70</sup> Worse, diversity is completely absent in Army Doctrine Publication 6-22, the Army's foundational reference for leadership.<sup>71</sup>

Table 1. Diversity and Army Publications<sup>72</sup>

Publication	References to Diversity
AR 600-20 Command Policy, 2014	Three references to diversity: 1) Informs the G-1 of responsibility regarding the conduct of Senior Executive Diversity Awareness Training. 2) Recipients of the EO Advisor of the Year Award are required to advance diversity. 3) Outlines Senior Executive Diversity Awareness Training.
ADP 6-22 Army Leadership, 2012	None.
ADRP 6-0 Mission Command, 2012	One out of context reference to diversity. Refers to diversity in terms of Unified Action partners.
Army Leadership Development Strategy, 2013.	Two out of context references. Refers to diversity in terms of 1) emerging threats and 2) national, allied and indigenous partners.

The lack of emphasis on diversity in key publications, combined with a mixed signal in the *U.S. Army Diversity Roadmap*, creates a fifth and final misalignment in strategic messaging. In an attempt to sound inclusive, the *Roadmap*, a strategic document signed by the Secretary of the Army, Chief of Staff and Sergeant Major of the Army, states that “creativity and innovation are linked to diverse thinking styles, backgrounds, viewpoints and values.”<sup>73</sup> The Army should welcome diversity in many forms, but not in values. Encouraging diversity in values can damage organizational trust, cohesion and esprit de corps. The paradigm of value diversity concludes that team members with mutual values reap a number of positive outcomes, including greater efficacy and less conflict, while team members with differing values are characterized by low levels of trust and performance and high levels of miscommunication and conflict.<sup>74</sup> Combined, these inconsistencies present an obstacle to change efforts. Left

unattended, they could impede progress toward building an inclusive environment on a foundation of trust where diverse teams thrive.

### Improving the Diversity-Performance Relationship in the Army

Both a benefit and a burden to team performance, diversity is a paradox to organizational effectiveness. Diversity is both a “source of creativity and innovation” and a cause of social divisions that negatively impacts harmony, performance, and competitiveness.<sup>75</sup> Increasing diversity in the Army, therefore, presents an intractable problem, but a problem that needs to be addressed. According to legend, Alexander the Great solved the Gordian knot, a puzzling entanglement of ropes which many considered unsolvable, by cutting through the complexity with a single sword stroke. Diversity solutions are not as clear cut, but do exist in academia and corporate best practices.

In 2004, a comprehensive study was conducted involving over 150,000 federal employees to measure the effectiveness of diversity management by surveying employee perceptions and tracking equal employment opportunity complaints. The results confirmed that diversity is both a benefit and a burden as it provides a wide range of skills, ideas and perspectives which contribute to problem solving and decision making, but it also extracts a heavy cost in terms of coordination, communication and conflict resolution. The study confirmed that race, in particular, was responsible for the greatest negative impact on the diversity-performance relationship, while gender had a positive effect. Although these results are consistent with previous studies confirming pessimistic social theories, the final analysis is important to the Army. The study determined that when organizational policies, culture, communications, and leadership actions align, diversity actually enhances performance, which is encouraging.<sup>76</sup>

Furthermore, multiple corporations instituted successful diversity management programs in recent years resulting in greater efficacy and team performance.<sup>77</sup> After reviewing nearly forty journal articles, multiple RAND studies, and recent DoD and Army policies and initiatives, I offer the following recommendations to increase the diversity-performance relationship in the future Army: 1) Align diversity policy, practices, and messaging, 2) institute diversity training, 3) leadership emphasis and accountability and 4) incorporate feedback mechanisms.

#### Recommendation #1 – Align Diversity Policy, Practices and Messaging

First, the Army Diversity Office, in conjunction with the ODMEO and the Deputy Chief of Staff (DCS), G-1 and DCS, G-3, needs to formulate, manage, and evaluate command policies, plans, and programs to achieve alignment by communicating a consistent, relevant message across all platforms, including publications and regulations. Five deficiencies in initiatives were previously noted in this research paper and should be addressed to facilitate alignment: 1) describing a vision for diversity, 2) measuring and communicating progress, 3) celebrating mediocrity, 4) absence of diversity in Army publications, and 5) underscoring the benefit of different value systems.

First, as it stands now, the DoD vision for diversity, “To maintain a diverse, mission ready force,” is vague and uninspiring. The ODMEO should publish a new vision that provides a compelling, strategic and desirable end state of the future force.<sup>78</sup> Second, the ODMEO and the Army Diversity Office (ADO) should focus less on increasing diversity and more on inclusion efficacy in order to send a message that all service members and civilians matter, not just the minority. The *DoD Diversity and Inclusion 2013 Summary Report* highlights an inconsistency, “Racial and ethnic

minorities make up 30% of our total civilian workforce, and women represent nearly 34% of all Department Civilians. These statistics mark a notable increase in DoD workforce diversity, and are a result of the consistent and successful initiatives detailed in this report.”<sup>79</sup> In the same report, the DoD Chief Diversity Officer asserts, “Looking to the future, we will continue to our efforts to increase and enhance diversity and inclusion throughout the Army.”<sup>80</sup> The current, DoD level diversity message sounds like an affirmative action initiative, and could create perception issues for service members and civilians alike. Third, the ODMEO needs to avoid the temptation to celebrate mediocre milestones, particularly in paltry social networking activity, which exposes low expectations for diversity progress. Fourth, the Army needs to address the conspicuous absence of diversity from key publications, such as Army Regulation 600-20: *Command Policy*, Army Doctrine Publication 6-22: *Army Leadership*, and the Army Leadership Development Strategy. The lack of reference to diversity sends a mixed signal contributing to misalignment. Instead, a consistent message needs to be interweaved across various publications and platforms, including doctrine, and openly discussed in every phase of leader education to underscore the value of diversity and inclusion, synchronize leaders and change culture. To be effective, the message needs to acknowledge the inherent challenges of diverse teams on process and performance, and why individual differences matter.

The 2004 federal employee study underscored the necessity for leaders to welcome individual differences while openly discussing diversity, including the challenges.<sup>81</sup> Developing leaders that can manage diverse teams requires an open, mature discussion. Before that discussion can happen, the strategic message needs to

be consistently aligned in policies and doctrine, not just diversity promotional products, such as the *Army Diversity Roadmap* and the ADO website. While these resources are valuable and necessary, they stand alone, which means that they can be bypassed. Lastly, the ADO needs to update the Army Diversity Roadmap to remove the word “values” from the statement, “Creativity and innovation are linked to diverse thinking styles, backgrounds, viewpoints and values.”<sup>82</sup> The Army needs to embrace diversity, and the value of individual differences, but not differences in values. In short, the ADO, in conjunction with the ODMEO and the DCS, G-1 and DCS, G-3, needs to formulate, manage, and evaluate command policies, plans, and programs to achieve alignment by communicating a consistent, relevant message across all platforms.

#### Recommendation #2 – Institute Diversity Training

Second, the DCS, G-3, in conjunction with the G-3-Training and Doctrine Command, should incorporate diversity training requirements into the professional military education curriculum at every stage of institutional leader progression. The training should focus on developing culturally competent professionals through individual self-awareness of underlying assumptions and biases. According to research conducted by Sungjoo Choi and Hal G. Rainey, diversity training programs tend to focus on racial awareness, not bias awareness, and consequently fail to produce desired change, but studies have found that diversity enhances organizational performance when it is treated as a source of learning.<sup>83</sup> Understanding the role of bias toward differences, and how it drives discriminatory behavior, is fundamental to producing change, and needs to be incorporated in diversity training, starting with the institution.

Individuals enter the operational Army through institutions, such as the Officer Basic Course, and return to the generating force throughout their career progression,

including the Captain's Career Course, Intermediate Level Education, Pre-Command Courses, and Senior Staff College. Since the Army imposes more training requirements than operational unit commanders can accomplish, diversity training should be incorporated into institutional curriculum at all levels of individual development, such as initial entry, company grade, field grade, and senior service college.<sup>84</sup> Targeting mandatory training at the institution, and complemented by on-line scenario based training, might enable a higher level of standardization and message consistency, while lowering resistance to overburdened units in the field. The focus of the training should progress with the seniority of the audience, including the general officer ranks, but continue to include the role of unconscious bias and how it contributes to discrimination through pessimistic paradigms, such as self-categorization and the similarity attraction theory. Additionally, diversity training should include the role of self-identity theory sensitivity. Regardless of race or gender, minorities are more sensitive to their status within groups, which impedes their sense of inclusion which contributes to discord and distrust.<sup>85</sup> Leaders can learn to be aware of this perception in racial minorities to develop superordinate goals and identification to unify diverse groups.

How diversity training is conducted is just as important as the curriculum. To be meaningful, diversity training needs to equip individuals with the skills and confidence to influence unit climate by increasing Diversity Self-Efficacy (DSE). According to Gwendolyn Combs, in the article *Meeting the Leadership Challenge of a Diverse and Pluralistic Workplace*, DSE is the ability to apply cognitive resources to promote a positive work environment. In other words, a DSE adept individual is self-aware, understands the role of bias, and possesses the skill to identify positive and negative

behavior in the environment. More importantly, they have the confidence to intervene and promote inclusiveness within the work environment when witnessing discriminatory behavior. To be effective, DSE requires interactive, experiential training scenarios that includes decision making and feedback.<sup>86</sup> This type of training should be included in Army diversity training to increase individual bias awareness and develop skills to reduce conflict and enhance heterogeneous team performance. Diversity training is time and resource intensive and produces mixed results in the corporate world. To be effective, Army diversity training needs to be interactive, multi-dimensional and targeted at self-awareness throughout career progression to develop individual leadership skills and promote efficacy in diverse environments.

### Recommendation #3 – Leadership Emphasis and Accountability

Leaders are the key to promoting inclusive conditions, and need to be engaged and held accountable for the climates they foster. Diversity, Inc. annually ranks over 1,500 participating companies on their diversity-management practices and, not surprisingly, Chief Executive Officer and top management involvement is considered a best practice.<sup>87</sup> Since stalled change efforts are often attributed to leadership failures in communicating a new vision and desired outcomes, Army leaders at all levels need to demonstrate a personal commitment to the value of diversity and drive change. Choi and Rainey believe that organizations with alignment in policies and practices, combined with effective training and personally involved leaders, can achieve higher results with heterogeneous teams.<sup>88</sup> As obvious as it sounds, leaders are a critical component in the diversity-performance solution.

In order to be effective, leaders should be equipped with an understanding of bias and the influence of pessimistic social theories on individual and organizational

behavior, and trained to foster inclusive environments. By doing so, informed leaders can guide diverse teams to higher performance by promoting a positive climate where individual differences matter, but everyone commits to a common team identity, vision, values, and goals.

It is obvious why leaders are so important to cultural change. Leaders are uniquely positioned to focus team members on superordinate identification and organizational goals, which diminishes the effects of minority sensitivity, similarity attraction and social categorization. Leaders can set the example by allowing minorities to voice opinions to reduce in-group versus out-group bias and social isolation, which enables creativity and innovation. Leaders that consistently reward and reinforce individual performance and commitment to superordinate goal achievement, regardless of surface level characteristics, can serve as a barrier to in-group formulation.<sup>89</sup> Leaders that support diversity policy and initiatives also play a role in preventing decoupling, or bureaucratic resistance to new routines and priorities, by holding subordinates accountable to organizational goals and discouraging divisive behavior.<sup>90</sup>

#### Recommendation #4 – Incorporate Feedback Mechanisms

Leaders are the key to making diversity an advantage in the Army, and feedback is the mechanism to monitor progress to inform changes in policy or procedures. Diversity, Inc. determined that the best corporate diversity programs in the world include accountability and feedback loops to monitor the culture, climate, and change efforts, which serves as an incentive for the Army to adopt internal mechanisms.<sup>91</sup> Specifically, and in addition to gathering demographic population data, the Chief ADO should develop mechanisms to monitor perceptions regarding inclusion efficacy to validate policy and procedures. A model for consideration, the 2004 Choi and Rainey federal

employee study measured diversity progress through two mechanisms—sexual harassment and equal opportunity complaints *and* employee perception surveys.<sup>92</sup> A 2013 RAND study concluded that DoD focused on gathering a wide range of demographic data but remained deficient in collecting information related to inclusion efficacy.<sup>93</sup> The ADO, which already collects complaints based data, needs to gather perception feedback directly from the Soldiers and Civilians in the field in order to monitor change progress and promote inclusionary practices.

In conclusion, increasing diversity presents a challenge for the Army, but also an opportunity. Through effective management, the benefit can outweigh the burden resulting in increased team cohesion, performance and readiness. By aligning diversity policy, practices, and messaging, instituting diversity training, emphasizing the role of leadership in diversity progress and incorporating feedback mechanisms to track progress, the Army can foster an inclusive environment that values individual differences, engenders trust, and rewards merit. Through a renewed commitment to training, leadership and feedback, the Army can cut the Gordian knot, achieve greater organizational effectiveness to attract and retain talent, and become an employer of choice for individuals of all backgrounds.

## Endnotes

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